3.
varying dimensions and lessons emerging from selected commonwealth countries

This chapter attempts to broaden the existing understanding of boys' underachievement by looking at the situation in four Commonwealth countries – Australia, Jamaica, Lesotho and Samoa – in greater depth. The analysis is primarily based on the case studies of these countries found in Part II, but it also draws from the existing literature wherever relevant. For each of these four countries, it tries to identify the causes for the issues as they exist in that context and analyses an initiative undertaken to address the situation in order to determine (a) how far this has succeeded in the specific context, and (b) to what extent it has the potential for providing indications for policy or programmatic solutions.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE COUNTRIES

The four countries that were identified for this study are different from each other not only in terms of size and location but also in a number of social and economic indicators, as demonstrated by Table 4.

TABLE 4: SELECTED DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS FOR AUSTRALIA, JAMAICA, LESOTHO AND SAMOA

	AUSTRALIA	JAMAICA	LESOTHO	SAMOA
INCOME CATEGORY	HIGH	LOWER-MIDDLE	LOW	LOWER-MIDDLE
POPULATION (MILLIONS)	20.1	2.7	0.8	0.2
PER CAPITA GDP (US$)	29,632	4,104	2,561	5,854
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX (HDI)	0.955 (3)	0.738 (98)	0.497 (149)	0.776 (74)
GENDER-RELATED DEVELOPMENT INDEX (GDI)	0.954 (2)	0.736 (75)	0.487 (114)	NA

Notes:

1. HDI is a composite index based on life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, combined enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary education and per-capita gross domestic product (GDP).
2. GDI is based on life expectancy, education index and income index.
3. Figures in parentheses in Rows 3 and 4 represent the respective world ranking.

Sources: Income category from the World Bank, 2006; other information from UNDP, 2005.

While Australia is a large country with a population of more than 20 million, Lesotho and Samoa are tiny in comparison, each with a population of less than a million, and Jamaica is also comparatively small with a population of less than 3 million. A large proportion of the Australian population is made up of immigrants from diverse backgrounds and a small proportion consists of aboriginals, who are now marginalised in social and economic terms. The society has a multicultural nature, and different languages are spoken at home. It is a high-income country with a high level of human development and gender equality, yet it has pockets of inequalities in terms of socio-economic development as well as education.

Lesotho, a landlocked African country, and Samoa, a country consisting of two large and six small islands in the Pacific, are relatively homogenous in terms of the nature of their populations and languages. Lesotho is a low-income country with a low rank in human development and gender equality as measured by the *Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2005). A third of the population lives in the highlands and most people speak Sesotho. Livestock forms an important part of their lives. Samoa has a single system of societal organisation and language. Economically, it is much more advanced than Lesotho, the per capita GDP in the former being more than twice as high as the latter.

Jamaica is closer to Samoa in economic and developments indicators. Both are lower-middle income countries falling somewhere in the middle in the human development and gender equality world rankings. The most populous English-

...these four countries... provide a diverse picture of social features and economic development, therefore presenting an opportunity to understand the commonalities as well as the varying nature of the phenomenon of boys' underachievement in different contexts.

speaking Caribbean island, Jamaica is a predominantly black nation, with approximately 98 per cent of the population being of total (90.9 per cent) or partial (7.3 per cent) African descent. The remainder of the population is made up of East Indians (1.3 per cent), Chinese (0.2 per cent, whites (0.2 per cent) and 'other' (0.1 per cent).[3] Although racial differences are not as important as class differences, the lightness of one's skin is still an issue, especially since the minorities are generally members of the upper classes.

It is obvious that these four countries in the Commonwealth provide a diverse picture of social features and economic development, therefore presenting an opportunity to understand the commonalities as well as the varying nature of the phenomenon of boys' underachievement in different contexts.

THE ISSUE: COMMONALITIES AND DIVERGENCES

The preceding chapters have highlighted that

i the issue of boys' underachievement in education is essentially viewed and discussed in relative terms, contrasted to the achievement of girls in education, and

ii underachievement in education has two dimensions: under-participation and underperformance.

This section looks at these two dimensions of boys' underachievement in relation to girls' in the four countries, as depicted by the various available indicators. While it is relatively easy to get information on participation indicators for different countries that are comparable, this is always not the case with performance indicators. Countries adopt different ways of assessing performance, and information on these is not readily available. Hence, for participation an attempt has been made to use comparable indicators using the same data sources, whereas for performance whatever data is available for

3 Jamaican information on population from 2006 CIA World Factbook: *www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/fields/2075.html*.

different countries has been accessed and analysed. Despite these limitations of data, the analysis provides an idea of the situation in these countries in a comparative sense.

Relative under-participation of boys in schooling

A perusal of Table 5 shows that the situation in terms of literacy and educational participation at school level is quite different in these four countries.

TABLE 5: SELECTED EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS FOR AUSTRALIA, JAMAICA, LESOTHO AND SAMOA (PERCENTAGES)

	AUSTRALIA	JAMAICA	LESOTHO	SAMOA
ADULT LITERACY RATE (MALE)	NA	79.8	73.7	98.9
ADULT LITERACY RATE (FEMALE)	NA	80.2	90.3	98.4
GENDER PARITY INDEX (GPI) IN LITERACY RATE (FEMALES/ MALES)		1.00	1.22	1.00
NET ENROLMENT RATIO (NER) - PRIMARY (MALE)	96.4	94.4	82.9	98.6
NER - PRIMARY (FEMALE)	97.2	94.8	88.6	96.4
GPI IN NER - PRIMARY (FEMALES/ MALES)	1.01	1.00	1.07	0.98
NER - SECONDARY (MALE)	87.0	73.9	17.8	59.1
NER - SECONDARY (FEMALE)	89.1	77.0	27.2	65.4
GPI IN NER - SECONDARY (FEMALES/ MALES)	1.02	1.04	1.53	1.11

Source: UNESCO, 2005.

Australia is a fully literate (not shown in the table) country with a high level of participation by both boys and girls at both primary and secondary levels. Participation is not universal, however, and more needs to be done to raise enrolment rates at the secondary level. Gender parity is slightly tilted in favour of girls at both primary and secondary levels, but the disparity is marginal and therefore not significant.

Samoa is close to Australia in terms of literacy at higher than 98 per cent for both males and females, with a GPI of one (showing complete gender parity). The enrolment ratios for primary education are also high and similar to those of Australia, but the same is not the case for secondary education where enrolment ratios are much lower. Gender parity is in favour of boys at primary level but it changes sharply at secondary level. Not only do girls have a much higher enrolment ratio, but the differences between the enrolment ratios are also much

higher in comparison to those at primary level. This trend occurs while the enrolment ratios for both boys and girls remain low in general, and lower in comparison to Australia.

Jamaica presents a picture somewhat similar to Samoa in terms of enrolment ratios. At primary level these are nearly 95 per cent for both boys and girls, but gender disparity occurs at secondary level where the enrolment ratio for boys is lower than that for girls. The level of difference between boys and girls, however, is less than that for Samoa at secondary level as participation remains high for both sexes in Jamaica. On the other hand, the literacy rate in Jamaica is much lower at only about 80 per cent for both males and females. Lesotho, which is economically much behind Jamaica, has a significantly higher literacy rate for females. However, it is the only country out of these four that shows significant gender disparity in literacy rates, relatively lower yet quite notable disparity in primary level participation rates and very high disparity in secondary level enrolment ratios.

The...analysis makes it clear that under-participation is a major issue for boys in Lesotho; it starts at primary level and becomes very serious at secondary level.

