

# Life Skills Critical to Achieving Gender Equality in and through Education

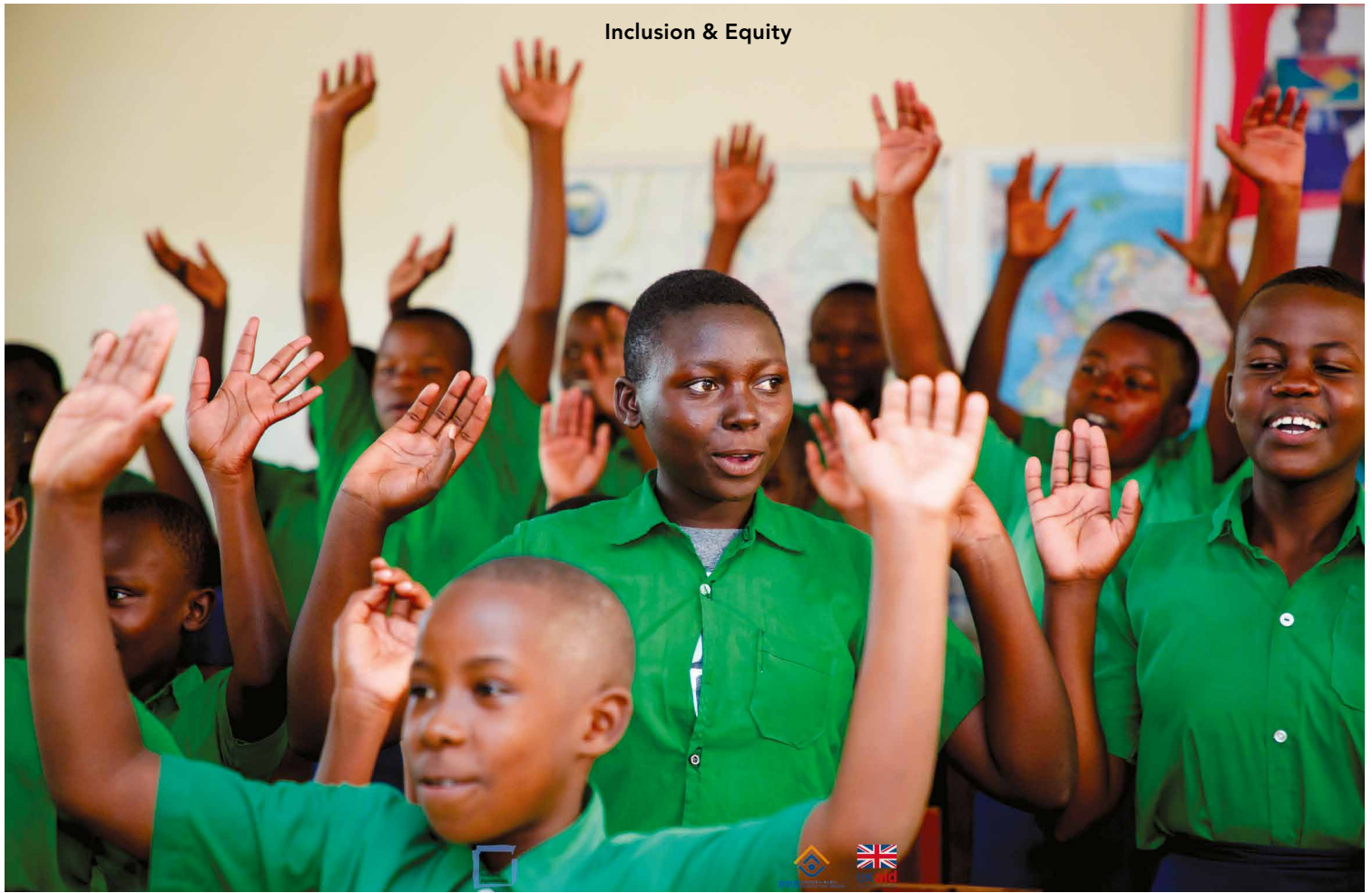


**Sarah Holst,**  
Lead Advisor on  
Girls' Education and  
Gender Equality,  
Education Development Trust

**Whilst most people recognise that enabling girls to access an education is not enough, it is becoming clearer that even attendance, as well as a quality classroom education, despite being a good start may not be enough to enable girls to progress through school and positively impact later-life outcomes.**

