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for Education

Mainstreaming gender
at the whole-school level

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Objectives

The objectives of this tool are to:

- build a clearer understanding of how gender sensitive and responsive your school is;
- encourage reflection on the changes that need to be made, how these changes can be implemented, and by whom.

Key information

Setting the scene

Across the education system, various efforts take place to mainstream gender – in policies, in teacher education, in the development of curricula and teaching and learning materials, and so on. All these efforts are brought together and become reality in the school.

Within the school there are other stakeholders who need to get involved, and other areas of change that are needed to ensure that schools consistently promote and practice gender equality.

These changes require leadership from school principals and school management committees. They also need the participation of the whole school community including teachers, students, parents and community members.

A. School management's role in mainstreaming gender equality across the school

The school management has a central role in establishing a gender responsive environment. They have a responsibility to understand what is happening in the school and to take a proactive role in bringing about positive change.

School principal

School principals should be role models for gender equality. As leaders in their school community, they should both promote gender equality and be seen to practise it. School principals are likely to need training on gender equality, and this should be integral to their professional development as it is vital for ensuring they perform their job effectively. Gender equality also needs to be included in any manuals on running a school that are written for school principals.

School management committee (SMC) and/or the parent-teacher association (PTA)

SMCs and PTAs and other committees in the school need to take a lead in promoting gender equality within school management. Their members may need training on gender equality, alongside other training that helps them carry out their role. Those overseeing these committees need to ensure there is a gender balance among the members and take active steps to address any imbalance.

School policy

In some education systems, schools are empowered to set their own policies in line with national guidelines. Where this happens, school policies should include a statement of gender equality, a strong statement against gender-based discrimination, and zero tolerance of violence in any form.

Key issues for school management to consider

Access, enrolment and completion	• Are both boys and girls entering and staying in school? • If not, what are the causes of non-enrolment or drop-out for girls and for boys? • How can school management tackle these causes?
Participation in the teaching and learning process	• Are both girls and boys participating in all academic and non-academic activities, inside and outside the classroom? • If not, what aspects of teaching and learning are girls and boys not participating in, and why? • How can school management address these barriers to participation?
Learning outcomes	• Are both girls and boys learning and achieving to the best of their abilities? • If not, in what areas are girls and boys under-achieving or failing, and why? • How can school management address this?
Use of school facilities	• Do girls and boys get equal access to school facilities and equipment, such as libraries and sports equipment? • If not, which facilities or equipment is restricted for girls and for boys, and why? • How can the management ensure equal access?
Access to basic services	• Do girls and boys have equal access to toilets, water, school health services and guidance and counselling services? • Do girls have access to appropriate hygiene facilities or sanitary materials, for instance during menstruation? • Which services are girls and boys not accessing, and why? • How can school management improve access for all?
Community participation	• Are male and female community members encouraged to participate actively in school-related activities? • If not, which activities are men and women not engaging with, and why? • How can school management improve participation across the community?
Enforcing policy	• Is the school's policy on gender equality known by staff, students, and parents, and being upheld? • If not, in what areas is the policy being ignored or breeched? • How can school management ensure the policy is upheld?
Monitoring	• Is there a mechanism for monitoring gender equality in the school? If so, what is it and who does what? • If there is no mechanism, what needs to be in place and how can school management make this happen?

Self-study and/or group activity
Analyse the gender responsiveness of school management

- Work on your own or in a group.
- Think of a school you have worked in or know well.
- Think about the management structure that is in place in this school.
- Draw a diagram showing the school's management structure, key personnel, committees, and so on.
- Add details about their roles. Note if anyone has a role that focuses on gender equality, or more broadly on supporting diversity or tackling discrimination in the school.
- Then look at the questions in the table above. Think about how the people involved in school management could find out the answers to these questions.
  - Who could they talk to?
  - What participatory activities could they use to help key stakeholders discuss these issues?
  - Which documents may contain useful information?
  - What role could you play in helping the school management collect information or respond to any challenges identified?

B. The link between gender equality, the school environment, and health and safety

When we think about the environment and including learners in education, we tend to assume that this relates to disability issues and how to make the environment accessible for learners with physical, sensory, or intellectual impairments. However, the school environment can also play an important role in promoting or hindering gender equality. Schools face a range of health and safety concerns, too, and these are often different for boys and girls.