The above analysis makes it clear that under-participation is a major issue for boys in Lesotho; it starts at primary level and becomes very serious at secondary level. However, this disparity needs to be viewed in a situation of very low levels of participation for both boys and girls at secondary level. Under-participation is also an issue in Samoa at secondary level, while that is not the case for the primary stage of schooling. Jamaica falls in the same category as Samoa, though the level of under-participation is not as high as Samoa even at secondary stage. Australia does not appear to be facing the problem of under-participation of boys at any level.

Relative underperformance of boys in schooling

Australia

The major issue relating to boys' underachievement in Australia is underperformance. Two types of sources have been used to indicate this: secondary stage results and the outcomes of Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a large sample survey in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and a few developing countries. A number of indicators for secondary stage education in the 1990s indicated underperformance of boys in different parts of the country. For

example, aggregate results at Grade 12 level show that in the 1999 New South Wales Higher School Certificate, for subjects studied by more than 100 students, the girls' average mark was higher than the boys' in 36 of the 40 subjects by up to 11 per cent. In 1998 in Queensland a greater proportion of girls were in the top performance bands in 36 of 45 Year 12 subjects, and in 1998 in South Australia a higher proportion of girls were in the top performance bands in 27 of 34 subjects in Year 12. The difference between boys' and girls' average results in the New South Wales Tertiary Entrance Score (TES) widened from 0.6 marks in 1981 to 19.4 marks in 1996, with the difference increasingly rapidly in the early 1990s.

Australia was one of the top scorers in all three areas – reading, mathematics and scientific literacy – in the PISA 2000 results. No significant difference in girls' and boys' performance in mathematics and science was reported in any of the Australian states or territories in 2000. PISA 2003 also did not show any gender difference in the means for overall mathematical literacy in Australia. But twice as many males as females achieved the highest PISA proficiency level, showing that girls were at a disadvantage when it came to mathematics. The situation changes, however, when it comes to reading literacy. Girls performed better than boys, though the level of difference was lower in Australia than most other OECD countries. The gap also varied between different states and territories within the country, being significantly higher in some as compared to others.

The Australian analysis also shows that socio-economic status compounds the difference between boys and girls in the case of reading literacy. Boys from low socio-economic backgrounds were found to be almost twice as likely to be in the lowest quarter of reading literacy results as girls from similar backgrounds. The results for mathematics and science also show a relationship between socio-economic status and the likelihood of achieving a low score, but this is the same for both boys and girls in science and not large enough to be significant in mathematics. Thus the relationship between socio-economic status and achievement in mathematical and scientific literacy in Australia was not as strong as the relationship for reading literacy. This suggests that schools may play a larger role in the development of mathematics and science skills than they do in reading skills, a conclusion that is corroborated by the fact that students in Australia who came from a non-English-speaking home background performed at an equivalent level in mathematical literacy to students whose home language was English, but at a lower level in reading and scientific literacy.

Students' results also showed some differences according to the location of their schools. Students in provincial cities performed as well as students in large cities and major urban areas, but students whose schools were in remote areas performed worse than other students in reading and scientific literacy. There was no difference in mathematical literacy results by location of school. The environment outside school appears to be having an important role in building reading literacy and to some extent scientific literacy.

An analysis of results related to 'engagement with reading' provides some insights into girls' higher reading literacy scores. 'Engagement with reading' reflects how much students like reading, how much they enjoy talking about books and going to libraries, whether reading is a favourite hobby, and so on. Australian students were at the same level as the OECD average in this area, but girls scored significantly higher than boys on this index in most countries including Australia. Attitudes towards reading were moderately strongly related to reading achievement in Australia.

... gender is only one dimension of differentiation that characterises the performance outcomes of 15-year-olds in Australia. Socio-economic status turns out to be more critical for both boys and girls.

It is also noteworthy that though nearly 40 per cent of Indigenous students in Australia performed on par with the average, in general they performed at a lower level than the non-Indigenous students in all three assessment areas. Gender differences were similar to the other Australian students, with females outperforming the males in reading literacy. No significant gender differences were found in mathematical or scientific literacy.

The analysis of PISA results makes it clear that gender is only one dimension of differentiation that characterises the performance outcomes of 15-year-olds in Australia. Socio-economic status turns out to be more critical for both boys and girls. However, what makes gender important is that similar trends of no significant difference in mathematics and science scores and a significant difference in favour of girls in reading literacy are observed for all socio-economic and social groups.

Jamaica

A study on gender differentials in enrolment and performance at the secondary and tertiary levels undertaken by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has been used as the major source for getting evidence for performance-related indicators in Jamaica (Bailey and Bernard, 2003). Using data submitted by

countries for the June 2002 Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations offered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), it was able to determine male/ female achievement gaps by subjects.

The CARICOM study shows that boys' and girls' achievements in Jamaica are evenly distributed at the General Proficiency level in 11 science subjects, with each gender having an achievement gap advantage in five subjects and one subject showing no evident advantage either way. The trends are somewhat similar to Australia, as girls perform relatively better in languages and the humanities and boys in science and mathematics. In the humanities (General Proficiency) girls clearly show better performance in all the subjects with the exception of French. With English language and literature being included in this category, the concerns regarding diminished literacy among boys and therefore the lack of rudimentary capacities needed for further education and learning are clear. Jamaica thus faces both under-participation and underperformance of boys at the secondary level of schooling.

Lesotho

Lesotho does not show a clear trend of boys' underperformance. The results of the second round of Southern and Eastern Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (known as SACMEQ II), an assessment survey held in a number of African countries, has been used here as a source. SAQMEC originated from a survey in Zimbabwe in 1991 and was later expanded to 13 countries, which included Lesotho in the second round. SACMEQ II assessed reading and mathematics achievements of Grade 6 on a sample basis. Boys and girls showed similar scores in almost all areas of Lesotho in these tests. The results of SACMEQ II 2000-2002 show that there is no notable difference between boys and girls even in reading literacy in the country. This is despite the fact that repetition rates are higher for boys. According to a report by the Ministry of Education and Training (2000), girls perform better than boys in all the grades at the primary education level, but the scores for both sexes level off in the final examinations. The main problem with boy's underachievement in Lesotho is under-participation.

Samoa

Two kinds of indicators are used for understanding performance in Samoa. The country has a system of conducting tests at the end of Years 4 and 6 in three subject areas: English, Samoan and numeracy. These assessments are used as

diagnostic tests to identify low scorers, with those not achieving a minimum level of desired competencies being designated 'at risk'. This is one source of information for lower levels. Another is the mean scores achieved in different subjects at the end of Years 8 and 12. Admission to post-basic level after Year 8 is determined by performance in the National Year 8 Examination, and hence it assumes special significance even for participation at the secondary stage of schooling.

The results for different years show that the proportion of boys identified as being 'at risk' has consistently been higher than that of girls for all three subject areas for both Years 4 and 6. The proportion of those not achieving the minimum desired competencies increases for both boys and girls in English and numeracy and decreases for Samoan at Year 6 in comparison to Year 4, but the disparity between the sexes continues, the proportion 'at risk' being much higher for boys in all the subjects. Unlike other countries, boys are not performing better even in numeracy in Samoa. In other words, with about 69 per cent of boys and 44 per cent of girls being 'at risk' in English and 76 per cent of boys and 58 per cent of girls being 'at risk' in numeracy (Government of Samoa, 2004a), the situation is alarming for both sexes, though far worse for boys.

