

# HOW IS GENDER EQUALITY INCLUDED IN EDUCATION SECTOR PLANNING?

AN ANALYSIS OF  
POWER, VOICE  
AND SOCIAL NORM  
CHANGE IN EIGHT SUB-  
SAHARAN COUNTRIES

POLICY BRIEF

PRIORITÉ À L'ÉGALITÉ  
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# INTRODUCTION

Engaging with gender equality in and through education at a systems level has the potential to break the cycle of discrimination and poverty. Gender sensitive education interventions have been shown to have a significant impact on the educational outcomes of girls and other marginalized children, by helping girls to break out of generations of low educational attainment and limited social mobility for women. Yet for gender transformational changes, system and sector wide changes are needed to support effective interventions at scale and sustainably.

This study was conducted within the framework of the [Gender at the Centre Initiative](#) (GCI), a program that is co-led by UNGEI and UNESCO-IIEP. GCI applies a systems strengthening approach to promoting gender equality in and through education, working with MoEs, civil society and young feminist activists to holistically address gender inequality in education. GCI is built on UNGEI's GRESP approach, an approach to help MoEs mainstream gender equality in education sector planning.

To better understand how MoEs can embed gender equality in their education systems, we wanted to investigate where the bottlenecks lie, as well as identify good practices. UNGEI, with support from the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, commissioned Cambridge Education to undertake this study in the 8 GCI partner countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger and Sierra Leone) to identify examples of good practice, opportunities for change and to highlight where there are opportunities and threats to progress in achieving gender transformative education systems.

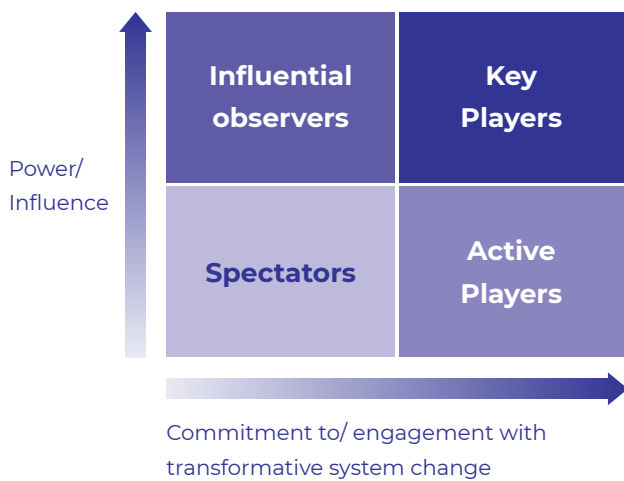
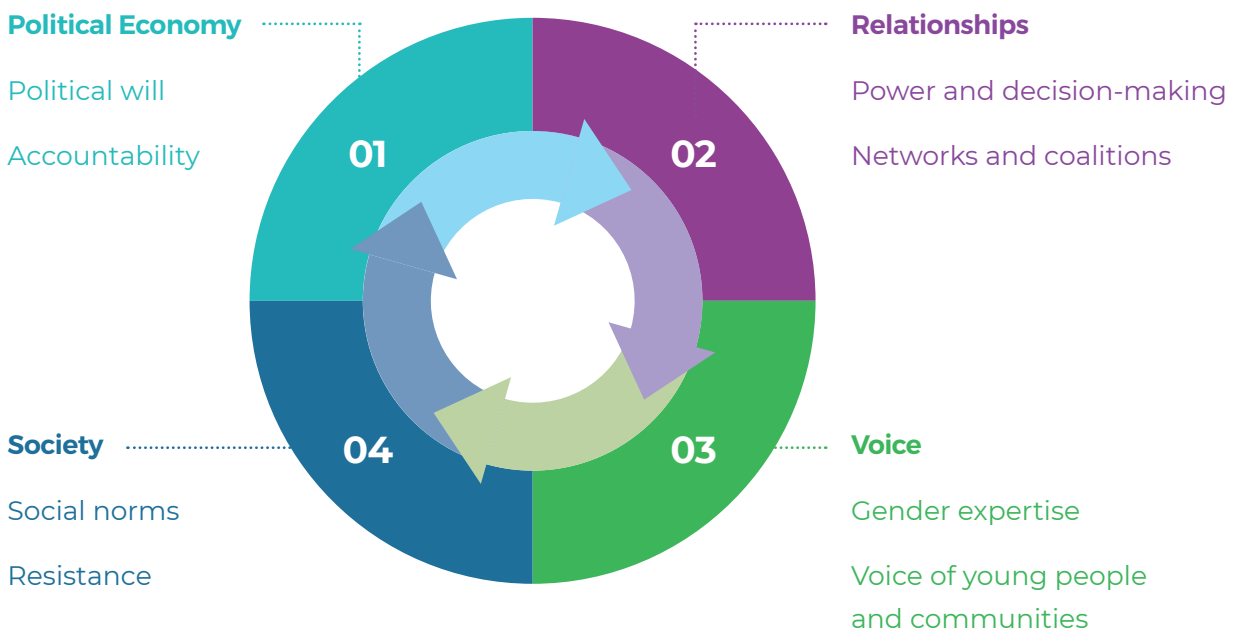
The study looks at the political economy of education sector planning, zooming in on issues of power and voice, and seeks to answer the following questions: Are education sector planning processes including gender transformative ambitions and intentions? Who within the MoE has the power to push this gender agenda? How are civil society and other gender experts engaged within education planning?

