



## Girls' Education Department (GED) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)

The FCDO shares a strong commitment to gender equality with the World Bank and we very much welcome the development of this draft strategy and the opportunity to contribute. The FCDO commitment to girls' education and to gender equality in education is reflected in both the Women and Girls strategy and the latest White Paper on international development, and the three strategic priorities identified in this gender strategy (ending GBV and elevating human capital, economic participation and engaging women as leaders) are well aligned.

Please find some detailed considerations on the strategy below:

### Gender Transformative Education (GTE)

- As founding partners in the Global Coalition for Foundational Learning, and co-signatories of the Commitment to Action, we share the same overarching priority of addressing learning poverty by supporting quality education systems that deliver for all children, regardless of gender. However, focusing on the most marginalised children, including girls, is an effective entry point for enhancing education outcomes for all children, with targeted support having positive 'spill-over' impacts for marginalised boys.
- The Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning, as well as the World Bank's own Education Strategy, recognises the crucial, cross-cutting role of education in achieving gender equality, inclusive growth, sustainable development - and every one of the Sustainable Development Goals. This strategy update places the role of gender at the core of climate action, recognising the pivotal role of women and girls in addressing climate and environmental change, but limits the role of education to skills and STEM.
- We would strongly support the inclusion in the strategy of the critical role of gender transformative education systems in addressing the strategic priorities identified by dismantling gender norms and stereotypes as well as equipping women and girls with the education and skills they need. This would demonstrate the World Bank's continued global leadership on supporting education to foster gender equality and complement their wider work on learning poverty. The strategy could reflect, for example:

#### Ending Gender Based Violence

- The role of gender norms in hindering access to education and learning, and in perpetuating how both genders understand and experience violence in and around schools.
- Evidence shows that intervening early provides opportunities to address gender norms and barriers within and through education. GTE provides a significant opportunity to stop the intergenerational cycle of normalising violence based on gender and other characteristics, and can actively contribute to the development of more gender-equitable

societies, where violence against women and girls is not tolerated. The importance of e.g., engaging boys on healthy relationships, positive masculinity, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (including through World Bank education projects in Angola, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Tanzania for example) is already briefly referenced in the Strategy (para 38).

#### Economic Empowerment

- How quality learning interventions, including in contexts where boys are particularly underachieving, can help foster progressive societies that prioritise women's economic empowerment.
- The multifaceted role of education in equipping marginalised groups with the necessary skills to participate in the workforce, whilst also dismantling the norms and stereotypes that can block their entry into the workforce – including the need to demonstrate the value of girls' education to parents beyond marriageability as part of wider efforts to tackle child marriage, as referenced in the World Bank's current gender strategy.
- That female underrepresentation in STEM is partly due to the structure of education systems, which include gender biases, also referenced in the current gender strategy.
- The Bank's evidence and practice note on female labour participation, which confirms that access to quality education should remain a priority (in conjunction with other critical interventions).
- Relevant references from the World Bank's Education Strategy, including strong links between education and the labour market, and the need to provide children and young people with appropriate opportunities to consolidate their basic knowledge and competencies, before equipping them with technical or vocational skills that promote employment and entrepreneurship.

#### Rollback

- We echo feedback from the FCDO Women's Economic Empowerment Adviser, particularly on restoring the focus on voice and agency from the previous strategy. This is especially important given the constraints social norms place on women and the worrying rollback on women's rights.

#### Data and Gender Equality

- The draft strategy helpfully references the challenges faced by gender minorities, particularly in the area of GBV, and recognises the vulnerabilities arising from the intersection of gender with other characteristics, such as poverty, ethnicity and disability. This strategy could be an opportunity to reflect the role of gender in achieving the World Bank's wider objectives on learning poverty and other work, such as the disability inclusion and accountability framework.
- The data that is currently available is not sufficiently disaggregated and there are many unknowns, and we agree with the strategy that progress on the three areas of emphasis and broader gender equality "calls for further investments in data, evidence, and capacity" and that "robust data on the

differential development experiences and outcomes of sexual and gender minorities in developing countries are scarce” which “jeopardizes the commitment to “leaving no one behind” in addressing poverty and inequality” (para 64). The available data hides regional and intra-country gender differences as well as consideration of other intersectional data including gender, e.g., how the most marginalised girls are doing in addition to the wider gender inequalities in education.

- Without contextualising available data within the larger situation of girls and boys and wider intersectionalities, the data can lead to incomplete or incorrect conclusions. Interpretations risk diminishing that most girls are not learning, for example. It is also important to challenge the assumption that girls have an advantage over boys and avoid the girls vs boys narrative, as UNGEI sets out in their Op Ed: [‘It’s not girls versus boys, it’s ALL children against gender inequality’](#). When girls appear to have (very slightly in some cases) higher literacy scores than boys, gender and social norms still act as barriers against them. Despite gender parity in education enrolment globally, progress in girls’ education has stagnated in many countries. It is true that once in school, girls can learn as well as, or better than, boys, but learning levels for all children, including all girls - need to rise significantly from their current low levels to support them to overcome the additional barriers they face as they reach adolescence.
- The work from AGEE [About the Accountability for Gender Equality \(AGEE\) project \(gendereddata.org\)](#) outlines the limitations of gender parity in this context, and we found useful lessons in the Population Council report: [Measuring gender equality in education: Lessons from 43 countries \(popcouncil.org\)](#), finding that progress in girls’ education has stagnated in many countries, that despite gender parity in enrolment globally, in many countries female disadvantages persist, that once enrolled in school, girls tend to complete as many grades as boys, that gender parity in attainment may mask other important deficiencies in education, and gender parity in attainment does not necessarily translate into gender parity in learning.

#### Accountability

- We welcome the commitment to strengthen and enhance internal accountability for results on gender and gender outcomes and to build on the existing gender ‘tag and flag’ approach. It would be useful to understand how this will work at country level and within education programmes, particularly those with a strong World Bank presence, such as GPE.
- We support the World Bank’s commitment to strengthening the technical capacity of staff, and would like to see the strategy provide more detail on this including the “corporate targets, training, and support mechanisms” boosting “incentives and capacity to identify entry points for action in operations and investments across the World Bank portfolio” set out here (in para 59) to support the delivery of this strategy in practice.

We would be happy to answer any questions you may have as you work to finalise the strategy. We look forward to working with you to progress our shared objectives on gender equality as a priority for both of our organisations.