Improving Gender Equity in Education

Will Millard with Alex Rossiter, Abi Angus and Joe Hallgarten

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

Contents

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

1   Introduction

Across the globe, education offers young people better health, higher earnings and greater control over their lives. Gender equity in education has broad positive impacts on families, communities and societies, contributing to economic growth, labour productivity and social mobility.[1] What is good for gender equity in education is good for societies and economies as a whole.

However, despite significant progress in recent years, girls remain much more likely to be excluded from education than boys in many parts of the world, particularly in poorer countries.[2] These inequities in participation are reflected in outcomes; 21 out of 25 countries where there is more than a 5 per cent gap between girls and boys in completion rates at primary level are low-income and lower-middle-income countries.[3]

Evidence indicates that girls and women are disproportionately and negatively affected by pandemics.[4] During the COVID-19 pandemic girls who were unable to access education during the pandemic are less likely to return to education than boys.[5] It is vital to consider not only gender equity among children in education but also among educators, since women appear to have been more vulnerable to job loss than men during the pandemic.[6]

This report provides information relating to the promotion of gender equity in education. It addresses two research questions:

1. What practices are effective in promoting gender equity for children in education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries?
2. What practices are effective in promoting gender equity for teachers and education officials, particularly in low- and middle-income countries?

[1] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944.
<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>
[2] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2019). 'New methodology shows that 258 million children, adolescents and youth are out of school', UIS Fact Sheet No. 56.
<http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/new-methodology-shows-258-million-children-adolescents-and-youth-are-out-school.pdf>
[3] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944.
<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>
[4] Hallgarten, J. (2020). 'Evidence on efforts to mitigate the negative educational impact of past disease outbreaks', *Helpdesk Report: Knowledge, evidence and learning for development*.
https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15202/793_mitigating_education_effects_of_disease_outbreaks.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y
[5] Malala Fund. (2020). *Girls' Education and COVID-19: What Past Shocks Can Teach Us about Mitigating the Impact of Pandemics*, Malala Fund: Washington, DC.
<https://downloads.ctfassets.net/0oan5gk9rgbh/6TMYLYAcUpjhQpXLDgmdIa/3e1c12d8d827985ef2b4e815a3a6da1f/COVID19_GirlsEducation_corrected_071420.pdf>
[6] Madgavkar, A., White, O., Krishnan, M., Mahajan, D. and Azcue, X. (2020). *COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects*, McKinsey & Company: New York.
<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

2   Recommendations

Principles for programme design

1. **Blend targeted with universal interventions** to achieve a balance between initiatives that target girls and women specifically, versus more general interventions that seek to support all pupils, school leaders and officials. The right balance may vary depending on local context.

2. **Address multiple disadvantages**, acknowledging that gender is one of many factors that contributes to educational and professional inequalities. In different contexts, factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and geography also exert a powerful influence on gender outcomes.

3. **Use multi-stranded interventions that support longevity**. Sometimes initiatives can be a 'flash in the pan'. Programmes targeting gender equity should consider how to achieve the right balance between short-term, fast improvements in gender equity, and longer-term, sustainable changes.

Working with partners and building networks

4. **Adapt practices to gender-specific and cultural contexts.** Gender norms and expectations look and feel very different in different localities, and organisations targeting gender equity must ensure programmes are sensitive to these differences.

Developing the evidence base

5. **Contribute to building the evidence base**. Organisations targeting gender equity have an important opportunity to build understanding of what interventions support improved gender equity in the contexts in which they operate.

6. **Explore how education interacts with other policy areas to address the wider determinants of gender equity**. Organisations targeting gender equity should evaluate how their programmes interact with other activities underway in their localities, to understand how they can add most value alongside other public policy initiatives for example in health.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

3   Methods

This rapid review provides information relating to the promotion of gender equity in education. It addresses two research questions:

1. What practices are effective in promoting gender equity for children in education, particularly in low- and middle-income countries?
2. What practices are effective in promoting gender equity for teachers and education officials, particularly in low- and middle-income countries?

This review is the result of a rapid search for evidence, with priority given to evidence:

- published within the past 10 years;
- addressing interventions and practices in low- and middle-income countries;
- exploring gender equity as an output;
- specific to education, including teaching, teacher training and education policy, but excluding other policy areas such as health and employment.

The evidence selected for synthesis included:

- systematic reviews;
- meta-analyses;
- experimental (including randomised controlled trials), quasi-experimental and non-experimental studies;
- grey literature;
- qualitative studies.

3.1   Definitions

This review addresses gender equity in education in low- and middle-income countries. When considering gender equity for *children*, it uses a simple definition based on the common approaches of the evidence included in this review. Gender equity promoting practices support both 'learning and access',[7] with most evidence included in this review referring to practices that seek to improve school enrolment and enhance educational attainment for girls.[8]

When considering gender equity for *teachers and education professionals*, a slightly broader definition is necessary. This report borrows from the definition of gender equality from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which focuses on the equal enjoyment of rights, responsibilities and opportunities among education professionals, regardless of their gender.[9]

---

[7] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>

[8] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

[9] UNHCR. (2020). *UNHCR Gender Equality Toolkit*, UNHCR: Geneva. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/publications/manuals/5e5cd64a7/unhcr-gender-equality-toolkit.html>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

3.2   Limitations

The evidence in this review about programmes that are effective in promoting gender equity was generated in specific cultural and educational contexts. The extent to which programmes can be transferred to and applied in different contexts is not clear, and is not a subject of this review.

