



# **GIRLS' EDUCATION AND POVERTY ERADICATION: FAWE's RESPONSE**



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**FAWE SECRETARIAT**

**PRESENTED AT THE THIRD UNITED  
NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE  
LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES**

**10-20 MAY 2001**

**BRUSSELS, BELGIUM**

## **Background on FAWE**

**The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is a pan African non- government organization, registered in Kenya, that seeks to promote the education of women and girls in Africa. FAWE was created in 1992 to counter the slow pace of implementation of Education For All (EFA) goals in sub-Saharan Africa. It seeks to ensure that girls have access to school, complete their studies and perform well at all levels.**

FAWE is a membership organization comprising women policy makers, such as ministers of education and permanent secretaries, as well as male associate members and National Chapters in 33 African countries.

### ***FAWE's Vision***

It is FAWE's vision that by the year 2004 gender disparities in education will be significantly reduced, and more girls will have access to schooling, complete their studies and perform well at all levels.

### ***FAWE's Mission***

FAWE will work at continental, national and local levels, together with its partners, to create positive societal attitudes, policies and practices that promote equity for girls in terms of access, retention, performance and quality, through influencing the transformation of educational systems in Africa.

### ***FAWE's Goal***

To increase access and retention as well as improve the quality of education for all girls within the school system, and for women in universities.

## Introduction

*When poverty engulfs a family, the youngest are the most affected and most vulnerable—their rights to survival, growth and development are at risk. A child born today in the developing world has a 4 out of 10 chance of living in extreme poverty (UNICEF: The state of the World's Children 2001 p. 32).*

*Poverty has many faces. It is much more than low income. It also reflects poor health and education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human and political rights and the absence of dignity, confidence and self-respect (Human Development Report 1997 p.iii).*

**Education for All (EFA) and more specifically the education of girls is a vital factor in dealing with root causes of poverty and under-development. Evidence shows a clear link between the level of girls' education and some indicators in health and well-being, most notably nutrition, maternal and child health and survival.**

**With the onset of the third millennium, the challenge of eradicating poverty in the least developed countries is greater than ever before. The timing of this conference is most appropriate. The decisions made and the follow up actions taken will set the pace and direction towards the eradication of poverty in LDCs. It is clear from recent statistics that the promises made in the 1990s, Education for All by the year 2000 and Health for All by the year 2000, have not been fulfilled. Recent statistics indicate that several countries especially in Africa still have high under-5 mortality rates. Sierra Leone is ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, Angola 2<sup>nd</sup> and Niger 3<sup>rd</sup>. Out of the 51 countries that have high mortality rates, 39 are from sub-Saharan Africa (UNICEF, 2001).<sup>1</sup>**

**The economies of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) continue to decline. The GNP per capita is given as US\$130 for Sierra Leone, US\$100 for Angola and US\$ 190 for Niger while the GNP per capita annual growth rate is given as -5.4 for Sierra Leone, -9.2 for Angola and -0.9 for Niger for the period 1990-1999. The annual rate of inflation in the least developed countries is 102% compared to 67% for developing countries and 2% for industrialized countries during the period 1990-1998 (UNICEF, 2001). The adult lit-**

<sup>1</sup> The under-five mortality rate is defined as the probability of dying between birth and exactly five years of age, per 1,000 live births.

eracy rates in the same countries are 18% for females and 45% for males in Sierra Leone, 29% for females and 56% for males in Angola and, 7% for females and 21% for males in Niger during the period, 1995-1999 (UNICEF, 2001).

These indicators have implications for education and consequently, sustainable development. The participation of children and the youth in education in several of the LDCs is extremely low. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for primary school in Sierra Leone is 41 for the females and 59 for males. The GER for primary school in Angola was 88 for females and 95 for males while for Niger the GER for primary school was 22 for females and 36 for males during the period 1995-1999 (UNICEF, 2001). The statistics at the secondary school level show a more worrying trend. While there are no figures given for Angola, Sierra Leone has a GER of 13 for females and 22 for males and Niger has a GER of 5 for females and 9 for males. Ethiopia records a GER of 10 for females and 14 for males at the secondary school level for the period 1995-1997.

