UNGEI FEMINIST NETWORK
FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION
2024

REGIONAL DECLARATION FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Context

Asia and the Pacific will achieve only one third of the promised progress towards the sustainable development goals by 2030 as per UN ESCAP (2024). The progress towards education-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4) has faltered on account of inequitable access and financing challenges especially post pandemic.[1] While access to primary education has shown gains (UN Women 2023), youth (60% of who reside in Asia and the Pacific) especially young women continue to encounter discrimination in education and transition to work. The third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE III), states that Asia and the Pacific is home to 456 million illiterate adults, most of whom are women. The United Nations upholds the right to education and lifelong learning as central to the achievement of the SDGs and in ensuring no one is left behind but acknowledges that persistent inequities continue to leave the most vulnerable and marginalized behind, in particular women and girls. In addition, low-income groups, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, refugees and displaced women and girls among others are far behind, threatening not just social economic and environmental justice but global peace and security.[2]

A transformative approach to education to promote greater equality, sustainability, and peace and a better future for all is an urgent imperative.[3] The Feminist Network for Gender Transformative Education (FemNet4GTE) found that siloed work in the education sector is limiting the opportunity for a unified approach towards advancing gender-transformative education which has the potential for transforming education and education systems. This declaration, drawn from a regionally driven consultation of the key factors of inequity in education and pathways to dismantle silos, presents an evidence-based call to action for gender-transformative education in the Asia and the Pacific region.

Methodology

FemNet4GTE, together with its regional partners, Aahung, the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and Pratisandhi, conducted a mixed-method survey and two in-person and online consultations with civil society members and partners to understand the landscape of gender equality through education. The consultation included evaluation of the gains and pushbacks in Asia and the Pacific, the understanding of gender equality in and through education at policy and programmatic levels, and the key asks for Gender Transformative Education (GTE) as a policy and statement in the sustainable development overall discourse. The survey was completed by 65 respondents in 23 countries, with representation across East, Central, and South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. The majority of the participants who responded were from South Asia (73%) but all regions across Asia were represented.[4] More than half of respondents were representing civil society organizations (CSOs), including national education coalitions, while young feminist activists comprised one fifth of the respondents, and other participants included researchers and subject matter experts, United Nations representatives, community-based organizations, education institutions and other education stakeholders.

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1   The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2024 https://www.unescap.org/kp/2024/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2024

2   Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 10, Transforming Education, United Nations 2023 https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-transforming-education-en.pdf

3   Ibid.

4   The analysis has been focused on regional variations and have reported information from across regions of Asia and the Pacific, not just South Asia which received the highest response rate.

SIGNIFICANT GAINS

- **Positive policy on primary and secondary education** - a positive policy push towards education for all has led to increased primary and secondary level enrollment and completion of both girls and boys. Data gaps persist regarding enrollment and completion of gender-nonbinary children.

- **Reduced prevalence of out-of-school children** due to positive reinforcement through scholarships, and implementation of education policies especially in South East Asia.

- **Push towards enrolling girls in STEM** - push for girls in STEM reported across South Asia, Southeast Asia and in the Pacific.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

- **Progress towards eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education is significantly off track**. Further, **higher education and tertiary education retention** is a challenge across all sub-regions and the majority cite social norms, safety and harassment, menstrual hygiene taboos for girls, and early entry to work for boys.

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education discussions are not yet mainstreamed** as reported by South Asia respondents posing a challenge to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights, leading to early pregnancy and perpetutated menstrual health myths and taboos, that impede continued education for adolescent girls.

- **Conflict zones** in Central and Southeast Asia and **post disaster zones** in Pacific are at a disadvantage as **climate change and conflict reinforce social norms**. Conflict reinforces lack of safety and reduced access to school for girls; climate change-led poverty fuels early marriage but more evidence is needed to drive policy change.

- **Women with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, minority religious or indigenous groups** are marginalized in policies that lack intersectional data to reach these groups. "We need more work that addresses the multiple identities that influence educational outcomes, like ethnicity and economic status," NCE Nepal, South Asia.

- **Low focus on training of educators** - Fiscal constraints impact continued training and adequate pay of educators impacting quality and reiterating social norms.

- **Lifelong Learning is not a policy focus** - The focus of the sector is on in-school education for children and youth. Mechanisms for continuing education, skills building or life-long learning opportunities as a policy mandate are missing for drop-outs or adults.

