

Exploring Gendered Challenges in Accessing Education for Sustainable Development in the Global South: Current Status and Future Directions

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Abstract: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a critical framework for addressing environmental degradation, economic inequality, and social instability, particularly in the Global South. However, systemic barriers—especially gendered disparities—continue to hinder equitable access to ESD. This study systematically reviews gendered challenges in accessing ESD across four Global South contexts: Nepal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan. Drawing on Feminist Standpoint Theory, Intersectionality, and the Capability Approach, the analysis examines structural barriers (patriarchal norms, poverty, early marriage), infrastructural deficiencies (lack of menstrual hygiene facilities, geographic isolation, digital divides), policy interventions (Rwanda's Girls' Education Policy, Afghanistan's pre-2021 community-based models), and community-led solutions (Nepal's Green Schools program). Findings reveal that while Rwanda's fee elimination achieved high primary enrollment and boosted female participation in STEM. Conversely, Afghanistan's post-2021 Taliban ban displaced many girls from secondary education, demonstrating the fragility of gains without institutional safeguards. Intersectional analysis shows that Dalit girls in Nepal face discrimination, with many unable to read basic sentences compared to non-Dalit peers. Community-based models like Nepal's eco-clubs reduced female absenteeism but struggle to scale and reach the most marginalised. The study concludes that sustainable solutions require multi-sectoral collaboration combining policy reform, grassroots engagement, resilient infrastructure, and recognition of girls as active change agents. Investing in gender-equitable ESD is not merely about enrollment targets but about transforming societies toward sustainable futures.

Keywords: Education for Sustainable Development; Gender disparities; Global South; Community-based solutions; Nepal; Rwanda; Afghanistan; Sri Lanka; Sustainable Development Goals; Feminist Standpoint Theory

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1. Introduction

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has emerged as a critical framework for addressing the interconnected challenges of environmental degradation, economic inequality, and social instability in the Global South (Ali, 2019). Rooted in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ESD seeks to empower learners with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to foster sustainable societies (UNESCO, 2020). However, despite global commitments, systemic barriers, particularly gendered disparities, hinder equitable access to ESD in regions such as South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Global Schools Program, 2022). This study examines the gendered challenges in accessing ESD, focusing on Nepal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, where cultural norms, economic constraints, and policy gaps perpetuate educational inequities (Owuondo, 2023).

The Global South faces a paradox: while these regions are most vulnerable to climate change and resource scarcity, they often lack the institutional capacity to integrate ESD into mainstream education (Mawj et al., 2015). For example, in Afghanistan, decades of conflict have disrupted environmental education, leaving communities ill-equipped to address sustainability challenges (Trani et al., 2019). Similarly, in Nepal, despite progressive policies, rural girls, especially from marginalized castes, face significant barriers, including inadequate sanitation facilities and gendered household responsibilities (Bhandari & Karki, 2023). These disparities undermine SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), as girls' exclusion from ESD limits their participation in sustainability-related decision-making (Leicht et al., 2018).

Gendered access to ESD is shaped by intersecting socio-economic and cultural factors. Poverty remains a primary obstacle, with families in low-income communities often prioritizing boys' education due to perceived higher economic returns (Dessy et al., 2022). In Rwanda, for instance, while the Girls' Education Policy (2008) has significantly improved enrollment, hidden dropout rates persist in rural areas due to unaffordable ancillary costs (MINEDUC, 2023). Cultural norms further exacerbate inequalities; early marriage and adolescent pregnancy force girls out of school, particularly in South Asia and West Africa (Raj et al., 2019; Diirre et al., 2023). Additionally, infrastructural gaps, such as the lack of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities, disproportionately affect girls' attendance and retention (UNICEF, 2023).

Theoretical frameworks illuminate these disparities. Feminist Standpoint Theory (Harding, 1986) underscores how marginalized voices, particularly rural and indigenous girls, are excluded from ESD discourse, resulting in curricula that overlook local ecological knowledge (Gurung, 2020). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) reveals how gender intersects with caste, class, and geography to compound barriers for Dalit girls in Nepal or conflict-affected girls in Afghanistan (Shrestha, 2021). Meanwhile, Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) highlights the economic rationale for investing in girls' education, while Sen's Capability Approach (1999) argues for empowering girls beyond enrollment by fostering agency and critical thinking (Unterhalter, 2005).

