

**KENTON CONFERENCE 2008**  
**Kenton ko Thabeng tsa Mogale**  
**23 – 26 October 2008**

**Abstract: Multiple paper session**

**Sub-theme: Local and global influences on education**

***Gender, education and global poverty reduction initiatives***

**Introduction and overview of presentation**

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Gender equality in education has gained increasing prominence in global policy since 2000. Two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) contain commitments to aspects of gender equality in schools. Further aspirations are detailed in the Dakar Platform for Action on Education for All (2000) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). Despite this, global progress addressing gender equality in education has been slow. The 2005 MDG target to have equal numbers of girls and boys in primary school and secondary school was missed in 94 countries. Moreover, global policy and research on gender, education and development has often been interpreted to mean no more than giving girls access to different levels of schooling. A gulf has opened up since Beijing between the global women's movement which has emphasized action on violence against women and the effects of poverty, and the Education for All (EFA) movement which has tried to hold governments and donors accountable for delivery on the education components of the MDGs. In exploring some aspects of these divisions the paper considers how wider understandings of gender or equality or education that go beyond issues of access appear to have been largely been ignored in the EFA movement. In providing the conceptual basis for the two other papers which are presented in the panel, based on empirical data, this paper explores the contested meanings of gender, global obligation, education and equality entailed in policy declarations, feminist critiques of the MDGs, and the positions being adopted by a group of theorists, activists and practitioners who seek to engage critically with the MDG agenda. The paper has been written as part of the work of researchers based in the UK, South Africa and Kenya engaged in the project *Gender, education and global poverty reduction initiatives* funded by the ESRC.