We make the difference

The Girls Education Movement: GEM

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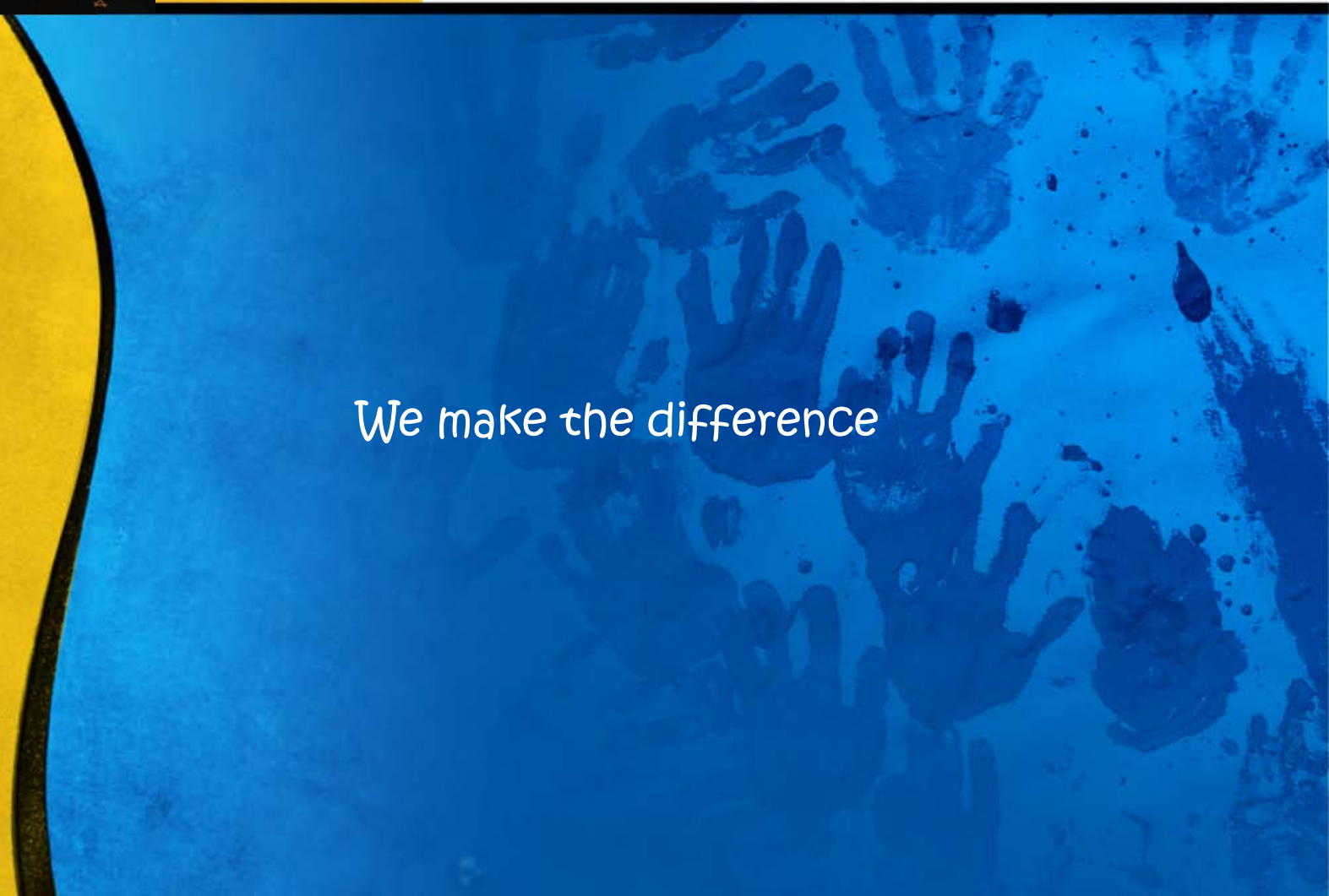

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Introducing GEM

GEM stands for **Girls Education Movement**. GEM is a child-centered, child-led grassroots movement. It was launched in August 2001 in Kampala, Uganda at a conference attended by children and young people from throughout Africa.