A perusal of mean scores achieved in five subject areas – basic science, English, mathematics, Samoan and social sciences – for the National Year 8 Examination at the end of the primary level for 2001, 2002 and 2003 clearly show girls as performing better than boys in all subjects. The trends are similar for Year 12 results, where girls outperform boys in terms of mean scores in all subjects including mathematics, economics and physics. The difference, however, in mean scores is less notable in physics and mathematics as compared to other subjects such as economics, English or Samoan. Chemistry is the only subject where boys show consistently higher mean scores than girls for the period (2001-2004) for which data have been analysed. Although mean scores can be a deceptive indicator (as they do not reveal the proportion that actually achieves the mean, below mean or above mean), they do indicate clearly that boys are underperforming in Samoa. There is under-participation as well as underperformance, the former being more notable at secondary level while the latter is an issue at both primary and secondary levels. Underperformance at primary level could be one of the causes leading to under-participation at secondary level.

Summary

The above analysis makes it clear that Australia and Lesotho each face one aspect of boys' underachievement in education: Australia faces only underperformance whereas Lesotho faces only under-participation. On the other hand, Jamaica and Samoa face both under-participation and underperformance, especially at secondary level. The problem is sharper and more obvious in Samoa as compared to Jamaica. Boys' underperformance is limited to languages and humanities in Australia and Jamaica, which is the trend in most other countries wherever boys' underachievement has been noticed, whereas this is visible for almost all subjects in Samoa. The following section discusses some of the reasons that could explain these findings.

WHAT EXPLAINS THESE TRENDS?

This section draws from the country cases as well as from the available literature on boys' underachievement, gender equality and masculinities from these countries and elsewhere in and outside the Commonwealth. An effort has been made to understand these issues in their particular contexts by identifying general as well as typical causes of the trends in boys' underachievement as reflected through various means and measures. The analysis shows that, while it is important to understand the specific context, certain underlying causes are fairly universal. This is especially so in the case of boys' underperformance, particularly in languages and the humanities. Under-participation, on the other hand, has a range of explanations, some having similarities while others are very context specific.

In this regard, it should be stressed that boys' underachievement in any of these countries is not a result of the secondary position of men or gender under-privileging, and hence cannot be compared with the under-participation in education that girls have faced in all parts of the world at some point in time, and continue to face in many places even now. Most societies are primarily patriarchal and, despite varying degrees of change witnessed over time,

... it should be stressed that boys' underachievement in any of these countries is not a result of the secondary position of men or gender under-privileging, and hence cannot be compared with the under-participation in education that girls have faced in all parts of the world...

gender relations remain in favour of men in more than one way. For instance, Lesotho's patrilineal and patriarchal system continues to subordinate women to men, and the customary law classifies women as minors that need to be perpetually subjected to the guardianship of their male counterparts. Customary laws and tradition also remain paramount in Samoa. The *aiga*, or extended family, is important in terms of decisions and is headed by *matai*. While women are not prohibited by the Constitution from being elected as *matai*, many villages ban women for being chosen for this position. This restricts their political participation as only *matai* title holders can run for elections. In general, customary law and tradition provide greater power and authority to men (PPSEAWA, 2004). The data from these four countries on economic and political participation, the two major indicators for women's empowerment, clearly reveal that even where the law does not differentiate between the sexes, women's participation rates are visibly lower than those of men (Table 6).

TABLE 6: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA, JAMAICA, LESOTHO AND SAMOA: SELECTED INDICATORS

	AUSTRALIA	JAMAICA	LESOTHO	SAMOA
FEMALE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY (%), 2003	56.7	67.3	47.7	NA
FEMALE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AS % OF MALE RATE, 2003	79.0	86.0	56.0	NA
% SEATS IN PARLIAMENT HELD BY WOMEN, 2005	24.7	11.7	11.7	6.1
% WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL	20.0	17.6	27.8	7.7

Source: UNDP, 2005.

This indicates that the explanations for boys' underachievement either in terms of under-participation or underperformance in education have to be located within a situation where men continue to be advantaged in terms of power and privileges. The apparent reasons as emanating from different sources and case studies have been classified into three categories:

i social, economic and occupational practices;
ii paucity of school places and facilities; and
iii conformity to 'masculine' gender identity and 'feminisation' of schools.

i. Social, economic and occupational practices

Some socio-economic and occupational practices appear to play a role in keeping boys away from schooling, especially in Lesotho, and to some extent in Jamaica and Samoa.

As noted earlier, the highlands in Lesotho, where about one third of the population lives, have a tradition of boys herding livestock. Apart from being a source of pride, these animals are an important source of livelihood, and wealth was traditionally counted in terms of the number of livestock a family had. From as early as the age of ten, herdboys spend their days taking the family's livestock to a field where they can graze. During winter this often means taking the animals a few miles from home; when spring planting begins, these young boys need to move the herd further up into the mountains to look for pasturelands. Herdboys are one of the main groups that remain outside the fold of modern education. A number of researchers have pointed out that herding of animals is considered a good practice even in terms of socialising the male child to become a responsible member of family and society (Mokhosi et al, 1999). Most herdboys come from a poor family background, and the situation is worse for children who serve other families as herdboys and stay with their employers. They work for poor remuneration from a tender age and are denied many basic rights.

Some socio-economic and occupational practices appear to play a role in keeping boys away from schooling, especially in Lesotho, and to some extent in Jamaica and Samoa.

A clear relationship to socio-economic or occupational practices is less obvious in Jamaica and Samoa. In Jamaica, women have a higher unemployment rate despite having higher educational participation and achievement rates. For instance, unemployment rates for males in 2004 stood at 8.1 per cent as against 15.7 per cent for women, and in terms of active job-seeking only 4.5 per cent of males were looking for work as against 8.4 per cent of women.[4] It is possible that the labour market favours male employment and as such women continue with higher education as the only available choice. Women may also need to perform better to compete with men in a market that shows a bias towards male employment. However, in the absence of clear evidence, these are only conjectures.

The employment data in Samoa reveals that a high proportion of men are employed in traditional occupations such as agriculture, hunting and forestry,

4 Data from Statistical Institute of Jamaica, Jamaican Labour Force Statistics. Available at: *http://www.statinja.com/stats.html*

the proportion being as high as 44 per cent as against 14 per cent for females according to the 2001 national census (Government of Samoa, 2003c). It is likely that a preponderance of occupations that do not call for modern education as a pre-requisite means there is no catalyst to increase the demand for secondary schooling among males. However, there is no definite evidence to arrive at this inference conclusively. It is also possible to surmise that the labour market favours male employment and therefore women have to have higher qualifications to compete, and as such they continue their studies while boys discontinue theirs.

ii. Paucity of school places and facilities

A deficit in the supply of schools, school places and adequate schooling facilities appears to be playing an important role in boys' underachievement in Lesotho and Samoa. Highland areas in Lesotho face a paucity of teachers, especially qualified ones, as lack of facilities makes rural areas unattractive. A study undertaken by the Government of Lesotho and the World Bank (2005) revealed that 51 per cent of teachers in mountain areas are unqualified, compared with only 24 per cent in lowland areas. Even these figures may mask greater teacher shortages in the most isolated schools, many of which might not have any or only one qualified teacher.

Samoa appears to be facing the problem of a lack of school places at secondary level. Admission to secondary schools depends on performance in Year 8 examinations, and underperformance of boys at primary level translates into under-participation at secondary level. Therefore, though the paucity of school places is not directly responsible for boys' underachievement, an increase would enable more boys and girls to participate in secondary schooling. This is perhaps particularly true for rural areas as there is a concentration of facilities in the major island. Available information from Australia and Jamaica does not show any such trend.