THE LANDSCAPE OF GENDER AND EDUCATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Asia-Pacific has made strides in primary and secondary education enrolments, literacy rates, girls' education, and a decline in out-of-school rates. Various countries have adopted inclusive education laws, child protection measures, gender-responsive policies, and budget increments for disadvantaged learners.

Despite these gains, civil society organisations and collectives identified the following persisting challenges to achieving gender equality in and through education:

1. **Both gender norms and the continuous marginalization of communities impact equity and fairness of education**
   Survey respondents noted that the social system is moderately fair and somewhat just in Asia & Pacific, attributing policy level gains which primarily focus on primary and secondary education. **Gender norms and stereotypes** allocating caregiving roles to women however impede girls' and women's access to higher education and subsequently the workforce: "Women's education[al] advantage is not bringing any benefits after graduation and in the world of work," highlighted the civil society group AFE Mongolia. Regional differences and leaving out the marginalized impede equitable access to education as shared by civil society from Cambodia, in Southeast Asia: "**Regional differences** are sharp.… The gap comes from the reasons linked to school resources like shortage of budget and funding, lack of school facilities, and teaching and learning materials." The access to education of young women and girls in marginalised areas is impacted by lack of physical infrastructure like safe dormitories for boarding, water or sanitation facilities along with safe transportation between school and home.

2. **There is a lack of comprehensive approach to understanding intersectionality between gender and education**
   A moderate collaboration between gender and education sectors exists across the region, but is inadequate given the diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. There are committees on gender equality and policies that support integration of gender and education at the ministry level in South, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. In the Philippines, "Civil society organizations work with Local Divisions of the Department of Education in gender mainstreaming with curriculum development, instructional materials, but also in monitoring the implementation of these memoranda" (E-Net Philippines). However, implementation needs deeper intersections; collaborations between and among stakeholders in education and gender are limited in scale, scope and understanding, therefore "are usually project-based and lack the sustained effort needed for real change." CSO representatives from India share that cross-sectoral collaborations exist but are not implemented adequately. "Government has setup the gender department in each line ministry to support women and girls including the Secretariat of State for Gender and Inclusion itself. But due to a limited understanding from all these parties, gender and inclusivity are still challenging to achieve," Timor Leste Civil Society.

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3. Funding gaps impact curriculum revision, educator training and reiterates gender-norms; lifelong learning is not a focus

There is a widespread belief that current education systems are helping new learners across Asia and Pacific to develop into confident and equal adults due to improving enrolment rates, better infrastructure and policies, among others. However, a crucial gap remains in integrating gender and life skills into the curriculum and lack of training of educators due to funding constraints. As a respondent from East Asia shares, "Parents and teachers are not aware of gender equality, they are very traditional and patriarchal." In the Pacific sub-region of Vanuatu, "people still have the belief that girls should stay at home and help the family in doing house chores...There is also a disconnect between what is taught in schools and the real-world skills children need to navigate society confidently." No investments in adult learning and education, particularly adult women's education, are made despite SDG4's commitment to the promotion of lifelong learning for all. Gender-transformative budgeting for education is not the norm at a national level where fiscal constraints and debts impact social sector spending. There is work at the ground level in Asia and the Pacific, from review and push for gender in national policies in East Asia and Pacific to gender analysis of existing policies in Central Asia, along with focus on gender mainstreaming of curriculum and teaching materials in Southeast and South Asia. Samoa, in the Pacific sub-region, is "working on teacher trainings, implementing comprehensive policies and programs to prevent and respond to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in schools along with supporting women's leadership in education, from the classroom to administrative roles." However, these advocacy efforts of civil society, women's rights groups or community-based organizations face constraints of long-term sustainability due to limited funding.

4. Lack of research/evidence

While disaggregated data is being collected in some areas, it does not include data on gender, including data on non-binary individuals, nor is inclusive of people living with disabilities. Therefore, evidence on access to school and completion rates of children facing intersecting deprivations, such as non-binary individuals, those with disabilities or who are neurodivergent, those affected by climate disasters and conflicts, is needed to build an evidence-base to advocate for supportive and inclusive policies. In addition, research should focus on the safety of girls, non-binary individuals and learners with disabilities in educational settings, as "discrimination towards LGBTIQ+ and people with disabilities persist, and inclusive education is still very weak; there are no policies and supportive systems to strengthen gender-friendly and inclusive education settings" as shared by a civil society group operating in Myanmar and Thailand. The impact of climate change and disasters and other vulnerabilities that affect access to education are also critical areas for evidence creation to strengthen policymaking.

