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EXPLAINER

Developing a Gender Equality Evaluation Index for Higher Education Institutions in Mongolia



A study found a lack of gender equality in management councils and leadership positions at the Mongolian University of Science and Technology but reported above average gender equality among teachers, staff, and students. Photo credit: ADB.

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A gender equality index for Mongolia's higher education sector illuminates how tailored evaluation strategies can help improve education and equality.

Introduction

The global discourse on gender equality has gained momentum, shifting its focus from empowering oppressed women to promoting social equality between men and women. Yet gender inequalities are persistent in every society. Take the case of Mongolia, where the implementation of legal frameworks for gender equality remains inadequate, according to international studies of the country. For example, the [2017 National Study on Gender-based Violence in Mongolia](#) found that almost 30% of women surveyed had experienced physical abuse by their partners, and around 17% reported workplace or other forms of abuse.

We have found that none of the extant studies on gender equality in Mongolia has specifically addressed the status of gender equality in higher education institutions. To fill this gap, we conducted two focus group interviews with 20 faculty and staff at the Mongolian University of Science and Technology (MUST). These interviews revealed that sexual and other forms of harassment were common within the institution, negatively affecting the working environment. Our findings also highlighted the absence of a victim protection culture and low trust within the organization, which can hamper productivity. Other contributing factors to gender inequality within the organization included the lack of a dedicated career development policy, excessive political interference, and male-dominated policies of political parties.

The Need for a Gender Equality Evaluation Index in Mongolia's Higher Education Sector

In the 21st century, human rights, including gender equality, have emerged as crucial global issues. Today, gender equality assessment is gaining significance in the governance of global business and economic environments. For instance, the [NASDAQ's Board Diversity Rule](#) now requires companies whose shares are traded on the exchange to publicly disclose board-level diversity statistics annually, while the Green Climate Fund, in addition to its green credit criteria, mandates [gender assessment](#) for all projects it finances.

Most studies on gender equality in Mongolia have concentrated on women's equal rights in areas such as the labor market, society, and politics. International organizations—primarily engaged in reducing poverty, increasing equal participation, and eliminating domestic violence—have been the conduits for such research. While international evaluation indices can provide a broad perspective on inequality, there has been a notable absence of a

suitable evaluation instrument tailored to assessing gender equality in Mongolia's educational institutions. Our research sets out to develop such an evaluation index with international standards. This index can enhance the educational policymaking process by fostering evidence-based decision-making.

How to Measure Gender Equality in Mongolian Higher Education

In our research, we compared internationally used gender indices. We then adapted the general evaluation index used at the national level to a specific institution, developing a multi-parameter index specifically for Mongolia's higher education institutions. To assess the feasibility of implementing this evaluation in the country's higher education organizations, we conducted two focus group interviews with representatives from faculty, researchers, and staff at the Mongolian University of Science and Technology.

We compared four internationally recognized indices: the [UN Development Program Gender Inequality Index](#), the [World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index](#), the [European Union's Gender Equality Index](#), and [UNESCO's Gender Index in the Education Sector](#). Each index uses between 5 and 65 indicators to evaluate various numbers of subgroups. They supply a broader perspective on gender equality, encompassing various macro-level indicators across countries, such as the economy, society, employment, finance, and health.

It is important to note that these global indices do not adequately capture gender equality in education. The one that best represents the education sector is UNESCO's Gender Index in the Education Sector. It compiles gender-sensitive education statistics and indicators from different countries and identifies factors that influence gender equality in education under two categories: Demand and Supply. Nevertheless, it primarily focuses on primary and secondary education and is designed to assess countries as a whole rather than specific institutions.

Parameters Used to Develop a New Index of Gender Equality in Higher Education

From the four general indices compared in the study, we adopted 20 common parameters and developed 43 additional parameters specifically tailored to educational institutions. Thus, the final version of our index consists of three groups and 63 parameters. We categorized these 63 parameters into Governance, Faculty and Staff, and Students. To demonstrate the application of this index, we conducted an experimental measurement using MUST as a

representative educational institution. We evaluated each group at MUST for gender equality and assigned scores accordingly.

We derived the values of the parameters in the gender index from information provided by Mongolia's National Institute of Education. We created these parameters based on relevant quantitative indicators pertaining to the faculty and staff and all students of MUST, including those enrolled in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs.

Beyond basic quantitative data related to individuals, other parameters analyzed for inclusion were MUST's internal regulations, labor contract provisions for teaching staff, codes of conduct for teachers and staff, student codes of conduct, and the composition of councils and trade unions at MUST. The selection of parameters adopted a similar principle to the European Union index, which assesses and evaluates working environment conditions. We also drew inspiration from the Gender Diversity Index of the World Economic Forum, a widely recognized index that measures gender representation in employment, terms of employment contracts, and gender equality at the management level.

It should be noted that our newly developed index does not intend to evaluate gender aspects of educational programs and curriculum content.

Findings from the Mongolian Gender Equality Index

In our study, a parameter value of one indicates that gender equality has been achieved, while a value of zero indicates the opposite.

The assessment of gender equality at MUST yielded the following results: a score of 0.239 at the governance level, 0.594 at the level of teachers and staff, and 0.617 at the level of students and learners. The overall score for MUST was 0.465, indicating a lack of gender equality in management councils and leadership positions. Yet, the assessment of gender equality among teachers, staff, and students was above average. This assessment aligns with the findings of other qualitative studies conducted at the school.

Recommendations

Proposed strategies to improve gender equality at Mongolian University of Science and Technology and, by extension, in Mongolian higher education, include the following:

Governance level

- Incorporate gender equality into the university's development policy at the organizational level.

- Develop and implement a gender balance policy and create a dedicated unit responsible for this policy.

Teaching staff level

- Provide gender-related training and awareness.
- Establish mechanisms to prevent and address sexual and other forms of harassment in the workplace.
- Implement programs to support male and female employees returning to work after maternity leave or leave for childcare.

Student level

- Implement a policy to increase male students' participation in scholarships and loans.
- Pay attention to increasing the employment rate of female graduates.
- Activate the Ethics Committee's work.
- Foster an environment that respects academic freedom in its entirety.

By implementing these recommendations, Mongolian higher education institutions can make significant progress in promoting gender equality within their organizations. It is also possible to expand the usage of the Mongolian gender equality index to the higher education sector in other countries.

We conducted a pilot study using the index to evaluate gender equality in eight universities across four countries. An important conclusion from this study is the strong demand for Gender Data Transparency—more transparent data results in better gender equality assessments. However, in Asia, gender data, in general, is neither available nor transparent.

Resources

European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). [Gender Equality Index](#). EIGE.

Green Climate Fund (GCF). [Simplified Approval Process. Annex 4: Gender Assessment and Action Plan](#). GCF.

NASDAQ. 2023. [Nasdaq's Board Diversity Rule: What Companies Should Know](#). NASDAQ.

National Statistics Office of Mongolia and the UN Population Fund Mongolia. 2018. [Breaking the Silence for Equality: 2017 National Study on Gender-based Violence in Mongolia](#). Ulaanbaatar.

UN Development Program (UNDP). [Gender Inequality Index \(GII\)](#). UNDP.

UNESCO. [World Inequality Database on Education](#). UNESCO.
(This is the source of data for the UNESCO Gender Index in the

Education Sector. The data format and presentation has changed since the authors used this index for the study.)

World Economic Forum (WEF). *Global Gender Gap Report*. WEF.

Ask the Experts



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