



TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

A CONTEXT TO ACTION

This brief was prepared by Dr. Kirsten Locke, Dr. Liyun Wendy Choo, and Dr. Ritesh Shah from the University of Auckland, who were contracted to undertake a landscape analysis of U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) efforts to promote gender equality in and through education. The USAID Gender and Education Working Group provided support and participation in the development of the brief.

The landscape analysis sought to explore the following three questions:

1. What does the existing evidence base say about gender inequalities in education and gender-transformative and gender-inclusive approaches in and through education?
2. What are the characteristics of recent USAID programming efforts to advance gender equality in and through education, and have the characteristics shifted over time?
3. What opportunities does USAID programming have to advance gender equality in and through education, and where and how can USAID programming do better?

The landscape analysis was carried out through an extensive review of existing research, literature, and data on the nature of gender inequalities in education today; key informant interviews and focus groups with stakeholders within USAID and partners (totaling 42 individuals); and a secondary analysis of the gender equality/equity education programming included in the 2019 and 2020 Performance Plan and Report narrative data analyses. The key findings of the landscape analysis inform the substance of this brief and its recommendations.

USAID has a longstanding commitment to supporting gender equity and equality and strengthening women's empowerment. This is because the Agency strongly believes gender equality is both a human right and an important precondition to building prosperous, peaceful, democratic, and inclusive societies.

Within this, USAID's education programming has and continues to make important contributions to promoting and advancing gender equity and equality through its efforts. Schooling increases girls' aspirations, empowerment, and agency.¹ Additionally, for women, each year of post-primary education has significant multiplier effects in terms of expanding employment outcomes, decreasing chances of early marriage, and

¹ World Development Report, 2018.

improving the health and well-being of these individuals and their families.² For these reasons, the U.S. government identifies that addressing persistent barriers to girls' education is critical to closing gender gaps in education and boosting health, economic growth, and stability.³ Under its 2018 Education Policy, the Agency prioritizes gender equality, with equity and inclusion being a guiding principle for all its education programs. Improving access to equitable, inclusive, and quality education for women and girls, in all their diversity, is also a key priority of the 2022 (Draft) USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy.

This prioritization requires programming that:

1. Understands the gender-related constraints that prevent access to quality education; and
2. Works through a combined set of interventions that develop and enforce laws, policies, and procedures to promote equitable access and gender equality at all levels of education.⁴

RECENT SHIFTS IN EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

One of the significant shifts within USAID in recent times is a move beyond both seeing gender as a binary (male/female) and treating the goal of equality as a zero-sum game where the gains of one group are sacrificed for the other. For example, there is increasing focus on USAID gender equality programming applying an intersectional lens, which understands the systems of oppression and injustice based on people's overlapping identities—including biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, class, race, age, disability, nationality, etc.⁵ **This shift requires that analysis of gender equality in and through education moves beyond comparing education outcomes of boys and girls.**

The other significant shift is a focus toward transformative approaches within USAID's gender equality programming. Transformative approaches are ones that **foster critical examination of inequalities and gender roles, norms, and dynamics; recognize and strengthen positive norms that support equality and an enabling environment; promote the relative position of women, girls, and marginalized groups; and transform the underlying social structures, policies, and broadly held social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities.**⁶ USAID recognizes that gender equality requires "fundamental social transformation" that involves "changes in attitudes, behaviors, roles, and responsibilities in the home, in the workplace, and in the community."

This means that **education programs must move beyond striving to achieve parity in education or mitigating gender-related barriers precluding access and/or learning. Instead, they must work toward addressing the root causes of gender-based inequities.** The box below provides an example of what gender transformative programming might look like.

² UN Women (2018). *Infographic: Why gender equality matters to achieving all 17 SDGs*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2018/7/infographic-why-gender-equality-matters-to-achieving-all-17-sdgs>.

³ 2021 U.S. Government National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality.

⁴ USAID Education Policy, 2018.

⁵ This is reflected in ADS 205, the 2021 U.S. Government National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, and the 2022 (Draft) USAID Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy.

⁶ IGWG (2017). *The Training Gender Continuum*. www.youthpower.org/resources/igwg-training-gender-continuum.



An Example of Gender Transformative Programming

Involving grassroots and policy work with 94 civil society and 200 government partners, the USAID Takamol project in Jordan takes a systems-approach to gender equality/equity programming. It includes a variety of small projects spanning the justice, education, political, and economic sectors. It is also notable in its multi-sectoral, multi-level effort to engage local partners in shifting social norms that perpetuate gender inequality/inequity. One partner, the Haya Cultural Center explicitly countered traditional gender stereotypes promoted during childhood through photography, theater, and storytelling sessions utilizing gender-sensitive children's books. It developed six books to encourage children to think beyond any limitations of what a boy or girl "should" be. Souk Takamol awarded small grants to local community-based organizations to support their efforts to change community attitudes on gender stereotypes and to advocate for the inclusion of gender issues in policy.