It is important to add at this juncture that a paucity of qualified teachers or school places should affect both boys and girls, and it is difficult to assert that it affects boys more adversely. However, when seen in conjunction with the prevalent practice of boys adopting the profession of herdboy in Lesotho, and with an admission policy based on Year 8 results in Samoa where boys are underperforming, it can be safely inferred that such deficits affect boys' participation more adversely in these specific situations.

iii. Conformity to 'masculine' gender identity and 'feminisation' of schools

Conformity to 'masculine' gender identity that clashes with the demands of so-called 'feminised' education emerges as the most important and common reason given to explain underperformance of boys in general, and in humanities and reading in particular. While this relationship is clearer and better researched in Australia and Jamaica in comparison to Lesotho and Samoa, the evidences of 'masculine' identities and expectations of conformity to these are clear even in those two countries. What is not so obvious in these two cases is how this relates to the underachievement of boys.

Conformity to 'masculine' gender identity that clashes with the demands of so-called 'feminised' education emerges as the most important and common reason given to explain underperformance of boys...

There are several dimensions of differentiated gender identity that interact with education and provide certain explanations for boys' underachievement. As mentioned earlier, gender is a social construct, referring to the ways in which societies distinguish women and men and assign them social roles. Every society has its own notions of feminine and masculine qualities, behaviour patterns and roles and responsibilities. Despite minor and sometimes major differences in these notions across different societies, certain aspects of what define masculinity and femininity appear to be fairly universal. Men are universally viewed as warriors and protectors and women as care-givers. Masculinity is associated with physical and mental toughness, the capacity to conceal emotion, capability for sexual conquest and fatherhood, and with not being feminine. 'Not being feminine' assumes special importance when one tries to trace the relationship between masculinity and boy's underachievement in education (see chapter 2).

Formal education started as a male prerogative, and women across different parts of the globe earned this right only after much struggle over time. Till a few decades ago, education was still men's preserve even in the Western world. For girls and women, it was a special accomplishment to be able to access and complete education. With the rise of the feminist movement and the struggle for equal rights for women, having equal access to education became an important goal as well as a means for women's advancement. Education has been and is seen as a means of attaining other rights for women, and education itself is viewed as an achievement. As such, one of the factors that explain the better performance of girls is the sense of accomplishment that is attached to education for women.

However, the societal notions of masculinity and femininity have entered the arena of education as well. The streams of education and the professions that were considered most 'suitable' for women had their roots in the care-giving role and included subjects such as home-science, teaching, languages and nursing. Masculinity, on the other hand, came to be associated with subjects that demanded either precision or 'application of mind', e.g., science, mathematics and economics, or physical strength and power such as sports. Having equal access to and opportunities for education in all subjects and entry to all professions, including so-called 'masculine' ones, is something that women are still fighting for across the world. Therefore, an important distinction that came into being is that entry to traditionally 'men's subjects' or 'men's professions' is an achievement for girls and women, but the opposite is not the case for boys and men. Since masculinity continues to be associated with 'not being feminine', anything that is considered 'feminine' is considered not 'masculine' enough.

The socialisation of boys also affects their personalities, perceptions and performance in education. A perusal of the literature on masculinity in the context of homophobia emanating largely from countries like Australia, Jamaica, the UK and the US helps illuminate the nature of homophobic references, its impact on the masculine identity of boys and its relationship with boys' underperformance in education. Plummer (1999), for instance, traced through research in Australia how the use of words with homophobic connotations starts early at primary stage and targets boys for many non-sexual behaviours and preferences as well. A number of these words are used, among other things, against boys who prefer academic pursuits or solo men's sports over team sports, who are interested in reading books and doing well in class, who are 'teacher's favourite' or who choose subjects that are 'feminine' and so on. These have deeply negative connotations and serious implications for boys' behaviour and personality.

Plummer (2003) rightly argues that

> [during] crucial early periods in a boy's development homophobic words are deployed against non-sexual targets and these meanings persist into adulthood alongside later antigay connotations. Coherence between the early (nonsexual) and later (antigay) meanings is achieved because all of the meanings (early and late) share the quality of targeting behaviours and characteristics that are deemed inappropriate for boys as they mature. Thus homophobia is rooted in gender dynamics, but rather than specifically marking the inter-gender divide

> between masculinity and femininity, homophobia marks an intra-gender divide between appropriate, peer-endorsed masculine behaviour and a lack of appropriate masculinity (a failure to measure up).

Conformity to peer-endorsed masculine behaviour in school has direct implications for their performance, especially in languages and reading. Plummer (2005) suggests that "while not inherently gendered, the discourses deployed by the boys reveal that these transgressions do have a gendered basis...homophobia is triggered by departures from the expectations of the male peer group: by doing anything that, according to the group, a 'real man' would not do".

Seen from this perspective of what is referred to as 'hegemonic masculinity' by some[5], school and education are viewed as 'feminised'. Boys are not supposed to have an academic orientation and should not have any allegiance to teachers, as it would be tantamount to betrayal of the peer perception of 'manhood'. The fact that a particular kind of language that promotes use of slang is considered appropriate for boys, as discussed in the last chapter in the context of Jamaica, makes it difficult for them to perform well in language. On the other hand, as noted earlier, the feminisation argument also stems from the fact that girls' early childhood socialisation and their role within the household works well with the demands of homework and reading (Figueroa, 2000) and suits the ethos of education. It is obvious that the way these notions affect boys' performance is complex and multilayered. On one hand, inter-gender divides play a role where girls come to school with a different kind of socialisation, making them more amenable to schooling processes and demands; on the other, intra-gender pressures further push boys away from academics, especially certain subjects.

On one hand, inter-gender divides play a role where girls come to school with a different kind of socialisation, making them more amenable to schooling processes and demands; on the other, intra-gender pressures further push boys away from academics, especially certain subjects.

In this context, it is important to point out that the debate on masculinities and their impact on boys' underachievement also helps in understanding the class or racial/ ethnic characteristic of the phenomenon. The review of literature in the previous chapter has shown how in the context of Australia, Jamaica and the UK, boys from working-class backgrounds are more likely to continue with anti-school manifestations of masculinity, drawing them towards crime and anti-social behaviour in their adulthood, whereas boys from middle-class backgrounds find an alternative manifestation of masculine identity in the form of intellectual pursuits.[6]

5 See Connell (1987).
6 See, for instance, Epstein (1998), Figueroa (2000), Brown (2001), West (1999, 2002) and Mahony (1998).

THE INITIATIVES

The case studies from Australia, Jamaica, Lesotho and Samoa that form the next four chapters have tried to document the experiences of certain initiatives at micro level. Two of these are formal schools while the other two are outside the formal primary or secondary education system. In their own way, all of them have tried to address the issue of boys' underachievement, and the analysis of the experiences offers some lessons. This section provides a summary of the interventions followed by a discussion of the lessons learnt for (and questions raised about) likely solutions to the issue.

I. Creating a learning organisation in a multicultural, poor socio-economic neighbourhood, Australia

The school that was identified for this case study was a government inner city co-educational primary school located in Queensland. The school had previously been the subject of a detailed case study and identified as "one of the best for boys" by Lingard et al (2002), and the conclusions drawn in this case study are based on the earlier observations as well as those made in a recent visit.

A large primary school located in a low-income area, with over 800 students and 65 teachers, the school faces multiple challenges because of the socio-economic and linguistic background of its students. Most of the children's families are poor, coming from various cultural backgrounds and ethnic/linguistic minorities. Student absenteeism has been high, late arrival common and behaviour management a major issue. The school is especially relevant to this report because

i socio-economic status is the most important factor related to underperformance of students in Australia;

ii boys relative underperformance is evidenced largely in reading literacy; and

iii the difference between boys and girls achievement outcomes for reading literacy is wider for lower socio-economic status groups.

