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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Deepening the Analysis

Roshan Chitrakar

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Foreword

Advances in girls' education enable them to participate in and contribute to their societies and economies more broadly. Quality education also helps change their lives for the better. But a pervasive cycle of disparities faces girls in South Asia and threatens this realization.

Several studies have looked at the aspects influencing progress in girls' education, including the series of UNGEI Issues Papers published by UNICEF ROSA. The present study takes us a step further, by a deeper analysis of the ways in which the countries of the South Asia region are working towards enabling girls to overcome barriers.

The study brings together the results of the available literature showing the status of girls' education in South Asia, emphasizing that girls frequently suffer from multiple disparities – the barrier to education for girls is often compounded by other issues including caste, ethnicity, religion, poverty and remoteness. The study offers a critical analysis of the steps that countries are taking to overcome these barriers, as well as feasible policy options and tools for advocacy.

All countries in South Asia are making serious efforts to work towards gender parity, equality and equity within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All targets. These efforts can help ensure that girls can realize their rights to education through improved access, and *within* education though quality teaching and enhanced learning outcomes.

The study is directed towards both policymakers and practitioners from Ministries of Education, Planning and Finance, and INGOs and NGOs, as well as academics and other professionals in the field of education. It is an effort to understand the steps being taken – and further steps which need to be taken – in order to overcome the barriers to girls' education.

Daniel Toole
Regional Director
UNICEF ROSA

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AGEI	Afghanistan Girls' Education Initiative
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAMPE	Campaign for Primary Education
CDC	Community Development Council
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
CGA	Country Gender Assessment
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CMES	Centre for Mass Education in Science
COPE	Community Organized Primary Education
DFID	Department for International Development
DISE	District Information Systems for Education
DoE	Department of Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DWS	Department of Women's Studies
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDI	EFA Development Index
EFA	Education For All
EGS	Education Guarantee Scheme
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESCO	Eastern Self-reliant Community Awakening Organization
GAD	Gender and Development
GCE	Global Campaign for Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEEI	Gender Equality in Education Index
GEI	Gender-specific EFA Index
GEP	General Education Project
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GoI	Government of India
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
HRRAC	Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium
ICT	Information and Communication Technology

IDEAL	Intensive District Approach to Education for All
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KTS	Kumbeshwor Technical School
LDC	Least Developed Country
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MWTL	Multiple Ways of Teaching Learning
NAEP	Northern Areas Education Project
NCED	National Centre for Educational Development
NCERT	National Centre of Educational Research and Training
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NPE	National Policy on Education
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PDP	Perspective Development Plan
PEDP	Primary Education Development Project
PMED	Primary and Mass Education Division
PMS	Post-Menstrual Syndrome
PSPMP	Primary School Performance Monitoring Project
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
SAP	Social Action Programme
SMC	School Management Committee
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SKP	Shiksha Karmi Project
UCEP	Underprivileged Children's Education Programme
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNGEI, SA	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, South Asia
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VEP	Village Education Plan
WID	Women in Development

Executive Summary

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the achievement of education and gender-related goals of EFA and MDG in the South Asian countries by adhering to the framework of a rights-based approach; and to offer feasible policy options and/or tools for advocacy, as appropriate, for Ministries of Education of the region.

The analysis of documentary evidence for this study is informed by the need to investigate the barriers to girls' education and gender equality in South Asian countries that UNICEF (2007) has outlined along with the investigation of more critical aspects as outlined by Heward (1999a, p.10) (see Section 2.3). For each country of the South Asia region the status of girls' education has been described. Factors supporting as well as hindering girls' education are explored through the study of available documents, most of which are internet based. The findings of the country analyses are then collated to map out the regional scenario of girls' education. Recommendations of policy and/or other remedial measures to address the issues of barriers have been made, specific both to individual countries of the region and to the region as a whole.

Afghanistan

The long-standing war in Afghanistan prior to and during the Taliban regime stalled not only the education of girls but also the entire process of development for many decades. The consequence of the war history looms large in present-day Afghanistan with the education sector facing massive challenges. Lack of female teachers and basic infrastructure are among the key obstacles to girls' education. With the advent of democratic government in the country in 2001, promoting girls' education has become a priority development agenda. Afghanistan's constitution recognizes the education of girls as their fundamental right. The first 5-year National Education Strategic Plan has attempted to uphold this constitutional provision through priority programmes for a speedy promotion of girls' education.

The challenges of promoting girls' education are massive, hence concerted efforts will need to be made for many more years to come. Special measures such as incentive packages are essential to bring more girls to school and narrow the gender gap. The incentive for girls to pursue higher education is even more critical to ensure that they are motivated not only to enrol in basic education but also to complete it and acquire further qualifications.

Integrating gender education in the teacher, headteacher and school management training programmes can potentially create a conducive environment for girls in schools. Enhanced capacity of stakeholders at macro- and micro-levels to carry out gender audits and meet gender-related targets will be a significant step forward. With a secure and violence-free environment at and on the way to school, the enrolment of rural Afghan girls' in school can be multiplied many-fold. The state will be required to accept the high cost involved in raising the status and level of educational attainment of girls in the country.

