GPE KIX BRIEF

The Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

POLICY AND PRACTICE INSIGHTS
EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

GPE KIX
KNOWLEDGE INNOVATION EXCHANGE

IDRC · CRDI
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A synthesis of six GPE KIX projects in 20 countries offers practitioners and decision-makers effective strategies and practices for promoting gender equality in and through education.

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Over the past 30 years, increasing numbers of children have been able to exercise their right to an education.[1] Nevertheless, systemic, gender-based disparities continue to affect both equal access to quality education and school completion rates for children of all genders. Globally, girls have traditionally been less likely than boys to enter and enrol in primary and lower secondary education, but in several countries the gender gap has reversed, putting boys at a disadvantage.[2] In sub-Saharan Africa, gender parity has not been achieved at any level of education, and more girls than boys are still out of school.[3] Even when children of all genders attend school, they are often subjected to curricula and environments that reinforce traditional gender roles, limit their aspirations and expose them to gender-based violence (GBV).

Achieving gender equality in and through education requires more than a focus on expanding access to education. It requires specific interventions — for example, political commitments; widespread institutional reform; and targeted interventions aimed at transforming power dynamics and challenging harmful and discriminatory gender norms, attitudes, behaviours and practices — and a fundamental shift in how education systems operate.

THE RESEARCH

From 2020 to 2024, the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX), a joint endeavour with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), supported six research projects to develop, test and scale education innovations to improve education access, quality and outcomes for girls and other marginalized learners. The projects involved 20 partners across 20 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

[1] Global Partnership for Education. (2023). Transforming education. https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/annual-report-2023#ar-2023-transforming-education

[2] UNESCO. (2022). Leave no child behind: Global report on boys' disengagement from education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381105

[3] UNESCO. (2024). Global education monitoring report: Gender report – Technology on her terms. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389406

Photo: GPE/ Carine Durand

THE SIX GPE KIX PROJECTS WERE:

Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies on Students' Participation and Learning Achievement at Secondary School During the Pandemic and Beyond (Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies): Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam.

Improving Knowledge on Gender Norms to Promote Gender Equality in Schools in Africa (Improving Knowledge and Gender Norms): Burkina Faso, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program to Improve the Quality of Education for Marginalized Girls (Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program): Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

School Leaders as Agents of Change Toward Equity and Inclusion (School Leaders as Agents of Change): Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan.

Strategies to Prevent Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Foster Equity in Rural Schools (Strategies to Prevent SGBV): Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Forum of African Women Educationalists' Gender-Responsive School Model as an Innovative Response to the Challenge of Gender Equality (FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model): Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Senegal.

KEY GENDER-RESPONSIVE MODELS ASSESSED

Each project assessed a wide range of gender-responsive models to expand and strengthen knowledge of their characteristics, including the quality of their implementation, and address knowledge gaps about how to scale them. The models that were assessed included:

- **Strategies to dismantle gender biases and stereotypes** and change power dynamics in education.
- **Gender and inclusive pedagogies (GIP):** A teacher training program that covers various aspects of gender-responsive and inclusive education — for example, recognizing student diversity, fostering inclusive school cultures and implementing inclusive teaching and assessment practices.
- **Networked improved communities (NICs) with school leaders:** A capacity-strengthening methodology to enhance school leaders' agency and ability to address gender equality and inclusion — including disability inclusion — issues in their schools and school districts.
- **The FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model:** A school model that includes gender-responsive school management training for school directors and principals; gender-responsive pedagogy training for teachers; community involvement in school management; gender-responsive school infrastructure; science, mathematics, engineering and technology (STEM) programs for girls; and empowerment training for girls and boys, through Tuseme clubs.
- **School-related gender-based violence (SRGVB) prevention practices:** Strategies to empower members of local education communities and school actors to identify SRGBV and develop context-specific prevention tools and practices.
- **The Learner Guide program:** A youth-led social support and mentorship program to strengthen secondary school girls' self-development, foundational learning skills and learning outcomes.

THE IMPACT OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE MODELS ON GENDER INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION

Based on their assessment of contextualized gender-responsive models, the GPE KIX project teams observed positive outcomes at multiple levels for learners, teachers, school leaders, parents and caregivers, communities and education systems.

AT INDIVIDUAL, HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

Increased retention and attendance in school

Many of the gender-responsive models assessed through the GPE KIX research projects proved to be effective in reducing dropout rates and increasing participation in education rates.

In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Senegal, 82.8% of the girls in the schools that leveraged the FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model stated that it encouraged them to stay in school. In Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the peer mentorship provided by Learner Guides also improved marginalized girls' secondary school attendance and completion rates. Teachers' use of GIP practices in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam also improved student attendance and class participation for both girls and boys.