The school has been maintaining a database of progress of students, which shows positive change over the years. The school considers its focus on a collaborative pedagogical approach as the key to its success. This approach is said to help everyone, both those who have traditionally been underachievers and those who have been performing well. The reasons for this success can be

traced to imaginative and committed leadership from the principal and a number of pedagogical reforms initiated in the school. Strategies for greater involvement of parents have also been introduced.

The analysis of the experiences of this school helps in identifying two specific practices that has helped the school and its children perform well:

i An empathetic understanding of the socio-economic, linguistic and cultural background of students; and

ii A focus on cooperation and engagement in teaching methods and learning opportunities.

Interviews with both teachers and the principal showed that they recognised the challenges of the poor socio-economic status and multicultural backgrounds of students, but that they also saw this as an opportunity. Most teachers showed a good understanding of students' backgrounds and the impact these could have on behaviour as well as learning, and none of the students interviewed shared any negative experience from any teacher in this context. There was an overall belief in children's innate desire and ability to learn, with the principal noting that it is schools or individuals that switch off this basic desire.

The school considers its focus on a collaborative pedagogical approach as the key to its success.

The school focuses on cooperation and teamwork in its pedagogy and the kinds of learning opportunities it tries to create. It uses double teaching spaces, and two teachers work as a team to teach two grades. The use of interactive whiteboards in all double classroom spaces is a special feature of the school and provides a good example of the potential that technology has in making classrooms more engaging and interactive for students. Classroom observations showed that children enjoyed taking turns on the board and discovering new aspects of whatever they were learning through its use. Students also mentioned how, in addition to making subjects more interesting, using the board helped them to develop skills such as teamwork and sharing. Special efforts are made to engage children needing special attention. No gender differentiation was observed in terms of work allocation and efforts to engage children in different activities.

Interviews with teachers, students and the principal as well as classroom observations suggested that the school did not have any specific intervention for boys or girls, and did not perceive this to be a major issue. Rather, the

teachers were addressing the needs of each child depending on her or his situation. Students did not perceive of subjects as 'feminine' or 'masculine', as was seen in some of the statements they made in their interviews when several boys identified the arts as their favourite subject. When they did express stereotypical notions about boys and girls, these came from experiences in their homes. Although the school did not explicitly engage in countering such gender stereotypes, engaging all students in all types of activities and encouraging all students in all kinds of subjects was helping to break these down.

The case study of the school makes it clear that it could be termed a learning organisation in the sense that it is continuously learning from others' experiences as well as from its own. For example, research studies on similar schools were carefully analysed for learning lessons, and the principal encouraged teachers to experiment and share their experiences. This is how the interactive whiteboard got introduced into one classroom and then from there to the entire school. It is also important that technology was not being viewed as a means in itself, but rather as a way of promoting interactive learning. Another example is that the principal and teachers showed a reflective attitude regarding their challenges, efforts, successes and failures. The development of an positive learning environment that took the students' social circumstances into account could largely be attributed to the direction provided by the principal, who was taking the lead in understanding the specific needs of the school, promoting team teaching and also allowing leadership skills to be developed in all teachers.

II. Implementing a project, 'Change from Within', in a single-sex boys' secondary school, Jamaica

A former Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies (UWI), the late Sir Philip Sherlock, came across four inner-city schools in Jamaica that, independently of one another, were trying various ways of dealing with essentially the same problems of increasing violence and anti-social behaviour among boys. He brought them together under a programme called 'Change from Within', which involved a team of scholars at UWI in an applied research project to find ways of building the self-esteem of students, which in his opinion lay at the root of the problems. The principals, a few support staff and a the research team met as a Circle of Friends once a month to share experiences and ideas, plan strategies for action and learn how to improve leadership skills. A range of action research projects were undertaken, followed by strategic

actions. This also promoted partnerships among all stakeholders including the community, teachers, parents and students. The programme expanded from four to seven schools during the period when it was being led by the University and later to 32 schools. The methodology developed on the basis of analysis of work being done in seven schools by the UWI team helped in the later expansion. Within a similar approach, each school had the freedom to adjust strategies according to its own specific situation. The focus was on:

i creating a general awareness of the process;
ii building social skills;
iii establishing positive interdependence; and
iv encouraging supportiveness and building a good interpersonal environment.

At another level, this also included elements of institution building within the schools. A number of workshops, training sessions and meetings were organised that provided guidance and assistance to teachers and encouraged them to identify the problems and generate workable solutions, map plans for action and implement strategies.

...effective leadership required a set of important qualities. Some of these were: shared vision, commitment, team approach, problem solving/ conflict reduction skills, openness to learning and the ability to provide mutual support and to help manage the distress and challenges of change.

The Circle of Friends meetings were central to the methodology and facilitated effective feedback and communicative planning. As group members were faced with the challenge of mobilising participants at a number of different levels, it became clear that effective leadership required a set of important qualities. Some of these were: shared vision, commitment, team approach, problem solving/ conflict reduction skills, openness to learning and the ability to provide mutual support and to help manage the distress and challenges of change. A series of school-based action research projects identified two factors as primarily responsible for the alienation of boys from schooling and education:

i the nature of the early socialisation of boys by parents, their community and school; and
ii the 'drill to kill' teaching and learning methods that were perceived as having increasingly marginalised boys and also girls from the schooling process.

The introduction of 'active learning' and innovative ways of engaging parents in the education of their children produced positive outcomes.

One of the schools implementing the CFW programme had once been a very prestigious school, educating Jamaica's elite. However, its image had changed as the school started taking children from poorer backgrounds and it faced problems of violence, gang-culture, drug addiction and under-performance. Poor family relations made the students undisciplined and insecure, and there was inter-school rivalry and conflict. On the teaching side, there was low teacher motivation, 'cliquism' among teachers and a lack of effective staff development programmes.

Three kinds of strategies were followed in an attempt to change boys' desires to conform to a stereotypical male identity and help them to develop a wider worldview. The first was to introduce strict rules relating to weapons and violence. It had been common for students to bring weapons to school and use them within and outside the school compound. A stringent ban was instituted on weapons and any instrument that could be used to inflict injury, as well as on cellular phone use, and metal detectors were introduced to catch violators of the rule. In addition, an emergency response team was formed to deal directly with violators. The second strategy was the introduction of effective and easily accessible counselling services to help boys shed the stereotypical masculine identity that stopped them from being emotional and inter-dependent. The death of some boys from the school was a great shock and led many boys to seek counselling, which helped them to accept different norms of living. Counselling has assisted students a great deal in facing and challenging peer pressure and forming a different kind of identity in due course. The third major strategy was to follow a transparent and inclusive approach where teachers, parents and the students themselves were treated with confidence and trust that helped the school win the support of all stakeholders.

Although there are still some problems of continued drug addiction among a small proportion of students, the school has succeeded to some extent in making the desired changes. It can perhaps change more if the curriculum and teaching practices also become more inclusive and empathetic.

III. A basic education programme through distance mode, Lesotho

The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC), a department of the Ministry of Education and Training, was set up in 1972 to use distance education methods to address the needs of students who had not passed the final secondary education examinations. In 1977, a literacy and numeracy section, now the Centre for Basic Education, was added to provide literacy and skill training. This was started when it became clear that, despite the introduction of free primary education, some sections of society were not attending school. The reasons for this included the practice of having boys tend to livestock as well as the lack of value placed on education. The Learning Post (LP) programme was thus intended to cater for illiterate and semi-literate learners, a large proportion of whom are herdboys. It is very flexible and allows learners to complete the course at their own pace and time.

The formal education system is not geared to deal with the specific needs of children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, and learners who had dropped out stated that they had not felt comfortable there because of being older than other students and because of a lack of attention from teachers.

