

Learning Brief

NAVIGATING RESISTANCE TO GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION IN EMERGENCIES

10 Tips for Practitioners

This brief was developed to highlight different forms of resistance to gender-transformative education and provide practical guidance for practitioners working at the intersection of education, gender equity, and inclusion in emergencies.

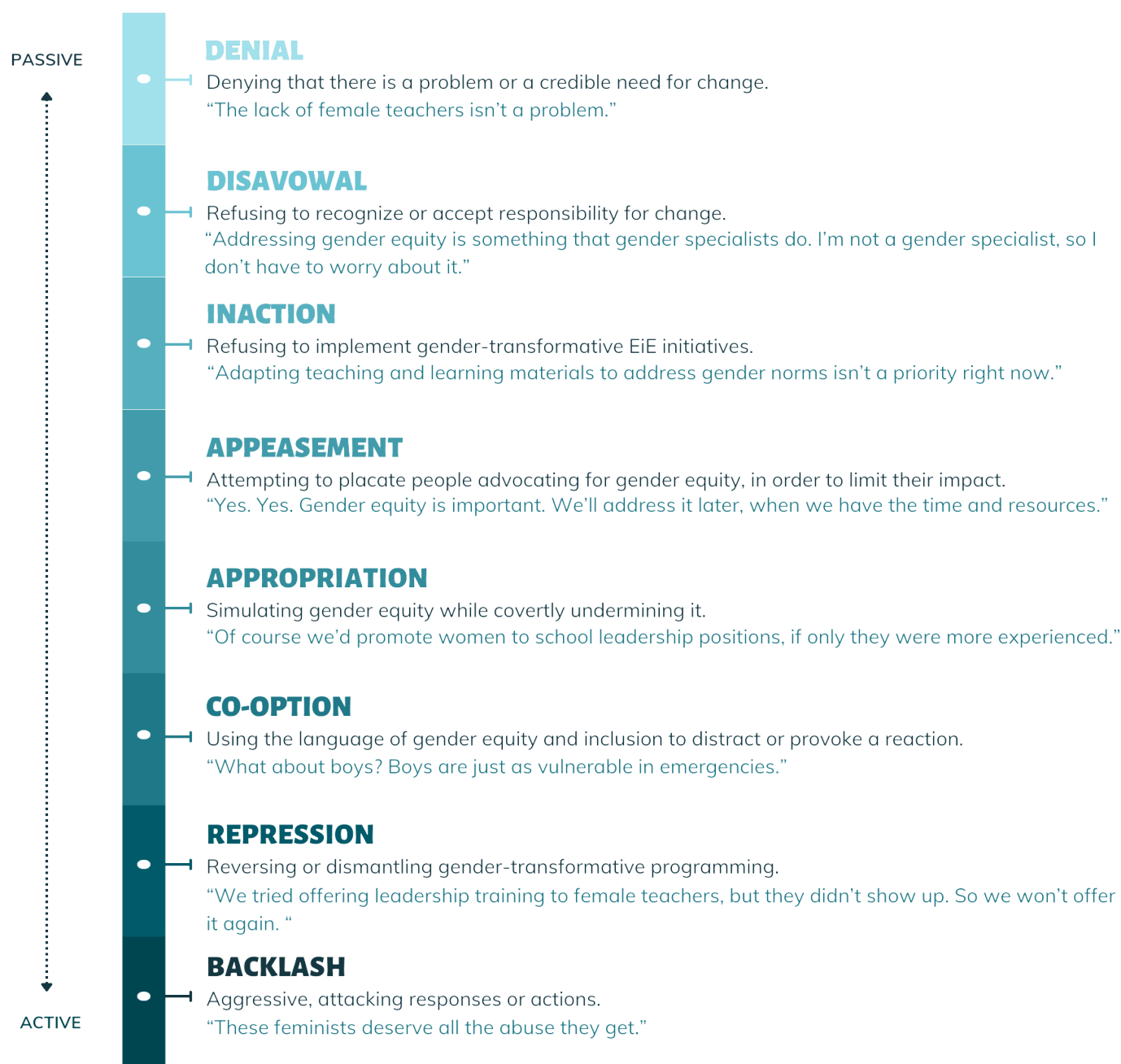
Gender-transformative education in emergencies (EiE) aims to address the structural causes, as well as the symptoms, of gender inequality in education, leading to lasting changes in gender norms, roles, and power dynamics, and improved opportunities for people of all genders.

Some examples of gender-transformative education include:

- Co-designing programs with children and youth of all genders, to ensure their priorities are addressed and they have ownership of education interventions
- Working with women and girls to build their knowledge, skills, and confidence in advocating for their rights, bodily autonomy, access to services, etc.
- Working with and supporting boys, young men, and men to embrace positive masculinities and to promote gender equality, while also achieving meaningful results for them
- Supporting teachers to strengthen their capacity to create safe, equitable, and inclusive learning spaces

If you are working on gender-transformative EiE, at some point you will likely meet with resistance to gender concepts, policies, or programming strategies. Resistance to gender-transformative EiE often comes from people who directly or indirectly benefit from existing gender norms and power dynamics. These may be individuals (learners, teachers, parents and caregivers, etc.) or groups (political or faith groups, etc.). Resistance can come from people of all genders and can take many forms. While it may seem that resistance comes from anger or hatred for a specific minoritized group (ex: women, LGBTQIA+ people, etc.), it actually often stems from fear or anxiety around a perceived loss of power, privilege, or influence as a result of shifting gender norms.