School environment

School and classroom facilities should help promote gender equality. The following issues need to be considered:

Classroom arrangement	• Is there enough seating and desks? • If not, do boys and girls equally experience having to sit on the floor or having to share seats and desks? • Are girls and boys expected to share seats/desks or sit in very close proximity? Does this have any cultural implications in your context? • Does the seating arrangement give girls and boys equal opportunities to see, hear, and participate in lessons? • Do they get equal opportunities to sit in well-lit, well ventilated spaces? • If girls and boys do not experience equal opportunities with regard to where they sit in the classroom, what can be done about this?
Recreation and other facilities	• Are both girls and boys able to use the playground or quiet spaces in school? • Do they both have access to sport facilities? Is access to sport facilities or equipment determined by gender (e.g. only boys are allowed access to footballs or the football pitch)? • Are there private places where girls and boys can change clothes before/after playing sports? • Are there any spaces where girls or boys feel unwelcome or unsafe? Why is this? • Do girls and boys get equal access to other facilities such as the dining room, library, etc? If not, what are the barriers to access? • What can be done to ensure that girls and boys feel safe, welcome, and are able to access the school's recreation and other facilities?

Health and safety

Schools should have a policy which addresses health, safety, and nutrition, and all expectations in the policy should be gender responsive. The following issues need to be considered in the school's policy and practice:

Policy	• Does a school health, safety, and nutrition policy exist? • Does everyone know about it? • Was it created with inputs from girls, boys, women and men? • If no policy exists, what can be done to develop one, and who will be involved?
Sanitation	• Do girls and boys have equal access to safe, clean, private and physically accessible toilets or latrines and handwashing facilities? • Do girls and boys, and male and female teachers, have access to separate toilets? • Are menstrual hygiene arrangements in place for adolescent girls and female teachers? • Is there clean drinking water in school available and accessible for both girls and boys? • If facilities are inadequate for girls and/or boys, what can be done to improve them?
Health, nutrition and life skills education	• Is skills-based health and nutrition education taught at the school, to both girls and boys? • Does the course include health and gender issues? • Is there evidence of these skills being practised by both girls and boys? • Do life-skills follow stereotypical roles (e.g. boys are taught skills relating to work or house maintenance and girls are taught domestic skills)? • What improvements are needed and how can they be achieved?
Health and nutrition services	• Does the school provide health and nutrition services (e.g. regular health check-ups, vision and hearing tests)? • Do these meet the needs of both boys and girls? • Are there any gender disparities in access or quality of services on offer? • Do girls who get pregnant receive support and feel welcome to continue their education? • Are boys and girls living with or affected by HIV supported by the school? What kind of support do they receive? • How can health and nutrition services be improved for both girls and boys?
School location	• Is the school close enough for all school-age boys and girls to walk to? • Are both boys and girls always safe on their way to school? • Are services provided to ensure their safety, such as transportation? • Is the additional vulnerability of girls and boys with disabilities taken into consideration? • Do girls and boys feel safe from bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment, on the way to and in school? • Are teachers and school officials aware of existing laws? • Is there a student and/or teacher code of conduct? • Is there a system for reporting bullying, and for the school to take appropriate action against perpetrators? • What can be done to make the journey to school, and the time in school, safer for girls and boys?

Self-study and/or group activity
Map a school environment

- Work alone or with a group of colleagues who work in or know the same school.
- Draw a map of the school and surrounding area.
- On the map mark any areas that you think may be unsafe or unwelcoming for girls and for boys.
- Make a note of any information that you are not sure about or need to investigate further. How will you find out this information?

Optional extension activity for self-study and/or group work

- Take the map that you have created and work with colleagues from the school, girls, boys, parents and other community members to improve or expand the map.
- Fill in information from different people's perspectives.
- Discuss with all these people what their ideas are for improving the situation so that the school environment is more welcoming, healthy and safe for girls and boys, and offers them equal opportunities to participate in all aspects of education.

C. Embedding gender equality in the curriculum and teaching and learning materials

Curriculum

Tool 18 discusses the importance of making curricula gender responsive. It is, of course, vital that curricula are also interpreted in a gender-responsive way at the school level.

