Approaches to addressing gender inequality in education are generally based on a one-size-fits-all model that has predominantly focused on girls' education. However, there are growing gender disparities in education impacting boys in regions, such as the Caribbean and Middle East. It is therefore necessary to take a more holistic look at gender and target those children who are most at risk of being unable to access "equitable quality education," (UN, 2018, p. 1). This brief calls for the establishment of baseline data and targeted interventions to benefit the most marginalized girls and boys in order to achieve gender equality in education.

Proposal

Ensuring gender equality around the world remains crucial, and there is an opportunity for G20 member states to take action to address this in the education sector. With modest but strategic investment, the G20 member states can support the development and implementation of the first holistic gender policy frameworks to support more equitable education systems. While there is no exact formula for how to ensure gender equality in education, the hope is that G20 member states consider addressing gender disparities in education by working upwards from the local to the national to the global level.

National-level Recommendations

G20 member states can begin by understanding the specific issues related to gender and education in their own countries. Similar to recommendations at the global level, all countries need to have access to research to better understand their own educational contexts. Only once areas of need are identified and understood can targeted interventions be implemented. As gender equality issues are not confined only to education, there is also a need for multi-sectoral collaboration in terms of research and policy implementation. Governments, education institutions, businesses, philanthropic actors, think tanks, civil society organizations, youth, and others need to work together if gender equality is to be achieved in and through education. Our recommendations are outlined in more detail below.

Recommendation 1.1:

Establish a national research fund to examine issues related to gender in education Governments have a responsibility to understand the various education landscapes in their own countries, and in order to do so, funds should be allocated to non-partisan research. At the country level, research should focus on mapping and understanding gender disparities, examining barriers, and identifying promising solutions to eliminate gender disparities in education. Research first needs to map educational issues related to gender in order to better understand what and where the most pressing issues are and determine if these issues are linked to associated underlying structural factors, such as poverty, race, and/or geography. Next, research needs to identify what barriers to success in education exist for marginalized girls or...
such as poverty, race, and geography. Next, research needs to identify what barriers to success in education exist for marginalized girls or boys. Finally, national level research should also identify existing promising programs and policies in the local context as well as examine other countries that have been successful in reducing the gender gap in education.

Recommendation 1.2:

Formulate and implement targeted policies to address particular gender issues Using the research, appropriate gender policies should then be designed and formulated to fit country-specific needs. These policies may include addressing issues related to a range of areas, including infrastructure, teacher training and recruitment, curriculum design and development, or parental involvement (see Table 1). For example, policies linked to infrastructure may include developing water and sanitation systems in schools, as girls have been found to be absent from school due to inadequate access to toilets (Birdthistle, Dickson, Freeman, & Javidi, 2011). Similarly, schools can be spaces where boys are exposed to and unprotected from violence (Barker et al., 2012), and as such teachers could be trained on how to identify, respond to, and prevent such issues (Antonowicz, 2010). Child labor also represents a barrier to education for poor girls and boys, and governments could design policies to increase school enrollment and attendance, potentially through initiatives around educating parents on the benefits of education and by introducing legal frameworks to prevent child labor (Sakamoto, 2006; UNICEF, 2006).

Gender-specific programs may also be implemented to support the girls or boys most in need. For example, several Balkan countries introduced the Young Men Initiative (YMI) which targets vocational secondary schools and disengaged boys within them in an effort to redefine manhood and promote healthier masculinities (Namy et al., 2015). Through using educational workshops, residential retreats, and a social marketing campaign, YMI has provided additional support for boys in education outside of the traditional school environment. Research on YMI suggests that boys who participated in the Initiative showed increased gender-equitable attitudes, exhibited reduced levels of violence, and a strengthened sense of civic engagement (Namy et al., 2015). Policymakers should share such success stories, in addition to lessons learned.

Recommendation 1.3:

Encourage multi-sectoral collaboration Gender inequality will not be eliminated without broad support from both within and outside of the education sector. Thus, there should be concerted effort to collaborate across government entities, as well as with education institutions, think tanks, businesses, philanthropic organizations, social welfare organizations, civil society, and other relevant bodies when appropriate. For example, as education has a direct link to the labor market, it makes sense to partner with entities such as ministries of labor to explore the linkages (or lack thereof) between education and the labor market as they relate to challenges for women and men.

Recommendation 1.4:

Implement targeted polices to close gender gaps in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and in reading G20 countries must pay close attention to STEM education and reading outcomes in their countries as there are often marked gender disparities related to participation and achievement in these subjects. At a global level, girls are less likely to study STEM subjects or subsequently enroll or take up career paths in related fields (Chavatzia, 2017; UNESCO, 2018). However, in the case of reading, boys consistently underperform in comparison to girls. In the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment, in every country, boys scored less than girls on average in reading (OECD, 2016). Domestic narratives and policies around girls pursing STEM and boys’ achievement in reading need to better communicate the importance of the ability to be able to, create, think, use and develop innovative solutions to address local and global challenges. At a global level, G20 countries can also commit to supporting international agendas like the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2016) and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (United Nations, 2015), both of which call for equality and increased investments in STEM education in order to ensure those entering the workforce are equipped with the skillsets required for jobs of the future.

Global-level Recommendations

Globally, education policies need to be designed to better support gender equality in education. While there has been a shift in the global agenda for gender education equality with advent of the SDGs—namely in moving away from a narrower focus on girls’ education to a broader appreciation for gender equality more holistically—there is still more to be done to ensure that all girls and boys receive the support they need. Although there should be a sustained effort to target the systematic marginalization of women and girls, there must also be an appreciation of the issues facing men and boys. The two recommendations outlined below focus on ensuring equitable approaches to
appreciation of the issues facing men and boys. The two recommendations outlined below focus on ensuring equitable approaches to
education; firstly, through forming a global coalition to understand and actively implement relevant policies targeting gender disparities in
education and secondly, through mobilizing and pooling resources for the most vulnerable.