This review largely relies on evidence that is framed within the gender equity context – programmes that explicitly seek to promote gender equity. As a result, interventions that have positive gender-related outcomes but which may not have been evaluated against metrics associated with gender equity are likely to be excluded. This is especially true where evaluations do not report gender impacts in a disaggregated way. Similarly, this review only includes interventions and programmes that have been subject to evaluation; interventions that may be effective in practice but which have not been evaluated are not included.

Few of the papers included in this review are based on longitudinal evidence. The lack of long-term evidence-gathering means that conclusions are limited in their reliability, validity, scope and longevity, and may not provide insight about broader impacts, for example on economic inclusion. Though the definitions of gender equity used in this report are drawn from the body of literature, they may be too narrow to capture all the effects of the interventions and programmes. For example, evidence suggests that more days of schooling are lost at the primary level to enrolled children not attending class, rather than low enrolment itself;[10] evaluations that focus on enrolment as a measure of gender equity may not capture this issue.

While many of the studies included in this review show how interventions can improve girls' access to and outcomes in education, these interventions are often applied in settings where girls' outcomes and participation are worse to begin with. In fact, this is often why they are applied in the first place, as the promotion of gender equity often occurs in contexts of existing inequity. These existing inequities may reflect wider societal disadvantages facing women, which are unlikely to be addressed solely through interventions targeting education.

The majority of papers focus on promoting gender equity for children in education, with fewer addressing gender equity among teachers or education professionals. Furthermore, many of the papers that do address the latter issue focus on developed economies, such as gender discrepancies within school leadership in the United States.[11] This is symptomatic of a wider problem, in that there is little empirical research about the work of school leaders in developing nations, and the work that is available tends to focus on middle-income countries rather than the lowest-income countries.[12]

---

[10] Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. (2017). 'Roll call: getting children into school', *J-PAL Policy Bulletin*. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/roll-call-getting-children-into-school.pdf>

[11] Robinson, K., Shakeshaft, C., Grogan, M. and Newcomb, W.S. (2017). 'Necessary but not sufficient: the continuing inequality between men and women in educational leadership: findings from the American Association of School Administrators Mid-Decade Survey', *Frontiers in Education*, 2(12). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00012>

[12] Cordeiro, P. and Brion, C. (2018). 'Women school leaders: entrepreneurs in low fee private schools in three West African nations', *Frontiers in Education*, 2(67). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00067>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

4 Findings

We have grouped effective practices into four broad categories. Each category contains real-life examples, though it should be noted that variations between different contexts have a considerable impact on their effectiveness. The available evidence suggests that each type of intervention included here can have a positive impact on promoting gender equity in education, though it is likely that these effects will be largest when they are brought together in multicomponent approaches, and when they are adapted to the specific contexts in which they occur.[13]

4.1 Reducing costs

'The costs of education are immediate and easy to observe. As a result, even small changes in costs can have important impacts on participation.'[14]

Many of the most effective practices for improving access to education involve removing barriers to participation. Perhaps the most tangible of these barriers are monetary costs, such as school or report-card fees and uniform payments. For example, the elimination of primary school fees in Uganda was followed by an increase in enrolment of over 60 per cent.[15] Evidence suggests that girls' access to school is more responsive to changes in these types of costs[16] and cost reduction may therefore have a positive impact on gender equity.

A recent systematic review of 275 interventions to promote gender equity in education found that seven out of the ten most effective interventions sought to increase access to education by reducing costs, whether by cash transfer or subsidy. The majority of these interventions were conditional cash transfers targeted at specific households, rather than through the school itself. These interventions sought to – and often succeeded in – getting out-of-school children to participate in education. These findings led the researchers to conclude that reducing the cost of schooling, including through cash transfers, 'is likely the single most effective way to bring girls into school'.[17]

While interventions such as cash transfers have consistently been shown to have positive impacts on school attendance, they can be expensive and appear to be most effective in areas where participation is low overall. And there are other ways to reduce the direct costs of schooling, which could narrow gender gaps while also supporting children from the poorest households, such as direct provision of materials or

---

[13] Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J. and Saito, M. (2014). *Interventions to Enhance Girls' Education and Gender Equality: Education Rigorous Literature Review*, Department for International Development: London, UK. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326205/Girls__Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf>

[14] Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. (2017). 'Roll call: getting children into school', *J-PAL Policy Bulletin*. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/roll-call-getting-children-into-school.pdf>

[15] World Bank. (2018). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>

[16] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>

[17] Ibid.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

uniforms.[18] Likewise, reducing the indirect costs of school also holds potential. One example of this is investment in transport to school, such as a programme in India which provided bicycles to adolescent girls.[19] Similarly, school leaders interviewed for research into gender equity among education professionals spoke about the difficulties of gaining transport to university campuses, often hours away from their schools,[20] and consequently reducing such barriers could improve girls' access.

Lastly, it should be noted that efforts to reduce costs can have positive impacts on participation, defined variously as increased enrolment and/or reduced dropout rates, but few evaluations report any effect on learning or other wider features of gender equity. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that merit-based scholarships or targeted prizes can act as an incentive to improve both attendance and student effort.[21]

4.2   Increasing the supply of education

Efforts to improve access to schools and school infrastructure have been grouped together here under the category of supply of education. These interventions include school construction, community schools and remote learning, and appear to have positive impacts on both participation and learning.[22] A multicomponent school construction programme in Burkina Faso in West Africa, which built schools in rural villages, increased enrolment by 19 percentage points – more steeply among girls than among boys – and increased test scores for all new attendees.[23] This may be because girls lived closer to the schools and their travel times were reduced and safety improved.