PROGRESS TO DATE IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION

A strength of USAID's current programming within each geographic region is the prioritization and targeting of specific **gender-related concerns/constraints common across that area**. Where gender is signaled as an explicit consideration in activity design, there are examples of USAID's efforts to **promote transformative solutions to gender inequities** by engaging with a range of educational stakeholders and institutions to shift prevalent gendered norms, structures, and practices. **Engagement with multi-stakeholder bodies has strengthened the Agency's value proposition and influence** within global decision-making and action on gender-related concerns in education and allowed it to exercise thought leadership and global advocacy. Importantly, there is **significant will and commitment** across USAID and other arms of the U.S. Government at present to advance gender equality programming, and this is increasingly being reflected in policy and new strategies. Beyond this, there is increased elevation and attention in the current U.S. Administration to promote a more expansive view of gender, which brings attention to LGBTQI+ individuals and wider discourses of inclusion.

However, there are also substantive challenges. As of now, and due to a lack of dedicated funding, expertise, and associated resourcing for gender equality programming, seeing gender transformative solutions as vital to addressing educational inequities and the overall resilience of education systems has **yet to translate into a clear commitment across education activities**. Rather, gender equality programming has been **integrated into education responses**, particularly in the context of strengthening overall education outcomes. **While integration provides a robust programming approach**, the consequence of this is that often gender equity/equality are not part of the overall performance objectives or intermediate results of USAID education activities, and in many instances, activities do not have a specific gender component. In part, this has been driven, until recently, by a policy approach that has **privileged gender parity and access outcomes rather than shifts in underpinning norms, practices, and structures, which reproduced gender-based inequities**. Current Agency mandatory reporting requirements are based solely on sex-disaggregated participation or outcome measures, which create little incentive for activities to embrace more transformative

approaches to gender programming in education. Beyond this, there remains a strongly entrenched view within the Agency of **gender as equated solely with biological sex**, and with a focus of education programming only on girls.

WORKING TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE GENDER EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Now is the right time to reinvigorate and strengthen gains made in gender education programming (GEP) toward **gender transformative education**, i.e., education that shifts beyond acknowledging and addressing symptoms of inequality, to education that “transforms education systems by **uprooting inequalities**.”⁷ With the continued expansion of access to education and educational parity in areas such as literacy, **the sites of inequality are shifting**. These shifts require an agile, flexible, and robust evidence-informed response to GEP that is meaningfully sustained throughout the program cycle. As the 2022 (Draft) USAID Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy acknowledges in relation to recent policy reform that integrated gender programming throughout sector program design, “gender integration was strongest in the early stages of the country strategy Program Cycle, somewhat weaker in project design, and weakest in solicitations, suggesting that **the Agency still had a ways to go** before the requirements of the policy would be fully met.”⁸ This raises important questions but also considerations for USAID’s programming going forward. Below are key considerations and recommendations for USAID workforce members to advance gender equity in and through education.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Translating into Practice
<p>Strengthen existing mechanisms (Automated Directives System [ADS] 205, Country Development Cooperation Strategies [CDCS], etc.) that can support gender integration, contribute to innovative gender equity/equality education programming, and sustain the gender agenda.</p> <p>While mandated in programming, there is unevenness in the quality of gender analyses, ambiguity in what is expected, and a drop from reporting focus over the lifetime of an activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At solicitation, strengthen the quality of the gender analysis to dig deeper into the structural causes of gender inequality and the embedded cultural beliefs that create barriers to all genders in education. • Embed mid- and end-points of program evaluation that explicitly report on gender equality measures. • Rethink what is being reported and assessed by moving beyond beneficiaries reached and learning outcomes, to measuring changes in gender norms and attitudes. • Shift gender equality programming to the center of all activity as the first principle of an inclusive and socially just education system. • Leverage the CDCS process to develop an ecosystem of multi-component and cross-sectoral strategies that can address gender equality barriers in education programs.⁹

⁷ UNICEF, 2021. Gender Transformative Education: Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world. P. 5. https://plan-international.org/uploads/2022/01/unicef_plan_ungei_te_gender_transformative_education_web_copy_10dec21.pdf.

⁸ USAID Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy (Draft), 2022. P. 3.

⁹ An example of a cross-sectorial and multi-component activity that used a range of interventions as part of the same activity to build skills, reduce barriers, and provide services is the USAID/Mali Girls Leadership and Empowerment through Education (GLEE) activity. This activity sought to empower girls to excel at school and beyond. It involved several components that addressed different barriers to girls’ education, improved safety of adolescent girls in schools and their communities, and increased their knowledge and adoption of health behaviors, such as supporting accelerated learning programs in targeted GLEE schools; developing a comprehensive life skills curriculum; improving water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities at school to support menstrual hygiene management; and providing scholarships in the form of mobile money transfer.

