



Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Schools Building on What Children Value and Aspire to Do and Be

# Children's Perspectives on Valued Well-Being Capabilities







#### Disclaimers

The project 'Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Schools, building on what children want to do and be' is being implemented by LIKE Lab, Kathmandu University School of Arts with support from the Global Partnership for Education Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE KIX) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or its Board of Governors.

#### © Copyright by Learning, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Lab, 2025



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0)

For further details about the CC BY license, visit: https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/cclicenses/

#### **Published by**

Learning, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Lab Kathmandu University School of Arts

#### **Authors**

Dr. Binayak Krishna Thapa Ms. Isha Karki

#### **Research Team**

Dr. Binayak Krishna Thapa, Principal Investigator

Ms. Anushka Shrestha, Project Coordinator

Mr. Saurav Rajbhandari, Community Mobilizer

Ms. Mijala Chitrakar, Researcher

Ms. Isha Karki, Researcher

Ms. Sanjita Katuwal, Field Mobilizer

Mr. Agraj Ranjitkar, Research Intern

#### **Editor**

Dr. Sakshi Chanana

#### **Design and Layout**

Crimson Design and Prints Pvt. Ltd. Hattiban, Lalitpur, Nepal

## **Acknowledgments**

This report is based on a survey conducted by a team of researchers in the Koshi Province of Nepal's Hilly Region. It is an output of the project titled *Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Schools: Building on What Children Value and Aspire to Do and Be,* funded by the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to 13 participating community schools and research participants, including principals, and GESI focal points, in Bhojpur Municipality, for their invaluable contributions and insights.

We acknowledge the support of local officials who facilitated the fieldwork and offered critical perspectives on the challenges and opportunities for promoting gender equality and social inclusion in schools.

Finally, we express our sincere gratitude to all the children who shared their experiences, aspirations, and voices and offered a foundation for meaningful dialogue and change. Their willingness to engage in this process has been instrumental in informing us of this study's outcomes.

We are profoundly grateful to everyone who has contributed to this research.

## **Acronyms**

CA Capability Approach

**CEHRD** Center for Education and Human Resource Development

**COVID-19** Coronavirus Disease 2019 **FGD** Focus Group Discussion

GESI Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

**GPI** Gender Parity Index

IDRC International Development Research Center
LIKE Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Exchange

MDGs Millennium Development Goals

MoEST Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology

NER Net Enrollment Rate

SESP School Education Sector Plan
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WASH Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

## **Table of Contents**

Ackno	owledgments	ii
Acron	nyms	iii
List of	f Figures	vi
List of	f Tables	vi
Execu	itive summary	vii
Sectio	on 1 Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Setting the Context	3
Sectio	on 2 Theoretical Framework: Key Concepts	5
2.1	Children Well-being	5
2.2	Why Well-Being in Childhood Matters?	6
2.3	Why does the capability to be educated matter for children?	6
2.4	How Can We Conceptualize the Capability to Be Educated?	6
2.5	What are Fundamental, Foundational, or Basic Capabilities?	6
2.6	Capability Approach	7
2.7	Theoretical Perspective	8
2.8	Operationalizing Capability Approach	8
2.9	Capability Domains and Functionings	8
2.10	0 Stages of Domain Selection for Capability List:	9
Sectio	on 3 <b>Methodology</b>	10
3.1	Description of the field site	10
3.2	Sample Selection and Data Collection Instruments	11
3.3	Potential Children's Well-being Domains	12
3.4	Data Analysis: Scoring & Ranking Process	12
Sectio	on 4 Understanding of Potential Well-being Domains	13
4.1	Children's Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains	13
	4.1.1 Highly Understood Capability Domains	13
	4.1.2 Moderately Understood Capability Domains	14
	4.1.3 Lesser Understood Capability Domains	14
	4.1.4 Least Understood Capability Domains	14
4.2	Boys' Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains	15
	4.2.1 Most Understood Capability Domains	16
	4.2.2 Moderately Understood Capability Domains	16
	4.2.3 Less Understood Capability Domains	16
	4.2.4 Least Understood Capability Domains	17
4.3		18
	4.3.1 Most Understood Capability Domains	18
	4.3.2 Moderately Understood Capability Domains	19
	4.3.3 Less Understood Capability Domains	19

	4.3.4 Least Understood Capability Domains	20
4.4	Comparison Between Girls' and Boys' Understanding of the Well-Being Domain	21
	4.4.1 Shared Priorities: Emotional Support, Personal Growth, and Education	21
	4.4.2 Differences in Social and Emotional Well-Being Awareness	21
	4.4.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion: A Commonly Overlooked Domain	21
	4.4.4 Autonomy, Participation, and Rights: A Gendered Divide	22
	4.4.5 Mental Well-Being and Health Awareness: A Commonly Neglected Domain	22
Section	5 Valuation of Capability Domains	23
5.1	Children's Valued Well-being Domains	23
	5.1.1 Highly Prioritized Capability Domains	23
	5.1.2 Moderately Prioritized Capability Domains	24
	5.1.3 Lesser Prioritized Capability Domains	24
	5.1.4 Least Prioritized Capability Domains	24
5.2	Boys Valued Well-being Domains	25
	5.2.1 Highly Prioritized Capability Domains	26
	5.2.2 Moderately Prioritized Capability Domains	27
	5.2.3 Lesser Prioritized Capability Domains	27
	5.2.4 Least Prioritized Capability Domains	27
5.3	Girls' Valued Well-being Domains	29
	5.3.1 Highly Prioritized Capability Domains	29
	5.3.2 Moderately Prioritized Capability Domains	29
	5.3.3 Lesser Prioritized Capability Domains	30
	5.3.4 Least Prioritized Capability Domains	30
5.4	Comparison between Boys' and Girls' Valued Well-being Domains	31
	5.4.1 Education as a Shared Priority, but Different Emphases on Aspiration	31
	5.4.2 Boys Prioritize Respect and Security, While Girls Focus on Equity and Well-being	32
	5.4.3 Boys Emphasize Security and Physical Protection, While Girls Highlight Care and Health	32
	5.4.4 Girls Deprioritize Autonomy and Mobility More Than Boys	32
	5.4.5 Leisure and Participation Rank Low for Both, but for Different Reasons	33
Annex		38
Diff	erent Capability lists	38
Sch	al Information	30

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Map of Bhojpur District	10
Figure 2: Map of Bhojpur Municipality	11
List of Tables	
Table 4.1: Children's Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains	15
Table 4.2: Boy's Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains	17
Table 4.3: Girls' Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains	20
Table 5.1: Children's Valued Well-being Domains	25
Table 5.2: Boys Valued Well-being Domains	28
Table 5.3: Girls Valued Well-being Domains	31

## **Executive summary**

"Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Schools: Building on What Children Value and Aspire to Do and Be" is a research-for-development project funded by the Global Partnership for Education's (GPE) Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The project was initiated on 1 March 2024. It aims to identify, contextualize, adapt, test, learn, and scale the Children's Valued Educational Capabilities (CVEC) using the Gender Equality, Equity, and Social Inclusion (GESI) diagnostic tool. This innovative and culturally responsive tool has been designed to drive transformation in practices and strategies that address barriers to gender equality, inclusion, equity, and gender-friendly education resulting in a safe environment for all children in public schools.

The project has three sub-objectives:

- a. To generate knowledge and evidence of the use and scalability of diagnostic tools based on children's valued capabilities to promote gender equality and social inclusion.
- b. Strengthening the capacities of students, teachers, and relevant stakeholders to develop children's capabilities resulting in gender equality and social inclusion in school and beyond
- c. To mobilize the generated knowledge and evidence for improving gender and inclusion-related policies and practices in schools.

These objectives align with the primary objectives of KIX, which are knowledge generation, knowledge mobilization, and capacity building.

This situation analysis report corresponds to the first sub-objective of the project and contributes to KIX's core overall objectives, particularly knowledge generation. The rationale and objective of this analysis is to provide initial observations and information collected from the 13 schools in Bhojpur municipality, Nepal.

The primary objectives of the situation analysis are as follows:

- To map potential children's well-being domains.
- To examine students' understanding and perceived importance of their well-being domains.
- To develop a context-specific GESI diagnostic tool for schools.

#### Methodology and Approach

The study was conducted in Bhojpur Municipality, Nepal, spanning 13 selected community schools from different wards to ensure caste, gender, ethnicity, and geographical representation.

- a. 234 students (117 boys and 117 girls).
- b. 26 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- c. Stratified and random sampling techniques to balance gender representation
- d. Analysis of 21 well-being domains using children's responses for understanding and valuation rankings

Children were asked to evaluate well-being domains along two dimensions:

- 1. Understanding: Whether they recognize and comprehend the domain.
- 2. Valuation: How significant they perceive the domain to be for their well-being.

#### **Key Findings**

The research has yielded the following key findings:

#### 1. Children's Understanding of Well-Being Domain

Children exhibited a strong understanding of "Love and care," "Aspiration," and "Social Relations," highlighting their emphasis on emotional security, goal-setting, and meaningful interactions. "Education" and "Leisure Activities" were equally understood domains, indicating cognizance for academic development and recreation. However, the "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" and "Mental Well-being" ranked lowest, elucidating a critical gap in gender-sensitive education and mental health awareness.

#### 2. Gender-Specific Insights on Understanding Well-Being Domains

- Girls exhibit a stronger understanding of "Social Relations" and "Education", ranking these domains
  higher than boys, which suggests a greater emphasis on interpersonal connections and learning
  opportunities.
- Boys demonstrate a greater comprehension of "Mobility", "Bodily Integrity", and "Autonomy", reflecting a more structured awareness of physical movement, security, and decision-making power.
- Boys exhibit a slightly stronger understanding of "Economic and Non-Economic Exploitation" than girls.
- Both boys and girls demonstrate a weak understanding of "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion", highlighting a lack of awareness of systemic inequalities and inclusion-related issues.
- "Mental Well-being" is the least understood domain for both boys and girls, revealing that
  psychological and emotional health remains a poorly recognized aspect of well-being in children's
  perceptions.

#### Children's Valued Well-Being Domains

Children placed the highest value on "Education", "Shelter and Environment", and "Aspiration", emphasizing the importance of basic needs, knowledge, stability, and future opportunities. "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" also ranked highly, indicating a growing awareness of fairness and equity. However, "Personal Autonomy" and "Mobility" were ranked lowest, suggesting limited perceived agency and movement freedom in their well-being conceptualization.