A classroom education must be supported and enhanced by life skills, which are especially needed where gender equality in and through education has not been reached and where girls continue to face educational marginalisation within the home, school and community. Every single girl, boy and non-binary young person has the right to education. It is a public good – yet





**“ Education is about ensuring girls have a quality learning experience, that they feel safe in schools, that they have the opportunity to complete all levels of education and are equipped to enter the labour market and navigate successfully through life.”**

in many parts of the world, it still favours boys. Whilst great progress has been made globally in achieving gender parity, and globally enrolment rates are getting closer for girls and boys, completion rates highlight that gaps remain and, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, these gaps increase as you transition from primary to lower and then upper secondary. UNESCO estimates suggest that only 63 per cent of female primary school students complete primary school, compared to 67 per cent of male primary school students. Secondary school completion rates also lag, with 36 per cent of girls completing lower secondary, compared to 44 per cent of boys. These gaps are even wider in countries affected by conflict and violence.

The global community recognises that there is more to be done, and with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) target deadline of 2030 approaching, new commitments to girls' education have been made. The G7 heads of state have endorsed the global objectives of 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more girls reading by age 10, recognising the systemic barriers that girls face and the targeted support that girls' education continues to need.

However, there needs to continue to be a global recognition that even when gender parity in education is achieved, girls are still disadvantaged in other areas of their lives, impacting those later-life outcomes. Unequal responsibilities for household chores remain, often bargaining power in

financial decisions is not equal, access to formal paid work, assets and credit is lower, and the risk of gender-based violence continues in the school and community. Education has the power to address these barriers when we look beyond just getting girls into the classroom. Education is about ensuring girls have a quality learning experience, that they feel safe in schools, that they have the opportunity to complete all levels of education and are equipped to enter the labour market and navigate successfully through life. School is a place to equip young people with the socio-emotional and life skills necessary to make decisions about their own lives, challenge harmful gender norms, identify dreams and goals and map out the pathways to get there.

What we have learnt through our



direct delivery of education reform programmes for girls in Kenya and Rwanda is that in addition to a quality education, what many girls want and need is a safe place, someone to trust, someone to talk to, someone who believes in them and their abilities to succeed, someone to champion and guide them. The provision of these safe spaces for girls offers the opportunity to teach critical life skills whilst providing an environment to develop and maintain relationships, build confidence to allow both girls and boys to openly share challenges and concerns and be there to support one another. Education Development Trust (EDT) recognises the importance of the creation of these safe spaces. Across our programmes in Kenya and Rwanda, we have been establishing girls' clubs and designing life skills curricula in order to:

- Build girls' confidence and self-esteem;
- Challenge the harmful gender norms and stereotypes existing within the classroom, which lead girls to believe they can't succeed;

- Identify where gendered expectations are limiting girls' opportunities to engage in STEM subjects or those which have traditionally been identified as male;
- Identify unique skills and talents, which may not conform to society's expectations for different genders;
- Be equipped with the knowledge about their sexual and reproductive rights in order to make informed decisions about sex, as well as stand up against sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse.

While some aspects of life skills are best delivered through the national curriculum, such as Comprehensive Sexuality Education, many aspects are best unpicked and discussed within these safe spaces. Whilst our ongoing work around life skills and girls' clubs has demonstrated that there are some critical factors for success (the content, the facilitation, the attendance – size and inclusivity – as well as the commitment from school leadership), the flexibility around delivering life skills through

this channel enables groups to identify what works best for them. Safe spaces can be within the school but can also be established within communities, which we started to see develop of their own accord during COVID-19 restrictions.

Through these life skills spaces, girls' educational aspirations are changing, their views of success are widening, and their understanding and knowledge about rights and consent are increasing. All of these are critical in order to equip and support this generation of young people to become gender equality activists and push for gender equality in the home, classroom, community and country. What starts as knowledge, skill and attitude building within a small safe space can eventually lead to:

- Equipping girls, through building confidence and self-esteem, to challenge teachers within the classroom who have gendered expectations and build a network of champions within the school who are all pushing for gender equality;

## // Harmful gender norms and gender bias, portrayed in the classroom, are key barriers to achieving gender equality.”

- Enabling girls to move into school leadership positions, such as class captains, school prefects or head girl. This both equips them for transition into further education or the workplace, as well as building valuable communication, negotiation and management skills;
- Creating the space to challenge gender bias which exists within the home and community and becoming advocates for themselves, their peers and their siblings to change attitudes around a girl’s right to education and the future that she chooses;
- Highlighting and standing up against school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) within schools by acknowledging that the underlying intent of this violence is to reinforce gender roles and perpetuate gender inequalities. Changing attitudes and beliefs towards gender roles is the first step in working to prevent SRGBV.

