Demand- and supply-side factors and gender parity
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Barriers to gender equality can arise out of both demand- and supply-side factors that affect the engagement of girls and boys, and men and women, in all levels of education.

Demand-side issues relate to all those who ‘demand’ education. These could be children, families, communities and the wider society. Barriers and challenges to gender equality on the demand side may be rooted in sociocultural norms and traditions and in economic conditions – for example, parents’ preference for sons, or a tradition of marrying off girls at a young age. Such norms and economic conditions can affect the supply side too.

Supply-side issues relate to those who ‘supply’ education, such as governments (including ministries of education and decentralized/district education offices), pre-schools or nurseries, primary and secondary schools, tertiary colleges, universities, and technical and vocational education training providers. Supply-side factors influence a range of issues such as policy, curriculum, teachers and school management. Supply-side barriers include, for example, gender-biased text books and a lack of female science teachers.
Self-study and/or group activity

**Reflecting on demand- and supply-side factors in your context**

- Either individually or in small groups, choose an education level that you are familiar with (e.g. pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary).
- Try to identify up to three demand-side and three supply-side factors that you think affect male and/or female engagement in your context.
- Write your answers in the first column in the table below.
- If you have any additional information about how this factor is a barrier to gender equality in education, make some notes in the middle column.
- Leave the third column (interventions) blank for now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demand-side factors</th>
<th>Barrier to gender equality</th>
<th>Intervention(s) required</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
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<th>Barrier to gender equality</th>
<th>Intervention(s) required</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now read **Handout 1** and compare your answers with the examples provided. Is there anything surprising about the factors mentioned in the handout? Are any of the factors particularly controversial or difficult to deal with in your context?

**Optional extension activity**

For those who are already more experienced in gender equality in education, you could consider possible interventions to address the demand- and supply-side barriers you noted in your table. Make notes about possible interventions in the third column.
Gender parity

Gender parity in education is an indicator of the ratio of girls to boys. Gender parity is reached when there is equal representation and participation of male and female learners in education (see the glossary in Tool 1). It is a useful indicator, but by itself does not measure gender equality. It is important to consider gender parity when thinking about demand- and supply-side factors impacting on educational participation and achievement, because these factors might affect boys and girls differently.

The gender parity index (GPI) of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report measures the ratio of female-to-male for a given indicator. A value between 0.97 and 1.03 indicates that gender parity was reached.

Gender parity is a prerequisite for gender equality. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report, the world has achieved gender parity at all levels of education except tertiary. However, this is not true of all regions, country income groups, or individual countries. Only 66 per cent of countries have actually achieved gender parity in primary education; 45 per cent of countries have achieved it in lower secondary; and 25 per cent in upper secondary. As indicated above, gender parity is only a step on the way to achieving gender equality.

In some countries, failure to reach gender parity is because boys rather than girls are facing barriers to education. Table 1 demonstrates that while girls are disadvantaged at secondary level in Australia, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, boys face disadvantage in various countries, shaded in red. Table 2 suggests a knock-on effect at tertiary level; boys are disadvantaged at this level in the Pacific region.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Palau</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Australia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
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2 Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower secondary</th>
<th>Upper secondary</th>
<th>Tertiary</th>
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<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>66</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>World</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern and South-eastern Asia</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.99</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
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<td>1.11</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
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<td>Northern Africa and Western Africa</td>
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<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
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<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low income</td>
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<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower middle income</td>
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<td>1.03</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper middle income</td>
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<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High income</td>
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<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parity situation in the Asia-Pacific region

Signs of progress

Caution must be exercised when analysing national and regional data, as it can mask important differences within and between sub-population groups, particularly with regard to socio-economic status, and can blur disparities at sub-national level.