#### 4. Gendered Differences in Well-Being Valuation

- Girls prioritize "Education", "Aspiration", and "Gender Equality", viewing learning and fairness as critical to their well-being.
- Boys emphasize "Shelter", "Respect", and "Bodily Integrity", indicating a focus on security, social standing, and physical protection.
- Girls place a higher value on "Economic and Non-Economic Exploitation" than boys even though their comprehension is less in this domain.
- Girls rank "Mental Well-being" higher than boys, indicating a stronger recognition of emotional and psychological health in their well-being conceptualization.
- Boys place a stronger emphasis on "Mobility" and "Autonomy", which reflects greater independence in movement and decision-making compared to girls.
- Both boys and girls rank "Participation" and "Time Autonomy" among the lowest, indicating a lack of perceived agency and decision-making power in their lives.

#### Section 1

## Introduction

#### 1.1 Background

The journey from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been pivotal in offering and supporting education to all children. The efforts towards attaining education milestones as part of these goals have shown commendable improvement in the context of the increment in the numbers of children having access to primary and secondary education, enhanced participation in schools, and completion of education. Since education is the means to social justice and equal society, it is the responsibility of all governments, stakeholders, and beneficiaries of education systems to ensure that children worldwide have an opportunity to exercise their right to education. While notable improvement has been seen in the educational indicators/metrics in the last decades, COVID-19 and the subsequent post-phase have become barriers to sustained progress. Though the global parity gap in enrollment is under 1% (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2022), much needs to be done owing to learning loss and learning poverty. Termed as "learning crisis," the phenomenon has garnered significant global attention, as the dream of education for all remains unfulfilled with an estimated 224 million children still out of school, of which 79% of these children come from sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia (UNESCO).



While millions of children are excluded from education, those in school are underperforming. According to the World Bank (2022), the percentage of 10-year-olds globally who cannot read simple text has risen from 54% to 70% during the post-pandemic period. This alarming trend highlights the worsening state of education for children in recent years, which has exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly among those marginalized by factors like poverty, ethnicity, race, disability, and geographical isolation.

The Government of Nepal, like other South Asian countries, remains committed to improving educational outcomes and continuously works to enhance its education system. The School

Education Sector Plan 2022-2032 outlines objectives, plans, and targets to address gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in education. The SESP 2022-32 document affirms a commitment to update the Consolidated Equity Strategy for the school education sector, which will serve as an overarching framework to reduce disparities in educational outcomes. Additionally, the document emphasizes the importance of a child-friendly school framework designed to promote equality and inclusion within academic institutions (SESP MoEST Nepal, 2022).

The Educational Statistics of 2022, provided by the CEHRD, highlight significant milestones in children's enrollment across all levels of education: lower basic level (grades 1-5), basic education level (grades 1-8), and secondary education level (grades 9-12). The recorded Net Enrollment Rates were 96.9% for lower basic education, 95.1% for basic education, and 54.0% for secondary education. The report also indicated a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 0.99 for basic education and 1.01 for secondary education, demonstrating a maintenance of gender parity across different levels of schooling.

While Nepal has shown progress in these macro-educational indicators, these achievements primarily focus on accessibility, participation, and learning outcomes. An equity strategy based solely on these limited dimensions fails to address crucial educational conditions such as the child-friendly school environment, gender dynamics, social inclusiveness, and broader social justice in education. As a result, the targeted milestones outlined in the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) are confined to plans and policies to improve educational metrics at the macro level. While such improvements are necessary, they are not sufficient. The metrics that indicate the situation of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in education at the macro level do not provide a complete picture of the educational landscape. These measurements are primarily limited to indicators such as enrollment, attainment, dropout rates, retention, and gender parity. Although this data can help quantify educational achievements, it lacks information regarding the quality of education, specifically the experiences children encounter while being educated.

This research report addresses this gap and explores the missing dimensions of gender equality, equity, and social inclusiveness experienced by school children. It seeks to provide insights and opportunities emphasizing the importance of equality, equity, and access to a safe and inclusive learning environment, and foster the well-being and growth of students within schools and beyond. The Government of Nepal's Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST) restricts the understanding of gender equality to just achieving equal enrollment for boys and girls. It has defined equity and inclusion merely as increased student participation concerning socio-economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, and location. However, efforts must now be extended beyond these limited priorities. International and non-governmental organizations have been diligently working at various levels to enhance girls' education, linking gender equality to education initiatives.

Over the past decade, the focus on GESI has diminished, exacerbated by a rise in global challenges and a backlash against women's rights. This has hindered its progress in education. Developing countries in South Asia now confront new barriers to educational success, including academic underachievement among girls, increasing instances of sexual harassment in and out of schools, harmful societal norms, and school violence. These issues remain prevalent in public schools across South Asia. While considerable attention has been given to access to education, learning experiences, and educational outcomes, there has been insufficient progress in overcoming harmful gender norms, discriminatory practices, harassment, and social exclusion within school environments.

Even though efforts are being made to address the above-mentioned challenges, additional investment and financing are essential to make Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) a reality.

Successful initiatives aimed at achieving GESI encompass research, programs, practices, and policies related to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), social protection, education, and child protection. Some proven innovations to improve GESI in the education sector include implementing a gender-responsive education system and ensuring equitable access to education for all. This also involves addressing gender-based violence issues, promoting gender equality programming for transformative results, tackling discriminatory gender norms, and advocating for gender-responsive workplace practices and institutional accountability. Evidence and successful practices show that these initiatives, interventions, and innovations require a multi-sectoral approach based on high-quality data and evidence, as well as partnerships that involve girl-led networks, organizations, and girl leadership.

#### 1.2 Setting the Context

This report is based on action research conducted by the Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Exchange Lab at Kathmandu University, School of Arts. The researchers aim to explore children's valued educational capabilities, needs, and desires, which shape their experiences related to gender equality, equity, social inclusion, safety, and support at school. This research initiative is supported by the Global Partnership for Education and the International Development Research Center, both committed to strengthening education systems through their Knowledge Innovation and Exchange program.

The LIKE team employs the Capability Approach, a theoretical framework focused on individual capabilities and freedoms. This approach aligns with the research's goal of enhancing child well-being by promoting gender equality and social inclusion in schools. Rather than measuring child well-being purely based on resources or the income available to their parents, this approach considers what children are effectively able to do and become. It emphasizes the importance of providing children with the opportunities and resources they need to lead lives they value.

Our team firmly believes that enhancing children's valued educational capabilities based on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) can nurture their identities and attitudes as school-going children while promoting a gender-friendly, inclusive, safe, and supportive school environment for all. Although policies, programs, projects, and activities generally rely on established approaches such as human capital, human rights, and basic needs to strengthen education systems for children's well-being, our team has chosen the capability approach for gender-responsive and socially inclusive education.

The rationale for choosing the capability approach is contextualized by extensive literature and applications from works such as Biggeri's (2011) on children's valued capabilities, Terzi's (2007) and Crespo's (2007) examination of education within the human capabilities framework, Unterhalter's (2007) analysis of gender equality in education through the capability approach, and Walker's (2007) capability list for assessing gender equality in education. The capability approach offers a valuable alternative to human capital, human rights, and social exclusion frameworks for action research in education.

This approach conceptualizes various elements, including autonomy, respect, play, emotions, imagination, participation, bodily integrity, mental and physical health, and relationships. Together, these elements are termed as "indicators of children flourishing." A GESI diagnostic tool derived from these concepts, reflecting children's voices and context, is a more effective evaluation tool for assessing children's well-being at both individual and institutional levels. These concepts provide a framework for examining individuals and institutions, focusing on children and their schools. This

report presents the findings of a pilot study that produces a revised capability list, capturing hill-based children's understanding of the potential indicators for the envisioned GESI diagnosis.

A well-functioning school is generally understood to possess characteristics of institutional well-being, which refers to the institution's contribution to the overall well-being of its students and staff (both teaching and non-teaching). A valuable tool for Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, and Equity (GESI) diagnosis can help strengthen public schools by addressing demand-side issues based on performance evaluations and ensuring the well-being of children with respect to gender equality, equity, and social inclusion. These evaluations can subsequently serve as policy instruments, informing decisions to support the needs of public schools at the institutional level and facilitate GESI transformative programs and practices for individual children.

This report outlines how the previously mentioned framework and diagnostic tool can be developed. It describes the theoretical foundation, methods used to gather children's perspectives on their capabilities, and the process of selecting various domains and potential indicators for the GESI diagnosis tool.

The current understanding of the novel concept of child well-being is contextual and contested within the fields of education and development. Research, programs, and initiatives aimed at promoting children's well-being face several challenges, including differing interpretations of child well-being, variations in evaluation techniques, and disagreements on how best to promote it. This complexity arises from the implicit intertwining of normative and ethical stances regarding the definition of well-being itself. Therefore, this research adopts a multidisciplinary approach to investigate child well-being, starting with the assumption that indicators of educational achievement do not provide a complete picture of child well-being. It further assumes that children's well-being is measurable and can be best assessed through a multidimensional framework. Lastly, it considers that children themselves possess the potential agency to conceptualize, prioritize, measure, and evaluate their own well-being indicators.



#### Section 2

## **Theoretical Framework: Key Concepts**

#### 2.1 Children Well-being

Firstly, the concept of child well-being places children at the center of human development, making it essential to theories and rights that promote justice for children. A just society is one that provides every child with the space and opportunities for meaningful development, as well as the resources to achieve their well-being. The basic elements, fundamentals, and foundations of well-being are crucial rights that must be accessible to children. Additionally, the multidimensional nature of well-being includes various important indicators for a child's wellness, such as health, education, social relationships, participation, nutrition, shelter, love and care, and autonomy.

Secondly, the way "well-being" is conceptualized and measured can often seem subjective and tied to welfarism. This report takes a different approach and aims for objectivity in examining the notion of child well-being. Rather than focusing on subjective notions of welfare, happiness, or satisfaction commonly linked with well-being, the report emphasizes the opportunities and achievements that children experience in their everyday lives, particularly in school environments as a parameter of well-being.

Thirdly, adopting an objective perspective to understand child well-being is a common approach in research related to children and in the formulation of policies. The capability approach is a prominent framework for objectively understanding the well-being of children. Nussbaum's renowned ten central capabilities can be seen as an objective means of conceptualizing well-being. This idea is further developed by Biggeri et al. (2011), who suggest that children's well-being consists of significant capabilities and functions. In this framework, capabilities refer to the freedom and opportunities available to children, while functions represent their actual achievements.

According to the capability approach, an individual's well-being is tied to a set of capabilities that are essential to human nature. This idea is similar to that of other living beings in nature; for example, plants require photosynthesis, while predators need speed and stealth to hunt. In her book, "Creating Capabilities", Martha Nussbaum outlines ten basic capabilities that constitute human well-being: life; bodily integrity; bodily health; sense, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; care for animals and plants; play; and control over one's environment (Nussbaum 2011, p. 33f). Because of its objective account of well-being, the capability approach is particularly effective for conceptualizing child well-being (Bagattini 2014, p. 175).