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION IN THIS SCENARIO

Gender Transformative Education is an approach to disrupt gender norms and "dismantle stereotypes" (civil society in Mongolia). It goes beyond "access to education to redress inequalities and improve gender responsiveness" (civil society in Cambodia) and it calls for "Empowerment with the focus on providing a quality education that is inclusive, gender-sensitive, and transformative" (civil society in Papua New Guinea).

Gender Transformative Education is known to have potential

GTE is an approach that is already being adapted in programs by 37% of the respondents across Asia and the Pacific, alongside gender equality in and through education (37%) and Gender-responsive education (22%). Among the civil society players who provided complete responses, 38% use Gender-Transformative Education methods/approaches and 41% used the term Gender-Responsive Education. In terms of its potential, to solve the current challenges faced in the region, while South, Southeast and Pacific report high potential[5], central Asia and East reported a moderate potential.[6]

Clear and contextual understanding and adequate resourcing is needed for success

The potential for GTE can only be realised with increased clarity of approach, inclusive and contextual understanding as it is very subjective, and people may understand and interpret it differently. It requires integration with local cultural contexts. The Samoa Education Network, also notes that for GTE "It is essential to approach this with cultural sensitivity and respect for Samoan traditions... Involving the community in the process is crucial for its success...teachers will need adequate training to implement gender-transformative approaches effectively...sufficient resources must be allocated to support the implementation of this educational approach."

Need for a comprehensive approach from policy to implementation

"Gender-transformative education would mean we make gender an integral lens in the work that we do – for curriculums to be inclusive; teachers to be better equipped with handling diverse needs, and students to understand that they have a safe space to voice their concerns. It would mean that budgets for the school are gender-responsive, that male members make space within administration as well as teaching roles for women, it would also mean that we work with all stakeholders that interact with the education system on breaking down the nuances of gender equality at the ground level."

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5   The average respondents rated gender transformative education as having a "high potential" to solve regional challenges. The responses were rated 7 or 8 out of 10 i.e upper end of the scale

6   The average respondents rated gender transformative education as having a " moderate potential" to solve regional challenges. The responses were rated 5.5 or 6 out of 10 i.e middle of the scale

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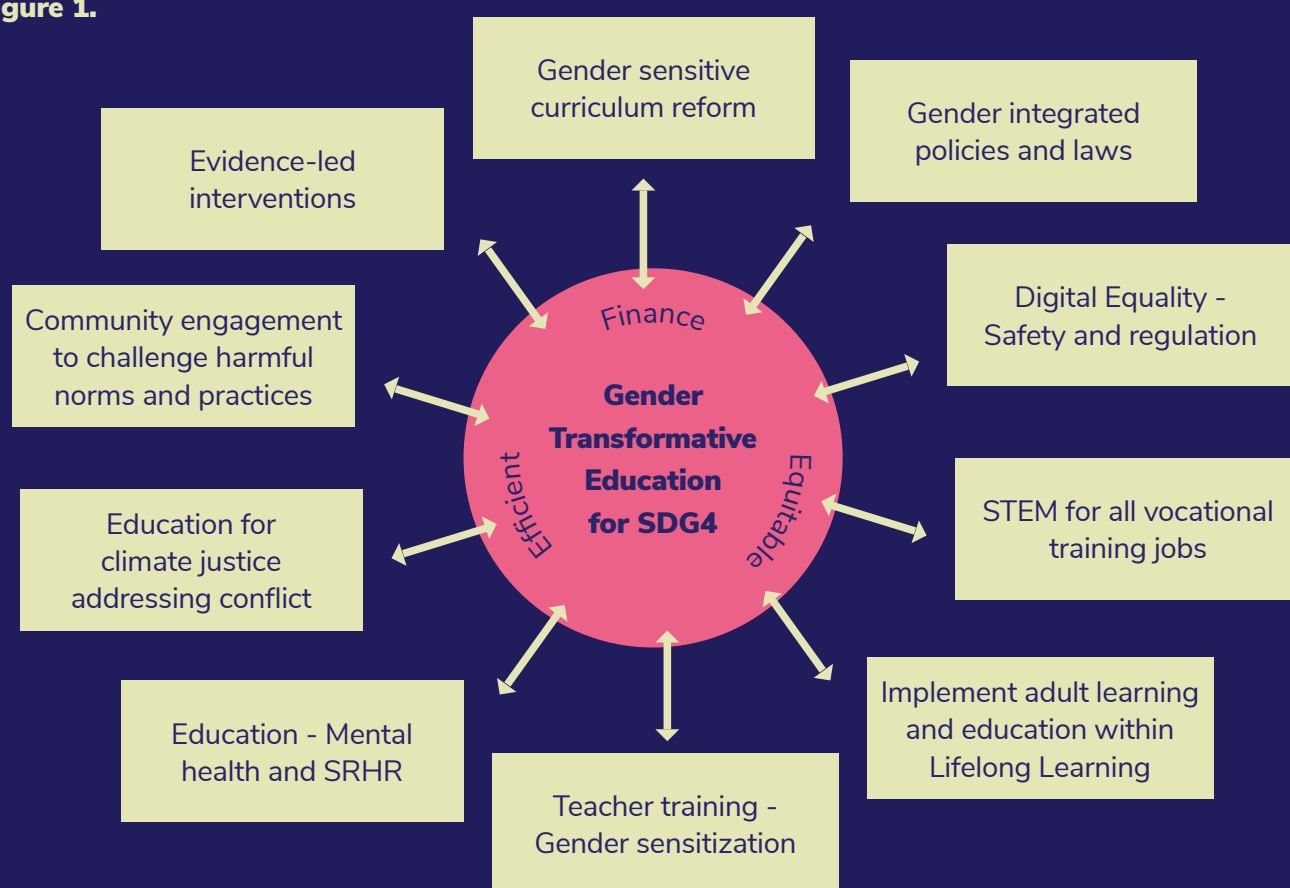
GOALS, ACTIONS, AND THE PATHWAY FORWARD: SPECIFIC DEMANDS FOR ACHIEVING GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

