



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Sustainable  
Development  
Goals

Bangkok Office  
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau  
for Education

TOOL

10

# Introduction to gender mainstreaming



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## Objectives

The objectives of this tool are to:

- define gender mainstreaming in the context of the education sector;
- understand the rationale for using gender mainstreaming as a process;
- understand the limitations of a gender mainstreaming approach;
- help trainees to think about gender mainstreaming in their own context.

## Key information



### Setting the scene

Gender mainstreaming in education is the process of assessing the implications – for girls, boys, women and men – of **all** planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, at **all** levels of the education system. Gender mainstreaming should be conducted in all education institutions, whether private or public, as well as in government and international organizations which have a stake in education.

It is a holistic 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, boys, women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.

Mainstreaming does not just involve adding on women's or girl's components to existing policies, plans, programmes or projects. Rather, a gender perspective informs all phases of development and implementation. Gender mainstreaming can involve fundamental changes to the culture and practice of education in a country.

The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality in education.



Self-study and/or group activity

### Reflect on the meaning of gender mainstreaming

On your own or as a group, brainstorm around the following statement:

**I think gender mainstreaming in education is...**

Make a list of your ideas. Keep the list and look at it again when you have worked through the whole tool. Is there anything in your list that you want to add or change?

The process of mainstreaming gender includes:

- questioning the underlying paradigm on which the national policy, goals and objectives have been based;
- aligning priorities, activities and critical issues with the principal of gender equality;
- placing gender-sensitive women and men in strategic positions in policy- and decision-making;
- making women visible in all data;
- providing systematic training in gender analysis, methodology and awareness.

The mainstreaming of gender in education should be guided by overall national goals, objectives and priorities, but should specifically seek to:

- make explicit the importance of gender along with other characteristics, such as ethnicity and social class/caste, which can intersect to create disadvantages in the processes of education;
- ensure gender equality in access, progression, transition and completion of educational levels;
- overcome structural barriers, whether they be legal, economic, political, or cultural which may influence the access, participation and achievement of either sex in education;
- increase awareness of the active role women can and do play in development;
- increase the equal participation of women and men in decision-making in the management and implementation of education.



## Box 1 Gender mainstreaming in Indonesia

Indonesia reviewed a decade of gender mainstreaming in the education sector and documented progress towards gender equality (Ministry of National Development Planning, 2013). The fact that such a study was conducted can be considered evidence of the government's commitment to gender mainstreaming and achieving gender equality in education.

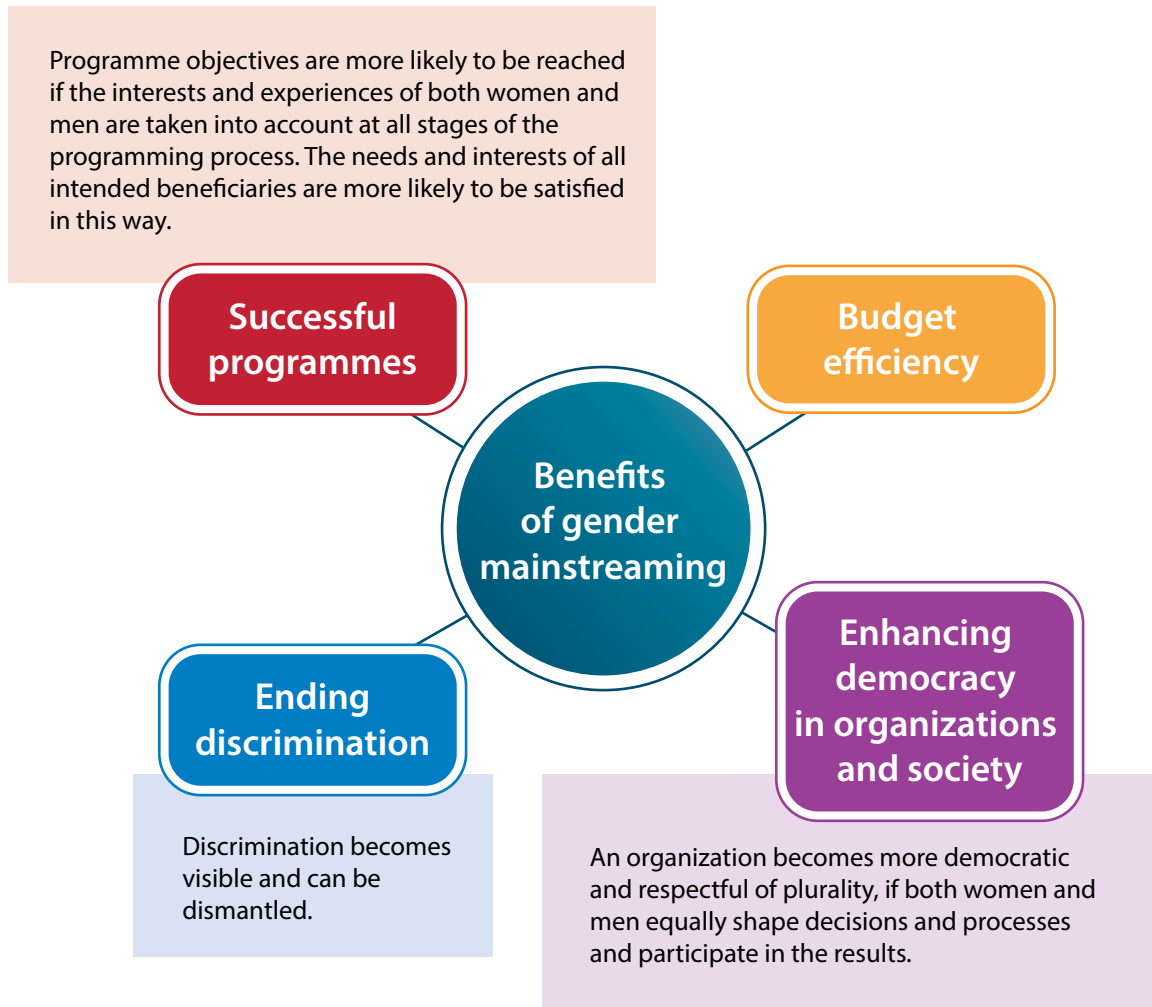
The study report notes that achieving gender parity in access to education is only a first step and that equal access does not guarantee equality. Achieving gender equality in education requires that there is equal opportunity for females and males, and that they are treated equally and fairly. It is anticipated that this will in turn translate to greater equality in learning achievement and outcomes, and beyond education, equality of opportunities in the labour market and other spheres of life.