#### 2.2 Why Well-Being in Childhood Matters?

A flourishing childhood is inherently valuable. This concept is not just important for the child but also for concerned parents, as children are subjects of moral concern and have an inherent right to a good life during their formative years. A child's well-being is not merely a personal benefit but also a moral imperative, significantly impacting their development and the broader community's responsibility toward its future citizens.

Children's well-being today represents a continuum across time and space, laying the groundwork for their future well-being. A society that fails to establish social arrangements that support children's well-being cannot be considered just. Moreover, childhood is marked by vulnerability, immaturity, and a dependency on caregivers. Since children cannot be held accountable for their own well-being, any compromises to it may limit their opportunities as they transition into adulthood. Such compromises are morally unacceptable, as they violate the ethical standards of any society.

As previously mentioned, well-being is a multidimensional concept that requires a comprehensive understanding. Examining well-being allows us to gain deeper insights into the various dimensions crucial to a child's life. Single-dimensional approaches, such as focusing solely on a child's economic situation or using a limited disciplinary perspective, risk distorting the nuanced portrayal of childhood wellness or illness and failing to capture its complexity.

#### 2.3 Why does the capability to be educated matter for children?

Education offers well-being, agency freedom, and comprehensive education outcomes including both opportunity and capability formation to children. It also equips them to live "examined lives" as they grow and navigate various settings, like school, home, and the community.

- a) Education facilitates knowledge of what it means to live well.
- b) Education allows children to compare different ways of life.
- c) It capacitates them to make informed choices about what constitutes a good life.

Hence, education plays a pivotal role in enhancing children's quality of life and contributing to the expansion of their capabilities.

#### 2.4 How Can We Conceptualize the Capability to Be Educated?

Terzi (2007) argues that a person who lacks or misses the opportunity to be educated, whether through informal learning or formal schooling, will be at a disadvantage, potentially harming their present and future well-being. Moreover, the opportunity to access education, and thereby to possess the capability to be educated, can be considered a fundamental and foundational capability that supports the achievement of other capabilities. The absence of this opportunity, or being deprived of it, impedes the holistic well-being of an individual, as education is a critical component in the development of various aspects of a person's life.

#### 2.5 What are Fundamental, Foundational, or Basic Capabilities?

These are subsets of all possible capabilities. Sen (1992) states that basic capabilities are essential aspects of being and doing that are crucial to well-being. Based on this understanding, the following are examples of basic capabilities:

- To be well-nourished.
- To be well-sheltered
- To escape avoidable morbidity
- To escape premature mortality

- To be educated
- To be in good health
- To be able to participate without shame

#### 2.6 Capability Approach

The Capability Approach (CA) offers wide normative framework to conceptualize and evaluate individual children's well-being and educational arrangements in community schools. Using CA, this research aims to explore and understand the processes through which the students come to decisions about what they know, understand, and value in and from gender-equal and socially inclusive education settings, It also focuses on comprehension of how children make choices and learn from



other experiences of socio-educational action and interaction regarding their well-being, within and beyond their school settings.

Sen defines a capability as "a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being, it represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be" (Sen, 1999, p.30). He identifies education as one of "a relatively small number of centrally important being and doing that are crucial to well-being". Complementing this, Nussbaum's work on higher education explains the importance of education for women's empowerment and a healthy democratic society through strong public education. Both Sen and Nussbaum confirm the importance of education as a basic capability that enhances other capabilities. Further, Sen (1999) mentions the different roles education plays in various contexts. One role is the instrumental social role, while another is the instrumental process role. Other roles include the empowering distributive role and the redistributive role.

The capabilities of children are formed through social interaction and receptiveness within the household and broader environment such as schools. Children here are the agents in the process of developing their capabilities and well-being. This research is based on the conviction that children are subject to respect and agency in the society they live in. They are active in their being and doing and therefore, play an important role in their own development and accessing their rights.

Hence, this research conceptualizes children as active actors, agents, and subjects of capabilities. Based on this conception, our research unveils insights into how children understand their status of well-being in terms of their capabilities as opportunities and functioning as current achievements. Hence, the work initially builds on their knowledge, understanding, and prioritization of the already existing dimensions and indicators of child well-being as earlier proposed by established children's well-being academicians, child rights specialists, well-being researchers, and policymakers.

#### 2.7 Theoretical Perspective

This research utilizes and affirms the educational relevance of the Capability Approach. The choice of the Capability Approach as a theoretical lens for this action research is based on the following rationale:

- a) This approach enhances the informational base that supports understanding children's being and doing better.
- b) It is an evaluative framework that addresses contextual diversity, heterogeneity, and intersectionality while engaging with the children population.
- c) It offers novel dimensions pertaining to the issues of children's well-being, from theory, to practice and policy.
- d) It provides a wide range of principles on which this research can be developed, for example, children's experiences of inclusiveness, fairness, equality, and justice.

#### 2.8 Operationalizing Capability Approach

Drawing on the definition of capabilities approach of Sen (2009) and Nussbaum (2011), a multidimensional framework has been chalked out to explore what children are able to do and be. This framework defines and evaluates social justice goals within SDG 4 and its composite sub-goals, targets, and indicators.

Capability Approach (CA) is one of the many approaches that is being used to evaluate wellbeing. Based on the capabilities and priorities of disadvantaged groups, evaluators can develop a context-specific multidimensional framework for exploring wellbeing. Amartya Sen (2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2011) offer the Capability Approach as an alternative measure of well-being. As well-being is dominantly measured by economic growth, or by happiness, but such an approach is limited to examining the means to achieve the ends. In fact, we need to prioritize things that matter intrinsically, where both freedom and agency are recognized as vital aspects of the achievement of social justice, and diversity and situated conditions of certain groups are acknowledged as things different across class, gender, race, or disability.

According to the Capability Approach, well-being is defined as a range of capacities that an individual possesses. Well-being is "what people are actually able to do and to be" (Nussbaum, 2011). Researchers and academicians working on the Capability Approach suggest different capabilities lists to evaluate what an individual is able to do and be, such a list comprises different capability domains. The first of such lists is developed by Nussbaum (2011) and mentions ten core capabilities.

While different capability lists are available other than Nussbaum's, a common thing across these is that each list attempts to demonstrate the necessities for a life with value and dignity. Each domain in the list is a fundamental requirement for a life lived, and each of the domains needs to be met. Though each of the lists offers a different set of capabilities, when such a list or framework is put to a real application, the framework indicators should be adaptable for use in a context-specific manner. Literature on the use of CA suggests that evaluative framework should be modifiable for use in particular contexts, fields, and settings (Burchart and Vizard, 2011, Lewis, 212, Robeyns, 2003). One such list drawn specifically for evaluating children's well-being and young people is that of Biggeri's Children Capabilities list.

#### 2.9 Capability Domains and Functionings

A capability list is a set of domains, and each domain is defined by a series of functions. According to Kelly (2012), a domain defines what a person is able to do and to be, and functioning defines the 'being and doing' of that person (Robeyns, 2003). The selection process of domains for a capability

list should include a) prioritizing domains according to their importance in one's life (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007), b) including a participatory approach during selection as 'bottom-up' strategy and taking into consideration existing international standards such as list of human right (Burchardt & Vizard, 2011).

#### 2.10 Stages of Domain Selection for Capability List:

The different stages of domain selection for the Capability List are:

- a) Compile a set of capability lists based on existing literature on the Capability Approach (analyzing existing documentation to determine a set of children's capabilities from the literature).
- b) Generate a set of domains through a series of workshops and focus groups with children (generation of capability sets with children and young people in field sites).
- c) Merge capability sets according to a 'Bottom-up and Top-down' approach, combining the capability sets from stages a and b.



#### Section 3

## Methodology

#### 3.1 Description of the field site

The study was conducted in Bhojpur Municipality located in Koshi province, the eastern part of Nepal. It is situated in the Bhojpur District, which lies in the hilly region of the country. It lies approximately 400 kilometers east of Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. The geographical terrain is predominantly hilly, and the climate varies across the municipality due to the variation in altitude. Bhojpur Municipality covers a diverse area, encompassing both rural and semi-urban settlements. It also serves as an administrative and cultural center of the district and offers various services to the local population.

Bhojpur is also home to a variety of ethnic groups, including Brahmin, Chhetri, Rai, Limbu, and Tamang, who contribute to its rich cultural heritage. Agriculture is a major livelihood for the residents, with crops like maize, millet, and rice being grown in the fertile areas of the district. Our study focuses on community schools in Bhojpur, which are crucial for educating students from various caste, class, and ethnic backgrounds.

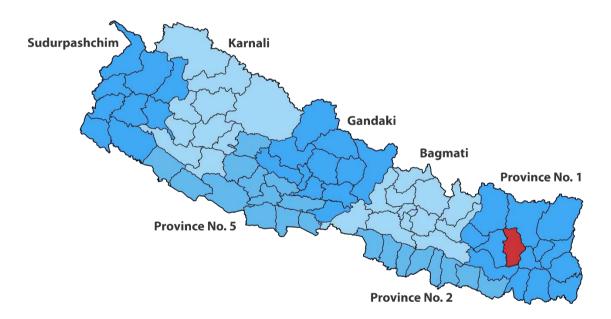


Figure 1: Map of Bhojpur District

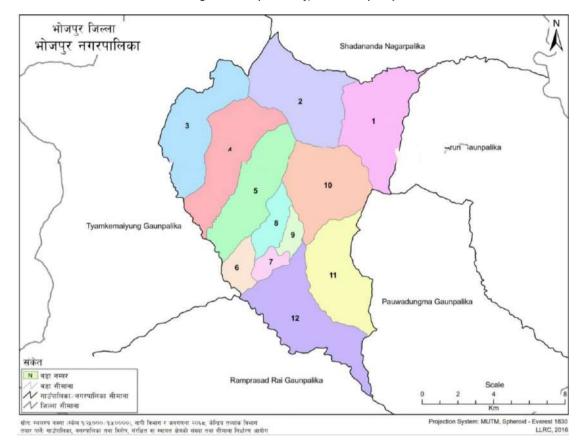


Figure 2: Map of Bhojpur Municipality

## 3.2 Sample Selection and Data Collection Instruments

Out of the 45 community schools in Bhojpur Municipality, 13 schools were strategically selected using a random sampling method to ensure representation from each ward. The selection process aimed to capture diversity across caste, gender, ethnicity, and geography, so as to ensure an accurate representation of the Municipality's educational scenario.

Key participants from each selected school included GESI focal teachers and students. The action plan incorporated varied activities as mentioned below:

- 26 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted across the 13 schools, engaging two separate groups of boys and girls from grades 1 to 10.
- In total, 234 students (117 boys and 117 girls) participated in the FGDs.