GTE upholds education as a fundamental human right for all within an intergenerational and rights-based framework. To be truly transformative, actions towards SDG 4 need to attend to education and lifelong learning issues and concerns of all children, youth, and adults. This also requires removing gendered barriers to education for girls and transforming the norms that keep girls from achieving their full potential. Therefore, this declaration uses the approach of GTE to demand the right to inclusive and equitable education and lifelong learning for all as outlined in SDG 4 and reiterated by the United Nations in 'Our Common Agenda, Transforming Education"[7]. The approach and demands are highlighted in the Figure 1 and detailed above.

Figure 1.

Gender sensitive curriculum reform

Gender integrated policies and laws

Evidence-led interventions

Digital Equality - Safety and regulation

Community engagement to challenge harmful norms and practices

Finance

Gender Transformative Education for SDG4

Efficient

Equitable

STEM for all vocational training jobs

Education for climate justice addressing conflict

Implement adult learning and education within Lifelong Learning

Education - Mental health and SRHR

Teacher training - Gender sensitization

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7   Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 10, Transforming Education, United Nations 2023 https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-transforming-education-en.pdf

1. **Relevant gender-integrated policies on education:** National policies need to address critical gaps like challenges faced by girls in the transition from education to decent employment, promoting STEM for women and ensuring digital access for all. Evidence-based policies to address the gaps in reaching marginalized groups through formal, non-formal and informal means of education or vocational schemes is critical. There is also a need to develop specific gender-transformative policies for education in case of emergencies and uncertainties like conflict, climate related disasters and others.

2. **Focus on training and recruitment of teachers:** UNESCO reports that at least 69 million more teachers are needed globally to deliver on Sustainable Development Goal 4. This declaration demands that adequate fiscal allocation be made for recruitment of teachers, that they receive fair and competitive salaries, good working conditions and manageable workloads along with continuing professional development in gender responsive pedagogies and relevant 21st Century curriculum for educators. This will support teachers to deliver equitable, inclusive, and quality education. Allocations should be made for teacher training to ensure safe learning environments, including addressing menstrual hygiene taboos, eliminating harmful gender norms that prevent equitable access to digital spaces for learning, and greater access for STEM for women and girls. Training should also include prevention of early, forced, and child marriage, as well as promoting climate justice and addressing the impact of conflict and migration on education.

3. **Gender-sensitive curricula free of harmful gender stereotypes**[8] is essential to achieve gender equality in and through education. This will also contribute to reducing early, forced and child marriage and unions, and in addressing gender-based violence and discrimination against women and sexually diverse persons[9]. Education curricula needs to include discussions on gender equality, promoting peace, human rights, democratic principles, and values, and recognize the interlinkages of various social issues, including the impacts of climate change, conflict on education, health, food and nutrition, and livelihoods, amongst others. Transversal and 21st century skills like critical thinking, cross-cultural communication, collaboration, social-emotional learning, digital skills and climate change education should be part of existing curricula in formal and non-formal education systems, and be accessible and inclusive of girls.

