

UNGEI | **FEMINIST NETWORK** | **2024**
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

REGIONAL DECLARATION FOR

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

AFRICA



INTRODUCTION

This regional declaration was developed through a consultative process involving a survey across all African countries and 253 respondents in six languages¹. It highlights the work of development partners, CSOs, and governments on gender equality in and through education. There was at least one CSO response from each of the 54 countries while in some countries there weren't responses from government officials. The declaration outlines the current barriers to achieving Gender Transformative Education (GTE), the existing evidence, and opportunities for collective action in the region.

Background

Gender Transformative Education is a conceptual framework and practice that recognizes the power of education to transform harmful gender stereotypes, norms, binaries and practices in the classroom and beyond. It is key to promoting more equal, just and sustainable societies. Organisations working on issues of gender and development initiated a process to co-create a regional process of defining its regional advocacy agenda on GTE, and a shared learning platform, inspired by the Feminist Network for Gender Transformative Education (FemNet4GTE) global convening in Istanbul, Türkiye. This declaration therefore, sets the tone for regional engagements on gender transformative education and strategic actions toward its achievement.

The context of gender equality in education across Africa

The need to pursue GTE has long been recognized. Progress has been made at least in acknowledging the magnitude of the problem and the promise of resolving it in form of global and regional pronouncements. Many global, regional and national initiatives have been implemented to actualize the aspirations of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which underpinned education as a human right and instrumental in achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Africa's Agenda 2063 commits member states of the African Union to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, including sexual violence in conflict situations, for women to fully enjoy all their human rights. It further commits member states to end all harmful practices (e.g. early and forced child marriages and female genital mutilation), remove all barriers to access to quality health and education for women and girls, and eliminate all gender disparities at all levels of education by 2063. Accordingly, countries in the region have continued their push for progress towards gender equality.

The 2022 [Transforming Education Summit](#), addressed key education issues common across all countries, with special attention given to cross-cutting issues: gender equality; disability inclusion; and education in emergencies and crises. The most important outcome of this summit with respect to GTE, however, was the launch of the Global Platform for Gender Equality and Girls' and Women's Empowerment in and through Education. This is a multi-stakeholder forum to drive transformative leadership, accountability, innovation, data and financing to advance gender equality in and through education.

1 [Analysis](#) of Survey Results: Gender Equality in and through Education in Africa

UNGEI | FEMINIST NETWORK 2024
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

CURRENT BARRIERS TO PROGRESS TOWARDS

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

This section highlights the main barriers to GTE in the African Region.



1. **The definition of Gender Transformative Education terminology:** Gender Transformative Education has often been confused with gender-responsive education.

- ◆ **Gender Responsive Education:** This approach includes specific actions aimed at considering gender as part of design and analysing data to inform implementation and policy. Gender responsive education does not address the underlying power structures in advancing gender equality within educational settings.
- ◆ **Gender Transformative Education:** This approach transcends responding to gender differences. It fundamentally challenges and seeks to change power imbalance that propagates harmful gender norms, roles and inequalities. It equips and empowers stakeholders to examine, challenge and alter those norms and their structural bases, to foster a more just society.

While gender-responsive education seeks to reduce existing gender inequalities, gender-transformative education tackles the root causes of these inequalities. In short, the diversity of understanding of what GTE is and is not among the practitioners is a major challenge, resulting in mixed messaging and sometimes misrepresentation with the attended risks of backlash.



2. **Established norms and systems:** In several contexts, there is a resurgence of retrogressive cultural practices despite progressive legal and policy frameworks across the region. In several countries for instance, the perpetrators of female genital mutilation (FGM), which is widely acknowledged as a gateway to early, mostly forced child marriages, besides being harmful to girls' and women's health in a myriad of ways, have become creative to defeat the law. They have invented medicalization of FGM, reduced the age at which girls are cut and engaged in cross-border cutting to evade law enforcement officers. Respondents across the continent reaffirmed that deep rooted patriarchal beliefs and societal norms continue to ensure the prioritization of boys' over girls' education. These norms pervade the school system with career paths being gendered to the disadvantage of girls and women. With resurgent cultural norms and practices, come inimical political rhetoric that often culminates into unreasoned, non-evidence-based, often random and confusing policy pronouncements. It may be recalled that a few years ago, the then-president of Tanzania, vowed to stop schoolgirls who got pregnant from being readmitted into schools. This policy has since been reversed, but its effects continue to linger on.