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Movement: GEM is not a single organization, but consists of groups of children and young people in schools and communities throughout Africa who are working in different ways to bring about positive changes in the lives of African girls.

GEM is about getting things done. It is about movement and action, not just talking. And most of all it is about young people driving the movement through active participation.

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Education: Education is the key to positive change. GEM focuses on education because it gives girls the knowledge, skills, confidence and power to positively transform their own lives by claiming their rights.

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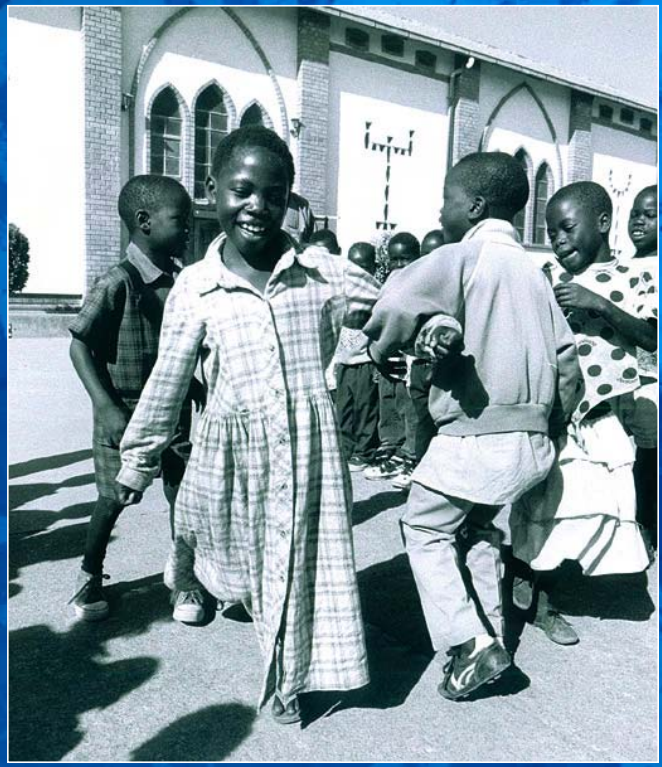
Girls: In many African countries, girls as a group are worse off than boys. For a long time girls have been discriminated against and still today are often treated differently and unfairly because of gender prejudices.

Girls and boys supported by the wisdom of older people in various supporting capacities, are natural allies in the struggle to create equal opportunities for girls and a better quality of education for all.



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GEM's Goals

GEM's goal is to empower girls as this is the best way to strengthen and accelerate positive transformation in Africa. The empowerment and education of girls is the key to overcoming barriers to social and economic development, ensuring healthy, stable families and building peaceful, productive communities.

These goals can be reached by lobbying for:

- Equal access to education for girls
- Improved quality of education for both boys and girls
- Gender-sensitive curricula and learning materials
- Safe learning environments
- Abolition of harmful cultural practices
- Life skills training to empower girls against sexual abuse, exploitation and HIV/AIDS

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GEM's Objectives

During the process leading up to the launch of GEM in Kampala, Uganda in 2001 GEM's founding group of children and young people identified the following basic objectives for the movement:

1. To protect and promote the rights of all girls to quality education.
2. To enable African girls to participate in decision making about their education.
3. To provide girls with opportunities to develop and exercise their leadership and technical skills.

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4. To tap the potential of boys, men and women to work in partnership with girls to promote equitable, accessible, high-quality education in Africa and, through education, to create more equitable, just societies.
5. To protect the rights of girls with special needs and any children at risk of exploitation or abuse in or outside school.
6. To sensitize key actors in the importance of girl's education and mobilize them to support policies and programmes that will ensure quality education for all girls.

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Main areas of concern

At the conference in Kampala, Uganda in 2001 an action-oriented GEM Agenda with six areas of special concern in girls education was agreed on:

1. Transition and Transformation
2. Safety and Security
3. Science, maths and technology (SMT)
4. Gender in the curriculum and teaching–learning process
5. Girls with special needs
6. Resources and legislation

(Networking for change, GEM Uganda, 2001)

GEM's eleven-point Action Plan

The eleven-point action plan ensures that the movement to transform Africa through girls education will be led by children and young people themselves and will be focused on their own ideas, experiences and aspirations.

