

## WHY IS GENDER SENSITIZATION NECESSARY AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL?



### **The true purpose of education**

I believe that education or schooling is a process through which society creates the kind of individuals we wish to see in the world. Hence, it's imperative that school curriculum lays strong emphasis on inculcating values of equality, inclusivity and diversity, all of which are essential for building a healthy society.

## **Change must begin from a young age**

In a patriarchal country like India, where stark gender roles, overt gender discrimination and devaluation of women and girls is ingrained into our daily lives, I feel that it is extremely important to identify and address this problem from a very young age. Boys and girls start developing their gendered identities from birth. The upbringing at home also influences them. While egalitarian gender roles may not be present at home, the school can become a space of transformation where children, especially those hailing from disadvantaged backgrounds, learn to question gender roles, identify areas of gendered discrimination, and work towards changing them.

## **Change has to start from the grassroots**

In many families, in both rural and urban areas, while boys are encouraged to study and have a career, girls are taught to concentrate on household chores. Only when both boys and girls learn to question this typical gender bias at school, will the situation at home also change for the better.

The different geographical and cultural contexts I have had the opportunity to work in has taught me that gender roles and inequalities are very contextual, and rooted in cultural and social practices. Thus, to have a national policy addressing gender equality is not sufficient. At a more local level, we need clear directives to understand and address specific gender norms through the schooling process.

## **In spite of our efforts towards providing education to a girl child, where exactly are we lacking?**

For the longest time, we have been working on bringing girls to school and ensuring that they complete their schooling. We assume that schooling and academic ability will empower a girl through financial and social independence. Why then, do **we still have a society where women and girls fear for their safety and well-being, and are considered 'burdens' on their families?** We may have been able to bring women to the forefront, but without addressing and challenging gender norms at a nascent stage of social development, we cannot hope to work towards a society where women and girls feel safe and valued.

Imperative to this process is the need to working with boys. From a young age, i.e. through schooling itself, if boys are taught to understand **how an egalitarian society is beneficial for all by questioning gender norms, only then will boys learn to treat women as equals.** Thus education can play a critical role in making the society safer for women, and that can happen by making gender sensitisation a part of the school curriculum.