

Statement on the Occasion of the International Women's Day

Uphold Real Gender Equality In and Through Education.

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous world. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a stand-alone goal (Sustainable Development Goal 5 - SDG 5) and is inextricably linked to SDG 4 on ensuring the right to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning.

While much progress has been made, large gender gaps still exist in education in many settings. If statistics are to be the basis of "equality" in education, Philippine Statistics Authority data will consistently show that females perform better than males in nearly all key education indicators. Participation rate is higher among females. In the 2019 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) Final Report, there are more females in the age group 10 to 64 years old who have a literacy level four, or those who have completed at least four years of secondary education. There were more female college graduates or higher (13.8%) than male (9.9%). But gender equality in education is not simply a question of parity measured by the number of girls relative to the number of boys in school. **Females continue to be discriminated in and outside school and gender bias still permeate the entire education system.**

There are several reasons that act as barriers to girls' and women's education, the more prominent ones being poverty, gender stereotyping, early pregnancy and marriage and gender-based violence. Studies show that housekeeping chores, including taking care of younger siblings, are mainly the responsibility of girls and young women. It is a big factor causing dropouts among females. Discrimination is also manifested in the significant number of females dropping out and eventually quitting school due to early pregnancy and marriage. There are social stigmas associated with early pregnancy – pregnant young women become embarrassed to attend school and after childbirth, they mainly drop out to take care of their children, often due to limited access to affordable childcare.

The pandemic also exacerbated already-existing socioeconomic and gender disparities which has a disproportionately negative effect on women. According to the 2021 Plan International survey, nearly 71% of Filipino women have categorised education as one of the main aspects of their lives that the pandemic impacted most. The economic impact of the pandemic has resulted in declining financial resources among households, leaving them with little to no capacity to fund their education.

Another immediate outcome of COVID-19 has been the global surge in gender-based violence. Girls are most disadvantaged and vulnerable in terms of exposure to violence. Gender-based violence in schools violates the fundamental rights of children and youth, specially of girls and LGBTQ+, with wide ranging consequences to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being including cognitive development and academic achievements, thereby impeding their access and full participation to basic, higher, and also vocational education. In many cases in schools, teaching practices are not gender-responsive and result in gender gaps in learning and skills development. Discriminatory education policies, regulations, curricula and learning materials still exist and are being implemented.

Inclusion and equity are central in the achievement of SDG 4. It requires the unleashing of the full power of education to tackle the unequal power relations, social norms, discriminatory practices, and belief systems that underpin gender inequality and exclusion in society, ensuring not only equal access, but equal empowerment in and through education. Too many girls and women have been and are being held back by social norms and traditional school practices influencing their educational rights and opportunities. It is high time for real and transformative change to happen.

- ✓ Enact and implement non-discriminatory policy and legislation that ensures all children's right to education;
- ✓ Ensure a gender-responsive national education sector plan;
- ✓ Strengthen monitoring frameworks to advance gender equality in education;
- ✓ School management must ensure safe learning environments, free from gender-based violence;
- ✓ Curricula, learning content and materials must promote gender equality and are free from gender stereotypes;
- ✓ Promote and implement continuation of age-appropriate education and training on sexual and reproductive health rights to build students' knowledge, values and skills for gender equality and healthy lives;
- ✓ Plan out education programs including Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) that build women's literacy and skills for life and work;
- ✓ Develop and offer flexible learning modalities for young parents to facilitate their participation in education and training;
- ✓ Establish inter-agency cooperation mechanisms to address early pregnancy, and other rights violations;
- ✓ SDG 4 monitoring must contribute to greater accountability for gender equality.

Strengthen Education Systems to be Gender-Transformative and Promote Gender Equality!

Empower Girls and Women through Education for a Better Life and Future!

A Meaningful International Women's Day to All! #####