



**Policy Brief:  
Mainstreaming Gender in the Education Sector in Namibia**

## Introduction

This policy brief discusses pertinent policy issues in mainstreaming gender in the education sector in Namibia, based on the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for Continental Education Strategy for Africa (GE4CESA) as an analytical framework. The policy brief draws from the findings of an assessment of gender mainstreaming in education in Namibia.

The main policy gap with regard to gender mainstreaming in the education sector in Namibia is the discrepancy between policy intentions and their actual implementation. This emanates from the absence of a clearly articulated gender mainstreaming policy, the absence of gender analysis complemented with targets and indicators, and the absence of gender focal points in key departments and functions of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.

**The Policy Context – understanding gaps and opportunities:** The policy expectation is that Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (MoEAC) should have a gender policy aligned to the broader National Gender Policy for developing its plans, budgets and strategies. The assessment could not establish any explicit gender policy or gender plan of action based on articulated strategies and gender targets. Equally, there are no gender analysis reports guiding gender interventions aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. Likewise, the absence of a Gender Policy Statement or gender-based targets from an institutional perspective constitute a gap.

The National Gender Policy (2010) requires ministries to establish a position for gender focal points/units (GFPs or GFUs) at a senior level but the MoEAC has neither established a gender focal point nor appointed anyone to serve in that role. The result is the absence of dedicated gender mainstreaming interventions and activities. Moreover, little support is given to women appointed through affirmative action, especially those who might need capacity strengthening or empowerment support.

The implementation of the National Gender Policy has not received the requisite prioritization that it should within the MoEAC. This is partly because the Policy's implementation is not mandatory in the absence of a legal instrument. Examples of what works can be drawn from the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Defence where the National Gender Policy is implemented mainly due to the senior leadership's commitment and appreciation of the value of gender mainstreaming as a strategy in transforming organisations.

**Gaps in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the education sector:** Budgetary constraints make it hard to attain the stated goal of the various policies, programmes, and the five-year strategic plan of the MoEAC. In practice, close to 80% of the budget goes to the wage bill. This results in fragmented budgeting process that is ill suited for tackling systemic barriers that impede achievement of gender equality in the education sector.

Most policies of the MoEAC were seemingly designed without a thorough gender analysis or did not benefit from the application of a gender perspective lens. Besides, the policies are not regularly subjected to gender analysis, limiting the scope for taking corrective measures regarding gender gaps and the gender disparities identified. Moreover, the Ministry does not regularly review and monitor its policies, which makes it difficult to assess progress on how far policies are being implemented and whether some policies are still relevant. Achieving gender related objectives is hard, just like achieving substantive gender equality. Assessing the gendered implications of planned actions or programmes is similarly hard, especially in the absence specific gender indicators or targets.

#### **Sector Human Resource Practices in the Context of Gender Mainstreaming:**

The MoEAC should prepare an Affirmative Action (AA) Plan or Gender Equity Plan that is guided by the Affirmative Action policy and the Affirmative Action Act (1998) but the study could not establish if MoEAC has Gender Action plans or Gender Parity Plans in place. With regard to affirmative action, staffing patterns data point to affirmative action interventions in favour of women having largely worked. On an annual average, for every male appointed, two females were appointed. The workforce profile data indicates that more than 11,913 women and more than 12,567 women were employed in the MoEAC in 2019 and 2020 respectively. In 2020, 2,231 more women were recruited, compared to men.

A sense of disquiet exists among male staff regarding the number of women employed by the Ministry at different levels and cadres, in comparison to men. Most men feel that the goal of affirmative action has been achieved and it is time to review the arrangement. During the study, the view that the appointment of senior managers should be based on a gender-balanced approach was recurrently expressed in one of the regions. The appointment of only women in senior positions was seen as contributing to tensions and conflict in the organisation.

Staff capacity strengthening interventions on the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment are scarce. The study could not identify any meaningful presence of gender experts dedicated to advising the Ministry's top executive and political leadership on gender

mainstreaming as a whole and, in particular, on gender in relation to staff development. There is inadequate awareness of the international and national frameworks for gender equality and women's empowerment among non-management staff.

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) collects and compiles sex disaggregated data on an annual basis focusing on several parity indicators and other types of performance indicators. These data are meant to direct programme planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. However, sex disaggregated data is not adequately analysed from a gender perspective for proper programme planning and budgetary allocations (Integrated Training Consultancy Services, 2009:23 and Ministry of Education, 2021). Thus, the need for bringing in gender analysis of sex disaggregated data by conducting qualitative research to get deeper insight into the needs and opportunities of males and females is critically important.

The EMIS database does not adequately capture qualitative aspects and distinctions which are critical for gender equality strategies, and this limits its ability to sufficiently capture and provide the data required for an effective gender responsive and inclusive planning and management information system.

On a more positive note, the current practice of promoting equitable access and inclusive education, gender neutral curricula, and equitable employment principles has had positive results for both the girl-child and the boy-child, even though this is more by default than by design. In essence, equitable and inclusive education principles have an inherent capacity to foster gender equality among learners and society as a whole.

While gender parity has successfully been achieved with regards to enrolment, gaps remain in retention and completion. For instance, over the last five years – 2017 to 2021 – some 81,602 learners' dropped out of school; the annual average dropout ranges between 13,000 and 15000 children. This raises important questions on whether children are dropping out of school due to pregnancy related issues, as well as the effectiveness of the Sector Policy for the Prevention and Management of Learner Pregnancy on the right to Education. It also raises questions on the impact COVID-19 might have had on the high dropouts in 2020, and whether these children are traceable, whether they were registered in schools before the pandemic, and where they are and what they are doing currently.

## Recommendations areas for achieving gender equality at work

The following are the key gender priority areas that FAWENA and other entities could towards advocacy with the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.

- a) **Institutionalization of Gender Mainstreaming:** FAWENA and other civil society organizations need to carry out concerted advocacy and provide support towards the development of a Gender Policy, a Sector National Gender Plan of Action, and a review of policies and programs to make them gender-responsive and gender-sensitive. This should be predicated on the adoption of a Transforming Gender Mainstreaming Model that is embedded in institutional values, including gender equality.
- b) **Advocacy for Reforms to Human Resources Practices**
  - (i) The MoEAC needs to review of the Affirmative Action Act to make it more gender equality-responsive, guided by research interventions and consultations.
  - (ii) The government of Namibia needs to lobbied to establish the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality (WEGE) Act.
- c) **Partnerships for Gender Mainstreaming:** there is need for establishing and strengthening partnerships with decentralized structures such as the Directorates of Planning in Regional Councils to ensure alignment of government policies and programmes at regional levels, including improving their capacity in gender mainstreaming.
- d) **EMIS Reporting:** FAWENA needs to advocate for the employment of qualified personnel to support further analysis of EMIS data. The data so produced needs to be packaged in formats that enable policy action across different levels of the education sector. Moreover, qualitative data needs to be collected alongside quantitative metrics to enable the generation of more robust data that can support transformative gender analysis. This will make it possible to take corrective action on policies, programmes and practice.