Transition and Transformation:

1. Empower girls to participate actively in making decisions, which concern them.
2. Fight poverty by supporting measures that will increase household incomes, free girls from exploitative labour and enable them to go to school.
3. Promote peace education programmes to resolve conflicts that expose girls to violence or prevent them from going to school.

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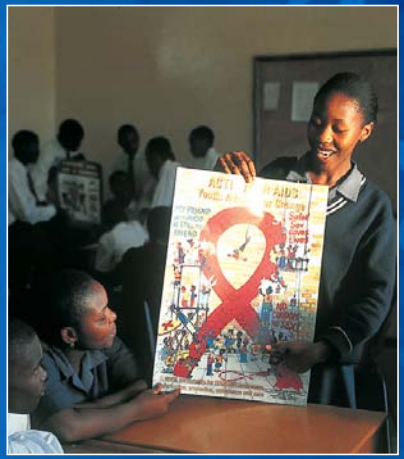
Safety and Security:

4. Promote life skills education to empower girls and to fight HIV/AIDS. Use innovative methods and channels both in and outside schools.
5. Abolish all harmful cultural practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation.



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Science, maths and technology:

6. Take affirmative action to promote girls in maths, science and technology (SMT), including information and communication technology (ICT), and sensitize parents, communities and educators to bridge the digital divide.
7. Promote mentoring using positive role models for girls in SMT.

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Gender in the curriculum and teaching-learning process:

8. Make the teaching-learning process gender-responsive in all learning environments, including the family. Restructure curricula and train teachers in girl-empowering teaching methods.

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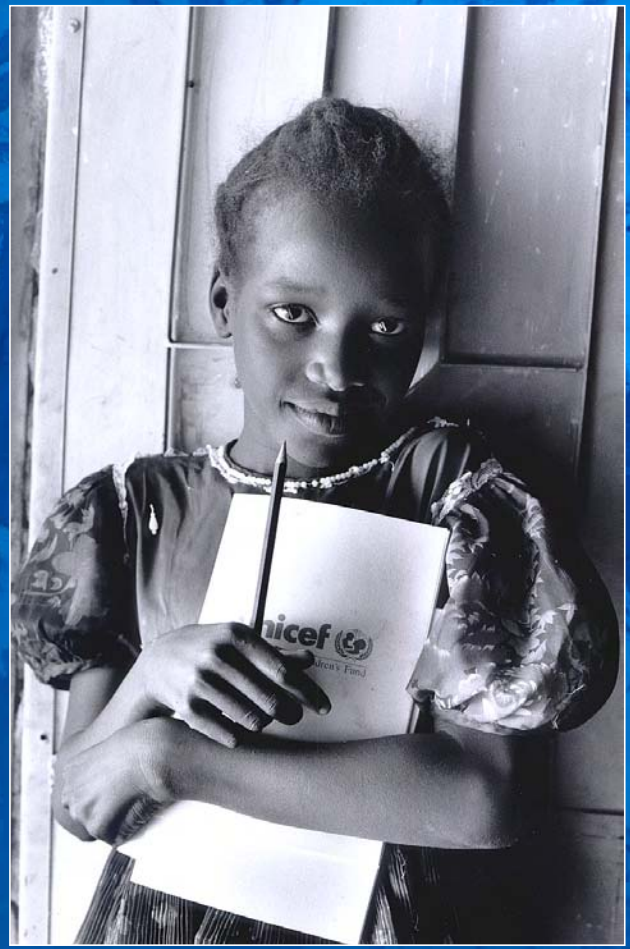
Girls with special needs:

9. Provide friendly learning environments that are inclusive, affordable and accessible to all girls with special needs, including girls with disabilities, girls living or working in the streets and girls who are refugees, internally displaced or orphaned.

Resources and legislation:

10. Increase education and health budgets.
11. Focus on policies and programmes to improve the quality of girls education, not just girls access to education.



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GEM in Context

GEM doesn't want to compete with other organizations working to improve education and empower girls in Africa. Nor is GEM saying that other organizations are not doing good work.

But GEM wants to bring the ideas and voices of girls (and boys) to the forefront. The best way of making progress on girls' education is for children and young people themselves to have a chance to develop and share ideas about how our education systems can be improved.