However, school construction is expensive and the provision of community schools, hosted in existing community buildings or houses, may be more cost-effective.[24] For example, a study of schools in 31 villages in rural northwestern Afghanistan found that

[18] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

[19] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[20] Cordeiro, P. and Brion, C. (2018). 'Women school leaders: entrepreneurs in low fee private schools in three West African nations', *Frontiers in Education*, 2(67). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00067>

[21] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[22] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

[23] Kazianga, H., Levy, D., Linden, L.L. and Sloan, M. (2013). 'The effects of "girl-friendly" schools: evidence from the BRIGHT School Construction Program in Burkina Faso', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(3), 41–62. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.5.3.41>

[24] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

they significantly increased enrolment and attainment, and that these effects were stronger for girls, effectively erasing the pre-existing gender gap in enrolment.[25]

Again, these effects are contingent upon specific applications and contexts. Efforts to supply schooling locally are most effective when existing schools are far away and in areas where safety when travelling is an issue.[26] Community schools in Rajasthan, India, where teachers were selected and supervised by the community and which hired part-time workers to escort girls from specific underserved groups to school, saw higher attendance and test scores compared with the public school average.[27]

4.3   Improving pedagogy and leadership

'The most effective interventions change how teachers teach.'[28]

As was outlined in section 1.1, girls face inequitable learning outcomes on average in low- and middle-income contexts. Consequently, learning itself – and not just access to it – is an important element of achieving gender equity in education. Evidence shows the importance of having effective teachers. They must be appropriately and effectively supported through training, guided reflection on gender norms and attitudes, and continuing professional development.[29] The most effective pedagogical interventions in relation to gender equity appear to be multicomponent – a 'quality mix' that explicitly promotes gender equity through a combination of: teaching, learning and management; the curriculum; and learning resources. All of these will need to take into account the local context, including cultural norms.[30]

The components that make up this quality mix that are specific to pedagogy and leadership include: training around gender and norms for teachers;[31] classroom

---

[25] Burde, D. and Linden, L. (2013). 'Bringing education to Afghan girls: a randomized controlled trial of village-based schools', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(3), 27–40. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.5.3.27>

[26] Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J. and Saito, M. (2014). *Interventions to Enhance Girls' Education and Gender Equality: Education Rigorous Literature Review*, Department for International Development: London, UK. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326205/Girls__Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf>; Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. (2017). 'Roll call: getting children into school', *J-PAL Policy Bulletin*. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/roll-call-getting-children-into-school.pdf>

[27] Lockheed, M. (2008). 'The double disadvantage of gender and social exclusion in education' in Tembon, M. and Fort, L. (eds) *Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth*, World Bank: Washington, DC.

[28] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[29] Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J. and Saito, M. (2014). *Interventions to Enhance Girls' Education and Gender Equality: Education Rigorous Literature Review*, Department for International Development: London, UK. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326205/Girls__Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf>

[30] Ibid.

[31] Murphy-Graham, E. and Lloyd, C. (2016). 'Empowering adolescent girls in developing countries: the potential role of education', *Policy Futures in Education*, 14(5), 556–577. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1478210315610257>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

strategies that encourage group learning;[32] and the provision of opportunities to learn outside the classroom. One study assessed a combination of these types of interventions in Nigeria and Tanzania, including the establishment of girls' clubs and training teachers in collaborative learning methods. It found some improvements in enrolment and an effect on girls' 'empowerment', a measure that included the likelihood of challenging discrimination and gender-based violence.[33]

Successful practices associated with changing pedagogy may also impact on gender equality outcomes more broadly, especially if content integrates ideas about power and rights.[34] Step-by-step lesson guides are among the most well-evidenced interventions to improve learning outcomes, though they are most effective in areas where current teaching focuses on rote learning and where practitioner subject knowledge is low.[35] A randomised controlled trial across nearly 170 rural villages in The Gambia, for example, found that scripted lesson plans, after-school classes and regular teacher coaching drastically improved learning outcomes.[36] Similar practices have been evidenced as effective in several sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya, Liberia and South Africa.[37] More structured lessons can also allow teachers more time for socioemotional support and personalised learning,[38] with possible knock-on effects in terms of gender equity. Though many of these studies do not disaggregate findings by gender, there is some evidence that this type of structured teaching can have a positive impact on gender equity. A review of 270 interventions to promote gender equity in education found that several of the top interventions in terms of effect sizes involved either structured pedagogy and teaching guidance or scripted lesson plans.[39] One of these interventions is the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus programme in Liberia, which focused on improving reading instruction in primary schools. An evaluation found

[32] Hossain, A. and Tarmizi, R. (2012). 'Gender-related effects of group learning on mathematics achievement among the rural secondary students', *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 12(47), 1–22. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1057355.pdf>

[33] Unterhalter, E. and Heslop, J. (2012) *Transforming Education for Girls in Nigeria and Tanzania: Cross Country Analysis of Endline Research Studies*, Institute of Education, UCL: London. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/111068235.pdf>

[34] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

[35] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[36] Eble, A. *et al*. (2020). 'How much can we remedy very low learning levels in rural parts of low-income countries? Impact and generalizability of a multi-pronged para-teacher intervention from a cluster-randomized trial in the Gambia', *Journal of Development Economics*, 148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2020.102539>