The study examines education sector planning processes in the 8 GCI countries. The analysis looked at the interactions between actors in planning processes and the content being discussed within planning. It also sought to determine the level of power or influence each actor had in the process.

# STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study data collection consisted of qualitative interviews with key informants in each of the countries.

The researchers developed an analytical framework that explored different dimensions of power and political economy to enable a deeper analysis of the planning process. Semi-structured interview questionnaires were developed to explore the four quadrants.



Further to the analysis of the process, researchers also explored the influence and interest of key participants in the planning process to determine who were the enablers and who were the blockers of the promotion of more gender transformational ambitions in the planning process.

# MAIN FINDINGS

The study found some promising practices, but overall, it showed that a lot remains to be done to ensure gender equality is effectively included in education sector planning.

**Political economy analysis** revealed that, despite the presence of national level policies on gender equality, these often fail to be translated into appropriate resources and technically sound implementation. Bottlenecks identified were funds not being released, or approvals not granted; stakeholders saw this as a failure of political will to deliver, with some actors putting their own political, financial, or social interests above gender equality goals.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM SIERRA LEONE

The culture created by the Radical inclusion policy in Sierra Leone is regularly quoted by activists, donors and CSOs as the bedrock for open discussions on inclusion. It allows ministry solutions to be debated in planning processes and for actors to offer suggestions on how to improve systems to be more proactive on gender and inclusion. The Minister of Education is a keen advocate for this policy and continues to keep these principles central to discussions about education.

**Accountability mechanisms for gender equality were inconsistent and unclear in most countries.** An innovative power sharing model of accountability was found in Nigeria's Katsina State where a broad coalition of women's rights and education actors works closely with the Ministry of Education to monitor the gender-responsive implementation of the education sector plan and budgets. Burkina Faso also hosts a National Council for Gender Promotion which holds each ministry to account on their progress on gender equality as established by the national gender strategy 2020-24.

When it comes to including the **voice of civil society gender experts in education sector planning**, some GCI countries have shown promising examples of effectively inviting gender expertise at the table. However, in most cases civil society gender experts and young activists were not engaged in education sector planning, or their inputs were not taken into account in the final versions of the education sector plan. **A recommendation is to design transparent planning processes where wide and meaningful gender consultation is included right from the start.**

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM MALI

The voice of the communities was considered in the PRODEC II planning process, through the participation of School Management Committees/ Comités de Gestion Scolaire (CGS), students-parents associations/ Associations des Parents d'Elèves (APE) and educational advisors at the level of the town hall in the decentralized workshops. Students and young people were involved at the end of the process through their unions who were invited to the PRODEC II presentation workshop. In addition, some preparatory studies for PRODEC II, in particular the gender study, held consultations with representatives of local authorities, school principals and girls.

**Relationships** between different groups were critical to augment influence. Where well-coordinated CSO networks with a commitment to gender equality were present, they managed to gain influence in the planning processes. There were several examples that showed when CSO networks coordinated with a clear message, they were able to exert significant influence to include more gender transformative elements in education planning documents. A successful education coalition in Mozambique influenced the education sector plan through a joint advocacy paper on the importance of recognising the role of child marriage and initiation rites as barriers to education.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM NIGERIA

Coalitions in Katsina State are reported to work well, consulting their membership regularly. They are seen as particularly successful as many of the CSO members are former civil servants, meaning they have an established understanding and trust with gender experts in government, making effective cross network relationships. They are often referred to as the 'third eye,' indicating their role in holding the government to account. The good working relations between CSOs and ministry gender experts can be seen to have made visible progress on gender issues within planning.