Those enrolled in the LP programme gave as their motivation the hope of better employment opportunities and being able to deal with the exploitation that they often face. The formal education system is not geared to deal with the specific needs of children coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, and learners who had dropped out stated that they had not felt comfortable there because of being older than other students and because of a lack of attention from teachers. These drop outs largely came from uneducated and poor households, where almost all mothers were housewives and fathers were farmers. The flexibility helped them cope with their need to also help support their families and engage in practices such as cattle grazing. Although not equivalent to primary education, the programme covers basic literacy and numeracy skills in addition to some vocational skills. All the respondents who were consulted stated that the programme has had a positive impact on the learners and their communities. Graduates of the programme have been actively participating in community-based development projects, which was seen as a good use of the skills acquired through the programme. There have been more male students – a large number of them herdboys – in the LP programme than females students.

However, although the programme has had a positive impact and helped a number of children and adolescents acquire skills that they would not have acquired otherwise, it has been questioned on several grounds. The LP programme does not provide learners with a full cycle of primary or basic education and hence it cannot be considered as equivalent to the primary stage. It thus does not appear to be in conformity with the rights approach as it provides an inferior substitute for poor children, a criticism often made of alternatives that do not have the same or equivalent curricula. In addition, the relevance of the present curriculum has been questioned and the need has been highlighted to include additional topics such as conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, career guidance, etc. A number of respondents suggested that the nature and quality of vocational skills need to change if the learners are expected to use these to find employment.

The low monthly honoraria paid to the programme administrators and teachers has led to most of the staff being middle-aged women as well as to a high incidence of turnover. Despite this, however, the level of motivation among these administrators/ teachers is usually observed to be high, one of the major reasons for the quality of delivery remaining acceptable despite adverse conditions. At the same time, it became clear in the process of consultation that motivation alone cannot sustain the programme and a number of interventions are required to improve it further. Major obstacles to improvement include the lack of a conducive environment and of adequate facilities for schooling. The respondents, particularly the administrators, indicated that the schools' proprietors do not allow the programme administrators to use their facilities. This confirms the finding of almost all evaluations undertaken for LDTC, which have recommended the more active involvement of stakeholders such as school proprietors, field-based education officers and parents/ guardians to improve the environment.

The LP programme relies heavily on the print and face-to-face modes of delivery, and there appeared to be widespread agreement that the use of modern technology would make the programme more accessible and cost-effective. This is especially relevant given the mountainous and remote nature of the terrain. However, while reception of Radio Lesotho is generally good throughout the country, its increased use as an education tool would only be possible if poor communities could be provided with radios.

For a number of reasons, the retention rates are apparently not very high in the LP programme. The most important has to do with the herdboys' lifestyle, as

those who are employed tend to change employers and so may move from the district or locality in which they were able to participate in the programme. Even when the boys herd their own cattle, the long working day makes it difficult for them to attend classes in the evening. Attendance may also be sporadic as boys tend to spend longer periods at the cattle post during winter while girls are retained at home for help during harvesting periods. It is obvious that the whole issue of child labour needs to be addressed as these practices clash with any form of schooling. Sometimes herdboys join circumcision school, after which they discontinue other forms of education. Early marriages are common, and girls are often not permitted to go back to class after marriage or pregnancy. Language also acts as a barrier in some cases due to not everyone speaking Sesotho (the main language).

IV. A vocational education alternative to secondary education, Samoa

Don Bosco Technical Centre is a single-sex boys' institution that responds to the needs of marginalised boys who have dropped out of regular formal secondary schools. It aims to facilitate their holistic development through an emphasis on technology education, career preparation and opportunities to develop social awareness. The Centre opened in 1989 with 32 students and had 250 in 2005. Most of the students come from the rural villages of the two largest islands: Upolu and Savaii.

The boys in the Centre revealed that teaching and teacher-related factors had been the most important barriers to their achievement in regular mainstream schools.

The four-year programme of study at the Centre focuses on design and technology associated with woodwork, metalwork, plumbing, mechanical engineering and boat building and includes theory, practical applications and information about the range of available career possibilities. Students are also offered courses in mathematics, communication skills, basic literacy, Samoan culture and religion. In addition, the Centre seeks to develop in its students the virtues of honesty, integrity, responsibility, trust and loyalty and strives to foster a commitment towards religious and moral convictions. It operates a flexible arrangement whereby students may leave on finding employment. Students who remain at the Centre for the duration of four years have a very high rate of success in terms of finding a job or continuing on to further studies.

The boys in the Centre revealed that teaching and teacher-related factors had been the most important barriers to their achievement in regular mainstream schools. They cited corporal punishment, threatening language, favouritism and lack of attention to weak students as examples of teachers' negative attitude towards boys from poorer families. The curriculum and pedagogy were described as narrow and uninspiring, with teachers failing to provide feedback and differential learning for varying abilities. There were also home-related factors that had caused them to drop out, the most common of which was the inability to pay school fees and meet other school costs. Girl-related factors included the fact that boys perceived girls to be distracting and feared being ridiculed in front of them due to lack of relationship skills. It appears that poor performance was also due to poor knowledge of the English language, which is the medium of instruction in secondary schools. A test of students entering the Centre showed that none of them had the proficiency required for learning other subjects through that language.

Most of the students at the Centre are there to obtain the skills necessary to finding a way to earn a living in order to pay back a perceived debt to parents, church and society. Students reported a great sense of achievement at the Centre in terms of learning skills related to technology and its application, development of appropriate attitudes, values and behaviour, and other life skills. They spoke of developing a sense of purposefulness, a keenness to learn and a disciplined lifestyle. Many of them reported improvement in language skills, and they also made special mention of communication skills, including increased confidence to interact with audiences of different sizes and ages. In addition, the boys appreciated the feelings of independence and self-confidence that came from being allowed to design and complete projects on their own. They felt respected and cared for.

The students identified seven principles that had led to their high level of support for the Centre and for their good performance: (1) enabling school environment, (2) school leadership, attitudes and philosophy, (3) nature of the curriculum, (4) education for life, (5) teachers' attitudes and philosophy, (6) teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills and (7) teacher-student relationship.

The school stresses the importance of respectful and meaningful dialogue between teachers and students, principal and students, and students and

students. Ways in which this is created include an annual residential one-week retreat for the entire school and regular whole school meetings with the principal. Students agreed that these meetings, which are used to challenge, motivate and counsel, had a great impact on them. A collective identity and cooperative attitude is also developed through the Centre's participation in outside-school events – including competing in the long boat (*fautasi*) races and sporting competitions and performing traditional dances. Students' achievements are highlighted in order to increase their self-esteem and self-image. Corporal punishment is not allowed.

The combination of theory with practical and workplace experience is clearly considered an effective approach by both students and teachers. An emphasis on interpersonal skills, understanding gender-related issues, diversity, decision-making skills, creative thinking and problem-solving skills, analytical skills for assessing self and others, information-gathering skills, coping and stress-management skills prepare them for life. The teacher-student relationship appeared to be relaxed and based on trust and respect, with teachers showing confidence in students' ability to do things on their own and students appreciating the special attention given to those who were perceived to be weak.

The combination of theory with practical and workplace experience is clearly considered an effective approach by both students and teachers.

There is no doubt that the Centre has helped these boys develop worthwhile skills and values including knowledge of various technologies, positive attitudes and behaviours, life and workplace skills, and spirituality. A language test also indicated an improvement in language and literacy as a result of their time at Don Bosco. On the other hand, the school also seems to reinforce the students' traditional notions of masculinity. Although this has helped in giving the students an identity and a purpose, it fails to change gender relations in the long run and therefore needs to be questioned.