The study employed a combination of stratified sampling and random sampling techniques:

- Stratified Sampling: Students were divided into two strata, based on gender to ensure a balanced representation of boys and girls.
- Random Sampling: Respondents within each grade were selected randomly.

This methodological approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how students from different genders and age groups perceive well-being in their school environments.

#### 3.3 Potential Children's Well-being Domains

The study utilized 21 capability domains derived from different capability lists. These domains were used during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students to gain insights into their understanding and valuation of well-being concepts. The selected capability domains included:

- Life/Physical Health
- Religion and Identity
- Love and Care
- Mental Well-Being
- Participation
- Education
- Bodily Integrity
- Social Relations
- Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation
- Respect
- Leisure Activities

- Nutritional Well-Being
- Mobility
- Spirituality
- Understanding and Interpretation
- Time Autonomy
- Planning, Imagination, and Thinking
- Aspiration
- Shelter and Environment
- Personal Autonomy
- Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum

#### 3.4 Data Analysis: Scoring & Ranking Process

Students were asked to evaluate 21 domains in two dimensions:

- 1. Understanding: All students from Grades (1-10) were asked whether they understood or identified the domains. Responses were coded in Excel, with 1 indicating "Yes" and 0 indicating "No." The understanding scores were calculated by summing the number of students in each grade who understood a particular indicator, normalizing the scores to provide proportional understanding scores for each grade, and averaging these scores across all grades to rank the domains. The ranking reflected students' understanding rather than any predefined guidance.
- 2. **Valuation**: Students from Grades (1- 10) collectively ranked the domains based on their perceived importance. Each group, representing a specific grade, provided a rank for all 21 domains on a scale of 1 to 10. The scores assigned by each group were averaged across all grades, providing insights into the relative emphasis students placed on each well-being indicator. The final rankings represented the collective valuation of importance assigned by the students.



#### Section 4

## Understanding of Potential Well-being Domains

The section focuses on how children perceive and comprehend the various domains contributing to their well-being. Children's understanding of capability domains represents a crucial aspect of their cognitive and social development. As children grow, they begin to grasp the different dimensions of their own abilities and potential, which influence how they navigate the world around them. These domains ranging from physical and cognitive skills to emotional and social competencies shape their interactions, learning experiences, and self-perceptions.

#### 4.1 Children's Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains



Table 4.1 presents findings from the ranking of children's understanding of the 21 capability domains, illustrating distinct patterns in how they conceptualize their well-being. The domains are ranked based on points out of 234, with the ranking determined by children's understanding of each well-being domain. Some domains are more clearly understood and hold greater significance, while others remain relatively obscure.

#### 4.1.1 Highly Understood Capability Domains

The domain of "Love and Care" emerged as the most understood, securing the 1st rank with 224 points out of 234 which suggests that children have a strong grasp of the understanding of love, affection, and emotional support in their lives. Following closely, "Aspiration" ranked 2nd (219 points), signifying that children have a deep awareness of their hopes, dreams, and future possibilities. "Social Relations", with 217 points, was ranked 3rd, demonstrating the critical role that friendships, peer interactions, and broader social networks play in children's lives. Their understanding of this domain reflects a recognition of the importance of social belonging, cooperation, and mutual support. In the 4th position, "Education" (212 points) was ranked equally with "Leisure Activities" (212 points), showing that children see both structured learning and recreational activities as essential for their well-being. Their understanding of education as a key capability suggests they are aware of how knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities contribute to their future. At the same time, the equal

ranking of leisure activities indicates that children recognize the importance of play, hobbies, and relaxation in maintaining a balanced and enjoyable life. This ranking suggests that for children, education and leisure are not separate but complementary aspects of their daily experiences.

#### 4.1.2 Moderately Understood Capability Domains

"Respect" and "Plan/Imagine and Think", both received scores of 208 points, ranked 6th, illustrating children's awareness of the value of being treated with dignity and the cognitive ability to engage in thoughtful decision-making. "Nutritional Well-Being" (201 points) ranked 8th, suggesting that while children acknowledge the importance of food, diet, and sustenance, their understanding may be more implicit, shaped by their lived experiences rather than by an explicit recognition of nutritional health as a critical capability. "Shelter and Environment", with 190 points, was placed 9th, reflecting children's awareness of their living conditions and the role of a safe and supportive physical environment in their well-being. Children's comprehension of "Understand and Interpret" (181 points, ranked 10th) and "Participation" (179 points, ranked 11th) indicates a growing but still developing awareness of knowledge and engagement. They seem to recognize the importance of making sense of the world around them and being included in decision-making, but these concepts may not be as concrete in their daily experiences. "Mobility" (173 points, ranked 12th) suggests that while children recognize the ability to move freely as important, they may not think about it in a structured way unless they face mobility restrictions. Similarly, "Life/Physical Health" (164 points, ranked 13th) indicates that children are aware of their physical well-being but may not have a deep understanding of long-term health care, or illness prevention. "Religion and Identity" (163 points, ranked 14th) reflects a moderate understanding, suggesting that while children recognize religious and cultural affiliations, these are not necessarily central to their daily thinking about well-being.

#### 4.1.3 Lesser Understood Capability Domains

The domains of "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation" and "Time Autonomy" (both ranked 15<sup>th</sup> with 160 points) reveal a limited awareness of personal rights and economic vulnerability. Children may not fully grasp the implications of labor rights, financial independence, or the structured control of time, as these concepts are often managed by adults in their lives. Similarly, "Personal Autonomy" (157 points) and "Bodily Integrity" (152 points) ranked 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> respectively, suggesting that children's understanding of personal agency, self-determination, and bodily rights is still developing. The relatively low ranking of bodily integrity, in particular, indicates a need to enhance awareness of personal safety and protection from harm.

#### 4.1.4 Least Understood Capability Domains

At the bottom of the ranking, the least understood domains reflect issues that may be more abstract, unfamiliar, or insufficiently addressed in children's environments. "Spirituality" (142 points, ranked 19<sup>th</sup>) suggests that while some children recognize the existence of spiritual beliefs, their understanding is likely influenced by cultural exposure rather than personal reflection on its role in well-being. "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" (129 points, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) reveals a gap in children's awareness of gender-related issues and inclusivity. This suggests that even if such discussions are introduced in schools, they may not yet be fully internalized by children, highlighting a need for more accessible and engaging ways to address these topics. "Mental Well-Being" (110 points, ranked 21<sup>st</sup>) received the lowest ranking, underscoring a major gap in children's understanding of emotional and psychological health. The low ranking indicates that children may not have the vocabulary or conceptual framework to recognize mental well-being as a crucial aspect of life, emphasizing the urgent need for greater attention to mental health education and emotional literacy.

Overall, the findings reveal a clear pattern in children's understanding of well-being, with relational, aspirational, and educational aspects ranking the highest, while abstract concepts related to autonomy, rights, and mental well-being remain less understood. However, the lower rankings of mental well-being, gender equality, and bodily integrity indicate critical gaps in children's awareness that need to be addressed through targeted Education and support. Strengthening children's understanding of these less-recognized domains can contribute to a more holistic, inclusive, and empowered perception of well-being, ensuring that children not only recognize but also advocate for their rights, health, and opportunities.

Table 4.1: Children's Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains

Domains	Points (Out of 234)	Rank
Love and Care	224	1
Aspiration	219	2
Social Relations	217	3
Education	212	4
Leisure Activities	212	4
Respect	208	6
Plan/Imagine and Think	208	6
Nutritional Well-Being	201	8
Shelter and Environment	190	9
Understand and Interpret	181	10
Participation	179	11
Mobility	173	12
Life/Physical Health	164	13
Religion and Identity	163	14
Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	160	15
Time Autonomy	160	15
Personal Autonomy	157	17
Bodily Integrity	152	18
Spirituality	142	19
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	129	20
Mental Well-being	110	21

Field Survey, 2024

### 4.2 Boys' Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains

Table 4.2 presents the rankings of the 21 capability domains based on boys' responses, with scores assigned out of 117 points, offering insights into their perceptions of well-being and the aspects of life they prioritize. These rankings show the capabilities boys find most intuitive and relevant to their experiences, as well as those that remain less understood.

#### 4.2.1 Most Understood Capability Domains



"Love and Care" ranked highest (1st 112 points), indicating that boys strongly associate well-being with receiving affection, emotional support, and nurturing relationships. Their high understanding of this domain suggests that they recognize the importance of love in fostering security, trust, and happiness in their lives. "Aspiration" followed closely in 2nd place (108 points), showing that boys have a clear understanding of goal-setting, ambition, and future-oriented thinking. They recognize that having aspirations shapes their identity and personal growth, suggesting a strong awareness of the role of self-improvement and achievement in well-being. "Leisure Activities" ranked 3nd (105 points), highlighting boys' recognition of play, sports, and recreation as essential for their well-being. Their strong understanding of this domain suggests they view leisure not just as entertainment but as an integral part of a fulfilling life.

#### 4.2.2 Moderately Understood Capability Domains

"Plan/Imagine and Think" ranked 4<sup>th</sup> (104 points), indicating boys' recognition of the importance of creativity, problem-solving, and future planning. Their understanding suggests they see cognitive skills as valuable in shaping their experiences and opportunities. "Nutritional Well-Being", "Mobility", and "Shelter and Environment" were equally ranked 5<sup>th</sup> (102 points each), showing that boys acknowledge the significance of health, movement, and living conditions in their well-being. "Respect" ranked 8<sup>th</sup> (101 points), reflecting boys' understanding of dignity and fair treatment in their interactions with others. However, its slightly lower rank suggests that while they recognize the value of respect, it may not be as deeply internalized as relational or aspirational capabilities. "Social Relations", "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation", and "Understand and Interpret" shared the 9<sup>th</sup> rank (100 points each), indicating that boys recognize the importance of friendships, knowledge, and economic freedom but with slightly less emphasis than leisure, aspirations, and planning.

#### 4.2.3 Less Understood Capability Domains

"Time Autonomy" (99 points, ranked 12<sup>th</sup>) suggests that boys acknowledge their ability to manage time but may not fully conceptualize autonomy in broader terms. "Education" and "Personal Autonomy" shared the 13<sup>th</sup> rank (97 points), suggesting that while boys recognize the role of learning and independence, they may not perceive these domains as central to well-being compared to aspirations or leisure. "Participation" (92 points, ranked 15<sup>th</sup>) reflects a limited understanding of engagement in decision-making processes, indicating that boys may not fully grasp their role in influencing their surroundings. "Bodily Integrity" (88 points, ranked 16<sup>th</sup>) and "Life/Physical Health"

(86 points, ranked 17<sup>th</sup>) ranked lower, suggesting that boys may not have a strong awareness of their physical rights, health security, or protection from harm.