[37] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>

[38] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[39] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

that the programme had a slightly larger impact on girls than on boys, though this was partially because girls started at a lower baseline.[40]

Alongside structured pedagogical improvements, classroom interventions that help teachers to adapt pedagogy to their classes' prior attainment and soft skill development (such as children's ability to communicate) appear to be effective for promoting gender equity, such as those that use diagnostic feedback[41] or competency groupings.[42] For example, several studies have found that implementing mother-tongue learning instruction has a disproportionately positive impact on girls' learning compared with that of boys.[43] However, there is some evidence to suggest that the introduction of new pedagogical methods via short teacher training programmes is less likely to be effective in leading to longer-term changes in teaching approaches.[44]

A recent evidence review found that the vast majority of effective pedagogical interventions supporting gender equity focused on reading and maths skills at the primary level.[45] The authors of the review noted, however, that as girls become older, interventions to promote gender equity through pedagogy place increasing emphasis on building life skills and increasing earnings capacity directly through training.[46] They caution that interventions targeting older girls may therefore – and inadvertently – stymie equitable outcomes, if they come at the expense of developing literacy and numeracy.

Improving pedagogy may also be a crucial route to promoting gender equity among teachers and education professionals. Evidence from a survey of the Ghana Education Service found that more men than women were teaching in the service, and more men were in leadership positions. The study suggested that this was partially due to men having better professional and academic qualifications than their female counterparts, 'compounded by the cultural and traditional milieu … that relegates women into

---

40 Piper, B. and Korda Poole, M. (2010). *Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Plus: Liberia. Program Evaluation Report*, RTI International: North Carolina. <https://www.rti.org/publication/early-grade-reading-assessment-egra-plus/fulltext.pdf>

41 Banerjee, A., Banerji, R., Berry, J., Duflo, E., Kannan, H., Mukherji, S., Shotland, M. and Walton, M. (2016). 'Mainstreaming an effective intervention: evidence from randomized evaluations of "teaching at the right level" in India', National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 22746. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w22746>

42 Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>; Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

43 See, for example: Piper, B., Zuilkowskil, S. and Ong'ele, S. (2016). 'Implementing mother tongue instruction in the real world: results from a medium-scale randomized controlled trial in Kenya', *Comparative Education Review*, 60(4). <https://doi.org/10.1086/688493>

44 See, for example, Berlinski, S. and Busso, M. (2017). 'Challenges in educational reform: an experiment on active learning in mathematics', *Economics Letters*, 156, 172–175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2017.05.007>

45 Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944. <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>

46 See, for example, Bandiera, O., Buehren, N., Burgess, R., Goldstein, M., Gulesci, S., Rasul, I. and Sulaiman, M. (2020). 'Women's empowerment in action: evidence from a randomized control trial in Africa', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 12(1), 210–259. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20170416>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

subservient positions'.[47] Improving pedagogy via a gender-responsive or -sensitive curriculum, which consciously addresses gender stereotypes – for example in representations of jobs done by different genders in textbooks – was suggested as part of the possible response to these issues.

There is some evidence to suggest that efforts to address gender norms via teacher training can support teachers to be positive role models in the classroom. Interventions in this vein often seek to address a range of issues, from girls feeling uncomfortable speaking up in a dominantly 'male' environment, through to overtly gender-biased teaching methods such as avoiding asking girls to answer questions in class due to preconceptions about their level of knowledge or ability to contribute constructively. A review of interventions targeting gender norms through the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Fund found that the introduction of mentors, role models and one-to-one support helped to build girls' self-esteem and confidence, with impacts on their attendance and outcomes.[48] An intervention in Malawi, for example, focused on training and support for female teachers (called 'agents of change' in the programme), particularly in interactive and participatory methods. These teachers then organised weekly girls' clubs, with activities including role-playing games to address real-life situations as well as literacy and numeracy exercises. An evaluation found that girls' self-esteem and confidence grew during the programme, though these improvements did not carry over to co-educational environments.

The review also notes that it is not only teachers who can provide positive role models for gender equity; peers can also be mentors.[49] Initiatives like BRAC in Afghanistan have reported positive results from supporting girls to mentor their peers, such as by supporting each other academically and encouraging each other to contribute in classes. The programme saw literacy and numeracy improvements among its mentees. Overall, the GEC evaluations suggest that gender norms can be slow to change, and efforts such as training teachers and peers to be role models require constant reinforcement, supported by systemic changes in teacher training, infrastructure and teaching materials.

Networks of peer support can play an important role in promoting gender equity among education leaders, too. A 2018 study exploring the diverse experiences of female school leaders in three West African nations interviewed women who spoke about the vital role that close family or community members' support played. They also spoke of the importance of networks of support between schools, and how these measures helped them to develop their leadership and pedagogy. These features were particularly important due to some of the common barriers these female school leaders faced, such as gender norms associated with women's roles in the home and workplace.[50] Notably, the theoretical elements of this study relied on wider literature from studies of women in business due to the dearth of research on gender equity in school leadership.

