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GOING FURTHER TOGETHER

A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGEE	Accountability for Gender Equality in Education
ALIGN	Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms
ANCEFA	Africa Network Campaign on Education for All
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CSO	civil society organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
Education 2030	The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action
EGER	The Evidence for Gender and Education Resource
EiE	education in emergencies
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GCI	Gender at the Center Initiative
GEA	Girls' Education Accelerator
GENIA	Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific
GES	Gender Equality in Education Snapshot
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPE 2025	GPE strategic plan 2021-2025
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
KIX	Knowledge and Innovation Exchange
LEG	local education group
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
QAR	Quality Assessment Review
REAL Centre	Research for Equitable Access and Learning Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRGBV	school-related gender-based violence
STG	system transformation grant
TES	Transforming Education Summit
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN	The United Nations
UNAIDS	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNHCR	The UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WIDE	World Inequality Database on Education

INTRODUCTION

The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) is the largest global fund solely dedicated to transforming education in lower-income countries. GPE achieves this through a multi-stakeholder partnership model, bringing together donors, multilateral institutions, civil society, teacher representatives and the private sector to support country governments through a mutual accountability approach.

GPE is working toward the goal of “accelerating access, learning outcomes and gender equality through equitable, inclusive and resilient education systems fit for the 21st century.”
GPE 2025

Embedded in this partnership approach, the GPE 2021 – 2025 Strategic Plan (GPE 2025) sees gender equality as a central priority for education transformation. The strategy highlights that GPE will support countries to systematically identify and address the barriers to education that affect boys and girls differently, putting gender equality at the heart of planning and implementation of education systems.

GPE also emphasizes the role of partners to “leave no one behind.”

GPE’s mission is “to mobilize partnerships and investments that transform education systems in developing countries, leaving no one behind.”
GPE 2025

GPE convenes stakeholders at an education system level, enabling opportunities to influence and leverage how gender equality is prioritized in education system planning and delivery. A partnership approach to gender equality includes recognizing the unique role each partner plays in upholding gender equality within GPE processes. Holding each other mutually accountable for these roles is a vital part of the partnership.

The Purpose of the Paper

This paper responds to feedback from country and global GPE partners to clarify how the ambition for ‘gender hardwiring’ set out in GPE 2025 is delivered through the partnership approach. This paper is not a new strategy on gender equality; it is an operational paper highlighting existing tangible actions that are being made through the GPE operating model. The paper also expands on partner roles and responsibilities for hardwiring gender equality that uses a model of mutual accountability.

GPE 2025 adopts a ‘learn and adapt’ approach in everything the partnership does and includes a bold ambition for gender equality that is operationalized in this paper. This paper also acknowledges that gender is one of many characteristics that impacts an individual child’s access to education and learning outcomes. Aspects including disability, refugee status, ethnicity, race, location and gender identity will intersect with gender to influence every child’s access to and experiences within education. GPE 2030 will be an opportunity for the partnership to build on the lessons learned and experience of addressing this collective ambition for gender hardwiring as the partnership continues to learn how to support children with varied experiences of educational marginalization moving forward.

This paper was developed through a detailed consultation process involving input from GPE partners, including partner countries, donors, private foundations, country-level and international civil society organizations (CSOs) and GPE Youth Leaders. Section 1 provides a brief global context of the importance of including gender equality within education system change and in GPE 2025. Section 2 highlights how gender equality is being operationalized across the GPE partnership and the guiding principles being upheld by partners. Section 3 discusses the role of mutual accountability for gender equality among GPE stakeholders. Section 4 concludes the document.

SECTION 1. GPE 2025, THE GLOBAL CONTEXT AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY

1.1. Global Context of Gender Equality and Education

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5—“Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls”—highlights gender equality as a fundamental human right that underpins all areas of economic and social development. In parallel, SDG 4—“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”—emphasizes that quality education for all plays a vital role in equipping girls and boys with the necessary skills and understanding to participate equally in society and the economy. SDG 4 also highlights the need for an intentionally inclusive approach to reaching the most marginalized children in society through education. A full cycle of education is important in its own right. However, in locations where girls’ education has been significantly improved alongside progress for boys, it can also play a significant role in unlocking the wider benefits of gender equality for healthy, prosperous and fair societies.¹ Schools are environments where critical thinking skills are learned and harmful gender norms, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and masculine norms around violence, can start to change.

The Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (Education 2030) lays out a roadmap for achieving SDG 4. This framework for education delivery reflects the fact that limited access to education as well as low-quality teaching is constraining life choices for many young populations. Education 2030 acknowledges that development has

been uneven, leading to many children and young people being excluded from education based on their gender and/or other characteristics.

Despite significant progress in gender parity in access to education at the primary level in many countries, progress is beginning to stall. In sub-Saharan Africa there has been no progress on girls’ enrollment in lower secondary since 2011 or in upper secondary since 2014.² Data reveals high levels of dropout for girls as they reach adolescence and transition to secondary school. These gendered patterns of dropout are amplified when combined with social norms and characteristics such as poverty, disability or marginalized ethnicity.³ In a reversal of girls’ rights in Afghanistan, girls have been denied access to secondary and university education.⁴

Gender equality in education is about much more than parity in access. Education spaces are central to communities and, as mentioned earlier, have the potential to teach critical thinking and challenge gender norms to create future generations where gender inequalities are eliminated. In 2022, over half the countries that submitted national commitments to the Transforming Education Summit mentioned violence as a key constraint to addressing learning and transforming their education system.⁵ Education planning that embeds gender equality at the heart of delivery has the potential to create communities where girls and boys can learn without the threat of violence, are able to engage with all opportunities and to thrive irrespective of their gender. Given these deeply rooted legacies of how gender impacts educational experience and attainment, nuanced education

1 Quentin Wodon et al., *Missed Opportunities: The High Cost of Not Educating Girls* (World Bank Group, 2018).

2 UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report: Deepening the debate on those still left behind* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022).

3 Kelly Yotebieng, *What we know (and do not know) about persistent social norms that serve as barriers to girls’ access, participation and achievement in education in eight sub-Saharan African countries* (New York: UN Girls’ Education Initiative, 2021).

4 Malala Fund, “With the decision to ban women from attending university, the Taliban betray Afghan students and the nation,” *News Update*, December 21, 2022.

5 UN Transforming Education Summit (TES) Team, “Annex: Paper 2, Gender-Transformative Education” in *Action Track 1 on Inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022), 26-31.

solutions—that is, solutions based on gender analysis that considers context, characteristics and legal frameworks—are vital.

The compounding shocks to education from the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change are undermining the already fragile gains made in equality in education, putting global education systems and the futures of girls and boys under further strain. As with previous health crises, current estimates indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic will have created a spike in teenage pregnancy rates, child marriage and increased violence against women and girls, which all threaten girls’ access to and engagement with education.⁶ The education sector response to the COVID-19 pandemic involved increasing the use of technologies for education to enable remote learning throughout school closures. However, the pandemic exacerbated the digital gender divide both in terms of access and use of digital technologies, resulting in further exclusion of girls and marginalized communities from access to learning opportunities.⁷

Research has shown that climate and environmental change are disproportionately affecting the educational experiences of girls and marginalized groups.⁸ The majority of those displaced by climate change are women and girls, leading to an increased risk of violence and exploitation. Climate shocks reduce incomes, exacerbating thus a major barrier to education, especially for the poorest, girls and children with disabilities. However, existing evidence points to an association between girls’ education and better resilience to climate disasters at the country level.⁹ Specifically, studies have found girls with advanced levels of schooling are more likely to live in

countries that experience climate disasters less often or not at all and vice versa, suggesting a positive association between the average number of years of schooling a girl receives and a country’s resilience to climate disasters.¹⁰ GPE is supporting governments to navigate education system reform with this combined gender and climate lens by developing and sharing a ‘Climate-Smart’ framework for action.¹¹

Large-scale forced displacement of populations due to conflict, economic instability and climate change is creating complex humanitarian emergencies that also have profound impacts on young peoples’ education. The 2022 UNHCR education report¹² indicated that while two-thirds of all refugee children are enrolled in primary education, only approximately one-third can access secondary education, and just 6 percent participate in tertiary education. Gender is a significant determinant of access to education and training among refugees and forcibly displaced persons, with displacement exacerbating disadvantages for girls’ access to and participation in education. In conflict or displaced communities, boys face threats to their education through forced recruitment into armed forces or withdrawal from school to help household finances.¹³ National education systems must find a place for girls and boys who have been forced to leave their homes to give them a chance to rebuild and succeed.

Discriminatory laws and gender-unaware institutions continue to thwart cross-sector leadership and gender-responsive education sector plans. When considering a holistic approach to education that reaches all children, it is vital that education sector plans include cross-sector coordination with ministries of health, social protection programs as well

6 United Nations Children’s Fund, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects. 2023 update* (New York: UNICEF, 2023); UN Women, *Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19* (UN Women, 2021).

7 Lara Tembey et al., *Understanding Barriers to Girls’ Access and Use of EdTech in Kenya During Covid-19* [Working Paper] (EdTech Hub and Busara Center for Behavioural Economics, 2021).

8 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), *FCDO Position Paper: Addressing the Climate, Environment, and Biodiversity Crises in and through Girls’ Education* (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2022).

9 Ibid.

10 Measured through the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) index; Christina Kwauk and Amanda Braga, “*Three platforms for girls’ education in climate strategies*,” *Brooke Shearer Series - Global Economy and Development at Brookings*, no. 6 (September 2017); Erich Streissing, Wolfgang Lutz, and Anthony G. Patt, “*Effects of Educational Attainment on Climate Risk Vulnerability*,” *Ecology and Society* 18, no. 1 (March 2013).

11 GPE, *Toward Climate-Smart Education Systems: A 7-Dimension Framework for Action* (Global Partnership for Education, 2023).

12 UNHCR, *UNHCR Education Report 2022 – All Inclusive: The Campaign for Refugee Education* (The UN Refugee Agency, 2022).

13 UNGEI, ECW, and INEE, *EiE-GenKit: A core resource package on education in emergencies* (New York: United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative, Education Cannot Wait, and Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2021).

as connections with civil society and gender actors from other sectors. This vision of gender equality requires engagement at a system level to leverage significant, sustainable change.

System-level shortcomings have implications for girls and boys on a national scale. There are a growing number of global initiatives that are beginning to recognize the role political and institutional leadership plays in championing gender equality as a fundamental aspect of education system change. Delivering on high-level commitments to gender equality within education reforms is as critical as ever.

1.2. Political Leadership on Gender Equality in Education

Since the introduction of SDG 4 and its focus on quality education for all, there have been some major regional- and national-level political commitments and a growing number of education policies that recognize the role of gender and inclusion as part of effective education reform. However, there continue to be concerns that these national policies become diluted when decisions are made about resources, delivery and results.¹⁴ A study by the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) in 2022 highlighted some examples of good practice as well as areas where opportunities were missed in the inclusion of gender equality in education sector planning processes. Specific weaknesses found included the lack of gender expertise at key points, politically motivated resistance to funding gender equality advancement and weak indicators to hold actors to account.¹⁵

Political leadership on gender equality in education by governments, ministries and education actors is a vital part of ensuring education systems deliver inclusive quality education. These leaders

must then be held to account for delivering on their commitments. UNGEI and the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre have developed a framework for transformative leadership that promotes a model of 'individual political leadership'—comprising heads of government, ministers and senior civil servants, as well as 'collective political leadership'—comprising cross-ministerial coordination, cross-parliamentary and cross-country coalitions. A transformative approach to political leadership requires engagement with key stakeholders such as women's, youth and other civil society organizations (CSOs). The relationships between individual and collective political leadership alongside the aforementioned key stakeholders establish conditions for sustainable change and ensure relevance, ownership and effective implementation of strategies for promoting girls' education.¹⁶

In the past five years, key global initiatives and declarations have recognized the role of gender equality in the delivery of effective education systems:

- **Charlevoix Declaration, 2018:** This G7 declaration promotes increased access and safe and quality education that promotes gender equality.
- **Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2019:** Launched by the G7 with technical leadership and coordination from UNESCO International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) and UNGEI, this alliance supports education planners to embed gender equality at the heart of education system reform in eight (mainly West African) countries.
- **Girls' Education Declaration, 2021:** Launched by the G7, this declaration committed to the goal in low- to middle-income countries of ensuring 40 million more girls attend school and 20 million girls are reading by age 10 or by the end of primary school by 2026.