Recommendation	Translating into Practice
<p>Ensure that programming is addressing the education-to-work continuum to in turn ensure that gains made in gender equity/equality education programming do not lose ground in women’s transition from school to work or leadership roles.</p> <p>Gains made in learning outcomes are not translating to better life outcomes for many women. This is an area in need of GEP focus if transformative gender education is to succeed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support programming activities that expose children and young people to authentic and gender-diverse role models in the teaching profession, specifically in areas of leadership. ● Pursue creative and bold partnerships with diverse professionals across multiple private and public sectors that focus on challenging gender-based forms of exclusion. ● Consider scholarship programs that connect young women and LGBTQI+ youth to mentoring activities and role models. ● Prioritize programming activities that link education to viable labor market entry points. ● Consider multiple activity approaches at various levels of the education continuum that consider structural elements to tackle gender-based forms of exclusion in the workforce.
<p>Garner and leverage the support of Mission leadership to champion gender equity/equality education programming.</p> <p>Mission leaders are often the people with access to high-level country policymaking and as such are often the best placed and most experienced networkers with the right kinds of social capital to appropriately navigate challenging cultural attitudes and beliefs that can limit gender equality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide clarity around the roles and spheres of influence of Gender and Education points of contact and advisors so that unrealistic expectations are avoided. ● Mandate transformative GEP Key Performance Indicators (or equivalent) in Mission leadership roles. ● Provide incentives for Mission leaders to maximize their convening power to have conversations with their local counterparts, who can help identify appropriate interventions within the specific legal and cultural contexts, establish parameters for the gender work based on the context, and smooth the way for technical officers to engage in programming with their professional counterparts.
<p>Support USAID staff and implementing partners to understand gender through the lens of intersectionality; to move beyond a simplistic categorization of gender by biological sex; and to understand gender’s relationship to ethnicity, disability, sexuality, social location, poverty, etc.</p> <p>A key lever toward transformative GEP is an active awareness of intersectional forces of discrimination and oppression that affect women, girls, men, boys, and minority genders. This requires a systems level theory of change in which intersectionality is germane.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Socialize gender equity and inclusive education policies at every level of the Bureau and provide robust and meaningful professional development opportunities that bring together all sectors with an interest in gender transformation and inclusivity. ● Extend curriculum activities to ensure teaching materials challenge entrenched norms that limit gender equality. ● Provide more targeted programming activities that address teacher professional conduct, and teacher professional development initiatives that make gender prejudice and harmful gender norms visible.

Recommendation	Translating into Practice
<p>Leverage existing partnerships with government and non-governmental actors, such as local civil society organizations, to navigate the political sensitivity of gender programming, identify needs, and institutionalize and sustain the gender equity/equality agenda, particularly at the design and implementation stages of any activity.</p> <p>Maintaining and nurturing multiple pathways to local partnerships with state and non-state actors is indispensable and ensures options are available in culturally sensitive gender contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure smaller implementing partner organizations that may have specialist “insider” engagement with underground/criminalized gender networks are awarded activity contracts and are not crowded out by larger well-established partnerships. • Continue to prioritize local relationships with existing and potential stakeholders, specifically USAID’s Leading through Learning Global Platform. • Keep abreast of emerging stakeholders and capitalize on local knowledge and expertise at Mission level.
<p>Consider useful entry points for LGBTQI+ programming, acknowledging the political, cultural, and social sensitivities around this.</p> <p>Transformative GEP challenges harmful gender norms and any barriers in the education system that limit the pursuit and realization of gender equality in any form. It is important that the Agency continues momentum with LGBTQI+ organizations and networks and finds multiple points of entry to build successes in education specifically.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with the Inclusive Development Hub and capitalize on the skillsets of these specialists. • Incentivize LGBTQI+ education programming activities/initiatives and find Mission “champions” who can run pilot activities with key stakeholders and implementing partners. • Be flexible, creative, thoughtful, and judicious about data gathering, what is being measured, and how information is reported so that it ensures confidentiality and adheres to the “do no harm” principle above all else.
<p>Continue to identify opportunities for USAID to exercise thought leadership regarding gender in education issues, which at present might be toward promoting a more expansive view of gender focused on inclusive development.</p> <p>USAID is well positioned globally to enhance and build on its strategic influence in gender equality conversations. A strongly articulated focus on inclusive transformative education programming positions the Agency as a natural thought leader that can speak to the educational challenges of all genders from an intersectional perspective.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to build and refine higher education partnerships (e.g., through the USAID Higher Education Learning Network and with the Comparative and International Education Society). • Consider PhD/postdoc partnerships with institutions that involve internships/mentoring scholarships. • Focus on a clear and coherent “philosophy” of inclusive and transformative GEP that synthesizes the operational principles in the new 2022 (Draft) USAID Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy.