[47] Segkulu, L. and Gyimah, K. (2016) 'Women in educational leadership within the Tamale metropolis', *Journal of Education and Practice,* 7(19). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1109248.pdf>
[48] Amili, S. and Di Paolo, I. (2019). *Learning about Norm Change in Girls' Education in Low- and Middle-Income Contexts: Lessons from the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) Fund*, Overseas Development Institute: London. <https://www.alignplatform.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/gec_policy_feb_2019_es.pdf>
[49] Ibid.
[50] Cordeiro, P. and Brion, C. (2018). 'Women school leaders: entrepreneurs in low fee private schools in three West African nations', *Frontiers in Education*, 2(67). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00067>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

4.4   Public information and communication campaigns

Short-term improvements in the quality of education are not necessarily associated with improved participation.[51] Improving public information and campaigns addressing misperceptions about education, or making education's benefits more apparent to both students and their communities, can increase girls' participation in schooling. For example, where the costs of education are overestimated, programmes to promote merit-based scholarships, including those specifically targeted at girls, can be effective in promoting participation.[52] Where the benefits of education are underestimated, effective practices include presenting examples of employment returns from education.[53] Communication between teachers and parents or carers appears to have positive impacts on learning outcomes. Monthly parent–teacher meetings in Bangladesh improved learning outcomes for both girls and boys.[54]

Efforts to make the benefits of education appear more achievable and salient may be effective even where misperceptions do not exist. Evidence suggests an array of education promotion programmes can be effective. These include a Chilean initiative to share information about higher education, including the financial aid available,[55] and recruiters in India holding information sessions for women during which they learned about compensation levels, necessary qualifications and application processes for a specific local industry.[56]

There is some evidence that public information sharing examples of female role models and mentors can have a positive impact on gender equity. Exposure to female leaders, for example, improves perceptions of female leadership and challenges stereotypes about appropriate roles and norms.[57] An experimental study conducted in India found that awareness of local female role models was associated with better attainment among girls, and changed families' views on the likely labour market return on education.[58] Though the female leaders involved in this study were reported to have 'relatively limited' ability to change the situation for women and girls locally, the research suggests they influenced aspirations nevertheless. 'It is their presence as positive role models for the younger generation that seems to underlie observed

[51] Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. (2017). 'Roll call: getting children into school', *J-PAL Policy Bulletin*. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/roll-call-getting-children-into-school.pdf>

[52] Ibid.

[53] Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J. and Saito, M. (2014). *Interventions to Enhance Girls' Education and Gender Equality: Education Rigorous Literature Review*, Department for International Development: London, UK. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326205/Girls__Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf>

[54] Islam, A. (2016). 'Parent-teacher meetings and student outcomes: evidence from field experiments in remote communities', International Growth Centre, Working Paper F-31022-BGD-1. <https://www.theigc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Islam-2016-working-paper.pdf>

[55] Dinkelman, T. and Martínez, C. (2014) 'Investing in schooling in Chile: the role of information about financial aid for higher education investing in schooling in Chile', *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 96(2), 244–257. <https://doi.org/10.1162/REST_a_00384>

[56] Jensen, R. (2012). 'Do labor market opportunities affect young women's work and family decisions? Experimental evidence from India', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 127(2), 753–792. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjs002>

[57] Sperling, G. and Winthrop, R. (2016). *What Works in Girls' Education: Evidence for the World's Best Investment*, Brookings Institution: Washington, DC. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/What-Works-in-Girls-Educationlowres.pdf>

[58] Beaman, L., Duflo, E., Pande, R. and Topalova, P. (2012). 'Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: a policy experiment in India', *Science*, 335(6068), 582–586. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1212382>

changes in aspirations and educational outcomes of adolescent girls.'[59] The researchers also suppose that the fact that the women were able to counter any backlash to their appointment by demonstrating capable leadership also contributed to the educational and time-use impacts observed.

An intervention that brought many of the above components together in a broad 'quality mix' is the BRIGHT School Construction Programme in Burkina Faso in West Africa.[60] The programme sought to create 'girl-friendly' schools through a combined approach. This included infrastructural development, such as ensuring that each school had separate latrines for boys and girls, on-site housing for at least three teachers and a bore hole to provide a source of clean water. Free school meals were provided each day to all students, and girls were also eligible for take-home rations, conditional on having a monthly attendance of over 90 per cent. All students were provided with textbooks. The programme included interventions to create wider institutional change. Parents were targeted with an information campaign on the potential benefits of education, particularly girls' education. A literacy training programme was provided for mothers. The programme also sought to place more female teachers in its schools, and all teachers and education officials received gender-sensitivity training. The BRIGHT programme increased enrolment and test scores, particularly among girls. Moreover, a study conducted over 10 years after the programme began found that these effects were lasting, with children in BRIGHT schools attending more often, achieving higher test scores and having higher completion rates at primary and secondary level.[61]

---

[59] Ibid.
[60] Kazianga, H., Levy, D., Linden, L.L. and Sloan, M. (2013). 'The effects of "girl-friendly" schools: evidence from the BRIGHT School Construction Program in Burkina Faso', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(3), 41–62. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.5.3.41>
[61] Ingwersen, N. (2019). 'The long-term impacts of girl-friendly schools: evidence from the BRIGHT School Construction Program in Burkina Faso', National Bureau for Economic Research, Working Paper No. 25994. <https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w25994/w25994.pdf>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

5 Implications for organisations and interventions promoting gender equity

5.1 Blend targeted with universal interventions

There is some debate as to whether practices to promote gender equity should specifically target underrepresented or underserved groups, or whether these groups are best served by general interventions that improve the overall quality of education. A 2019 evidence review argued that general interventions have similar impacts for boys and girls, and pointed to several examples of interventions that disproportionately benefited girls despite not targeting them specifically. The researchers suggest that focusing only on girl-targeted interventions may overlook 'some of the best investments for improving educational opportunities for girls in absolute terms' and conclude that more general interventions provide a 'broader menu' of options to choose from.[62]