Nevertheless, in the Asia-Pacific region, data suggests that the major challenge now is to achieve gender parity in secondary and tertiary education. A synthesis of the National EFA reports\(^4\) and Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific report\(^5\) offered the following headlines on gender parity in the region:

- Gender disparity in access to primary education was substantially reduced between 1999 and 2012 and is not a major issue for the region, as most countries have an Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (ANER) of 100 per cent. Wide gaps remain in a few countries, such as Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, and also in Cambodia, Pakistan and Samoa. The most severe disparities affect girls.
- Gender parity in net primary attendance is reported in 28 out of 34 countries for which data is available.
- In secondary education enrolment, gender parity has improved. Gender parity exists for slightly less than half of countries for which data is available. However, more than half of countries in the region had an ANER at lower-secondary level of less than 90 per cent. This means that achieving appropriate enrolment rates remains a challenge and there remain high rates of out-of-school adolescents.
- Most countries are close to achieving gender parity in terms of learners staying in school to the last grade of primary education. However, disparities still exist in survival rates to the last grade of lower secondary education.
- Gender disparity is most evident at tertiary level. The picture is complex, with some countries having higher female enrolments than male, and others vice versa.

Remaining challenges

Primary education: Girls are less likely than boys to attend primary school in countries such as Pakistan and Afghanistan, where only 85 and 69 girls respectively enrol in school for every 100 boys. In South and West Asia, lack of access to school particularly affects girls, who make up 52 per cent of the primary school age out-of-school children.\(^6\)

In some countries in East and South West Asia, more girls are out of school than boys at primary level. For example, in Indonesia in 2017, 72 per cent of out-of-school children of primary age were girls, while in Uzbekistan and Mongolia the figure was 76 per cent and 73 per cent, respectively (UIS, 2019). A similar picture emerges in some South Asian countries. For example, the percentages of girls who are out of school at primary level in 2017 in Nepal and Pakistan are 62 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively.

Secondary education: Female participation is significantly lower in some South Asian countries. For example, in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2017, girls made up just 40 per cent and 41 per cent respectively of the total secondary enrolment.

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Tertiary education: Female participation is particularly low in some countries of South Asia, where data is available. In Uzbekistan, for example, the percentage of females in the gross intake rate (GIR) for tertiary education is 8 per cent (UIS, 2019).

Transition: Transition rates from primary to secondary education disadvantaging girls are reported in a range of countries including Afghanistan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan. For further information on transition, see Tool 17.

STEM and TVET: There are major gender disparities in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in some countries. For example, female participation in TVET in secondary education is generally very low compared with male. In 2017 in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan, the percentage of females enrolled (out of all students) was <1%, 1%, 3% and 4% respectively (UIS, 2019). Female participation in STEM varies by country in the Asia-Pacific region. Females are concentrated in certain disciplines and levels, e.g. pharmacy at tertiary level. In other subjects, participation can fall away as the level of education increases. Females are significantly under-represented among the highest levels of achievement in mathematics and science. See Tool 16 for more information on STEM.

Boys becoming disadvantaged in education:
In Central Asian countries and some East Asian countries – including China, Indonesia, Kiribati, Mongolia, Thailand and Timor Leste – the Gross Intake Rate (GIR) is higher for girls than boys in lower secondary education (UNESCO, 2016). Enrolment disparities that disadvantage boys within secondary education are growing, especially in East Asia and the Pacific. In Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Macau, Philippines Tonga and Tuvalu in 2014 there were more out-of-school boys than girls at lower secondary age (UNESCO, 2016).

Learning outcomes: A recent study across the Asia-Pacific region showed that there are gender differences in terms of learning outcomes. In some countries girls outperform boys and in others the reverse is the case. There are also differences in uptake and outcomes in different subjects, with boys in many countries showing a preference for science and mathematics and girls demonstrating strong proficiency in languages. Findings from the UNESCO study are outlined in Box 1.

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8 UNESCO. 2017b. Cracking the Code: Girls’ and women’s education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Paris: UNESCO.