The third millennium brings challenges especially with the rapid advances in technology. The Information Technology age requires that for development to occur and affect all people, levels of education, adult literacy and economic growth have to increase, hence this conference—eradicating poverty in the Least Developed Countries. Poverty eradication requires a multi-faceted approach in which gender is very central.

That girls' education directly contributes to sustainable development is no longer an issue. It is now well documented that educating the girls and women is the *single most important* investment that yields maximum returns for development. The infant mortality rates decrease, children have a higher probability of getting a good education and most importantly women become income generators, which increases the economic power-base of the family. The most important issue in any country is the number of girls that have access to education and the quality of education they receive as measured by levels of retention and performance.

Despite several efforts to increase enrollments and reduce the gender gap, significant increases in access still show declines in the overall proportion of girls enrolled at different levels of the education system. The gender gap has

not narrowed across the continent. Some countries have made significant progress in reducing the gender gap—Zambia, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and Namibia. Some African countries—Mali, Niger, Senegal, Benin, Chad, Guinea, Mozambique, Ethiopia, still have low enrollments for girls at all levels. In Ethiopia the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) at the primary school level was 31.0 for females in 1997. At the tertiary level, Ethiopia registered a GER of 0.3 for females in 1996. Overall, in sub-Saharan Africa more than two-thirds of eligible children are out of school, a majority of whom are girls.

In view of the main benefits of education girls as it relates to poverty eradication the paper is divided into three sections. Section 1 discusses the benefits of educating girls and the impact education has on girls' participation in development, democracy and eradication of poverty. Section 2 discusses the factors that inhibit girls' participation in education. Section 3 discusses the strategies that have been used to increase girls' participation in education and FAWE's response in educating girls for eradication of poverty.

## Section 1: Benefits of educating girls

### 1.1 Education for sustainable development

There is overwhelming evidence that there is a direct relationship between education and development. The more developed countries show high levels of participation in education for both females and males and conversely the least developed countries show low levels of participation in education at all levels as shown in the table below.

	Adult literacy (Male)	Adult literacy (Female)	Primary School, Gross Enrollment Ratio (Male)	Primary School, Gross Enrollment Ratio (Female)	Secondary School, Gross Enrollment Ratio (Male)	Secondary School, Gross Enrollment Ratio (Female)
Industrialized Countries	99 (1980)	97 (1980)	104 (1995-1999)	103 (1995-1999)	105 (1995-1997)	107 (1995-1997)
Developing Countries	68 (1980) and 81 (1995-1999)	46 (1980) and 66 (1995-1999)	84 (1995-1999)	77 (1995-1999)	55 (1995-1997)	46 (1995-1997)
Least Developed Countries	47 (1980) and 63 (1995-1999)	24 (1980) and 44 (1995-1999)	84 (1995-1999)	69 (1995-1999)	23 (1995-1997)	14 (1995-1997)

*Adapted from: UNICEF (2001), The State of the World's Children Table 4: Education Statistics, p. 93*

### 1.2 Impact of girls' education on development indicators

#### *Raising healthy families*

Health is an important development indicator. Better health for a nation implies better quality of life and more productivity. UNICEF has documented that women who are educated provide better nutrition for their families and more children survive the early years. Loss of life, especially

with the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is expensive and reduces the productivity of nation, leading to slower development. It has also been documented that educated women delay child birth and their fertility goes down—they produce less children than their uneducated age mates. An educated mother will realize the need for maternity, pre-natal and post-natal care. *'Poor and uneducated parents lack the information needed to provide optimum care for their children, increasing the risks of childhood illness and childhood mortality.'* (UNICEF, 2001 p. 32)

#### *First and second generation education*

Educated mothers will almost always want their children, both girls and boys to acquire better education than they themselves received. This is critical in sustainable development because of the need to break the poverty cycle. As UNICEF has observed, *'poverty's cycle does not stop in one life cycle. A girl born in poverty is more likely to marry early and have a child while still an adolescent. A malnourished girl becomes a malnourished mother, who will give birth to an underweight baby'* (UNICEF, 2001 p. 33).

