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# GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

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# GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

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EQUATE: Achieving Equality in Education

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## INTRODUCTION

This document introduces a simple framework within which often misunderstood terms and concepts are reviewed in easily understood terminology. The Gender Equality Framework is based on the results from USAID education program assessments conducted during the past decade that revealed the need for a tool to help USAID move education programming toward achieving gender equality. The framework was developed and introduced by the EQUATE project with support from the USAID Office of Women in Development and in consultation with USAID education staff, implementing partners, and other stakeholders.

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1973 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was mandated to take the lead in the international donor community to address persistent gender inequities when the U.S. Congress enacted the Percy Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act and launched the Office of Women in Development. In the following decade USAID began supporting innovative programs to improve girls' access to primary education. In 1988, a Congressional set-aside for basic education, especially for girls, launched an intensive phase of activities to address the gender gap in education, which continued through the 1990s. In 2004, the U.S. Department of State reaffirmed the commitment of the United States "to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, both domestically and internationally" (U.S. Department of State 2004). Although the U.S. endorsed the goal of gender equality, what this constituted remained largely undefined and education sector programming continued to focus primarily on promoting access to education for girls. As girls' access to education increased, programming efforts began to focus increasingly on improving education quality. As a result of this shift, attention to gender equality declined, as demonstrated in two recent reports (EQUATE 2007; Kendall 2006). Moreover, critical dimensions of gender dynamics that perpetuate inequality between and among girls and boys have been overlooked.

## GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

The Gender Equality Framework draws clear distinctions and demonstrates interrelationships among the concepts of gender parity, gender equity, and gender equality. In addition to drawing out the nuances between equity and equality, the framework reinforces other key concerns such as access, quality, continuity, relevance, and learning outcomes. The framework also emphasizes the relationships between and among students and teachers and boys and girls, implying the need to transform deeply ingrained behaviors and gender norms that have negative impacts on the aspirations and life choices of girls and boys.

Gender equality is a broad concept that is best understood within the wider context of social exclusion—the systematic discrimination of individuals based on characteristics such as ethnicity, race, sex, economic status, place of residence, language, or health status. Working children, indigenous children, street children, domestic workers, and children who are physically challenged, affected by HIV or AIDS, or living in conflict areas often do not have their educational needs met. In addition to addressing the injustices resulting from gender bias, a

gender equality approach to achieving full participation needs to operate within the larger sphere of social justice so all children have a chance to succeed.

**TABLE 1. KEY TERMS IN GENDER EQUALITY**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Means ...</b>	<b>Looks Like...</b>
Parity	Proportional representation of boys and girls in an education system relative to the population per age group	Equal number of boys/girls enrolled in school (proportionate to the population)
Equity	Strategies and processes that provide fair and equal chances for all to pursue and benefit from educational opportunities	Scholarships, teacher training on gender-sensitive pedagogies, curriculum revisions to remove gender bias, separate safe and clean latrines for girls and boys, and programs to promote math and science among girls
Equality	Females and males have equal rights, freedoms, conditions, and opportunities for realizing their full potential in society	Male and female leaders in society, equitable and positive power dynamics, and empowered female and male citizens

Gender equality implies that males and females have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development. Other key terms commonly used in discussing gender equality are reviewed in Table 1. Parity and equity are the building blocks to achieving gender equality in education. Parity is attained when the same proportion of boys and girls—relative to their respective age groups—enter the education system, achieve educational goals, and advance through the different cycles (UNESCO 2003). Reaching parity in enrollment and increasing access to education is necessary but not sufficient for achieving equality and ought to be considered a “first stage” measure of progress towards gender equality in education (Subrahmanian 2005).

Equity is the process of being fair to girls and boys. To ensure fairness, measures are needed to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent girls and boys from operating on a level playing field. Equity does not imply treating all learners the same, as there are many factors that might disadvantage some learners in achieving equitable outcomes. Equity strategies may include “equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities” (ILO 2000). Equity mechanisms such as scholarships have been used to achieve gender parity in enrollment rates. Additional equity tools such as math and science camps for girls have been implemented to increase achievement. Over the long term, equity strategies to attain gender equality need to be reflected in policies and practices directed toward learners, teachers, and the community.