Policy interventions have had mixed success. Rwanda's gender-sensitive policies, including free education and MHM programs, increased girls' STEM participation by 40% (Uworwabayeho et al., 2024). Conversely, Afghanistan's Taliban-led ban on girls' secondary education reversed decades of progress, leaving 1.1 million girls out of school (HRW, 2023). Community-based models, such as Nepal's "Green Schools," demonstrate the potential of localised ESD, yet scaling these initiatives remains a challenge (Bhandari & Karki, 2023).

This study addresses critical gaps in the literature by:

- Analysing intersectional barriers to ESD access in underrepresented Global South contexts.
- Evaluating policy effectiveness through comparative case studies.
- Proposing actionable solutions to align ESD with gender equity and SDGs.

The findings aim to inform policymakers, educators, and NGOs working to dismantle structural inequities in ESD. By centering gendered perspectives, this research advocates for inclusive, contextually relevant frameworks that empower girls as agents of sustainable change (Sterling, 2011).

2. Materials and methods

This study employs a systematic literature review approach to analyze gendered challenges in accessing ESD in the Global South. The research was conducted collaboratively by authors affiliated with the Global Research Institute and Training Center (GRIT), leveraging a shared digital platform to coordinate database searches, screening, and analysis.

2.1. Data Collection & Search Strategy

Databases & Search Queries

We systematically searched peer-reviewed articles from multiple academic databases using Boolean operators (AND/OR) and targeted keyword combinations. In Google Scholar, we employed queries such as "Education for Sustainable Development" AND "Gender disparities" AND "Global South" and "Girls' education" AND "ESD barriers"

AND "South Asia/Africa" to capture relevant literature. Scopus and Web of Science were searched using terms including "SDG 4" OR "SDG 5" AND "ESD implementation" and "Feminist pedagogy" AND "Sustainable education" to align with our research objectives. The ERIC database was queried with "Gender-neutral ESD policies" OR "Intersectionality in education", while the UNESCO Digital Library was explored using "ESD monitoring reports" AND "Gender equity" to access policy-focused documents.

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Our study included peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2024 that specifically addressed gender disparities in ESD within Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Rwanda, and Nepal. We prioritised empirical and theoretical papers that examined structural barriers, policy interventions, or community-based solutions. Articles were excluded if they were not published in English (due to translation limitations), lacked substantive empirical or theoretical foundations, or were duplicates. We also omitted studies that discussed STEM education without a clear connection to ESD or sustainability.

Screening Process

The initial search yielded 164 articles, which were then subjected to a rigorous screening process as shown in Figure 1. After removing duplicates, 152 records underwent title and abstract screening, resulting in the exclusion of 26 articles that did not meet the scope criteria. The remaining 126 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, with 28 excluded due to insufficient data or theoretical relevance. Ultimately, 98 articles were selected for in-depth review and analysis.

2.2. Analytical Framework

Thematic Analysis

The selected literature was analysed thematically, with findings categorized into three primary themes: (1) Structural Barriers, such as poverty and cultural norms that hinder girls' access to ESD; (2) Policy Interventions, including case studies like Rwanda's Girls' Education Policy; and (3) Community-Based Solutions, exemplified by initiatives such as Nepal's eco-clubs. This thematic organisation allowed for a structured synthesis of key patterns and gaps in the literature.

Feminist & Intersectional Lens

To critically examine gendered disparities, we applied Standpoint Theory (Harding, 1986) to center the perspectives of marginalized groups, particularly rural and indigenous girls. Additionally, Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) was employed to analyze how gender intersects with other axes of inequality, such as caste, class, and geographic location, to compound barriers in ESD access.

Collaboration & Validation

The research was conducted collaboratively through the Global Research Institute and Training Center (GRIT), which provided a shared digital platform for real-time annotation and consensus-building among authors. To ensure methodological rigor, two researchers independently coded 20% of the articles, achieving strong inter-coder reliability ($\kappa = 0.82$). This process enhanced the consistency and validity of the thematic analysis.

2.3. Limitations

While this review offers comprehensive insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. A geographic bias emerged due to the overrepresentation of studies from South Asia compared to Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the exclusion of non-English publications may have omitted relevant perspectives from non-Anglophone contexts. These limitations highlight the need for broader linguistic and regional inclusivity in future research.