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Education is a fundamental children's right which African governments have committed themselves to uphold. They have ratified international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (New York, 1989), the Global Platform for Action (Beijing, 1995) and the Education for All Framework of Action (Dakar, 2000). These agreements obligate governments to provide good-quality, basic education for *all* children.

At the same time, NGO's, communities and civil society as a whole have worked with governments to operationalize these instruments. GEM intends to make sure that commitments become reality.

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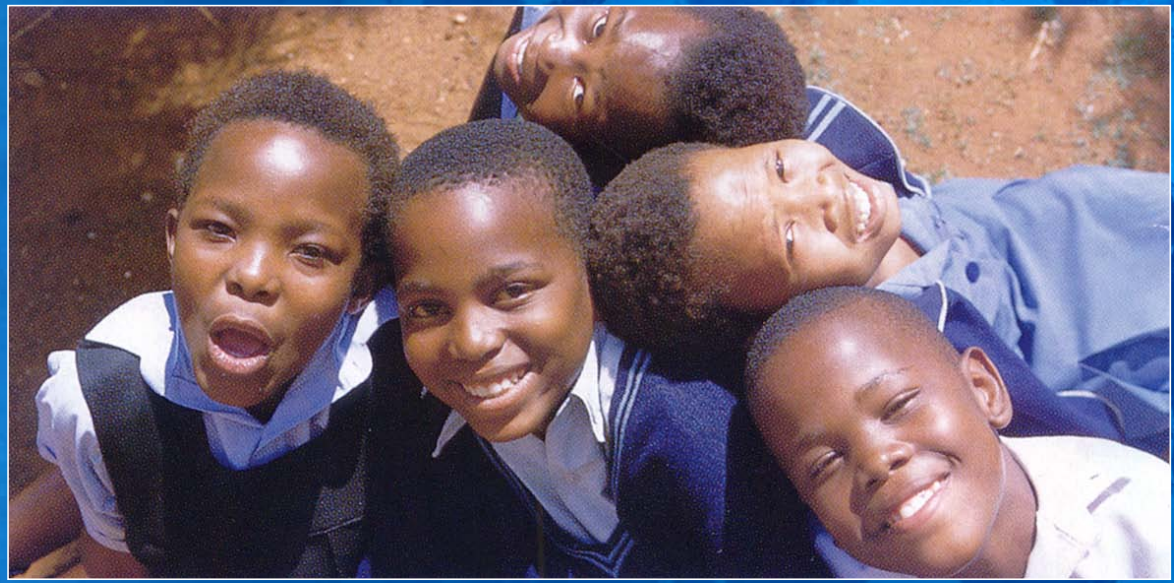
"Children and young people are the experts on childhood and youth. So tackle the problems of girls education in Africa, let's call the experts!"

(Urban Jonsson, Regional Director of UNICEF ESARO)



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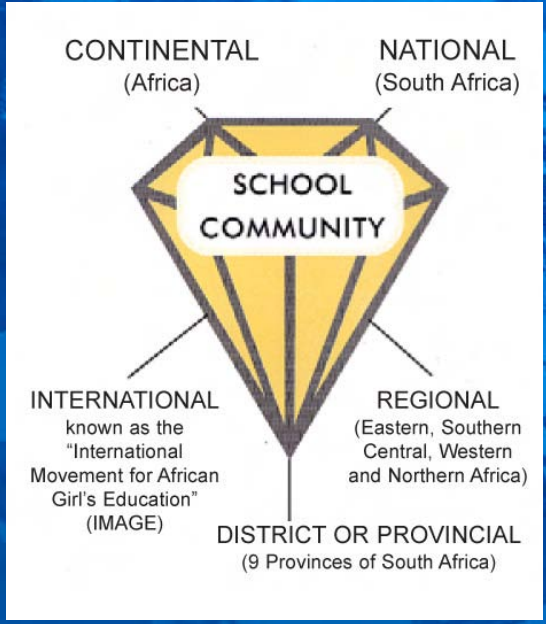
The GEM Network

The key to GEM is the participation of children and young people in their own education. GEM does not have hierarchical structures or a set of rules on how members should operate. GEM exists through a network of children's and young people's organizations in schools and communities.