8   Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 10, Transforming Education, United Nations 2023 https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-transforming-education-en.pdf

9   No country will achieve gender equality by 2030 reported by EM2030. A gender equal future in crisis? Findings from the 2024 SDG Gender Index https://equalmeasures2030.org/wp content/uploads/2024/09/EM2030_2024_SDG_Gender_Index_EN_digital.pdf

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4. **Focus on digital access and STEM for all:** In compliance with the Global Digital Compact[10], there is need to bridge the digital divide especially for girls and vulnerable groups, through meaningful and affordable infrastructure, imparting digital skills and capabilities to access without harm during its usage for well-being and growth. There is a need for strong governance and regulatory frameworks to guide global, regional, and national approaches for safe and equitable digital access. STEM for all is being promoted at a policy level but there is a need to address persistent gender norms, which act as barriers to access, and provide wider access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET), apprenticeship training, financial literacy, and digital literacy, through vocational accredited courses and other non-formal learning pathways along with mainstream education. This will ensure avenues for decent work and livelihoods of marginalised and socially vulnerable youth, including women and girls, who have been deprived of formal education due to early marriage, pregnancy, migration or other socio-economic causes.

5. **Pursuing Adult Learning and Education (ALE) within a rights-based and lifelong learning framework:** Most education systems cater only to institutional learning for children and fail to attend to the education rights of youth and adults. There is a need to support and pursue Adult Learning and Education (ALE) as committed by governments in the Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA)[11] and to ensure lifelong learning (LLL) opportunities for all as embodied in SDG4. Gender-transformative adult learning and education must be comprehensive, holistic and intergenerational, bringing together education actors with sectors such as health, protection and justice. It also calls for the promotion of relevant, non-discriminatory and gender-responsive curricula and learning materials that will incorporate emerging fields of learning. All of these will require financing ALE, training of educators, supporting flexible learning pathways and awareness-raising on ALE and LLL opportunities for youth and adult learners. Attention should be brought to the inclusion of marginalised groups, equipping them with skills to respond to work and life challenges. This should also enable them to participate in the evolving labour market, including through access to digital and green skills and entrepreneurship opportunities, therefore reducing the gap in labour force participation.

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10   As outlined in the Summit of the Future, Global digital compact https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/global-digital-compact

11   The Marrakech Framework for Action (MFA), as agreed by more than 140 UNESCO Member States in the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VII) in 2022, affirmed education, including adult learning and education (ALE), as a fundamental human right and called for greater participation of adults in education by increasing public funding for ALE and preventing regression in existing budget allocations.

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6. **Building an all-of-society approach to education:** With governments fully accountable on delivering the right to education for all, this will require accountable and transparent mechanisms that will drive education transformation at all levels. As such, there should be a process where students and learners, parents, families, teachers, principals, local governments, political leaders, community elders, youth, labour and civil society organisations are able to participate and engage in education transformation processes with stronger attention to gender equality in education and undoing the impact of harmful gender and social norms.

7. **Generating evidence and monitoring:** Information on educational access of marginalised groups, those facing multiple intersections such as gender non-binary, living with a disability, neurodivergence, religious minorities and others, is critical for policy focus yet little evidence on these groups exist. There is an urgent need to push for high-quality and **timely disaggregated data collection systems** accessible to all stakeholders to enable more comprehensive analysis, assessment and monitoring of the progress of SDG 4 and national education policies. **Focus on citizens' data** with a spotlight reports or action research produced by civil society, including education, youth and women's rights organisations, to reflect their lived realities need to be acknowledged and given credibility. Towards this, a regional data bank which includes information shared by civil society or rights-based organisations, should be made available to serve to mitigate data gaps.