#### 4.2.4 Least Understood Capability Domains

The lowest-ranking capabilities reflect domains that boys understand the least. "Spirituality" (78 points, ranked 18<sup>th</sup>) and "Religion and Identity" (75 points, ranked 19<sup>th</sup> indicate that while boys recognize religious and spiritual beliefs, they may not consider them critical aspects of well-being. "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" (72 points, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) suggests a limited awareness of gender and social inclusion issues. "Mental Well-Being" ranked the lowest (54 points, ranked 21<sup>st</sup>), revealing a critical gap in boys' understanding of emotional health, self-care, and psychological well-being. This suggests an urgent need for greater awareness and education on mental well-being.

Overall, the findings show that boys demonstrate the most substantial understanding of emotional security, aspirations, and leisure, while autonomy, participation, and mental well-being remain less comprehended. The findings highlight the need to strengthen awareness in areas related to Bodily Integrity, gender equality, and emotional health to ensure a more holistic understanding of well-being.

Table 4.2: Boy's Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains

Boys Ranking		
Domains	Points (Out of 117)	Rank
Love and Care	112	1
Aspiration	108	2
Leisure Activities	105	3
Plan/Imagine and Think	104	4
Nutritional Well-Being	102	5
Mobility	102	5
Shelter and Environment	102	5
Respect	101	8
Social Relations	100	9
Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	100	9
Understand and Interpret	100	9
Time Autonomy	99	12
Education	97	13
Personal Autonomy	97	13
Participation	92	15
Bodily Integrity	88	16
Life/Physical Health	86	17
Spirituality	78	18
Religion and Identity	75	19
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	72	20
Mental Well-being	54	21
	Field 9	LIEVOV 2024

Field Survey, 2024

#### 4.3 Girls' Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains



Table 4.3 presents these rankings, with scores assigned out of 117 points, showing areas of strong awareness as well as those that may require greater attention. The ranking of 21 capability domains based on girls' understanding provides valuable insights into how they perceive well-being and prioritize different aspects of their lives. These rankings reveal the domains that resonate most with their lived experiences and those that are less clearly understood.

#### 4.3.1 Most Understood Capability Domains

"Social Relations" ranked 1st (117 points), signifying that girls have a profound understanding of interpersonal relationships and the importance of connections with family, peers, and communities. This suggests they strongly associate well-being with meaningful interactions, trust, and emotional support from their social networks. "Education" followed closely in 2nd place (115 points), highlighting that girls recognize the transformative power of knowledge, learning, and academic growth. Their strong understanding of this domain indicates an awareness of education as a key factor in shaping their futures and expanding their opportunities. "Love and Care" (112 points, ranked 3rd) reflects girls' deep recognition of emotional security and affectionate relationships as fundamental to their well-being. This suggests that they associate happiness and stability with warmth, empathy, and support from their families and loved ones. "Aspiration" (111 points, ranked 4th reveals that girls acknowledge the importance of ambition, personal growth, and future planning. Their strong understanding of this capability suggests that they actively think about their goals and see aspirations as a driving force in their lives.

#### 4.3.2 Moderately Understood Capability Domains

"Respect" and "Leisure Activities" were equally ranked 5<sup>th</sup> (107 points), demonstrating that girls recognize both the importance of being treated with dignity and the role of play, creativity, and recreation in their well-being. Their understanding of respect indicates an awareness of fairness, kindness, and social harmony. At the same time, their recognition of leisure activities highlights the value they place on relaxation and enjoyment alongside structured responsibilities. "Plan/Imagine and Think" (104 points, ranked 7<sup>th</sup>) suggests that girls have a solid comprehension of creativity, critical thinking, and decision-making in shaping their futures. "Nutritional Well-Being" (99 points, ranked 8<sup>th</sup>) reflects an awareness of food and health, though this understanding may stem more from personal experiences rather than a broader knowledge of nutrition and well-being. "Religion and Identity" and "Shelter and Environment" shared the 9<sup>th</sup> rank (88 points each), suggesting that girls recognize the significance of their cultural, religious, and environmental contexts but may not view them as central to their immediate well-being. "Participation" (87 points, ranked 11<sup>th</sup>) indicates that while girls acknowledge the importance of engaging in decision-making and social involvement, their understanding of agency and participation may not be as developed as their comprehension of education or relationships.



#### 4.3.3 Less Understood Capability Domains

"Understand and Interpret" (81 points, ranked 12<sup>th</sup>) reflects a moderate awareness of critical thinking and comprehension skills, though it ranks lower than direct educational and relational domains. "Life/Physical Health" (78 points, ranked 13<sup>th</sup>) suggests that while girls recognize the importance of well-being, they may not have a deep understanding of long-term health management beyond immediate concerns. "Mobility" (71 points, ranked 14<sup>th</sup>) ranked lower, indicating that girls may not prioritize the ability to move freely as a key factor in their well-being unless they experience restrictions in this area. "Bodily Integrity" and "Spirituality" were equally ranked 15<sup>th</sup> (64 points), suggesting a limited understanding of personal security, physical autonomy, and abstract spiritual well-being. "Time Autonomy" (61 points, ranked 17<sup>th</sup>) reflects that girls have a relatively lower awareness of managing time independently or controlling their schedules. "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation" and "Personal Autonomy" shared the 18<sup>th</sup> (60 points), indicating that girls may not fully comprehend economic vulnerability, independence, or self-governance.

#### 4.3.4 Least Understood Capability Domains

At the bottom of the ranking, the "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" (57 points, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) suggests that girls have limited familiarity with gender-related rights and inclusion issues, highlighting a gap in awareness and education on this topic. "Mental Well-Being" received the lowest ranking (56 points, ranked 21<sup>st</sup>), underscoring a significant lack of understanding regarding emotional health, psychological resilience, and mental self-care. This finding suggests an urgent need to integrate mental well-being discussions into education and social settings to foster greater awareness among girls.

Overall, the findings show that girls demonstrate the most substantial understanding of social relationships, education, emotional security, and aspirations, highlighting their emphasis on connections, learning, and future growth. However, autonomy, gender equality, bodily Integrity, and mental well-being remain less understood, indicating a need for greater awareness and education in these areas. Strengthening girls' comprehension of personal rights, mental health, and gender inclusion will ensure a more holistic and empowered understanding of well-being.

Table 4.3: Girls' Understanding of Their Potential Well-being Domains

Girls Ranking		
Domains	Points (Out of 117)	Rank
Social Relations	117	1
Education	115	2
Love and Care	112	3
Aspiration	111	4
Respect	107	5
Leisure Activities	107	5
Plan/Imagine and Think	104	7
Nutritional Well-Being	99	8
Religion and Identity	88	9
Shelter and Environment	88	9
Participation	87	11
Understand and Interpret	81	12
Life/Physical Health	78	13
Mobility	71	14
Bodily Integrity	64	15
Spirituality	64	15
Time Autonomy	61	17
Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	60	18
Personal Autonomy	60	18
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	57	20
Mental Well-being	56	21

Field Survey, 2024

## 4.4 Comparison Between Girls' and Boys' Understanding of the Well-Being Domain

The comparative analysis of boys' and girls' understanding of well-being domains underscores shared priorities and key differences in their perceptions. While both groups recognize the importance of love and care, aspirations, and education, notable variations emerge in their awareness of social relationships, autonomy, gender equality, and mental well-being. These differences likely stem from societal expectations, lived experiences, and exposure to well-being concepts in their respective environments.

#### 4.4.1 Shared Priorities: Emotional Support, Personal Growth, and Education

Both boys and girls demonstrate a strong understanding of emotional security and personal development, as evidenced by the high ranking of "Love and Care", "Aspiration", and "Education". Boys rank "Love and Care" as their most understood capability (1st place, 112 points), while girls rank it (3rd 112 points). This suggests that both groups recognize the importance of emotional support and nurturing relationships in their well-being. "Aspiration" ranks 2nd for boys (108 points) and 4th for girls (111 points), reflecting a shared recognition of goal-setting, ambition, and self-improvement as critical components of well-being. "Education" ranks much higher for girls (2nd, 115 points) than for boys (13th, 97 points), indicating that girls place a stronger emphasis on structured learning as a means of empowerment, while boys may see education as just one of many contributing factors to well-being. Interestingly, "Leisure Activities" rank 3rd for boys (105 points) but only 6th for girls (107 points), suggesting that boys may associate play and recreation more closely with well-being than girls do.

#### 4.4.2 Differences in Social and Emotional Well-Being Awareness

Girls exhibit a stronger understanding of social relationships and respect, while boys show a greater awareness of independence and physical freedom. "Social Relations" is the highest-ranked capability for girls (1st, 117 points), but ranks significantly lower for boys (9th, 100 points). This suggests that girls place greater importance on friendships, peer interactions, and social belonging in their well-being, while boys may see relationships as less central compared to personal aspirations and independence. "Respect" ranks 5th for girls (107 points) but only 8th for boys (101 points), reinforcing that girls are more attuned to fairness, dignity, and mutual regard in their social interactions. Conversely, boys rank "Mobility" much higher (6th, 102 points) than girls (14th, 71 points), suggesting that boys have a greater awareness or expectation of physical movement and freedom, whereas girls may experience more constraints on mobility due to social norms or safety concerns. Similarly, "Shelter and Environment" ranks 9th for girls (88 points) but 5th for boys (102 points), implying that boys may perceive a stable home environment as a more immediate factor in well-being, whereas girls may prioritize relationships and social aspects of security.

#### 4.4.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion: A Commonly Overlooked Domain

Both boys and girls rank "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" among the lowest capabilities, suggesting a gap in understanding gender-related issues and inclusivity. Boys rank it 20<sup>th</sup> (72 points), while girls rank it even lower at 20<sup>th</sup> (57 points). This indicates that both groups have limited exposure to structured discussions on gender equality despite its relevance to their lived experiences. The fact that both rank it lower suggests that they may not fully recognize different rights and the broader impact of gender inequality, emphasizing the need for stronger integration of gender and inclusion topics into education and social learning.

#### 4.4.4 Autonomy, Participation, and Rights: A Gendered Divide

Boys demonstrate a stronger understanding of Autonomy and decision-making, while girls show lower awareness of personal independence and freedom from exploitation. "Personal Autonomy" ranks 13<sup>th</sup> for boys (97 points) but 18<sup>th</sup> for girls (60 points), indicating that boys are more aware of independence and self-governance, whereas girls may have fewer experiences with making autonomous decisions. "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation" ranks 9<sup>th</sup> for boys (100 points) but 18<sup>th</sup> for girls (60 points), suggesting that girls may not fully recognize their vulnerability to labor rights violations or social and economic exploitation. "Participation" ranks slightly higher for girls (11<sup>th</sup>, 87 points) than for boys (15<sup>th</sup>, 92 points), demonstrating that girls may have a better understanding of involvement in decision-making processes, though it remains a secondary concern for both groups. The starkest contrast is in "Mobility", where boys rank it 6<sup>th</sup> (102 points), while girls place it 14<sup>th</sup> (71 points). This suggests that girls perceive greater restrictions on their ability to move freely, likely due to social norms and concerns over safety.