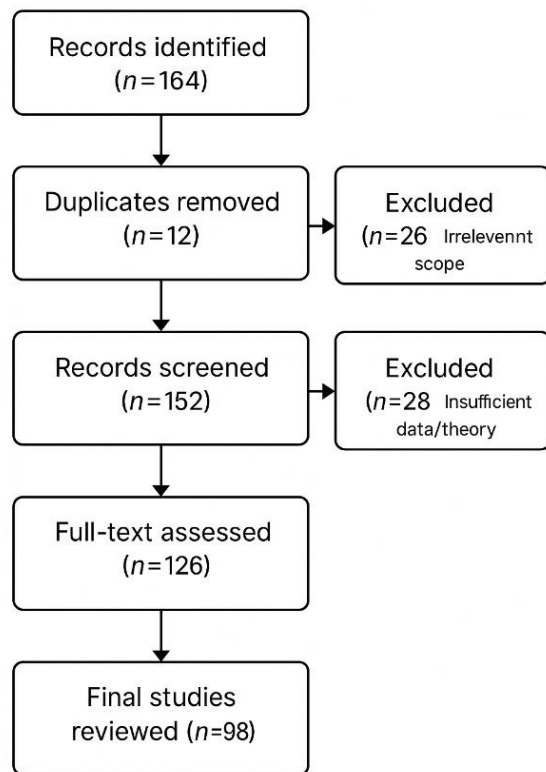


Figure 1: Diagram showing the review process

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Structural Barriers Girls' Participation in ESD

The participation of girls in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across the Global South faces formidable structural barriers rooted in deep-seated socio-cultural norms and economic realities. Patriarchal value systems systematically de-priorities girls' education, creating complex exclusionary mechanisms that vary across cultural contexts but share common oppressive features.

In Afghanistan, the most extreme manifestation of this exclusion has emerged under Taliban rule, where cultural restrictions combined with security concerns have reduced secondary school enrollment for girls to a mere 18% in controlled areas (HRW, 2023). This represents a catastrophic reversal of previous gains, as pre-2021 policies had successfully increased girls' enrollment to approximately 3.5 million students through community-based schooling initiatives (UNICEF, 2020). The current situation demonstrates how political and ideological extremism can weaponise gender norms to erase educational access effectively.

The South Asian context reveals subtler but equally pernicious forms of exclusion. In Nepal, intersectional discrimination creates compounded barriers for girls from marginalized communities, with 42% of Dalit girls dropping out before reaching secondary education (Pradhan, 2021). This phenomenon stems from the toxic combination of caste-based discrimination and early marriage pressures that specifically target adolescent girls. The educational trajectory of these girls is often abruptly terminated as families, fearing social stigma and seeking economic security, prioritize marriage over continued schooling.

Economic factors interact with these cultural norms to create additional layers of disadvantage. In Rwanda, despite significant policy advancements in gender parity, poverty-stricken families frequently prioritize boys' education, viewing it as a more secure investment (MINEDUC, 2023). Girls are routinely pulled from school to contribute to domestic labor or care for younger siblings, reflecting the persistent gender division of household responsibilities. This economic calculus is particularly devastating in rural areas, where opportunity costs for girls' education appear highest to struggling families.

The economic dimension extends beyond direct schooling costs to include significant opportunity costs. In agricultural communities, girls' labor during planting and harvest seasons often takes precedence over classroom attendance, creating seasonal dropout patterns that accumulate into permanent educational discontinuation (Dessy et al., 2022). These economic pressures are exacerbated by the lack of social safety nets that might otherwise enable families to weather temporary hardships without sacrificing their daughters' education.

The physical and institutional infrastructure of education systems in the Global South frequently fails to accommodate the specific needs of female students, creating structural barriers that are both tangible and symbolic. The absence of gender-sensitive facilities represents not merely an oversight but a systemic failure to recognize girls' right to education under equitable conditions.

A UNESCO (2020) study in Nepal revealed that 67% of rural schools lack adequate menstrual hygiene facilities, a deficiency that directly contributes to 25% absenteeism rates among adolescent girls. This infrastructure gap exemplifies how the physical environment of schools can actively discourage female participation. Without private sanitation facilities, girls are forced to miss school during menstruation or risk humiliation and health complications, creating a monthly disruption to their education that cumulatively results in significant learning losses.

