



Photo: Nicaragua, Christina Guldbrandsen

CONCEPT PAPER

# EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

Oxfam is guided by “Universal and Equitable access to Quality Education” and also the fact that “lack of access and poor quality of education have serious consequences for especially girls and women” (Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013-2019)..

In November 2016, in Copenhagen, in a meeting convened by Oxfam IBIS, Oxfam constituted an “Education Community of Practice and Influence” agreeing that “Strengthening transformative public education for all to fight inequality” is the overall goal of our future education work. Achieving this goal will:

1. Have a straight redistributive impact – putting ‘virtual income’ into the pocket of poor and marginalized people – particularly in relation to girls and women.
2. Enhance social mobility.
3. Strengthen political mobilization - a transformative, quality education leads to knowing your rights and responsibilities, having a voice, being able to participate and organize, and building active citizenship for children, youth and adults.

This series of Oxfam IBIS concept papers define the Oxfam IBIS’ understanding and approach in key areas.

Each paper contains the following sections:

- A) **Justification** for Oxfam IBIS’ work on the issue
- B) Brief overview of relevant **theories and definitions**
- C) Presentation of **Oxfam IBIS’ approach** and lessons learned
- D) References to further documentation

## JUSTIFICATION

Gender inequality is a serious and pervasive form of discrimination affecting especially women and girls. Discrimination against women and girls is a major obstacle to obtaining their rights as citizens as well as to the development of societies. Non-discrimination and equality between women and men are central principles of human rights law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 proclaimed the equal entitlements of women and men to the rights contained in it, without distinction of any kind, such as sex. The obligation of states to eliminate discrimination based on sex is also underlined in the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights from 1966. The recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be reached by 2030 also promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. Goal number 5 pursues to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," and is an opportunity to address structural obstacles and shift social norms. This would potentially enable permanent pathways out of poverty and inequality achieving the gender equality targets of the 2030 agenda. Gender equality is a right in itself, but it is also an important means to achieving other sustainable development goals.

Education has the potential to play a crucial role in attaining gender equality, as documented for example by UNESCO in *Education transforms lives* (2013). When a girl receives a quality education, she is less likely to get pregnant young, be married early, be a victim of violence, get a job or contribute as active citizen to the development of society. Educating both girls and boys has a huge positive impact in terms of preventing gender inequality and gender based violence. Evidence shows, that the more literate the women in a country are, the lower female mortality rate and the better health and political integration of women.

Since the launch of the Education for All (EFA) movement in 2000, gender equality in education has been considered necessary for social justice on a global scale. And yet, gender inequality is also pervasive in education. Though significant progress has been made over the last decades in narrowing down gender disparities at primary and secondary level, in most parts of the world, girls and women are still disadvantaged in the education systems. According to the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) report 2015, about 43 % of the world's out-of-school children will never go to school: 48% of girls compared with 37 % of boys are likely never to enter a classroom. Moreover, 500 million women above the age of 15 are illiterate, compared to 281 million men, meaning that 64% of the adult illiterate population are women. Fewer girls than boys get a secondary education, and even fewer get a higher education.

It should be noted though, that in some countries, boys are now at a disadvantage, for example in some Latin American countries, girls are more likely to enrol in and complete their education than boys. Since 2000 there has been a growing concern over boys 'underachievement in learning outcomes. According to the GEM 2015 research from Brazil, Rwanda and other countries showed that men with less education were more likely to be violent in the home and express discriminatory gender views. However, only a few countries have put in place policies to address this concern. An education that promotes gender equality needs to be of good quality, explicitly aimed at addressing gender inequalities and transforming negative or rigid gender norms and stereotypes. The quality and transformative character of education is crucial to ensure that gender inequality is not reproduced in the formal education system and in non-formal education activities and later in life.

Achieving gender justice is one of the goals in Oxfam's Strategic Plan 2013 – 2019. While the reasons behind inequality between women and men are about more than money there is

no doubt that economic inequality compounds gender inequality. In the case of children who have ever been to school, there is gender parity for middle income countries, but disparity at the expense of girls in low income countries where 93 girls for every 100 boys have ever been to school. Oxfam works to encourage women's participation and transformative leadership; to eliminate violence against women and girls and to improve women's economic empowerment. Oxfam believes in transforming gender - and related power relations - as well as the structures, norms and values that underpin them - by using education. This transformation is critical to ending poverty and to empowering women to enable them to be global active citizens with rights equal to men.

