

A Comprehensive Research Study on Identifying Gaps in Current Gender Policy in Education in Somaliland

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Table of Contents

<i>Table of Content</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
<i>Executive Summary</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1. Introduction</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>2. Literature Review</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>3. Background and Context</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>4. Methodology</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>5. Overview of Current Gender Policies in Education</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>6. Identification of Gaps</i>	<i>6</i>
6.1 Inadequate Gender-Responsive Budgeting.....	6
6.2 Limited Focus on Gender-Based Violence in Schools	7
6.3 Insufficient Support for Female Teachers	7
6.4 Lack of Gender-Disaggregated Data	7
6.5 Weak Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms	7
6.6 Cultural and Social Barriers	8
6.7 Limited Community Engagement	8
6.8 Inadequate Infrastructure	8
<i>7. Recommendations</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>8. Conclusion</i>	<i>10</i>

Executive Summary

This comprehensive research study examines the current state of gender policy in education within Somaliland, with a focus on identifying critical gaps that hinder the achievement of gender equity and equality. Through an extensive review of national education policies, strategic plans, and international frameworks, this study provides a detailed analysis of existing gender-related provisions and their implementation challenges.

The research reveals significant disparities in gender representation within the education sector, particularly in teaching staff composition, where only 19% of primary teachers and 4% of secondary teachers are female. Student enrollment data shows a gender gap with 55.9% male versus 44.1% female enrollment, and the gender parity index has declined from 0.84 to 0.83, indicating a worsening trend in gender equality.

Eight major gaps have been identified: inadequate gender-responsive budgeting, limited focus on gender-based violence in schools, insufficient support for female teachers, lack of gender-disaggregated data, weak implementation and monitoring mechanisms, persistent cultural and social barriers, limited community engagement, and inadequate infrastructure. These gaps collectively undermine efforts to create an equitable and inclusive education system.

The study concludes with actionable recommendations designed to address each identified gap, providing policymakers and education stakeholders with a roadmap for strengthening gender policies and improving their implementation in Somaliland's education sector.

1. Introduction

Gender equality in education is a fundamental human right and a critical driver of social and economic development. In Somaliland, despite progress in expanding access to education, significant gender disparities persist, particularly in enrollment rates, retention, and the representation of women in teaching and leadership positions.

This research study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of current gender policies in education within Somaliland, identifying gaps and challenges that impede the realization of gender equity. The study examines national education policies, strategic frameworks, and their alignment with international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education and Goal 5 (Gender Equality).

The purpose of this research is to provide evidence-based insights that can inform policy reforms and practical interventions to strengthen gender equality in Somaliland's education sector. By identifying specific gaps in policy formulation, resource allocation, implementation, and

monitoring, this study seeks to contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive education policies that benefit all learners regardless of gender.

2. Literature Review

This literature review examines key policy documents that form the foundation of Somaliland's education system and their provisions related to gender equality. The following policy documents were reviewed:

- National Education Policy (2011) - Establishes the framework for education development with provisions for gender equality in access and quality
- Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2017-2021 - Provides strategic direction for education development with specific gender-related targets and indicators
- Higher Education Policy (2015) - Addresses gender considerations in tertiary education access and participation
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy (2014) - Includes measures to promote gender balance in vocational training programs
- Teacher Development and Management Policy (2016) - Contains provisions for recruiting and retaining female teachers
- International commitments including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and Education 2030 Framework for Action

3. Background and Context

Somaliland's education system has evolved significantly since the declaration of independence in 1991. The sector has been rebuilt from the ground up, with policy development guided by both national priorities and international education frameworks. The gender dimension of education policy has received increasing attention, though implementation challenges remain significant.

