Tool 1 Definitions of Terms and Concepts Related to Gender

Target audience: All

This tool defines the main terms and concepts related to gender in education. The definitions will be helpful as you use the Toolkit.

Sex describes the biological differences between men and women.

Gender is a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). This concept is also useful in analyzing how commonly shared practices legitimize discrepancies between sexes.

Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human physiology. It encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in various forms and manners, including thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. Sexuality is not always experienced/expressed openly and in a direct manner. It is influenced by the interaction of physical, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

Gender parity is a numerical concept. Gender parity in education implies that the same number of boys and girls receive educational services at different levels and in diverse forms.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on an even playing field. For instance, countries where female students outnumber their male counterparts at the tertiary education level (particularly in science and technology fields) can introduce a quota system or affirmative action. This helps to ensure that the same or increased number of female students are enrolled in this field at the university level.

Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, community and society. Gender equity is one means of achieving gender equality.

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2 Adapted from various national organizations and international cooperation agencies
3 This definition is adapted from proceedings of the WHO Technical Consultation on Sexual Health in 2002. It does not represent an official WHO position.
4 Adapted from UN ECOSOC Resolution 1997/2
Gender equality in education would imply that girls and boys are ensured and actually offered the same chances and treatment in access, process and outcome of an education of good quality and which is free from any stereotypes.

**Gender mainstreaming in education** is the process of assessing the implications for girls and boys/women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, at all levels of the education system. It is a strategy for making girls’ and women’s, as well as boys’ and men’s, concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education policies and programmes so that girls and boys/women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality in education.

**Empowerment** is about people, both women and men, taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, developing skills (including life skills), building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. Education facilitates this process of empowerment, enables boys and girls to question existing inequalities, as well as act for change.

The Mahila Samakhya programme of the Department of Education, India, offers an example of the importance of women’s empowerment as a critical pre-condition to facilitate greater inclusion of women and their daughters into education. This programme has provided an alternative approach to women’s mobilization and empowerment. By placing the empowerment agenda in the hands of collectives of women at the village level, Mahila Samakhya has seen the emergence of a locally articulated development agenda, including health, livelihoods, income generation, savings and credit, with women developing their own strategies to address issues of importance to them. This includes participation in local governance, ensuring the effective functioning of government service delivery and dealing with broader social issues that have a negative impact on women’s lives such as violence. The greatest impact of women’s mobilization has been in the area of girls’ education. Often, women have taken the difficult decision of withdrawing children (especially girls) from work and providing them an opportunity for education. Many women have been motivated to bring a change in the lives of their daughters in order to ensure that their daughters have better opportunities and a different life from their own.

**Women in Development (WID)** is a concept which is based on a recognition that women play important roles in the development process. The WID approach, however, does not necessarily result in changing male-female hierarchical gender relations. Rather, it intends to support women-specific practical needs, such as women’s skills development for income generation.

**Gender and Development (GAD)** approach focuses on intervention to address unequal gender relations in the entire development cycle (access, processes and outcomes) that prevent women from full and equal participation in, and benefits from development. GAD is a concept developed out of lessons learnt from the experiences gained through WID programmes and activities. It seeks to have both women and men participate, make decisions and share benefits. This approach emphasizes long-term strategic concerns in order to reach the ultimate goal of gender equality.

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5 Adapted from Gender Analysis, Learning and Information Pack, UNDP, 2001
6 Adapted from UN ECOSOC Resolution 1997/2
7 Adapted from ‘Scaling Up’ Good Practices in Girls’ Education, UNESCO/UNGEI, 2005, p. 27
The main difference between WID and GAD is that WID projects traditionally provide practical, women-specific services to meet the immediate needs and concerns of women and their families without a comprehensive gender analysis.

**Practical needs** are immediate, material daily needs such as water, shelter, clothes, and food. Addressing women’s practical needs means focusing on releasing women from water fetching, promoting skills development education, and supporting income-generating activities that improve impoverished conditions faced by women and their families.

**Strategic gender interests** are long-term in nature, not necessarily material, and often related to structural changes in society. Interventions based on strategic gender interests focus on fundamental issues related to women’s (or, less often, men’s) subordination and gender inequities. In education, strategic gender interests focus on creating an enabling educational environment to prevent gender-biased attitudes and practices from taking hold, and promoting the empowerment of women and girls so that they can take control over their lives, by being active change agents.

**Gender analysis** investigates the different experiences, knowledge and activities of women and men in a given context. It explores these differences so that policies, programmes and projects can identify and meet the different needs of men and women.