Others argue that the available evidence suggests that a combination of girl-targeted and general interventions is needed,[63] particularly when one gender is at a specific and strong disadvantage, for example in participation.[64] Rose and Yorke, for example, suggest it is particularly important to consider girl-targeted interventions to address specific disadvantages experienced by girls, such as school-based gender-based violence. Thus, though they provide no heuristic for when to apply a general versus a targeted intervention, the researchers suggest the latter is more appropriate when tackling challenges that are 'structurally different' for girls, especially among communities that are marginalised or underserved. This is reflective of their wider point that measuring gender equity should move beyond simply considering outcomes and access – the impact of girl-targeted interventions in particular may be clearer when considering a wider range of factors.[65]

3.1.1 Camfed Tanzania

One example of this blended or multidimensional approach is Camfed's education programme in Tanzania.[66] The programme sought to improve secondary school drop-out rates among marginalised girls. It targeted a range of obstacles for these girls, including direct costs such as tuition fees, concerns around safety, pregnancy, caring responsibilities, and low self-esteem. To address direct costs, bursaries were given through the programme based on a needs assessment by local community leaders (using established measures of marginalisation in Tanzania). Alongside this targeted

---

[62] Evans, D. and Yuan, F. (2019). 'What we learn about girls' education from interventions that do not focus on girls', World Bank, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8944.
<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3430559>

[63] Rose, P. and Yorke, L. (2019). *General versus Girl-Targeted Interventions: A False Dichotomy? A Response to Evans and Yuan*, REAL Centre: University of Cambridge.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3249882>

[64] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[65] Rose, P. and Yorke, L. (2019). *General versus Girl-Targeted Interventions: A False Dichotomy? A Response to Evans and Yuan*, REAL Centre: University of Cambridge.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3249882>

[66] Sabates, R. *et al.* (2018). *Cost-effectiveness with equity: Raising learning for marginalised girls through Camfed's programme in Tanzania*, REAL Centre: University of Cambridge.
<https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/downloads/REAL%20Policy%20Brief%20Cost-effectiveness%20Camfed%20A4_FINAL.pdf>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

intervention, a more general intervention also occurred in which all children in Camfed supported schools were provided with supplementary learning materials for core subjects. This was accompanied by provision of educational resources focusing on extracurricular 'life skills' for all children, supported by a mentoring programme. The mentoring was quasi-targeted, in that it was led by young women who had previously attended Camfed schools and were selected to share their own experiences of disadvantage. Lastly, all schools were supported with a school-community engagement programme which included parent support groups and engagement with local community leaders. Unusually, this programme was evaluated for cost-effectiveness using measures for all children *and* a specific measure of its impact on equity. The results suggest that every $100 spent through the Camfed programme was equivalent to an additional 1.7 years of schooling for all children. When considering the targeted intervention to improve girls' access, this rises to 2 additional years for every $100.

3.1.2   Practical implications

- Any practice to promote gender equity must consider the debate between targeted and universal interventions and take into account the evidence on both outcomes and cost-effectiveness.
- Universal interventions must, nevertheless, consider gender-specific barriers to learning and participation and report gender-disaggregated findings in order to contribute to the evidence base of what works when promoting gender equity.
- There is some evidence that interventions applying a blended or multidimensional approach should consider specific structural challenges facing girls, using targeted interventions to address these alongside general interventions has been found to be cost-effective.
- Targeted interventions should be considered particularly when addressing the needs of marginalised groups.

5.2   Address multiple disadvantages

Gender is one among many lenses through which to view inequity, and interventions to promote gender equity can have positive and negative effects depending on how they intersect with other factors. For example, evidence suggests that resource interventions, such as those which seek to lower the costs of education, are most effective when targeted at under-resourced families.[67] Interventions must take account of the different challenges faced by girls according to a range of factors including age, location and socioeconomic status,[68] especially for those who experience 'double disadvantage', such as girls from socially excluded communities.[69]

3.2.1   Kenya WASH Programme
The importance of interventions that are cognisant of these specific factors and local conditions is demonstrated perhaps most clearly by a water, sanitation and hygiene

---

[67] Unterhalter, E., North, A., Arnot, M., Lloyd, C., Moletsane, L., Murphy-Graham, E., Parkes, J. and Saito, M. (2014). *Interventions to Enhance Girls' Education and Gender Equality: Education Rigorous Literature Review*, Department for International Development: London, UK. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326205/Girls__Education_Literature_Review_2014_Unterhalter.pdf>

[68] Rose, P. and Yorke, L. (2019). *General versus Girl-Targeted Interventions: A False Dichotomy? A Response to Evans and Yuan*, REAL Centre: University of Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3249882>

[69] Lockheed, M. (2008). 'The double disadvantage of gender and social exclusion in education' in Tembon, M. and Fort, L. (eds) *Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth*, World Bank: Washington, DC.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

(WASH) improvement programme in Kenya. Researchers found that the programme had an impact on school enrolment, but only in areas with poorer baseline water access during the dry season.[70]

3.2.2 Role Model Outreach, Ghana

A programme called Role Model Outreach in Ghana is an example of interventions responsive to multiple factors that were identified as the leading causes of school dropouts, particularly among girls. The factors identified by this programme included pregnancy, child marriage and caring responsibilities. The programme formed girls' clubs in schools to discuss a range of topics relevant to the girls within this context, including adolescent reproductive health, children's rights and time management.[71] Sessions with 'female role models' in school were held in order to provide information about possible educational goals and future careers, with an aim of improving girls' motivation and aspirations related to education. Evaluation of the programme found reductions in child marriage and early pregnancy and an improvement in self-reported self-esteem among girls in the programme, compared to a control group.