It is up to these organizations to decide how to interact and help one another at community, district (or province), national, regional, continental (Africa) or international (IMAGE = "International Movement for African Girls Education") levels in co-operation with appropriate government, civil society, NGO's and other donor organizations.



(Networking for change, GEM Uganda, 2001)

GEM Network Functions

What are the functions of the GEM Network?

- To promote the objectives of GEM throughout Africa
- To enable groups of children and young people in all parts of the continent to share ideas and to lobby for change and access resources
- To facilitate the sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences to help build fairer and more equitable African education systems and societies by creating linkages among girls in different parts of Africa

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- To be a platform for developing consciousness and creativity of African young people
- To create a "critical mass" to ignite positive change
- To lobby for support from strategic allies (boys, women, men, civil society, policy makers, donors)
- To lead the network right from the community level to the international level.

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GEM's Activities in South Africa

GEM's activities in South Africa are driven by the South African Girl Child Alliance (SAGCA), supported by UNICEF South Africa and UNICEF ESARO (Eastern and Southern African Region). Three provinces are targeted at phase one (Limpopo Province, KwaZulu Natal, Eastern Cape). GEM will be rolled over to the other provinces, when it is sufficient active and sustainable in these three provinces.

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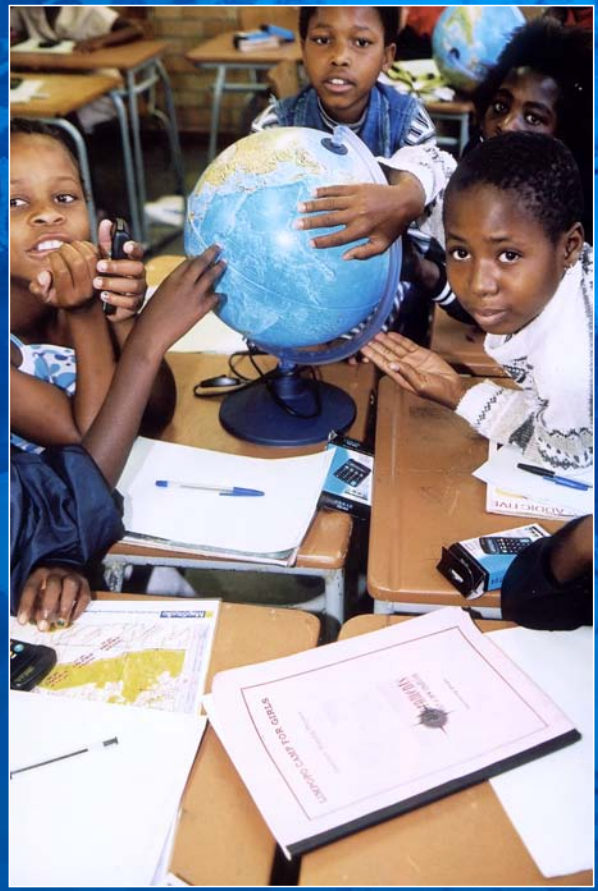
The South African GEM's activities are:

1. Participation of South African youth in the Launch of GEM in Uganda (August 2001)
2. Participation of South African girls in the UN Children's Summit in New York in presence of President Museveni of Uganda, who presented GEM to the UN Assembly (May 2002)
3. Awareness raising on GEM for learners, head teachers, gender co-ordinators and School Governing Bodies in Limpopo Province, KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape (2002)



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4. Participation of girls in a Workshop on Violence against Girls in Schools, conducted by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) (June 2002)
5. Presentation of the GEM to National School Governing Bodies (NASGB) (August 2002)
6. Training of girls from Limpopo Province and KwaZulu Natal as well as SAGCA co-ordinators on the Human Rights Approach to Programming (September 2002)

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7. Story Telling/Comic Writing Workshop for girls as a strategy to support efforts for advocacy and prevention against gender based violence in schools in Limpopo Province (September 2002)
8. Peer Counseling Training in collaboration with Planned Parenthood South Africa (PPSA) for girls to conduct the same training in schools in Limpopo Province, KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape (September 2002)
9. Launch of GEM in Limpopo Province (September 2002), KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape (2003)

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