An effective strategy for educating girls needs to include attention to parity and education quality at the same time. As noted in USAID’s Education Strategy “[a]s a matter of policy, USAID places major emphasis on females’ access to basic education. In all cases, USAID emphasizes

educational equity for girls and women as a strategy for achieving educational equality for all” (USAID 2005). Moving from an emphasis on access to equality requires an explicit, proactive response to the structural roots of gender inequalities. In order to achieve equality, the roles, identities, and power relations that shape relationships need to be transformed.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUALITY AND EQUALITY**

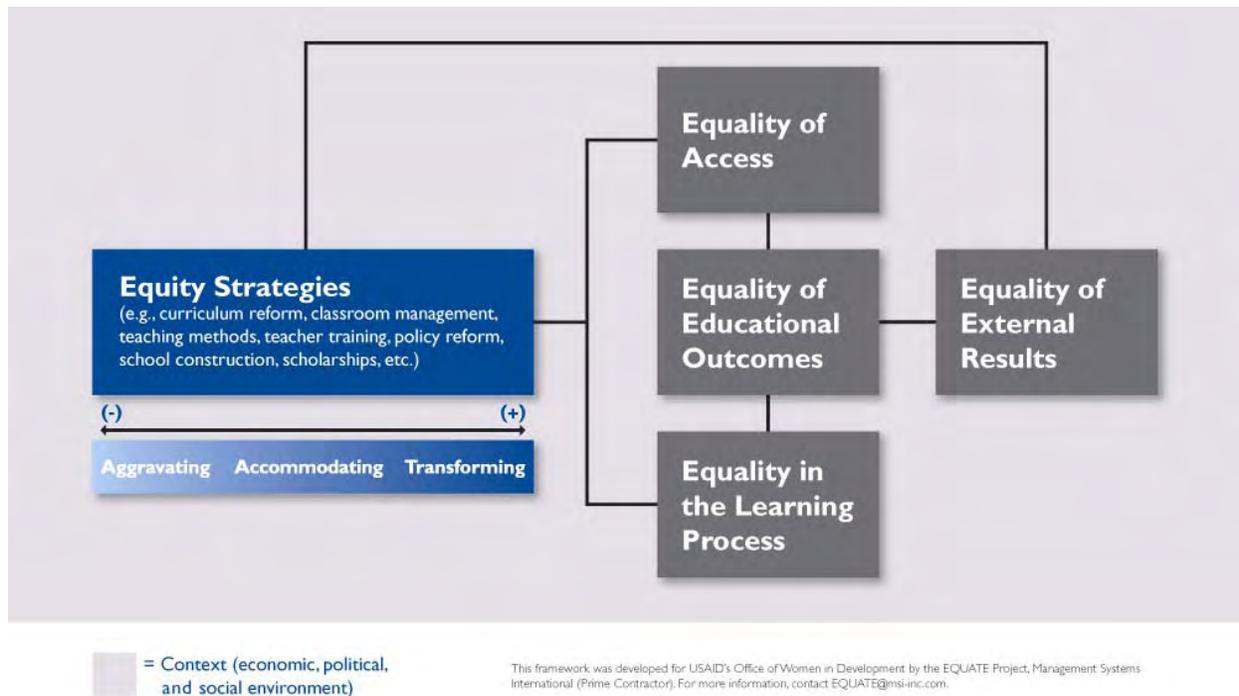
Achieving parity in enrollment remains a critical objective and is fundamental to gender equality. However, focusing on access as the primary issue for girls can undervalue the importance of quality and relevance, with the false conclusion that the learning environment does not impact the opportunity for girls to succeed. Some of the more traditional approaches to increasing parity in enrollment may treat only the symptoms, not the root causes of inequality. Striking a balance between equitable access, quality, and relevance, as expressed in USAID’s Education Strategy, is one way for USAID to strengthen its ability to provide a quality education to all learners. According to UNESCO (2005), educational inputs and processes need to be reviewed through a gender lens to make sure that reforms aimed at increasing educational quality also take into account the needs of both boys and girls.

Fundamental to EQUATE’s approach is the belief that an education system that is inequitable and discriminatory cannot be considered of high quality. Dimensions of educational quality that impact equality include curriculum content, teacher-student relations, and the safety and security of the learning environment (Oxfam 2005). Research has also shown that girls seem to be more sensitive to school quality than boys and that the quality of teachers has a greater impact on the demand for girls’ education than for boys’ education (Kane 2004).