In most GCI Ministries of Education, gender expertise positions are held by women in junior roles. Some key informants said that these experts struggle to have their voices heard in highly hierarchical, patriarchal government structures. **A recommendation is to include gender expertise at senior levels, as well as adequate numbers of gender specific posts that are given a remit to engage with all areas of education planning.**

The importance of **society** was also often not consistently considered in planning. For example, the mitigation of discriminatory gender norms was found to not be sufficiently taken into account in education sector planning. One exception is Niger where religious leaders are actively engaged to promote girls' education and address harmful practices like child marriage. **Other countries can take an example from Niger to engage traditional and religious leaders throughout the education planning cycle, both to make best use of their role as norm holders and also to potentially pre-empt any resistance from them.**

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE FROM NIGER

In Niger, Qu'ranic theologians from major religious institutions have brought about real change in recent years by actively supporting girls' education through their teachings at the mosque. Due to low literacy rates in Niger, religious leaders play a significant role in informing and influencing community engagement with new ideas. However, there are limits to this support for gender equality; topics such as ending child marriage and promoting sexual and reproductive health still do not have widespread support.

Other findings are summarized below against the four quadrants of the analytical framework:

### Political Economy

**Political will:** Good policies not translated into practice due to lack of political will - Often masked as a lack of resources and expertise; Leaders need to encourage open debate for gender inclusive solutions to find support

**Accountability:** Bottom-up accountability missing resulting in loss of buy-in and commitment to gender equality.

### Society

**Social norms:** Willingness to discuss the important impact of harmful social norms on gender equality in and through education was rare.

**Resistance:** Resistance took many forms, including deliberate misunderstanding of the issues, dismissal of experts, and stalling tactics.

### Relationships

**Power and decision-making:** Planning directorships have the power to include or exclude different voices; tightly controlled and invited spaces for consultations were the norm.

**Networks and coalitions:** Collective power through networks and coalitions were the norm.

### Voice

**Gender expertise:** Gender expertise in Ministries of Education was often disempowered; while external experts were excluded.

**Voice of young people and communities:** Few opportunities for young people's voices to be heard were found.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that, except for some promising practices, a lot remains to be done to ensure gender equality is effectively mainstreamed in education sector planning. Most GCI countries have high-level policies on gender equality in education, but they are often not backed up by tangible resources and expertise to translate policies into practice. Further, these gender aware policies are rarely accompanied by coherent and bottom-up accountability systems to ensure they are acted upon.

Good practices were found on how MoEs engage civil society gender expertise and evidence in education sector planning (for example in Niger, Sierra Leone and Nigeria), but more efforts are needed to make power sharing a consistent practice in all 8 GCI countries.

There is strong potential of collective power in the strong eco-systems of civil society networks that exist in the majority of the GCI countries. These networks can offset the fact that many gender experts within MoEs are often disempowered women in junior positions; these experts often need to fight hard to have their voices heard in a patriarchal government structure. As such, MoEs need to put gender experts at senior decision-making positions.

Social norms influence education sector planning from within the system and from outside. The beliefs and perceptions held by MoE officials create resistance to mainstreaming gender equality in the education system. Additionally, social norm change is not integrated effectively in education sector planning despite the impact discriminatory social norms have on gender equality in and through education. Key norm holders (religious and traditional leaders) are often not engaged in planning dialogues adequately or in such a way as to manage their resistance.

**As such the main recommendations for more gender transformative education sector planning processes are:**

- 1.** Within the Ministry of Education include **gender expertise at senior levels**, as well as adequate numbers of gender specific posts that are given a remit to engage with all areas of education planning.
- 2.** Ground education sector planning in **education sector gender analyses** and other robust evidence. The GCI [Gender Equality Snapshot Tool \(GES\)](#) is a good starting point for assessing gender equality in and through education.
- 3.** Organize **gender equality training** across ministries to engage leadership and planning staff on how their roles can contribute to challenging gender inequalities in bureaucratic cultures and in planning processes.
- 4.** Design transparent planning processes that ensure meaningful engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including **civil society gender experts, grassroots voices and young activists**. Support planning directorates to create open and deliberative spaces where power can be challenged, and innovative solutions can be explored.
- 5.** **Support and fund civil society coalitions** to convene specific gender and education working groups, within existing LEG structures or independently, to create a collective voice to advocate for impactful inclusion of gender equality throughout sector planning and implementation.
- 6.** Commission and collate good quality, nationally specific **research on gender and social norms** and the role they play in education, to understand where and how key opportunities to shift norms can be included in education planning.
- 7.** Engage context specific norm holders such as **traditional and religious leaders** in ongoing dialogue and in education planning specifically to explore ways to transform social norms at a system level.



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[Gender at the Centre Initiative](#)