

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK
Danida

GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION







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This booklet argues for gender equality in education as a sound investment with massive returns at individual, family and macro-economic level. Guidance is provided for practical measures to bridge the gender gap with case examples from Nepal, Bangladesh and Uganda. Ideas for policy development and gender activities in education can be found on the last pages of the booklet.

Full use of human resources

Equal access to education for girls and boys is a basic human right. Gender equality in education is crucial to the United Nations commitments to Education for All and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Education is essential for transmission of knowledge and skills, but also for understanding and acceptance of basic values such as gender equality. Schools play a key role in changing prevailing gender stereotypes.

Educating girls is a particularly effective way of eradicating poverty and the positive effects of education for girls are well documented on the health and welfare of families as well as on economic opportunities and social transformation on a larger scale. Girls' education holds the key to a stronger role for women in private sector development as described in booklet 5.4. Yet millions of girls never have the chance to learn how to read and write. Worldwide, 60 million girls, compared to 45 million boys, are still not enrolled in school. The overall objective remains education for all boys and girls, but the effect of the gender gap in education is a particularly acute waste of opportunity.

Bridging the gap

There has been progress in school enrolment for both girls and boys over recent decades. Sixty-five per cent of countries reporting on school

enrolment in 2004 had reached parity between girls and boys at primary level. Only one third of 171 countries reporting on secondary education enrolment had achieved parity at secondary level. Completion rates are much lower than enrolment rates, and particularly so for girls. Disparities between educational opportunities for girls and boys increase from primary to secondary and tertiary level, and are significant in vocational training.

The gender gap is so pronounced that special efforts are often needed. Examples of measures include balancing the enrolment, preventing early dropout of girls, ensuring a better balance in post-primary education, a curriculum which does not replicate stereotyped gender roles, and a gender sensitive educational environment. The case of Nepal presented in the box below demonstrates that impressive results can be achieved in a relatively short time by taking a comprehensive approach to gender equality involving key stakeholders throughout the education sector.

Gender equality in education requires gender mainstreaming initiatives in the entire sector. In addition, special interventions targeting women and girls can make up for serious gaps. In the process of planning education programmes it can be useful to carry out a sector gender analysis to identify differences between boys and girls with implications for school attendance and achievements. Prospects for tertiary and vocational training and use of educational skills on the formal and informal labour markets can also inform a gender sector analysis in education.

Nepal: Remarkable achievements in education

Literacy in Nepal is very low. For women over 15 it was 25 per cent in 2003, compared to 44 per cent for men¹. The gap between women and men's literacy is one of the highest in the world due to low enrolment rates of girls, decreasing at the higher levels of education.

In support of Nepal's Basic and Primary Education Programme in early 2000, country-wide consultations were held with the public in order to collect suggestions and feedback from all levels. These are reflected in

Nepal's Education for All Programme (EFA) 2004-2009. The objective is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education and more specifically to increase gender parity from 60 to 90 per cent by 2009.

Nepal's education programme is supported jointly by Danida and a number of development partners. The programme applies a two-tiered strategy of gender mainstreaming and targeted measures for girls. The activities aim at increasing the number of girls (from marginal groups in particular) and female teachers in schools, having more women in school committees, and integrating gender issues in curricula and in teacher training. Gender issues are also addressed in social mobilisation campaigns with civil society organisations. Prior to each academic year, the campaign Welcome To School encourages girls and marginalised group to enrol. Targeted measures to attract more girls include installation of separate toilet facilities for girls and boys.





Remarkable achievements have been made in Nepal. From 1998 to 2001 girls' enrolment increased by 15 per cent and their completion of primary education increased by 20 per cent. The ratio of female to male attendance rates in secondary education improved from 0.67 to 0.83 between 19996 and 2006. The latest value is below the gender parity index in primary education, 0.95, but it brings Nepal closer to the Millennium Development Goal of gender parity in primary and secondary education.

Lessons learnt

The main lesson learnt is that joint efforts of essential stakeholders such as civil society, development partners, and the Nepali Government have been a key to the success of the gender equality work in the education sector.

In 2001-02 the Ministry of Education undertook a 'gender audit' that recommended the development of a ministerial gender policy. Recommendations included integration of gender perspectives in all training and statistics and increased number of women leaders at all levels to 30 per cent within 5 years. Further actions include presentation of gender sensitive role-models and educational materials without gender stereotypes. The audit has proven an important instrument to achieve gender equality in the education sector. Development of a gender policy for the Ministry of Education is now well advanced.