It is important to recognise that whilst life skills are often delivered in girls’ clubs, it is essential to engage both boys and girls in the conversations. Boys are also gender equality champions; they can help redefine gendered roles in the home and community, recognise, respond to and report violence against girls and be peer leaders to start to shift attitudes in the wider school and community. Life skills cannot be taught to girls in isolation, and those establishing and running girls’ clubs where life skills are taught need to be equally mindful of the impact that gendered expectations also have on boys. Social expectations can lead to toxic masculinities, aggressive behaviour and ultimately violence – so these spaces create room to start to challenge this and break down the divide between how males and females are expected to behave and present themselves.

Harmful gender norms and gender bias, portrayed in the classroom,

are key barriers to achieving gender equality. These harmful norms can affect girls’ educational aspirations and ambitions. Limiting expectations around what girls can achieve affects confidence and self-esteem. The portrayal of girls and boys in gendered roles, which conform to social norms (often demonstrated by carers and leaders respectively), take away choices and dreams. Furthermore, a lack of support, guidance and belief in girls can contribute to their increasing rates of drop-out and repetition.

Working with teachers to tackle these harmful gender norms and to address stereotypes found within teaching and learning materials is one step, but equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to challenge these things and push for their rights is essential. Life skills are key to this. They start to address some of the barriers stopping girls from progressing through education and into a safe, secure future of their own choosing. ■



# THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY OF KENYA

Enroll for our

**top-rated** programmes  
and take advantage of our  
**exciting** academic exchange  
programmes



The Technical University of Kenya is the leading university in technological training in Kenya. The University was awarded a Charter in 2013, making it a full public university. The University specialises in training at the Postgraduate, Undergraduate and Diploma levels, while at the same time engaging in research. It has a clear upward movement policy, which makes it easy for students to move from one level to the next and recognise prior training by awarding students credit transfers. Furthermore, the University has strong partnerships and linkages locally and internationally, leading to exciting exchange, scholarship and industry-based learning programmes with excellent standing. The University has developed and implemented a digitised and completely paperless student applications process, from application to registration. **Interested individuals are therefore, advised to make their applications online for programmes in the following academic units:**

## FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

School of Architecture and Spatial Planning  
School of Aerospace and Vehicle Engineering  
School of Chemical and Biological System Engineering  
School of Construction and Property Studies  
School of Civil and Resource Engineering  
School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering  
School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering  
School of Surveying and Geospatial Sciences

## FACULTY OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

School of Biological and Life Sciences  
School of Computing and Information Technology  
School of Chemistry and Material Science  
School of Health and Biomedical Sciences  
School of Mathematics and Actuarial Science  
School of Physics and Earth Sciences  
Centre for Integrated Water Resource Management (CIWRM)

## FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY

School of Business and Management Studies  
School of Creative Arts and Media  
School of Hospitality and Human Ecology  
School of Information and Social Studies

## ONLINE APPLICATION PROCEDURE:

1. Create an Account with us or sign in if the account is already created;
2. Enter your personal details to obtain a **REFERENCE NUMBER** which is in the form of **APP/xxxxx/2021**;
3. Enter your academic qualifications and upload scanned copies of the corresponding certificates or result slips. Please note that result slips for examinations taken more than two years ago will not be accepted;
4. Pay the application fee of KES 2,000 for Diploma/undergraduate programmes, KES 3,000 for postgraduate programmes and KES 3,600 for foreign applicants. These payments should be made through **MPESA Paybill number 5236153** and account number should be your application **REFERENCE NUMBER** obtained in 2. above. The payment will be confirmed automatically after 24 banking hours;
5. After the elapse of 24 banking hours, return to this portal, log in and choose your preferred programme of study; thereafter,
6. **SUBMIT** your programme of choice and wait for the selection process to be concluded. Meanwhile, you are advised to frequently log in, using your account details, to establish the status of your application.

*Enquiries or clarification on the application for the programmes above may be made through the dedicated Admissions Office telephone number +254 20 2216136.*

Haile Selassie Avenue • P. O. Box 52428 – 00200, City Square, Nairobi • Tel. +254 20 2219929, 3341639 (General enquiries) • Fax: +254 (020) 2219689 • E-mail: registrar.academic@tukenya.ac.ke