#### 4.4.5 Mental Well-Being and Health Awareness: A Commonly Neglected Domain

One of the most concerning findings is that "Mental Well-Being" ranks the lowest for both boys and girls. Boys rank it 21st (54 points), while girls rank it 21st as well (56 points), indicating a severe lack of awareness or engagement with psychological health. This suggests that mental health discussions, emotional resilience, and stress management are largely absent from both boys' and girls' understanding of well-being. Additionally, "Life/Physical Health" ranks 17th for boys (86 points) and 13th for girls (78 points), showing that physical health is not prioritized as much as other domains such as education and aspirations. These findings highlight a critical need to integrate mental health awareness into well-being education to ensure that children understand the role of psychological and emotional health in their lives.

The comparative findings show the comparison of boys' and girls' understanding of well-being domains reveals both shared priorities and gendered differences in perception. While both groups highly value love and care, aspirations, and education, their understanding of social relationships, Autonomy, mobility, and gender equality differs significantly. Girls place greater emphasis on social relationships, respect, and education, while boys demonstrate higher awareness of physical freedom, autonomy, and leisure. A major gap exists in the understanding of gender equality and social inclusion, with both boys and girls ranking it among the least understood domains. Additionally, mental well-being is consistently the lowest-ranked capability for both groups, suggesting a severe lack of awareness regarding psychological health. These findings emphasize the need for targeted educational interventions that promote mental health awareness, gender equality, and personal Autonomy, ensuring that both boys and girls develop a holistic, balanced, and empowered understanding of well-being.

#### Section 5

## **Valuation of Capability Domains**

This section explores the well-being domains children value most, providing insights into their priorities, perceptions, and the aspects of life they consider essential for their overall well-being. It examines how children conceptualize well-being based on their lived experiences and highlights the key dimensions they find most meaningful.



#### 5.1 Children's Valued Well-being Domains

Table 5.1 presents children's prioritization of the 21 capability domains, revealing a clear hierarchy and distinct patterns in how they conceptualize and assign importance to various dimensions of well-being. The ranking, based on a total score of 260, provides insights into the domains that children perceive as fundamental to their quality of life and those that, while acknowledged, hold comparatively lower significance.

#### 5.1.1 Highly Prioritized Capability Domains

At the very top of the ranking, "Shelter and Environment" (259 points, ranked 1<sup>st</sup>) is perceived as the most essential capability for well-being. This suggests that children place a high value on having a safe, stable, and supportive living environment. Their prioritization of this domain indicates an acute awareness of the role that housing, infrastructure, and surroundings play in ensuring security, comfort, and quality of life. Closely following, "Education" (258 points, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>) is perceived as a critical determinant of well-being. Students recognize education as a gateway to opportunities, self-improvement, and future success. Two domains, "Aspiration" and "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" (both 256 points, tied for 3<sup>rd</sup> place), rank equally in perceived importance. The high ranking of Aspiration suggests that students strongly value having dreams, ambitions, and a

vision for their future. Similarly, the high ranking of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum, shows that students recognize the importance of fairness, social justice, and equal opportunities in their lives. "Respect" and "Nutritional Well-Being" (255 points, ranked 5<sup>th</sup>) highlight students' recognition of mutual dignity, fair treatment, and health as essential components of well-being. Their emphasis on respect suggests that they value social harmony, kindness, and ethical treatment of others as key to a good life. Simultaneously, the equal importance placed on nutritional well-being indicates that students understand that food security and proper nutrition are foundational to physical and mental development.

#### 5.1.2 Moderately Prioritized Capability Domains

The two domains, "Life/Physical Health" and "Bodily Integrity" (253 points, tied for 7th), demonstrate the importance students place on physical well-being, safety, and personal security. The ranking of Life/Physical Health suggests that students understand that maintaining good health is fundamental to all aspects of well-being, while the high ranking of Bodily Integrity reflects an awareness of the need for personal safety, freedom from harm, and protection from violence or abuse. "Love and Care", "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation", and "Understand and Interpret" (all 252 points, tied for 9th) indicate the importance of emotional security, economic freedom, and intellectual engagement in students' conceptualization of well-being. The confluence of love and care with protection from exploitation suggests that children view nurturing relationships as a shield against vulnerabilities, reinforcing the interconnected nature of emotional and social security. "Mental Well-Being", ranked 12th with 250 points, indicates recognition of psychological and emotional health, though its slightly lower prioritization may suggest that children's understanding of mental health remains underdeveloped compared to more tangible or externally regulated aspects of well-being. "Plan/Imagine and Think" (247 points, ranked 13<sup>th</sup>) suggests that while children value cognitive autonomy and creative reasoning, these faculties are considered marginally less pressing than other domains directly linked to material security and social relationships. Similarly, "Social Relations" (243 points, ranked 14th) highlights that while peer interactions and social networks are deemed important, they are not perceived as central determinants of well-being in the same way as fundamental resources and protections.

#### 5.1.3 Lesser Prioritized Capability Domains

"Religion and Identity" and "Spirituality" (both 242 points, tied for 15<sup>th</sup>) indicate that while students recognize the role of religious and spiritual beliefs in personal identity, they may not see them as central to well-being compared to more immediate and tangible needs. "Mobility" and "Time Autonomy" (both 239 points, tied for 17<sup>th</sup>) suggest that freedom of movement and personal control over time are not perceived as primary concerns among students. This could indicate that their ability to move freely or manage time is often structured by external factors such as parental supervision or school schedules, making them less pressing compared to other capabilities. "Participation" (237 points, ranked 19<sup>th</sup>) and "Leisure Activities" (235 points, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) further illustrate this trend, indicating that while engagement in decision-making and recreational pursuits is valued, these domains are not as highly prioritized as those related to survival, protection, and structured development.

#### 5.1.4 Least Prioritized Capability Domains

At the bottom of the ranking, "Leisure Activities" (235 points, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) suggests that while students acknowledge the value of recreation and relaxation, they may not perceive it as a pressing necessity, possibly because they already engage in such activities as part of their daily routines. Similarly, "Personal Autonomy" (225 points, ranked 21<sup>st</sup>) emerged as the least prioritized capability,

suggesting that students do not regard self-governance, independence, and decision-making authority as fundamental to their well-being. This ranking implies that many students experience their lives as largely structured by external forces, including familial expectations, educational institutions, and broader societal norms.

The overall finding offers valuable insights into children's prioritization of well-being, revealing a clear inclination toward basic material security, educational attainment, and aspirations for the future. While foundational necessities such as shelter, education, and dignity in interpersonal interactions are ranked highly, aspects associated with autonomy, participation, and leisure occupy a lower tier, suggesting that children may conceptualize well-being primarily through externally structured provisions rather than self-directed agency.

Table 5.1: Children's Valued Well-being Domains

Domains	Points (Out of 260)	Rank
Shelter and Environment	259	1
Education	258	2
Aspiration	256	3
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	256	3
Respect	255	5
Nutritional Well-Being	255	5
Life/Physical Health	253	7
Bodily Integrity	253	7
Love & Care	252	9
Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	252	9
Understand and Interpret	252	9
Mental Well-being	250	12
Plan/Imagine and Think	247	13
Social Relations	243	14
Religion & Identity	242	15
Spirituality	242	15
Mobility	239	17
Time Autonomy	239	17
Participation	237	19
Leisure Activities	235	20
Personal Autonomy	225	21

Field Survey, 2024

#### 5.2 Boys Valued Well-being Domains

Table 5.2 illustrates how boys rank 21 capability domains based on their perceived importance, providing insights into the aspects of well-being they prioritize. It presents an analysis of these rankings, derived from their responses, with scores assigned out of 130 points.



#### 5.2.1 Highly Prioritized Capability Domains

The domain of "Shelter and Environment" ranked 1st (130 points), indicating boys' strong recognition of the necessity of stable, secure, and conducive living space as the most fundamental component of their well-being. This ranking suggests that boys conceptualize well-being in terms of physical security and environmental stability, possibly reflecting concerns about housing conditions, safety, and basic infrastructure. "Respect" (129 points, ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>) holds a central position in boys' conceptualization of well-being, highlighting the significance placed on dignity, recognition, and ethical treatment in social interactions. The prioritization of respect suggests that boys consider social standing, mutual regard, and fairness as crucial for their overall well-being. A cluster of domains ranked 3rd (128 points each), demonstrating an equally strong prioritization of multiple aspects of well-being. These include "Education", "Bodily Integrity", "Nutritional Well-Being", "Understand and Interpret", "Plan/Imagine and Think", "Aspiration", and "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum". The equal ranking of education and aspirations underscores the emphasis boys place on structured learning and future-oriented thinking, recognizing the role of knowledge and ambition in shaping their opportunities. The inclusion of "Bodily Integrity" and "Nutritional Well-Being" at this level highlights the recognition of personal security, health, and sustenance as critical for their development. "Understand and Interpret" and "Plan/Imagine and Think" share this ranking, suggesting that boys place significant value on cognitive engagement, analytical abilities, and imaginative reasoning, viewing them as integral to their well-being. The presence of the "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" in this tier indicates an emerging awareness of equity and inclusivity, positioning fairness and representation as key considerations in their perception of wellbeing.

#### 5.2.2 Moderately Prioritized Capability Domains

"Life/Physical Health" and "Personal Autonomy" (127 points, ranked 10<sup>th</sup>) are positioned slightly below the highest tier, indicating a strong but comparatively less pressing prioritization of physical well-being and individual agency. While boys recognize the importance of maintaining good health, the lower ranking compared to bodily integrity and nutrition suggests that they may not view it as an immediate concern but rather as a secondary factor in well-being. Similarly, the ranking of personal autonomy implies that while boys acknowledge the importance of independence, it is not a dominant feature in their overall conceptualization of well-being, possibly due to external influences shaping their decision-making processes. A group of domains ranked 12<sup>th</sup> (126 points each) includes "Love & Care", "Social Relations", "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation", and "Mobility". This grouping reflects a more relational dimension of well-being, where emotional support, social interactions, and freedom of movement are recognized as valuable but not prioritized as highly as material security, education, or respect. The inclusion of freedom from exploitation suggests that while boys are aware of potential vulnerabilities, they may not perceive exploitation as an immediate threat in their lived experiences.