#### *Avoiding contracting HIV/AIDS*

With the rapidly increasing incidences of HIV/AIDS in all countries in Africa, girls and women are the most vulnerable. There is evidence that young girls are dropping out of school to take care of their sickly parents or younger siblings. The girls have to go to markets to buy food or sell their produce to take care of families. This means that they themselves have to avoid contracting the deadly virus. Given the myths surrounding sexuality in Africa, it is crucial that girls have access to adequate information and knowledge about their sexuality and how to avoid other sexually transmitted diseases.

Lack of accurate information is the most important factor contributing to the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS. There are some African communities that believe in wife inheritance and have refused to accept that widows whose husbands died of AIDS should not be inherited. This increases the death rate. The use of contraceptives is still surrounded by myths and speculations that need to be corrected through education. The educated girls will not only avoid making errors that will make them vulnerable, but will also teach their children about the dangers involved.

*Income generation and participation in development*

There is evidence that in the rural areas the women who have some training and undertake some income-generating activities also participate in the development of their area much more than the uneducated. In the women's groups, the women who can write and keep records, hold positions of authority and participate in several associations or development groups.

*Decision-making*

While it is true in many African societies that women may not be the key decision-makers either in their homes, local or national levels, there is evidence that an educated woman will make a contribution to the decision-making process both at home and outside the home. The educated women are able to negotiate their rights and are aware of their responsibilities.

## Section 2: Factors militating against girls' full participation in education

While the benefits of educating girls for sustainable social and economic development are numerous as discussed earlier in this paper, Africa still lags behind other continents in terms of provision of education to all children and especially girls. The levels of access are lowest for women at the university level and other tertiary institutions. At the primary school level, the enrollment figures for girls may be comparable to those for boys but as one goes up the education ladder, the proportion of girls drops rapidly. The girls also tend to drop out more and in greater numbers due to a myriad of factors.

A closer look at the factors reveals that the factors fall into categories and should be addressed in an integrated manner. The factors that influence the gender disparities in education include:

**2.1 Socio-cultural beliefs and practices**—in many societies marriage is still considered as the ultimate goal for girls and hence there is no need to invest several years of formal education for them. Many communities, particularly those in the semi-arid and arid areas consider girls as a source of wealth for the families. Majority of societies silently believe that *'educating a girl is like watering another man's garden.'*

**Early marriages**—in a number of communities, the socialization process leads girls to view marriage as the ultimate purpose in life and if they get a good husband who can take care of them, they need not worry about getting an education themselves. In addition, girls are expected to get married *before they are spoilt (when they are still virgins)* and hence as soon as girls reach puberty, age 11-13, they are expected to get married. Some of the early marriages are arranged by the parents. In Southern Africa girls go through a virginity test from an older lady and get certificates for it! The girls have to expose themselves to the woman and it is a celebration when the girls are declared virgins!

**Early pregnancies**—these happen mainly because a majority of the girls mature while still in primary school and early years of secondary school before they acquire adequate information about their bodies and growing up. It is clear from meetings held to discuss adolescent reproductive health that the youth have inaccurate information about reproductive health and the health services that are available are not *Youth Friendly!* The facts are that *young boys and girls do have sex*—what

is important is that adults accept this fact and devise strategies to deal with it.

- 2.2 **Opportunity costs**—parents in many African societies still prefer to have girls work at home and assist the mothers with domestic chores. This leaves little time for school work and homework. Girls spend a lot of time assisting their parents to carry out domestic chores.
- 2.3 **Relevance of Education**—a number of girls and parents find education irrelevant to their lives and drop out to get married early or are forced to get married early by their parents who want to be paid dowry. With the present scenario where even children who have completed university education have no jobs, many parents are less convinced of the relevance of schooling.
- 2.4 **School environments**—in many cases, the school environments are not conducive to learning especially for girls. There is evidence that a majority of girls miss school during their menses because there are no separate toilet facilities to meet their needs. Some toilets have no doors and there is no running water.
- 2.5 **Teaching and learning**—the teaching and learning environment are not always conducive to learning especially for girls in science, mathematics and technological courses. Girls develop attitudes that mathematics and science are not for them and they perform very poorly to their detriment because they are not able to choose careers in science-based courses such as engineering. Teachers also discourage girls from taking mathematics and science subjects.
- 2.6 **Safety and security**—a majority of girls are not safe when walking long distances to and from school. Together with their parents they fear being raped, abducted and in some cases being attacked by animals. We have heard of schools in Kenya for example, that have been closed down in the areas where there is cattle rustling or ethnic conflicts. For girls, the safety both within the school and outside is very crucial. Recently there are more cases of teachers defiling their pupils and assistant chiefs defiling minors. There are fewer places where girls are safe and secure.