In Bangladesh, following the teachers' GIP training, secondary school students with disabilities were provided with Android cell phones equipped with built-in support applications. This positively affected their attendance and participation by enabling them to access and engage with educational content more easily, allowing them to learn at their own pace and in ways that best suited their abilities.

Enhanced education outcomes and soft skills

Evidence showed that the components of the FAWE gender-responsive school model that had the greatest impact on girls' education outcomes were gender-responsive management, gender-responsive pedagogy and the Tuseme clubs. These components helped foster a learning environment in which the girls felt valued and supported, and this increased their engagement and active class participation.

In Bangladesh and Bhutan, statistically significant improvements were also observed in girls' academic achievement, including grades and test scores, following the GIP intervention.

In Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project found that the life skills developed through the Learner Guide program played a crucial role in enhancing the success of female students both academically and personally. In Tanzania, female students showed significant advances in their goal-setting skills, sense of personal responsibility and self-confidence. In Zambia, the program helped female students develop leadership skills, including assertiveness and communication. In Zimbabwe, female students improved their soft skills, including self-confidence and resilience.

Improved engagement and support among parents or caregivers

The GPE KIX projects demonstrated the importance of engaging parents or caregivers and community members to promote the success of education initiatives addressing gender equality and inclusion.

In the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project, parent-teacher meetings and school management committee discussions helped foster greater understanding and support among parents and caregivers for new teaching methods that encouraged mixed-gender interactions in classrooms.

In Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, Learner Guides served as important links between schools, parents, caregivers and community members, thus bridging gaps and building strong support systems that extend beyond the classroom.

In Pakistan, following the implementation of NICs and through targeted collaborations with parents, local religious groups, teachers and students, school leaders acted to address inclusion issues in their schools by implementing a pilot system that included flexible study hours for street children.

AT THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION LEVEL

Enhanced teachers' attitudes and perceived efficacy

In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Senegal, gender-responsive teacher training was found to be an essential precursor to implementing inclusive pedagogies and supporting girls' education. Teachers trained through FAWE's gender-responsive model were increasingly attuned to the specific needs of girls and boys and were integrating this awareness into their teaching practices.

The findings from the Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project also show that the GIP training positively influenced teachers' attitudes toward and perceived efficacy in implementing inclusive pedagogies, as well as their actual use of these pedagogies. Following the GIP training in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Vietnam, teachers implemented a variety of inclusive pedagogical practices — for example, using diverse teaching strategies and assessment techniques to accommodate different learning styles and abilities, employing gender-neutral language, monitoring gender parity in classroom discussions, selecting teaching materials that represent diverse identities, creating more physically accessible classrooms and establishing ground rules for inclusive behaviour.

Greater support from principals and senior management in schools

The Impact of Gender and Inclusive Pedagogies project demonstrated that support from principals and senior management in schools is essential for the success of interventions promoting gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogies.

In the FAWE Gender-Responsive School Model project, after participating in the gender-responsive management training, most principals supported their teaching staff in incorporating gender-responsive pedagogy: 94.2% in Burundi, 91.7% in Mali and 68.4% in Senegal.

In the School Leaders as Agents of Change project, collaboration in the NICs provided school leaders in Nepal and Pakistan with new forms of support and inspiration and fostered a sense of collective agency. In Nepal, school leaders who participated in the NICs moved to improve student absenteeism rates by providing extra support to girls during menstruation and organizing a free bus service for all students. In Pakistan, school leaders worked closely with parents or caregivers, teachers and religious groups to provide financial support for children from very low-income families.

Tailored, relevant strategies to address SRGBV

The Strategies to Prevent SGBV project not only enhanced participants' ability to recognize different forms of SRGBV, but also deepened their understanding of the problem and facilitated the development of tailored, locally relevant solutions. In Haiti, a shift in attitudes to SRGBV, particularly sexual violence and teachers' and principals' use of corporal punishment, was noticeable. In Honduras, the project's participatory action research approach increased awareness of SRGBV — in particular, recognition of issues such as corporal punishment and bullying — among principals, teachers, students and families or caregivers in rural schools. The project's findings influenced infrastructure improvements, such as making school washrooms, which were identified as high-risk spaces, safer. Nicaragua saw an increase in practical measures to prevent violence in schools — for example, monitoring high-risk areas including the routes to schools, washrooms and playgrounds.

AT THE POLICY LEVEL

Scaling at national level and policy change

The GPE KIX project teams worked with different education implementers and government stakeholders, such as ministries of Education, to ensure the scaling and sustainability of gender-responsive models.

The Scaling a Youth-Led Social Support and Mentorship Program project established national scaling advisory committees that played a pivotal role in guiding the potential scaling efforts. When the committee members saw how the Learner Guide program played out on the ground and heard directly about its impact from different groups, they were convinced of its value.

