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# GENDER EQUALITY



## ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL GIRLS AND WOMEN

**Girls just want to have fun...damental human rights.** When we examine our world through a gender equality lens, we can see that we have made many advances and we have come a long way in ensuring girls and women have the same opportunities as the boys and men in our world. However, we still have much work to do as many barriers for girls and women still exist today. This goal examines the ways women and girls are discriminated against in our world and how to put a stop to it. From ending violence and exploitation to empowering women, or protecting their mental, physical and sexual health, there are many areas to focus on if we are going to achieve this goal by 2030. Just like many of the other Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality is interconnected with the other goals —everyone’s actions and support make the difference in achieving gender equality.

## TARGETS

- End all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
- Eliminate forms of violence and exploitation against women and girls in both public and private spheres.
- Eliminate harmful practices such as child or forced marriages and female genital mutilation.
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through public services, social protection and shared responsibility.
- Ensure full and effective participation for women in leadership and decision-making.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

“Women’s status in society has become the standard by which humanity’s progress toward civility and peace can be measured.”

**Mahnaz Afkhami**  
Founder and president  
of the Women’s  
Learning Partnership



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 1 Learners will understand the concepts of gender, gender equality and gender discrimination in addition to the current and historical causes of inequality in their own country and around the world.
- 2 Learners will understand the basic rights of women and girls, including their reproductive rights and their right of freedom from exploitation and violence.
- 3 Learners will understand the opportunities and benefits that exist with full gender equality, as well as the role of education and legislation in the empowerment process.
- 4 Learners will be able to recognize and question traditional perceptions of gender roles in a critical approach, while respecting cultural sensitivity.
- 5 Learners will be able to measure gender equality in their surroundings and then plan, implement and support initiatives to empower themselves and others who are discriminated against because of their gender .

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### Media

How does the media report on gender issues?  
How do you think this impacts the ways we talk about gender issues in society?

### Environment

How is climate change a gender equality issue?

### Poverty, wealth and power

How does the poverty cycle affect women uniquely?  
How does a lack of power or resources affect the lives of women?

### Indigenous Peoples

What are gender equality barriers and opportunities within Indigenous communities?

### Oppression and genocide

How are women and girls uniquely impacted by oppression and genocide?

### Health and biotechnology

What are important health issues facing women today?  
What policies and practices are needed to support them?

### Gender politics

What laws would you put in place to ensure gender equality? How would you monitor them?

### Social justice and human rights

How have women's social justice and rights changed over the course of history?

### Peace and conflict

How are women supporting peace and post-conflict reconstruction in our world?



# THE BIG QUESTIONS

## 1 Where did it begin?

- This goal is rooted in our understanding of **gender**. It is important to understand that gender is the socially constructed and personally identified classification as either male, female or distinct from male and female such as people who are **gender neutral** or **transgender**. While sex is a biological label, gender is a social and cultural construct.
- **Gender discrimination**, or sexism, is the prejudice or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender. Gender discrimination can take on multiple forms, including stereotypes, sexist language, **institutional sexism**, **'glass ceilings'**, objectification, harassment and violence. These forms of discrimination can take place in our schools, our homes, our workplaces, our communities and our bodies.
- Social, economic and political discrimination against women has been fueled by **misogyny**, or the oppression of women beneath men. Harmful practices like **female genital mutilation**, honour killings, child marriages, unequal employment opportunities and pay, traditional gender roles, anti-abortion laws, violence, and abuse individually and collectively contribute to gender discrimination and inequality.
- Throughout history, **feminism** has become an important platform for the push for equal treatment of women in social, economic and political spaces. Feminism is a range of political, ideological and social movements that seek to define and advance the rights of women in the effort to achieve equality of the sexes. Feminist movements continue to campaign for women's right to vote, hold public office, earn fair wages, own property, receive education, have maternity leave and have equal rights in marriage. As actress Emma Watson said, "If you stand for equality, then you are a feminist."