Source: Nepal Demographic and Health Surveys 1996, 2001 and 2006

A sound investment

Support for education of girls is the development investment with the greatest impact in terms of halting the spread of AIDS, increasing economic growth and breaking the cycle of poverty². This is the message in the World Bank's Fast Track Initiative and the Action Plan of 'Smart Economics'. Millennium Development Goals (MDG) number 3 aims to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education at all levels by 2015. There is evidence that focus on equal opportunities in education for girls and boys and investing in girls' education yields high returns for the individual, for families and for society.

In many countries, policy-makers have tended to see the benefits of educating girls and women as connected with improving family health and welfare, rather than with economic opportunities or social transfor-



mation on a larger scale. Equal access to education is an important starting point in pursuing such opportunities, and represents an important platform for strengthening women's employment opportunities and participation in decision making.

Equality in education needs to be seen in context. Synergies between investments in different sectors are important: In some countries the provision of accessible clean water reduces the workload of fetching water so much, that girls can actually attend school. Particularly in the dry African countries where women and girls spend long hours fetching water, investments in water supply may have a strong complementary effect on girls' access to primary education.

Dilemmas of investing in girls' and boys' education

A number of aspects of the education system reinforce unequal opportunities, access and results for girls and boys. They include policies and resource allocation, quality of facilities and education materials, curriculum, teacher training and recruitment, school-fees, and bursaries. Other deep rooted aspects reinforcing gender imbalances concern traditions and values of families and communities, security in and on the way to school, risk of rape, teenage pregnancy causing expulsion from schools, and out-of-school work-load for girls.

Higher out-of-school work-loads for girls are reflected in higher drop-out rates for girls than for boys already in primary school. Families who cannot afford to send all their children to school tend to send their sons, hoping for better job opportunities for them. What pays off in the wider society from investing in girls' education may look very different in the household's short term perspective.

Educated women appear less likely to suffer from domestic violence. However, the road is rocky as many girl students experience demeaning and humiliating treatment by male students and teachers who demand sexual favours. Poverty makes girls particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment when offers of money and gifts are involved.

Inequalities within schools

Social inequalities are often reinforced in the school system because women teachers are under-represented and teachers tend to show more attention to boys and display a lower opinion of girls' abilities. The choice of subjects and the way subjects are taught in schools mirror and widen social inequalities, such as denigrating physical labour as 'the job of the poor' and domestic activities as 'the women's job'. Girls and boys are often streamed into different disciplines. Girls are encouraged to take up 'arts' subjects, and boys are encouraged to pursue 'scientific' and 'technical' subjects. This influences job opportunities later in life.

These difficulties need to be analysed in a country-specific context in order for education programmes to be gender sensitive. Gender analysis is particularly critical to the success of endeavours to attract and retain women and girls from poor backgrounds. An example of an intervention to address some of the gender differences affecting hard to reach children in an urban setting in Bangladesh can be found in the box below.

Bangladesh: Literacy for 'hard to reach' children

In Bangladesh, many girls work as house servants and look after small children. Boys are often involved in small trading and help scooter drivers. A Programme for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children, supported by Sida, provides 351,000 children with basic literacy, numeracy, and broader life skills in early hours before they go to work. Special attention is given to children at risk, for example, girls and boys in hazardous and exploitative child labour. The programme is implemented by NGOs and requires a minimum of 50 pct. of the learners and teachers to be female.

Intangible but important results

Many achievements are hard to measure but can be seen in changes in attitude amongst learners and teachers. Illiterate mothers proudly tell how they have learned to write their name from their children attending the programme. The mix of girls and boys in the same class room has provided for discussions of day-to-day issues concerning girls and boys. The opportunity to learn even basic literacy has given the girls and boys



self-confidence and optimism for the future. Boys often want to become doctors and businessmen and many girls want to become teachers.

Lessons learnt

Gender analysis has implications for interventions targeted at hard to reach children. The programme demonstrates that it is possible to make progress if gender equality is dealt with in the basic curriculum and in discussions in class. NGO partners need to be carefully selected and progress in awareness monitored closely. The programme has reduced the isolation of working girls. The mix of boys and girls in the same classroom has played an important role in facilitating new forms of socialising. Contact between teachers, supervisors and parents' committees has contributed to a softening of gender stereotypes.

Source: Mainstreaming Gender Equality. Evaluating SIDA's Support for the Promotion of Gender Equality in Partner Countries, SIDA 2002.