Educational relevance is increasingly seen as a critical dimension of improved quality. Relevance refers to the degree to which the education provided is applicable and relates to learners’ present and future. Too often education fails to prepare students for the contemporary labor market and adult life. There are insufficient training opportunities for youth to meet the needs of the private sector and the global economy by gaining the skills needed to earn an income and become self-supporting.

The achievement of gender equality in education requires attention to access and quality, as access alone will not guarantee the realization of equality. The dimensions of gender equality in education are multiple and inter-related. These dynamics are illustrated in Figure 1 and described more fully below.

**FIGURE 1. GENDER EQUALITY FRAMEWORK**



## THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

The four dimensions of gender equality in education include:

- equality of access,
- equality in the learning process,
- equality of educational outcomes, and
- equality of external results (Subrahmanian n.d.).

Implicit throughout the four dimensions of gender equality is the idea of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity includes holding the individual accountable for his or her own achievement and expecting society to level the playing field so that all people can develop to their fullest potential and that they are given a fair chance to succeed (Roemer 1998). Equality of opportunity in the Gender Equality Framework refers to providing both girls and boys with equal opportunities to go to school, learn, achieve, and succeed as adults.

Below are brief descriptions of each dimension, accompanied by examples of equity measures that contribute to achieving equality. The examples are drawn from USAID education projects.

**Equality of access** means that girls and boys are offered equitable opportunities to access formal, nonformal, or alternative approaches to basic education. Access is defined broadly and

encompasses initial enrollment, persistence, attendance, and retention in an education system. Parity strategies can be designed with a broader understanding of how these contribute to achieving gender equality since “equal access alone may not translate into meaningful processes and outcomes in education” (Subrahmanian 2005).

### **Interventions:**

- Establish safe schools or learning centers that are near students’ homes.
- Provide clean water and private and secure latrines at schools and in learning centers.
- Form advisory committees in which teachers monitor girls’ and boys’ participation in school and intervene when necessary.
- Reintegrate ex-combatants and other youth affected by conflict by providing nonformal education activities that emphasize self-discovery, healing, health, well-being, democracy, good governance, and conflict management in addition to basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Provide scholarships for children at risk to encourage better attendance while simultaneously raising the issue of the importance of education with parents.
- Provide accelerated learning programs to help students whose education was interrupted by war or other hardships to achieve grade-level equivalencies and potentially re-enter the formal school system.

**Equality in the learning process** refers to pedagogic processes and the school environment, both of which have a significant impact on how and what students learn. Girls and boys should receive equitable treatment and attention and have equal opportunities to learn. This means that all students ought to be exposed to the same curricula, although the coursework may be taught differently to accommodate the different learning styles of boys and girls. In addition, all learners should experience teaching methods and materials free of stereotypes and gender bias, and have the same freedom to learn, explore, and develop skills in all academic and extracurricular settings.

The school environment is molded, in part, by the nature of relationships between teachers and learners and between girls and boys. Students need to be safe from psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. A safe, supportive environment is a prerequisite to effective teaching and learning. Unfortunately, in many cases schools are risky environments for girls and boys. Schools, especially teachers, can reinforce negative gender stereotypes and replicate systemic inequalities that discourage and marginalize students. This can lead to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and high dropout rates. Alternately, teachers can contribute to eliminating gender bias and expanding the choices and aspirations of both boys and girls. In the latter case, schools can be effective in helping young people learn positive and healthy models of behavior by challenging the harmful gender norms that limit academic achievement and influence students’ life choices.

### **Interventions:**

- End academic streaming based on gender stereotypes, e.g., girls streamed into the humanities and boys into science and technology.

- Train curriculum developers, textbook writers, administrators, managers, and teachers in classroom gender dynamics prior to developing new curricula.
- Train teachers in inclusive teaching practices to help them integrate students who have been marginalized due to poverty, ethnicity, language, or discrimination based on their sex.
- Undertake annual classroom studies to monitor teachers' interactions with boys and girls.
- Promote an open-classroom system that encourages teachers to act as learning facilitators who foster democratic student government and student participation, ensuring that girls and boys assume active leadership roles.
- Include life skills programs for boys and girls that allow them to talk about gender roles and that provide them with positive images of masculinity and femininity.