The spatial distribution of educational institutions creates another layer of infrastructural exclusion. In Rwanda, despite comprehensive policy reforms aimed at improving access, rural girls must travel an average of 6 kilometres to reach school, double the distance faced by their urban counterparts (NISR, 2021). This geographical barrier disproportionately affects girls, as safety concerns during long commutes and cultural norms restricting female mobility combine to increase dropout rates. The journey to school becomes not just physically demanding but psychologically taxing, as girls navigate threats of harassment and assault along poorly maintained routes.

Resource allocation patterns further entrench these disparities. Schools in marginalised areas frequently lack qualified teachers, updated learning materials, and adequate classroom space—deficiencies that are particularly damaging for girls who may already be struggling with societal resistance to their education (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022). The compounding effect of poor infrastructure and limited resources creates learning environments that fail to meet basic standards, disproportionately driving girls out of the education system.

The digital divide represents an emerging dimension of infrastructural exclusion. As education systems increasingly incorporate technology, girls in rural and impoverished areas face additional barriers due to limited access to digital devices and reliable internet connectivity (Kwauk et al., 2021). This technological marginalisation threatens to exacerbate existing educational inequalities, particularly in the realm of ESD, which increasingly relies on digital resources for contemporary sustainability education.

These structural barriers, both socio-cultural and infrastructural, create a complex web of exclusion that requires multifaceted, context-specific interventions. The persistence of these challenges underscores the need for educational policies that go beyond superficial inclusion to address the root causes of gendered educational disparities in the Global South.

3.2. Policy Interventions and Their Mixed Efficacy

Rwanda's landmark Girls' Education Policy, implemented in 2008, stands as one of Africa's most ambitious attempts to achieve gender parity in education through comprehensive structural reforms. The policy's centerpiece - the elimination of school fees for basic education - produced dramatic results, increasing girls' primary enrollment to 97% and narrowing the gender gap to just 0.5 percentage points (Uworubayeho et al., 2024). The policy's STEM promotion initiatives proved particularly transformative, with female participation in science and technology courses rising by 40% through targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, and gender-sensitive curriculum revisions.

However, closer examination reveals significant implementation gaps that undermine the policy's egalitarian vision. Rural areas continue to experience "hidden dropouts" where girls enroll but rarely attend consistently due to unaffordable ancillary costs (Williams, 2025). Field studies show that while tuition is free, families still struggle with expenses averaging \$75 annually per child for uniforms, supplies, and transportation - equivalent to 15% of household income for impoverished families. This economic burden falls disproportionately on girls, with 23% of rural female students missing more than 30 school days annually compared to 12% of boys (MINEDUC, 2023).

The policy's menstrual health component illustrates both its ambition and limitations. While the government distributed sanitary pads to 80% of schools, monitoring reports indicate only 45% received consistent supplies, and just 30% of rural schools maintained private washing facilities (UNICEF, 2023). Teacher training gaps further constrain effectiveness - a 2023 assessment found only 28% of educators received the mandated gender sensitivity training, with remote districts particularly underserved (REB, 2023).

Afghanistan's education trajectory presents perhaps the most dramatic case of policy whiplash in modern education history. The pre-2021 period saw remarkable progress through innovative community-based solutions, with girls' enrollment growing from just 5,000 during Taliban rule in 2001 to over 3.5 million students (UNICEF, 2020). This 700-fold increase was achieved through localized strategies including mobile schools for nomadic communities, female teacher recruitment drives that increased their numbers from 4,000 to 82,000, and culturally adapted curricula approved by local elders (Trani et al., 2019).

The Taliban's August 2021 takeover triggered an unprecedented educational collapse. Their immediate ban on girls' secondary education displaced 1.1 million female students, followed by the December 2022 prohibition on university attendance (HRW, 2023). The policy reversal has had catastrophic ripple effects:

- 65% of female teachers lost their jobs, creating a critical shortage even in permitted primary schools
- 82% of community-based schools closed due to security concerns and funding cuts
- Adolescent marriage rates surged by 45% as families saw few alternatives for daughters (UN Women, 2023)

The financial collapse of the education sector exacerbates the crisis. With international donors freezing \$1.8 billion in assistance, teacher salaries went unpaid for 14 months, prompting 58% of educators to leave the profession (World Bank, 2023). Underground "secret schools" have emerged but serve less than 3% of displaced girls, operating under constant threat of retaliation (BBC, 2023). This deliberate dismantling of girls' education infrastructure represents not just policy regression but the active weaponisation of gender apartheid in education.