¹⁴ UNESCO Bangkok, *Gender in Education Network in Asia-Pacific (GENIA) Toolkit: Promoting Gender Equality in Education* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNESCO Bangkok Office, 2019).

¹⁵ UNGEI and Cambridge Education, *How is Gender Equality Included in Education Sector Planning? An analysis of power, voice and social change in 8 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Gender at the Centre Initiative, 2023).

¹⁶ Pauline Rose et al., *Transformative Political Leadership to Promote 12 Years of Quality Education for All Girls* (Cambridge: REAL Centre, University of Cambridge, 2020).

- **Freetown Manifesto for Gender Transformative Leadership in Education, 2022:** Ministers of education from 14 African countries as well as CSOs, GPE, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNGEI committed to providing technical leadership and finance to address harmful gender norms in pedagogy, and to improving data on out-of-school populations, education in crisis-affected areas and transition to employment, with a particular focus on girls.
- **Transforming Education Summit, 2022:** Hosted by the United Nations, this international forum catalyzed 140 national commitments to education reform focusing on equity and inclusion as a key driver for improved education access and quality in the post-pandemic global learning crisis. A global platform to drive leadership and accountability for gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment in and through education was launched as a follow-up to the summit, supporting accountability, action and learning and drawing on transformative action for gender equality.
- **G7 Hiroshima Summit, 2023:** G7 actors reaffirmed their commitment to uphold previous commitments to protect education opportunities for all and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in and through education. This includes breaking down gender-related barriers and underlying discriminatory social norms from pre-primary through higher education for more resilient, inclusive and gender-transformative education.

1.3. GPE 2025

Against this global and political backdrop, GPE refreshed its strategy in 2020. This new strategy, among other aspects, includes the need for evidence-based policy dialogue, the multi-stakeholder nature of education reform and the growing urgency of including a gender-transformative approach to education system thinking. GPE's commitment to raise

the profile of a system approach to gender equality in education joins the growing number of countries and education actors who are committed to moving beyond gender parity in access. Installing gender equality as a foundational principle within education systems can deliver transformative education for children and young people globally.

"To realize our ambitions, we are making bold changes to our operating model as well as mainstreaming gender equality throughout everything we do." GPE 2025

GPE 2025 recognizes the need to support strategic or policy statements on gender equality with sufficient resources and expertise to operationalize this vision. This includes having processes that aim to deliver on the gender equality ambition at every stage of engagement. GPE works with global, regional and country partners, drawing on and developing technical expertise to further the aim of gender equality. Due to this unique way of working, clear partnership expectations and ways to maintain mutual accountability on gender equality are vital. This aspect of the strategy is explored in more detail in section 3.

1.4. GPE Approach to Gender-Transformative System Change

GPE is committed to gender-transformative system change in access to, within and through education. There is an urgent need to look beyond parity in attendance and to also consider the role gender plays in boys' and girls' experiences within the education system, as well as the potential to engage young people as agents for change through education. All of these dimensions need to be seen from a system change perspective to leverage gender-transformative education reform (see figure 1). Social norms are an aspect that play an important role across all these dimensions, including with actors engaged in the system change dialogue.

FIGURE 1. SYSTEM CHANGE TO ADDRESS GENDER EQUALITY IN ACCESS TO, WITHIN AND THROUGH EDUCATION



Embedding the principles of gender equality in access to, within and through education at a **system change level** has the potential to create long-term, sustainable change that delivers on the SDG goals of gender equality and quality education for all. The system approach to gender equality in education described below covers all sites where children and young people can learn, including early learning environments where gender stereotypes start to be established, primary and secondary schools and in accelerated as well as non-formal learning classes.¹⁷

➤ **Access to education:** The promotion of equal access for all aims to address the disparities in education that occur when gender and other characteristics, combined with context, lead to many girls and boys being denied their right to education. Addressing both the demand and supply side of education access from a system level is needed to catalyze real change. For example, access to education for adolescent girls with disabilities requires an improved supply of local, inclusive education facilities, specialized

teachers and an inclusive teacher training curriculum. Demand from families also needs to be addressed through efforts to challenge gender and disability norms and resolving concerns such as travel distances and safety.¹⁸

➤ **Within education:** Even when children have overcome the gender barriers to attending school, learning experiences within schools are still deeply gendered. System-level reform has the potential to introduce policies and practices that include gender-responsive pedagogy in teacher training as well as reform curricula and revise textbooks to eliminate gender stereotypes or bias.¹⁹ These gender-transformative policies and practices can help to ensure that girls are not discouraged from engaging in subjects or vocations seen as traditionally male, and that boys are not discouraged from exploring opportunities that are incompatible with context-specific norms of masculinity.²⁰ This dimension of gender equality within education is particularly relevant for policies and practices that ensure adequate response to

17 VVOB – education for development, *Technical Brief no. 5 – Putting SDG 4 into practice: Gender-responsive pedagogy for early childhood education* (VVOB – education for development, 2020).

18 Nidhi Singal et al., *Independent Evaluation of the Girls' Education Challenge Phase II – Evaluation Study 4: Educating Girls with Disabilities in GEC II: Final Report* (Berkshire: Tetra Tech International Development, 2023).

19 Rebecca Gordon et al., *12 Years of Quality Education for All Girls: A Commonwealth Perspective* (Cambridge: REAL Centre, University of Cambridge, 2019); FAWE/Claire Dowd et al., *Gender Responsive Pedagogy: A Toolkit for Teachers and Schools, 2nd edition* (Nairobi: Forum for African Women Educationalists, 2018).

20 Rachel Marcus, "Gender norms and educational attainment," in *ALIGN Guide: Education and gender norms* (Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms, 2018).

various forms of violence in schools, from bullying to physical or sexual harassment.²¹

- ▶ **Through education:** Schools have the potential to model environments where people are given opportunities to thrive regardless of gender. By addressing gender equality through education, young people can learn essential critical thinking skills, supporting them to understand their rights and become agents for change.²² Examples include: promotion of women in school leadership positions and career guidance to students that encourages vocational pathways that support opportunities, irrespective of gender. Evidence shows that discussions on reproductive health,

healthy relationships, power and respect²³ help to address the root causes of gender-based violence, avoid early and unintended pregnancies and increase the prevention of HIV.²⁴ Every girl and boy can learn how to play their part in shifting damaging norms and expectations around gender roles in their communities that prevent them from realizing their potential.²⁵

It is critical to not lose sight of the influence of social norm change that cuts across all these potential areas of engagement in gender equality surrounding education for societies and actors involved in system change choices.



Social norms are the implicit and informal rules that most people accept and follow. They are influenced by our beliefs, economic circumstances and sometimes by the rewards and sanctions we might expect for either adhering to or disobeying them. Norms are embedded in formal and informal institutions and are produced and reproduced through our social interactions. They only change when enough of us choose or are compelled to act in a different way, creating a new norm.

Gender norms are a subset of social norms. They describe how we are expected to behave as a result of the way we, or others, identify our gender. In most contexts, gender norms are framed in binary terms (female and male) and erase non-binary or gender-fluid identities. Gender norms often reflect and reinforce unequal gender relations, usually to the disadvantage of women and girls, but also to those men, boys and people of diverse gender identities who do not conform to prevailing gender norms. Gender norms intersect with other norms and inequalities related to age, race and ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation and religion, among other factors.

Source: [ALIGN platform](#).

21 UNGEI, *A whole school approach to prevent school-related gender-based violence: Minimum standards and monitoring framework* (UN Girls' Education Initiative, 2019).

22 Engaging young people as agents of change involves giving them the opportunity for leadership positions or decision-making powers in the process of system change.

23 Many countries include comprehensive sexuality education within their curricula. This includes age- and developmentally appropriate curriculum-based messages on sexuality, human rights, healthy and respectful interpersonal relationships, cultural and social norms, personal and shared values, gender equality, violence and gender-based violence, consent and bodily integrity, sexual abuse and harmful practices; "What is Comprehensive Sexuality Education?" in *Comprehensive Sexuality Education Implementation Toolkit*, UNESCO Health and Education Resource Center, accessed August 4, 2023

24 Every week, 4000 adolescent girls and young women acquired HIV. In 2022, women and girls (of all ages) accounted for 63 percent of all new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa; UNAIDS, *The Path that Ends AIDS: 2023 UNAIDS Global Update* (Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2023).

25 Audrey Kettaneh, *West and Central Africa Commitment for educated, healthy and thriving adolescents and young people, "Listen, Understand, Act" – Situation analysis* (Technical Working Group of the West and Central Africa Commitment for educated, healthy and thriving adolescents and young people, 2021).

Integrating Social Norms into System Approaches to Gender Equality in Education

Social norm change is a complex process. Social norms can take a while to shift, and change is uneven and unpredictable, but they have the power to catalyze gender equality if evidence-based and context-specific strategies are used.²⁶ There are tools to guide decision makers and practitioners that highlight the roles of decision makers from the national to the community level in shifting social norms.²⁷

Parents and communities are an essential part of a system approach to gender equality. Community engagement should be a key consideration in the

introduction of new legislation, education policy change and resource allocation.²⁸ Intentional strategies need to be employed to engage parents in understanding the benefits of policy changes and resources that invest in gender-responsive teacher training, curricula that include explicit gender equality content and efforts to create more gender equitable school leadership.

“How do we change harmful social practices, abandon old social norms, and/or adopt beneficial new ones? Two key maxims apply: (1) enough people have to believe that enough other people are changing, and (2) seeing is believing.” Gerry Mackie, 2018²⁹

East and Southern Africa: Lessons from a System Level Approach to Social Norm Change

Emerging results from GPE KIX research in East and Southern Africa highlight the positive news that many African countries have instituted school reentry policies for pregnant girls and teenage mothers.³⁰ While these policies provide a legal framework, evidence shows that their effectiveness depends on whether policies are accompanied by multi-stakeholder awareness-raising efforts about social norms that target relevant government representatives, civil society, school administrators, religious leaders, communities and families. Policy implementation also needs funding for practical aspects, such as counseling support for boys and girls and childcare provision. In many of these settings, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) is also reaching out to boys and young men to be community champions for appropriate and effective school reentry policies.

30 GPE KIX research includes studies conducted by the CSO FAWE; Joy Nafungo, “[School re-entry for pregnant girls: Policy vs practice in Eastern and Southern Africa](#),” *GPE Education for All blog* (blog), 16 June, 2022.

26 Caroline Harper et al., *GENDER, POWER AND PROGRESS: How Norms Change* (London: Advancing Learning and Innovation on Gender Norms and Overseas Development Institute, 2020).

27 See this [UNICEF technical note](#) that uses the socio-ecological model when addressing norm change around child marriage; “[Implementing strategies: Social Norms – Understanding, leveraging and addressing unwritten rules](#),” UNICEF, accessed August 4, 2023.

28 See the [ALIGN Platform Guide to Education and Gender Norms](#).

29 Gerry Mackie, “[Social Norms Change: Believing Makes it So](#),” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 85, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 141-146, Project Muse.

