GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

GLOSSARY

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women, men, girls, boys and gender minorities. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's, girls' and gender minorities' historical and social disadvantages that prevent women, men, girls, boys and gender minorities from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.[1]

Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women, men, girls, boys and gender minorities of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards.[2] It means that all persons, regardless of their gender, enjoy the same status in society; have the same entitlements to all human rights; enjoy the same level of respect in the community; can take advantage of the same opportunities to make choices about their lives; and have the same amount of power to shape the outcomes of these choices.[3]

Gender identity: Gender identity refers to how an individual feels about their own gender. Individuals may identify as male, female or as something else and their gender identity may or may not be the same as the sex that they were assigned at birth. Everyone has a gender identity and expresses their gender in a unique and personal way.[4]

Gender norms: Gender norms are informal, deeply entrenched and widely held expectations or rules about how each gender should behave. Every society has distinct gender norms because gender itself is not fixed, but the concept of gender norms has at its core the notion of unequal power relations and prestige between men and boys, and women and girls, or of a gender minority.

Gender responsive education: Identifies and addresses the different needs of girls, boys, women and men to promote equal outcomes. Does not explicitly seek to redress gender inequalities.

Gender sensitive: Shows awareness of gender differences and inequalities but does not necessarily address them.

Intersectionality is the understanding that a person's identity is made up of multiple, intersecting factors such as age, poverty, class, race, ethnicity, caste, language, migration or displacement status, HIV status, disability, gender identity and/or sexual orientation, which combine to both benefit and disadvantage them, and which cannot be separated.[5]

In all their diversity: The term 'in all their diversity' means recognizing, accepting, celebrating and finding strength in individual differences such as gender, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. For stakeholders, this implies respecting this diversity and finding ways to support its positive expression.

Stereotype: A stereotype is a widely held, fixed idea or image of a particular type of person or thing.

Whole school approach: A whole school approach is a strategy that takes into account the inter-connectedness of schools, communities, and families in order to improve the school environment for students, staff, and community members.

imagine if every child and young person had the tools, knowledge and resources to challenge the status quo and champion gender equality from a young age.

imagine if this removed barriers to learning for all children of any gender and sexual orientation.

imagine if this helped every child and young person to explore their talents.

imagine what a different world these children would be living in today.

imagine the future they would be shaping for a more gender just, climate just and socially just planet.

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INTRODUCTION

Education has massive transformational power.
Yet, the potential of education systems to achieve gender equality and equity – and fulfil its promise to all children – has not been fully harnessed in any country.

Huge progress has been made. Over the last quarter of a century, gender parity in education around the world has skyrocketed. Between 1995 and 2018, the percentage of countries with gender parity in education rose from 56 per cent to 65 per cent in primary, from 45 per cent to 51 per cent in lower secondary, and from 13 per cent to 24 per cent in upper secondary education.[6] But parity is only a surface measure.
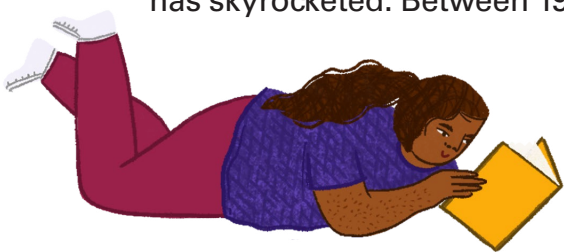
> In some countries, textbooks deliberately entrench gender norms, depicting women in the kitchen or girls carrying water on their heads and men in the office or as doctors in hospitals.

> *Why enforce a barrier to a young person striving to reach their potential? Why would we risk losing out on the contribution a child may make in the future because they do not fit within predetermined gender norms?*

Everyone has the right to an inclusive and equitable quality education. For some, this right is curtailed by socially constructed gender norms and expectations that are as arbitrary as they are discriminatory. First and foremost, we are human.[i] A person's gender should not determine how they are treated, nor the services they can access. Their very humanity should be enough to warrant respect and equal treatment, not to mention social and economic investment.

There is still much to do to improve access to quality learning for all children in all their diversity around the world. And much more to do to address gender norms that permeate education systems and limit opportunities.