8. **Greater, Equitable and Effective Financing:** Transformative fiscal actions to ensure the long-term and sustainable financing of education as a human right is most critical to achieve GTE. At the national level, addressing the gap in domestic finance through increasing tax-to-GDP ratios would be critical, including allocating efficiently at least 4 – 6% of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15 – 20% of total public expenditure towards education. At the global level, education financing gaps need to be mitigated through international cooperation to reduce external debt in developing countries that impacts their allocation towards education. In addition, accelerating the implementation of all Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments towards the target of 0.7% of the gross national income for ODA to developing countries is critical.
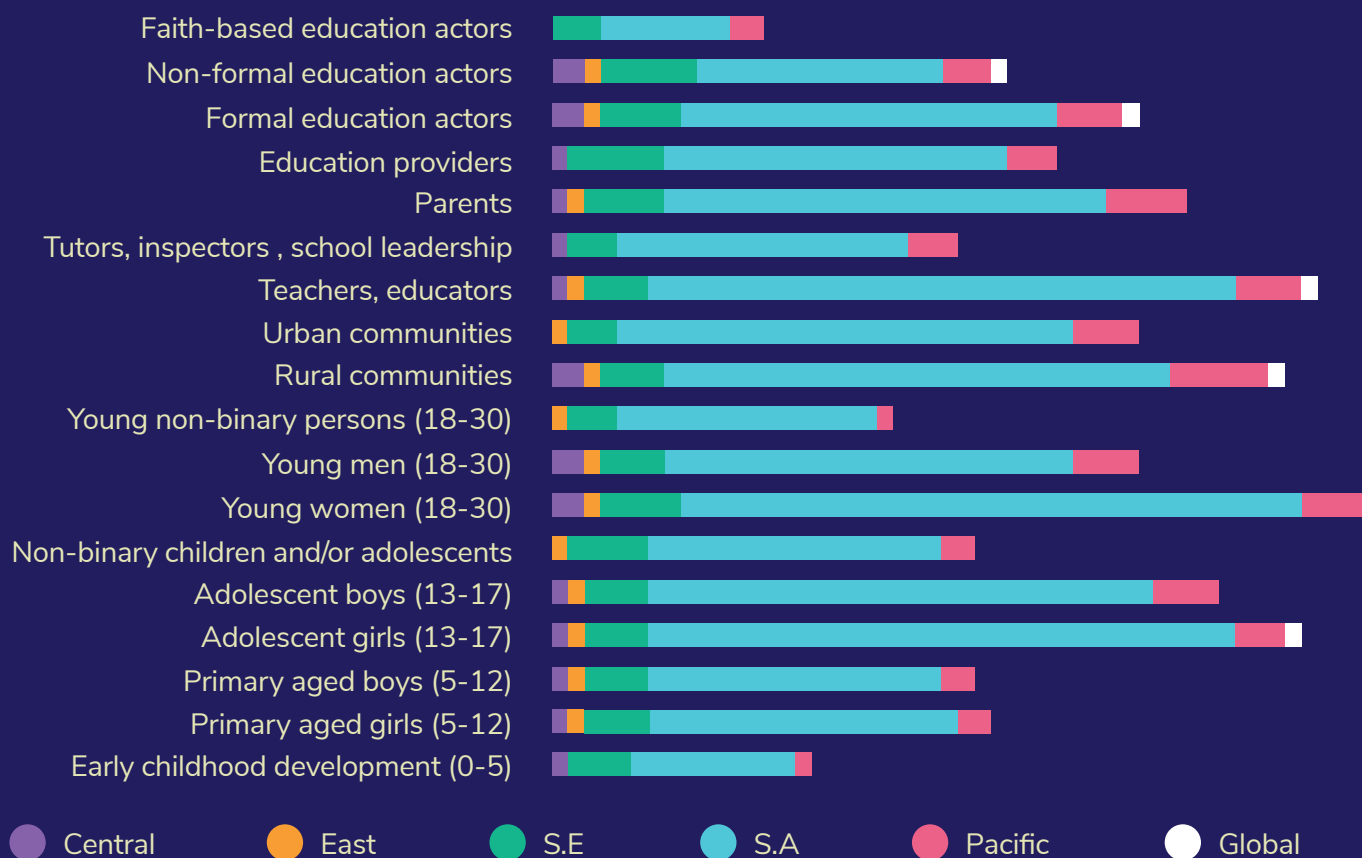
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ANNEX

1: PROFILE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Regions from Asia and the Pacific who participated in the survey

South Asia	73%
Central Asia	3%
East Asia	2%
Africa/Global	2%
Pacific	9%
Southeast Asia	11%

Communities represented by participants

Categories (top to bottom):
- Faith-based education actors
- Non-formal education actors
- Formal education actors
- Education providers
- Parents
- Tutors, inspectors , school leadership
- Teachers, educators
- Urban communities
- Rural communities
- Young non-binary persons (18-30)
- Young men (18-30)
- Young women (18-30)
- Non-binary children and/or adolescents
- Adolescent boys (13-17)
- Adolescent girls (13-17)
- Primary aged boys (5-12)
- Primary aged girls (5-12)
- Early childhood development (0-5)