The policy foundation for gender equality in education rests on several key pillars:

- Constitutional commitment to equality and non-discrimination
- National Education Policy (2011) establishing gender parity as a core objective
- Education Sector Strategic Plans incorporating gender-specific targets and strategies
- Alignment with international frameworks including SDG 4 and SDG 5
- Recognition of persistent barriers including cultural norms, early marriage, and economic constraints
- Acknowledgment of the critical shortage of female teachers, particularly at secondary level

Current education statistics reveal the magnitude of gender challenges. Female representation in teaching positions remains critically low at 19% in primary schools and only 4% in secondary schools. Student enrollment shows a gender gap with 55.9% male versus 44.1% female enrollment. The gender parity index has declined from 0.84 to 0.83, indicating that progress toward gender equality has stalled and, in some areas, reversed.

4. Methodology

This research employed a qualitative document analysis approach to examine gender policies in Somaliland's education sector. The methodology consisted of a comprehensive review and analysis of policy documents, strategic plans, and implementation reports to identify gaps in gender policy formulation and execution.

The research process involved the following steps:

- Collection and review of national education policy documents from 2011 to present
- Analysis of Education Sector Strategic Plans and annual performance reports
- Examination of teacher development policies and gender-related provisions
- Review of higher education and TVET policies for gender considerations
- Analysis of available gender-disaggregated education statistics and data
- Assessment of alignment between national policies and international frameworks (SDGs)
- Identification of policy gaps through comparative analysis of stated objectives versus implementation outcomes
- Consultation of secondary sources including research studies and reports from education development partners

The analysis focused on identifying discrepancies between policy intentions and actual implementation, resource allocation patterns, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the comprehensiveness of gender provisions across different policy areas.

5. Overview of Current Gender Policies in Education

Somaliland has developed several policy documents that address gender equality in education, each with specific objectives and strategies. The following table provides an overview of the key policy documents and their gender-related objectives:

Policy Document	Year	Key Gender-Related Objectives
National Education Policy	2011	Promote gender parity in enrollment and completion; eliminate gender disparities in

		access to education; ensure gender-sensitive curriculum
Education Sector Strategic Plan	2017-2021	Increase girls' enrollment and retention; recruit and train female teachers; provide gender-responsive learning environments; establish gender focal points
Teacher Development and Management Policy	2016	Increase female teacher recruitment through targeted incentives; provide professional development opportunities for female teachers; address barriers to female teacher retention
Higher Education Policy	2015	Promote gender balance in tertiary education enrollment; support female students through scholarships and mentorship programs; address gender disparities in STEM fields
TVET Policy	2014	Encourage female participation in vocational training; eliminate gender stereotypes in career pathways; provide safe and accessible training facilities for female students

These policies collectively establish a comprehensive framework for promoting gender equality in education. However, as detailed in the following section, significant gaps exist between policy provisions and their actual implementation, limiting the effectiveness of these interventions.

6. Identification of Gaps

Through comprehensive analysis of policy documents and their implementation, this study has identified eight critical gaps that undermine the effectiveness of gender policies in Somaliland's education sector. Each gap represents a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and requires targeted interventions.

6.1. Inadequate Gender-Responsive Budgeting

While education policies articulate gender equality objectives, there is insufficient allocation of dedicated resources to implement gender-specific interventions. Budget documents lack clear line items for gender programs, making it difficult to track expenditure on gender equality initiatives.

This gap results in under-resourced programs for girls' education, inadequate incentives for female teacher recruitment, and limited funding for gender-sensitive infrastructure development. Without dedicated budgets, even well-designed policies remain aspirational rather than operational.

6.2. Limited Focus on Gender-Based Violence in Schools

Current policies do not adequately address the prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) in educational settings. There is minimal guidance on establishing safe reporting mechanisms, protocols for responding to incidents of harassment or abuse, or training for teachers and administrators on GBV prevention. This gap leaves female students vulnerable and creates an unsafe learning environment that contributes to dropout rates. The absence of comprehensive GBV policies and procedures represents a critical protection gap in the education system.