Recommendation 2.1:

Establish a Global Coalition for Gender Equality in Education The G20 is in a unique position to establish a Global Coalition for Gender
Equality in Education. Three key aims of this body would be to: i) support research on gender disparities in education, ii) hold governments
accountable for gender equality in education, and iii) convene key actors to share the latest findings in research and practice.

i) To start, the Coalition would commission research related to developing gender and education indicators, mapping the gender landscape,
tracking progress made toward achieving SDG 4 as it relates to gender, and identifying future research and policy areas. Although there is
enough data available to report on gender issues in education, the ability to track gender equality is limited. Researchers have found that for
many of the global indicators, additional methodological work is needed, and the SDG 4 monitoring framework should be broader (see GEM
Report Team, 2018b). Thus, research into existing and new indicators could strengthen the monitoring framework. Expanded areas of focus
could include values and attitudes, teaching and learning practices, and laws and policies (GEM Report Team, 2018b; Unterhalter, Exzegwu,
Heslop, Shercliff, & North, 2015). Research commissioned by the Coalition should also examine existing and emerging issues in gender in
education as they relate to SDG 4. This should explore cross-cutting issues related to barriers in education for girls and boys, identifying
overlapping issues and those that are gender-specific. The Coalition would be responsible for making findings widely available to inform
policymakers, academics, and other stakeholders.

ii) Secondly, the Global Coalition for Gender Equality in Education would assist governments with upholding their obligations to the
Education 2030 Framework for Action, the international community’s roadmap towards achieving SDG 4 (GEM Report Team, 2018b). In
addition, the Coalition would encourage G20 member states to initiate new international treaties on gender in education and create
associated formal mechanisms to hold governments accountable. It would also encourage G20 member states to support their counterparts
struggling to enact and enforce relevant policies, which may include countries affected by conflicts or natural disasters.

iii) Finally, a third core mandate of the Coalition would be to facilitate the convening of policymakers, academics, practitioners, and other
stakeholders in order to exchange information through targeted events and platforms. Some possible avenues to facilitate such exchanges
could include symposia, meetings adjacent to pre-existing events, and/or an online sharing portal. Such facilitation would support a sharing
of best practices and the adoption of strategic gender education policies at the state, regional, and global levels.

Recommendation 2.2:

Increase funding for initiatives in education to address gender needs within vulnerable populations, including refugees G20 member states
can collectively increase support for the most vulnerable populations in education, as these groups are not only in the greatest need but
gender issues in education can also be particularly pronounced for them. If policymakers are to advance SDG 4’s aim of leaving no one
behind, then they should invest more heavily in quality education for those who are most vulnerable, including and especially in countries
with refugee populations. For example, in 2011 in Pakistan, the national primary net enrollment rate was 71%; however, for Afghan refugees it
was less than half at 29% (GEM Report Team, 2018c). Within that subgroup, 39% of Afghan refugee boys were enrolled in comparison to only
18% of Afghan refugee girls (GEM Report Team, 2018c). While in 2017, USD 450 million was given in global humanitarian funding to
education, this amount was only 2.1% of total humanitarian aid and fell short of the 4% target (GEM Report Team, 2018c). G20 member states
can make a united effort to improve provisions and increase funding 4, as many refugee host countries cannot provide the necessary
educational provision alone. Those from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds constitute another vulnerable group, and the
intersection of poverty and gender deserves greater attention from policymakers. Gendered labor expectations can pull low SES boys out of
school and push them into unskilled labor jobs where secondary school completion is not a requirement, and differences have also been
found in terms of academic achievement levels of girls and boys when they come from the poorest segments of the population (David,
Albert, & Vizmanos, 2018; GEM Report, 2018b; Ridge, Kippels, & Chung, 2017). Governments can prioritize financing education for such
populations. If there is a heightened global effort to invest in the education of vulnerable populations, this would boost development and
economic growth at national and international levels (GEM Report Team, 2018c).

Conclusion
Significant advances have been made in education over the past two decades as near universal primary education has been achieved and education is now accessible to many sections of society that were previously excluded, including girls. Moving forward, policymakers must recognize and understand existing gender issues in education in their specific contexts and correspondingly implement evidence-based policies to establish more equitable, quality education systems. Only after this will they develop societies where everyone can be an active and productive citizen.

1 For example, in sub-Saharan Africa between 2010–2015, 86 females completed lower secondary education for every 100 males while in Latin America and the Caribbean, 93 males completed the level for every 100 females (GEM Report Team, 2018b).

2 In low-income countries, from 2010–2015, 66 females completed upper secondary education for every 100 males, in contrast to upper middle- and high-income countries where 91 males completed this level for every 100 females (GEM Report, 2018a).

3 The Report states that values for North Africa and West Asia refer only to low- and middle-income countries in the region and that the analysis is based on household survey data.

4 Two avenues for supporting populations in need include the International Finance Facility for Education (IFFEd) and Education Cannot Wait (ECW).

References


• Birdthistle, I., Dickson, K., Freeman, M., & Javidi, L. (2011). What impact does the provision of separate toilets for girls at schools have on their primary and secondary school enrolment, attendance and completion? A systematic review of the evidence. London, UK: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.


Existing Initiatives & Analysis