The study looked at the key dimensions of teaching and learning processes including curricula, textbooks, learning materials, the learning environment, teacher development and student achievement. It found that good practice and innovation exist, for example, initiatives to eliminate gender stereotyping and bias in learning materials and the school environment, integration of gender awareness in the training of principals and teachers, and gender sensitization for school communities. However, opportunities were missed because good practices remain largely localized and relatively small scale, often through limited pilot projects which are seldom taken to scale. The key challenge is to evaluate and disseminate good practice as well as to prioritize resources and budgets to scale up initiatives that will make a difference. The study found that while there was general support for prioritizing gender equality at central level, there was a lack of clear strategic direction for gender mainstreaming in education, and limited specialist technical capacity.

## Benefits of gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is not just a trend or a politically correct approach – there are genuine and obvious benefits to mainstreaming gender concerns throughout all education work. **Figure 1** explains some of these benefits.

**Figure 1: Benefits of gender mainstreaming**





## Limitations to gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming has not yet solved all the challenges of gender inequality in education and does have some limitations. Common barriers to successful gender mainstreaming include:

- lack of political will;
- underfunding of units given responsibility for gender mainstreaming;
- marginalization of units responsible for gender mainstreaming within the bureaucratic structures;
- institutionalization of male gender bias in the norms, rules and practices of organizations;
- most mainstreaming mechanisms look the same regardless of the country context and are located only at the national level, rarely reaching decentralized levels of the education system, including sub-state administrative levels and the school;
- gender has been over-simplified and interventions then fail to address the complexity of people's lives effectively;
- resistance by staff / departments to taking on responsibility for cross-cutting issues such as gender that may affect budget allocations;
- gender mainstreaming has been accompanied by what has been termed policy evaporation, a process by which gender fades out or becomes invisible in policy commitments and strategies;
- lack of coordination and communication between all stakeholders.