#### 5.2.3 Lesser Prioritized Capability Domains

"Mental Well-Being", "Spirituality", and "Time Autonomy" (124 points, ranked 16<sup>th</sup>) are placed slightly lower in the ranking, suggesting that while boys acknowledge the relevance of psychological health, spirituality, and control over their time, they may not consider these aspects as critical to their immediate well-being. The comparative de-prioritization of mental well-being implies that boys may not fully recognize the significance of emotional and psychological health, reinforcing the need for greater emphasis on mental health awareness and emotional literacy. Similarly, the relatively lower ranking of "Time Autonomy" suggests that boys may experience structured schedules dictated by external authorities (such as parents, schools, and social norms), leading to a perception that control over one's time is not a primary concern. At 19<sup>th</sup> place, "Religion & Identity" (121 points) suggests that while cultural and religious identity holds some value, it is not perceived as a defining aspect of well-being. This ranking may indicate that boys' engagement with religious or cultural identity is shaped more by external influences than by intrinsic personal prioritization.

#### 5.2.4 Least Prioritized Capability Domains

Positioned at the lowest ranks, "Participation" (119 points, ranked 20<sup>th</sup>) and "Leisure Activities" (116 points, ranked 21<sup>st</sup>) indicate that boys place the least emphasis on engagement in decision-making processes and recreational pursuits. The low ranking of participation suggests that boys may not see

active involvement in governance, school, or community affairs as essential to their well-being, possibly due to limited agency in structured environments or a lack of exposure to participatory decision-making mechanisms. Similarly, the lowest ranking of leisure activities implies that while boys likely engage in recreational pursuits, they do not necessarily associate them with critical components of well-being. This could indicate that play and relaxation are perceived as secondary to more survival-oriented and pragmatic aspects of life, reinforcing a tendency to prioritize education, security, and structured development over personal enjoyment.

Overall, these findings reflect a structured, externally guided perception of well-being, where boys place greater emphasis on stability, social dignity, and structured pathways to success while deprioritizing autonomy, leisure, and participatory agency. Addressing these lower-ranked domains through educational interventions, participatory initiatives, and awareness programs could foster a more balanced and holistic conceptualization of well-being, ensuring that boys develop a more comprehensive understanding of mental health, autonomy, and civic engagement alongside their existing priorities.

Table 5.2: Boys Valued Well-being Domains

Boys Ranking			
Domains	Points (Out of 130)	Rank	
Shelter and Environment	130	1	
Respect	129	2	
Education	128	3	
Bodily Integrity	128	3	
Nutritional Well-Being	128	3	
Understand and Interpret	128	3	
Plan/Imagine and Think	128	3	
Aspiration	128	3	
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	128	3	
Life/Physical Health	127	10	
Personal Autonomy	127	10	
Love and Care	126	12	
Social Relations	126	12	
Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	126	12	
Mobility	126	12	
Mental Well-being	124	16	
Spirituality	124	16	
Time Autonomy	124	16	
Religion and Identity	121	19	
Participation	119	20	
Leisure Activities	116	21	

Field Survey, 2024

# 5.3 Girls' Valued Well-being Domains



Table 5.3 presents the ranking of capability domains based on girls' perceived importance, offering valuable insights into their well-being priorities and conceptualizations.

#### 5.3.1 Highly Prioritized Capability Domains

At the top of the ranking, "Education" (130 points, 1st rank) stands as the most important capability domain, highlighting girls' belief that learning and academic achievement are fundamental to their well-being. This suggests that they see education as a key enabler of empowerment, self-improvement, and future success. Three domains, "Aspiration", "Shelter and Environment", and "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" (every 128 points, tied for 2<sup>nd</sup> place), closely follow education, reflecting a balance between personal ambition, security, and social justice. The emphasis on aspiration indicates that girls view goal-setting and ambition as central to shaping their future, while the ranking of shelter and environment signifies the importance of stable and safe living space in their well-being. The strong placement of the "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" suggests a heightened awareness of fairness, social justice, and the need for equal opportunities.

### 5.3.2 Moderately Prioritized Capability Domains

"Nutritional Well-Being" (127 points, 5<sup>th</sup> place) ranks high, underscoring girls' recognition of the role of food security and proper nutrition in maintaining health and overall well-being. A cluster of domains "Life/Physical Health", "Love and Care", "Mental Well-Being", "Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation", and "Respect" (every 126 points, tied for 6<sup>th</sup> place) indicates a well-rounded prioritization of physical and emotional security, dignity, and social justice. Life/Physical health high ranking suggests an awareness of the importance of maintaining physical well-being and disease prevention. The high ranking of love and care signifies the importance of emotional security, familial support, and cultivating nurturing relationships. Mental well-being ranking highly shows that girls recognize the importance of psychological health, emotional resilience, and self-care. Freedom from

economic/non-economic exploitation ranking in this tier suggests an awareness of vulnerability to financial instability, child labor, and the need for protection from economic hardships. Respect being included in this group indicates that girls see dignity, fairness, and mutual regard as key to their well-being. "Bodily Integrity" (125 points, 11<sup>th</sup> place) and "Understand and Interpret" (124 points, 12<sup>th</sup> place) rank slightly lower, suggesting that while girls acknowledge the importance of personal security and critical thinking, they see them as less pressing concerns than education and aspirations.

### 5.3.3 Lesser Prioritized Capability Domains

A shift in prioritization occurs with "Religion and Identity" (121 points, ranked 13<sup>th</sup>) "Leisure Activities" and "Plan/Imagine and Think" (both 119 points, ranked 14<sup>th</sup>). The moderate ranking of Religion and Identity suggests that while girls acknowledge the role of cultural and spiritual belonging, it does not assume a central position in their perception of well-being. The lower ranking of leisure activities and plan/imagine and think suggests that girls place greater emphasis on structured development over recreational or imaginative pursuits. This pragmatic approach indicates a preference for tangible, goal-oriented capabilities rather than abstract or leisure-based dimensions of well-being. "Participation" and "Spirituality" (118 points, ranked 16<sup>th</sup>) indicate a relatively lower valuation of civic engagement and spiritual reflection, suggesting that girls may not feel actively included in decision-making processes or may perceive spiritual well-being as less integral to their immediate needs. "Social Relations" (117 points, 18<sup>th</sup> place) ranking lower than "Love and Care" suggests that while girls value personal relationships, they do not view broad social interactions as central to their well-being.

### 5.3.4 Least Prioritized Capability Domains

At the bottom of the ranking, "Time Autonomy" (115 points, 19th place) and Mobility (113 points, 20th place) indicate that girls place less emphasis on independence in managing time and freedom of movement, which could be because they have less experience in such things. The lowest-ranked domain, "Personal Autonomy" (98 points, 21st place), suggests that girls do not yet perceive self-governance independent decision-making as central to well-being, possibly due to external societal influences that limit their autonomy.



Overall, the findings reveal that girls prioritize education, aspirations, security, and fairness, demonstrating a structured and goal-oriented approach to well-being. The high ranking of gender equality, mental well-being, and economic protection suggests that girls have a strong awareness of social justice issues and personal development. However, the low ranking of autonomy, participation, and Mobility indicates that independence and self-governance are not yet widely perceived as essential to their well-being. These insights emphasize the need to encourage greater agency, decision-making power, and active participation in shaping their own lives, ensuring a more balanced and empowered perception of well-being among girls.

Table 5.3: Girls Valued Well-being Domains

Girls Ranking		
Domains	Points (Out of 130)	Rank
Education	130	1
Aspiration	128	2
Shelter and Environment	128	2
Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum	128	2
Nutritional Well-Being	127	5
Life/Physical Health	126	6
Love and Care	126	6
Mental Well-being	126	6
Freedom from Economic/Non-Economic Exploitation	126	6
Respect	126	6
Bodily Integrity	125	11
Understand and Interpret	124	12
Religion and Identity	121	13
Leisure Activities	119	14
Plan/Imagine and Think	119	14
Participation	118	16
Spirituality	118	16
Social Relations	117	18
Time Autonomy	115	19
Mobility	113	20
Personal Autonomy	98	21

Field Survey, 2024

# 5.4 Comparison between Boys' and Girls' Valued Well-being Domains

A comparative analysis of boys' and girls' prioritization of capability domains reveals distinct patterns in their conceptualization of well-being, reflecting gendered perspectives on security, opportunity, and agency. While both groups recognize fundamental dimensions such as education, shelter, and respect, notable divergences emerge in their valuation of aspiration, autonomy, social relations, and well-being-related concerns.

## 5.4.1 Education as a Shared Priority, but Different Emphases on Aspiration

Both boys and girls highly prioritize education, underscoring its universal recognition as a fundamental enabler of well-being and future success. However, while girls ranked education as their highest priority (130 points, 1st rank), boys placed it slightly lower (128 points, 3rd rank). A striking difference lies in the ranking of aspiration girls placed it second (128 points), positioning future-oriented goal setting as a critical dimension of well-being, whereas boys, despite valuing aspiration, ranked it third among a cluster of multiple domains. This suggests that girls may view education as a

stepping stone toward their ambitions, whereas boys perceive it as a necessity alongside other equally important aspects of well-being, such as bodily integrity and respect.

## 5.4.2 Boys Prioritize Respect and Security, While Girls Focus on Equity and Well-being

One of the most notable differences is boys' higher prioritization of respect, ranking it second (129 points), compared to girls' lower ranking (126 points, 6<sup>th</sup> place). This suggests that boys may place a greater emphasis on social recognition, dignity, and interpersonal treatment, possibly reflecting their experiences in competitive social hierarchies or societal expectations of masculinity. Conversely, girls strongly prioritize Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum (128 points, 2<sup>nd</sup> place), compared to boys, who rank it slightly lower (128 points, tied in 3<sup>rd</sup> place with six other domains). This suggests that girls may be more attuned to issues of fairness, representation, and inclusivity, likely shaped by their experiences navigating gendered expectations and social inequalities. Additionally, mental well-being ranks higher for girls (126 points, 6<sup>th</sup> place) than for boys (124 points, 16<sup>th</sup> place), suggesting that girls may be more aware of emotional and psychological health concerns, while boys may not perceive mental well-being as a core component of their overall well-being framework.

# 5.4.3 Boys Emphasize Security and Physical Protection, While Girls Highlight Care and Health

Boys place greater emphasis on bodily integrity, ranking it third (128 points, alongside multiple domains), whereas girls rank it lower (125 points, 11<sup>th</sup> place). This suggests that boys may perceive physical security and personal protection as integral to their well-being, possibly due to social norms that emphasize resilience, strength, and personal safety in public spaces. Girls, on the other hand, rank love and care 26 points, 6<sup>th</sup> place) and mental well-being (126 points, 6<sup>th</sup> place) higher than boys (rank 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, respectively), indicating a stronger emphasis on emotional support and psychological well-being as critical dimensions of their overall well-being. This difference highlights how girls conceptualize well-being in relational and emotional terms, while boys place more weight on tangible, external security factors.