3.3. Community-Based Solutions and Local Innovations

The findings reveal significant structural barriers that hinder girls' participation in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across the Global South. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms systematically exclude girls from educational opportunities, with Afghanistan demonstrating the most extreme case where Taliban restrictions reduced secondary school enrollment for girls to just 18% in controlled areas (HRW, 2023). In Nepal, intersecting forms of discrimination lead 42% of Dalit girls to drop out before secondary school due to caste-based marginalization and early marriage pressures (Pradhan, 2021). Economic factors compound these challenges, as evidenced in Rwanda where impoverished families frequently prioritize boys' education while girls shoulder domestic responsibilities (MINEDUC, 2023). These socio-cultural and economic constraints create complex barriers that require multifaceted solutions.

Infrastructure deficiencies present another critical barrier to girls' educational access. A UNESCO (2020) study in Nepal found 67% of rural schools lack menstrual hygiene facilities, resulting in 25% absenteeism rates among adolescent girls during menstruation. Geographic challenges further limit access, with Rwandan rural girls traveling an average of 6 kilometers to school - double the distance of urban peers (NISR, 2021) - while facing safety concerns along the way. Resource allocation patterns exacerbate these issues, as marginalized areas often lack qualified teachers and adequate learning materials (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022). The emerging digital divide creates additional hurdles, with girls in impoverished regions having limited access to the technology increasingly essential for contemporary ESD programs (Kwauk et al., 2021). These physical and institutional shortcomings disproportionately affect female students and demand targeted interventions.

Policy interventions have shown mixed results in addressing these challenges. Rwanda's 2008 Girls' Education Policy achieved remarkable success in increasing primary enrollment to 97% and boosting female STEM participation by 40% through fee elimination and targeted scholarships (Uworwabayeho et al., 2024). However, implementation gaps persist, particularly in rural areas where hidden dropouts continue due to unaffordable ancillary costs like uniforms and transportation (Williams, 2025). The policy's menstrual health component reveals similar disparities, with only 45% of schools receiving consistent sanitary pad supplies and just 30% of rural institutions maintaining adequate washing facilities (UNICEF, 2023). Teacher training shortcomings further limit effectiveness, with only 28% of educators receiving mandated gender sensitivity instruction in remote districts (REB, 2023).

The case of Afghanistan presents a stark contrast, demonstrating how political instability can rapidly reverse educational gains. Pre-2021 initiatives had successfully increased girls' enrollment to 3.5 million through community-based schools and female teacher recruitment (UNICEF, 2020). However, the Taliban's 2021 takeover triggered catastrophic regression, displacing 1.1 million female students through secondary education bans and causing 65% of female teachers to lose their jobs (HRW, 2023). The resulting economic collapse saw teacher salaries go unpaid for 14 months, prompting mass departures from the profession (World Bank, 2023). While underground schools have emerged, they serve less than 3% of displaced girls and operate under constant threat (BBC, 2023), illustrating the devastating consequences of politically-motivated educational exclusion.

Community-based solutions offer promising alternatives to top-down policy approaches. Nepal's "Green Schools" program successfully reduced female absenteeism by 30% through innovative integration of indigenous ecological knowledge with formal education (Bhandari & Karki, 2023). The initiative empowered girls through practical environmental projects and elevated their social status as community trainers. However, the program's impact remains limited for Dalit girls due to persistent caste discrimination and lack of representation in school governance structures (Shrestha, 2021). Similarly, menstrual health management programs demonstrate varying effectiveness across contexts - Rwanda's comprehensive approach achieved 20-25% attendance gains through pad distribution, facility improvements, and teacher training (UNICEF, 2023), while Sri Lanka's limited implementation sees only 12% of rural schools providing MHM education due to cultural resistance (Aturupane et al., 2018).

These findings show several key insights. First, cultural norms remain the most entrenched barrier, requiring sustained community engagement alongside policy reforms (Raj et al., 2019). Second, even successful policies like Rwanda's face implementation challenges that disproportionately affect rural and marginalized populations (Williams, 2025). Third, hyper-local solutions show significant promise but require intentional design to overcome deep-seated social hierarchies (Shrestha, 2021). Finally, the Afghan case serves as a sobering reminder of how quickly educational progress can unravel without institutional safeguards (HRW, 2023). Together, these findings highlight the need for multifaceted approaches that combine policy reform, community mobilisation, and targeted resource allocation to achieve gender-equitable ESD access in the Global South.