## How can we make gender mainstreaming happen?

**Figure 2**<sup>1</sup> shows the two core elements of gender mainstreaming.

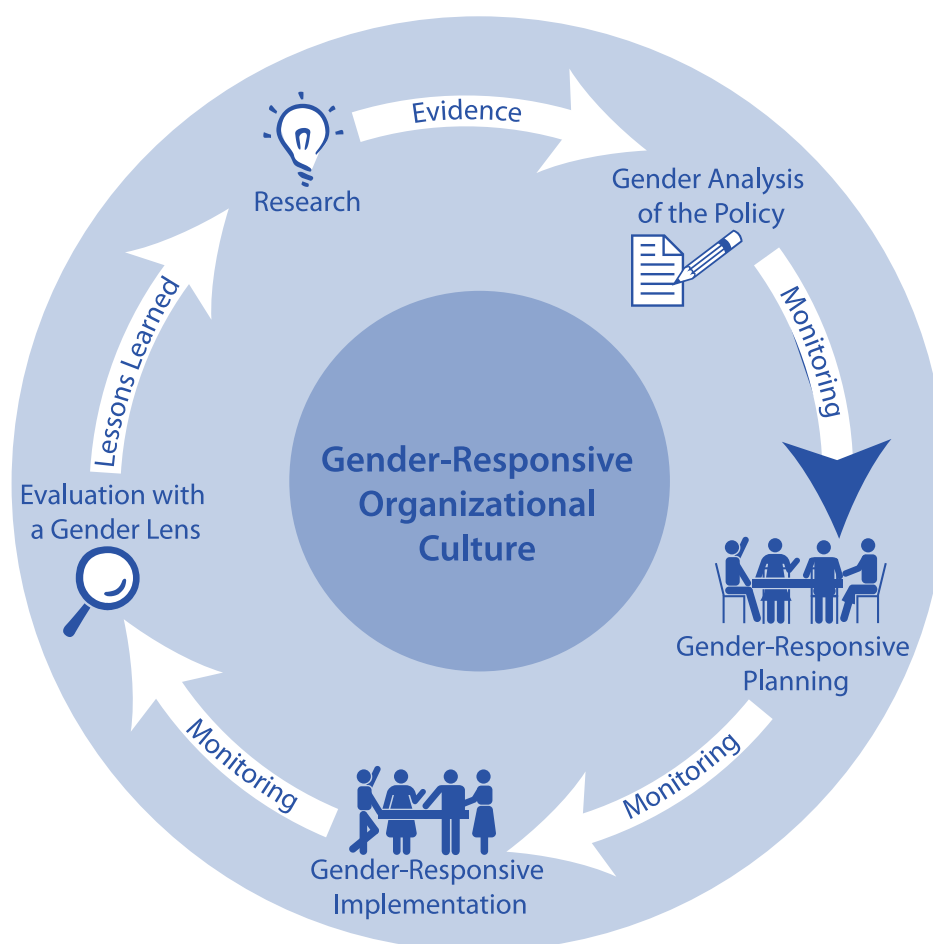
The diagram – the Gender Mainstreaming Cycle – shows the two core elements of gender mainstreaming:

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**.<sup>2</sup> The organization commits itself to advancing gender equality and demands that every employee, at all levels, do so. All employees (whether male or 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.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the original developed by Linda Pennells, (2003) UNESCO gender consultant. Monitoring mentioned here must be conducted with a gender lens.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO. 2019. *From access to empowerment: UNESCO strategy for gender equality in and through education 2019-2025*. Paris: UNESCO.



**Figure 2: The Gender Mainstreaming Cycle**

Self-study and/or group activity

### Reflect on gender mainstreaming in education in your country context

- On your own, or in groups, think about or discuss what steps have been taken to institutionalize gender mainstreaming in the education sector in your context. What have been the results of these efforts?
- Try to fill in the table in [Handout 1](#).
- Think about the possible interventions and make a note of these in the left column.
- Identify which of these possible interventions have been implemented in your country and how this has been done. Make notes in the middle column.
- Think about any results from these actions that you are aware of, and make notes in the right column).
- The completed table can be used to stimulate discussion about progress in gender mainstreaming in education.



## Further reading

Subrahmanian, R. 2006. *Mainstreaming Gender for Better Girls' Education: Policy and Institutional Issues*. New York: UNGEI.

UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre. 2012. *Gender Responsive Policy Analysis*. [https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/womens\\_empowerment/gepmi/RBAP-Gender-2012-GEPMI-Module-2.pdf](https://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/womens_empowerment/gepmi/RBAP-Gender-2012-GEPMI-Module-2.pdf).

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## Handout 1

# Gender mainstreaming in your context

Intervention	Action(s) taken	Results
Develop a gender equality policy in education	<i>e.g. policy developed</i>	<i>e.g. more boys or girls in school and learning</i>
Put in place an institutional mechanism to mainstream gender at central and decentralized levels		
Conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of the education sector		
Develop gender-responsive action plan(s)		
Develop gender-responsive budgeting		
Train staff on gender equality at central level		

Intervention	Action(s) taken	Results
Train staff on gender equality at decentralized levels of the education system		
Gender mainstreaming in school management		
Gender mainstreaming among teachers	<i>e.g. in-service teacher training on inclusive pedagogy</i>	
Gender mainstreaming in the curriculum and in teaching and learning materials		
Gender mainstreaming with parents and the community	<i>e.g. awareness raising among parents/communities</i>	<i>e.g. more parents refusing early marriages and sending girls to school</i>
Put in place a framework for monitoring and evaluation on gender equality		



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Indonesia. Ministry of National Development Planning. 2013. *The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of National Development Planning/National Development Planning Agency of 2015–2019*. Jakarta: MoNDP. [https://www.bappenas.go.id/files/renstra-bappenas/RENSTRA\\_Bahasa%20Inggris-V2.pdf](https://www.bappenas.go.id/files/renstra-bappenas/RENSTRA_Bahasa%20Inggris-V2.pdf).









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