## THEORIES AND DEFINITIONS

### GENDER

Gender refers to the socially constructed identities, attributes and roles between women and men, girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, roles and relationships are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender influences determines what is expected by, allowed for and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In all societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, power and rights and decision-making opportunities. In most of the world's societies these socially constructed differences and relations often results in a specific focus on girls and women because they are mostly adversely affected by existing gender inequalities and roles.

#### Gender equality

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men and girls and boys to access and control social, economic and political resources, including protection under the law. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that there is equality of opportunity, i.e. that girls/women's and boys/men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women.

#### Gender justice

Oxfam IBIS understands gender justice as the full equality and equity between women and men in all spheres of life, resulting in women jointly, and on an equal basis with men, defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole. This means that there is need both to continue improving legislation and policy, but also to transform societies through sustained, widespread changes in attitudes and beliefs about gender power relations. Oxfam IBIS envisions a safe and just world, where women and girls gain power over every aspect of their lives, including not to be exposed to violence. When women and girls are able to make their own choices and exercise their collective voice, and when institutions address their needs and interests, gender justice will be achieved.

#### Gender mainstreaming

Oxfam IBIS is involved in an ongoing process to ensure that all our work across development, humanitarian and campaigns programming incorporates the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. This process, known as Gender Mainstreaming (or integration), involves gender justice considerations being built into all stages of policy making and programming.

This includes using gender and power analysis, set focus on girls and women's rights' objectives and specific actions explicit addressing structural gender discrimination - and not just its symptoms. As an organisation, we are committed to building the capacity of staff and partners to focus on gender justice and girls and women's rights and ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in all our policies, structures, practices and beliefs.

**Gender equality in education**

Gender equality in education involves achieving gender parity – (equal numbers of boys/girls, women/men) in accessing formal and non-formal quality education. Furthermore, it includes equal access to education at all levels, as well as equal opportunities within the education system for advancing, gaining competences and developing as an individual.

FACTORS	FACTORS OUTSIDE SCHOOL	EFFECT ON EDUCATION	FACTORS IN SCHOOL	EFFECT ON EDUCATION
Gender stereotypes	Women are expected to become mothers and wives and men to bread-winners and contribute economically to the family as heads of households	Low value placed on girls' education as they are not perceived as bread winners. Early marriages and early pregnancies can lead to school drop out	Negative or inflexible gender stereotypes may be reinforced at school	Lack of female teachers means a lack of female role models for girls Gender biased curriculum reinforces existing gender roles Gender biased teachers' may reinforce existing gender stereotypes and lead to discrimination
Violence and safety	Women and girls are more often than boys and men the victims of gender based violence and harassment In fragile countries and conflict contexts this disadvantage is reinforced	Girls are less safe than boys on the way to school as well as in school	School related gender based violence (SRGBV) makes it less safe for girls than boys to go to and sometimes be in schools	Long distance to school increases unsafety for girls Lack of separate toilets increases unsafety for girls SRGBV is a higher risk for girls
Economic factors	Poor families cannot afford the cost of sending all their children to school Poor families depend on children to work inside or outside the home	If families have to choose for financial reasons they tend to prioritise boys' education over girls Girls have to do work in the household with less time for school Boys have to carry out work for the family with less time for school	The cost of schooling may include school fees, additional cost and opportunity costs (value of children's work lost by family)	The higher the cost of schooling the higher risk to girls' education Privatisation of education, particularly commercially driven for-profit schools, increases inequality and exaggerates girls' already disadvantaged position in accessing and completing quality education



Barriers to gender equality in education: There are a number of factors that hinder gender equality in education. They are related to equal access to education and equal competition but also to chances of success. Some of these barriers are linked to the school/education, but others are linked to the social and cultural perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities in society, and to poverty, inequality and power relations. The table below developed by Oxfam IBIS summarises some of the barriers related to gender inequality with a focus on girls and adolescents girls in formal education.