6.3. Insufficient Support for Female Teachers

Despite policy recognition of the need to increase female teacher representation, there is inadequate support infrastructure to recruit, develop, and retain female teachers. Policies lack specific provisions for addressing challenges faced by female teachers, including limited access to professional development, insufficient maternity leave provisions, absence of childcare facilities, and inadequate housing in rural areas. The critically low percentage of female teachers (19% at primary level and 4% at secondary level) reflects this systemic gap. Without addressing the specific barriers facing female teachers, the teaching profession will remain male-dominated, limiting role models for female students.

6.4. Lack of Gender-Disaggregated Data

Comprehensive gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis systems are not systematically integrated into education management information systems. While some basic enrollment data is collected by gender, there is insufficient data on retention rates, learning outcomes, reasons for dropout, progression to higher education levels, and other critical indicators disaggregated by gender. This data gap makes it difficult to identify specific challenges, monitor progress, evaluate interventions, and make evidence-based policy decisions. Without reliable gender-disaggregated data, policymakers cannot effectively target resources or measure the impact of gender equality interventions.

6.5. Weak Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms

Policies contain gender equality provisions but lack robust implementation frameworks and monitoring mechanisms to ensure these provisions are translated into practice. There is insufficient clarity on roles and responsibilities for gender policy implementation, limited capacity among education officials to mainstream gender considerations, and weak accountability mechanisms for tracking progress. Gender focal points mentioned in strategic plans are not systematically established or empowered. Regular monitoring and evaluation of gender outcomes is inconsistent, and there is limited reporting on gender-specific indicators. This implementation gap allows policies to remain on paper without meaningful change in practice.

6.6. Cultural and Social Barriers

Policies acknowledge cultural and social barriers to girls' education but provide limited strategies for systematically addressing these deep-rooted challenges. Issues such as early marriage, traditional gender roles, parental attitudes toward girls' education, and community perceptions of the value of educating girls are recognized but not comprehensively addressed through policy interventions. There is insufficient integration of community mobilization strategies, limited engagement with religious and traditional leaders, and inadequate programming to change harmful social norms. This gap is particularly significant as cultural barriers often represent the most formidable obstacle to achieving gender parity in education.

6.7. Limited Community Engagement

There is insufficient emphasis on engaging parents, families, and communities as active partners in promoting girls' education. Policies do not adequately outline strategies for community participation in school governance, parental education programs on the value of girls' education, or mechanisms for communities to support the retention of female students. School management committees and parent-teacher associations lack clear mandates and capacity to address gender issues. This gap limits the sustainability of interventions, as community buy-in is essential for changing attitudes and behaviors that affect girls' educational participation and success.

6.8. Inadequate Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure deficits disproportionately affect female students' participation and retention, yet policies do not sufficiently prioritize gender-responsive infrastructure development. Critical gaps include insufficient separate toilet facilities for girls, lack of privacy and safety measures in school facilities, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, and limited accessibility considerations. The absence of basic amenities such as separate, clean, and safe toilets is a significant factor in female student dropout, particularly after puberty. While policies mention infrastructure needs, they lack detailed standards, budgetary allocations, and implementation timelines for gender-responsive school facilities.

7. Recommendations

Based on the identified gaps, this study proposes comprehensive recommendations to strengthen gender policies in Somaliland's education sector. These recommendations are organized by gap area and include specific, actionable interventions that can be implemented by the Ministry of Education and relevant stakeholders:

Gap Area	Recommended Actions
Inadequate Gender-Responsive Budgeting	Develop and implement gender-responsive budgeting frameworks with clear line items for gender interventions; allocate minimum percentage of education budget to gender equality programs; establish tracking mechanisms for