5.3 Use multi-stranded interventions that support longevity

Few evaluations of efforts to promote gender equity are carried out longitudinally, so their long-term effects remain unclear. Some outcomes may be relatively short-lived. For example, the positive effects on attendance associated with cash transfer programmes appear to cease shortly after the programmes themselves finish.[72] This may suggest that these programmes are able to adjust extrinsic motivation, but fail to adequately address structural barriers or intrinsic motivation. Programmes that focus on resources also do little to address the school learning environment or attitudes towards education itself. Recent studies have called for a 'cash plus' approach that incorporates other interventions to address the non-material barriers in gender equity.[73]

3.3.1 Practical implications
- Multicomponent interventions may promote more sustainable change in terms of gender equity, though they must be evaluated in a way that offers insight into what combinations of features work best.[74]

---

[70] Garn, J., Greene, L.E., Dreibelbis, R., Saboori, S., Rheingans, R.D. and Freeman, M.C. (2013). 'A cluster-randomized trial assessing the impact of school water, sanitation, and hygiene improvements on pupil enrolment and gender parity in enrolment', *Journal of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for Development*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2013.217>

[71] Pereznieto, P. (2016) *UNGEI Good Practice Fund: Synthesis Report*, UNGEI and Overseas Development Institute: London. <https://www.ungei.org/sites/default/files/Good-Practice-Fund-Synthesis-Report-2016-eng.pdf>

[72] Visaria, S., Dehejiab, R., Chaoc, M.M. and Mukhopadhyayd, A. (2016). 'Unintended consequences of rewards for student attendance: results from a field experiment in Indian classrooms', *Economics of Education Review*, 54, 173–184. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.08.001>

[73] Roelen, K., Devereux, S., Abdulai, A.-G., Martorano, B., Palermo, T. and Ragno, L.P. (2017). 'How to make "cash plus" work: linking cash transfers to services and sectors', Innocenti Working Paper. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/IDS%20WP%20Rev%20Jan%202018.pdf>; Rose, P. and Yorke, L. (2019). *General versus Girl-Targeted Interventions: A False Dichotomy? A Response to Evans and Yuan*, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge: Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3249882>

[74] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

5.4 Contribute to building the evidence base

There is a significant need to develop the evidence base with regards to interventions to promote gender equity among children, including the contexts in which they are effective, for whom and how. There are also considerable gaps in the evidence on promoting gender equity among teachers and education professionals. These are also highlighted in the Limitations section of this report, above (section 1.4).

3.4.1 Practical implications

Across the literature from the past decade, researchers have made suggestions for evidence gaps that must be filled and actions that would support this. These actions include:

- reporting gender-disaggregated findings, even for interventions that do not specifically target gender equity;[75]
- incorporating metrics of structural barriers in evaluations, to shed light on the role played by issues such as gender norms;
- conducting more evaluations of interventions that specifically target girls' learning, especially in adolescence[76] – areas that are commonly suggested as priorities for further research include: pedagogy, including content on gender and rights; gender-sensitive school environments; community engagement; and involvement in decision-making.[77]

Lastly, a short-term solution to the lack of evidence around promoting gender equity among education professionals would be to borrow from literature addressing gender equity in other sectors. For example, evidence reviews of interventions to support women's careers in other industries have shown promising effects for programmes involving mentoring, continuing professional development and networking.[78]

---

[75] Rose, P. and Yorke, L. (2019). *General versus Girl-Targeted Interventions: A False Dichotomy? A Response to Evans and Yuan*, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge: Cambridge. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3249882>; Lockheed, M. (2008). 'The double disadvantage of gender and social exclusion in education' in Tembon, M. and Fort, L. (eds) *Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment, and Economic Growth*, World Bank: Washington, DC.

[76] World Bank. (2020). *Cost-Effective Approaches to Improve Global Learning: What Does Recent Evidence Tell Us Are "Smart Buys" for Improving Learning in Low- and Middle-Income Countries?*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/719211603835247448/pdf/Cost-Effective-Approaches-to-Improve-Global-Learning-What-Does-Recent-Evidence-Tell-Us-Are-Smart-Buys-for-Improving-Learning-in-Low-and-Middle-Income-Countries.pdf>

[77] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

[78] Laver, K., Pritchard, I., Cations, M., Osenk, I., Govin, K. and Coveney, J.D. (2018). 'A systematic review of interventions to support the careers of women in academic medicine and other disciplines', *BMJ Open*, 8(3), e020380. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-020380>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

5.5 Adapt practices to gender-specific and cultural contexts

'The most effective interventions will depend on the particular challenges facing girls and their families in each setting. Understanding those challenges – and tailoring our responses effectively – will be key to success.'[79]

Programmes promoting gender equity that have been highly effective in some contexts fail in others. The impact of interventions depends on them being adapted to the specific barriers that are in operation within a particular local context and these can vary considerably. Just one review can include countries where girls are less likely to participate in education (Benin), countries where gaps between genders are virtually non-existent among the wealthiest students (India) and countries where the poorest girls do better than the poorest boys (South Africa).[80] Context-specific issues can include child marriage, adolescent childbearing and gender-based violence.[81] Many of these issues remain largely hidden and knowledge about what works to address them is therefore limited.