Eight African Countries: Resistance to Gender Equality in Education Planning

In a recent study led by UNGEI across eight African countries, resistance techniques were delaying progress on gender equality in education sector planning. Passive blocking techniques included: blaming the limitation of budgets on the lack of gender integration in plans; dismissal of the existence of gender disparities in education or the prevalence of gender-based violence in cities; rejection of gender equality as a Western concept; and displays of support for gender equality being superficial, with political actors ‘going behind’ to influence inaction on bills to redress gender imbalances in ministry leadership.

Resistance and Backlash to Gender Equality

Gender equality academics and activists are noting a concerning growth of resistance and/or backlash to progress on gender equality.³¹ Understanding the dynamics and types of resistance is vital to mobilizing efforts to reduce their impact. Backlash and resistance are shown to manifest in a variety of forms, including denial of the problem, disavowal of responsibility, passive blocking techniques, co-option and more actively aggressive techniques to maintain the status quo.³² Despite feelings of frustration at these kinds of resistance or ‘patriarchal brakes,’ researchers of the ALIGN platform’s “Gender, Power and Progress” paper encourage actors to see the longer view which reveals how collective efforts are generating patterns of progress on gender and entrenched cultural norms.³³ Identifying and resisting the varied forms of backlash is another example of the importance of blending system and social norm approaches in actions addressing gender equality in education systems (see also the ‘Do no harm’ principle in section 2.4).

School-Related Gender-Based Violence

An estimated 246 million girls and boys experience violence in and around schools. Violence may take forms such as physical, sexual or emotional abuse, online and in person. This violence hinders learning and has a long-lasting impact on children’s lives.³⁴ Existing evidence suggests that school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is primarily driven by social norms, particularly gender-discriminatory norms, weak or discriminatory institutional, legal and policy frameworks and wider contextual factors, such as conflict or socioeconomic deprivation.³⁵ Practical guidance on addressing this violence highlights the importance of engaging actors at all levels and the need to tailor solutions to each setting. Approaches are likely to include parental engagement, codes of conduct, support for teachers and staff and strengthening incident reporting, school leadership and community engagement that links to the police and child welfare agencies.³⁶ Inclusion of these holistic approaches can be built into system-level reforms to address SRGBV.

31 Anne Marie Goetz, “The politics of preserving gender inequality: de-institutionalisation and re-privatisation,” *Oxford Development Studies* 48, no. 1 (October 2019): 2–17.

32 Michael Flood, Molly Dragiewicz, and Bob Pease, “Resistance and backlash to gender equality,” *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 56, no. 3 (October 2020): 393–408.

33 Harper et al., *GENDER, POWER AND PROGRESS*.

34 “Safe to Learn: A Global Initiative Working to End All Forms of Violence Against Children in and through Schools,” End Violence Against Children, accessed August 4, 2023.

35 UNGEI, *Report on findings from school-related gender-based violence action research in schools and communities in Sierra Leone* (USAID, UNGEI and UNICEF, 2023).

36 UNGEI, *A whole school approach to prevent SRGBV*.

Sierra Leone: System and Social Norms Approach to School-Related Gender-Based Violence

A recent study in Sierra Leone explored how the policy environment operated alongside beliefs and norms that underpin school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) in schools and communities. Findings indicated that SRGBV is driven by deep-rooted norms that legitimize the sexual exploitation of adolescent girls and corporal punishment of children, socioeconomic factors and the lack of meaningful oversight and accountability mechanisms in schools. To address these multiple factors, the report highlights the need for: enhanced cross-sector coordination; careful policy implementation; human and material resource allocation; engagement of multiple actors at different operational levels; strengthening response mechanisms; and comprehensive awareness-raising efforts with parents, community leaders and school staff on violence prevention.³⁷

³⁷ UNGEI, *Report on findings from SRGBV action research in schools and communities in Sierra Leone*.

This **system and social norms approach** helps to structure dialogue around system-level opportunities to address gender inequality, encouraging stakeholders to move beyond short-term solutions to gender equity in access to education. Evidence-based analysis and inclusive dialogue will determine country-specific priority reform areas selected by GPE partners. Applying this approach may also help to identify further opportunities to advance gender equality within and through education, or to encourage dialogue around strategies that move toward an engagement with social norm change at each level, recognizing that this is a necessary but challenging ambition for all countries, including high-income contexts.³⁸

Gender-transformative system change involves both recognizing the power dynamics that exist at all levels of education system decision-making and delivery, and mobilizing multiple actors to address the root causes of gender inequality.

“Gender-transformative education seeks to utilize all parts of an education system—from policies to pedagogies to community engagement—to transform stereotypes, attitudes, norms and practices by challenging power relations, rethinking gender norms and binaries, and raising critical consciousness about the root causes of inequality and systems of oppression.” Gender Transformative Education (UNGEI and Plan International, 2021)

³⁸ “Research and Analysis – Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges in the UK: Executive summary and recommendations,” GOV.UK, Ofsted, June 10, 2021.

Nepal: System-level Change on Gender Equality in Access to, within and through Education

Nepal applied a system approach to their education priority reform that considered gender equality in access to, within and through education, including addressing social norms. These changes aimed to support girls from specific ethnic groups or girls with disabilities, which evidence had shown were at higher risk of being excluded from mainstream education.

Nepal's system-level initiatives included building local government capacity to translate national policies into local-level mechanisms to create gender-sensitive schools that are free from gender-based violence and harassment. Reforms included:

Access to education: Granting secondary school scholarships to girls and households affected by poverty and improving toilet and sanitation facilities at school.

Within education: Increasing the number of female teachers and reviewing curriculum materials and topics to challenge gender and disability stereotypes and omissions. Modeling curriculum subjects as gender equitable through encouraging girls' engagement with math and science at secondary level.

Through education: Integrating life skills curriculum and materials that explore understanding gender equality and human rights, respect for inclusion and diversity, non-violence and global perspectives for sustainable development.

Source: [Nepal Partnership Compact](#).



In another example of efforts to enact system-level change, participants from the Central African Republic, Guinea and Mali met for a workshop in May 2023 to leverage peer learning. This guided them to move towards an inclusive policy dialogue on priority reforms based on data and evidence, where gender equality issues were prominent.

GPE/Florian Rabenstein

SECTION 2. OPERATIONALIZING GENDER EQUALITY

2.1. GPE's Operational Approach to Gender Equality

Gender-related terminology used in the discussion of advancing gender equality can lead to some confusion. 'Gender equality' is often used interchangeably with 'gender equity' and 'girls' education.' GPE prioritizes using the language of 'gender equality' to ensure a broader scope of analysis is referenced that considers women's and girls' experiences in relation to boys and men in the social and institutional contexts within which they all exist.

Techniques to deliver the goal of gender equality may include 'gender equity' approaches, which are short-term measures to balance opportunities, or targeted interventions to support 'girls' education' specifically where girls' access and learning lags behind that of boys.

Working toward gender equality involves recognizing that girls and women experience a systemic disadvantage in countries where access to resources and opportunities has been restricted, and that

this legacy is yet to be resolved. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that women are systematically underrepresented in decision-making forums that shape societies and women's own lives. Beyond political and social institutions, social norms in many countries restrict girls' access to education due to competing expectations for them to fulfill domestic and caring responsibilities in families. Even in countries where gender norms are shifting, gender pay gaps and reduced opportunities in the job market at the expense of women are still present.

While it is generally recognized that women and girls have less access to resources, power and opportunities, using the broad lens of gender analysis also reveals where men and boys are adversely affected by gender roles and harmful gender norms, impacting boys' and men's choices and behaviors. These include context-specific ideals of masculinity that may lead to restricted career choices or the normalized use of violence to dominate or exert control. Progress toward gender equality requires a collective engagement of women and girls and for men and boys to shift restrictive norms and gender-biased institutions, ultimately benefiting everyone.



Gender equality: refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of girls and boys, women and men. It means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development, and to benefit from the results.

Gender equity: refers to the process of being fair to girls and boys, women and men. Because women have often historically been placed at a disadvantage, being fair can involve taking temporary measures to level the playing field for all genders. Equity, therefore, is the means used to achieve equality.

Girls' education: in response to historic disadvantage and existing social norms that limit girls' educational achievement, girls' education programs are a targeted approach to address gender disparities in access and learning for girls specifically.

Source: [UNESCO Glossary](#) and GPE Secretariat.

The Importance of Considering Intersectionality

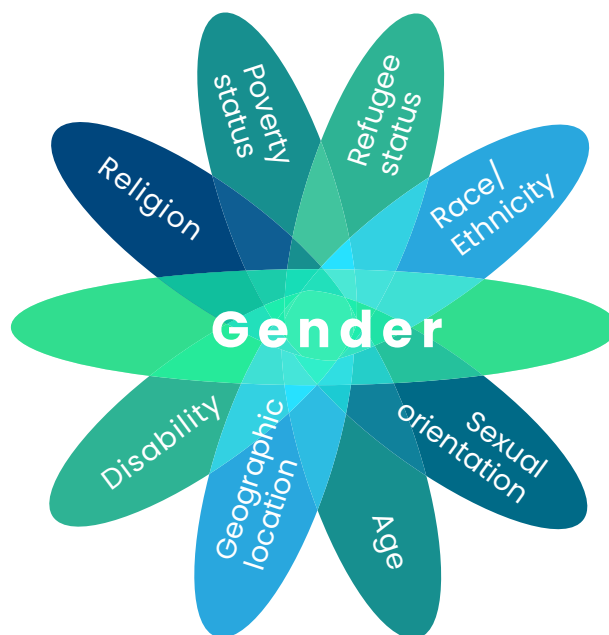
GPE’s approach to gender equality recognizes that gender-based discrimination intersects with many other factors to exacerbate exclusion.³⁹ Race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geographic location, disability, refugee status, religion and poverty status (see figure 2) all coincide with gender and gender identity to create unique social experiences of inclusion or exclusion that differ depending on contexts. Although this paper uses the terminology of men, women, boys and girls, GPE recognizes that other gender identities exist and can be a source of discrimination and exclusion when they do not conform to local norms. GPE supports the rights of all children irrespective of their sexual orientation, gender expression or identity.⁴⁰

There is considerable evidence of how geographic and political factors affect girls and boys differently, including the gendered consequences of increased natural disasters due to climate change.⁴¹ In both conflict- and natural disaster-related settings, evidence is showing that gains made in the last few decades on gender equality are often reversed, with societies reverting to more traditional gender roles and practices with profound impacts on education. In these settings, girls’ education is sidelined due to their increased risk of sexual harassment, child marriage increases and girls are expected to assume an increased domestic load due to economic hardship or displacement. Boys in these settings may be expected to prioritize contributing to family finances or to join armed forces rather than continuing with their education.⁴²

Using this intersectional lens allows more complex analysis that recognizes how gender and other individual characteristics combine with social norms and context to influence how individuals access and experience educational opportunities. GPE advocates

for applying an intentional intersectional lens within the approach to gender equality that will improve analysis and engagement, aiming to leave no one behind.

FIGURE 2. GPE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY



Intersectional Data Analysis: Understanding the Drivers of Education Marginalization

Metrics that capture enrollment and retention in education are fundamental building blocks of education sector analysis and policy decisions. Yet discussions on the achievement of gender parity in access or learning outcomes miss the existence of gender-based rights abuses or social injustices in education spaces that influence life opportunities. Studies on the measurement of gender equality in education propose the need for a much broader range of indicators that complement current data collection mechanisms to allow a more nuanced

39 'Intersectionality' refers to the complex and cumulative way in which multiple forms of discrimination combine, overlap or intersect and their particular impact on the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1, (1989): 139–167.

