

STRENGTHENING GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOL

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Gender and development are two important aspects that greatly influence how individuals grow, interact, and contribute to society. Gender is not only about biological differences but also about social and cultural expectations, while development refers to the improvement of people's lives and the conditions in which they live. When these two aspects are combined, they play a significant role in shaping behavior, values, and opportunities. In schools, strengthening gender and development is particularly important because education is one of the most powerful tools for promoting equality and building a more inclusive community. By integrating gender awareness into teaching and policies, schools can help young people develop the skills and attitudes they need to contribute to a fairer society.

The school environment is one of the best places to promote gender and development because children spend much of their time there. Students are constantly exposed to different cultures, values, and perspectives, which gives schools a unique opportunity to influence their views on equality and respect. Through lessons, interactions, and policies, schools can instill values such as fairness, tolerance, and acceptance of diversity. These values are essential in breaking down stereotypes, reducing discrimination, and creating an environment where every learner feels valued regardless of gender or background.

One effective way of strengthening gender and development in schools is by reviewing and revising teaching materials. Many textbooks and resources still contain gender stereotypes that can reinforce outdated views about what boys and girls can or

cannot do. For instance, boys are often portrayed as leaders or problem solvers, while girls are shown in supporting roles. These stereotypes, when left unchallenged, can influence the way students see themselves and their peers. To address this, schools should use gender-sensitive materials that present balanced and diverse perspectives. This could include books and media that highlight women in science, men in caregiving roles, or stories that challenge traditional gender expectations. Inviting guest speakers, holding workshops, and training teachers in gender-aware teaching strategies are also useful steps toward more inclusive education.

Promoting equal opportunities for all learners is another crucial step in advancing gender and development. Schools should ensure that both boys and girls are encouraged to take part in all subjects and activities without bias. For example, girls should be supported to pursue STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects, while boys should feel equally welcome in arts or caregiving-related fields. Teachers and school leaders must actively promote participation in sports, leadership roles, and extracurricular programs in ways that avoid gender bias. Creating gender-neutral facilities and safe spaces for students can also ensure that everyone feels included. Additionally, schools need clear policies to prevent and address discrimination or harassment, ensuring that all students have equal access to resources, support, and opportunities.

It is also essential for schools to integrate gender concerns into their broader policies and programs. Gender-responsive policies recognize that boys and girls may face different challenges and therefore require specific forms of support. For example, schools should provide proper sanitation facilities for girls, particularly those managing menstruation, so that they do not miss school. Schools should also have programs that promote sexual and reproductive health education, covering issues such as gender identity, relationships, and HIV/AIDS awareness. These initiatives not only improve

health outcomes but also encourage respect, responsibility, and informed decision-making among young people.

Strengthening gender and development in schools also means investing in the capacity of teachers and staff. Educators need proper training to recognize bias, challenge stereotypes, and handle sensitive issues related to gender and diversity. Professional development programs can equip teachers with the tools to create classrooms where all students feel included and supported. When teachers are confident in addressing gender-related issues, students are more likely to grow up with inclusive values that they carry into adulthood.

Overall, gender and development are critical elements in shaping both individuals and societies. Schools that actively work to promote these values create communities where diversity is respected, and equality is practiced. By incorporating gender-sensitive materials, ensuring equal opportunities, implementing responsive policies, and training educators, schools can play a vital role in building a culture of inclusion. In doing so, they prepare students not just for academic success but also for life in a society that values fairness and justice. Strengthening gender and development in schools is not only about changing the present but also about shaping a future where equality and respect are the foundation of progress.

References:

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