UNGEI | **FEMINIST NETWORK 2024**
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION



3. **Funding for Gender Transformative Education:** Funding gaps continue to limit action on GTE, especially in the communities where it is most needed. It is in the communities where norms change should take place. It is also in the communities where the groundswell of demand for implementation of the many pro-GTE policies should take place to herald sustainable change. But this requires more investment than is currently available. The survey findings highlight the need for greater focus on and investment in community-based work and point out barriers to acquiring funding for such work as follows:
- ◆ Stiff competition for limited funds from international funders which smaller, grassroots organisations can't cope with in the face of the competitive advantage of the regional and global organisations operating in their areas.
 - ◆ The pressure to demonstrate impact of education projects was cited as an important hindrance in advancing gender equality and scaling good practices. This also includes a lack of flexible funding.
 - ◆ The fragmented nature of donor funding toward GTE might hamper efficiency and diminish the impact of funding toward shared goals. From the survey, 91 donors were cited with a majority being from philanthropic and government bodies (29 and 27 percent respectively).
 - ◆ International commitments by governments to allocate resources towards education notwithstanding, governmental funding towards GTE programmes remains insufficient often due to budgetary constraints and inequitable distribution of available resources.
 - ◆ Many education budgets are gender-blind, which results in inadequate funding for GTE-relevant programmes.
 - ◆ The lack of strong accountability mechanisms in the allocation and utilization of funds for education programmes in some African countries might negatively impact the delivery of GTE programmes.



4. **Conflict and protracted crises:** In several countries across the region, challenges of conflict have resulted in the education system and schools being destroyed or closed due to insecurity. Conflicts hinder free movement and render schools unsafe for learners, especially girls and children with disabilities. Respondents from the survey noted the decrease in funding towards gender equality in their communities with most funds redirected towards security and the prevention of violent conflict. There are also worsening impacts of climate change on education, such as the flooding and cyclones.



5. **Research gaps:** The existence of data from government bodies, global partners such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank and UN Women, as well as CSOs such as FAWE, Usawa Agenda, Haki Elimu, among others was noted. However, gaps in available data and evidence on gender equality in and through education persist, hindering desired resource allocation as well as demonstration and tracking of progress. Indeed, the survey findings show that

UNGEI **FEMINIST NETWORK 2024**
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

there is still limited data on the importance and relevance of GTE as well as on effective gender-responsive pedagogies. Similarly, the nexus between girls' education, climate change mitigation and girls' agency remain areas that require more focus and simultaneously more data to support the expansion of projects. Theoretical refinement of the key concepts around GTE and strategies for comprehensive community engagement around the subject remains an area of interest for further exploration.

The main limitations include:

- ◆ Limited availability of studies that are timely and context-relevant;
- ◆ Incomplete data sets that are often fraught with data quality concerns; and
- ◆ Inadequately disaggregated data that fail to identify intersectional shifts and impacts by gender, age, disability and socio-economic status.

OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Many opportunities are emerging for pushing the GTE agenda forward. Thus, global, regional and national organisations can play their part as follows:



1. **Shape the discussions on global and regional re-commitments towards education:**

Ongoing efforts towards re-commitment to the implementation of global and regional agreements, which are in most cases usually domesticated for implementation at the national level, provide an opportunity for advancement on GTE. For instance, with the re-commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, there is an opportunity to advance the GTE agenda as the core indicator and precursor of the successful implementation of the Platform. Furthermore, at the regional level, the review of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), among other regional strategies presents an opportunity for development actors and partners to engage. The recent global commitment to transforming education presents an opportunity for stakeholders in the region to ask questions about what is being transformed, how, and where, as well as shape the discussions. In these questions lies the platform to reopen and evaluate all the commitments to advance gender equality in and through education and the broader women's empowerment agenda in the region, which we should exploit.



- ### 2. **Advocate for increased domestic financing:** Global, regional and national level partners can leverage the new funding commitments and opportunities to mobilise domestic resources towards the advancement of the GTE agenda. We can jointly advocate for AU member states to increase domestic financing to promote GTE.

UNGEI **FEMINIST NETWORK 2024**
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION



3. **Define and domesticate Gender Transformative Education:** The push for progress in the GTE agenda has been hampered by blurry terminologies. The establishment of UNGEI is a unique opportunity to rally researchers and practitioners pushing the GTE agenda to collaborate on refining terminologies, sharpening the message and thus communicating with the relevant actors more clearly and effectively.



4. **Strengthen capacities of Civil Society Organisations for joint action:** Strengthening the partnerships among the network members and development partners is critical for joint resource mobilisation for the advancement of GTE and development. The network members work with many partners from grassroots communities to national governments, as well as regional and global organisations. This is also especially critical in conflict and crisis contexts.



5. **Leverage funding opportunities for GTE:** Funding for GTE in Africa has gained traction over the years. This support ranges from grants to implementing programmes and interventions, capacity strengthening of Civil Society Organisations and communities, and technical assistance to governments to develop education policies and plans. Governments, philanthropic institutions and foundations have prioritised gender equality in education through their programmes. Furthermore, private sector companies and development partners have invested in education initiatives aligning with their corporate social responsibility goals. This includes the need for more flexible funding for local organisations as this is a critical gap in responses.