### 5.4.4 Girls Deprioritize Autonomy and Mobility More Than Boys

One of the most striking contrasts is the ranking of personal autonomy and mobility. While boys rank personal autonomy significantly higher (127 points, tied for 10<sup>th</sup> place), girls rank it the lowest of all domains (98 points, 21<sup>st</sup> place). This suggests that girls may perceive less control over their personal agency and independent decision-making, possibly due to social constraints and protective cultural norms that limit their autonomy. Similarly, mobility ranks significantly lower for girls (113 points, 20<sup>th</sup> place) than for boys (126 points, 12<sup>th</sup> place), reinforcing the idea that girls may experience more restrictions on movement and freedom compared to boys, potentially due to safety concerns, cultural expectations, or family-imposed limitations.



### 5.4.5 Leisure and Participation Rank Low for Both, but for Different Reasons

Both boys and girls rank participation and leisure activities among the lowest priorities, but for different reasons: Boys rank participation 20<sup>th</sup> (119 points) and leisure activities 21<sup>st</sup> (116 points), suggesting that they may not feel strongly connected to civic engagement or structured recreational activities, possibly due to a greater focus on pragmatic and survival-oriented aspects of well-being. Girls rank participation 16<sup>th</sup> (118 points) and leisure activities 14<sup>th</sup> (119 points), indicating that while these aspects are also not central to their well-being, their slightly higher ranking compared to boys suggests a greater awareness of the value of social inclusion and self-expression. This difference implies that girls may acknowledge the importance of having a voice in decision-making but do not feel actively engaged in participatory processes, while boys may not see participation as relevant to their well-being at all.

The comparative findings reveal gendered differences in how well-being is understood and prioritized. Boys emphasize material stability, respect, and personal security, suggesting a pragmatic, externally guided approach to well-being that focuses on social standing, protection, and structured opportunities. In contrast, girls prioritize education, aspirations, gender equity, and emotional well-being, indicating a future-oriented, empowerment-driven perspective that values knowledge, ambition, and fairness. However, while girls place greater importance on social inclusion and emotional well-being, they also rank autonomy, mobility, and participation lower, pointing to potential systemic constraints that limit their ability to exercise agency and independence. Boys, on the other hand, rank bodily integrity and respect highly, reflecting a greater emphasis on personal security and social status.



# **Conclusion**

This report shows insights into children's perceptions and valuation of well-being domains and provides a lens through which one can critically examine the intersection of gender equality, social inclusion, and educational practices in schools. While the findings show progress in understanding and addressing children's needs within school environments, they also expose deep structural and cultural barriers that undermine efforts to achieve a holistic and equitable educational system.

One of the most critical observations is the disparity in how boys and girls understand and place varying degrees of significance on different domains of well-being. Girls display a stronger awareness of education, social relationships, and emotional well-being, reflecting the expectations placed on them to prioritize learning and interpersonal connections. At the same time, their limited understanding of personal autonomy and mobility suggests they experience greater restrictions in decision-making and movement, reinforcing entrenched gender norms. Boys, on the other hand, demonstrate a stronger grasp of autonomy, mobility, and physical security, indicating they have more freedom and control over their environment and are more inclined toward individualism and independence.

Girls prioritize education, aspirations, and emotional well-being, emphasizing the role of learning and interpersonal relationships in their lives. In contrast, boys value autonomy, mobility, and physical security more strongly, indicating greater freedom and agency in their environments. This divergence signals deeply rooted gender norms that shape children's expectations and aspirations from a young age. The perpetuation of these norms not only restricts children's potential but also entrenches societal inequalities. Schools, as transformative spaces, are yet to challenge these gendered perceptions effectively, and this inertia raises questions about the adequacy of existing curricula and pedagogical approaches.

Equally concerning is the low understanding of critical domains such as mental well-being, gender equality, and social inclusion. The persistent gaps in understanding mental health, personal autonomy, and participation indicate that schools do not adequately engage children in discussions that go beyond traditional academic subjects. Similarly, the marginal emphasis on "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Curriculum" reflects the failure of educational frameworks to promote critical discourse on equity and inclusiveness. These findings show systemic neglect in addressing the socio-emotional and institutional dimensions of education, which are as critical as academic achievements in fostering holistic development.

The study also points to the inadequacy of macro-level indicators in capturing the complexities of well-being. While national statistics on enrollment, retention, and gender parity show encouraging progress, they fail to illuminate the qualitative aspects of education that matter most to children. Domains such as "Love and Care," "Aspiration," and "Social Relations," which children prioritize highly, often remain peripheral in policy discussions. This disconnection between quantitative metrics and children's lived experiences underscores the need for a paradigm shift in how educational success is defined and evaluated.

Another critical finding is the apparent gap between theoretical commitments to equity and the realities of school environments. The Government of Nepal's education policies, while commendable in their aspirations, remain largely focused on surface-level indicators of access and participation. The absence of substantive initiatives to integrate concepts like capability development, child agency, and contextualized well-being into daily school practices limits the transformative potential of these policies. Furthermore, the lack of institutional accountability in addressing issues such as harassment, exclusion, and discriminatory practices perpetuates a culture of silence, undermining efforts to create truly inclusive learning spaces.

The application of the Capability Approach in this study offers a framework for rethinking educational practices. This approach challenges reductionist views of education as merely a means to economic ends by

emphasizing what children value and aspire to be. Instead, it positions education as a fundamental enabler of human growth, capable of addressing intersecting inequalities and fostering collective well-being. However, operationalizing this framework requires deliberate efforts to involve children, teachers, and communities in co-constructing indicators of well-being that reflect local realities. The participatory approach adopted in this study provides a valuable space for such engagement, but its scalability and sustainability remain uncertain without systemic support and investment.

In conclusion, while this report shows some reflection of children's understanding of their potential well-being, it also portrays gaps in the current educational framework. Achieving gender equality and social inclusion requires moving beyond tokenistic intervention to tailored intervention that genuinely incorporates children's experiences, voices, and aspirations. These findings will guide the development of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Diagnosis Tool, to capture what children value and aspire to do and be. Only through such meaningful and locally grounded engagement can schools in Nepal become spaces where all children regardless of gender, caste, ethnicity, or socio-economic background can thrive, express their aspirations, and shape their future.

# References

- Bagattini, A. (2014). Child well-being: A philosophical perspective. In A. Ben-Arieh, F. Casas, I. Frønes, & J. E. Korbin (Eds.), *Handbook of child well-being: Theory, indicators, measures, and policies* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 163–186). Dordrecht/New York: Springer.
- Ballet, J., Biggeri, M., & Comim, F. (2011). Children's agency and the capability approach: A conceptual framework.
- Biggeri, M. (2004). Capability approach and child well-being. Invited paper presented at the International Conference on Promoting Human Rights and Social Policies for Children and Women: Monitoring and Achieving the Millennium Development Goals, The New School University, New York, April 28–30.
- Biggeri, M. (2007). Children's valued capabilities. In M. Walker & E. Unterhalter (Eds.), *Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education* (1<sup>st</sup> ed., pp. 197–214). Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burchardt, T., & Vizard, P. (2011). Operationalizing the capability approach as a basis for equality and human rights monitoring in twenty-first-century Britain. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 12(1), 91–119. https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2011.541790
- Crespo, R. F. (2007). The capability approach and development economics. London: Routledge.
- Kelly, A. (2012). Sen and the art of educational maintenance: Evidencing a capability, as opposed to an effectiveness, approach to schooling. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *42*(3), 283–296. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2012.706256
- Lewis, L. (2012). The capabilities approach, adult community learning, and mental health. *Community Development Journal*, 47(4), 522–537. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bss027
- Nussbaum, M. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Robeyns, I. (2003). Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: Selecting relevant capabilities. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2–3), 61–92. https://doi.org/10.1080/1354570022000078024
- Sen, A. (1992). Inequality reexamined. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Sen, A. (2009). The idea of justice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Terzi, L. (2007). The capability to be educated. In L. Terzi (Ed.), Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education (pp. 25–43). London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230604810\_2
- UNESCO. (2022). Educational statistics of 2022. Paris: UNESCO.
- Unterhalter, E. (2007). Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, M. (2007). Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wolff, J., & De Shalit, A. (2007). *Disadvantage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199278268.001.0001

World Bank. (2022). World Development Report 2022. Washington, DC: World Bank.

# **Annex**

## **Different Capability lists**

artha Nussbaum list: Central Human Capabilities
e
dily Health
dily integrity
nses, Imagination, and Thought
notions
actical Reason
îliation
her Species
іу
ntrol over one's Environment

Source: Nussbaum M. C. (2000). Women and human development: the capabilities approach. Cambridge University Press. Page 78

Mario Biggeri List: Children
Life and physical health
Love and care
Mental well-being
Bodily integrity and safety
Mobility
Social relations
Participation
Education
Freedom from economic and non-economic exploitation
Shelter and environment
Leisure activities
Respect
Religion and identity
Time-autonomy

Source: Biggeri (2004)

Ingrid Robeyn's List: Gender Equality	
Life and physical health	
Mental well-being	
Bodily integrity and healthcare use	
Social relations	
Political empowerment	
Education and Knowledge	
Domestic work and nonmarket care	
Paid work and other projects	
Shelter and environment	

Mobility		
Leisure activities		
Time-autonomy		
Respect		
Religion		
Life and physical health		

Source: Robeyn's 2003

Melanie Walker Gender Equality List
Autonomy
Knowledge
Social Relations
Respect and Recognition
Aspiration
Voice
Bodily Integrity & Bodily Health
Emotional integrity & emotions

Source: Melanie Walker (2007)

## **School Information**

S.N	Schools Name	Toll and Ward No.
1	Singhadevi Ma.Bi	Bhamrang, 1
2	Kalika Ma.Bi	Helauchha, 2
3	Panchakanya Aa.Bi	Bachhla, 3
4	Siddheshwar Ma.Bi	Dawa, 4
5	Panchakanya Ma.Bi	Bokhim, 5
6	Panchakanya Pra.Bi	Paluwa, 6
7	Jansewa Aa.Bi	Bhojpur, 7
8	Sarswati Aa.Bi	Pokhre, 8
9	Jankalyan Aa.Bi	Kafle, 9
10	Jalpa Ma. Bi	Bhaisipankha, 10
11	Jankalyan Ma.Bi	Aamtep, 11
12	Yasodhara Ma.Bi	Taksar, 12
13	Biddodaya Ma. Bi	Bhojpur, 7