	gender-related expenditure; conduct annual gender budget analysis; ensure dedicated funding for female teacher incentives and girls' education programs
Limited Focus on Gender-Based Violence	Develop comprehensive GBV prevention and response policy for education sector; establish confidential reporting mechanisms in all schools; train teachers and administrators on GBV identification and response; create safe spaces in schools for students to report concerns; implement awareness campaigns on GBV prevention; establish referral pathways to support services for survivors
Insufficient Support for Female Teachers	Establish targeted recruitment programs for female teachers with financial incentives; provide professional development opportunities specifically for female teachers; ensure adequate maternity leave and benefits; develop childcare facilities at schools or provide childcare support; improve housing conditions for female teachers in rural areas; create mentorship programs pairing experienced and new female teachers; establish support networks for female teachers
Lack of Gender-Disaggregated Data	Strengthen Education Management Information Systems to systematically collect gender-disaggregated data across all indicators; train data collection personnel on gender-responsive data management; establish regular reporting on gender-specific indicators; conduct periodic gender analysis of education data; publish annual gender equality progress reports; use data to inform policy adjustments and resource allocation
Weak Implementation and Monitoring	Establish gender focal points in Ministry of Education and regional education offices with clear terms of reference; develop detailed implementation plans for gender policy provisions with timelines and responsible parties; create accountability mechanisms for gender policy implementation; conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of gender interventions; establish gender equality taskforce to oversee implementation; build capacity of education officials in gender mainstreaming

Cultural and Social Barriers	Develop comprehensive community mobilization strategy to address harmful social norms; engage religious and traditional leaders as advocates for girls' education; implement awareness campaigns highlighting benefits of girls' education; address early marriage through community dialogue and policy enforcement; provide economic support to families to reduce opportunity costs of girls' education; integrate gender equality messages into curriculum and community outreach
Limited Community Engagement	Strengthen school management committees with clear gender equality mandates; train community leaders on gender issues in education; establish parent-teacher associations focused on promoting girls' education; develop community support programs for vulnerable female students; create community monitoring mechanisms for school safety and gender equality; implement parental education programs on the value of girls' education
Inadequate Infrastructure	Develop gender-responsive infrastructure standards for all schools; prioritize construction of separate toilet facilities for girls and boys; ensure water and sanitation facilities meet needs of female students; implement safety and privacy measures in school design; allocate dedicated budget for gender-responsive infrastructure development; conduct infrastructure audits with gender lens; establish maintenance systems for school facilities

These recommendations are interrelated and should be implemented in a coordinated manner. Success requires political commitment, adequate resource allocation, capacity building, and sustained engagement with all education stakeholders. Prioritization should be given to interventions that address the most critical gaps, particularly gender-responsive budgeting, female teacher support, and infrastructure development, as these have cascading effects on other areas.

8. Conclusion

This comprehensive research study has examined gender policies in Somaliland's education sector and identified eight critical gaps that impede the achievement of gender equality. While Somaliland has developed a policy framework that acknowledges the importance of gender equality in education, significant challenges remain in translating policy commitments into meaningful outcomes.

The persistently low representation of female teachers (19% at primary level and 4% at secondary level), the gender gap in student enrollment (55.9% male versus 44.1% female), and the declining gender parity index (from 0.84 to 0.83) demonstrate that current policies and their implementation are insufficient to address deep-rooted gender inequalities in the education sector.

The identified gaps span multiple dimensions: inadequate resource allocation, weak implementation mechanisms, insufficient attention to gender-based violence, limited support for female teachers, data deficiencies, persistent cultural barriers, insufficient community engagement, and infrastructure deficits. Each gap reinforces the others, creating systemic barriers to gender equality that require comprehensive, coordinated interventions.

The recommendations provided in this study offer a roadmap for strengthening gender policies and improving their implementation. Addressing these gaps will require sustained political commitment, adequate financial resources, capacity building across the education system, and meaningful engagement with communities and stakeholders at all levels.

Achieving gender equality in education is not only a matter of social justice but also an economic imperative. Educated women contribute to economic development, improved health outcomes, reduced poverty, and stronger communities. By addressing the identified gaps and implementing the recommended interventions, Somaliland can create an education system that provides equal opportunities for all students regardless of gender, thereby contributing to broader national development goals.

The path forward requires urgent action, sustained commitment, and collaborative effort from government, civil society, development partners, communities, and families. Only through comprehensive reforms that address the multifaceted nature of gender inequality can Somaliland achieve its vision of equitable and inclusive education for all.