## Section 3. Challenges and opportunities for increasing girls' participation in education and FAWE's response

### 3.1 Challenges

To address some of the constraints or factors influencing girls' participation in education, the biggest challenge is to devise strategies at the classroom, school, societal and national levels.

**Classroom dynamics:** Teachers will need training on gender-responsiveness to reduce their negative interactions with the girls. There is research evidence that interactions between teachers and male students is different from the teachers' interaction with the female students. Girls and women are generally not expected to be brilliant or to perform well. At the university level, the demand for sexual encounters with lecturers as a way of getting better grades, is still rampant.

**School environment:Providing sanitation facilities:** There is evidence that at the school level, girls will not get discouraged from attending school when they are menstruating when there are adequate toilet facilities and running water. It is known that there are some areas where girls miss school when they have their monthly periods, either because they do not have adequate sanitary pads or because they cannot change sanitary pads while in school due to lack of water and closed door toilet facilities. In one school in Ghana, we found that prior to getting assistance from a donor to construct a set of toilets for boys and girls separately, the principal used to bring in the girls to change their pads in the toilet in her office. Schools must take this factor into consideration because one week of school missed in a month translates to 25% of school missed in a year and could contribute to poor performance in examinations.

**Providing escorts to school or bringing schools closer:** There are areas in which the nearest school is more than 5km from the girls' homes. Some girls are too afraid to walk to school for fear of being raped, abducted or in some cases eaten by animals. This means that parents keep the girls home much longer than the prescribed age of entry, which means they start later and mature long before they get to the end of primary school. Some of these girls do not perform well, are forced to repeat grades and finally give up and drop out! Providing escorts for girls to school and building schools nearer communities helps increase girls access and retention in school.

**Building community and parental involvement in schools:** Parents are a very important factor in the education of their children. Boarding schools can no longer keep parents away from visiting their daughters in schools as regularly as is necessary.

### 3.2 Opportunities

**Analyzing educational policies for gender-responsiveness:** Educational policies that govern education do not always favour girls and women. In the provision of school places, school equipment, teachers distribution and deployment, the gender approach needs to be applied to ensure non discriminatory practices.

**Bursary schemes and scholarships**—there are many intelligent girls who are unable to pay their way through school, particularly at the secondary school level. Several countries have initiated bursary schemes and scholarships at the national level.

**Up-grading teachers' skills and providing gender sensitivity training:** In almost all African countries a majority of the teachers have not attended in-service courses since they completed the pre-service training. A majority of the teachers may not have adequate knowledge of the subjects they are supposed to teach. Many students fail in critical subjects primarily because they are taught badly and/or by incompetent teachers. There is research evidence that some subjects such as mathematics and science are extremely teacher-dependent. This may be a plausible explanation as to why girls perform almost as well as boys in the languages. Students can learn languages even from reading on their own unlike mathematics and science.

**Making the curriculum relevant:** The curriculum in many African countries needs to be revised for relevance and appropriateness. Some countries continue to use curricula inherited from the colonial times and a majority of the students continue to fail the examinations taken at the end of each cycle. The students completing each cycle of education do not normally have skills for living. There is a need to review the curriculum in terms of the basic competencies required at each level and the life skills that students need so as to fit in the society in which they will live and the teachers should relate the content learnt in the classroom to life outside the classroom whenever possible. Science and mathematics learnt in school must be made meaningful and practical for the girls to internalize it and learn and more importantly

develop in them a curiosity to continue learning and transferring knowledge to new situations!