## 2 Why does this issue matter?

- **Women deserve to fulfill their potential**  
Women and girls represent half of the world's population, and therefore half of its potential. **Gender equality** is a fundamental **human right**. When we support women and girls, we are advancing other critical areas such as healthy societies, **poverty reduction**, quality education and well-being for all.
- **The future is female**  
Raising the age of marriage and investing in education for girls can result in a rate of return of \$5 for every dollar invested. When we spend on programs that improve income-generating activities for women, the rate of return has been shown to be even higher at \$7 for every dollar invested.<sup>1</sup>



- **Violence and abuse are still a major problem**

Thirty-five per cent of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner violence.<sup>2</sup> About 133 million girls and women have also experienced some form of female genital mutilation in the 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East where it most often occurs.<sup>3</sup>

### 3 Who and what are affected?

- **Girls**

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers that prevent them from entering primary and secondary school. Thirty-two million primary-age girls and 98 million secondary-age girls are missing out on school.<sup>4</sup> Girls often face pressure to drop out of school in order to take care of the home and their family members, get married or bring in money for their family.

- **Women**

Women in Northern Africa hold fewer than one in five paid jobs outside of the agricultural sector. Skills training, education and support for unpaid domestic labour are essential to economic, social and political empowerment. However, women are gaining more opportunities to hold positions of power. For example, 46 countries now have women in over 30 per cent of their seats of parliament.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, it is critical to go beyond the numbers to manifest actual change in the policies and practices of government and state support of gender equality.

- **Transgender Women**

Transgender women, or people who are assigned male sex at birth but identify as a woman, are **disproportionately** discriminated against in our world. In 2013, transgender women of colour made up more than half of all LGBTQ homicide victims.<sup>6</sup> With higher rates of **poverty**, harassment, violence, poor health, job discrimination and isolation, transgender women one of the most vulnerable groups in the world today. Safe spaces, legislation, education and social supports are critical to the support and full inclusion of trans women and trans people.

### 4 What needs to be done?

- To achieve gender equality, we need political leadership, dedicated and increased resources, and partnerships throughout our society. Equality in education, employment, economic empowerment and leadership will all help to remove barriers for women, enabling women to be self-sufficient, supportive and safe from discrimination and gender-related hardships. We need more women involved to help other women access resources and improve their lives and the lives of their families.
- Female workers earn 10 to 30 per cent less than their male counterparts, according to the International Labour Organization.<sup>7</sup> Fighting to decrease the gender pay gap is a key step, as is removing barriers that prevent women to reach leadership positions and implement gender equality policies.



- Increasing access to primary and secondary education has incredible effects in the lives of girls. They are less likely to get pregnant and/or married early-on, which will help them stay in school longer. Reducing barriers such as making school more affordable, reducing distances to school, developing girl-friendly schools and promoting and implementing strategies for **marginalized** and out-of-school girls can help them access long-term education, increase their income and support themselves and their families. This helps break the **cycle of poverty**. Countries like Benin and Bangladesh are offering free schooling or reduced tuition for girls, encouraging them to enter school and delay marriage.
- Companies need to break the **glass ceiling** for women and involve them in leadership. This will encourage more diverse perspectives, informed and inclusive decision-making, and higher returns on their investments. In the political realm, policies catered to the needs of women help the next generation of women achieve increased access and resources.
- Increased education on harmful practices, cultural norms and forms of marginalization will us to better understand the issues women and girls face, the rights they have and the responsibility of our government and institutions to protect them. Additionally, for society at large, learning how to dismantle sexist, violent and discriminatory language, attitudes and behaviours will contribute to changing our social and cultural understandings of discrimination and gender.

“ Countries with higher levels of gender equality have higher economic growth.

Companies with more women on their boards have higher returns.

Peace agreements that include women are more successful.

