Gender equality will only be achieved when all types of discrimination against women and girls are eliminated, and when equal conditions, treatment and opportunities are provided to girls and boys, and women and men. Globally, we are still far from achieving gender equality in education and gender justice in society.

In Ghana, despite some progress towards gender parity in primary school enrolment, and a substantial reduction since 1999, disparity persists. Notably, women’s representation and participation in decision-making continues to be low. Of the 275 members of the Ghanaian Parliament sitting at the end of 2015, only 29 were women. This ranks Ghana 111th on the global Inter-Parliamentary Union’s ranking, far below Rwanda (1st), Seychelles (4th) and Senegal (6th).

Women in decision-making: Notwithstanding the low proportion of women in Parliament, women have been appointed to positions at the highest decision-making levels, including among others Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Justice and, most recently, Chairperson of Ghana’s Electoral Commission.

Data and budgeting: A general improvement in the systematic compilation of data disaggregated by sex, and the expansion of gender-responsive budgeting, which ensures that budget in the public and private sector is set aside for gender related interventions, means that appropriate resources have been allocated to gender equality programmes.

Gender parity in education: The Gender Parity Index (GPI) target was set between 0.97 and 1.03 in 2000. Although the goal of reaching gender parity in primary enrolment by 2005 was missed, Ghana did achieve it in 2014. At kindergarten level the GPI was 1.04 in 2014/2015. At junior high school level, though parity is yet to be achieved, the GPI rose from 0.95 to 0.96 in 2014/15. Furthermore, the country has made good progress towards achieving gender parity at senior high school level where GPI and share of female enrolment have both increased, and where the completion rate for female students rose sharply from 28% to 38% between 2012/13 and 2013/14. The percentage of females enrolled in further and higher education institutions has also risen in recent years: in 2012/13, 33.6% of public university students, 33.1% of polytechnic students and 43.3% of college students were female.
DRIVERS OF SUCCESS

Including more women in decision making: in addition to the various policies and legislation that will enable more women to participate in decision making, UNDP has also been promoting greater inclusion of women and young people in public life through capacity-building programmes with Ghanaian political parties.

Bridging the gender gap in education: The Girls’ Education Unit (GEU) was established in 1997 under the Basic Education Division of the Ghana Education Service with the specific remit of bridging the gender gap in education. UNESCO has supported key activities of the GEU, notably by working with Girls’ Education Officers in 216 districts to enhance their capacity and effectiveness in identifying and addressing the obstacles facing girls who seek education, and in promoting and advocating girls’ education and gender equality in education.

Moreover, the World Food Programme (WFP) supports increased enrolment of girls in basic school in districts with low gender parity through incentive packages, to enable them stay in school and graduate, as education forms a strong basis for women’s ability to contribute to all forms of public life.

Preventing early pregnancy: In 2015, in response to emerging evidence on the role played by early and unintended pregnancy in curtailing girls’ participation in secondary education, UNICEF has been supporting the Ministry of Education in developing guidelines for an education sector response to prevent early pregnancy, and to help pregnant girls to return to school to complete their basic education. The guidelines will be available in 2016 for dissemination and implementation.

Encouraging women in science: The Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education Clinic was set up in 2003 by the Ghana Education Service; and part of its remit is to increase female enrolment and to improve the performance of girls in the study of science and technology-related subjects in secondary and tertiary educational institutions.

Offering incentives for school attendance: Through the Free Food Rations for Girls programme, 30,000 food insecure girls from the Northern and Volta regions with at least 80% school attendance are given take-home food rations every month to ensure their parents keep them at school and to enable them to graduate from school. The programme is supported by the WFP in collaboration with the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and is being implemented across selected districts in three regions in northern Ghana, and the Volta Region.

Providing scholarships for girls: Scholarship schemes for girls, notably the Girls Participatory Approaches to Students’ Success (administered by the UK Department for International Development), the Camfed MasterCard scholarship and the Education Improvement Programme, enable gifted girls whose families cannot afford to keep them at school a chance to continue their education. Since 2001, the WFP has also provided scholarship programmes for brilliant but needy students who excel at the Basic Education Certificate Exams to enable them complete Senior Secondary Education.

TRANSITIONING TO THE SDGs

Ghana’s achievements on the gender equality agenda have been limited by its focus on gender parity, underpinned by the emphasis on universal primary education. While this focus led to marked progress towards gender parity in primary school enrolment, wider advances towards gender equality in education more broadly require a shift in approach above and beyond counting the numbers of boys and girls in school. For example, attention needs to be given to how education can empower girls and boys, women and men, to challenge forms of gender discrimination they may experience in their families, communities and society more broadly. To enable more girls to continue education beyond primary level, practices that currently contribute significantly to high drop-out rates for girls, especially in upper primary school level, need to be addressed. These include:

- damaging socio-cultural practices (e.g. forced marriage, gender stereotyping, or the betrothal system);
- discriminatory practices in schools and gender-insensitive teaching;
- school related gender-based violence;
- child fosterage;
- early marriage;
- teenage pregnancy; and
- parental neglect.

As Ghana makes the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs, these issues must be given the attention they demand if the country is to achieve SDG 5: gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

2 Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2015, *Women in Parliaments.*