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Gender Equality Initiative



“ We recognize that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The advancement of women’s rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development. ”

Charter of the Commonwealth
(Commonwealth Heads of Government, 2013)



Overview

At the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), we believe that gender equality can be achieved by removing the barriers to equal access to education and responding to the gendered nature of experiences within education. We aim to achieve this through open and distance education and skills training for a just and more sustainable world.

Gender equality, therefore, is both a corporate strategy and a cross-cutting theme in COL’s 2021-2027 Strategic Plan to ensure gender equality is considered an integral part of all COL’s policies and programmes.

COL’s Gender Equality Initiative collaborates with governments, institutions and communities to develop policies/strategies for improving learning outcomes while also implementing targeted programmes/projects for addressing specific gender gaps.

Within COL’s Gender Equality Initiative, there are two pathways:



Building institutional capacity in gender mainstreaming.



Improving access to learning and learning outcomes for underperforming boys.



Building institutional capacity in gender mainstreaming

In 2022, the global gender gap was expected to close by 68.1%. However, due to global trends such as climate change and Covid-19, it will now “... take another 132 years to close the global gender gap.”¹ As global inequality persists and is exacerbated by global trends, gender equality and women’s empowerment outcomes will suffer and even intensify.

Gender mainstreaming remains the most preferred and practical means for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women. It pushes gender inequality and women’s empowerment to the centre of analysis for decision-making while integrating a gender perspective into all policies, programmes, functions and institutional structures.

THE OBJECTIVE

COL has adopted a gender mainstreaming approach to build institutional capacity in gender mainstreaming and aims to address gender inequality and social exclusion issues through specific targeted strategies, including:

- Sensitising/training government and institutional staff in gender equality.
- Providing support for policy/strategy development.
- Developing institutional policies/strategies.
- Expanding and/or creating gender-responsive learning opportunities.

¹ World Economic Forum. (2022, July 13, pg.5). Global Gender Gap Report. Global Gender Gap Report 2022 | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)



Improving access to learning and learning outcomes for underperforming boys

Education is a fundamental human right; it raises people out of poverty, addresses inequalities and contributes to sustainable development for communities and nations. However, “worldwide 244 million children and youth are still out of school for social, economic and cultural reasons.”² Research on boys’ disengagement from education indicates that:



“ complex factors exacerbate constraints on boys’ education and lead to, and reinforce, poor educational outcomes. ... [h]arsh discipline, corporal punishment and other forms of school-related, gender-based violence impact boys’ academic achievement and attainment” while affecting dropout rates and attendance levels.³

Boys’ high drop-out rates and disengagement from education and skills training is a growing global concern.

THE OBJECTIVE

The goal of the Gender Equality Initiative, *Improving Access to Learning and Learning Outcomes for Underperforming Boys* aims to support specific targeted interventions for greater learning outcomes for boys, including:

- Developing gender-responsive education interventions for linking boys’ education and skills building to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Supporting greater access and linkages between schools and community services.
- Training teachers in quality learning practices, including the use of open educational resources and technology-enabled learning.
- Sensitising and engaging communities to address challenges faced by boys in education.

To implement the two pathways in the Gender Equality Initiative, COL collaborates with governments, institutions/organisations and communities to increase the capacity of staff in gender mainstreaming and to address factors affecting boys’ disengagement and high drop-out rates.

² UNESCO. (2022, July 19). The Right to Education. Every human being has the right to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. www.unesco.org

³ UNESCO. (2022). Leave no child behind: Global report on boys’ disengagement from education. UNESCO Publication, 13 (6&8). DOI <https://doi.org/10.54675/BDLL3314>.