

How is gender equality included in education sector planning?

An analysis of power, voice and social change in Mauritania

Mauritania Country Report

Annex D.7 Mauritania Country Report

Mott MacDonald Limited trading as Cambridge Education. Registered in England and Wales no. 1243967. Registered office: Mott MacDonald House, 8-10 Sydenham Road, Croydon CR0 2EE, United Kingdom

Cambridge Education
22 Station Road
Cambridge CB1 2JD
United Kingdom
T +44 (0)1223 463500
camb-ed.com

United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
3 United Nations Plaza,
New York, NY 10017
USA
Ungei.org

Information class: Standard

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Contents

List of Acronyms.....	4
Context and overview of planning process.....	5
Thematic Findings.....	6
Political Economy.....	6
Political will.....	6
Accountability.....	6
Relationships.....	7
Power and decision-making.....	7
Networks and Coalitions.....	7
Voices.....	8
Gender expertise.....	8
Consultation with NGOs and CSOs.....	9
Voices of young people and communities.....	10
Society.....	10
Social Norms.....	10
Resistance.....	11
SWOT analysis.....	12
3.1 Strengths.....	12
3.2 Weaknesses.....	12
3.3 Opportunities.....	12
3.4 Threats.....	12
Stakeholder Analysis.....	13
Key informants list:.....	13
List of Documents Reviewed.....	14

List of Acronyms

AFCF	Association des femmes chefs de familles
ANCEFA	African Campaign Network for Education for All
CGI	Code General Des Impots
COMEDUC	Coalition des Organisations Mauritaniennes pour l'Education
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
ESP	Education Sector Plan
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GBV	Gender-based Violence
HCR	High Committee for Refugees
IIEP	Institute for International Educational Planning
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
LEG	Local Education Group
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PATB	Budgeted Education Sector Action Plan
PNDSE	Plan National de Développement de l'Education
RESEN	Rapport d'Etat sur le Systeme Educatif National/ Education Status Report
SWEDD	Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend
TFP	Technical and Financial Partner
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Context and overview of planning process

Although the last two decades have seen considerable progress on global commitments to address gender disparities in education, many challenges remain. Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are still furthest from equality in educational access and achievement, with factors such as poverty and location compounding with discriminatory gender norms to exclude girls from education (UNESCO 2022b). Through the [Gender at the Centre Initiative \(GCI\)](#), a program that encourages Ministries of Education to embed gender equality at the heart of education systems, a study was commissioned to examine how gender equality is integrated in education sector planning in 8 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger and Sierra Leone). The synthesis report identifies examples of good practice, opportunities and threats to promote gender transformative education systems. This country report presents the findings of the analysis for Mauritania.

The analysis is of the planning process for the three years budgeted education sector action plan (PATB 2019-2021) of Mauritania. It is the most recent education plan available (as confirmed by the Ministry of Education (MOE)). The development of the Plan took place in 2012, led by the Ministry of Education and supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). UNESCO also recruited an international consultant to do the evaluation of the previous PATB of 2016-18 and updated the *Plan National de Développement de l'Éducation*¹ (PNDSE) within the preparation of the PATB 2019-21. Multiple technical and financial partners (TFPs) also participated in the evaluation of the previous PATB and the elaboration of the new one.

Each department within the MOE was responsible for developing a part of the PATB and upon completion, the Planning and Strategy Department compiled it and prioritized actions based on available funding. The PATB extends previous actions planned in the PNDSE II and PATB 2016/18.

This analysis includes general views of the education stakeholders involved in the planning process around how gender was considered in education planning process and events. The analysis is based on 13 interviews.

¹ Mauritania ESP

Thematic Findings

Political Economy

Political will

The interviews showed that there is a political effort to include gender in policies and plans in the education sector which is an answer to external stakeholders' concerns.