3.5.1 Practical implications

- Initiatives should begin by reviewing local barriers to gender equity within specific contexts so that practices can be adapted accordingly.
- Involving individuals with personal experience of the issues when creating or delivering interventions can play an important part in this and there is growing evidence to suggest that interventions co-created or led by people with lived experience may appear more legitimate to their communities and be more effective.
- On the other hand, there is limited evidence for this from educational contexts in lower- and middle-income countries at present.[82]

5.6 Explore how education interacts with other policy areas to address the wider determinants of gender equity

Gender equity in education does not exist in a vacuum; it is shaped by context, both in school and beyond it. As a result, gender equity in education is affected by policies that are not necessarily educational. For example, there is strong evidence that efforts to improve children's health through better sanitation facilities or deworming programmes are among the most effective ways of attracting more girls to school.[83] Similarly,

---

[79] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York. <https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>

[80] Ibid.

[81] See, for example: Rasmussen, B., Maharaj, N., Sheehan, P. and Friedman, H.S. (2019). 'Evaluating the employment benefits of education and targeted interventions to reduce child marriage', *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 65(1), S16–S24. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.03.022>

[82] See, for example, this report focusing on the UK: Goulden, H. and Faber, S. (2020). *Nothing About Us Without Us: Lived Experience Insight & Social Investment*, The Young Foundation: London. <https://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Nothing-About-Us-Without-Us-Report-2020.pdf>

[83] Garn, J., Greene, L.E., Dreibelbis, R., Saboori, S., Rheingans, R.D. and Freeman, M.C. (2013). 'A cluster-randomized trial assessing the impact of school water, sanitation, and hygiene improvements on pupil enrolment and gender parity in enrolment', *Journal of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for Development*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2013.217>; Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab. (2017). 'Roll

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

programmes that focus on delaying marriage and childbearing or preventing violence against children and young people can improve educational outcomes.[84] A study by the World Bank found that 90 per cent of women in Uttar Pradesh, India, reported that they would need to acquire their husband's permission to work.[85] Consequently, initiatives that challenge social norms can improve labour market outcomes for women.

The studies included in this review pay limited attention to these wider factors. By focusing largely on attendance and performance in school, few gather information about non-educational issues that impact on gender equity, such as early marriage.[86] Nevertheless, some interventions do show promise in this regard. A study in Kenya found that the WASH programme increased girls' school enrolment and gender parity but also helped to reduce the burden of water collection, which predominantly falls upon girls.[87] Findings like this show it is worth considering a wider definition of 'what works' when promoting gender equity, though there will be practical limitations due to organisations' operational capacity and areas of expertise. At the very least, programmes should be well aligned with one another, in order to promote coherent and mutually beneficial change across policy areas.

---

call: getting children into school', *J-PAL Policy Bulletin*.
<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/roll-call-getting-children-into-school.pdf>
[84] Psaki, S., Haberland, N., Kozak, M. and Woyczynski, L. (2021). *Girls' Education Roadmap: 2021 Report*, EGER Reports, Population Council: New York.
<https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2264&context=departments_sbsr-pgy>
[85] World Bank. (2018). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*, World Bank: Washington, DC. <doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1096-1>
[86] Rose, P. and Yorke, L. (2019). *General versus Girl-Targeted Interventions: A False Dichotomy? A Response to Evans and Yuan*, REAL Centre, University of Cambridge: Cambridge.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3249882>
[87] Garn, J., Greene, L.E., Dreibelbis, R., Saboori, S., Rheingans, R.D. and Freeman, M.C. (2013). 'A cluster-randomized trial assessing the impact of school water, sanitation, and hygiene improvements on pupil enrolment and gender parity in enrolment', *Journal of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene for Development*, 3(4). <https://doi.org/10.2166/washdev.2013.217>

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

6 Recommendations

Principles for programme design

1. **Blend targeted with universal interventions** to achieve a balance between initiatives that target girls and women specifically, versus more general interventions that seek to support all pupils, school leaders and officials. The right balance may vary depending on local context.

2. **Address multiple disadvantages**, acknowledging that gender is one of many factors that contributes to educational and professional inequalities. In different contexts, factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity and geography also exert a powerful influence on gender outcomes.

3. **Use multi-stranded interventions that support longevity**. Sometimes initiatives can be a 'flash in the pan'. Programmes targeting gender equity should consider how to achieve the right balance between short-term, fast improvements in gender equity, and longer-term, sustainable changes.

Working with partners and building networks

4. **Adapt practices to gender-specific and cultural contexts.** Gender norms and expectations look and feel very different in different localities, and organisations targeting gender equity must ensure programmes are sensitive to these differences.

Developing the evidence base

5. **Contribute to building the evidence base**. Organisations targeting gender equity have an important opportunity to build understanding of what interventions support improved gender equity in the contexts in which they operate.

6. **Explore how education interacts with other policy areas to address the wider determinants of gender equity**. Organisations targeting gender equity should evaluate how their programmes interact with other activities underway in their localities, to understand how they can add most value alongside other public policy initiatives for example in health.

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'

'Society should ensure that all children and young people make a fulfilling transition to adulthood'