Parliaments with more women take up a wider range of issues—including health, education, anti-discrimination and child support. ”

**Ban Ki-moon**

Former Secretary-General of the United Nations



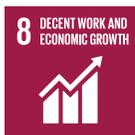
## CONNECTION TO THE OTHER GOALS



Globally, women and girls need increased access to health education, along with sexual and reproductive services and resources. Reducing barriers for women to ensure they understand and act on their rights supports the eradication of gendered health inequalities.



Two-thirds of illiterate people in the world are women. Increasing the quality of education and the number of students attending school requires a targeted focus on girls. Helping girls stay in school has incredible benefits for their future, the future of their communities and the future of our society as a whole.



Women comprise the largest percentage of the agricultural workforce; however, they often do not have control over land and production resources, which minimizes returns for their work. In addition, **climate change**-related disasters such as droughts and floods have serious effects on women farmers in particular in the Global South. Limited financial capacity can turn these shocks into a serious financial burden, continuing the cycle of poverty and increasing vulnerability. Women's increased agricultural production helps guarantee self-sufficiency.



## Consequences of Inaction

- If we fail to do something to ensure gender equality in all aspects of life, we are denying women a lifetime of opportunity, support and potential. When girls are deprived of health care or proper **nutrition**, their mortality rate increases, and without legal protection from child marriages, girls often have to sacrifice their education, health and economic opportunities.
- Without gender equality considerations in workforce policies, attitudes and behaviours, girls can be limited in their development and access to skills that will help support themselves and their community. The full participation of women in the labour force would add significant growth rates to national **gross domestic product**.

## REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS

- 1 How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?
- 2 How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?
- 3 How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?
- 4 What questions do you still have?

“ I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

**Audre Lorde**  
Writer and activist



# RESOURCES

## How to take action

- **Learn about gender equality in your community.** How are people in my community experiencing the effects of gender inequality? How might a lack of gender equality affect me or others in my community now, or in the future? How might it affect others around the world? Take action based on what you discover.
- **Start a social justice or gender equality group** in your school to work on these issues.
- **Join the HeForShe campaign.** Use their materials to plan and promote your own equality events. HeForShe is a project of UN Women dedicated to gender equality, and offers action ideas, resources and information.
- **Challenge sexist language.** We can make advances in gender equality when we challenge sexist and gender-biased language, especially in the classroom. Ask the speaker to think about how their comments reinforce gender stereotypes. The Internet should also be a safe space for everyone. Enlist your friends and followers on social media to send messages of support to victims of online bullying. Challenge your unconscious biases and assumptions that can contribute to barriers for equal opportunity.
- **Talk about health issues.** It shouldn't be shameful. Talk about women's hygiene and sexual health topics to help others see them as concerns that affect us all. Your health is your concern, so insist that doctors and health professionals address you directly. Be sure to exercise your right to access sexual and reproductive health services.
- **Teach peace.** Encourage your students to stand up to violence and bullying. Check in with people and ask if they need help. It may offer a potential victim a way out of a dangerous situation.
- **Be encouraging.** Encourage female students to stay in school, and look for ways to empower female colleagues.
- **Learn about the issues.** Join a cause like The Malala Fund and #HeforShe to take a stand for gender equality and learn how to take action in your school, your community and the world.