Breaking the mould

Cultural barriers may reinforce stereotype gender roles and limit the benefits of education. For example, where women's role in society is seen purely in relation to the family, the purpose of educating girls may be to increase their chances of finding a 'suitable' husband and make them better wives and mothers. These aspirations are legitimate, but do little to equip girls and women to change their subordinate status.

Access to education in conflict affected and fragile states

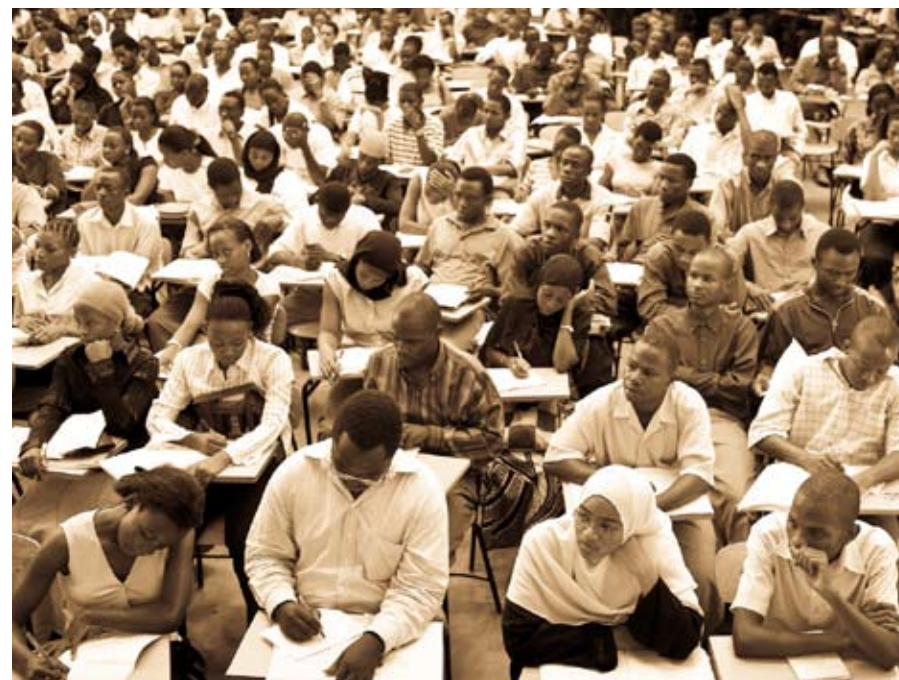
In conflict affected and fragile states, access to education at all levels is likely to be constrained by shortage of facilities. Obstacles include shortage of physical infrastructure, teachers, low salaries, poor education policies, and low family incomes (restricting the ability to pay school fees and free children from domestic labour). Girls are more likely than boys to be kept away from school. In conflict-affected areas, lack of safe mobility will further exacerbate such constraints. Special interventions for gender equality in education in the form of community-based solutions and grant assistance can help promote access where sector programmes are

not feasible. An example of an education initiative focusing on girls in a conflict-affected part of Uganda is presented below.

Uganda: Educating girls in a conflict area

The Acholi region of Northern Uganda has been ravaged by a long-running, low-level conflict during which thousands of women and girls have been raped and countless communities looted or destroyed. The conflict has exacerbated existing gender inequalities and poverty, including lack of access to education.

In response, Danida has supported the Acholi Education Initiative (AEI) in order for disadvantaged children in the conflict-affected area to be able to access secondary education and human rights resources. A participatory process allowed local actors to contribute to a gender-sensitive situation analysis in which sex-disaggregated data was provided and the



particular traumas experienced by girl abductees and their possible reintegration into the community highlighted.

Lessons learnt

Activities and outputs of the project need to be adjusted in response to the conflict. Funds allocated for girls were increased to meet boarding school costs and provide girls with the necessary protection and improved living conditions. Special after-school training in children's and women's rights was made available. The project budget allocated the majority of funds to target girls. A gender perspective also proved a useful contribution to the project's monitoring and evaluation methodology by including indicators that were disaggregated by gender impact.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS IN EDUCATION

A: Examples of gender equality promotion in policy development

- Analyse gender equality in the education sector to identify and justify priorities.
- Promote strategies in PRSPs for equitable education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels
- Promote gender budgeting in education - The shift to SWAps and budget support makes it more difficult to focus on gender equality but can be pursued (see booklet 3).
- Gender equality commitments and goals should not only address gender equality in access and retention, but include qualitative issues such as the streaming of girls and boys into disciplines.
- Gender equality goals need to be integrated in teacher training, recruitment, and placement of teachers. Managerial and supervisory staff in the education system should also be trained.
- Involve relevant stakeholders in policy dialogue from Government as well as civil society.
- Promote re-entry policies for teenage mothers, instead of permanent expulsion, as re-entry has a positive impact on enrolment at secondary level and teacher training colleges.
- Address legislative reform in post primary vocational and technical education to improve the balance in employment opportunities for women and men.