RESEARCH ON

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

This far, much remains to be done to achieve what was set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Among the things that need to be done is to refine the terminologies to usher in a new era where all actors speak in one language and generate a harmonious choir-like song that the policy and investment decision-makers will find easy to sing along. Similarly, we need to understand the ways and bandwidth required to engage meaningfully in the communities and sow the seeds of change that can in due course acquire a life of their own there. We need to understand how to better document stories of change and the impact of such meaningful engagements, as well as gender transformative education interventions, to build up critical evidence and lessons for scale-up and evidence-informed actions and decision-making. We need to understand how to use data more and better to demonstrate the impact of gender-transformative programmes as a basis for joint advocacy for more funding and scaling up of good practices.

UNGEI **FEMINIST NETWORK 2024**
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

GOALS, ACTIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

As we chart a path forward, it is crucial to prioritize community engagement and localised approaches to further strengthen education systems. Thus, the following priority areas will be instrumental in addressing the challenges to GTE across the region:

GOAL 1: CREATE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF GTE, FOR MOVEMENT BUILDING

Strategic Actions

Develop a Community of Practice on GTE for shared learning and advocacy action: Joint efforts, already existing through collaborations and networks, and in the future through a Community of Practice, offer a promising avenue to foster mutual learning, innovation and capacity strengthening on GTE, and are essential for overcoming barriers and driving sustainable change. By harnessing collective expertise, securing diversified funding, and ensuring that gender equality remains a central focus in education policy and practice, respondents will continue to make strides toward a more equitable and just future for all. Local organisations are drawing on their networks and collaborating with other like-minded organisations to increase their visibility. These strategies aim to cultivate a platform to showcase their work and build more trust.

Capacity strengthening for movement building and joint fundraising: Organisational needs and priorities for capacity strengthening include resource mobilisation, fundraising and capacity for grant writing, particularly when discussing the complex funding requirements from international funders.

GOAL 2: ADVANCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES THAT PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION AT BOTH REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS

Joint Action

Implement policies to end early forced child marriage and combat harmful cultural practices such as FGM: The survey findings highlight the fact that positive policies, such as those prohibiting early, forced child marriage or enabling adolescent mothers to re-enter school, are few and often remain unimplemented. While policies and political actors are beginning to support GTE processes, attention should also be given to strengthening policy implementation systems.

Strategically engage with regional mechanisms to strengthen reporting: These include engagements with the Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the African Commission on Peoples and Human Rights (ACPHR).

UNGEI | **FEMINIST NETWORK 2024**
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Expand access to digital learning and online safety: With the rise of digital learning, the gender digital divide is becoming more apparent. Many girls lack access to technology, which is crucial for modern learning, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Promote gender-responsive pedagogies and safe school environments: By promoting policies that support the training and professional development of teachers and education managers on gender transformative leadership, and championing the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration, network members will ensure the safety of learners within the school environment and ensure they fully benefit from the learning experience.

Promote educational interventions and programmes on climate education, climate activism and justice: The relationship between climate change and education is gendered and girls are particularly vulnerable.

Support to capacity strengthening and mutual partnerships for joint research: Altogether, with numerous barriers affecting the propensity for international research to be timely and provide context-specific data, the need for greater support to local and regional representation in the research production and dissemination space is evident. Research agendas need to a higher degree be co-created and more support (capacity strengthening and funding) is needed for locally-led, action-oriented research on GTE that prioritizes agency. Furthermore, education stakeholders must adopt a Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) approach to ensure the voices and experiences of girls, young women, and youths in their diversity as well as marginalized groups shape educational outcomes. This method fosters empowerment and drives structural changes that support gender equality in and through education.

Establish and support a pool of regional Africa-based research actors: They will be central in leading the research work and maintaining the necessary level of coherence across actors and levels.

Commission research studies: on the effectiveness of various gender-responsive pedagogies and teacher practices, as well as on other GTE interventions, with a focus on scalability and cultural adaptability, to better support programmatic success. Overall, the survey highlights the need for a decolonial approach to local funding arrangements that privileges localised methods around data collection and storytelling. Furthermore, the decolonisation of knowledge should be accepted and transmitted to the community level for ownership.

Documenting stories of change and the impact of meaningful engagements, as well as gender transformative education interventions, together with critical evidence and lessons for scale-up and evidence-informed actions and decision-making. Furthermore, using data to demonstrate the impact of gender-transformative programmes provides a good basis for joint advocacy for more funding and scaling up of good practices.

UNGEI FEMINIST NETWORK 2024
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION