CHAPTER 1

School, Gender and Stereotypes: Despair and Hope

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The issue of gender equality occupies a central place in global policy discourse on education, human and social development. Gender equality in education has several dimensions.

Equal access to schooling has to be a foremost concern: a first step. Despite notable progress in recent years, a good number of countries, especially in South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, are still facing gender disparity against girls in terms of access to schooling. This is a major hindrance in achieving universal primary education. Girls still constitute about 55 per cent of the estimated 75 million children who are not enrolled in primary education (UNESCO, 2009). The situation is different at secondary stage. While the disparities in access and enrolment at secondary level are generally high and against girls in most South and West Asian and sub-Saharan African countries, disparities are also visible against boys in many countries in the Caribbean and the developed part of the world.

Another important dimension of gender equality in education pertains to educational processes. Gender equality in education not only implies that both girls and boys have equal access to schooling, but also that the process of education provides all girls and boys with a range of equal opportunities and experiences for expanding their capacities to the fullest potentials in a manner that they are able to contribute to the making of a just, responsible and compassionate society. This dimension of gender equality in education raises questions about the role of educational and schooling processes in promoting substantive equality. Is education necessarily a process of change? What is the role of schools in this process of transformation? Are educational processes geared towards change? Are schools conscious of the responsibility and do they have the necessary wherewithal to make the processes gender responsive and the learning experiences empowering? These questions are especially relevant at secondary stage. Secondary education caters to an age group that is critical for identity formation and for developing the critical skill of decision-making. This is the stage that provides a link between childhood and adulthood.

Schooling processes refer to all that happens in a school: the ways in which teachers treat their children, the language that is used, the methods of teaching that are practiced, the ways in which the responsibilities are distributed – in classrooms and outside classrooms, the ways in which sports and other outside-classroom activities are organised. Overall, these are the practices that lead to knowledge and learning of skills and shape attitudes and beliefs among the learners. In the past, schooling processes have largely been considered an issue of quality and the definitions of quality have not always included attention to equality and gender. This is changing with newer perspectives and more comprehensive definitions of gender equality in education.

The Global Monitoring Report 2003/04 highlighted the fact that the achievement of full gender equality in education would imply:

- *'Equality of opportunities, in the sense that girls and boys are offered the same chances to access school, i.e. parents, teachers and society at large have no gender-biased attitudes in this respect,*
- *Equality in the learning process, i.e. girls and boys receive the same treatment and attention, follow the same curricula, enjoy teaching methods and teaching tools free of stereotypes and gender bias, are offered academic orientation and counselling not affected by gender biases, profit from the same quantity and quality of appropriate educational infrastructures,*
- *Equality of outcomes, i.e. learning achievements, length of school careers, academic qualifications and diplomas would not differ by gender,*
- *Equality of external results, i.e. job opportunities, the time needed to find a job after leaving full time education, the earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience etc would all be equal.*

The last condition, while not strictly part of a notion of educational equality, is nevertheless entailed by it: the perspective of gender discrimination in labour market prevents the attainment of equality of access, treatment and outcomes in education by affecting the relative costs and perceived benefits of educating girls and boys' (UNESCO, 2003).

Different groups have defined quality differently. Critical approaches are significant to understand the issue of equality in quality, and also in the context of acknowledging the role of education in reproducing or questioning the existing social order. The focus here is on empowerment and therefore makes it especially relevant in the context of gender. Although the cognitive aspects and easily measurable learning outcomes have received greater focus, there has recently been an emphasis on including the empowerment agenda within the definition of quality. Aikman and Unterhalter, for example, suggest that quality:

> *'... entails more than the attainment of equal numbers in school, or parity in examination results: it implies a fuller meaning of equality, which includes conditions in school and post-school opportunities... ... ...(and) concerns to improve quality include the framing of curriculum, the content and form of learning materials, the nature of the pedagogy, and teacher-student relations'* (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005: p. 4).

A deeper understanding of schooling processes from the perspective of gender is also essential if the wider goal of gender equality in society is to be achieved. Education is central to social development, critical for achieving greater participation of women in political activities, and for their social and economic empowerment. Amartya Sen, in his keynote speech at the Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in 2003, clearly articulated the connection:

> *'… the relative respect and regard for women's wellbeing is strongly influenced by women's literacy and educated participation in decisions within and outside the family. There is also much evidence that women's education and literacy tend to reduce the mortality rates of children – of boys and girls both. These and other connections between basic education of women and the power of women's agency indicate why the gender gap in education produces heavy social penalties'* (Sen, 2003).

The agency of women, however, gains real strength only when the process of education leads to empowerment. Research into boys' underachievement has also underlined the need for greater enquiry in schooling processes. Boys' relative underachievement at the secondary stage, in terms of participation or performance, is a growing trend in some countries that have largely succeeded in addressing the issue of access and nearly wiped out the gender disparities at primary stage. A study conducted by Commonwealth Secretariat Education Section illustrated how boys face tremendous pressure to conform to 'masculine' gender identities and that this is closely linked with their relative underachievement (Jha and Kelleher, 2007). The study suggested that gender analysis of classroom and schooling processes would help in understanding this trend and finding an answer to the required changes at classroom and school levels.

Educational processes are also important for their contributions to the attainment of quantitative goals and targets. In their study on boys' underachievement, Jha and Kelleher (2006) illustrated that schooling processes are critical to understand and influence the issues of numbers, i.e. issues dealing with gender disparities in education. Although it is difficult to apportion, it is increasingly being recognised that a significant proportion of dropouts, especially at secondary stage, may be related to 'non-access' issues such as teacher–child relationships, peer behaviour and expectations, etc. In the past, access has been seen as an issue of quantity and educational processes an issue of quality. This is changing and the crucial link between enabling classroom processes and attaining the goals for gender parity in access, completion and achievement are being better understood.

Despite some shifts in redefining quality and recognising the importance of the nature of educational processes in moving towards substantive gender equality in education, the evidence indicates that the issue has received less attention in the efforts made to improve classroom processes.

> *'Education reform since the 1990s has tended to emphasise students' performance and achievement. Consequently most efforts to improve classroom and teacher practices*

> *concentrate on teaching reading and mathematics. Less attention has been devoted to incorporating a gender development dimension in teacher training'* (Skelton 2005, cited in UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, 2007: p. 88).

In 2006, the Commonwealth Secretariat Education Section published an annotated bibliography of existing works in gender and education with special emphasis on secondary education in five countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, India and Pakistan (Jha, 2007). These Commonwealth countries are reported to have high levels of gender disparity and inequality. A perusal of the entries to the annotated bibliography illustrated that there are a large number of studies exploring access, but a dearth of studies looking at processes within schools. The need for further research to obtain a more nuanced understanding of school processes in developing countries was obvious: to inform policy and programmatic decisions as well as teacher-training and support activities.

Prompted by these findings and recommendations, the Commonwealth Secretariat Education Section initiated a research study on gender analysis of classroom and other processes in India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Samoa, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago. These countries were selected in order to represent the four main regions of the Commonwealth (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific); a diverse selection of economic, geographical, social and cultural contexts; very different gender environments; and marked educational gender disparities, either against boys (as in Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Samoa) or against girls (as in India, Pakistan and Nigeria).

The Conceptual Frame

If education processes and opportunities are geared to question unequal gender relations and established notions of femininity and masculinity, inequalities may be challenged. If not, they continue to exist. Equal access does not guarantee equality in treatment: it does not guarantee equality in educational processes. Unequal treatments are more likely to be more prevalent in situations where there is disparity in access. Gender analysis of classroom and schooling processes is relevant in all kinds of situations.

The conceptual bases and beliefs that lie underneath this gender analysis of classroom and schooling processes are outlined below.

The process of education or schooling that facilitates imparting of knowledge and skill on one hand, and acts as a course of socialisation on the other, has tremendous potential for empowerment and transformation. It is important to recognise this possibility, and shape education in a manner that helps realise this potential. This would also require recognition of the fact that there is always a likelihood of education and schooling to become 'status quoist' and conforming unless consciously ensured otherwise.

The concepts of equity and empowerment are critical in the context of gender equality. This means that quantitative measures alone are not adequate to capture progress towards gender equality in education. Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as ‘the expansion in people’s ability to make **strategic** life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them’. It is important to differentiate strategic life choices from others as ‘strategic life choices help to frame other, second order and less consequential choices which may be important for the quality of one’s life but do not constitute its defining parameters’. Also important to note is the fact that ‘empowerment entails a process of change’. People who exercise a great deal of power may be very powerful but not necessarily empowered, as they were not disempowered before.

Inequality needs to be separated from difference. To quote Kabeer (2001), ‘we have to disentangle differentials which reflect differences in preferences and priorities from those which embody a denial of choice’. The denial of choice asks for affirmative action to help mitigate unequal positioning in many cases. It may include measures to address gender stereotypes and creation of differentiated opportunities and treatment in order to impact traditional gender relations, roles and positioning. In the context of inequalities, affirmative action is not indicative of unequal treatment in a negative sense. Rather, they are indicative of a negotiation of inequality and a deliberate creation of opportunities to move away from it, towards equality.

Gender inequality cannot be viewed completely in isolation from other forms of inequality that exist in various societies and systems. It is often embedded in other forms of inequalities, e.g. caste, class, race, religion or location. The impact of gender differentiated norms and practices are often sharper and more complex for groups that also face other forms of marginalisation and vulnerability. It is important to understand and acknowledge this phenomenon, and appreciate the linkages and implications in the context of education. Gendered enquiry in education can be enriching and useful only when it works in tandem with other forces and divisions, taking note of the shifting configurations over time and space.

There are certain universally defensible values[1] that guide the concept of equality and justice, and are applicable to the issue of gender as well.

Each individual irrespective of caste, class, colour, gender, religion or location has a right to have all entitlements and opportunities for development of capacities so as to live with basic human dignity and without discrimination leading to autonomy of mind and action while caring for others at the same time is a universally desirable goal. The context as determined by polity, culture, society, economy or geography does not alter this principle. How this principle is achieved in practice and mediated through different institutions or processes – political, social, cultural and economic – is an issue of contextualisation. In other words, the broad goal remains the same; the roadmap to reach the goal may take different shapes and directions depending upon the context. This assumption helps in resolving some of the dilemma of public policy and social choice in a plural society.

These five broad and fundamental assumptions form the conceptual base of our enquiry. These are consistent with the 'Rights Framework' that emphasises achieving gender equality in its broadest sense.

It is also important to mention that equality is a relative concept, freedom being a more absolute term. Gender equality, in a broad sense does not refer only to equality of treatment and opportunity but also of ensuring the minimum desirable freedom for everyone, boys and girls belonging to all socio-economic, religious, ethnic groups in all locations, rural or urban.

Approach and Methodology

Approach

The research followed a qualitative approach, focussing on a small sample of secondary schools within their local and national education systems.

The foundational question of the study was whether education processes and opportunities reproduce or challenge unequal gender stereotypes. The study focused on:

- Processes both within the classroom and outside it, in the wider school environment,
- School management policies and processes, and
- Education system policies and processes.

The exploration of all processes also included a focus on expectations, aspirations, perceptions, behaviour and language use.

The study was conducted to analyse existing situations and provide pointers for addressing gender-related issues. Its objective was to analyse school and classroom processes to understand:

- If school and classroom processes reproduce or challenge dominant gendered stereotypes, identities and relationships,
- How these processes reproduce or challenge dominant gendered stereotypes, identities and relationships, and
- If these processes were found to reproduce dominant gender stereotypes, identities and relationships, what is being done, or what might be done, to interrupt the patterns and move towards more equitable processes.

Three questions were thus asked in each focus area, as illustrated in Table 1.1 below.

The research was conducted through a variety of qualitative approaches, including:

- Textbook analysis,
- Observations, both within and outside the classroom,

Table 1.1. Research questions

Focus areas	*Question 1*	*Question 2*	*Question 3*
• Classroom processes • School processes • School management processes • Education system processes	Do they reproduce or challenge dominant gendered stereotypes, identities and relationships?	How do they reproduce or challenge dominant gendered stereotypes, identities and relationships?	If they reproduce dominant gender stereotypes, identities and relationships, what is being done, or what might be done, to redress the situation?

- Interviews with teachers and principals,
- Focus group discussions with students, teachers, administrative staff and school inspectors/support officials, and
- Focus group discussions or interviews with senior education managers.

The research instruments were collaboratively developed by in-country researchers and the Commonwealth Secretariat Education Section. The basic design and instruments were kept constant across all countries, to facilitate the synthesis of the country studies and allow a comparative analysis.

The school-based research was conducted in five secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria, and four schools in the other countries. Table 2.1 shows the distribution of schools across intake and management types. Eighteen out of 30 schools were co-educational. All schools in Seychelles were co-educational, whereas in the other countries at least one or two schools were single-sex, taking either only girls or only boys, the former being more common. Responding to a demand from parents, one boys-only school in Pakistan had started admitting girls, though formally it still remained a single-sex school. Another co-educational school in Pakistan had started using single-sex classrooms from grades 6 to 9, responding again to pressure from parents to segregate the students. The later analysis reveals some interesting insights into how the understanding of gender unfolds differently in varying contexts of single-sex and co-educational contexts.

Of the 30 schools, 21 were state schools, fully managed and financed by the government. Two out of five schools in Trinidad and Tobago were privately managed denominational schools with full aid from the government for teachers' salaries and certain other maintenance expenses. In Samoa, two out of four schools were church schools and in Pakistan, one out of four was a community-based faith school while another was community-based, government supported school. Table 1.2 lists schools' student intake (whether co-educational, boys or girls) and management type.

Table 1.2. Intake and school management

	School 1		School 2		School 3		School 4		School 5	
	Intake	*Mgt.*	*Intake*	*Mgt.*	*Intake*	*Mgt.*	*Intake*	*Mgt.*	*Intake*	*Mgt.*
1 Seychelles	C	S	C	S	C	S	C	P		
2 T and T	G	PDA	B	PDA	C	S	C	S	C	S
3 Malaysia	G	S	C	S	C	S	C	S		
4 Samoa	C	S	C	S	C	PC	G	PC		
5 India	C	S	C	S	B	S	G	S		
6 Pakistan	G	S	B+G	S	CS	PMCS	C	CBF		
7 Nigeria	B	S	C	CGS	G	S	C	S	C	P

Intake C – co-educational (co-ed), B – boys only, G – girls only, B+G * – Boys, girls now admitted, CS – co-ed (single-sex rooms for G6–9)

Mgt.: Management S – state/government, PC – private, church, PDA – private, denominational, aided, CGS – community, government supported, CBF – community-based faith school, MCS – Muslim community school

In Seychelles, with only 13 secondary schools in the country, this sample represents a significant percentage of all schools. In other higher-population countries such as India, the percentage would barely register and therefore, the generalisation of the findings should be avoided. The actual teaching and learning process is always unique to a particular teacher and learner and therefore no two classes are ever conducted the same way. To that extent, it is difficult to generalise the findings of any process-based studies, even if the samples are large. The purpose of this study was to have an in-depth gender analysis of schooling processes in varying contexts rather than presenting the country profile per se; the country papers should be read and interpreted accordingly.

The field studies were conducted in different months of 2007, depending on the school calendar in different countries. The lead researchers developed their initial reports based on a suggested format provided by the Secretariat. These draft reports were shared and peer-reviewed in a workshop held in Seychelles, which was also attended by the government officials from respective countries. Barring Samoa, the rest of the countries were represented in this workshop. It was strongly felt and agreed upon that the reports should explore similar parameters but need not follow the same reporting structures. This was to retain the variety of context, perspective, approach, emphasis, detail and character. A synthesis of the country reports, following a common style and structure would have sacrificed this depth and variety, and the voice of the country authors. Therefore it was decided to have an introductory chapter providing an overview of the analysis, rather than a synthesis of the country papers. The following sections of this chapter provide that overview.

Limitations

Researching any social issue addressing power and privilege is always complex, often emotive and laden with potential for confrontation. These challenges are easily magnified when researching gender, as it cuts across every societal institution, from the family to parliament: no one is exempt. In some instances, researching gender does become confrontational, pitting women against men, focussing on blame and generalisations and reinforcing the gender dichotomies that the pursuit of gender equality seeks to dismantle. Factors of power and of performance may have policed the discussion in all focus groups, including those with teachers and with students. However, this is a challenge that any research of this kind faces and hence not unique. Nevertheless, it is important to remember this limitation while interpreting the observations and findings.

Although some references have been made to the issues of ethnicity, caste, poverty and socio-economic parameters, the analysis mainly limits itself to gender disaggregation. Therefore, except in a few instances it has not been possible to deeply explore the issue of intersection of gender with other inequality issues. The small number of schools makes it difficult to compare and contrast across different kinds of schools, except some comments regarding single-sex and co-educational. The study design did not include exploration of parental views. Interactions with students provided an understanding of parental attitude as perceived by boys and girls. Although the study explored the issue of aspirations among boys and girls, it did not explore post-school choices and outcomes of education.

An important challenge of qualitative research is that it is much more researcher-dependent than quantitative research. This at times leads to significant variations in analytical perspectives and interpretations, which is also true for this study. However, this can be turned into an advantage, as reading of one chapter provides a perspective which can then be applied to another context by the reader, even if the author themselves has not used it.

Statistical Overview: Development, Gender and Education in the Case Study Countries

The seven case study countries comprise a varied sample: two are from Africa, two from Asia, two from the Pacific and one from the Caribbean. In 2005, according to the 2007–2008 Human Development Report (HDR)[2] of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Seychelles and Samoa had very small populations of around 100,000; Trinidad and Tobago had a population of about 1.5 million and Malaysia had one of 26 million. In comparison, Nigeria's population was around 141 million, Pakistan's was 160 million, while that of India was over 1,000 million (a billion). Table 1.3 provides background information on geography, population, date of independence and major religions.

Table 1.3. Geography, population, independence and major religions

	Country	*Continent*	*Reg.*	*Geography*	*Area km2*	*Popul'n*	*Ind. Date*	*Main religions*
1	Seychelles	Africa	SSA	4 major islands	451	100,000	1976	Christianity
2	Trin & Tob	Caribbean	LAC	2 major islands	5,128	1.3m	1962	C & H
3	Malaysia	Pacific	EAP	Divided by ocean[3]	329,847	25.7m	1957	I, B, H, C
4	Samoa	Pacific	EAP	2 main islands	2,831	100,000	1962	Christianity
5	India	Asia	SWA	Varied	3,287,240	1,134.4m	1947	H, I, B, J, S, C
6	Pakistan	Asia	SWA	Varied	803,940	158.1m	1947	Islam
7	Nigeria	Africa	SSA	Varied	923,768	141.4m	1960	I, C

Notes:

1. SSA – sub-Saharan Africa; LA&C – Latin America and the Caribbean; EA&P – East Asia and the Pacific; S&WA – South and West Asia.
2. Population data from 2005, unless otherwise indicated
3. B-Buddhism, C-Christianity, H-Hinduism, I-Islam, J-Jainism, S-Sikhism

Sources: Population data from the UNDP 2007–2008 Human Development Report; population, independence and religions, Wikipedia; others – various.

These countries have a diverse social context. While India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago are multi-religious, multi-ethnic countries, Pakistan has only one religion, Islam, and Samoa only Christianity. Religion, traditions and social contexts have significant impact on gender notions and relations. Samoa is an interesting case as the village, district and national government political systems as well as protocols and procedures in all areas of life continue to be governed by the notion of *Fa'aSamoa*. '*Fa'aSamoa*' means 'the Samoan Way' and is an all-encompassing concept that dictates how Samoans are meant to behave. It refers to the obligations that Samoans owe their family, community and church and the individual's sense of Samoan identity. Each individual within *Fa'aSamoa* can have many roles and responsibilities, which are determined by several factors including locality, holder of *matai* title, age and gender.

As illustrated in Table 1.4 below, the 2007–2008 HDR indicates a clear rank in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, from Seychelles, through Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia, Samoa, India and Pakistan to Nigeria. Amongst the case study countries, the GDP per capita rank correlates exactly with the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI).[4] Following this approach, three countries are classified among the high human development group, three as medium human development and one as low human development.

Table 1.4. Selected development indicators for the case study countries

	Country	*GDP per capita US$*	*Human dev. category*	*HDI rank: of 177*	*Value*	*GDI rank: of 157*	*Value*	*GEM rank: of 93*	*Value*
1	Seychelles	16,106	High	50	0.843	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*	*NA*
2	Trin & Tob	14,603	High	59	0.814	56	0.808	23/93	0.685
3	Malaysia	10,882	High	63	0.811	58	0.802	65/93	0.504
4	Samoa	8,677	Medium	77	0.785	72	0.776	*NA*	*NA*
5	India	3,452	Medium	128	0.619	113	0.600	*NA*	*NA*
6	Pakistan	2,370	Medium	136	0.551	125	0.525	82/93	0.377
7	Nigeria	1,128	Low	158	0.470	139	0.456	*NA*	*NA*

Source: UNDP 2007–2008 Human Development Report

The GDP per capita/HDI ranking also correlates with that for UNDP's Gender-related Development Index (GDI),[5] for six of the seven case study countries. No GDI value is given for Seychelles. The Gender-specific EFA Index (GEI) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI)[6] for both primary and secondary Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs) of the UNESCO 2009 Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) suggests that Seychelles' GDI and HDI ranks **may** correspond. Seychelles is therefore assigned first place in the GDI ranking, as ranking the countries helps to provide a loose framework for analysis and comparison. Following the convergence of the GDP, HDI and GDI rankings, the case study countries are thus always addressed in the following order: Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia, Samoa, India, Pakistan and Nigeria.

The comparative ranking of the case study countries against the UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)[7] would give a more definitive indication of the gendered outcomes of education, as it assesses parliamentary representation, economic participation and actual income. Unfortunately, however, and in common with 84 of the 177 countries in the 2007–2008 HDR, there is no GEM data for Seychelles, Samoa, India or Nigeria.

In the absence of a full set of GEM data, the study can be contextualised with an overview of progress towards achievement of the second and third Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Table 1.5 provides such data for the case study countries, available for all but one indicator.

The presentation of this data illustrates the complexity of ranking countries against any indices. It also underlines the need to treat all macro data as at best, loosely indicative and at worst, potentially misleading. While this MDG data broadly replicates the HDI/GDI rank patterns in that the first four countries (Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Samoa) outperform the following three (India, Pakistan

Table 1.5. Country progress against MDG 2 and MDG 3

	MDG 2: *achieve universal primary education*			MDG 3: *promote gender equality and empower women*					
Country	*Primary NER % (2005)*	*Proportion (%) of students starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 (2004)*	*Literacy rate (%) of 15–24 years olds (Most recent of 1995–2005)*	*Ratio of girls to boys in primary education (using GER)*	*Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education (using GER)*	*Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education (using GER)*	*Ratio of literate women to men 15–24 years old*	*Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector*	*Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament*
1 Seychelles	99	99	99.1	1.00	1.03	1.39	1.01	NA	23.5
2 Trin & Tob	90	90	99.5	1.01	0.99	NA	1.00	NA	25.4
3 Malaysia	95	95	97.2	0.97	1.04	1.27	1.00	NA	13.1
4 Samoa	90	94	99.3	1.00	1.14	1.31	1.00	NA	6.1
5 India	89	73	76.4	1.00	1.12	0.93	0.80	NA	9.0
6 Pakistan	68	70	65.1	0.94	0.80	0.70	0.69	NA	20.4
7 Nigeria	68	73	84.2	0.76	0.74	0.88	0.94	NA	NA
HDR table	*T12*	*T12*	*T12*	*T30*	*T30*	*T30*	*T30*	*T31*	*T29*

Sources: UNDP 2007–2008 Human Development Report, Tables 12, 29, 30 and 31

and Nigeria), the data against certain indicators return surprises. Examples of this are the low primary Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) for Trinidad and Tobago; Nigeria's relatively high youth and adult literacy rates; India's apparently high ratio of girls to boys in secondary education and Pakistan's high representation of women in parliament. One of the discrepancies might be partly due to the fact that the female to male ratios in primary, secondary and tertiary education are calculated using the highly imprecise measure of Gross Enrolment Ratios (GERs) to allow comparison against the three levels (as there is as yet no full set of NERs for tertiary education). These apparent surprises remind us that quantitative indicators for global comparison must be contextualised with more problematised, country-specific explorations.

As there is no GEM data for Seychelles, Samoa, India and Nigeria, and the single MDG 3 indicator tracking economic activity has no entries, other data on women's economic activity and political participation is explored. Table 1.6 provides more information on female economic activity for Nigeria, and some for Samoa and India, but there is still no new information for Seychelles.

When ranked according to the percentage of women engaged in economic activity, or women's economic activity as a percentage of the male rate, all countries except

Table 1.6. Gender inequality in economic activity

	Female economic activity (Aged 15 and over)			*Employment by economic activity (%)*[8]						*Contributing family workers (%)*	
				Agriculture		*Industry*		*Services*			
Country	*Rate (%) 2005*	*Index (1990=100) 2005*	*As % of male rate 2005*	*Women 1995–2005*	*Men 1995–2005*	*Women 1995–2005*	*Men 1995–2005*	*Women 1995–2005*	*Men 1995–2005*	*Women 1995–2005*	*Men 1995–2005*
Seychelles	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Trin & Tob	46.7	112	61	2	10	14	37	84	53	NA	NA
Malaysia	46.5	105	57	11	16	27	35	62	49	NA	NA
Samoa	39.2	97	51	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
India	34	94	42	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Pakistan	32.7	117	39	65	38	16	22	20	40	NA	NA
Nigeria	54.4	95	53	2	4	11	30	87	70	NA	NA

Source: UNDP 2007–2008 Human Development Report, Table 31, pages 338–341

Nigeria retain the default order. Nigeria returns the highest (given) rate of female economic activity and the third rank in the female rate as a percentage of the male rate, placing it before Samoa, India and Pakistan. This change in Nigeria's rank reorders Pakistan at the bottom of the gendered economic activity scale, a fact rendered more interesting as Pakistan's 'employment by economic activity type' patterns diverge from those for the other countries with data. In all cases apart from Pakistan, data on employment by economic activity type duplicates recognised gender patterns: more men than women in agriculture and industry, and more women than men in the service industry.[9] In Pakistan, however, there are more women than men in agriculture, and more men than women in services.

Table 1.7 provides historical background with the year women received the right to vote, to stand for election, the year when the first woman was elected or appointed to parliament and the percentage of women at ministerial level, in the lower and upper houses. Against these categories, country rankings change significantly.

If we take the first year that women received the right to vote or stand for election, India and Pakistan were the earliest, followed by Trinidad and Tobago, Seychelles and Samoa, then Malaysia and finally Nigeria. In most cases, the right to vote came when countries were governed by colonial administration. A ranking against the year that a woman was first elected to parliament puts India first, followed by Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago, Pakistan, Samoa, Seychelles and then Nigeria. A third ranking, against the percentage of women in government at ministerial level has Trinidad and Tobago in the lead, followed by Nigeria, Seychelles, Malaysia, Samoa, Pakistan and then India. Finally, a ranking against the percentage of seats in the

Table 1.7. Women's political participation

Country	*Year women received the right to:*		*First year woman elected (E) or appointed (A) to parliament*	*Women in government at ministerial level (%) 2005*	*Seats in parliament held by women (% of total)*		
					Lower or single house		*Upper house or senate*
	Vote	*Stand for election*			*1990*	*2007*	*2007*
Seychelles	1948	1948	1976 E&A	12.5	16.0	23.5	NA
Trin & Tob	1946	1946	1962 E&A	18.2	16.7	19.4	32.3
Malaysia	1957	1957	1959 A	9.1	5.1	9.1	25.7
Samoa	1948 & 1990	1948 & 1990	1976 E	7.7	6.6	6.1	NA
India	1935 & 1950	1935 & 1950	1952 E	3.4	5.6	8.3	10.7
Pakistan	1935 & 1947	1935 & 1947	1973 E	5.6	10.1	21.3	17.0
Nigeria	1958	1958	1994 E	17.6	NA	22.0	NA

Source: UNDP 2007–2008 Human Development Report, Table 33, pages 343–346

lower house held by women puts Seychelles in the first place, followed by Nigeria, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia, India, then Samoa. These statistics present intriguing, and sometimes apparently contradictory patterns: patterns that the country chapters explore, contest and frame.

When we turn to deeper exploration of the macro statistics on education, using the more focussed, sector-specific EFA Global Monitoring Report, the different data sources and dates[10] introduce further inconsistencies. As outlined in Table 1.8, the Education Development Index (EDI) ranks Malaysia above Trinidad and Tobago and

Table 1.8. Country ranking by EDI and GEI[11]

EDI	*Country*	*Rank*	*Value*	*GEI*	*Country*	*Rank*	*Value*
1	Seychelles	34/129	0.974	1	Seychelles	11/129	0.991*
2	Malaysia	45/129	0.965	2	Trin & Tob	51/129	0.974*
3	Trin & Tob	64/129	0.941	3	Malaysia	77/129	0.952*
4	Samoa	NA	NA	4	Samoa	NA	NA
5	India	102/129	0.794	5	India	108/129	0.834
6	Nigeria	113/129	0.752	6	Nigeria	113/129	0.815
7	Pakistan	118/129	0.652	7	Pakistan	118/129	0.714

Notes: *Indicative of inequality at the expense of boys and/or men

Source: UNESCO GMR (2009)

Nigeria above Pakistan. (There is no data for Samoa: it has been placed fourth in both ranks).

The default/HDI rank is maintained in the Gender-specific EFA Index, and here we begin to see the negative gender balance turning from girls and women: the GEIs for Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago and Malaysia are indicative of gender disparities at the expense of boys and men in secondary and/or tertiary level.

Table 1.9 provides data to contextualise the difference between countries' HDI and EDI ranks, ordering them against *net* primary and secondary enrolment and gross tertiary enrolment. This data changes the ranking in each case, highlighting interesting patterns for deeper exploration. Of particular note are the primary NER for Trinidad and Tobago and the tertiary GER for India.

Finally, data presented in Table 1.10 below ranks countries against the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for enrolment at the three levels (not the NER or GER itself). Ranking against the GPI at the primary and secondary levels puts Nigeria before Pakistan, but ranking at the tertiary level puts Pakistan before India and Nigeria.

Table 1.9. Country ranking by primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment

P	*Country*	*NER*	*GPI*	*S*	*Country*	*NER*	*GPI*	*T*	*Country*	*GER*	*GPI*
1	Malaysia	100	1.00	1	*Seychelles*	94	NA	1	*Seychelles*	NA	NA
2	Seychelles	99	1.01	2	Malaysia	69	1.10	2	Malaysia	29	1.29
3	Samoa	90	1.00	3	Samoa	66	1.14	3	India	12	0.72
4	India	89	0.96	4	Trin & Tob	65	1.04	4	Trin & Tob	11	1.28
5	Trin & Tob	85	1.00	5	*India*	NA	NA	5	Samoa (1999)	11	1.04
6	Pakistan	66	0.78	6	Pakistan	30	0.77	6	Nigeria	10	0.69
7	Nigeria	63	0.86	7	Nigeria	26	0.84	7	Pakistan	5	0.85

Source: UNESCO GMR 2009

Table 1.10. Country ranking, GPI of primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment

P	*Country*	*NER*	*GPI*	*S*	*Country*	*NER*	*GPI*	*T*	*Country*	*GER*	*GPI*
1	Seychelles	99	1.01	1	Seychelles	94	NA	1	*Seychelles*	NA	NA
2	Malaysia	100	1.00	2	Samoa	66	1.14	2	Malaysia	29	1.29
2	Samoa	90	1.00	3	Malaysia	69	1.10	3	Trin & Tob	11	1.28
2	Trin & Tob	85	1.00	4	Trin & Tob	65	1.04	4	Samoa (1999)	11	1.04
5	India	89	0.96	*5*	*India*	NA	NA	5	Pakistan	5	0.85
6	Nigeria	63	0.86	6	Nigeria	26	0.84	6	India	12	0.72
7	Pakistan	66	0.78	7	Pakistan	30	0.77	7	Nigeria	10	0.69

Source: UNESCO GMR 2009

All these quantitative analyses and rankings highlight many areas for investigation and challenge. They do provide, however, an 'indicative' background or framework for the country-based qualitative enquiries, and the challenge.

The analyses suggest a good overall level of development and education in Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Samoa, gender disparity at the expense of boys and men at secondary and tertiary levels, and 40–50 per cent of women engaged in economic activity. It is not possible to know the status and pay of women's economic activity, but their political participation is limited, despite the other indicators. The percentage of seats held by women in national parliament ranges from 6 per cent to 25 per cent (all using UNDP HDR 2008 data). Women are persisting to higher levels of education, but the statistics do not enable us to make an assessment of the outcomes of their education.

In contrast, the analyses suggest progressively less robust development in India, Pakistan and Nigeria respectively; gender disparity against girls and women at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and 32 per cent of Indian women, 33 per cent of Pakistani women and 55 per cent of Nigerian women engaged in economic activity, again of unknown status. There is a surprising range in the percentage of seats held by women in national parliament. Most significantly, 20 per cent in Pakistan: greater than Malaysia, Samoa and India[12] (using UNDP HDR 2008 data). The data needs deeper contextualised exploration.

Addressing the Research Questions

The study was conducted to explore (i) whether school and classroom processes were reproducing or challenging dominant gendered stereotypes, (ii) how these processes were operating, and (iii) if processes were reproducing stereotypes, what was being done, or might be done, to interrupt the patterns and move towards more equitable processes.

The country case studies were broad and exploratory, the national contexts and the school samples were highly varied, and the analysis and report writing were conducted independently. The resulting reports contained such depth and variety: of perspective, approach, emphasis, detail and character. A synthesis of the country reports, following a common style and structure, would have sacrificed this depth and variety, and the voice of the country authors. This section thus presents a synthesis of insights on the **areas** that should be explored to address the research questions, rather than a detailed synthesis of the findings from each country. The country studies assigned different emphasis and order to the various areas, and not all chapters addressed all areas.

Do school processes reproduce or challenge gendered stereotypes?

The first question of the study was whether school and classroom processes were reinforcing or challenging dominant gendered stereotypes. To address this question, it was found necessary to explore the social, ethnic and religious mix of national populations, to determine if gendered stereotypes were common across all groups or specific to some. Having established this foundation, it was then necessary to explore the nature of the stereotypes themselves. Some countries grounded this exploration in a literature review; all included it as a major focus of data collection. In this case, the sample was restricted to the perspectives of educational bureaucrats, school managers, principals and head teachers, teachers and students who had reached class 9 or 10.

Gendered stereotypes and national policy

Analysis of dominant gender stereotypes, of the 'gender order and gender regimes' (Connell, 2002: p54) within each country highlights a constant refrain: from Seychelles, with its high levels of human development and female education; from Trinidad and Tobago, with its high levels and its large number of female-headed households to countries with lower human development ratings and evident gender disparities against women. The refrain, the dominant gender order of each country, was that of difference, of boys and girls, men and women being different and differently suited to different spheres. In each case, regardless of patterns of women's educational, economic or political achievements, researchers felt this difference contained an inequality, in both power and in authority. Notwithstanding these broad similarities, the notions of what is masculine and what is feminine have some stark differences. The two most contrasting examples are Trinidad and Tobago, where the notion of hegemonic masculinity goes to the extent of viewing education itself as a feminine activity, and Pakistan, where femininity is synonymous with being totally submissive and unquestioning, signifying family and community honour.

This did not, however, mean that boys and men always benefitted. Contained within each national gender order were notions of 'ideal types', of privileged, hegemonic forms of masculinity and of relationships between men and women. In contrast to the restricted range of acceptable male identities, girls' options were much wider. In both cases, assumed traits and behaviours could not radically contravene established gender orders, but the acceptable range, especially that acceptable to peers, was broader for girls than it was for boys. Girls may have had to act out different identities in different settings, to project themselves differently to satisfy various 'audiences', but girls and women could more easily display traits and behaviours stereotypically associated with boys and men than vice versa. Does national policy support or contest the dominant gender order?

The broad brush-strokes outlining national gender orders suggest persistent inequality and inequitable treatment between men and women, as well as between men. In somewhat stark contrast, however, many countries have national or policy engagement with, and commitment to gender equality, as enshrined in the human development discourse and encapsulated in the third Millennium Development Goal. Countries have signed up to the major significant declarations and conventions, most had revised national policies or reform packages with some mention of gender, and some had full education and gender policies. In these cases, there is often commitment to the achievement of societal and educational gender equality. There are few inclusions, however, of broad strategic plans suggesting how it might be pursued.

School processes and reproduction or challenge

Having established the nature of dominant gender stereotypes, as well as the gender visions underlying national policies, the studies were able to address the question of whether school and classroom processes were reproducing or challenging them. The response across all countries was that the reproduction of dominant gender stereotypes and regimes was immediately evident across numerous educational, school and classroom processes. This does not mean that some of these processes, or other less obvious ones, did not entail challenges to dominant stereotypes, but that the patterns of reproduction of these stereotypes were both numerous and almost always immediately apparent.

Despite the inevitably generalising nature of analysis, there were some examples of challenge to the dominant gender order: most obviously in the statements and practices of girls and women, less regularly, but significantly, in those of some boys and men. Due again to the limited nature of the student data, it was not possible to identify correlations with socio-economic group, ethnicity and/or religion. In comparison with processes of reproduction, those who challenged gendered stereotypes were few, and often hidden – sometimes consciously, often subconsciously. This fact is indicative of the sometimes aggressively gendered environment of sample schools.

How do these processes reproduce or challenge stereotypes?

The country analysis identified four arenas where processes might contribute to or challenge the school-based reproduction of dominant gender orders. These arenas were those of attitudes, environments, curriculum and materials, and teaching, learning and classroom processes.

Attitudes, expectations and aspirations

While attitudes, expectations and aspirations are not in themselves processes, their centrality to all processes necessitates their detailed exploration. The analysis explored how people intuitively feel that gender identities are formed: whether they feel that people are 'essentially' male or female, or if gender identities and relationships are constructed through their socio-cultural experiences. And, if they feel the latter, whether they think concepts of gender equality, or tradition, religion or any other value framework should set the parameters for this construction. It explored whether livelihood and educational expectations of men and women (or boys and girls) are set by (i) essentialist notions, (ii) recognition, acceptance or resigned submission to the gendered status quo, or (iii) by a commitment to gender equality and equity. Analysis attempted to determine how those committed to equality respond to the reality of the gendered status quo and whether people's attitudes applied equally to all socio-economic or ethnic groups.

In nearly every country context, the focus on gender was emotive, for both men and women: the research always prompted strong, sometimes defensive or aggressive reactions. For some, who felt various levels of 'gender frustration', the research seemed to offer the opportunity to vent it. Others may have felt guilty that they were not doing anything to implement or pursue gender equality strategies, or that their thoughts, actions or practices contributed to the perpetuation of inequality. In other cases, individuals were threatened by the debate, did not see the perspective of the researchers and could not see what it had to do with the enterprise of schooling. Whatever the causes, the level of administration- or school-wide intellectual engagement with the issue of gender and its importance to their professional roles was minimal.

Due to their power over schools, school management and teachers, the attitudes of education bureaucrats and administrators, both of government and non-government organisations (private, religious and community-based) are crucially important. Individuals of this group who are committed to gender equality can initiate a virtuous cycle of gender-opportunity. If they not, they can contribute to the opposite. On the whole, attitudes within this group reflected stereotypes of the gendered status quo. Individuals in these senior positions, with considerable power and influence to affect change, seemed 'stranded' without the analytic or strategic tools to understand, appreciate or implement any policy frameworks addressing the pursuit of gender equality. It did not appear as if they reflected on the fact that these frameworks should affect their practice, or on how they might do so. Attitudes about head teachers or principals and teachers reflected essentialised dichotomies about the characteristics of each sex and the impacts of this on their professional conduct. There was no generalised notion across the countries that men were always better at leadership than women, but the stereotypes were always gendered. There was regular reference to the ways in which women's domestic roles interfered with their professional ones, and occasional mention of how men's non-educational activities and commitments took them away from school and their duties during the teaching day.

The attitudes of the principal or head teacher and the way in which they contributed to the schools' vision and mission (either written or unarticulated) were probably even more significant than those of educational administrators, bureaucrats, funders or even school management boards. A capable and strong head teacher, committed to gender equality, whether a woman or a man, could be one of the most critical factors in determining a school's gender regimes. With support, they could create enabling environments for like-minded teachers as well as those who have not yet engaged with the issues. Given the contentious nature of gender, however, such leaders often face isolation, resistance and/or hostility and such reactions can undermine the opportunity, courage or energy for change. Across the country studies, none of the principals or head teachers felt zealously committed to progressing gender equality in their schools as one of the most important features of their role. Women often (though not always) had ‘gut’ feelings about gender equality and some took principled stands (a female principal in Pakistan who supported her teacher’s autonomy in her choice of head-gear being a particular case in point). There were examples of ‘would-be’ transformative men, inclined to review inequitable school processes and procedures. If these leaders had reflected deeply on these issues, it had not yet resulted in any strategic plans for action or for addressing real or anticipated opposition.

Although head teachers and principals committed to equality have the potential to determine the ethos of the whole school, they were enabled or undermined by the presence or absence of likeminded teachers among their staff. Teachers committed to gender equality could also make a difference (albeit one that is constrained) even in schools with no likeminded colleagues. It was the teachers who came into regular contact with the students, the teachers whose attitudes, expectations, practices and interactions could count for so much, or so little, in their students’ lives and imaginations.

Teachers’ viewed girls’ role in contributing to ‘care work’ at school and home was viewed as non-problematic: both acceptable and unavoidable. In Trinidad and Tobago, boys’ leisure-time activities were seen as detrimental to their academic success and school lives. Teachers’ academic expectations were higher for girls in Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Samoa; differentiation was not so clear in the other countries. In Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Samoa, girls were considered more responsible and hardworking, while boys were considered indifferent and ill disciplined. In India and Pakistan, boys were seen as more naturally intelligent, but more inclined to be lazy, while girls were seen as hardworking, conscientious grafters. Also common was the perception that ‘girls learn by rote learning’ and ‘boys are more active learners’ based entirely on the fact that girls outperformed boys in areas where rote learning was considered necessary and not on any real experiences of trying out active learning processes with either boys or girls. Boys were also invariably perceived as the ultimate leaders, although girls were increasing in their assertiveness in leadership roles in Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago.

The students, always the greatest number of any group in a school, constitute a powerful source of influence, inspiration and sometimes, control. In every school, when asked to list the traits of boys and girls, men and women, the students recognised and often repeated gendered stereotypes. When they were asked to describe themselves, and their future aspirations, the boys more readily upheld these stereotypes. Boys generally believed they would be the main breadwinner (even in Trinidad and Tobago, where there is such a large percentage of female-headed households) and saw girls as ‘weaker’ and in need of protection.

In many cases, the girls upheld some traits and aspirations, but rejected those associated with weakness, secondary status and dependency; even when they spoke of independence, some admitted that they felt they needed protection. A lack of realism in career or work aspirations was common to both boys and girls (in terms of a mismatch between subjects under study and those required for stated career preferences), not just the few girls who aspired to careers in male-dominated fields. Students' parents and their home environments appeared to reinforce gender stereotypes, but the research did not interview parents or visit homes, so such inferences were derived from discussions with students and school staff.

Identities are rarely only 'formed' by external influences: individuals are at the centre of the construction and negotiation of their own identities. While this research did not focus specifically on less obvious student cultures and peer-group processes, boys' reduced enrolments, poor achievement and increased dropout constituted a significant marker of student resistance to school regimes. Other, less high-profile incidences of resistance can be gleaned from focus group discussions and observations. Two incidents of students' undermining any transgression of their accepted gender regimes are both from Trinidad and Tobago. In one, boys who were interested in academic subjects and in doing well were regarded as effeminate by their peers. In the other, girls on the sideline of a netball match referred to the only boy on the pitch as a 'faggot'.

This first section has addressed the importance of attitudes, expectations and aspirations in the processes of identity formation. The next section addresses the actual environments of the school and the messages that these environments convey.

Environments: school visions and messages

The primary feature of a school's environment, raised by all country studies, was that of the actual physical environment. Schools were more appealing and enabling for all students if they were maintained and cared for, regardless of resources; if they offered at least basic facilities, with toilet blocks and water supply; if they provided an encouraging environment; and, vitally, if girls, boys and staff were safe from psychological bullying, or physical, sexual or reputational harm, within the school or while on school-assigned tasks. In the most extreme case of an unsafe school, Nigerian girls were subject to the threat and reality of sexual abuse while on school errands to collect water. Even one such occurrence undermines the entire purpose of schooling.

The issue of girls' reputational and physical safety was a major issue in all countries, Seychelles to Nigeria, often for very different reasons – sometimes with different consequences, but always highly gendered ones. As has been shown, Nigerian girls were exposed to unacceptable risks: they were more openly involved in voluntary relationships with student peers. In India and Pakistan, girls' education could be arrested even on parental suspicion of involvement with boys, and the inclusion of sex or HIV education was usually considered inappropriate in schools. Schools in Trinidad and Tobago and Seychelles tried to adapt codes of conduct and versions of personal and social education (PSE) to address high rates of teenage relationships and pregnancy.

The importance of this need for a safe environment, particularly for girls, often resulted in gender-segregation during certain tasks and activities. This, like many other issues explored in the chapters, was seen from a variety of perspectives. Some researchers saw it as protecting and enabling the girls; others saw it as an example of the reproduction of gendered dichotomies. Each case has to be assessed in its own context.

The school purpose, ethos and mission, both the explicit and the hidden versions, had a major impact on identify formation, even in the absence of explicit commitment to gender equality. If the schools were committed to quality, equality and the success of every student, they were more likely to present all students with a broader range of life-options. Some schools in the study, generally those with greater resources and more successful or affluent student populations, provided such inspiration.

Beyond the creation of a baseline of quality, the school vision and mission statements (where they existed) could determine which types of gender identities and interactions were encouraged, and which were discouraged. Almost all principles and head teachers of single-sex schools, whether in Trinidad, Samoa, India or Pakistan perceived gender as a non-issue in their schools, as they were single-sex. This reflects the fact that gender is widely perceived as a boy versus girl issue, which prevents a more holistic understanding. In almost all cases, girls-only schools were more conformist in protecting and promoting the dominant notions of feminine behaviour and image. This is in contrast with a number of experiences in literacy and women development programmes where single-sex experiences have been used to promote empowerment-based approaches and question unequal gender relations. The issue of a large number of girls underperforming within the situation where boys' underachievement is the average occurrence, and vice versa, also gets lost where gender is perceived only in terms of boys versus girls.

In practice, even a vision and mission statement based on gender equality might be undermined. School management, principals and teachers may want to treat girls and boys in a gender-equitable way, but they may feel that this will have detrimental results for the girls. In India, Pakistan and Nigeria, for example, teachers or principals with visions of equality/equity are caught between these and those of the parents or communities whom they serve, if they have different aspirations for their daughters. Such schools or teachers have to tread a fine line to inspire their pupils and yet not jeopardise the same girls' chances of staying in school. The larger school system, in most cases, does not provide the desired tools and support to these teachers and principals to deal with such issues.

In another complex situation, in all country cases, not just those with educational gender disparities against boys, there was a disjuncture between the school system (with its endorsement of hegemonic masculinities) and the aspirations, identities and imaginations of some of the male student population. The student data did not allow in-depth analysis by socio-economic, ethnic or religious background, but other research suggests this percentage constitutes large numbers of boys from disadvantaged groups. These disaffected boys tended to either not enrol, or to underachieve, misbehave and/or drop out, compounding their disadvantage. In the pursuit of equity, the dynamics of these situations demand analytic attention and exploration, rather than the anecdotal apportioning of blame on women teachers, as reported in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another feature identified by the country studies as critical in setting guidelines for the pursuit of equity, was the identification of which groups (if there are identifiable groups, among both girls and boys) were achieving and which ones were underperforming. If groups could be and were identified, by staff or students, the underperformance itself was seen as an essential 'trait' associated with that group. In many cases, teachers labelled students from lower socio-economic/ethnic groups (boys or girls or both, depending on the setting) as 'weak' purely by the fact of their background. An extension of this, raised in the Pakistan study, was the affect on groups or individuals by the messages communicated about which families and communities were valued: by what interaction took place, and by who was involved in that interaction. Schools encouraged performance and aspiration where they engaged the support and involvement of parents and communities, especially those of marginalised students or groups.

All country studies identified areas of the school environment of co-educational schools, where the gendered dimensions were immediately apparent: those of gender differentiation in authority, responsibility, subject choice tasks, sports, clubs, break-time activities and disciplinary procedures.

The first of this category was the gendered allocation of authority and responsibility, among both the teachers and students. Given the very small size of the teacher sample, and the small percentage of each national teaching force they represented, the analysis could only highlight localised patterns. These patterns point to an increasing female majority among the teaching staff, but a persistent minority in management structures. There were many variations on the gendered patterns associated with positions of responsibility assigned to students, often related to whether the school in question was single-sex (in name and practice, as one boys' school in Pakistan admitted girls) or co-educational. There were discernable patterns, however. Jobs were assigned to girls and boys depending on management's gendered perception of their appropriateness and head boys were sometimes vested with authority over head girls.

In some countries, the second clear separation was related to teacher and student distribution across subjects. While there were exceptions in almost all instances, there was a persistence of women teaching, and girls selecting, arts subjects, and men teaching, and boys selecting, science subjects. In some schools, these patterns were gradually beginning to change.

The researchers identified clear examples where boys and girls were generally segregated around the school: before and after lessons; at break-times; doing teacher-assigned tasks; in sports activities, and sometimes in clubs and extra-curricular activities. The gender issues associated with sports and physical activities were so numerous that they alone deserve a separate study. Not only was the choice of and participation in sports highly gendered, sport **itself** was, as a phenomenon. Apart from in Seychelles, sports were regularly seen as an area of male preserve and excellence.

In the co-educational schools in Pakistan, boys and girls rarely interacted. One of the Pakistani co-educational schools even segregated the students from grades 6 to 9 into different classrooms. There were numerous justifications for these segregations, ranging from management techniques, notions of appropriateness, girls' reputational and physical safety, to concessions to comply with parental wishes and expectations. These are all complex areas, which required careful exploration and assessment of their impact, but no school teams appeared to be engaged in such activity.

The final area of differentiation was in the setting and enforcing of school rules. Rules were often framed by schools' understanding of appropriate behaviour and relationships between boys and girls. While this sometimes resulted in what appeared to be unnecessarily restricted interaction and the reproduction of dominant gender dichotomies, such strategies often appeared to be the only option available to the school staff. School management, principals and teachers may have had some aspiration to treat girls and boys equitably, but they may have not found any way to do so and maintain discipline in situations of limited resources, limited training and experience, and seriously disruptive students. Some teachers might have decided on balance between ideals and aspirations on the one hand and school or classroom control on the other.

The consequences of breaking the rules were often more gendered and severe than the rules themselves. In most cases, boys received more physical punishment, generally of a more harsh nature, which sometimes appeared to constitute assault. The punishment of the extreme cases of disruption by disenfranchised boys presented an acute gender contradiction. Whilst schools and education systems are often founded on academic masculinities that align poorly with those of disengaged boys, they resort to highly gendered management techniques which are responses to the boys' more 'macho' masculinities.

In many cases, girls' punishment included more public humiliation than physical violence, shocking examples being the cases of teachers' humiliation of Malaysian girls in incidents related to menstruation. In other situations, Nigeria's being a particular case in point, school rules were deeply, inequitably gendered. Not only were some cases of bullying and intimidation left unpunished, but in situations of pregnancy arising through rape or teacher-student relationships, the girl was punished and excluded from school, while the boy or the teacher continued with his education or job.

The second section explored school environments and the messages that they convey. The following section will explore the curriculum, syllabus, exams, textbooks and learning materials.

Curriculum, syllabus, exams, textbooks and learning materials

The nature – not exclusively the gendered nature – of the curriculum, any syllabi, exams, textbooks and other learning materials was identified as a significant factor in processes of reproduction or challenge to the gendered status quo. Attention was drawn to the epistemic foundations of the curriculum, whether it was based on the reproduction of a body or bodies of knowledge defined by others, or on the creation of knowledge; on rote learning and memorisation, or on exploration, independent thinking and questioning. It was felt that in Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago and Malaysia, where elements within the curriculum and materials appeared to encourage knowledge creation rather than reproduction, there was a greater likelihood of challenge to stereotypical gender norms. This seemed significantly reduced in India, Pakistan and Nigerian, however, where the curriculum and materials tended to lean towards reproduction.

Another curriculum-related issue was whether all schools offered an 'equitable' breadth of subjects to all its students, or whether some were restricted, based on either lack of availability of funds or teachers, or assumptions reflecting gender or social class stereotypes. One or both of these scenarios existed in schools in the case study countries.

The final major theme in this area was the composition and nature of textbooks and learning materials. The researchers explored (i) whether the textbooks and materials encouraged, required or rewarded rote learning and reproduction, or exploratory learning and questioning, (ii) their foundational societal and gender regimes, evident though text and illustration, and (iii) whether teachers were provided with the tools to use them in ways that encouraged critical and independent thinking and broader social equity. Following the patterns of the curriculum foundations, the textbooks of Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago and Malaysia tended to present fewer stereotypical gender images than those of India, Pakistan or Nigeria.

In Seychelles, most of the textbooks were recently published books and were gender-friendly. In India and Malaysia, there was an effort to depict women in non-traditional roles and portray them as capable of making choices. In India, there have been token 'shifts' such as an added chapter on women's status. In Pakistan, the visibility of women was very low; women and men were often identified with stereotypical attributes: men as brave, heroic, honest and strong; women as caring, loving, kind and self-sacrificing. Also in Pakistan, members of textbook review panels and authors are almost all men. In one instance, however, a team of female authors and reviewers was able to produce a comparatively gender-inclusive textbook.

Teaching, learning and classroom processes

This final section deals with actual teaching, learning and classroom processes.

Replicating the first themes under the issues of environment, the factor of teaching and learning processes to have the most significant impact on equality of achievement was quality. This was not an obviously, immediately apparent gendered issue, and certainly not one that could be linked with the success of either girls, or of boys, but it was a **baseline** issue. If lessons were conscientiously taught, and if teachers demonstrated a degree of professionalism, then this provided a baseline for broadening achievement **for all**. In an absence of such a baseline, schools did not have much leverage against any established inequalities. Key elements of quality included whether the full teaching cycle (of planning and preparing, delivering sessions, marking and re-planning) was commonly observed; whether teachers knew students' names and areas of strength and weakness; whether they differentiated, even within streams, and whether students ever shared concerns about areas of weakness, and, if they did, if teachers responded. In situations where some boys were underperforming, as in Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Malaysia and Samoa, then such boys would have benefitted. If the situation was reversed, and girls were underperforming, then such girls would have benefitted. The country research, however, reported the regular absence of such a baseline in some schools and some classes: again, most noticeably in Nigeria.

The next major non-specifically gendered factor identified that had the potential to have a significant impact on students' achievement, aspirations and goals was the teachers' engagement with individuals. Important areas for exploration were whether (i) teachers had a sense of a pastoral role with their students – whether they attempted to inspire and encourage them; (ii) they engaged with student interests and the things they felt were important; (iii) they tried to overcome generational, socio-economic, ethnic or any other gaps; (iv) they engaged with students' home/neighbourhood realities and encouraged to overcome external challenges, and (v) they adjusted their teaching and interaction with students so that they might succeed despite home/neighbourhood challenges. Most chapters reveal few instances of teachers engaging with students in these ways: it is possible teachers lost numerous opportunities for inspiration and motivation. The nature and duration of the fieldwork did not allow time for in-depth exploration of these factors, so the researchers could not be sure that more 'personal' interaction rarely took place, but little took place during the fieldwork.

Lessons in Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago and Malaysia were teacher-led with some opportunities for student participation. Those in India, Nigeria, Pakistan and Samoa were passive and highly teacher-dominated. Teacher-led lessons may have been the only option in very large classes with minimal resources. Across the study, there was a wide range of quality, commitment and professionalism and an even wider range of attention, or otherwise, to students. Every country had its share of disengaged teachers; some appeared to teach to the mythical 'average student' with no concern for what any student might be learning, while there were those who demonstrated energy and interest. After these two baseline factors, there were numerous features of teaching, learning and classroom processes where the gendered nature was more immediately evident.

The first of these was the number of male and female students in co-educational classrooms. The pattern of more men teaching and boys selecting science subjects, and more women teaching and girls selecting arts subjects has been addressed in the previous section on school environments. Where this pattern was sustained, its maintenance perpetuated existing gender and subject stereotypes. As an extension of this was the issue of numbers of boys and girls within a class, and the gender patterns among the obvious achievers within the same class. In classes where boys were in the significant majority, as in India and Pakistan, some girls tended to be more reticent and subdued than they were in classes with a more even gender mix. In classes where girls were in the majority (as in some case in the first four HDI-ranked countries), boys either competed to show themselves as 'good as the girls' or tended to 'act out' more assertive, careless masculinities to avoid 'losing face'.

An extension of this exploration, gendered dominance in classroom role was that of gendered patterns in 'streamed' sets. Year groups in nearly all schools were streamed within subjects, even in one school where a principal/member of the management team wished to phase it out: such an approach was deemed unavoidable. Streaming became gendered and (arguably) doubly inequitable, when the top sets were dominated by either boy or girls, and the lower sets by the inverse. Such patterns, replicating the wider societal gender orders and gender regimes, were recognisable in almost all cases. Again, this was not a phenomenon that only disadvantaged girls: the process was disempowering to significant numbers of boys.

The next very obviously gendered feature of most classrooms (in co-educational schools) was gender-segregated seating arrangements. There were exceptions, but in the majority of cases, whether students were seated at a desk or on the floor, boys and girls sat separately. Furthermore, in most instances, teachers had no involvement in determining seating: students organised themselves in this way. In Samoa, where most lessons were didactic and teacher centred, with their movements restricted to the front of the room, girls always sat nearer the teacher. This might have been a result of the influence of *Fa'aSamoa*, wherein boys treated girls as sisters, ensuring their wellbeing by offering them the opportunity of sitting nearer the centre of teaching activity. Whatever the causes and justification of gender-segregated seating, the consequences were sometimes theorised, but not always substantiated by the data. In order to assess any long-term implications on achievement and identity, the study would have had to be longer and more classroom focussed.

Another clearly gendered feature of all classrooms was teachers' use of gender as a management tool. Students were grouped by sex in registers, queues/lines, tasks, the collection of books, marks or money – or in the 'pitting' of boys against girls in competitive group work. In one Pakistani school, it was found that boys performed better when there were girls in the class, whereas the inverse was observed in Trinidad and Tobago. Another Pakistani school, although co-educational, organised all the classes from grade 6 to grade 9 as single-sex, as this was felt to be a more suitable management approach.

Beyond these highly visible differentiations, there were other processes that appeared to be gendered. Although research constraints precluded in-depth exploration of these areas, definite patterns were discernable.

One obvious area was that of physical, verbal and 'eye-contact' interaction between the teacher and the students: they were differently gendered in different settings. In Samoa, the girls interacted more regularly with their teachers, as they sat at the front of the classroom, in the main areas of teacher activity. In other cases, boys were more boisterous, more ready to volunteer ideas and even call out to the teacher (where it was permitted) and girls more reticent, their involvement hampered by their reluctance to get the answer wrong. In classes with an equal number of boys and girls, however, it was sometimes difficult to recognise any highly-gendered interaction patterns. In India, Nigeria and Pakistan, teachers gave greater attention to boys, by providing more opportunities to respond and participate. When Indian and Pakistani girls appeared shy and reticent, there was no teacher effort to draw them into the lessons or increase their confidence.

Another significant area was teachers' language and imagery, and their use of the textbooks and learning materials. Language regularly reinforced gender stereotypes, although this pattern was less marked in Seychelles. There was evidence of teachers repeatedly labelling boys and girls, terming boys as intelligent but irresponsible (in Trinidad), and girls as potentially less intelligent, but hardworking, disciplined and capable of the persistence required to learn by rote (in Pakistan). In many cases, teachers' use of the textbooks either (i) uncritically reflected the foundational, reproductive epistemology of dense, fact-laden books, or (ii) did not exploit the possibility of using less didactic, fact-based books to question and challenge gender stereotypes. Textbooks, materials and their use are one area in particular need of further research.

This final section has explored teaching, learning and classroom processes and their contribution to the reproduction or challenge of the gendered status quo. The arena of classroom processes is one that has a vast potential to create environments that help children to actively challenge the gendered status quo. In these country studies, however, they tended to reinforce it much more regularly. The next section explores the actions that might be taken to help progress more gender equitable school processes and, thus, the pursuit of greater gender equity.

What might advance greater gender equality?

Individual research teams have suggested a range of possible recommendations for various levels: policy to institutional reforms, teacher training to school-based changes. Advancing gender equality in education with a focus on schooling processes means making school a more democratic and equal institution in general and poses a major challenge in most societies. Nevertheless, it is a challenge that needs to be addressed and the study points to a number of possible solutions.

Democratising gender debate and action: going beyond national policies

Most national policies have incorporated the goal of gender equality in their commitments in some manner or the other. However, the action largely remains limited to adoption of access related initiatives. The relational aspects of gender rarely get addressed in a systematic manner. The attitudes, beliefs and views regarding gender among teachers, principals and educational bureaucrats are rarely questioned or challenged. Teacher training courses do not go deep enough into these issues and gender is generally treated only superficially both in pre-service and in-service programmes. In order to change this, it is important to democratise the gender debate taking it to all levels, and developing more nuanced approaches for training of teachers as well as educational administrators. Teachers and principals cannot lead the process of change unless equipped with the right kinds of attitudes and skills, and supported by educational administrators.

Gender mainstreaming at all levels and stages

Schools function as part of hierarchical structures governed by rigid systems and processes. This is largely true not only in the case of state schools but also those run by religious bodies and other school-governing structures. Even in cases where principals and school administrators were very aware of gender issues, they were reluctant to take action as they didn't feel empowered enough. Gender-equal processes in schools demand the presence of a democratic culture and ethos that teachers and principals themselves have not experienced. It is important to democratise the systems, processes and norms that govern schools if the processes and norms within schools have to change. This requires gender mainstreaming based institutional reforms of education systems as a whole. Gender mainstreaming includes adoption of gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring process. Gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring can go a long way in ensuring the gender-responsive school environment and processes.

Gender mainstreaming in education involves integration of gender at all stages and levels: curriculum, syllabus, textbooks, learning materials, teaching and assessment processes both in substance and in practice.

Promoting school-based and school-led research, initiatives and change processes

Change in schooling processes requires change in school ethos, change in classroom processes, change in the ways of interactions between principals and teachers, teachers and students, among teachers and among students. Shared vision and understanding is critical for this kind of change. School ethos and culture cannot be changed without developing shared vision of gender-equal processes and working collectively towards achieving that vision. Similarly, classroom-based changes leading to shifts in teaching/learning practices, styles, the language being used and stereotypes being questioned require a community of teachers who are willing to experiment, reflect, share and learn. A single teacher can initiate some of these, but it would be difficult to go far without support and reinforcement from others. It is important to recognise this fact in order to appreciate the need for promoting school-based and school-led research and change processes, especially when they are linked to bringing change in processes and gender-related attitudes.

Promotion of school-based and school-led research and change process also presupposes faith in the capability of school and recognition of the autonomy of teachers. Gender-responsive teaching/learning processes require a change in school environment and processes that recognise students', both boys' and girls', autonomy and tries to develop healthier, more wholesome notions of masculine and feminine. This is not possible in an environment that does not recognise and value teachers' autonomy. The study makes it clear that most schools would need external help and support to reach that stage where they are capable of developing a shared vision and initiating researches on their own.

The gender responsive school: an action guide

Following the completion of this research in seven countries, the idea of initiating a school-based Action Gender project was discussed and welcomed in the workshop where all researchers met to discuss the draft reports and present the findings to respective governments. The idea was to provide support to selected schools to develop into gender-responsive institutions in a manner that is empowering, documenting that process of change in order to learn lessons for broader application. The Commonwealth Secretariat supported this pilot project titled Action Gender in Schools in a small number of selected schools in four out of these seven countries: India, Malaysia, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago. The approach adopted by these four counties varied in many ways and the Secretariat organised a sharing workshop to facilitate exchange of ideas among country teams. The documented experiences of these projects led to the development of an action guide titled *The Gender Responsive School: An Action Guide,* meant mainly for teachers and principals but useful for policy planners and educational administrators as well. The guide was finalised after a trialling workshop where four Southern African countries (Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa) participated.

The guide – the result of collaboration among several players, significantly the team leaders and other researchers, teachers and staff of the schools participating in the pilot projects, and participants at the workshops – shows that it is possible to bring some significant changes in schools, if the process is appropriately conceptualised, supported and implemented. This offers practical and tested solutions for action at different levels, especially in schools. What makes this guide distinct is that it is based on real experiences and not merely ideas. It draws on the wealth of practical, well-documented experience in a variety of styles – reflection and analysis, action checklists, summaries of findings and experience – to provide lively and engaging content, with real life examples and voices.

Despair and hope

This research in seven countries looking at various classroom and other processes in selected secondary schools provided concrete indicators towards the fact that schools reinforce rather than question prevalent gender notions, and that learning experiences do not necessarily lead towards more equal gender relations and environment. The pilot Action Gender in School project that followed the study provided enough pointers to believe that schools can be made more gender-responsive if provided with adequate and appropriate support.

Notes

1. See Nussbaum (2000) for an argument for the universality of basic principles.
2. The 2007–2008 HDR presents the most recent data for the period up to 2005: there is no more recent data, as the 2009–2010 report is not due out until September 2009.
3. Peninsular Malaysia (Malaya or West Malaysia) and Malaysian Borneo (East Malaysia): separated by the South China Sea.
4. The HDI is a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions captured: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.
5. The GDI is a composite index measuring average achievement in the three basic dimensions captured in the human development index, adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women.
6. See the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (2009), pages 122 onwards, 248–249 & 250 and 302 onwards.
7. The GEM is a composite index measuring gender inequality in three basic dimensions of empowerment: economic participation and decision-making, political participation and decision-making, and power over economic resources.
8. As defined according to the International Standard Industrial Classification System, revisions 2 & 3.
9. Industry: mining & quarrying, manufacturing, construction and public utilities. Agriculture: agriculture, hunting, forestry & fishing. Services: wholesale & retail trade; restaurants & hotel; transport storage & communications; finance, insurance, real estate & business services, and community, social & personal services.

10. The default date of the UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report data is 2006, although data can range from 2004 to 2007.
11. See GMR, 2009, pages 248–249 & 250.
12. UNDP HDR, Page 332.