**Removing gender bias from textbooks and teaching and learning materials:** There is well-documented research in *Changing Images* (Obura, 1991) that shows evidence of stereotyping in textbooks and other learning materials. Gender bias needs to be removed so that girls know they too are capable of learning all subjects and particularly science and mathematics. A FAWE project, the Female Education in Mathematics and Science in Africa in Kenya has documented the status of mathematics and science for girls in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. It is clear that girls' attitudes towards these subjects are very negative, but can be enhanced by gender responsive programmes.

### 3.3 FAWE's response

FAWE has responded to these concerns and challenges in many ways. First, FAWE is itself a forum for discussing the concerns in girls' education. It is deliberate that its members are highly placed individuals who can influence policy at different levels. Second, the membership includes male counterparts in ministries of education and women in ministries other than education. Third, the wide network of 33 FAWE National Chapters with broad-based membership ensures that all stakeholders in girls' education are included.

FAWE has initiated several programmes aimed at closing the gender gap and empowering the girls themselves.

#### *Policy level*

FAWE recognizes the importance of influencing education policies relevant to female education so as to increase access and retention, and improve performance of girls and women in education. FAWE works with ministries of education in its member-countries and is initiating processes of ensuring that educational policies are gender-responsive. FAWE has developed a tool for analyzing educational policies for gender-responsiveness. Through the Strategic Resource Planning for Girls' Education (SRP) project, FAWE has carried out research in nine countries and encouraged the identification of the most promising policy choices for achieving Education for All (EFA) in

general and girls' education in particular. The main aim of the project is to assist governments in the continuous identification of strategies for reallocating resources in education systems to the advantage of girls.

### *Advocacy*

There are several communities that still need to be convinced about the importance of girls' education. FAWE aims at creating awareness and consensus on the social and economic advantages of female education through advocacy. Specific activities include the formation of Girls' Clubs where girls speak out. FAWE has also created the Girls' Forum in major educational meetings where girls voice, through drama and poetry, concerns and issues affecting the girls.

FAWE publishes and disseminates material for advocacy to target audiences. Using one message—Education of girls Benefits All—FAWE's newsletters and other publications are read widely in Africa and abroad. FAWE has also entered into a partnership with the media and has launched the FAWE Award for Media Excellence (FAME) which is given to the woman journalist who has written the best articles in support of girls' education nationally.

### *Demonstration projects*

Since inception, FAWE has supported small-scale demonstration projects that are aimed at interventions that make a difference in the levels of participation of girls in education at all levels. The three projects summarised below have been financially supported by FAWE under the Demonstration and Experimentation Grants Programme, FAWE has financially supported projects:

1. **“Nigerian Girls into Sciences” (NIGIS). (Nigeria)** NIGIS is an action-oriented performance enhancement programme for girls at junior secondary level in Nigeria, whose primary goal is to expand interest and improve performance in science among Nigerian girls. It is believed that a way of increasing female participation in science, stimulate interest, and increase confidence, is by paying special attention to their learning. Accordingly, NIGIS project prompted the development of a teaching manual, Learn Science by Doing, based on the syllabus of junior secondary (JSII) science in Nigeria. Learn Science by Doing (LSD) is a guide for teaching integrated science in schools. The pedagogical approach in LSD

emphasises a shift from teacher talk-and chalk or demonstrations to collaborative "hands on", activity-based learning, and skills development among students. The schools using the LSD approach found it of immense benefit to girls because it increased their (a) interaction, (b) ability to manipulate the environment, (c) mastery of science subject; and (d) the development of positive scientific attitudes.

2. **Ngong Young Restore Hope Training Centre for marginalised girls (Kenya)**. The Communities in Ngong area live below the poverty line (\$220) per household. Due to many social evils such as drugs, early marriages and prostitution, the most vulnerable is the girl-child who drops out from school due to early pregnancies and lack of school fees. The centre attempts to rehabilitate 200 young girls and mothers through training in Community based health care programme, Family Life Education, Justice and Peace and involvement in income generating activities and small enterprise development with community participation.
3. **Pre-Entry programme for female students-Faculties of Sciences of Engineering-University of Dar-Es Salaam (Tanzania)**. The programme is an attempt to redress the gender imbalance in admission to the Faculties of Science and Engineering. In these two faculties, enrolment in the year 1991 and 1996 averaged 15% and 4% females respectively. In response to this trend the Institutional Transformation Programme Steering Committee of the university decided to actively pursue strategies that would raise the proportion of female students ultimately to reach 50% of the overall enrolment. The programme was assisted by FAWE for two years. The course increased female participation for 1997-98 by 70% in chemistry and biology. One significant finding was that the programme oriented the students well to the university environment; making it easier for them to know their way around the campus, use the library and understand lectures' expectation, and generally raise their self-confidence.