The Strategies to Prevent SGBV project influenced national policy discussions. In Haiti, guidelines for preventing sexual violence and harmful physical punishment in schools were developed with government stakeholders.

In Pakistan, the NICs model is now being integrated by NGOs such as Sightsavers, and two federal government agencies have advocated for implementing the NICs approach in army public schools nationwide.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

If they are to lead to sustainable and transformational change, interventions designed to address gender equality in and through education must take a whole-of-system approach that focuses on changing unequal structures, gender norms and policies so that the underlying causes of gender disparities can be addressed. Some recommendations for policy and practice that emerged from the GPE KIX projects are highlighted below.

AT INDIVIDUAL, HOUSEHOLD AND COMMUNITY LEVELS

Tailor interventions for empowerment. Marginalized learners' needs can be addressed only through targeted interventions that go beyond traditional educational programs.

- **Implement peer mentor and role model programs** offering personalized guidance, motivation and support to boost marginalized learners' confidence and equip them with the tools they need to succeed academically and personally.
- **Offer flexible learning options** to accommodate the unique circumstances of marginalized learners.
- **Provide training in life skills** in addition to an academic education.

Build a collective commitment. Promoting gender equality and inclusion in education is not the sole responsibility of schools; it requires a collective effort from families, caregivers and communities.

- **Involve parents and caregivers** and establish regular communication with parents through parent-teacher meetings and workshops focused on gender equality and inclusion.
- **Support community-level awareness, knowledge and skills** relating to social norms to shift cultural perceptions and encourage collective action on gender equality and inclusion.

AT THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION LEVEL

Implement thorough gender-responsive training for teachers and school leaders. Teachers and school leaders are the frontline agents of change in any education system, and their training should cover a range of relevant topics and equip them with a range of relevant skills and abilities.

- **Foster understanding of gender dynamics and inclusion among educators** so they are aware of how gender biases and social stereotypes can influence classroom interactions, teaching practices and student performance.
- **Use inclusive teaching pedagogies** to create inclusive lesson plans that ensure the equal participation and representation of all genders.
- **Strengthen educators' ability to identify, prevent and respond to incidents of GBV** in and around schools. This involves understanding the legal frameworks, reporting procedures and support mechanisms available for students who are affected by GBV.

Integrate gender equality and inclusion into schools' core leadership practices. This will ensure that these values are embedded in the institution's ethos.

- **Offer leadership training programs** that emphasize the importance of gender equality and inclusion in educational settings. This training should cover strategic planning, infrastructure support, policy implementation and effective communication of gender-related and inclusion issues.
- **Provide mentorship and role modelling** by establishing programs that support the professional development of female educators and encourage young women to pursue leadership roles.

Challenge gender norms embedded in curricula and teaching practices. The content of education — that is, what is taught and how it is taught — plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions of gender roles and equality.

- **Revise learning materials** to eliminate gender biases. This includes ensuring that children and adults of all genders are portrayed in diverse roles and professions.
- **Create and use inclusive lesson plans** that actively promote gender equality and inclusion — for example, discussions, case studies and activities that challenge traditional gender roles and encourage students to think critically about the impact of social norms on society.
- **Offer STEM incentives** for girls, such as scholarships, awards or remedial classes.

Create safe and inclusive school environments. Schools must ensure that their physical infrastructure, policies and practices support the safety, dignity and well-being of every student.

- **Improve infrastructure and safety**, including secure washrooms and well-lit premises, to create an environment in which children of all genders feel safe and valued.
- **Organize peer-support programs** to encourage mutual support among students and contribute to a more inclusive school culture.

Integrate EdTech solutions that can bridge gaps in accessibility and inclusion for marginalized students, including students with disabilities, while making sure it does not exacerbate or create new inequalities among students.

AT THE POLICY LEVEL

Pioneer policy change. To foster gender equality in and through education and inclusion, it is essential to engage government stakeholders through participatory action research.

- **Establish multi-stakeholder research committees** that include representatives from the government, ensuring that the research process aligns with policy goals and addresses local gender equality and inclusion challenges.
- **Organize capacity-strengthening opportunities** relating to inclusion and gender equality in and through education for government stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of community involvement and the practical application of research findings to policy development.

Photo: GPE/ Kelley Lynch

These policy and practice insights are drawn from Gender Equality in and through Education: A Research Synthesis.

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) is a joint endeavour between GPE and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) that aims to ensure partner countries have and use the evidence and innovation they need to accelerate access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century.

Five synthesis reports were commissioned by GPE KIX to consolidate evidence across research projects conducted between 2020 and 2024. Topics include: data systems and data use; early learning; gender equality, equity and inclusion; teacher professional development; and out-of-school children and youth.

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