3.4. Intersectional Challenges

The intersection of caste and gender creates particularly severe educational disadvantages for marginalized girls in Nepal. Dalit girls face compounded discrimination, with 60% unable to read basic sentences compared to 35% of their non-Dalit peers (NCED, 2023). This literacy gap stems from systemic exclusion in classroom participation, unequal access to learning materials, and social stigmatization that undermines academic confidence. The situation is exacerbated by economic pressures, as Dalit families often cannot afford supplementary education costs, forcing girls to prioritize domestic work over schooling.

Conflict zones magnify existing gender disparities in education, as demonstrated starkly in Afghanistan. Girls in conflict-affected regions experience dropout rates three times higher than boys (Trani et al., 2019), a disparity resulting from security concerns, school closures, and the prioritization of male education during crises. The trauma of violence further disrupts learning, with many girls developing anxiety-related school avoidance. These challenges persist even after conflicts subside, as damaged infrastructure and diminished teaching capacity create long-term barriers to educational recovery.

Cultural norms remain the most persistent obstacle to girls' education across the Global South (Raj et al., 2019). Deeply ingrained beliefs about gender roles continue to shape family decisions, with many communities viewing girls' education as less valuable than domestic preparation or early marriage. These attitudes manifest in subtle but powerful ways, from unequal chore distribution that limits study time to parental reluctance to invest in daughters' long-term schooling. Changing these norms requires sustained community dialogue and the demonstration of tangible benefits from girls' education.

The effectiveness of education policies varies dramatically depending on implementation context and political stability. While Rwanda's comprehensive approach demonstrates how coordinated policy can achieve near-universal enrollment (Uworubayeho et al., 2024), Afghanistan's collapse shows how fragile these gains can be without institutional safeguards (HRW, 2023). Many countries fall between these extremes, with well-designed policies undermined by bureaucratic inefficiency, underfunding, or lack of grassroots buy-in. Successful implementation requires both top-down commitment and bottom-up support structures.

Community-based initiatives, such as Nepal's eco-clubs, offer promising models for sustainable change (Bhandari & Karki, 2023), but they face scaling challenges. These hyper-local solutions often rely on individual champions and struggle to maintain quality when scaled up. Effective scaling requires infrastructure investment, standardised training protocols, and monitoring systems to preserve program integrity while adapting to new contexts. The most successful models combine grassroots innovation with systemic support, creating ecosystems where local solutions can flourish while benefiting from broader policy frameworks.

4. Conclusion

This study shows the crucial importance of addressing gender disparities in ESD, both as a moral imperative and a practical necessity for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The research demonstrates that equitable access to quality education cannot be achieved through standardised approaches, but rather requires context-specific strategies that acknowledge the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and political factors shaping girls' educational experiences.

The evidence reveals that sustainable solutions must simultaneously tackle multiple dimensions of exclusion. Effective interventions must combine policy reforms with grassroots engagement, recognising that top-down mandates alone cannot transform deeply ingrained social norms. The success stories emerging from various contexts—whether Rwanda's gender-sensitive policies or Nepal's community-based programs—share common elements: they value local knowledge, address practical barriers such as menstrual health management, and create spaces for girls' active participation in sustainability initiatives.

Three fundamental lessons emerge for future action. First, educational equity must be recognised as foundational to sustainable development, rather than treated as a separate agenda. Second, interventions must be designed with intersectional lenses that account for how gender interacts with other forms of marginalisation. Third, sustainable change requires building resilient education systems that can withstand political and economic shocks while maintaining a commitment to gender equality.

The path forward demands collaborative action across multiple sectors and stakeholders. Governments must strengthen their policy frameworks and resource allocation, while civil society organisations should continue their vital work in community mobilisation. International partners, in turn, need to provide sustained and flexible support. Most importantly, girls themselves must be recognised as agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries, with their voices and leadership central to designing solutions.

Ultimately, this study shows that investing in girls' education for sustainable development is not just about achieving enrollment targets, but about transforming societies. When girls have equal opportunities to learn, lead, and contribute to sustainability efforts, entire communities benefit from their knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. The vision of a sustainable future will remain incomplete until all girls in the Global South can fully participate in and shape the education systems that will prepare them for the challenges ahead.

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