## OXFAM IBIS' APPROACH

Oxfam IBIS and partners work with a range of approaches in order to address the barriers to gender inequality in education. These include working at the community and school levels, as well as influencing work towards decision makers to bring about systemic change.

### CHANGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

#### Working with communities

Gender equality can not be achieved without involving the communities and challenging them to discuss and reflect on existing gender roles and perceptions. Gender perceptions have deep roots in culture and tradition and transforming these is a long process. It needs a long term engagement and commitment. In order to create awareness and facilitating a learning process, Oxfam IBIS and civil society partners use platforms to communicate and discuss issues such as: gender roles and norms, the right to gender equality, gender-based violence, and the importance of education to both women/girls and men/boys. These activities are in some cases linked to literacy training for adults. Gender discussions also take place within the framework of support to school management committees (SMCs), where we encourage and support gender equality among the parents participating in SMCs, and seek to put gender equality on the SMCs agenda.

#### Working with schools and teachers

To achieve gender equality quality educators, who are aware of gender issues, are crucial. Oxfam IBIS stresses the importance of ensuring gender sensitive pedagogic training for all teachers. It is important to capacitate the educators with methods, materials and tools that will ensure gender equality in the classroom and enable them to teach in a transformative way that will change discriminatory perceptions and attitudes of the roles and responsibilities of girls and boys in society. Gender-based violence in school settings is widespread, especially sexual violence. Applying an inclusive, gender-sensitive pedagogy that acknowledge diversity and a norm-critical approach has the potential to change this by creating a safe space for students, girls as well as boys, including those who may not identify with the conceptions and attributes, associated with the body and gender that they are born with.

Oxfam IBIS works to ensure not only equal enrolment of girls and boys but also an equal number of male and female teachers. Many girls lack female role models, feel unrepresented at their school and need female teachers to talk to – shortcomings which in some cases keep girls from coming to school or make them drop out. Strategies we use to encourage female teachers include providing secure transport between home and school, giving them economic incentives and providing them with further training to ensure the quality of their teaching. Similar to ensuring possible role models for girls, it is also relevant to introduce learners to a different approach to gender than the binary understanding.

Oxfam IBIS also support schools to work with the children themselves on gender equality, children's rights, etc. This work includes supporting girls' school clubs, children's parliaments and adolescent girls' summer camps, allowing them to talk about sensitive issues within a secure and conducive environment. Quality educators can challenge the perception of what is understood as 'masculine' and 'feminine', including which related possible actions are available and acceptable.

### Influencing decision makers

Oxfam IBIS supports civil society organisations and networks in holding governments accountable in fulfilling their responsibility of providing free public education services of good quality for all, which is one of the ways to ensure gender equality in education. Depending on the context, this includes advocating for more well-supported female teachers, teacher training on gender equality, gender scrutiny of the curriculum etc. It also includes influencing work related to policies and laws that may discriminate girls, such as violation or denial of the rights of girls to continue studies during or after an early pregnancy. Oxfam IBIS and partners (civil society organisations and local education authorities) also work with innovative models, e.g. junior secondary boarding schools for girls in the most deprived areas, and advocate the state to up-scale and integrate these in the public education system.

## ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AND ENSURING SAFETY

### Working with communities

Addressing School Related Gender Based Violence (SRGBV) is an important aspect in Oxfam IBIS's work with gender. SRGBV is a serious rights violation which also obstructs the education for especially the girl child and adolescent girl. SRGBV is a reflection of the gender based violence more broadly in societies and communities, and it is linked to the low status of women and girls as well as to the prevailing unequal power relations. In order to address gender based violence, it is important that girls, boys, women and men are aware of their rights and know when an act is a violation against those rights. Oxfam IBIS and partners apply a community based approach in working with SRGBV, an approach that often results in developing and approving gender rights by-laws. Platforms, groups, councils and other local spaces are used to discuss and be aware of rights, gender-based violence and to create awareness and action if these rights are violated.