40 "Statement by Laura Frigenti, CEO of the Global Partnership for Education, on the Uganda 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Law," GPE, May 31, 2023.

41 Dr. Christina Kwauk and Dr. Liesbet Steer, "Four Ways that Climate Change Impacts Girls' Education in Africa," Global Center for Adaptation, published January 24, 2023.

42 INEE, *Guidance Note – Gender. Gender Equality in and through Education* (New York: Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2019).

understanding of gender equality in and through education, such as the methodology proposed in the Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE) framework.⁴³

Progress on the collection of sex-disaggregated data has highlighted how significant gender disparities vary by sex, region and age. UNESCO's recent global monitoring report on gender highlighted where girls' proficiency in reading outperformed that of boys in many countries, except for some countries in sub-Saharan Africa where gaps were still at the expense of girls at the primary level.⁴⁴ Sex- and age-disaggregated data has shown that while girls continue to face severe disadvantages in education, boys in some locations face different patterns of disengagement from education, such as grade repetition. Data analysis shows that in many developing contexts, poverty and the need to work are important drivers for boys' dropout from education.⁴⁵

The use of sex- and disability-disaggregated metrics have also shone a light on the experiences of girls with disabilities. Global prevalence data estimate that nearly 240 million children have disabilities—1 out of 10 children worldwide.⁴⁶ In developing countries, 9 out of 10 children with disabilities are excluded from formal education, with most of these children being girls.⁴⁷ Despite having the same rights to education, girls with disabilities are frequently recorded as the most excluded group of learners due to multiple

intersecting forms of discrimination. Data on gender and disabilities in education is improving but remains patchy, limiting visibility and inclusion of these issues in policy decisions. More robust disability and gender data must be collected to raise awareness of rights violations and to design, implement and evaluate education interventions that aim to reach all children.

Data shared by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) indicate that children make up 40 percent of those who are displaced.⁴⁸ Despite some political momentum toward the inclusion of refugees in national education systems, nearly half of refugee school-age children remain out of school, with refugee enrollment lagging behind that of their non-refugee peers at primary, secondary and tertiary education levels. Refugee boys do slightly better than girls in terms of enrollment, but fuller datasets need to be considered in policy debates that expose other gender disadvantages faced by refugees, such as risk of gender-based violence and exploitation.

Criticisms of the cost effectiveness of targeting the most marginalized groups are also being disproven by more detailed intersectional and qualitative data collection that show intentional inclusion strategies benefit a much wider population than just those who are the most marginalized. Evidence shows that inclusive interventions that are effective for the most marginalized girls can have a positive spillover effect on outcomes for boys' retention and learning.⁴⁹

- 43 Elaine Unterhalter, Helen Longlands, and Rosie Peppin Vaughan, "Gender and Intersecting Inequalities in Education: Reflections on a Framework for Measurement," *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 23, no. 4 (July 2022): 509-538; "The AGEE Framework," Accountability for Gender Equality in Education (AGEE), accessed August 4, 2023.
- 44 UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2022 – Gender Report: Deepening the debate on those still left behind* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022).
- 45 UNESCO, *Leave no child behind: Global report on boys' disengagement from education* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022).
- 46 United Nations Children's Fund, *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities* (New York: UNICEF, 2021).
- 47 "Factsheet on Persons with Disabilities," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs – Disability, accessed August 4, 2023; GPE, *Working Paper #3 – Disability and Inclusion: A Stocktake of Education Sector Plans and GPE-Funded Grants* (Washington: Global Partnership for Education, 2018) quoted in Pauline Casters and Gloria Diamond, *Leave no girl with disabilities behind: Ensuring efforts to advance gender equality in education are disability-inclusive* (New York: UN Girls Education Initiative and Leonard Cheshire, 2021).
- 48 UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* (Copenhagen: The UN Refugee Agency – UNHCR Global Data Service, 2022).
- 49 Ricardo Sabates et al., "Assessing cost-effectiveness with equity of a programme targeting marginalised girls in secondary schools in Tanzania," *Journal of Development Effectiveness* 13, no. 1 (2021): 28-46.



Gender hardwiring: an intentional, accountable approach to embedding gender equality across all GPE systems and processes. GPE uses the term ‘hardwiring’ to reinforce the intentional and accountable aspects of gender mainstreaming.

2.2. GPE Gender Equality ‘Entry Points’

GPE has committed to ‘hardwire’ gender equality throughout the partnership’s work. Figure 3 illustrates areas in which GPE has found tangible opportunities in operational processes to advance gender equality. These are referred to as ‘entry points.’

The following examples illustrate how GPE partners—including donors, multilateral institutions, civil society organizations, teacher representatives, philanthropic foundations and the private sector—are integrating gender into their operating processes through various entry points.⁵⁰

2.2.1. Entry Points: Country Level

Strengthening Gender Analysis and Evidence-Based Diagnosis

In the early assessment and diagnosis phases of GPE’s partnership processes, members of the local education group (see also page 18) support government-led analysis of the policy environment

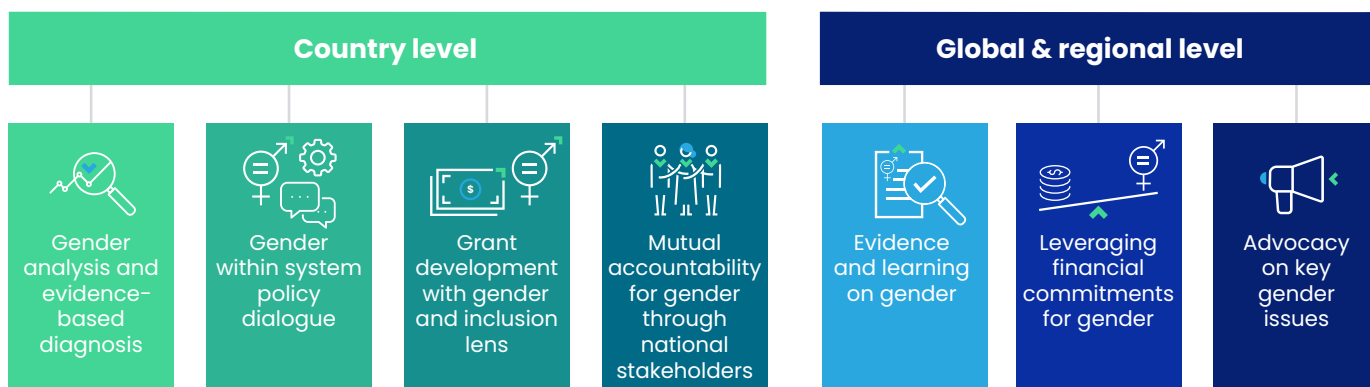
and education system. This phase includes collecting gender evidence and analysis to obtain a nuanced understanding of how girls and boys in different locations, with varied intersectional characteristics, may be experiencing education.

Gender analysis for education will include key questions such as:

- What are the patterns of education attendance and outcomes for different girls and boys? How does this vary by location? How does this vary as girls and boys progress from primary to secondary school?
- What impact do context-specific cultural norms have on girls’ and boys’ education engagement?
- Which boys and girls are not attending school?
- What are the ratios of male and female teachers in rural and urban areas or in leadership positions?

(See appendix 1 for suggested tools to support this analysis.)

FIGURE 3. GPE GENDER EQUALITY ENTRY POINTS



50 This list of examples is not exhaustive.

Liberia: The Role of Country-Level Gender Expertise

GPE planning processes in Liberia highlighted the importance of including gender specialists in the inclusive policy dialogue. Early analysis of the country-level selection of a priority reform was reviewed by the local education group. Stakeholders from the Girls' Education Coalition, who had recently joined the local education group, were able to highlight missing gender aspects and opportunities, linking them to existing girls' education policies and strategies. This inclusive consultation process strengthened the gender analysis to feed into program design decision-making.

Strengthening Gender within System Policy Dialogue

Ministries of education use a broad range of evidence, including gender evidence and analysis, to host an inclusive policy dialogue. This phase culminates in partners aligning behind a prioritized reform area captured in the partnership compact.⁵¹ Country-level gender expertise must be included in the task team contributing to dialogue and strategic decision-making during the compact development phase. The partnership compact should include an intentional gender lens across all prioritized reform areas. Where evidence has highlighted that significant gender disparities exist in the partner country, additional funding is available through the Girls' Education Accelerator (GEA) which provides targeted support for girls' education.⁵²

Integrating a Gender and Inclusion Lens in Grant Development Processes

For system transformation grants (see section 2.3.1), grant agents are selected through a competitive process led by the ministry of education in consultation with the local education group. Grant agents lead the design and delivery of a program to address system-level education reform. Country-level gender expertise is crucial at this key program design phase to provide technical and context-specific input. Technical gender support is also provided through

GPE Secretariat feedback. Gender analysis and evidence should inform design to nuance all priority reform areas to respond to the unique gender-based challenges in each country. In cases where GEA funding is provided, specific interventions to address barriers to access, completion and learning for girls are expected to complement the broader scope of work of the system transformation grant. Other GPE grants (as specified in section 2.3) also feature gender as a significant cross-cutting factor. Monitoring and evaluation of grants includes appropriate indicators to measure progress on identified gender equality goals and outcomes.

"It initially seemed to me that gender equality was just one aspect of accessibility. As the work progressed, that perspective changed... the gender perspective was essential within the framework of the strategy to ensure equity and quality in education." Ministry of education representative, Democratic Republic of Congo

Promoting Mutual Accountability for Gender through National Stakeholders

Local education groups play a critical role in maintaining mutual accountability of the partnership through their inclusion and representation of varied national stakeholders. Civil society organizations, who are a key component of the national stakeholders

51 A GPE partnership compact articulates how a GPE partner country intends to work with others around a priority education reform; GPE, *Partnership Compact Guidelines* (Washington: Global Partnership for Education, 2023).

52 Eligibility for GEA funding relates to locations where significant gender disparities in education occur and is accessed only as a complement to other GPE grants; "Girls' Education Accelerator," GPE, accessed August 4, 2023.

within local education groups, may include education non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's and girls' rights groups, disabled people's organizations and youth movements. They can play a vital role in national stakeholder dialogue at all stages of education planning and delivery. These

organizations can provide contextually specific evidence and analysis, gender expertise and connection with large-scale youth representation, and play an important role in the implementation and awareness-raising of reforms when they are introduced.

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Education Sector Planning and Delivery

The Gender at the Centre Initiative (GCI) supports civil society partners including Africa Network Campaign on Education for All (ANCEFA), Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and Plan International to engage with ministries of education at the country level on gender-responsive education sector planning.⁵³ In Nigeria, for example, FAWE, Plan International and partners produced a policy brief after carrying out a gender analysis of the education sector's COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery Strategy (2020–2029). Findings included an increase in incidents of sexual abuse, early marriage and child labor, and varied patterns of response to COVID-19 messages by boys and girls. These civil society partners collaborated with government officials to integrate the recommendations from the gender-responsive policy brief into education sector policies and plans. Recommendations included setting up multi-stakeholder safe school re-opening committees, incentives and sanctions to ensure the return of girls to school as well as differentiated messages for boys and girls on COVID-19 to increase uptake. This collaboration of civil society organizations with government ministries resulted in a more relevant, gender-responsive design and rollout of the strategy.

Joint sector reviews and monitoring exercises offer other opportunities to maintain mutual accountability on gender equality. Where gender and education working groups do not yet exist as a subgroup within the local education group structure, the education group is encouraged to use its unique convening position to bring key actors together and act as a collective voice to include gender insights into policy dialogue as well as grant and monitoring processes. (See section 3 for mutual accountability responsibilities of other actors in GPE.)

⁵³ See [GPE blog](#) on CSO capacity building within GCI.