Considering the fact that not much is known about the construction of masculinity in Samoan society and how, if at all, that interacts with school processes to contribute to boys' underachievement, it is difficult to arrive at definitive conclusions. The philosophies about maleness, masculinity and boys' ability to process themselves as males in Samoa and the interactions between these philosophies, practices and some of the evident patterns for males such as suicide and underachievement need to be studied further. With such deep-rooted beliefs in the role of the male in serving the family, it would

be important to find out what happens to males' notions of dignity when they find themselves in positions of underachievement at school and then in the community if they are unable to get paid employment.

HOW TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE: LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE INITIATIVES

The case studies of these four initiatives, one each of a formal school from mainstream systems in Australia and Jamaica, and two of outside-formal system, one using a distance mode for primary education in Lesotho and the other a means for alternative secondary education in Samoa, provide certain interesting insights regarding ways to address the issue of boys' underachievement. There are obvious limitations to generalising from case studies, and it is important to be aware of those caveats before applying the lessons on a wider scale. Nevertheless, the case studies succeed in providing valuable pointers for policy and programmatic solutions, and also raise questions for further research that would help in understanding the phenomenon better.

School leadership plays a major role

Boys' underachievement, either in terms of participation or performance, is a result of a complex interplay of forces; it is not a creation of school processes alone. As such, it would be unfair to expect schools to provide a complete solution. Nonetheless, the case studies from Australia, Jamaica and Samoa clearly reveal that schools can make a difference. The three schools were dealing with difficult circumstances in different contexts – an Australian school facing children coming from diverse ethnic and low socio-economic backgrounds, Jamaican students practicing violence and Samoan students having failed in the mainstream schooling system – and used reformed management and pedagogical practices to succeed in helping students achieve.

In all three cases, school leadership played a very important role. The principals of the three schools have been a source of inspiration to their teachers as well as students. They have taken bold decisions regarding introducing reforms in

management as well as teaching practices, and carried them through. They have shown signs of leading a learning organisation in continuously seeking new opportunities to learn and promote experimentation by colleagues. The environment in these schools helped develop leadership skills among teachers in general, reflecting the principals' leadership and managerial skills.

An emphasis on cooperation, confidence-building and conflict resolution helps create an enabling environment

An emphasis on cooperation, confidence building and conflict resolution as against competition and rivalries appears to help in creating an enabling school environment for teachers as well as students. The focus on cooperation even in classroom organisation in the Australian school succeeded in creating an ethos where teachers are dependent on each other and young primary grade children also identify mutual dependence and teamwork as essential skills. The 'Change from Within' project in Jamaica focused on cooperation, and the participating principals not only learnt from one another but also passed on the principles of shared vision and teamwork to their teachers and indirectly to students. Students in the Samoan school clearly identified the creation of space for continuous dialogue between teachers and students as an important positive feature of the school. These practices helped create an environment of trust. This proved to be critical in developing a sense of self-worth among boys, a key requirement for better performance and achievement at any age.

An emphasis on cooperation, confidence building and conflict resolution as against competition and rivalries appears to help in creating an enabling school environment for teachers as well as students.

A focus on active learning and respect for students helps to engage them

The focus on active teaching-learning processes, as against practices that require children to sit passively and learn, helped in engaging students and improving their achievement levels. These practices have to be chosen on the basis of age-appropriateness. The primary school-age boys and girls in the Australian school enjoyed working on the electronic board that allowed them space for experimentation and discovery, whereas the secondary school-age boys in the Samoan school appreciated undertaking projects from the beginning to the end

on their own, and both sets of children identified these activities as confidence-boosting and leading to better learning. The experience of the Australian school showed that both sexes enjoyed active and participatory learning as compared to those practices that did not require them to engage themselves. The case studies do not provide space for this analysis for secondary-stage students as both the schools under consideration (Jamaica and Samoa) are single-sex boys' schools.

Respect for students, irrespective of their age, emerges as an important factor that helps them develop respect for teachers and appreciation of teachers' efforts. Boys in the Jamaican school and Samoan centre clearly felt respected, which made them take their teachers more seriously. In this context, it is interesting to see that the principles that are emerging as successful in contributing to better performance of boys are also the ones that generally help any student, boy or girl, to perform better.

Female teachers a barrier: myth or reality?

A preponderance of female teachers in schools in certain countries, especially in the Caribbean and Pacific in addition to the developed countries, is often cited as a characteristic of school that deprives boys of suitable role models. The initiatives studied here do not provide any definitive indicators in this regard.

...it is interesting to see that the principles that are emerging for being successful in contributing to better performance of boys are also the ones that generally help any student, boy or girl, to perform better.

The Australian school is co-educational, with the majority of teachers being women. This did not seem to be creating any problems for the boys. However, this is a primary school and it could be argued that the sex of the teacher does not matter so much at that age. The majority of teachers in the Lesotho distance learning centres are also women. Although this is a primary education programme, a number of students belong to the secondary age-group, and they have not provided any negative feedback about teachers. On the contrary, teachers' motivation and role were cited as major reasons for the success (albeit limited) of a programme that operated under adverse situations. The remaining two schools are single-sex boys' schools for secondary-age students with all male teachers. Students are comfortable with teachers but it is not clear how they would have responded to women teachers under similar management or teaching practices. These case studies do not provide any negative experience of students in other schools. It is, therefore, difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion in this regard. Limited

evidence from the case studies suggest that it is not the presence or absence of female teachers but the adoption of a particular kind of management and teaching practices that make a real difference.

In this context, it would also be important in any future research to raise the issue of the kind and type of various male role models that are available in society and school, and their impact on the construction of masculine identity.

Are single-sex schools a solution?

Single-sex schools for boys are another solution often offered to tackle boys' underachievement. It is difficult to arrive at a definite solution on the basis of the case studies in this regard as well. The Australian co-educational school does not face any problem and nor does Lesotho's distance teaching programme. It is not very clear to what extent the single-sex situations in the Jamaican school and the Samoan centre have benefited students. Therefore, it cannot be said with any degree of confidence that the change that was achieved in these schools could not have been achieved in a co-educational situation with similar school management and pedagogical practices. The Jamaican experience suggests that simply being a single-sex school at the outset did not automatically make the boys less alienated and better performers. It requires greater enquiry to arrive at any definitive inference in this regard.

Alternative modes of schooling have potential

The Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC) in Southern Africa and the Don Bosco Technical Centre in Samoa are the two examples of outside-mainstream systems of schooling identified in this study. Lesotho's Centre strives to provide a basic education to herdboys whose duties often prevent them from attending formal schooling. Since the under-participation of boys in Lesotho is primarily due to socio-economic and cultural reasons, the distance mode is seen as a solution. However, the courses currently offered by the LDTC are not equivalent in terms of curriculum and quality to formal schooling and hence do not showcase the potential of open and distance learning (ODL) as a complementary system for marginalised groups to obtain access to education for all.

During the LDTC's early days, in the mid-1970s, its work on literacy and numeracy for herdboys was considered exemplary. The Centre had developed

workbooks and games that could be used in groups with the help of a trained leader. The project took several years to develop and eventually received the recognition of an international award. While the LDTC still survives, its current results are mixed. The print-based correspondence courses that are currently used to support the herdboys have done little to improve access to education in the country (nor do these course incorporate the principles that underpin the methodology of ODL, which includes structure and support from a provider)[7]; the institution as a whole lacks resources and is therefore unable to develop; and morale is low among LDTC staff. Further, the innovative vision of linking in-school and out-of-school education has not been realised (Jenkins, 1993).