Legend: Central | East | S.E | S.A | Pacific | Global

2: RESPONSE ON SOCIAL CONTEXT AND SUPPORT IT PROVIDES CHILDREN WITH (BY REGION)

Social context and support for children (Avg)

- 🟢 Is the social context just
- 🔴 Is the social context equal
- 🔵 Children receive support
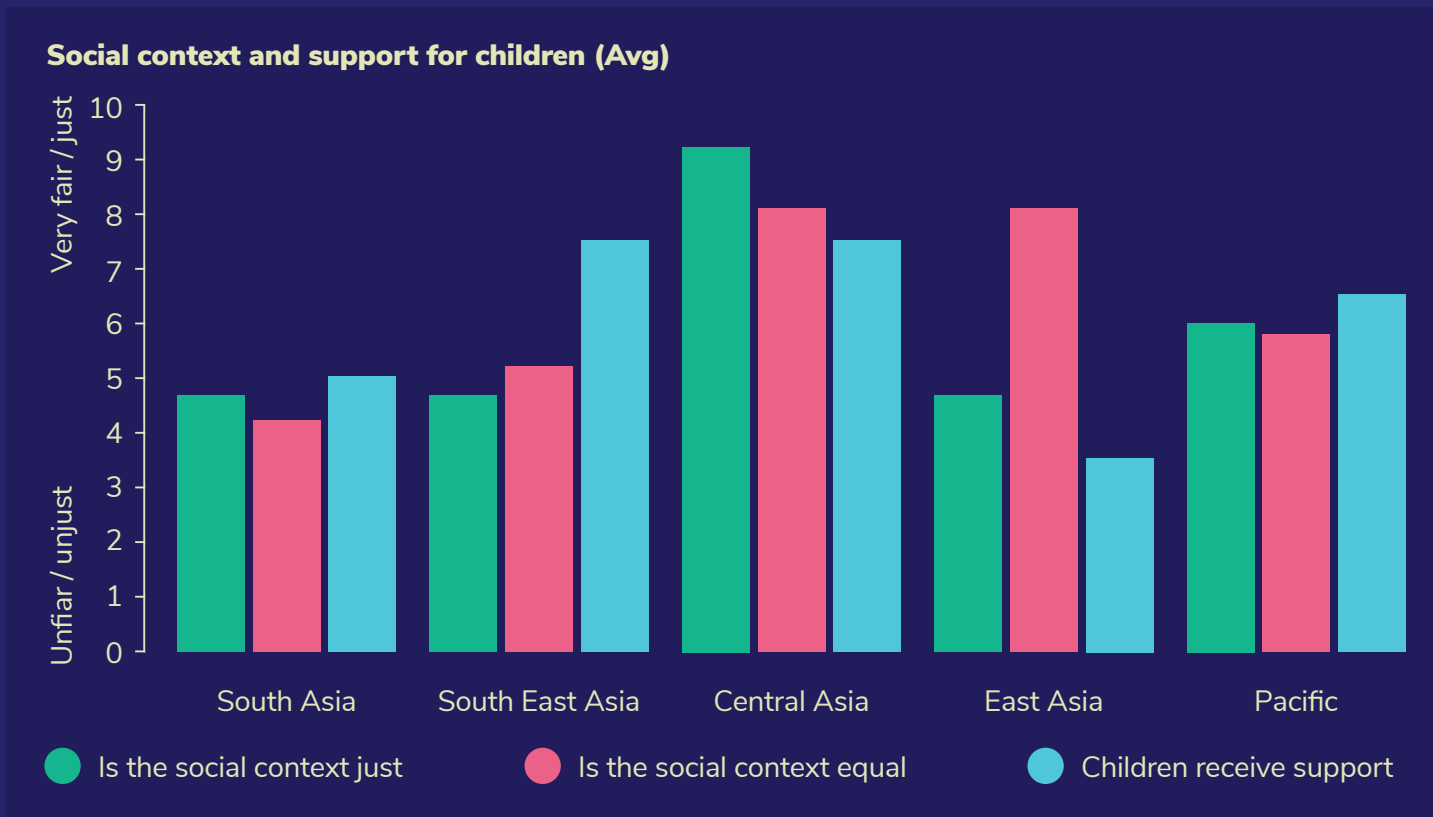
3: COLLABORATION BETWEEN GENDER AND EDUCATION (BY REGION)