## Educational resources

- The World's Largest Lesson is a series of lesson plans designed to help teach the Global Goals and take action. This lesson takes students through the basic ideas of gender equality and contributes to a worldwide survey called [From Where I Stand](#). In this survey, students identify gender ratios among their community leaders and draw out the results. Then, upload your community's data and be counted on the world map. Students can compare results from around the world.
- The Malala Fund's [student tool kit](#) has great ideas to learn, engage and raise your voice for gender equality.
- The [UN's Guide for Gender Equality](#) has great resources for teachers to learn about gender equality in the classroom as well as developing instructional materials that break gender stereotypes and teach positive attitudes about gender.
- In order to provide a safe and welcoming learning environment for all students, as well as helping students understand the full spectrum of gender identity, it is important to discuss transgender and gender non-conforming identity and issues in schools and classrooms. The National Center for Transgender Equality has a [resource page](#) for questions and terminology related to transgender issues.
- The [Gender Equity Activity Book](#) is a student-oriented selection of activities that focuses on detailed and easy to use activities for teachers and students. Activities include topics like stereotyping, sexual harassment, language, employability, classroom equality, gender and technology.
- Explore lesson plans on gender equality for various ages using the [Teach UNICEF website](#). You can search by topic, age and activity type.
- Check out this list of [downloadable lesson plans](#) on gender equality from the BC Teacher's Federation.
- Here's a [secondary level lesson plan](#) from the United Kingdom which includes a discussion on equal rights and what might get in the way. It includes case studies from around the world.

“It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen and visible in a world that tells us we should not exist.”

**Laverne Cox**  
Actress and LGBTQ advocate



## CASE STUDIES

### 1 Malala Fund

The Malala Fund wants to see a world where every girl can complete 12 years of safe, quality education. Through investments in programs and advocacy work at local, national, and international levels, the organization, developed by Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, seeks to amplify the voices of girls and help them reach their full potential through education. In Northern Nigeria, the organization has helped establish community-supported safe spaces to assist girls out-of-school learn essential literacy, numeracy and livelihood skills by reducing social and economic barriers to education.

### 2 HeForShe

HeForShe is a **solidarity** campaign initiated by UN Women fighting for gender equality through the fundamental belief that gender equality is not just a women's issue, it is a human rights issue.<sup>8</sup> From campaign to action, the movement addresses gender equality in the topics of education, health, identity, work, violence and politics. Bringing gender equality into everyday life, the campaign is helping to spread awareness and encourage informed action all over the world.

### 3 Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief

In Dibate, Ethiopia, Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief started a training program to encourage women-led community **food security** and nutrition. They are using the Farmer Field School approach to include education and experience in entrepreneurial support to improve savings and marketing practices. The focus of the program is to strengthen women's control over cash and resources, and improve nutrition at the household level.

### 4 MATCH International and World University Services of Canada

In Malawi, girls and women continue to face many obstacles on their path to acquiring education. Many menstrual age girls in Malawi do not attend school for three to five days a month because they lack sanitary products. This means that at menstrual age, girls miss up to five school days a month, which translates to 25 per cent of their monthly schooling. For this reason, MATCH International and World University Services of Canada have invested in community solutions for these gendered barriers preventing education for girls in Malawi. The provision of locally made, reusable sanitary pads helped girls in the project impact schools of Dowa improve retention, performance and overall completion of education.



## 5 MATCH International Women's Fund

Women living on or near Sri Lanka's tea plantations are among the most disempowered and marginalized in the country. The MATCH International Women's Fund is helping to build the confidence and self-esteem of women through increased leadership training and financial literacy as means to increase their role within the home, within the workplace and within their community.

## 6 The Marquis Project

The Marquis Project is currently assisting child-headed households and marginalized young women and girls by facilitating their participation in the local **market economy**. The program will help increase market intelligence and build self-employment skills among the participants. It will also act as a catalyst to increase local capacity through a combination of **microenterprise**, agro-production and vocational training, mentorship, and **microcredit** development.

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### End notes

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5\\_Why-it-Matters\\_GenderEquality\\_2p.pdf](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5_Why-it-Matters_GenderEquality_2p.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5\\_Why-it-Matters\\_GenderEquality\\_2p.pdf](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/5_Why-it-Matters_GenderEquality_2p.pdf)

<sup>3</sup><https://www.malala.org/girls-education>

<sup>4</sup><http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/understanding-issues-facing-transgender-americans.pdf>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.bpw-international.org/blog/entry/for-gender-equality-in-2030-here-s-what-needs-to-be-done>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.heforshe.org/en>