### Working with schools and teachers

To ensure gender equality in education, it is fundamental that the girls and boys feel safe in their learning environment. Making sure that the distance from home to school is reduced also reduces the risk of violence on the way to school. Separate toilet facilities for girls and female teachers are an important element in ensuring that girls' and women teachers' safety and needs are fulfilled at the school. Another important element is to establish Code of Conducts for teachers and other education personnel, a set of legally binding rules and guidelines on how teachers and other staff members are supposed to relate to the students. These should clearly spell out that any form of violence, abuse and harassment is forbidden. The school community must be informed of the code of conduct. In this way they know what is right and wrong for a teacher to do. In addition, both communities and children must have access to reporting cases of violence or abuse to responsive authorities, as well as to proper treatment of abuse victims. The protection and empowerment of girls and women is especially important in fragile situations, as they are often even more at risk of sexual harassment and exploitation. At the same time schools can also be a safe place, where girls and boys are safe from violence bringing normalcy in fragile contexts and refugee camps.

### Influencing decision makers

School safety and the elimination of SRGBV is ultimately the responsibility of the state. Oxfam IBIS and partners therefore advocates for governments to ensure the safety of both girls and boys at school through proper sanitation facilities, training of teachers, adoption of Code of Conducts for teachers and other education personnel as well and ensuring adequate systems for reporting, prosecution of perpetrators and proper treatment of victims of abuse.

## ADDRESSING ECONOMIC BARRIERS

### Working with communities

Within the community-based approach Oxfam IBIS seeks to sensitise parents to recognize that girls have an equal right to education with boys – even if the economic means of the families are limited. Oxfam IBIS also supports poor families and communities in terms of linking up to economic empowerment programs and access to micro credit. In very poor and fragile contexts, school-meal programmes are supported as a counter measure to the opportunity cost of parents when sending children, especially girls to school.

### Working with schools and teachers

Over the last decades more and more countries have started offering free public education, and school fees have been abolished, especially at primary level. This has had a tremendous effect on school enrolment in general, and an even more remarkable effect on girls' education. However, many schools have additional costs in terms of school uniforms, books and stationery, and in some cases also so-called 'hidden costs' where schools and/or teachers ask parents to contribute, and as such pay unauthorised fees. Oxfam IBIS works against hidden costs by building the capacity of SMCs to address and put an end to this.

### Influencing decision makers

Any kind of cost on education limits access – and thereby the right to education for all. This is particularly the case, when it comes to girls' education. Access to free, public, quality education is one of the major advocacy priorities of Oxfam IBIS, and we are engaged in these both at country level, but also in all regional and international forums, where education financing is raised. Ensuring free access to quality education is the responsibility of governments. In countries with limited means, donors should support education systems. Furthermore countries should seek to expand their gender sensitive budgets and spending through better taxation of companies and extractive industries, and they should make sure, that no hidden, unauthorised fees are required by schools or teachers. Finally, governments should also put an end to the recent trend of commercially driven low-cost private schools.

## FURTHER DOCUMENTATION AND REFERENCES

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- Even it up: Time to end extreme inequality, Oxfam 2014
- Education for Change Strategy (2012-2017), IBIS
- Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges, GEM report 6, UNESCO 2015
- Gender Review: Creating Sustainable Future for All, GEM report. UNESCO, 2015
- Education for People and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all, UNESCO 2016 GEM report, Education transforms lives, UNESCO, 2013
- United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI): <http://www.ungei.org/>
- UN Women: <http://www.unwomen.org/en>
- Sustainable Knowledge Platform:  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

### ABOUT IBIS EDUCATION FOR CHANGE CONCEPT PAPERS

Oxfam IBIS Concept Paper: Education and Gender, version 1, March 1st, 2017

This series of concept papers was introduced June 1st, 2014 with the target audience being Oxfam IBIS staff and management as well as partners and stakeholders. The papers have been developed through a participatory process and are living documents to be revised whenever needed. At this point the series includes the following concept papers:

1. Quality Education
2. Transformative Education
3. Educator Professional Development
4. Youth Education and Training
5. Mother Tongue - Bilingual Education
6. Education in Fragile Situations
7. Education and Gender Equality

All Oxfam IBIS concept papers can be found at [www.oxfamibis.org](http://www.oxfamibis.org)

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