Schools need to consider the following:

Choice of subjects	• Do boys and girls feel confident in choosing subjects that may not be traditionally considered male or female subjects? • Is there any gender bias in the subjects that are available to girls or boys or that they are encouraged to study? • If bias exists, what is the cause and how can it be changed?
Relevance of subjects	• Does the curriculum reflect the needs and life experiences of both boys and girls? • Does it do this without following stereotypical interpretations of what a boy or girl experiences or should experience? • How can the curriculum be made more relevant to the lives of girls and boys, and more relevant to their aspirations?
Motivation and encouragement to learn	• Are girls and boys encouraged equally in all subjects (e.g. do girls receive as much encouragement as boys in mathematics and science; do boys receive as much encouragement as girls in arts and social science subjects)? • How can girls and boys be encouraged to engage more in subjects that may traditionally be considered not appropriate to their gender?
Teaching about equality	• Does the whole curriculum promote gender equality for boys and girls regardless of their race, class, caste, disability, religion, language or ethnic background? • Are there lessons and activities that teach about diversity and challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination? • Are boys and girls expected to participate in these activities? • Are there activities (such as sports, cultural events, etc.) organized by teachers and/or students that intend to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote a fair and mutually supportive gender-responsive culture in the school? • How can existing lessons or activities teach more effectively about gender and other aspects of equality and rights? • What new lessons or activities could be planned?
Extra-curricular activities	• Do both boys and girls have opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities? • Do they get a choice of activities, not constrained by ideas of what activities girls and boys should do? • How could the school broaden the extra-curricular activities on offer and ensure that they are all accessible to both girls and boys?

Teaching and learning materials

Tool 18 discusses the importance of making teaching and learning materials gender responsive. It is, of course, vital that such materials are also used, made or adapted in a gender-responsive way at the school level.

Schools need to consider the following:

Access to books	• Does every boy and girl have access to the essential school books and other learning materials? If not, why not? • When books and materials are limited, and have to be shared or borrowed, do girls and boys get equal opportunities to use them. If not, why not? • Is any gender-based disparity in access the same across all subjects? • What can be done to ensure girls and boys have equal access, especially when resources are limited?
Content of materials	• Do the teaching and learning materials used in the school portray girls and boys of varying socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds, including those with disabilities, with equal prominence, potential and respect? • Is the language used in the materials gender-sensitive, or is it biased? For example, is a 'male first' style always used (e.g. 'boys and girls' rather than 'girls and boys')? • When teachers make their own teaching and learning materials, are they following or exceeding gender-responsive standards set for nationally produced materials? Are teachers aware of any such standards in their country? • Are teachers confident to adapt older materials that may not be gender responsive, so that they use the materials to challenge stereotypes or discrimination? • How can teachers' capacity to select and make materials that are gender responsive be raised? How can their capacity to critically question and adapt older, biased materials be improved?

Self-study and/or group activity
Map the school environment

- Work on your own, or in a group (ideally with people from the same school).
- Think about the curriculum and teaching and learning materials used in the school where you work, or in the school you know best.
- Reflect on the questions in the tables above.
- How many of these questions can you answer? How much information do you have?
- Who else do you need to consult in order to answer these questions?
- How can you consult them?
- What activities could you use to help them tell you about their experiences of and ideas for the curriculum and for teaching and learning materials?

D.   Teachers and teaching practice

Teachers play a central role in ensuring that every girl and boy receives a good-quality education. They also have a vital role in ensuring that all aspects of education are non-discriminatory, which includes making sure there is gender equality in education. We therefore need to look at teachers' capacity to promote and practise gender equality. We also need to look at gender equality in the teaching workforce.

Schools need to consider the following:

Teaching workforce	• What is the ratio of male teachers to female teachers in the school? • Are there more female than male teachers in certain grades or subjects, and vice versa? Which grades or subjects have more male or more female teachers? Why is this? • Is the school principal male or female? Does he or she treat all female and male teachers equally? Are they given equal responsibilities and opportunities? • Do community members and leaders equally value the female and male teachers in their community schools? If not, how is this unequal perception or treatment manifested? • Have female and male teachers and principals received any training on gender equality, non-discrimination, etc.? • Have female and male teachers been trained to identify gender bias in teaching and learning materials? Do they take action to address any bias that is found?
Teaching practices	• Do all teachers ensure they arrange their rooms and plan lessons so that girls and boys are given equal opportunities to participate and learn? If not, what bias is present? • Do all teachers encourage girls and boys to speak and contribute in class? Do they value girls' and boys' perspectives equally? If not, what bias is present? • Do teachers ensure there is no gender bias when giving praise or when disciplining children? • Do teachers set a good example and act as role models for gender equality in school, and in the community? If so, what do they do? If not, how could they be encouraged to be positive role models? • Does the principal or other colleagues observe teachers in their classes, as a way of helping to improve practice? Do these observations include looking at how teachers respond to girls and boys and identifying examples of gender equality or bias? How could observations be used more effectively to help address gender bias in teaching practice?