#### *Empowerment of girls*

FAWE's most recent intervention is the creation of three FAWE Centres of Excellence, one in AIC Kajiado Girls' School in Kenya, the other in Mgugu Secondary School in the Kilosa area of Tanzania and the third in Kigali, Rwanda. These schools have been supported in terms of technical support as well as material support. This includes bursary schemes as well as pro-

viding a safe and conducive school environment with adequate facilities and supplies. The teachers and principals have also been trained in educational management. The girls have been encouraged to form girls' clubs aimed at empowering the girls themselves. The Centres are instituting a Management Information System. A fourth Centre of Excellence has been started in Diourbel, Senegal. FAWE Centres of Excellence seek to reach poor girls in rural areas who would not otherwise have access to education.

### *Partnerships*

FAWE recognizes the need to work in collaboration and in partnership with other partners and organizations that are involved in girls' education. Through the FAWE National Chapters, FAWE is able to work closely with governments, especially ministries of education, to influence programmes and policies in favour of girls' education. FAWE also has an observer status with the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). FAWE works with UNICEF in the promotion of girls' education through community based organizations and grassroots NGOs. FAWE has also developed a partnership with universities as a way of addressing gender concerns at the university level.

### *Organizational capacity building*

The network of National Chapters was created for identifying priority issues on the ground, generating new ideas on how to address the complex issues and disseminating relevant information on girls' education. The 33 FAWE National Chapters are at different stages of development and are undertaking a variety of activities. FAWE recognizes the need to strengthen the Chapters for efficacy in the acceleration of female participation in education. The need for capacity building for the Chapters has been isolated as critical to enable the Chapters to fundraise for their activities.

### *Monitoring and Evaluation*

FAWE considers monitoring and evaluation as an integral part of its programmes and activities.

FAWE has worked within the seven strategic objectives discussed and realized that an integrated, packaged approach will have more impact in a demonstrable way. This is the FAWE approach in the Centres of Excellence.

## Conclusion

That girls' education is a necessary and important aspect of eradicating poverty is no longer debatable. What is critical now as the third millennium progresses is what we do—at the individual level, at the family and community level, at the national level and at the global level—to ensure that our girls, the future mothers, future wives and future citizens of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are not left behind as the world moves on to greater heights in technology and information. For girls to participate fully not only in their own lives and those of their future families, but also in their country's development, the factors militating against their full participation in education must be removed so as to increase the number of girls that acquire a secondary and a post-secondary education as well as acquire appropriate skills for development. To remove these hurdles requires a deliberate effort and the adoption of an integrated approach to eradication of poverty by all stakeholders.

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## *FAWE's Strategic Objectives*

- **Policy and data analysis:** To influence the formulation and adoption of educational policies on girls' education in order to increase access and improve retention and performance (including review of policies; collation, analysis and application of data).
- **Advocacy:** To build public awareness and consensus through advocacy on the social and economic advantages of girls' education (including advocacy at all levels—policymakers, education practitioners, communities).
- **Interventions:** To undertake and support innovative demonstration and experimental programmes that promote girls' participation in education (including demonstration grants programme and the Agathe Uwilingiyamana Award for innovations in promoting girls' education).
- **Girls' empowerment:** To empower girls through education for effective participation in the creation of an equitable society (including school based interventions to improve the school environment, curriculum and capacity building for girls).
- **Partnerships:** To create and sustain partnerships with governments, donors, universities, NGOs and communities and other partners in education for effective implementation of programmes to improve girls' education.
- **Strengthening organizational capacity:** To strengthen organizational capacity in order to effectively implement programmes promoting girls' education.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** To monitor and evaluate the implementation and impact of FAWE programmes.



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