Figure 1: Types of Resistance to Gender Equity in and through EiE



Adapted from Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2018. (En)countering resistance strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives, Victoria, Australia. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employing-and-supporting-women-your-organisation/resources/vichealth-encountering-resistance-strategies-respond-resistance-gender-equality-initiatives>

Identifying and responding to resistance to gender-transformative EiE

1. Be prepared: Expect and prepare for resistance. Work with community members to preemptively identify potential areas of friction and anticipate major challenges. Think critically about the language you’ll use when talking to different groups about equity and inclusion, especially when discussing potentially controversial topics like comprehensive sexuality education or sexual and reproductive health and rights, as language choices can sometimes reinforce misunderstandings. Budget appropriate time and resources (including funding and staff) to address resistance.

2. Identify concerns: Provide regular and diverse opportunities for feedback in order to identify concerns and determine where and from whom resistance originates. Use this information to tailor your messaging – and messengers – to address specific concerns or correct misinformation. Consider setting up multiple modalities for feedback (focus group discussions, key informant interviews, short surveys, etc.) so people can participate however is safest or most effective for them.

3. Keep it practical: Concepts like equality, equity, and inclusion can seem abstract and it can be difficult for people to see how they connect to their day-to-day lives. Use real-life stories and examples to illustrate key gender concepts and demonstrate how gender-transformative EiE can practically impact people's lives and livelihoods in the short and long term. Share examples of how people can contribute to gender equity in their homes, communities, and organizations. Highlight the benefits of gender equity for men and boys as well as women and girls.

4. Be willing to listen: Create spaces where people feel safe sharing their beliefs, biases, and fears. When people feel they can speak openly and safely without being shut down, they are more likely to be open to new ideas and perspectives. Approach conversations with curiosity and compassion and ask open-ended questions to try to break defensive patterns and get at the underlying reasons behind deeply held beliefs. Make sure you are aware of and open to challenging your own biases and assumptions as well.

5. Establish rules of engagement: Set clear and unambiguous rules about what kinds of responses are allowed or not allowed (rude language, personal attacks, threats of violence, etc.). Establish consequences for violating these rules and enforce them consistently. In learning spaces, this may mean setting class rules or working with teachers and learners to co-develop a code of conduct. In community fora, this may mean appointing moderators and training them in conflict mitigation or de-escalation techniques.

6. Find allies: Find like-minded people in your community who are committed to gender equity and gender-transformative EiE (girls' education activists, women's rights organizations, feminist youth groups, etc.). Make sure you recognize the work they are already doing at the community level – ask about what work is already underway, what strategies have worked (or not worked) in the past, and how you can build on existing efforts or connect with other allies. Consider creating supportive peer-learning spaces, like girls' and boys' groups or teacher learning circles, where people can come together to examine their beliefs and biases around gender, share ideas, and troubleshoot challenges.

7. Leverage leadership: Connect with community leaders (religious leaders, local politicians, celebrities, etc.) and get them involved in advocating for gender equity and gender-transformative EiE. People are more likely to listen to and believe someone they already know and trust. Community leaders may be able to adapt messaging to be more contextually relevant and appropriate, and they may be able to amplify your message to groups you may not have access to or who may not be receptive to external advocacy.

8. Be realistic: Accept that you will not be able to convince everyone. Rather than using your time and resources to try to win over entrenched opposition, focus on finding and engaging with individuals and groups that are at least somewhat open to discussing new ideas, even if they currently hold different or opposing views. Look for and leverage examples of positive deviance. Set realistic and achievable goals for change.

9. Practice self-care: Responding to resistance can be physically and emotionally draining. Make sure you are looking after your own mental health and wellbeing. Seek support and allow yourself to rest when needed.

10. Celebrate successes: Progress takes time, especially when tackling entrenched gender norms and structural inequalities. Make sure you're taking time to recognize and celebrate small wins along the way!

Glossary

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, responsibilities, and identities for women and men and how these are valued in society. They are culture-specific and they change over time. Gender identities define how women and men are expected to think and act. These behaviors are learned from family, schools, religious teaching, and the media. Since gender roles, responsibilities, and identities are socially learned, they can also be changed.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and girls, men and boys, and gender-diverse people. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but a person's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of all genders are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people.

Gender equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and girls, men and boys, and gender-diverse people, according to their respective needs. It is considered part of the process of achieving gender equality in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must be available to compensate for any discrimination that prevent women and girls, men and boys, and gender-diverse people from otherwise living equally.

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