Girls and women are excluded and discriminated against simply because they are girls and women. They are marginalized within education systems for a number of reasons: prioritization of boys' and men's education in

households where resources are scarce; a disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities; early and forced marriage; adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood; and unsafe learning environments, including lack of sanitation facilities for girls[7] or risk of gender-based violence in and around education spaces. Conflict exacerbates vulnerabilities[8] – teenage pregnancy can increase by as much as 65 per cent during an emergency[9] and some 54 per cent of the world's out-of-school girls are in crisis-affected countries.[10]

Boys and men are affected by gender norms too, restricted by harmful norms of masculinity. Early in adolescence, boys may start to face expectations to become income-earners or join armed groups, for example. Or they may conform to social norms that lead to disengagement from school and perpetuation of violence against girls.[11] Finding ways to breakdown that patriarchal grip is every bit as beneficial to boys as girls.[i] When it comes to teaching and learning positive gender norms, if we leave boys behind, then the problem becomes greater.[i]

Gender norms reinforce stereotypes of what children and young people are expected to become – and how they are expected to behave and define themselves.

Children and young people who do not identify themselves within the confines of traditional gender and sexual

Research shows that verbal and physical spaces in school are gendered, such as boys tending to take charge of the playground, supported by teachers. Girls and LGBTQI children can struggle to navigate these spaces. They are often expected to be in the background, not engaging in play or sport or leadership positions.[12]

orientation norms face the difficult and sometimes distressing task of fitting in. Gender norms and power relations limit – and try to shape – children and young people before they have had a chance to explore their unique gifts, abilities and preferences that often do not fit within traditional gender norms.

Moreover, forms of discrimination often intersect. Most people who experience one inequality experience injustice and exclusion on multiple fronts: poverty, class, race, ethnicity, caste, language, migration or displacement status, HIV status, disability, gender identity and/or sexual orientation. This intersectionality intensifies injustice and amplifies vulnerabilities.[13] Marginalization and discrimination – and the exclusion and vulnerability

> **In some countries, adolescent girls who have had children are not allowed to go to school, but adolescent boys who are fathers are allowed to continue their education.**[14]

they breed – will continue in an intergenerational cycle if action is not taken. Indeed, **without a deeper focus on transformative change to the way we educate, the gains mentioned above are easily reversible**. As the COVID-19 crisis has shown us, progress is fragile. And the encroaching threat of climate change threatens to exacerbate inequalities everywhere, including in education.

Gender norms are extremely challenging to address because they are entrenched in every aspect of society. Indeed, education systems themselves can often reflect and perpetuate prevailing harmful gender norms and power relations in teaching practices, curricula, and textbooks.

But **the potential of education is irrefutable**. Some of the most important influences on children and young people are in educational spaces. Outside the home, the school is at the heart of socialization and a space in which young people are exposed to role models. It is where children

learn about the world, their interests, and their capabilities. Education can reinforce existing norms or challenge and transform them, not just for children, but for their parents, communities, and nations. Afterall, children go home after school and talk about what they learn.[i]

To unlock this potential, we need education systems to become **'gender transformative'**. This needs to start right from early childhood when ideas about gender identity and expression start forming.

Gender Transformative Education is about inclusive, equitable, quality education (SDG 4, particularly target 4.7) and nurturing an environment of gender justice for children, adolescents and young people in all their diversity (SDG 5, particularly target 5.1). Gender Transformative Education would remove barriers to education and boost progress towards important social shifts, such as the reduction of gender-based violence and early marriage, increased participation of women in the labour market, the promotion of gender equality, and women's and girls' leadership in decision-making roles.

Gender Transformative Education makes sense for children and young people in all their diversity, as well as for communities and economies. **Educating girls to the same level as boys could benefit developing countries to the tune of at**

A study of sexuality and HIV education programmes from high-, middle- and low-income countries showed that programmes that addressed gender or power were five times more likely to be effective than those that did not. Fully 80 per cent of them were associated with a significantly lower rate of STIs or unintended pregnancies.[17]

least $112 billion a year.[15] As well as this, advancing gender equality could contribute $12 trillion to global growth.[16]

In other words, prioritizing gender equality in and through education has the potential to transform societies and bring about gender justice, climate justice, economic justice and social justice.

Current approaches to gender equality by the education community have brought us forward. **Gender-sensitive education** acknowledges existing differences between genders. **Gender-responsive education** goes a step further, actively exploring ways to address inequalities and reduce harmful gender norms and practices. Both approaches offer essential tools in education, but they work within

the existing system; they treat the symptoms. Gender norms and power relations must be dismantled to make any real difference to the opportunities for all children and young people in all their diversity. **Gender Transformative Education** completely transforms education systems by uprooting inequalities.[i]

This is calling for nothing less than a fundamental reset of how we approach education.

WHAT IS GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION?

Gender Transformative Education seeks to utilize all parts of an education system – from policies to pedagogies to community engagement – to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.

Gender Transformative Education moves beyond simply improving access to education for girls and women towards equipping and empowering stakeholders – students, teachers, communities and policy makers – to examine, challenge, and change harmful gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls, women and persons of other genders.