Gender-education-intersectionality

- 🟢 Gender and education collaboration
- 🔴 Is it intersectional
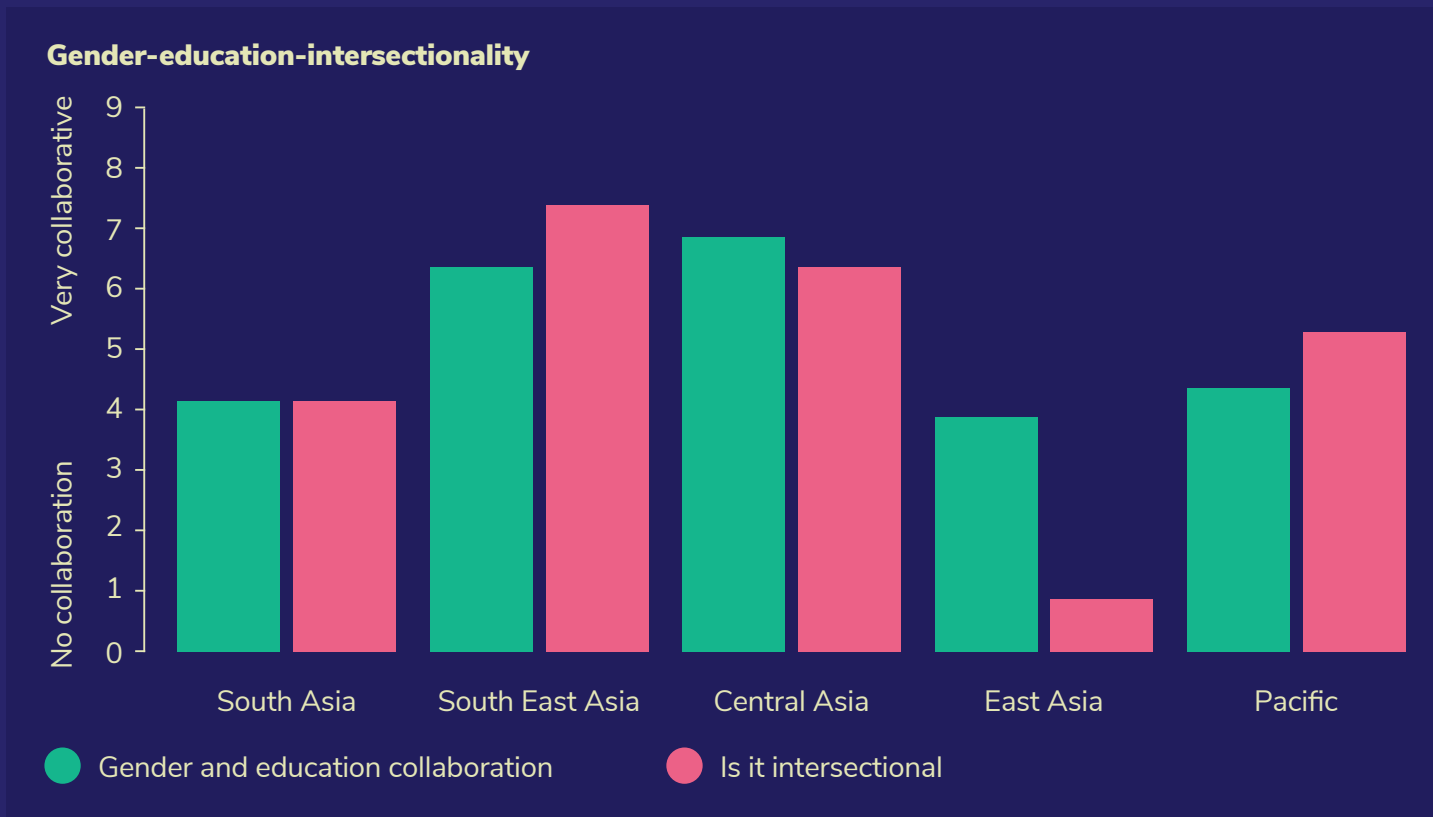
ANNEX

4: RECOGNITION AND ADOPTION OF GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION (BY REGION)

Recognition and adoption of GTE

Bar chart showing Recognition (green) and Usage (pink) percentages for categories:

- Participation of women in workforce for economic development of....
- Gender just education
- Gender-responsive education
- Gender equality in and through education
- Gender-tranformative education

X-axis: 0, 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%

Legend: ● Recognition ● Usage