Education planning exercises are structured within existing policy documents such as the Sectoral Policy Letter, the education sector plan (ESP), simulation model and the evaluation of previous action plans giving orientations on the education planning process. There is no specific Gender Education Policy although the Ministry's stakeholders ensure that there is a commitment to improve gender equity in education mentioned in the letter of the Sectoral Policy and the PNDSE II. The Ministry's request for benefiting from UNESCO IIEP's support for the Rapport d'Etat sur le Systeme Educatif National/Education Status Report (RESEN) currently taking place to prepare the next ESP clearly states the need of a gender sensitive analysis.

Both civil society organisations (CSOs) and TFPs are more reserved; gender is usually brought up by external stakeholders and the Ministry is less proactive on this issue. There is also no major study on gender completed recently and commissioned by the Ministry. Political structures do not seem to be driven by political leadership and will for change.

Accountability

Accountability for delivery of gender equality in education is missing by lack of clear reporting and tracking mechanism.

The government has committed to allocating a percentage of its budget to education. However, spending of this allocation might be different to what is set in the ESP or given to other priorities than the ones mentioned in the PATB. Delays in funding can also happen.

A sector review was conducted in March 2022 with a two-fold objective: (i) to take stock of past performance of the last three years (2019-2021) and (ii) to analyse the sector's performance and present an action plan for 2022. The general reporting of the review did not include gender issues. Working groups reviewed the Plan during one-day on specific themes, one of which was disparities and inequalities, gender, out-of-school children, disability, etc. The summary of the meeting of the Ministerial departments with the TFPs does not mention any particular discussions on gender.

No mechanisms seem in place to report on the work done by the Ministry on gender equity.

Relationships

Power and decision-making

Stakeholders' responses demonstrate that the planning spaces gave power to the planning direction to take the last decisions on the PATB which has been drafted individually by Ministry's cadres in each department, and therefore discouraging constructive dialogue and cross-coordination.

The PATB development process was not participatory as we understood from respondents that it is considered a low stakes document. The initial aim was to translate the PNDSE II in a budgeted action plan. Therefore, the PATB development process consisted of pursuing the activities started within the previous PATB of 2016-18 and to include those that had not been started. The low participation seen in the planning process was reflected by the difficulties faced in scheduling interviews for this analysis study; a significant number of persons contacted informed the researcher that they had not been involved in the process.

Departments of the Ministry of Education was responsible for developing the part of the PATB that concerned them. Negotiation was done at the planning direction level.

Findings highlight a lack of coordination between departments. No workshops were conducted involving all departments during the planning process, which is an issue for cross cutting themes/concerns. For example, as explained by the Secondary Education Department person, her department may need more teachers, but the department responsible for teacher training is within the Ministry of Higher Education. No avenue for the various departments to work together on the PATB was reported to ensure the needs of a department dependent on another are also taken into account.

The technical and financial partners consulted by the MOE shared their own project and funding plans. International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are represented within the local education group (LEG) – and therefore INGOs were consulted through this avenue.

Networks and Coalitions

In general, four main stakeholders promote gender in education: the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Bank (especially through the project Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD)), High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Union (EU) through their funding and advocacy especially when reviewing key education documents.

With regards to the PATB, funding by these agencies is a key source of their influence. The PATB was developed based on available funding, which limited the ambition of the PATB. Actions proposed by each department have also been cut due to a lack of funding by the Planning Department. There is also no clear percentage of gender linked activities or funding that should be conserved but the Planning Department is conscious of the objective of reaching education parity. Funding is coming from both the government and the TFPs.

No other major actor had an influence on the development of the PATB and supported the agenda for gender in education

Voices

Gender expertise

All stakeholders interviewed from the Ministry said there are no gender experts within the Ministry of Education, but officials have experience with gender even if they do not have specific training or diploma on gender. They are also following the priority given to gender in the letter for Sectoral Policy and the PNDSE II.

However, when looking at the PATB, gender is taken into account differently within the four main sectors highlighted in the PATB. Overall, the action plan promotes access to education for all children with a specific focus on sub-groups including girls. Overall, however, enrolment targets for school-going children are not desegregated by sex. Respondents interviewed also highlight gender equity (not equality) being an important objective for the secondary level but absent for other levels. Apart from the secondary level, no specific activities for girls or women are included in the detailed budgeted action plan. However, there are water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), school kits and school feeding activities which may benefit girls more than boys.

At the secondary level, specific activities are planned to promote girls' secondary schooling such as awareness-raising campaigns, award ceremony for girls, support for school transport, etc. These activities account for about 17% of the planned budget for education.

“Some people push gender more than others” - Ministry of Education Representative

The plan does not focus on main-streaming gender equity or equality in other key areas impacted by gender. For example, while specific efforts target the promotion and teaching of sciences, no specific activities are planned to encourage girls towards math and sciences, even if international evidence show that they are

usually not attracted by or oriented towards sciences. No steps have also been provided to lessen gender bias in this activity. Likewise, priority is given to the development of technical and professional training without any consideration for gender differences. When asked, respondents said that technical and professional training are for boys and girls are not interested in becoming a mechanic for example, without questioning the social norms behind having a limited offer for girls and their exclusion from those job-oriented training. It shows that gender expertise has not been engaged systematically and equally by all departments.

Many stakeholders agreed that the Gender Unit is not advancing gender equity in and through education, based on current resources available. The Unit only has one young person without any gender experience and no financial resources. The MOE has one technical advisor for gender, who is not a gender expert but has a long experience working to advocate for gender within the MoE. She is involved within the current RESEN development process. However, her actions are limited. Firstly, she has an advisory role and is not a decision-maker. Secondly, there are some gender topics which are difficult to discuss such as gender-based violence (GBV) (see below) and one person is not able to shift the conversation in this space.

Consultation with NGOs and CSOs

CSOs active in promoting gender equity were not consulted by the Ministry. CSOs in education are carefully selected by the Ministry to be part of consultation processes, which are limited.

The Ministry of Education does not involve NGOs and CSOs working in education in the planning process effectively or systematically. Respondents from NGOs and CSOs highlighted the absence of an official framework for any type of consultation, even though INGOS representatives are part of the LEG and have seen the PATB draft within this group. For the drafting of the RESEN, the gender technical advisor responsible for drafting the part on equity did not consult CSOs or NGOs. She said that she wrote that part based on the MOE statistical data and without consultation of key stakeholders on gender equity.

However, a respondent from the Ministry refuted this claim stating that national-level NGOs and unions are consulted. He said that usually one representative attends for many organisations of different types. He further added that the "civil society is not well-organized and therefore consultation with them is difficult".

Respondent from ANCEFA informed that a coalition of CSOs called Coalition des Organisations Mauritaniennes pour l'Education (COMEDUC) has been working in education for the past 10 years. The national RESEN team included participation from COMEDUC to represent CSOs. However, as the representative did not attend, the team does not include any CSO or NGO. COMEDUC has also been invited to participate in the LEG, but they are not known to promote gender equality.

Despite the lack of engagement seen in the planning process, it is important to highlight that CSOs active on girls and women rights including education also

exist. Discussions with both Ministry and CSO stakeholders show that they are not consulted or used as key resources for informing gender issues and solutions. For example, the CSO Association des femmes chefs de familles (AFCF) was not invited to the education planning process and further highlighted that in instances where CSOs are invited to government meetings, males are sent as representatives and they do not defend girls and women rights. Respondents further stated that the Ministry picks the CSOs which follow the direction of the Ministry to represent others CSOs and validate key documents.

Voices of young people and communities

The interviewees did not mention if communities and young people were involved during the planning process. Communities and young people voices are assumed to be brought to planning events through partners who worked closely with communities and are in the planning bodies such as UNICEF, but little evidence of this was available.

Society

Social Norms

The development of the PATB is about operationalisation but there are not many deep discussions on gender.

Interviewees stated that while, people are receptive to gender concerns, *“they do not have the reflex to register it”*. There is no active resistance except that *“sometimes people think that it is not necessary as girls’ data are close to boys’ data”*. Respondents noted that there is still a need to convince some people.