Box 1
Gender differences in learning outcomes across the Asia-Pacific region

“In Afghanistan, there are significant differences between girls and boys in reading and writing outcomes at Grade 6, where the data shows that there is a larger proportion of girls in the higher proficiency levels of reading and writing than of boys. The report also noted that the proportion of girls who are able to read is greater than boys across all types of reading materials that were surveyed. Similar results are found in the Solomon Islands and Viet Nam. In the Solomon Islands, it was reported that girls significantly outperformed boys in writing in all the provinces except one. In Viet Nam, the study stated that significantly more female students achieved above-standard level in Vietnamese language than male students. In Malaysia, the difference between the achievement of boys and girls was not large, however girls achieved slightly higher scores. Girls were also seen to have fared better in their level of knowledge, outperforming males on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) cognitive domain as well. The average achievement of boys in mathematics was found to be very much below the 400 benchmark for higher levels of cognitive skills. Counter to this, Bhutan reported mixed differences between girls and boys in mathematics and language (English for Bhutan). The Bhutan study indicated that while not very large, the differences are statistically significant and boys had outperformed the girls in mathematics and girls outperformed boys in English.

The case of Pakistan is also interesting, as boys outperform girls in all three subjects (writing and reading Urdu, and mathematics). However, boys and girls are mostly educated separately, and the case study indicated that there may need to be further examination in the teaching-learning process to determine this discrepancy. However, in several of the cases no statistically significant differences in achievement between the sexes were reported. While in Mongolia and Thailand, there were generally no significant differences between boys and girls across all subjects, Afghanistan, Solomon Islands and Viet Nam reported differences only in mathematics.”

National data can hide sub-national disparities

While national data may show gender parity, sub-national data may indicate disparities that disadvantage both girls and boys. For instance, data may show that in one province boys are significantly disadvantaged, while in another province the bias is against girls. Disparities between urban and rural communities and socio-economic status, not just sex, are commonly found in statistical data on enrolment.

If we look at national data, Sri Lanka has achieved gender parity at the primary level, with a Gender Parity Index of 1 for primary net enrolment. However, in some provinces, reports indicate that girls can be significantly disadvantaged. Viet Nam also reports gender parity in primary education, but disparity is found among girls in the North East and among boys in Southern Highlands.10

The availability of data

There are significant gaps in education statistics which are essential for tracking progress towards gender equality and other education goals. For example:

- Data is sparse in South Asia, East Asia and South-West Asia (UNESCO, 2016);
- Comprehensive gender analysis on out-of-school children is lacking in the Asia-Pacific region;
- Better Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) data disaggregated by sex is needed at country level to provide a clearer picture of female participation, progression and learning achievement.

It is anticipated that data systems will be improved as a result of the new SDG indicators on gender parity which should be integrated at the national/regional level to monitor gender disparities in the education system.

Self-study and/or group activity

Reflect on sub-national disparities in your context

- Think about your own context. Are there disparities in different parts of the country that do not show up in the national data?
- What are these disparities and how are they caused?
- Are there any interventions (policies, programmes, projects) in place to address these disparities? If not, what kinds of interventions would you recommend?
- If you are not sure of the answers, you could commit to undertake some research and reading.

Self-study activity

Investigating gender parity in your context

- Choose an emerging issue relating to gender parity in your context that you would like to investigate further.
- Draw a mind map to show what you already know about the issue and what you need to know more about.
- Add ideas for how and where you will find this information.

Group activity

Debating gender equality

- Choose one person to be a chairperson who will read out the statements.
- Split the remaining participants into two groups. One group must provide arguments as to why they agree with the statements. The other group will argue why they disagree with the statements.
- Ask the chairperson to read each statement in turn and allow the groups to debate each one for several minutes.
- The chairperson should encourage participants to back up their responses with concrete examples from their own contexts.

Possible statements to choose from include:

- There are important cultural factors that prevent gender equality in the classroom and school.
- There are currently barriers to achieving gender equality in our school system.
- Gender parity has already been achieved in primary and secondary education.
- Girls in particular face disadvantages in our schools in terms of educational opportunity.
- Boys in particular face disadvantages in our school system in terms of educational opportunity.
- There is significant inequality in boys' and girls' participation in STEM in secondary schools.
- Gender equality in learning outcomes is being achieved in our schools.
- Teachers are well equipped to practise gender equality in the classroom.
- School principals are committed to achieving gender equality in schools.
- Parents are supportive of gender equality in schools.


UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2015. Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All - Findings from the Global initiative on Out of School Children. Montreal: UIS.

Within a lifelong learning approach, it is important to understand the sociocultural demand-side factors that are responsible for influencing gender inequality in education at all levels of the system. These factors tend to be linked to cultural norms around gender. These vary considerably between sub-regions, countries and within countries in Asia and the Pacific. The picture is complex. It is necessary to conduct regular research to identify and better understand issues and track progress in addressing them. This is a role for universities and specialized research institutions. Research may be commissioned by ministries of education, or civil society organizations with an interest in advocating for gender equality.

Gender-related factors may affect access to education differently for girls and for boys. It is therefore necessary to examine these systematically at different levels of the education system. Examples of these factors are listed below but should not be considered exhaustive.

- **Poverty:** Poverty is often the key factor affecting education participation for boys and girls. In the family, consideration of the opportunity costs of lost income or the need for help with household work and child care may affect parental decisions to send their sons or daughters to school. If there are multiple children, a poor family may only afford school costs for the boys, where gender norms dictate the boys are the providers for families.

- **Burden of household work:** In poorer households, girls often help with household work and care for younger siblings, leaving them less time to spend on their studies. This is reinforced by gender norms, where domestic work is seen as primarily the responsibility of women and girls. Involvement in household chores is a cause of lateness, absence and dropout from school (UNESCO, 2009).

- **Child marriage:** Educational opportunities for girls are reduced in countries in South Asia where parents are willing to follow traditional gender norms and marry off their daughters at an early age. Typically, girls marry older men, but if the husband is also young, marriage may affect his ability to complete his education. Marriage and school are largely incompatible in most contexts in the region. Early marriage is reported also in parts of South-East Asia.

- **Son preference:** There are countries in the Asia-Pacific region where families exhibit a strong cultural preference for sons. These countries tend to have the greatest levels of gender inequalities, with generalized and systematic discrimination against women and girls, including in education (WHO, 2011). Such societies often have excess levels of female mortality and a higher proportion of men to women in the population than is the norm.
• **Adolescent pregnancy:** Adolescent pregnancy may be a factor in forcing girls to drop out of school. In many countries, the law does not allow girls to re-enter school after the birth of their child, and/or social stigma does not permit them to attend school.

• **Child labour:** Some 28 million South Asian children, mostly girls, are reported as inactive, neither working nor attending school. Girls are more likely than boys to be inactive, and to be involved in domestic chores or work that is not captured by the survey instruments. This is 1.5 times (more likely to be inactive) in Bangladesh, 2 times in India, and 3 times in Pakistan. (ILO and UCW, 2015).

• **Restricted physical and social mobility for older girls:** Schooling may be perceived as harmful for older girls, as it requires freedom of mobility outside of the home. This is particularly true among conservative religious communities in rural areas in parts of South Asia.

• **Sexual harassment of girls on their way to and from school:** Girls become more vulnerable to harassment when schools are far from home and there is a lack of secure transport. This can cause older girls to drop out of school in parts of South Asia. Parents in rural areas may be reluctant to send their girls to school due to the perceived risk of sexual abuse and harassment on the way.

• **Ethnicity and language:** In general, inequality in educational participation reflects broader inequalities in society. Ethnicity and language can be an important factor in inequality, and the effects of this can be gendered. For example, in parts of South Asia, girls from minority ethnic groups have higher rates of exclusion from school.

• **Disability and discrimination:** Girls with disabilities are a large and diverse group whose educational needs have gone largely unnoticed (UNESCO, 2003). Both girls and boys with disabilities face widespread cultural biases and discrimination in education which severely limit their life opportunities.

• **Low academic expectations of parents:** Parents may have low expectations for their children, reinforced by gender stereotypes. Education may be less valued for girls than boys, or vice versa.

• **Cultures of masculinity:** Emerging evidence suggests that routine classroom practices in education can discourage the participation of some boys (UNESCO, 2009:57). Some boys become disenchanted with school because its culture does not fit well with their adolescent male culture.
Gender issues are embedded in all aspects of a school or learning institution. They can also have a profound impact on the equity of whole education systems. This can reinforce negative gender stereotypes and undermine gender equality in teaching and learning. Examples of key supply-side factors are presented below.

- **The physical environment**: The built environment in the school may promote gender inequality. There may not be separate toilets for girls or facilities for menstrual hygiene. There should of course be separate and secure toilets for both girls and boys. There should also be safe spaces for both girls and boys, and sports facilities which allow both girls and boys to participate in physical recreational activities and a range of sports.

- **Distance to school**: Distance to school is an issue that affects both boys and girls, but girls face particular risks including sexual harassment and assault (UNESCO UIS, 2015). Fear of assault on the way to school may push girls out of school in rural contexts.

- **School culture**: The school should have a culture that promotes and enables gender equality at all times. It should be a safe and supportive location for learning. Many girls experience intimidation and abuse from teachers and other pupils. Sexual harassment is a major cause of girls dropping out of school (UNESCO UIS, 2015). There should be school policies on gender equality and gender-based violence which are fully implemented and carefully monitored. Support systems, such as guidance and counselling services, can play a helpful role in promoting gender equality and addressing individual issues.

- **The curriculum**: The curriculum is an important vehicle for promoting learning about gender equality. It can help girls and boys acquire relevant knowledge, values and skills. In many contexts, the curriculum reinforces existing gender stereotypes and bias. Sexism in textbooks continues to require attention.

Questions to consider include:

1. Are curricula, teaching and learning materials free from gender bias and stereotypes?
2. Do they promote positive roles for both males and females?
3. Do children learn about gender equality in the curriculum?

- **Teachers**: Teachers can be role models for gender equality and powerful change agents. Yet everyday classroom practices can reinforce gender discrimination and prejudice. Teachers need to be gender aware and have practical skill that promote gender equality in teaching and learning.

Some questions to consider:

1. Are teachers adequately trained in gender and education issues?
2. Are teachers familiar with concepts such as gender bias and discrimination, and do they take steps to eliminate them in their own practices?
3. Are they trained to teach in ways that create gender equality in the classroom?
4. Do teachers positively value gender equality in education?
• **Female teachers:** The employment of female teachers has a positive impact on girls’ education and learning.\(^{11}\)

• **Co- and extra-curricular activities:** Co-curricular activities at school can help promote gender equality. To do so, they need to cater to the needs of both boys and girls.

  Some questions to consider:
  
  i) Are there equal opportunities for girls and boys to participate in activities such as sports, arts, clubs and cultural activities?
  
  ii) Are there any barriers that prevent girls and boys from participating equally in co-curricular or extra-curricular activities?

• **Parental and community involvement:** Parental support for gender quality is fundamental.

  Some questions to consider:
  
  i) Are parents informed about the school’s approach to promoting gender equality?
  
  ii) Are parents involved in any way in promoting gender quality in the school, e.g., through the parent-teacher association (PTA) or school management committee?

• **School management:** The involvement of women in school governance has a positive effect on the participation of girls in schooling.\(^{12}\)

  A whole-school approach is needed to implement gender equality and this needs to be led by the school management.

  Some questions to consider:
  
  i) Are school principals and school management committees trained in gender equality?
  
  ii) Are school principals committed to achieving gender equality in the school?
  
  iii) Is there a system for monitoring gender equality in the school?

  iv) Is there a system for reporting gender-based violence or discrimination of any kind?


\(^{12}\) Ibid.


_________. 2017b. *Cracking the Code: Girls’ and women’s education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)*. Paris: UNESCO.