It is, therefore, an intrinsic dimension of policy analysis, which specifically identifies how public policy affects women and men differently. It demonstrates that policy and implementation cannot be gender-neutral in societies where specific roles are attached to sexes. Gender analysis is usually supported by the use of sex-disaggregated information and data, and requires good understanding of and sensitivity to the socio-cultural context.

In the area of education, gender analysis can be integrated into curriculum analysis to assess how a given curriculum may have an impact on boys’ and girls’ learning attitudes, motivation and achievements, as well as how they perceive themselves.

**Gender blindness** is the failure to recognize that the roles and responsibilities of men/boys and women/girls are given to them in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts and backgrounds. Projects, programmes, policies and attitudes which are gender-blind do not take into account these different roles and their diverse needs, maintain status quo, and will not help transform the unequal structure of gender relations. For instance, a gender-blind teacher may think that school education is gender-neutral because there is no difference between boys and girls in teaching and learning. However, in reality, teachers’ unconscious gender-stereotyped attitudes and biases can affect classroom practices, and result in differential treatment towards both boys and girls.

**Gender-neutral** is an adjective that is often attached to language. Using gender-neutral language implies that words we use do not reflect any bias against women or men. Imprecise word choices may indeed be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning, even if they are not intended to be. An example in the English language is to use the word “humankind”, which includes women and men, instead of “mankind”, which seems to exclude women.

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8 Adapted from *Gender Analysis, Learning and Information Pack*, UNDP, 2001.
Gender analysis is crucial because the prevailing cultural, social, political and economic systems and institutions are not necessarily gender-neutral. The belief that school education is gender-neutral is based on one’s gender-blindness.

**Gender awareness** is an understanding that there are socially and culturally determined differences between women and men based on learned behaviour, which affect their ability to access and control resources.

A school head who is gender-aware will understand that special attention should be given to the way education is delivered to both male and female students because society (and, more specifically, teachers), may value girls and boys differently. This has implications for their learning.

**Gender sensitivity** encompasses the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities, and incorporate these into strategies and actions. However, it does not mean that someone who is gender-sensitive has gender-responsive attitudes because a gender-sensitive person does not necessarily take action.

**Gender-responsive** policies and interventions associate with actions or concrete measures that reflect the unique needs, aspirations and capacities of men and women. However, they do not necessarily challenge biased and discriminatory policies, practices, ideas and beliefs. For example, in communities where women are faced with social constraints that prevent them from being out of their homes in the evening, for instance, a gender-responsive intervention would be to offer training to these women only when they are able to attend training sessions. This kind of intervention therefore addresses women’s needs (of training), but it does not challenge the discriminatory idea that women cannot be out of their homes during certain hours of the day/night.

**Gender-transformative** policies and interventions challenge biased and discriminatory policies, practices, ideas and beliefs. It is an approach that addresses the transformation of unequal gender relations through working with both women and men in ways that seek to reconstruct power relations in a more egalitarian way.

The Female Stipend Programme (FSP) was created in 1994 in Bangladesh to help increase the enrolment and retention of girls in secondary schools, and sought to help keep adolescent girls in secondary school to delay their marriage and motherhood. One of the criteria to receive the stipend was for girls to stay unmarried until they either sat for the Secondary School Certificate exam or turned 18. This policy was therefore gender-transformative because it sought to change the practice of early marriage.

**Gender discrimination** refers to any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of socially and culturally constructed gender roles and norms which prevents a person from enjoying full human rights. Girls who are discriminated against are discouraged to specialize or learn further those subjects thought to be masculine, such

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10 UNDP, Introductory Gender Analysis & Gender Planning Training Module for UNDP Staff, 2001.
11 Ibid.
12 Adapted from ‘Scaling Up’ Good Practices in Girls’ Education, UNESCO/UNGEI, 2005, p. 68
13 Ibid. p. 38
14 OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe).
as mechanics. Boys can be discriminated against in the same way when they are teased for learning so-called “feminine subjects”, such as nursing.

**Gender parity index (GPI)** is a ratio of female-to-male values (or males-to-females, in certain cases) of a given indicator. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes; a GPI above or below 1 indicates a disparity in favour of one sex over the other.\(^\text{15}\)

Gender parity can, however, be attained at a very low level of participation for both boys and girls (such as in early childhood education and secondary education). Hence, it is important to consider both absolute figures along with the parity index.

**Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB)** refers to an analysis of the “impact” of actual government expenditure and revenue on women and girls, as compared to men and boys. It neither requires separate budgets for women, nor does it aim to solely increase spending on women-specific programmes. Instead, it helps governments decide how policies need to be adjusted, and where resources need to be re-allocated to address gender inequalities.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{16}\) http://www.gender-budgets.org