Gender Mainstreaming in Education

Target audience: Policy-makers and planners, project/programme officers

What is gender mainstreaming in education?

*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.

Adapted from UN ECOSOC Resolution 1997/2

The graphic of the Gender Mainstreaming Cycle (see *Tool 17(b): “Gender Mainstreaming Cycle”*) depicts the two core elements of gender mainstreaming:

1) Gender mainstreaming is an approach used to integrate women's and men's needs and experiences into decision-making at every stage of the planning and programme cycle.

2) The heart of gender mainstreaming is a gender-responsive organizational culture. The organization commits itself to advancing gender equality and demands that every employee, at all levels, do so. All employees (whether male/ female) coming from different backgrounds and working at different levels respond positively to the organization's requirement that they internalize and actively advance gender equality in their daily work and interaction with others.

Gender mainstreaming should be conducted in all education institutions whether private or public, as well as government and international organizations who have a stake in education.

Why is gender mainstreaming needed?

Gender mainstreaming is the ultimate process in efforts towards achieving gender equality in education or any other sector. Until a country succeeds in reaching the goal of mainstreaming gender fully into education (as well as other fields), specific efforts are needed to reach that stage. Different countries are at different stages of gender mainstreaming, and almost all are far from achieving it fully.
What are the benefits of mainstreaming gender concerns?

• Successful programmes
  Programme objectives are more likely to be reached if interests and experiences of both women and men are taken into account at all stages of the programming process. Needs and interests of all intended beneficiaries are more likely to be satisfied in this way.

• Budget efficiency
  The success of programmes where gender issues have been mainstreamed means that the budget was allocated effectively and that no extra costs will be needed to remedy failures, since differentiated needs of women and men have been considered at the onset of budgeting.

• Enhancing democracy within organizations and society
  An organization becomes more democratic and respectful of plurality, if both women and men equally shape decisions and processes and participate in the results.31

• Ending discrimination
  Discrimination becomes visible and can be dismantled.32

How to make it happen?

There are many ways gender mainstreaming can be effected, and several agents can play their role in this process. At whatever level you are working, whether at a senior level in the ministry or as a teacher/head teacher in a school, you can introduce certain changes that would lead to gender mainstreaming.

It is important to have a strategy, including plans for monitoring of gender mainstreaming in education. The strategy could include the following steps:

• Developing and implementing a gender equality policy
  Your organization should state its commitment to addressing gender inequalities, both within the organization, in the programme design, and in implementation. The policy should set out clear objectives, outline the responsibilities and introduce mechanisms to monitor the progress made towards achieving gender equality.

• Conducting gender analysis
  Gender analysis is a critical step towards gender-responsive planning and programming. It involves the collection and evaluation of sex-disaggregated information and experiences in order to understand the differences, similarities and interactions between women and men. It examines both women’s and men’s specific activities, conditions, needs, access to, and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making power. It then studies the linkages of these and other factors in the larger social, economic, political and environmental context.33

32  Ibid.
Gender analysis necessarily involves application of both quantitative and qualitative methods. You can use the tools presented in this toolkit or others provided by different national and international organizations (see References section).

- Acting on the basis of the gender analysis findings

The gender analysis that has been conducted may have shed light on realities that had never been known or addressed before. The task is then to take action by designing and implementing policies, programmes and projects that meet the different needs and interests of both women and men.

Depending on the specific context and situation, gender-specific interventions can target women exclusively, men and women together, or only men, to enable them to participate in and benefit equally from development efforts. Some measures could be temporary, whereas others could be long-term. Temporary measures are needed to combat the direct and indirect consequences of past discrimination.

- Implementing a gender-responsive budgeting process

Gender budgeting is a critical component of a gender mainstreaming strategy (see Tool 18: “Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Education”).

- Appointing a gender focal point/team

Efforts towards mainstreaming gender issues in your organization can be further strengthened if they are monitored by one staff member, or even by a team.

The gender focal point (or a team) can serve as a resource element (e.g., for training) and be responsible for circulating information on gender issues to all staff.

He/she can also actively take part in all decision-making processes, or conversely serve on a consultative mandate.

Missions and activities of the focal point can be formalized under specific terms of reference. Incentives such as extra salary or reduction of other duties can also be planned, so that the focal point (team) does not feel this new assignment is an extra burden, decreasing his/her commitment.

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• Training staff on gender issues

Training is highly valuable because trained staff can:

- Understand the issues related to gender and reflect on how they manifest in their contexts
- Understand the need to tackle gender inequality at all levels and in all activities
- Adjust their behaviour and working methods to promote and enforce gender equality
- Make gender-responsive decisions
- Spread the word about the importance of gender equality to many others

There are several ways training can be provided:

- By the gender focal point (or team) within the organization or from a related organization (for instance from the Ministry of Education to a local school)
- By an external agent (for instance from an NGO or an international agency)
- On a self-study basis, with resources from the Internet/library or by any organization
- A combination of the above

Gender related trainings are more effective if they include reflective and analytical exercises, and address different kind of issues personal, inter-personal, organizational and larger social ones. One-time training does not help. It has to be a continuous process.

• Working in partnership with gender-specialized organizations and experts: Look beyond education sector for partnership and expertise to support teams. Please refer to the References section, to identify different partners working in the field of gender mainstreaming.

• Monitoring and evaluation plans

All efforts towards gender equality need to be monitored and evaluated so that adjustments during the process can be made and lessons learnt can benefit future progress.

Monitoring and evaluation can be conducted in different ways, but all staff should at least be involved in these processes. One example would be for them to monitor gender indicators through a regular checklist.
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Information on how to use this tool is given in Tool 17(a): “Gender Mainstreaming in Education.”

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35 Adapted from the original developed by Linda Pennells, (2003) UNESCO gender consultant. Monitoring mentioned here must be conducted with a gender lens.