There are, however, examples in sub-Saharan Africa where ODL, used as a pedagogical alternative, has been successful in providing basic and secondary level education to out-of-school children and youth. These include the Botswana Centre for Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL), the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), the Nigerian National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) and the Interactive Radio Instruction (IRI) initiative in Zambia. Both the Nigerian and Zambian initiatives provide primary education to children with the aim of improving literacy. NCNE provides primary education to children of nomadic pastoralists and migrant fishing communities via suitable delivery mechanisms such as boat schools and other mobile schools. The Zambian initiative broadcasts lessons over the radio to learners in IRI centres using an interactive approach. Children (from 8 to 10 years) are organised into listening groups that meet at the centres under the guidance of mentors, who themselves are school leavers (and who have subsequently been trained by qualified staff from the Zambian Ministry of Education).

There are...examples in sub-Saharan Africa where ODL, used as a pedagogical alternative, has been successful in providing basic and secondary level education to out-of-school children and youth.

At the secondary level, BOCODOL in Botswana and NAMCOL in Namibia are two parastatal or semi-autonomous national institutions offering programmes for out-of-school adolescents and adults who are unable to continue their secondary level studies in formal schools for various reasons. Both institutions offer courses leading to the Junior Secondary Certificate (Grade 10) and the General Certificate of Secondary Education (Grade 12) and employ a combination of face-to-face and specially designed ODL print materials

7 Adapted from the definition provided on The Open and Distance Learning Quality Council website: *www.odlqc.org.uk/g-odl.htm*; see also *www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/2904*.

supported by radio, audiotapes and, most recently, computers. In addition to these secondary level programmes, both institutions are expanding their repertoire by providing vocational and other pre-tertiary courses. The majority of learners enrolled in NAMCOL live in rural areas of northern Namibia or in severely disadvantaged urban areas. BOCODOL offers programmes throughout the country, including special programmes for nomads through which students have an opportunity to access a series of community learning centres as they move across the northern part of the country (Dodds, 2003; Green and Trevor-Deutsch, 2002; Mukhopadhyay and Phillips, 1994).[8]

Don Bosco Technical Centre's emphasis on high-quality vocational education at secondary level is well placed as a choice for post-basic education. However, such a choice cannot be promoted exclusively for boys and that too only for those who have failed in the mainstream system of schooling. This would undermine the importance of vocational education for anyone, including those who perform well in the regular secondary system, and also undermine the importance of reforming the mainstream system in a manner that allows students of both sexes from all kinds of backgrounds to learn and progress.

Schools should actively question stereotyped gender identity

...management and pedagogical practices that promote cooperation and active participation can help somewhat in breaking down traditional gender divides.

None of the four case-study schools/ centres, except the one in Jamaica to some extent, deliberately sought to address the issue of questioning prevalent or stereotyped gender identity and constructing a new gender identity that would help boys deal more effectively with schooling processes. However, the Australian school inadvertently succeeded in achieving this objective by adopting certain practices due to the leadership style of the principal and the kind of pedagogical practices that the school was adopting. This shows that management and pedagogical practices that promote cooperation and active participation can also help somewhat in breaking down traditional gender divides. Nonetheless, evidence from the same school also shows that more deliberate and active engagement is required in this respect as children from a very early age start forming and responding to social gender identities that they get exposed to in and outside the school, with home and family playing a major role.

8 For other examples of open schooling, see the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India: *www.nos.org/*; Open School BC (Canada): *www.openschool.bc.ca/index.html*; the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (Canada): *www.adlc.ca/home/*; and The Correspondence School of New Zealand: *www.correspondence.school.nz/*.

The Samoan case study suggests that the Centre tried to uphold and reinforce the 'traditional' masculine identity of boys, emphasising their role of protector, and it helped them in developing a positive self-image and identity. However, it does not provide a solution for all schools, especially in the mainstream system, if the vision is to develop a society where sex is not used for any form of discrimination and gender relations are based on equality of treatment and opportunity. The Jamaican school provides more interesting insights as it succeeded in breaking the pressure of peer-endorsed masculine behaviour that leads to violence and other negative behaviour and is a major reason for boys' underperformance. As in the case of the Australian school, the adoption of particular kinds of management and pedagogical practices that emphasise cooperation and trust-building has helped. This confirms that such practices have great potential for addressing issues related to masculine gender identity. In addition, certain specific strategies such as counselling played a major role in breaking the myth that boys should not show the need for emotional support and care.

... it is important for schools to play an active role in questioning the prevalent gender identities to address the issue of boys' underachievement. The experiences show that it is also possible to do so.

It emerges that it is important for schools to play an active role in questioning the prevalent gender identities to address the issue of boys' underachievement. The experiences show that it is also possible to do so. However, an in-depth analysis of curricular design and classroom practices in diverse situations can provide greater insights and more pointed indicators.

THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND ITS NATURE

This report has outlined the issue of boys' underachievement in the Commonwealth, discussing some of the possible causes and analysing some of the initiatives that appear to have addressed the issue. In this process it has also provided a few broad policy and programmatic suggestions. However, clearly there remains a lot more to be researched for greater understanding and more pointed policy recommendations. This includes:

1 In-depth and qualitative gender analysis of management and pedagogical practices in secondary schools operating under diverse situations and contexts: co-education, single-sex for boys, single-sex for girls, female-majority teachers, mixed-sex teachers and male-majority teachers. This could be undertaken in several countries following the same research design but with an understanding of the social and economic background in which the school operates and the nature of the boys' underachievement prevalent in that particular country or region.
2 A study of teenaged boys in diverse situations and contexts to understand the construction of masculinities and its impact on educational choices and processes.
3 A study of the relationship between boys' underachievement and gender privilege in diverse situations and contexts through analysis of statistics from different countries using both education (participation as well as performance data) and socio-economic and political indicators.
4 Identification of best practices, including the application of open, distance and technology-mediated learning and associated challenges and potentials.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the above analyses that boys' under-participation and underperformance both have their roots in a few general issues and characteristics of societies as well as education systems. There is also a lot of similarity in the manner in which this combination operates against boys' schooling participation in some countries as it works against girls' participation in many others. A combination of paucity of school spaces and societal demands regarding occupational or gender roles leads to under-participation of boys in countries such as Lesotho and Samoa whereas similar lack of adequate schooling facilities coupled with strict demands of gender roles work against girls' schooling in many Sub-Saharan African and South and West Asian countries. The solution, as is well known, lies in not only expanding the school spaces and facilities but also challenging established notions of gender roles, relations and stereotypes using all possible interventions inside and outside the school.

Transforming gender roles and relations in order to relieve the huge pressure of conforming to established notions of 'masculinities' is critical in addressing the issue of boys' underperformance, which especially occurs in countries or sub-national areas that have succeeded in expanding access and girls participate in schooling in high numbers. Increased participation of girls in situations where education was not their traditional domain signifies a shift in gender relations. Men start viewing this as shrinking the space for themselves and look for domains that are exclusively for men and therefore 'masculine'. Education itself, including good performance, is labelled as feminine, and not working hard and doing well is considered to be 'cool' by boys.

The case studies showed that schools can make a difference provided they focus on certain processes that promote cooperation and respect and question gender stereotypes. It is also interesting to note that most of these processes are such that they help both boys and girls and raise the quality of schooling in general. The case studies also suggest that changes in schools' curricula and processes are more crucial than having male teachers or all-male classrooms. Therefore, while there is a need for more researchers to develop a more nuanced understanding, there is also a need for this realisation that the issue of boys' underachievement is not de-linked from the issue of female social positioning, and school reforms based on the principle of gender equality can go a long way in addressing the root of the problem.