Gender equality issues within the Ministry are acknowledged especially at the secondary level. However, more sensitive issues linked to social norms and gender-based violence (GBV) are not given attention. Such issues can hardly be discussed within the Ministry.

“Violence exists more in rural areas and is nearly non-existent in urban areas as people have been sensitised. Violence against girls is rare in Mauritania” - Ministry of Education Representative

The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 years but early marriage is still common in Mauritania (with around 15% of girls married before 18). Female genital mutilation (FGM) is also common (66%).

Religious institutions are represented through the participation of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs within the education planning process.

Resistance

Although Ministry stakeholders said that there is no resistance to gender promotion; religious movements which are against mainstream education, ask for separation between girls and boys and early marriage exist and influence decision makers. To wit, since 2012, a bill on GBV has been discussed but has not been passed yet.

Some stakeholders note that exclusion of key voices, lack of consultation and ignoring key gender issues (such as GBV) are a form of resistance, perhaps better framed as silencing.

SWOT analysis

3.1 Strengths

The Ministry is currently developing a new ESP 2022-32. The integration of gender issues is being supported by GCI efforts.

The new (female) Director for higher education has been promoting aspects of gender equality and has integrated a new gender component into the Higher Education Strategy.

3.2 Weaknesses

Education is under the responsibilities of five Ministries. Leadership and coordination between these Ministries are a weakness and limit outcomes.

Nomination to positions in the Ministries is not always linked to competencies.

The Gender Unit is under-resourced and unable to play its role.

No consultation with CSOs and NGOs has been done in the planning process. Therefore, knowledge and experience accumulated by organizations working on gender equality are not benefiting to the Ministry.

3.3 Opportunities

The development of PNDSE III will start soon and it is an opportunity to integrate gender.

Having a specific study on gender to feed into the PNDSE III would be interesting. It can include collating all information known on gender by CSOs and INGOs, organizing a gender in education forum or recruiting a consultant to collate all knowledge acquired by a range of stakeholders.

RESEN is also currently in development. Ensuring that the equity chapter is strong and provides a deep analysis of gender issues in education would be interesting. UNICEF has offered to support a more specific study on non-formal education and out of school children.

3.4 Threats

The gender issues of the teacher's workforce are not well managed or mitigated. For example, teachers in Mauritania are majority female and urban and for various social and cultural reasons they are not willing or able to go to rural provinces.

CSOs are not involved in development work of RESEN. Additionally, CSOs working on gender equity can also not share their view and experience to feed a key document to the development of the PNDSE III.

Religious and traditional leaders resist to gender equity and influence decision-makers.

Stakeholder Analysis

In contrast to the other country studies the interviews in Mauritania had a broader scope of reference to general education planning events rather than a singular process, which made this exercise difficult to use with comparable results.

Key informants list:

Ministry	<p>Aly Soumare, Ministry of Education, Permanent Secretary</p> <p>Ahmed Ba, Planning and Strategy department</p> <p>Bette Cheickh, Planning and Strategy department</p> <p>Nagi Abdel Aziz, Planning and Strategy department</p> <p>Fatimetou, Gender Advisor</p> <p>El Betoul Ainina, Secondary Education department</p> <p>Mohamed El béchir, Monitoring and Evaluation Director, Education Programme department</p>
CSOs and NGOs	<p>Ely Aminettou, ACFC</p> <p>Solange Akpo, ANCEFA</p>
Technical partners	<p>Khadij Med Salem, UNICEF</p> <p>Alima Boukary Marcos, UNICEF</p> <p>Jihane Lamouri, UNESCO-IIEP</p>
Consultants	<p>Jean-Jacques Paul</p>

List of Documents Reviewed

1. PATB 2019-2021: Three years budgeted education sector action plan
2. Final report of the joint review 2019-2021
3. PNDSE II Update Note
4. Evaluation of the PATB 2016-18