**Equality of educational outcomes** means that girls and boys enjoy equal opportunities to achieve and outcomes are based on their individual talents and efforts. To ensure fair chances for achievement, the length of school careers, academic qualifications, and diplomas should not differ based on a person's sex. Mechanisms for evaluating individual achievement should also be free of any gender bias. What tests, examinations, and assessments measure tells students what matters and to the extent that these mechanisms reflect a gender bias, they transmit messages to students that can discourage their interest in school or in particular subjects. Results from classroom tests, national examinations, and international assessments can influence boys' and girls' confidence levels and their perceptions of their abilities and what is expected of them. They can also impact what is taught in the classroom and how content is delivered. Where tests or examinations are used to determine promotion into future grades, or other types of educational opportunities, the extent to which there may be bias in these mechanisms is an important consideration when trying to ensure equality of access and equality of outcomes.

The results from the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) illustrate the complexities and the attention required for achieving gender equality. The scores in mathematics indicated that attitudinal differences between girls and boys were far more pronounced than performance differences. Girls reported much lower interest in mathematics, less confidence as mathematics learners, less motivation to use mathematics in the future, and much greater anxiety when learning mathematics. Boys performed slightly better than girls, but were much more confident and less anxious learning mathematics (Schleicher 2007). Attitudinal patterns of school children are closely matched with current study and career choices. Test scores alone do not indicate whether the playing field has been leveled and whether girls and boys have equitable opportunities to achieve. Even when girls and boys are performing at the same rates, this can still mask inequitable treatment. These findings reinforce the importance of understanding the dynamics in the classroom and what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are being transferred to students and how this can limit children's future possibilities in career choice and future earnings.

### **Interventions:**

- Train teachers to understand how their perceptions or expectations of male and female students may influence how they assess students' progress, mark examinations, and provide feedback.

- Include an assortment of question types (prose, diagrams, charts, pictures, tables, etc.) when developing test, examination, or assessment questions to respond to the diversity in students' learning styles.
- Use various question types (multiple choice, essay, short answer, etc.) and weigh the test items to ensure that students with different learning styles have equal opportunities to succeed.
- Balance classroom assessment methods to evaluate group and individual work using verbal and written evaluation tools.
- Review existing tests, examinations, and assessments to determine whether the examples and language used are free of gender bias and stereotypes. Remove any gender-specific content and ensure that examples reflect a balance in girls' and boys' experiences.

**Equality of external results** is achieved when the status of men and women; their access to goods and resources; and their ability to contribute to, participate in, and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political activities are equal. This implies that career opportunities, the time needed to secure employment after leaving full-time education, and the earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience are equal. While there is no guarantee that outcomes will be the same for those with the same level of education, ideally, equality in the educational process “unlocks equal opportunities for men and women post-schooling” (UNESCO 2005). Although this dimension of equality falls outside the education system, it is nevertheless an important element of the framework. The achievement of equality in the broader society will influence which children are able to access school and how gender norms are manifested in the classroom. Likewise, the achievement of equality in education acts as a catalyst and contributes to the realization of equality for men and women in other spheres of life, including the labor market and the home.

The four dimensions of gender equality are related, but that relationship is complex and not necessarily linear. Parity in enrollment and greater gender equality in schooling can, and often do, coexist with inequalities outside of education.

### **Interventions:**

- Provide leadership training for women.
- Enact and enforce labor laws that ensure equal opportunity.
- Conduct social mobilization campaigns aimed at increasing women's and girls' status and value in society.

Viewing programming options through the multiple dimensions of gender equality can generate new ways of thinking about education for all children. A perspective that considers the dynamics between males and females and their respective socioeconomic and political roles will produce better results in the education of women and girls. Such a perspective is also useful for understanding the dynamics that create either a positive or negative impact on boys' education and on the relationships between males and females.

The Gender Equality Framework demonstrates that parity is not the only milestone against which success is to be measured. Understanding how stereotypes limit the choices and opportunities for boys and girls and obscure their needs and differences will enable educators to create learning

opportunities that contribute to the long-term outcome of equality through which all children flourish and reach their full potential.

Achieving gender equality necessitates a transformation of the power dynamics between boys and girls. The continuum of approaches described below is a useful tool to be used in tandem with the framework to assess whether proposed interventions are supporting the status quo or are actively promoting equality.