Self-study and/or group activity

- Work on your own, or in a group (ideally with people from the same school).
- Think about the teachers in the school where you work or that you know best.
- Reflect on the questions in the tables.
- How many of these questions can you answer? How much information do you have?
- Who else do you need to consult in order to answer these questions?
- How can you consult them?
- What activities could you use to help them tell you about their experiences of and ideas for the curriculum and for teaching and learning materials?

Optional extension activity for self-study and/or group work

This activity could be used on your own, or with a group of colleagues, to find out more about the curriculum, materials, teachers, and teaching practices in your school, and develop ideas for how to improve or overcome gender bias or barriers.

- Bring together small groups of relevant stakeholders (i.e. teachers, parents, children).
- With each group, create a mind map or spider diagram. In the centre, you can write "gender equality in our school" or similar.
- Start your diagram by drawing 4 bubbles or boxes, each linked to the centre with a line. The 4 boxes say: curriculum/subjects; books and materials; the teachers; the way the teachers teach.
- Ask each group to think about and make notes on these 4 issues. They could use a red pen to write notes about things they think are examples of gender inequality or bias, and a green pen to write about examples of gender equality.
- You can use the questions from the tables to help stimulate their thinking or guide their group discussions, but avoid turning the activity into an interview.
- Encourage them to also write down ideas for how gender bias/inequality could be removed, or how the good experiences could be expanded.
- If possible, after each group has made their mind map, display all of them in the school for everyone to see. Invite more children, parents and teachers to contribute to the diagrams, or make their own diagrams.
- These diagrams could then be used by the various school management structures to develop a plan for improving the school's curricula, materials and teaching.

E. Guidance, counselling and student participation

Guidance and counselling

School guidance and counselling services are relatively new in the Asia-Pacific region and still need to be expanded

Existing and new school counsellors need to be trained to promote and support gender equality in education. They can have an important role in monitoring school policies and practices to look for and help address instances of gender stereotyping and discrimination that may be impacting on girls' and boys' participation and achievement and on the overall environment of the school.

In particular, counsellors can help to address school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) issues. As trusted adults in 'safe spaces', school counsellors can also help adolescents to engage in confidential discussions regarding their psychosocial well-being and development.

Schools need to consider the following:

Guidance and counselling services	• Does the school have guidance and counselling services, and are these accessible by both girls and boys?
	• Where are the services located and who runs them? Are there male and female counsellors available? Does the location and staffing of these services have a positive or negative impact on their accessibility for girls and boys?
	• What do the services include? What aspects of their work address gender-related issues?
The counsellors	• Is there a balance of female and male counsellors available?
	• Have school counsellors been trained in gender equality?
	• Have they been trained or got experience in specific related issues such as SRGBV and sexual and reproductive health, non-gender biased career guidance, and so on?

Student participation in decision-making

An inclusive school that delivers high-quality education needs to be responding daily to the needs and interests of the children in the community. This means that children need to be involved in the school's decision-making processes. Their opinions and experiences need to be heard and considered when decisions are made and when plans for school improvements are being developed. It is vital that both girls and boys are listened to and involved in decision-making. Participation in decision-making at school can help prepare girls and boys for being active citizens in the community when they are older.