A **local education group** is a collaborative forum for education sector policy dialogue under government leadership and where the primary consultation on sector development takes place between a government and its partners. Local education groups are generally made up of civil society representatives, national or international NGOs, teacher representatives, student or youth coalition representatives, donors, private sector representatives and members of other government ministries. They may operate under a locally determined name.

2.2.2. Entry Points: Regional and Global Level

Generating and Sharing Evidence and Learning on Gender Equality

GPE advances an evidence-based and inclusive approach to policy making, encouraging cross-regional and global lessons to be learned on gender equality in education. The GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) and Education Out Loud programs are examples of this approach.

KIX generates and connects expertise, innovation and knowledge to strengthen capacity at the country, regional and global level to support countries in building stronger education systems. All KIX-applied research projects promote gender equality across their design and implementation, with nearly one-quarter of projects having a specific focus on gender equality themes. KIX teams organize regional and global webinars, virtual learning events, conferences and workshops intended to contribute to informing partner country policy-making on topics

such as preventing school-related gender-based violence, gender mainstreaming in education and strategies for inclusion. The combination of actionable research and sharing across countries strengthens the knowledge base of how gender equality can improve education system resilience, teaching, learning and data systems.

Education Out Loud is GPE's fund for advocacy and social accountability which focuses on building civil society strength to become active and influential in shaping education policy to better meet the needs of communities. This fund includes support for research on specific education challenges, ensuring a gender lens is included throughout.

In addition to the examples below, the GPE Secretariat amplifies evidence and learning on gender equality in education across the partnership through the Gender Hub's knowledge management function. Learning and evidence generated by the Secretariat include gender-sensitive evaluations and working papers on promising approaches in education.

Latin America: GPE KIX and Education Out Loud Support to Civil Society Organizations

In Latin America, research support from KIX and advocacy capacity support from Education Out Loud have helped to address cultural norms about gender-based violence in Honduras, Haiti and Nicaragua. This collaborative initiative involves connecting community-level action research with national-level advocacy. Data is collated by communities including teachers, families and students. Focus groups and perception surveys help research teams mobilize local knowledge and co-create prevention strategies. National education coalitions are then able to use the research findings to inform national-level policy and awareness campaigns.

In Haiti, for example, the use of community radio and teacher training is raising awareness with caregivers and the Ministry of National Education about the need to challenge physical punishment and gender stereotypes. Learning from this regional initiative highlights the value of locally produced evidence in policy dialogues.

Leveraging Financial Commitment to Gender Equality

Due to its unique partnership way of working, GPE has a strong global and regional network of donor governments, private sector donors and country partners that can be convened to secure financial and political support to advance the goal of strengthening gender-responsive education systems. This was done with great effect during the Education Summit in 2021 where world leaders made five-year pledges to support GPE's work and to help transform education systems in up to 90 countries and territories.⁵⁴ These far-reaching networks also enable country-level financial leverage, with partner countries using GPE grants and programs to catalyze additional country-level cofinancing through GPE Multiplier and match funding.⁵⁵ Contributing to GPE grants is an opportunity for donors to commit resources to deliver on high-level policies to advance gender equality in education.

Strengthening Advocacy on Key Gender Issues

GPE is working at global and regional levels to galvanize political support and promote the

importance of considering the role of gender equality in education. Working as a partnership, GPE promotes evidence and learning at key global events about what works to address gender inequalities. These events present opportunities to share experiences, evidence and practical lessons learned on advancing gender equality in education. Private sector and foundation partners are also advocates for gender equality through raising the profile of this work through their fundraising and communication channels.

2.3. How GPE Resources Support Gender Equality

Building on the entry points described above, GPE grantmaking supports countries in planning and prioritizing reforms that have the potential to achieve transformation across an education system. This includes supporting partner countries to deliver on their commitments to gender equality and girls' education.

The **partnership compact** is the basis of partnership dialogue, as it defines mutual accountability of

Advocacy: GPE Advocacy on Safety in Schools

Together with the other members of the Safe to Learn network, GPE supported the creation and production of a series of youth-led videos in which young people shared their views and experiences of violence in and around school and called on world leaders to urgently act to end violence and make education safe. This collaboration resulted in a series of four regional films with a focus on each youth activist and one global film. The powerful videos premiered at six high-level events during the 2022 Transforming Education Summit and UN General Assembly. The films made a significant impact on ministers, leaders and the education community, and helped focus attention in the political discussions on the issue of violence in schools. They continue to gain momentum and have been screened at other public policy events, including the 2022 UK-hosted International Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative Conference and the Women Deliver 2023 Conference Arts and Film Festival.

Note: The Safe to Learn network includes: UNICEF, UNESCO, UNGEI, Plan International, Together for Girls, Brave Movement, Safe to Learn civil society forum, Education Cannot Wait, GPE, Global Working Group to End School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV) and a GPE youth advocate lead in Bangladesh. The Global Working Group to End SRGBV is a coalition of 35 donors, civil society, academic and UN agencies.

54 Global Education Summit: Financing GPE 2021 – 2025," GPE, accessed August 2, 2023.

55 Match funding is a GPE funding mechanism that doubles qualifying investments made by GPE partner country business or private foundations; GPE, *Factsheet. The GPE Match* (Washington: Global Partnership for Education, 2021).

partners on achieving a priority reform and will eventually be shared with the GPE Board and used as the basis for decision-making for GPE funding.

Partnership compact guidance recommends:

- Gender analysis and evidence be used in enabling factors analysis,⁵⁶ dialogue and design.
- Inclusion of gender expertise in the country-led partnership task team and national actors, with experience in addressing key gender barriers to education as part of dialogue and priority reform selection.
- Priority reform embedding gender as an intentional cross-cutting feature.
- Inclusion of gender in results and monitoring frameworks.

Grantmaking by GPE uses a twin track approach: expecting gender considerations to be fully embedded across all grants plus having a dedicated fund to target girls' education in eligible countries.⁵⁷

2.3.1. Hardwiring of Gender Equality into GPE Grants⁵⁸

The following provides a short summary of current GPE grant guidance regarding gender equality.

- **System capacity grant:** designed to help strengthen countries' capacity to transform education systems through gender-responsive planning and development. These funds can be used for system diagnostics, including: a gender analysis; strengthening local education groups; joint sector reviews and gender-responsive budgeting; or training and support for staff on how to use data and evidence, including improving sex-disaggregated data and data on other intersecting characteristics (such as children with disabilities) that may lead to marginalization.

Grant guidance recommends:

- Systematically applying a gender lens and adopting a gender-equality perspective when identifying key challenges and designing program activities.
- Identifying and addressing multiple forms of exclusion, including strengthening system resilience and inclusion of displaced children.

- **Program development grant:** available to grant agents, working under the leadership of the government, to cover expenses related to preparation of the program for application to GPE grants. This grant can be used to support the grant agent's responsibility of ensuring gender equality is considered in program development.

Grant guidance recommends:

- Gender analysis; in fragile contexts, inclusion of a gender and fragility analysis.
- Inclusion of gender equality perspective in application.

- **System transformation grant:** available to support partner countries to transform their education system, making focused, evidence-based investments that identify system bottlenecks, including gender inequalities.

Grant guidance recommends:

- Use of enabling factor diagnostics, including data and evidence on gender.
- The priority reform area should indicate how gender has been considered as a cross-cutting issue.
- Including how the program will contribute to gender equality.
- A theory of change grounded in root cause analysis, including gender.

- **GPE Multiplier:** partner countries that can leverage additional external financing are able to apply for this grant, which supplements funds secured from other sources.

56 Enabling factors analysis supports meaningful discussions on the foundational issues of country level education bottlenecks; GPE, *Enabling Factors: Screening Questionnaire and Analysis* (Washington: Global Partnership for Education, 2023).

57 Find more information on eligibility criteria for GPE grants here: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/list-countries-and-grant-eligibility>.

58 Guidance for partnership compacts and all grants can be accessed here: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/funding/how-apply-grants>.

Grant guidance recommends:

- › Systematic consideration of gender across the theory of change throughout program design and delivery.
- › Clarification of how gender equality will be advanced in the chosen education reform priority area.
- › Where and how the program will contribute to gender equality and disability inclusion.

2.3.2. GPE Grants Targeting Gender Equality

- › **Girls' Education Accelerator:** supports system transformation by addressing specific barriers to girls' education. Funding is available for eligible countries where girls lag behind boys in terms of education access and outcomes. The rationale for this grant must be based on data and evidence. The accelerator grant supports activities targeted toward school-age girls, but can also fund non-

education specific issues, such as child marriage or gender-based violence, that impact education outcomes for girls. This fund complements the system transformation grant and/or GPE Multiplier and cannot be accessed independently.

Grant guidance recommends:

- › A robust theory of change that integrates girls' education as a key objective, in line with the priority reform selected in the partnership compact.
- › A rationale of how grant funds add value on delivering outcomes for girls' education based on data and evidence collected as part of the enabling factors analysis and/or use of additional qualitative evidence.
- › Clearly costed components or activities specifically focused on girls' education and equivalent to at least the amount of the requested grant funds in the program proposal.

Sierra Leone: Gender as a Cross-Cutting Feature of Program Design

Gender is featured as a cross-cutting aspect of the Sierra Leone education sector 'Foundations of Learning for All' reform supported by the system transformation grant. Benefiting from an inclusive dialogue coordinated by the local education group, gender evidence has been used to inform each of the components of this programming. Some of these components include: addressing gender norms in the offer of pre-primary education; strengthening teacher capacity using standards on gender and disability hardwiring; recognizing the need for increasing support for female teachers to strengthen their development and retention; and improving the gender and inclusion data analysis capacity in the collection and use of foundational learning data. As part of the teacher professional development reform, teaching and learning materials are being revised to include practices that support inclusion, raise awareness around stigma, increase child safety and reduce gender-based violence.

El Salvador: GPE Girls' Education Accelerator Supports Efforts Against Gender Stereotypes

The priority reform area selected in El Salvador's [partnership compact](#) is to improve the quality of learning, starting in early childhood. This includes coordination of cross-sectoral efforts (across health, education and protection) for this age group. The Girls' Education Accelerator is being used to complement the GPE Multiplier grant to remove harmful gender stereotypes within learning assessments, curriculum and materials across early childhood, primary and lower secondary education. These reforms support the delivery of El Salvador's Gender Equity and Equality Policy, which sees eliminating gender biases and stereotypes in early years education as playing a part in eradicating the root causes of violence against women.

2.3.3. Other GPE Grants

Beyond support to governments, GPE also allocates grants to promote civil society's voice through **Education Out Loud** and the **GPE Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX)** to generate new knowledge on key issues and solutions for the education sector. Gender equality is a priority theme for both KIX and Education Out Loud (see also section 2.2.2).

- **Strategic capabilities partnerships** provide eligible countries with technical assistance to support capacity building in a range of crosssectoral areas, including climate-smart education systems, school nutrition, safe learning, technology for education and gender equality. Gender equality has its own dedicated capacity support program and is integrated across other thematic areas.
- **Accelerated funding grants** are used in countries affected by fragility and conflict where there is an urgent need to disburse funds to address crises with systemic impacts on the education system. Gender equality evidence and consideration are still expected to be clearly articulated in these applications. The GPE Secretariat quality assurance process for these grants includes a technical gender review. This process is adapted

for countries in such contexts, ensuring that the [operational framework for effective support in countries affected by fragility and conflict](#) is upheld. In cases where existing programs require revisions, the Secretariat ensures new activities proposed still include a technical gender review (see section 3.1 for more detail on gender reviews).