### **Continuum of Approaches for Integrating Gender Considerations into Programming**

Deliberate planning and informed programming choices are necessary to achieve gender equality in education. The Gender Equality Framework offers a systematic approach to addressing key issues that are critical to the elimination of gender disparities in education. The continuum of approaches enables a practical application of these concepts by analyzing the interventions that have the greatest impact on transforming gender relations and achieving gender equality. The Continuum of Approaches for Integrating Gender Considerations into Programming is a tool that helps determine how effectively projects address gender issues through their planned activities.

On one end of the continuum are approaches that are harmful and promote inequality; on the other end are approaches that actively seek to improve equality by transforming gender relations. Strategies may fall anywhere along this continuum. Broadly, these strategies for gender integration are categorized as being aggravating, accommodating, or transforming.

Aggravating approaches are programs that create, exacerbate, or ignore gender inequalities in pursuit of project outcomes. This approach is harmful and, in the long run, can undermine project objectives, even if short-term goals are realized.

Accommodating approaches are programs that maintain existing gender roles to achieve project outcomes. While the approach may not be harmful, it does not seek to reduce gender inequality. This approach may bring short-term benefits but does not address greater systemic issues that contribute to inequalities.

Transforming approaches are programs that seek to actively change gender relations to promote equality and achieve project objectives. This approach helps to address issues such as power imbalances, resource distribution, and the allocation of duties between men and women in order to change ideas and behaviors within education programs. Such approaches include strategies that seek to involve and empower both women and men.

Figure 2 demonstrates where one particular program would fall on the continuum depending on the gender equality approach applied. The example in Figure 2 is from an adult literacy program, which uses a serial cartoon strip and radio instruction to educate community members.

**FIGURE 2. ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM ACROSS THE CONTINUUM OF APPROACHES**

<b>Aggravating</b>	<b>Accommodating</b>	<b>Transforming</b>
<p><b>Definition:</b> Programs that create, exacerbate, or ignore gender equalities in pursuit of project objectives</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Characters featured in the adult literacy program included a husband with several young girlfriends and his wife. The wife was burdened with raising five children and tending to their small plot of land. Episodes of domestic violence were featured in the serial without any discussion.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> From an educational perspective, the program was deemed very successful as literacy levels increased. However, the underlying message exacerbated gender inequalities. As a result, domestic violence in the community remained unchanged.</p>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Programs that maintain existing gender dynamics and roles while pursuing project objectives</p> <p><b>Example:</b> An episode on domestic violence featured women caring for a battered wife. The episode did not include a discussion of men's roles in treating the problem.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> The program met its educational objectives and was deemed very successful, as more adults became literate. The underlying message maintained gender inequalities by failing to question/challenge the status quo. In this case, domestic violence was accepted: the symptoms were treated but the underlying causes were left unchallenged.</p>	<p><b>Definition:</b> Programs that seek to <u>actively change</u> gender inequalities; create positive, healthy relations between males and females; and promote gender equality while achieving project objectives</p> <p><b>Example:</b> An episode of domestic violence in the storyline showed counseling activities and community involvement. Groups of men and women in the program dealt with domestic violence by exploring gender roles and role-playing positive behavior.</p> <p><b>Outcome:</b> The program was very successful on two levels. Literacy increased and communities were engaged in combating domestic violence by promoting healthy relations between men and women.</p>

Even though project designers may be aware of gender inequalities, programs put into place to address them may not always be beneficial. Some programs may have unintended, negative consequences or even perpetuate inequalities. Through the application of the continuum, project planners can make informed choices. To the extent possible, activities ought to move towards transformation as context and circumstances allow.

## CONCLUSION

The elimination of gender disparities in education demands more than the “mere quantification of the girls registered for school” (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2006). As the framework depicts, the achievement of gender equality requires a multi-pronged approach and an understanding of the roles and relationships between boys and girls and the harmful gender norms that exclude many children from meaningful participation in school. Targeted approaches, such as scholarships for girls or the establishment of girls’ clubs, although successful in providing access and improving girls’ education in the short term, can only contribute to the realization of gender equality in education by addressing gender inequities in a systemic way, including concurrent examination of gender dynamics between and among girls and boys. Investing in interventions that not only ensure access to education and also focus on quality and retention are essential. Adopting a broader perspective that promotes transformation of gender dynamics in an ongoing process, as the Gender Equality Framework advocates, holds greater promise for realizing true and lasting progress in the effort to achieve gender equality and education for all.

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