Schools need to consider the following:

Responsibility in the classroom	• Are both girls and boys given roles of responsibility in the classroom? Are these roles assigned to equal numbers of boys and girls? Is there any bias or stereotyping in the assignment of roles (e.g. girls given the responsibility of cleaning the room, boys given the responsibility of moving furniture around)? • Are boys and girls given equal opportunities to take leadership roles in class, such as leading a particular club or sports team? • Do teachers expect equal standards of behaviour from girls and boys?
School-wide decision-making	• Do the school decision-making bodies give opportunities for both girls and boys to express their opinions and experiences? If so, how? • Is there a special decision-making body for students, such as a student council? • How are students chosen as members of decision-making bodies? How are the leaders or chairs of these decision-making bodies chosen? Are leadership roles shared between girls and boys? • Are there equal numbers of boys and girls represented on decision-making bodies? How is parity ensured? • Are there other opportunities in school for girls and boys to express their opinions, such as suggestion boxes?

Self-study and/or group activity

Counselling

On your own, or in a group:

- Brainstorm all the issues that children may want to seek counselling support with at school.
- Mark which issues boys might seek help with and which issues girls might seek help with.
- Look again through the list of issues for boys and for girls.
- Think about boys you know (in school or in the community). Would they be happy to discuss these issues with a female counsellor? Would they prefer a male counsellor? Why do you think this? Which issues would they most or least want a same-sex counsellor?
- Do the same with the list of issues you think girls might seek support with?

- Think about your school or the school you know best.
- Does the school have a counselling service?
- Is it able to support the needs of boys and girls?
- How does it support their needs?
- How could it be improved to ensure it is more gender responsive?

Student voice

On your own, or in pairs:

- Think about an occasion when you were a child when you really wanted your opinion to be heard, but it was not listened to.
- Why weren't you heard? Maybe you were too shy to speak up, or there was no opportunity for you to speak. Or were you ignored or laughed at when you spoke?
- How did this make you feel?
- What was the impact of not being able to express your opinion? Was there an impact on you, and/ or on other people?

- Now think of an occasion when your opinion was listened to and acted on. This could be an example from childhood or adulthood.
- How did you get yourself heard? Or what mechanisms were in place to ensure you had a voice?
- How did this make you feel?
- What was the impact of expressing your opinion and having it listened to? Was there an impact on you, and/or on other people?

- Think about your school or the school you know best.
- What mechanisms are in place for children to express their opinions and to take leadership roles or other roles of responsibility?
- Do girls and boys have equal opportunities to express opinions and take on responsible, leadership roles? If not, why not?
- What could be done to improve this?

F. Community members and parents

Participation from parents is essential for supporting individual children's education and for bringing about changes and quality improvements across the whole school. Other community members also play a key role in such improvements. Parents and community members can be agents of change, promoting and monitoring gender equality in education. For this reason, they need to understand gender equality and the factors that cause inequality in society so that they can support and lobby for greater equality in schools.

Schools need to consider the following:

Role of parents and community	• What role do parents and community members play in the school? Are they active in governance and in school improvement activities? • Do any parents or community members already have a role that focuses on monitoring equality or tackling discrimination? • What other roles would you like parents and community members to play? What other roles would they like to have in school governance and improvement?
Building capacity	• Have parents and community members attended any training or other events to learn about gender equality in society and in school? • If so, has there been a positive result (e.g. more parents and community members being equally supportive of girls and boys to attend school)? • Has such training been focused on basic awareness, or has it also helped parent and community members to build analytical and practical skills? • What else could the school do to raise awareness and build practical skills among parents and community members, so that they can advocate for and monitor gender equality for their children and other learners?
Using resource people	• Has the school contacted and used the advice and skills of community men and women with knowledge and experience of promoting gender equality and tackling discrimination? • Have skilled and knowledgeable women and men been used as resource people and role models in class activities? • How could the school make more use of skilled and knowledgeable women and men from the community?

Self-study and/or group activity

- Work on your own, or in a group, and think about your school or the school you know best.
- On a flipchart or piece of paper, draw three columns. In the first column, write down all the things you think or know parents and community members do to support the school and help make improvements. In the second column, write down ideas for what you would like parents and community members to do in order to support school improvements, with a focus on improving gender equality. In the third column, write down what needs to be done to help parents and community members to be more active in gender-focused school improvements.
- Look at the list in the third column. Try to find at least one action that you could contribute towards. Write down some ideas for what you could do, when, where, how and who else would need to help you.

Optional extension activity for self-study and/or group work

- Bring small groups of parents and other community members together.
- Carry out a similar activity to the one shown above, so that you can find out – from their perspective – what support they already provide and what else they could do to support gender-equality focused school improvements.

Further reading

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