2.4. GPE Guiding Principles for Operationalizing Gender Equality

Operationalizing high-level ambitions for gender equality requires education actors to apply a gender lens across all organizational and programmatic activities. The following guiding principles for gender are the foundations upon which constructive dialogue and programming decisions are based across GPE (see figure 4). They articulate what partners should be aspiring to maintain across their processes to make significant progress toward gender equality within GPE programming. The guiding principles are grounded in learning and debate among gender specialists and development practitioners.⁵⁹ They are also underpinned by human rights agreements, international protocols and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶⁰

59 GPE guiding principles draw from the experience of other gender practitioners and actors mainstreaming gender, applied to the GPE partnership model, including: the [FHI360 Minimum standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality](#) and the [UN Women Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results](#).

60 Rights instruments and international protocols that inform these guiding principles include: the United Nations [SDG 4](#) and [SDG 5](#), the [Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All](#), the [UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education](#), the [UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#), the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) and the [UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#).

FIGURE 4. GPE GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OPERATIONALIZING GENDER EQUALITY



The GPE guiding principles on gender equality are designed to assist cross-partner dialogue and standardization of approach to key areas of gender equality hardwiring.



1. Leadership

Political leadership is key to galvanizing support and engagement from the diverse actors involved in education system change. GPE has a powerful convening role within the international education sector, providing global leadership on the importance of gender integration for education system effectiveness. For government partners and other leaders to translate a gender vision into gender mainstreaming across ministry and organizational practices, senior leadership must support actionable implementation plans and adequate financial resources in budgets. Leadership that creates a culture where gender can be debated and where solutions are invited from diverse stakeholders is vital for finding creative solutions to advancing understanding and operationalization of ways to address complex gender inequalities.



2. Gender Analysis and Evidence

Gender analysis is the study that identifies gender-specific and -differentiated needs, challenges, risks, power dynamics and opportunities that affect people’s education experiences. A tailored gender analysis for the education system is a vital part of any GPE planning process. Evidence to inform this analysis can be gathered and collated from varied reliable sources and stakeholders and must be kept dynamic to continually inform policy and initiatives. Use of up-to-date and context-specific evidence allows a nuanced understanding of gender realities and how best to address gender challenges at a system level.⁶¹ (See appendix 1 for various tools.)



3. Intersectionality

Applying an intersectional approach includes recognizing how intersecting identities contribute to power dynamics that can reinforce marginalization. Sex-disaggregated data is a critical first step in understanding patterns of educational engagement and challenges. However, boys and girls do not all have the same needs or challenges. Understanding of further identities such as age, location, disability, ethnicity, language, economic status, sexual orientation and other characteristics creates a more detailed picture of engagement that enables greater insight into how program design could address poor education performance or exclusion. The availability of data is a challenge in many contexts, but strengthening and expanding data systems as well as seeking input from different groups ensure that program design discussions include an intersectional lens.



4. Capacity

Engaging specific gender technical expertise is vital to help set up and guide GPE processes. However, it must be recognized that gender equality mainstreaming is the responsibility

of all partners, across all teams. Training and building capacity in gender expertise across departments and teams mobilizes broader support to identify opportunities for further progress. GPE's system capacity grant and civil society strengthening program Education Out Loud recognize the importance of investment in skills development, particularly around gender, to accelerate progress. Ensuring that gender focal points or gender units have explicit mandates and decision-making powers on strategic decisions are also crucial to empowering them in their role to advance gender equality in education programming.



5. System Solutions to Gender Equality

Ensuring that a system-strengthening approach includes clear objectives to advance gender equality has the potential to leverage significant, sustainable change on a national scale. Change at this deeper systemic level has the potential to address the root causes of reduced enrollment, retention, learning and transition rather than introducing short-term solutions that may have an impact on just one cohort of children and young people. The system approach to gender equality must acknowledge the role of power and whose

Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming

The UN Women's [Handbook for Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results](#) highlights the need for a twin track approach. Gender mainstreaming should integrate attention to gender equality through routine processes and employ targeted interventions to address specific constraints and challenges faced by women or men, girls or boys. A key element of the integrated approach involves organizational change techniques that include capacity building. Failures of gender mainstreaming can often be linked to organizational culture, whether leadership that does not buy into gender equality goals, resistance from staff, staff overload and/or lack of training. Adopting proactive participatory approaches to develop methodologies and tools with staff means gender mainstreaming efforts are much more likely to be successfully integrated into organizational practices.

Source: [UN Women Handbook for Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results](#)

voices are included in system-level decision-making forums as well as the content being discussed.⁶² Social norms are often dismissed as something to be dealt with at a local level; however, addressing harmful gender norms at a central level can remove major barriers to education, such as enforcing policy to eliminate child marriage, female genital mutilation and school-related gender-based violence. Many of these gender-responsive education initiatives require a cross-sector approach, such as working with departments of health and justice, illustrating the further value of gender equality objectives being positioned within system-level activities.

“At FAWE, we believe that embedding system-level changes is essential to deliver gender equality in education. Through our gender-responsive pedagogy models, we have witnessed the transformative power of addressing systemic barriers and biases. By fostering inclusive learning environments and empowering both girls and boys, we can create a future where every child has an equal opportunity to thrive and contribute to society.” CSO representative, FAWE Regional office



6. Inclusive Processes

Processes that analyze and define priority reforms must include diverse voices and gender expertise at the country level. Many institutional forums involved in education planning are deeply patriarchal and hierarchical—voices of young people, women in junior roles representing gender equality and/or representatives of marginalized communities therefore need to be intentionally included and supported.⁶³ Deliberate efforts must be made to ensure that solutions are informed by local insight as well as gender and intersectional expertise. Civil society organizations, including youth representative bodies, are valuable sources of local knowledge and gender expertise. Inclusion of diverse local groups or individuals may be through local education groups or other forums, and is often seen to lead to a more

effective uptake of reforms at a local level when they are rolled out.

“During our compact meeting, a government official said that he now had a different understanding of gender equality in education planning. Previously, they had focused only on learners, but with our input he appreciated the need to look at gender across the ‘whole’ education spectrum. We had advised the need to address the gender disparity in education leadership, including head teachers being predominantly male and how this impacts girls’ participation, aspirations and learning.” CAMFED Tanzania National Director interviewed by GPE Secretariat



7. Do No Harm

Programs that seek to change, challenge or shift the status quo often present risks for those involved. For programs that specifically seek to challenge existing attitudes to gender roles, there are likely to be unintended consequences for those involved, for example, in the form of resistance, backlash or exclusion. Risk assessments must include a gender lens to assess potential risks of activities and for stakeholders to propose mitigation strategies. This guiding principle is supported by GPE’s Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment Policy, which outlines expectations and requirements for GPE governance officials, GPE Secretariat staff and all GPE partners involved in the implementation of GPE grants.⁶⁴



8. Accountability

Accountability mechanisms are a way for all actors to track progress and maintain focus on mainstreaming gender into their processes and programs. GPE stakeholders are committed under human rights instruments, the SDG framework and other intersectional commitments such as those made at the Global Disability Summit in 2022.⁶⁵

62 UNGEI and Cambridge Education, *How is Gender Equality Included in Education Sector Planning?*

63 Ibid.

64 GPE, *Policy on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment* (Washington: Global Partnership for Education, 2021).

65 “Global Disability Summit 2022 – Oslo, Norway,” Global Disability Summit, accessed August 4, 2023.

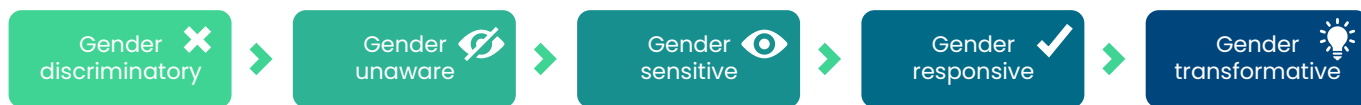
Concrete commitments to gender equality are made through GPE partnership compact agreements, along with their related monitoring frameworks. Other mechanisms across the partnership include annual reporting on key indicators, cross-department or team reflection exercises or more formal GPE-led evaluations or gender audits.

As a partnership, GPE stakeholders have shared accountability and responsibilities for gender equality. Responsibilities for gender equality within GPE processes must be clear to enable a culture of mutual accountability that tracks the delivery of education systems and opens the space for learning and improvement. (See table 1 in section 3 for a summary on mutual accountability for gender equality illustrating GPE stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities on hardwiring gender equality across GPE processes and delivery.)

2.5. Gender Equality Continuum Used in GPE Dialogue

Discussion of gender equality goals in program design benefit from specificity of gender terminology. The Gender Equality Continuum (see figure 5) is a tool used within program design to assess how programming efforts are delivering on their gender equality goals. By using the language on the continuum, education actors can assess active programs or inform future design, highlighting where they have potential to fine-tune their approach to move toward the responsive or transformative end of the spectrum. This continuum and related tools can also be applied with an inclusion or disability lens.⁶⁶ GPE aims to deliver programs that respond to gender analysis and evidence at least at the gender-responsive level, with the goal of working toward the transformative end of the continuum.

FIGURE 5. GENDER EQUALITY CONTINUUM FOR ASSESSING GENDER EQUALITY GOALS OF PROGRAM INTERVENTIONS



Note: Based on the [UNICEF Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation](#).

As a partnership, it is useful to have a shared understanding of this terminology as programs are developed together:

- **Gender discriminatory:** favors either boys/men or women/girls, deepening gender inequalities.
- **Gender unaware:** ignores gender in program design, perpetuates status quo or potentially worsens gender inequality.
- **Gender sensitive:** acknowledges gender inequalities but does not robustly address them.
- **Gender responsive:** identifies and addresses the different needs of girls, boys, women and men and promotes equal outcomes.
- **Gender transformative:** explicitly seeks to redress gender inequalities and empower disadvantaged populations.

⁶⁶ An example of a similar continuum used as a monitoring tool is the [Girls’ Education Challenge Gender Equality and Social Inclusion \(GESI\) Self-Assessment Tool for Projects Guidance Document](#).

SECTION 3. MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY

3.1. GPE Accountability for Gender Equality

Within GPE’s operating model, there are several accountability mechanisms that hold expectations in place across all processes, including grants. These go beyond the guidance for grants outlined in section 2.3. The following accountability mechanisms operate at country and global levels.

- **GPE Charter:** Actors involved in GPE country partnerships sign the GPE charter as a shared commitment to partnership working. It includes clear roles and responsibilities for each group of actors at the country level, the GPE Secretariat and the Board. The charter commits signatories to act in accordance with the principles which include “achieving gender equality.”
- **Local education groups:** GPE works through education stakeholders at the national level and facilitates inclusive policy dialogue through local education groups. These groups ensure that every partner’s voice is heard to inform policy dialogue and strengthen education systems, including on gender equality. Local education groups play a key role in the provision of suitable evidence, selection of grant agent and inclusion of local-level expertise, and are involved in grant development. The specific roles each partner plays at the country level are included in table 1.⁶⁷
- **GPE partnership compacts** are a country-level accountability mechanism. The partnership compact is endorsed by partners at the country level and accountability mechanisms include:
 - Active engagement of actors fulfilling roles and responsibilities on gender equality as set out in table 1.
 - Evidence of gender expertise being involved within the task team or engagement of a gender-lead agency.
 - Evidence that partner countries have based priority reform dialogue and prioritization on robust gender analysis and evidence.
 - Response to feedback given by GPE Secretariat Gender Hub review. A GPE Secretariat compact gender review tool is used to provide standardized feedback to partners.⁶⁸
 - Girls’ Education Accelerator (GEA)-eligible countries must have clarity on the value add of additional resources used to target girls’ education.
- **GPE grants** support partner countries’ system transformation, capacity strengthening and gender equality goals through a number of accountability mechanisms including:
 - Partners must ensure the program developed is aligned with the compact at the country level, including holding each other mutually accountable for gender equality.
 - Grant agents must ensure the program is hardwiring gender equality, requiring that the program design be informed by evidence as well as visibility of gender as a cross-cutting issue, including through the theory of change.
 - The GPE Secretariat quality assurance process includes a standard on gender equality integration in program design.⁶⁹ Assessment of

67 The [guidance note on terms of reference for local education groups](#) also discusses the role for gender equality in local education groups.