B: Examples of equality activities in education

- Design systems that meet students' gender-specific needs – in physical facilities as well as curriculum and counselling.
- Include measures for gender-equitable access to education facilities and resources such as scholarships. Long distances between home and school lower girls' attendance rate.
- Include community groups, women's networks and organisations



in the country in relevant activities such as school management and teaching.

- Promote women's influence in management of the education system at all levels.
- Include special initiatives, for example, for recruiting and training more women teachers.
- Support civil society organisations as entry points for dealing with cultural factors such as parents' objections to boys and girls being in the same classroom, fear of sexual harassment of girls by staff and fellow students.
- Eliminate persistent negative gender stereotypes in teachers' classroom behaviour and in curricula and teaching materials at policy level to help break the mould in practice.
- Support measures to retain boys in the education system to address economic pressure to drop out and support the family.

C: Examples of monitoring and evaluation in education

- Sex-disaggregated data should be available on human resources in the educational system at all levels and enrolment, retention/drop-out and achievement.
- With new forms of aid modalities experience related to gender needs to be tracked. Where budget support is provided, indicators to monitor the effect on gender equality are important.

Further reading

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Notes

1. *UNDP (2003) Human Development Report*
2. www.education-fast-track.org

GLOSSARY OF GENDER TERMS

This section offers a brief glossary of some of the frequently used gender terms in the booklets. Definitions are primarily drawn from the World Health Organisation and the European Commission.

Affirmative action

Measures targeted at a particular group and intended to eliminate and prevent discrimination, or to ameliorate existing disadvantages.

Focal points

Gender focal points are individuals given a particular responsibility for gender equality in an organisation. Given the right circumstances, networks of gender focal points can be a useful method to promote gender equality in a large-scale programme.

Gender

Social (as opposed to biological) differences between women and men. These differences have been acquired; they are changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.

Gender analysis

The study of differences in conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc. - between women and men in their assigned gender roles. Booklet 4 gives an introduction to gender analysis at country level, whereas details on gender analysis can be found in Booklet 5 with examples of gender analysis in agriculture, education, health, private sector and good governance initiatives.

Gender audit

The analysis and evaluation of policies, programmes and institutions in terms of how well they apply gender-related criteria.

Gender budgeting

Gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the

budgetary process and restructuring revenues in order to promote gender equality.

Gender equality

Gender equality means that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles. Different behaviour, aspirations, and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

Gender equity

Gender equity means fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. It often requires women-specific programmes and policies to end existing inequalities.

Gender mainstreaming

Incorporation of a gender equality perspective in all development policies, strategies, and interventions at all levels and at all stages by the actors normally involved therein. Considering both men's and women's wishes, needs, and experience in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and efforts.

Gender relations

The relationship and power distribution between women and men in a given socio-cultural context.

Masculinity

The quality or condition of being male in a given social context. Some cross-cultural elements, such as aggression, strength, and assertiveness have traditionally been considered male characteristics. However, the socially and historically constructed male characteristics need to be seen in their specific historical, cultural, and social context.

Reproductive rights

Reproductive rights rest on the recognition of the basic right of

all couples and individuals freely and responsibly to decide on the number, spacing, and timing of their children. The right includes the information and means to decide freely and access to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.

Sex-disaggregated statistics

The collection and separation of data and statistical information by sex to enable comparative analysis; sometimes referred to as gender-disaggregated statistics.

Special interventions


Special interventions are efforts aimed at creating fundamental structural changes in institutions, policies, legislation, and allocation of resources to promote gender equality between men and women, based on the specific needs in the individual country, policy area or organisation. Special interventions can be stand-alone projects or programmes identified to complement mainstreamed sector programmes in a country programme.

Women's empowerment

The empowerment of women concerns women gaining power and control over their own lives. It constitutes an important part of the efforts to bring about equal opportunities for men and women and involves awareness raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality.

Women's rights

The rights of women and the girl child are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of universal human rights.



GLOSSARY OF GENDER TERMS

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MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK

Danida

2008

Udenrigsministeriet

Asiatisk Plads 2

DK-1448 København K

Denmark

Tel: + 4533 92 00 00

Fax: +45 32 54 05 33

E-mail: um@um.dk

www.um.dk