68 The GPE compact gender review tool includes assessment of: whether gender evidence and analysis has been used to inform priority reform; whether gender is a cross-cutting concern in all proposed activities; how gender is considered in access to, within and through education; and whether a system approach to gender equality is being applied. An adapted version of this tool is used for GEA-eligible countries; reviewers also assess system-level solutions to address root causes of girls’ education challenges and complementarity of the accelerator grant with the accompanying grant.

69 GPE quality standards include [standards on gender equality](#).

this is supported by a gender review tool (see below for more detail on the tool).

- GEA-eligible countries must also differentiate the value add of the additional funds and make clear how they address key barriers to girls' education specifically. This is supported by an additional quality assurance checklist (see pages 12 to 14 of GPE's [Quality Standards for the Assessment of STG & Multiplier Programs](#)).

- **GPE Results Report**⁷⁰ provides annual information on progress on the [GPE 2025 Results Framework](#) agreed upon by the Board, including country- and global-level indicators on gender equality.

For the 2023 Results Report, GPE has introduced a new process indicator focused on gender equality: "the proportion of countries where gender equality is sufficiently integrated from an early stage of their program design." This process indicator is complementary to the existing results report indicators.

The process indicator is based on a gender review completed by the GPE Secretariat at the first Quality Assessment Review (QAR) of the program concept note from the grant agent. This gender review aims to assess the level of gender equality integration in the proposed program relating to the priorities on gender equality in and through education as set out in the partnership compact.⁷¹

Results from this tool also inform both accountability functions at an individual country level, providing feedback to support grant development, and for global GPE reporting functions including the risk framework.

- **Gender grant coding indicator**⁷²: All active and future system implementation grants will be coded based on a gender marker, adapted for GPE processes based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) policy marker, to allow for an estimation of grant contributions where gender equality is included as a 'significant' or 'principal' feature.⁷³ Data on this will be included in future results reports.
- **GPE Annual Report** highlights examples of how gender equality is being hardwired through grants, KIX research and Education Out Loud.

3.2. Mutual Accountability for Gender Equality within a Partnership Model

GPE 2025 promotes the principles and practice of mutual accountability and transparency across the partnership. This is a decentralized model of accountability that means all partners hold each other accountable for achieving shared goals and objectives (see figure 6). GPE supports mutual accountability at the country level in part by strengthening formal stakeholder forums, such as local education groups, which includes many of these actors. Regarding gender equality responsibilities within this accountability model, all actors at the country level share the responsibility for integrating gender in policy dialogue, planning and delivery. They are supported by global-level partners and counterparts that also play a role in maintaining the profile and delivery of gender equality.

All of these actors are accountable for upholding the education rights of the children GPE aims to support. Monitoring of these responsibilities will be completed through partnership compact mid-term reviews.

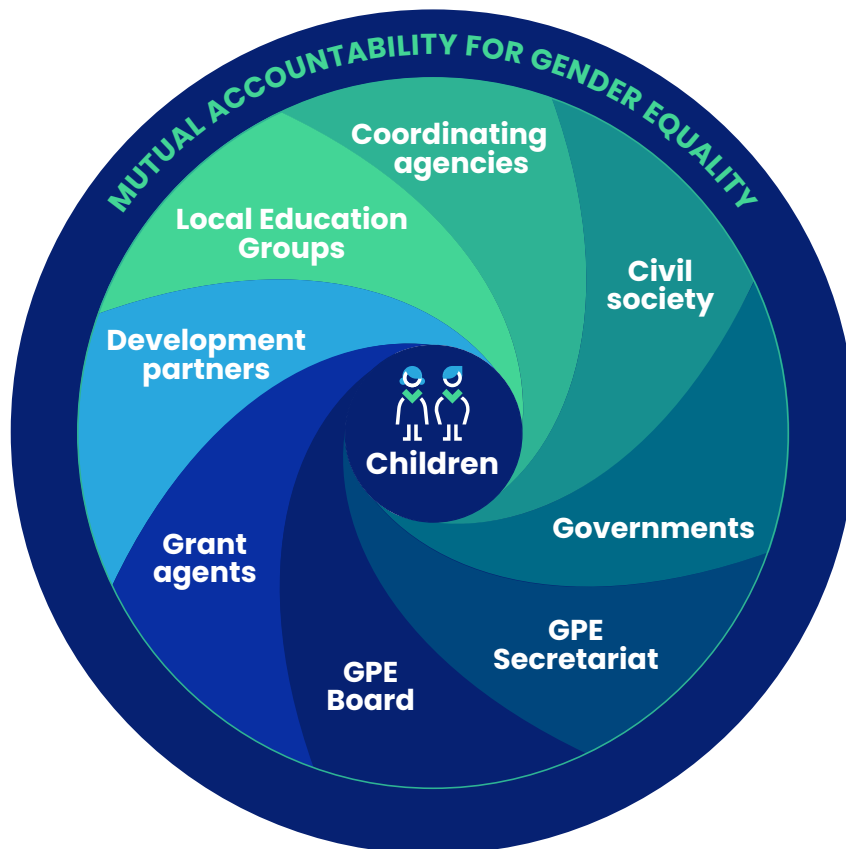
70 GPE Results Report 2023 (forthcoming).

71 The QAR gender review tool includes assessment of: whether gender evidence and analysis have been used to inform a partner country's priority reform; whether gender is a cross-cutting concern in all proposed activities; how gender is considered in access to, within and through education; and whether a system approach to gender equality is being applied. An adapted version of this tool is used for GEA-eligible countries; reviewers also assess system-level solutions to address root causes of girls' education challenges and complementarity of the accelerator grant with the accompanying grant.

72 The gender grant coding indicator has not been published at the current time of publication.

73 GPE grant coding metric is designed based on categories used in the OECD DAC policy marker. Find more information [here](#).

FIGURE 6. MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE GPE PARTNERSHIP MODEL



3.3. Roles and Responsibilities of GPE Partners in Gender Equality

Nomination of a ‘Gender Lead’ Partner

All GPE stakeholders have a role to play in delivering and being accountable to the ambition for gender equality set out in GPE 2025. However, experience of gender-mainstreaming initiatives across multi-stakeholder partnerships has demonstrated the value

of nominating a **‘gender lead’ partner** to maintain momentum and accountability within country-level processes. Suitability to take on this role will vary by country, but should be based on experience and expertise on gender equality within the country’s context. Nomination should be agreed through a transparent process with the local education group or equivalent. The gender lead partner has a key role in ensuring all members are aware of and delivering on their roles and responsibilities, as outlined in table 1.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Responsibilities included in table 1 are specifically related to gender. Broader roles and responsibilities of GPE partners are included in the [GPE Charter](#).

TABLE 1. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GPE PARTNERS IN GENDER EQUALITY

Partner	Responsibility
<p>Local education groups</p> <p>Depending on context, the local education group is generally composed of government, development partners, civil society groups, teacher representatives, youth representative bodies and NGOs. Private foundations and private sector partners may also be part of the group.</p> <p>The local education group is a collaborative forum for education sector policy dialogue, under government leadership, where the primary consultation on education sector development takes place between a government and its partners.</p>	<p>As a collective, the local education group (LEG) is responsible for the following:*</p> <p>Reviews and discusses sector diagnostics, ensuring analysis includes robust gender evidence and analysis.</p> <p>Ensures appropriate gender expertise is included in the consultative forum for the government’s development of education sector planning and partnership compact.</p> <p>Engages in processes to apply for GPE funding, including selecting a grant agent with suitable gender and education expertise.</p> <p>Ensures suitably diverse gender expertise is included in government-led joint sector reviews, or equivalent mechanisms, to jointly monitor the implementation of the education sector plan or transitional education plan, and the monitoring/mid-term review of a partnership compact.</p> <p>In countries affected by fragility and conflict, LEG responsibilities may involve working with the education cluster.</p>
<p>Civil society</p> <p>Civil society comprises NGOs, including international and local civil society organizations.</p> <p>Representatives of the teaching profession and youth and refugee representative bodies are also included in this category for accountability purposes.</p>	<p>Provision of meaningful and effective support through national-level gender expertise to education sector analysis and development as well as implementation and monitoring of the education sector plan.</p> <p>Engages in the grant agent selection process, ensuring grant agents have a suitable level of gender expertise to implement and monitor program design and delivery with a gender and do-no-harm lens.**</p> <p>Ensures that broad and representative voices of women and girls are brought into the discussions regarding development, implementation and monitoring of the education sector plan and partnership compact.</p> <p>Proactively shares evidence and lessons learned on gender through the local education group and GPE.</p>

Partner	Responsibility
<p>Governments & partner countries</p>	<p>Ensures compact development includes gender analysis, gender expertise on the task team and gender as a cross-cutting issue within selected priority reform areas.</p> <p>Develops and implements an evidence-based education sector plan that includes broad consultation and good-quality gender evidence.</p> <p>Ensures effective implementation of the education sector plan based on sex and other context-specific disaggregated education sector data.</p> <p>Strengthens education management and information systems and prioritizes the compilation, use and sharing of reliable and disaggregated education sector data, including on gender equality.</p> <p>Leads effective and inclusive mechanisms for policy dialogue that allow meaningful participation by stakeholders, including representatives from gender units within ministries as well as gender expertise drawn from civil society, teachers, youth representatives, private sector partners (as relevant) and development partners.</p>
<p>Development partners</p> <p>Development partners include local representatives from bilateral and multilateral development partners and other donors (including private philanthropic foundations).</p>	<p>Supports the compact development process to include gender analysis, gender expertise on the task team and gender as a cross-cutting issue within selected priority reform areas.</p> <p>Contributes technical gender expertise to support government-led policy and monitoring dialogue mechanisms.</p> <p>Ensures gender expertise is included within independent appraisal of a partner country's education sector plan, assessing whether the sector plan is built on quality, context-specific gender evidence.</p> <p>Engages in the grant agent selection process, ensuring grant agents have an appropriate level of gender expertise to implement and monitor program design and delivery with a gender and do-no-harm lens.**</p>
<p>Coordinating agencies</p> <p>The coordinating agency is selected by the local education group and facilitates the work of the group.</p> <p>The coordinating agency also serves as the communication link between the partner country's government, local education group partners and the GPE Secretariat.</p>	<p>Facilitates the partnership compact development process that includes gender analysis, gender expertise on the task team and gender as a cross-cutting issue within selected priority reform areas.</p> <p>Facilitation of harmonized sector coordination, policy dialogue and monitoring that is collaborative, effective and inclusive of gender expertise from GPE partners through the local education group and other forums.</p> <p>Supports the grant agent selection process, ensuring grant agents have an appropriate level of gender expertise to implement and monitor program design and delivery with a gender and do-no-harm lens.**</p>

Partner	Responsibility
<p>Grant agents</p> <p>The grant agent supports (a) the partner country's government in the development, implementation and monitoring of the GPE-funded education sector plan and education sector programs, and (b) GPE in the development and implementation of research, capacity development and knowledge-sharing activities at regional and global levels.</p>	<p>Responsible for ensuring that the gender equality perspective is taken into consideration when developing the education program with the partner country's government and local education group.</p> <p>Provides gender and education technical support** as well as capacity into building the government-led approved program and budget, including corrective action ensuring effective implementation according to the GPE Board-approved grant application.</p> <p>Promotes transparency and proactively shares gender-related evidence and lessons learned with the local education group and with the GPE Board through the GPE Secretariat.</p> <p>Reports to GPE and the local education group on outcomes and impact of GPE investments, following standards for monitoring and evaluation that measure gender-related indicators.</p>
<p>GPE Board</p> <p>The Board is comprised of representatives from partner countries, donors, multilateral or regional banks, civil society partners (including teacher representatives) and the private sector/foundations.</p>	<p>Positions gender equality within the vision, mission, goals and objectives of GPE's strategy and approves gender-mainstreaming resources and implementation plans.</p> <p>Drives and monitors the performance of the partnership to deliver on gender equality within GPE strategic plans.</p> <p>Tracks progress of gender mainstreaming within programmatic and financial performance of grants to ensure that resources are being used in line with GPE's strategic plans, including the goals, objectives and policies on gender equality (data tracked though annual results report).</p> <p>Advocates for GPE and for the delivery of quality education and gender equality for all children in partner countries.</p>

Partner	Responsibility
<p>GPE Secretariat</p> <p>The Secretariat carries out the day-to-day business of GPE, serving the interests of the partnership as a whole.</p>	<p>Provides global advocacy for gender equality in access to, within and through education.</p> <p>Provides guidance and information on GPE’s positioning of expectations around gender equality within funding mechanisms and related processes to deliver on GPE’s mission, vision, goals and objectives.</p> <p>Provides a gender quality assurance review and feedback on grant applications, ensuring that partners understand the applicable standards and expectations around gender mainstreaming.</p> <p>Mainstreams gender considerations through monitoring and evaluation of GPE-funded grants.</p> <p>Ensures grant agent adherence to the minimum standards for grant agents.**</p> <p>Provides support to local education groups and coordinating agencies, ensuring all categories of GPE partners and those with gender and inclusion expertise are included in policy development processes.</p> <p>Supports coordinating agencies and local education groups in partner country processes through participating in and providing quality gender technical support (that is needs-based as agreed in-country) to the planning process, and monitors results through joint sector reviews.</p> <p>Promotes and supports effective exchange of knowledge and good practice on the role of gender equality in education across the partnership.</p> <p>Provides monitoring of gender equality results at country and global levels in line with GPE strategies, objectives and policies, to report to the Board and its committees on the progress on gender mainstreaming across the partnership.</p>

* Specific local education group members’ roles and responsibilities in GPE processes are further outlined in separate partner sections below.

** Grant agent minimum standards and related documents are due to be updated to reflect this.

SECTION 4. CONCLUSION

This paper was designed to articulate how the ambition for gender equality set out in GPE 2025 is being operationalized through a partnership approach. The GPE partnership model convenes multiple stakeholders at an education system level in each partner country, enabling opportunities to influence and leverage how gender equality is prioritized in both education system planning and delivery.

Section 1 offered a brief global context of the importance of including gender equality within education system change. Given the deeply rooted legacies of how gender impacts both educational experience and attainment, nuanced education solutions—that is, solutions based on gender analysis that consider context, characteristics and legal frameworks—are vital.

In the past five years, a number of key global initiatives and declarations have recognized the role of gender equality in the delivery of effective education systems. It is important that we maintain the momentum these have created and effectively use resources to operationalize these commitments. GPE is committed to gender-transformative system change to create sustainable change toward the SDG goals of gender equality and quality education for all. To do this, we must recognize the importance of integrating social norms into system approaches to achieve gender equality in access to, within and through education.

Section 2 provided tools and approaches to highlight how gender equality is being hardwired across GPE systems and processes. Gender equality entry points within the GPE operating model and guiding principles are highlighted to assist cross-partner dialogue and the standardization of approaches to key areas of gender equality hardwiring.

Section 3 outlined a variety of robust accountability mechanisms that hold expectations in place on roles and responsibilities on gender equality across all GPE processes, including grants.

GPE's unique way of working means that no single body is solely responsible for driving results toward gender equality. Partners are held mutually accountable for gender equality across stakeholders in the partnership. Given the number of actors part of GPE operations, it is important to be clear on what each partner brings to this collective ambition as well as what each partner's role and responsibilities are at both country and global levels. Partner roles and responsibilities are described in table 1 in section 3.3.

GPE 2025 introduces a 'learn and adapt' approach in everything the partnership does, which includes operationalizing the collective ambition for gender equality as set out in this paper. Lessons learned over the next 12 to 24 months will be part of a continued partnership dialogue and will inform the development of the new GPE strategy and results framework for GPE 2030, which will be in development in 2024.

The leverage generated by the broad partnerships within GPE has the potential to transform education systems in multiple countries. The overarching aim of this paper and subsequent dialogue is to realize the power and reach of the partnership to make transformative change in education in all GPE partner countries. By delivering on the gender equality ambition through the approaches highlighted in this paper and being committed to sharing and learning as a global community, there is the potential to make significant gains towards the global goals of achieving gender equality, inclusive and equitable quality education and tangible change for girls and boys in all GPE partner countries.

GLOSSARY

Definitions of the following gender-related terms, with the exception of 'gender hardwiring,' are drawn and adapted from the UNESCO Glossary: Understanding Concepts around Gender Equality and Inclusion in Education.¹

Gender analysis: an assessment exercise to understand the differences and similarities between girls and boys, women and men, with regards to their experiences, knowledge, conditions, needs, access to and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making powers. It is a critical step toward gender-responsive and gender-transformative planning and programming.

Gender equality: the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of girls and boys, women and men. It means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development, as well as to benefit from the results. It is the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and differences between women and men and the different roles they play.

Gender equity: the process of being fair to girls and boys, women and men. Because women historically have often been placed at a disadvantage, being fair can involve taking temporary measures to level the playing field for all genders. Equity, therefore, is a means to achieve equality.

Gender focal point: an individual designated within an institution or organization to monitor and stimulate greater consideration of gender equality issues in daily operations.

Gender hardwiring: an intentional, accountable approach to embedding gender equality across all systems and processes, used to reinforce the intentional and accountable aspects of gender mainstreaming.

Gender identity: an individual's innate internal experience of gender which may or may not correspond to their physiology, designated sex at birth or social expectations of that sex. Many people face harassment, stigma and exclusion if the expression of their gender identity, for example through dress, speech and mannerisms, is different from what others might expect.

Gender mainstreaming: involves considering the implications of all policies and programs for girls and boys, women and men, at the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages. This ensures that all genders equally benefit from these interventions.

Gender norms: ideas about how men and women should behave, including the expectations and standards that are set for each gender in different societies, cultures and communities. These 'rules' tend to become internalized at an early age in the beginning of a cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping that continues for the rest of a person's life. Gender norms thus not only become individuals' expectations of others, but also of themselves.

Gender parity: the numerical concept for representation and participation; it is another term for equal representation of women and men in a given area. For example, gender parity in primary education might refer to the number of girls and boys enrolled or completing phases of education.

¹ UNESCO, *Glossary: Understanding concepts around gender equality and inclusion in education* (Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022).

Gender: the socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women and men, or girls and boys, but to the relationship between them.

Gender roles: define the responsibilities of girls and boys, women and men, as well as expectations about aspects of their identity. Gender roles vary both between and within societies and can change over time. Both women and men may experience stress resulting from the expectation to conform to gender roles in different situations.

Gender-based violence: violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering against someone based on gender discrimination, gender role expectations and/or gender stereotypes or the differential power status linked to gender.

Gender-responsive budgeting: an analysis of the impact of actual government expenditure and revenue on girls and women as compared to boys and men. It neither requires separate budgets nor aims solely to increase spending on women-specific programs. Instead, it helps governments and planners decide how policies need to be adjusted and where resources need to be reallocated to address gender inequalities.

Gender-responsive planning: technical and political processes and procedures to embed gender equality in all aspects of planning, including education sector planning. This work typically includes: substantial analytical work, such as gender analysis, to assess the enabling environment for gender equality in the education sector; applying a gender perspective to current education sector policy; using available data to analyze challenges to gender equality in education; and assessing institutional capacity to address gender equality in education.

Intersectionality: the way in which different forms of discrimination and disadvantage combine and overlap. Characteristics such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, geography and socioeconomic status can intersect with each other, causing multiple levels of disadvantage and marginalization.

Marginalization: the process of relegating people to a position of less importance—not allowing them to take full part in society, exercise their rights or access services that are available to others, such as education.

School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV): concerns acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes and enforced by unequal power dynamics. It may refer to the different experiences of violence and vulnerabilities for all learners, and may include physical violence or bullying, sexual or verbal harassment, non-consensual touching, sexual coercion and assault and rape.

Sex: refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish women and men.

Sex-disaggregated data: data collected and presented separately on men/boys and women/girls. This reflects the different roles, contexts and conditions of women and men, girls and boys—for example, in terms of literacy and education levels, employment, wages and land ownership. When data is not disaggregated by sex, it is more difficult to identify real and potential inequalities. Sex-disaggregated data is necessary for an effective gender analysis.

Sexual orientation: an individual's capacity for profound emotion, affectional and sexual attraction to individuals of a different gender, the same gender or more than one gender.

APPENDIX 1. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND TOOLS TO SUPPORT OPERATIONALIZATION OF GENDER EQUALITY GOALS

Gender and Education Global- and Country-Level Data

- [World Inequality Database on Education \(WIDE\)](#) – UNESCO and Global Education Monitoring Report: comprehensive database allowing intersectional data analysis on key education indicators; using national household surveys and learning assessments
- [Data for Sustainable Development Goals: UNESCO Institute for Statistics \(UIS\) data on SDG 4](#)
- [Accountability for Gender Equality in Education \(AGEE\) framework](#)
- [Her Atlas](#): UNESCO interactive tool monitoring the right to education for girls and women

Gender Analysis Tools

- [Gender Equality in Education Snapshot \(GES\) Toolkit](#) – UNGEI: rapid assessment of gender equality in and through education
- [EiE-GenKit](#) – INEE: a core resource package for gender in education in emergencies

Education System Change and Planning Guidance

- [Guidance for Developing Gender-Responsive Education Sector Plans](#) – GPE, UNGEI and UNICEF: guidance including gender analysis and gender-sensitive budgeting
- [From access to empowerment: Operational tools to advance gender equality in and through education](#) – UNESCO, 2021
- [Gender-Responsive and Disability Inclusive Education Budgeting](#) – ActionAid, 2022

Global Research on Gender and Education

- [UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Reports](#)
- [EGER 2021 Girls' Education Roadmap](#): topline messages for key decision makers in gender-responsive education

Social Norm Change and SRGBV

- [Advancing Learning & Innovation on Gender Norms \(ALIGN\) Platform](#)
- [UNICEF Manual on Social Norms Change 2022](#)
- [Safe to Learn Diagnostic Tool](#)
- [UNGEI resources on SRGBV](#): minimum standards and monitoring framework and online training tools
- [Shifting harmful gender norms through curricular approaches](#) – UNGEI

Gender, Education and Intersectionality

- UNGEI 2021 [Leave No Girl with Disabilities Behind](#)
- [2022 UNHCR Refugee Education Report](#)
- [Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit](#) – UN Women

Gender, Education and Climate Change

- [Toward Climate-Smart Education Systems: A 7-Dimension Framework for Action](#) – GPE, 2023
- [Four Ways that Climate Change Impacts Girls' Education in Africa](#) – Global Center on Adaptation, 2023
- [State and Trends in Adaptation Report 2022: Education Chapter](#) – Global Center on Adaptation
- [Addressing the climate, environment, and biodiversity crises in and through girls' education](#) – FCDO, 2022

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Cover photo: Pirakov Aliakbar (left) and Hasanova Shukrona (right), grade 4 students at school 51, Kulob, Tajikistan, study together in class.

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