Bangladesh

The concerted programmatic efforts of both the government and civil society organizations have produced a significant result in the field of girls' education. The girls' stipend programme is an outstanding

example, now extended up to secondary and higher secondary education, that not only brought economically disadvantaged girls into primary school but also motivated them to complete the cycle.

Access of girls and boys to primary education is no longer an issue, but evidence of quality and impact of improved access is lacking. For example, the country has made remarkable progress in reducing fertility but evidence is lacking to establish a link between this achievement and the improved access to basic education. The eligibility criteria of the stipend programme include the requirement for girls to remain unmarried until they turn 18, which may have been a cause of the fertility reduction over the years. The country, therefore, needs to demonstrate that students are getting quality education and are being increasingly empowered – to assert that educated women are taking control of their lives by, for example, voluntarily delaying marriage and giving birth to fewer children, but not by being under enforced criteria or rules. The state now needs to focus on the transformative purpose of education. What is required is that girls going to school need to be meaningfully involved in the learning process, experiencing and feeling a sense of accomplishment rather than just being judged by outsiders about what they should learn and what their educational competency should be.

It is prudent, therefore, that the state authority revisit how 'success' in basic education is defined and perhaps redefine it in the light of the need to assure quality and optimize impact. More qualitative investigations are required to understand why, for example, the outstanding improvement in access does not match girls' survival up to grade 5. The state needs to know if girls from specific backgrounds are deprived of the incentive programmes and quality education, and why many of them are still the victims of harassment, abuse and intimidation at school or on the way to school. Similarly, issues of female teachers and their training on empowering pedagogy are still not effectively addressed.

The Primary and Mass Education Department should initiate an administrative reform process to allow innovations and ideas to evolve and promote a bottom-up approach to planning, administration and management of primary education programmes. The issue that girls are under-achieving in primary education compared with boys needs to be seriously addressed. A policy supporting girls' entry into technical and vocational streams is necessary to encourage girls to realize new possibilities and aspirations as a result of completing the primary education cycle and continuing through secondary education.

Bhutan

The fact that there is an almost equal number of boys and girls attending primary education in Bhutan is commendable. Through their wide-scale participation in basic education, girls have acquired literacy and general life skills. But girls' participation in technical and vocational education is far less than that of boys – only 33 per cent of students are girls, and less than 1 per cent of teachers are female. Girls are yet to use their primary education to find further learning avenues that are linked directly to livelihoods, economic opportunities, and social and political empowerment. This has contributed to continuing the traditional gender roles in which women are confined to multiple household tasks and remain deprived of a decision-making role.

Women's and girls' social roles are subtly subordinate to those of men and boys. In the rural areas girls have to settle for a major role in subsistence agriculture and domestic chores. The options for technically and managerially oriented economic opportunities are mostly not for girls and women. The subtle subordinate gender role of girls and women is reflected in the gendered student composition of technical,

vocational and management fields at secondary and post-secondary levels. An institutionalized approach to gender audit will help unfold such a subtleness of gender bias in public educational institutions and propose appropriate policy options to address the associated issues. Girls in Bhutan will benefit educationally and socially if the current primary education curriculum includes pedagogical content and processes that guide students through a more critical outlook and orientation. The country needs to spend more on promoting girls' education, rather than curtailing the existing provisions such as discontinuing the boarding school facility in isolated areas on the grounds of cost.

India

Promoting girls' education has been a priority in India for over a century, but discrepancies still persist in learning opportunities. Education in public schools for rural poor girls and women is largely limited to acquiring literacy and numeracy. The second category of 'superior' schools, mostly in urban areas, is not within the reach of the poor. Only limited learning opportunities in rural public schools are left for girls from poor and deprived families. The focus on access has brought many girls into school, but assuring quality remains an ever-debated issue. The public education system could learn much about innovative approaches from some of the civil society organizations that promote active learning pedagogy.

The excessive emphasis on meeting quantitative targets through free and compulsory primary education schemes is referred to as dichotomization of educational provision into 'access first' vs. 'quality later'. Deprived children, including large numbers of girls, are offered this quality-compromised free education through what is formally known as 'transitional school'. Competing and consecutive political ideologies have all resulted in more education and progress towards EFA, but of low quality, where the poor and deprived, particularly girls, suffer the most. The state takes the approach not to 'waste' resources on pumping funds into the 'uninterested' section of social groups in the form of expensive high quality education.

Deprived women and girls themselves need to have their voices heard and their concerns reflected in the policies. In this context, it will be crucial for them to be mobilized and organized and to intensify their own movement for social justice and equality in education to bring about much-needed transformative education of girls.

Maldives

Universal primary education and attainment of universal adult literacy have been achieved by the Maldives. However, the systems of secondary and post-secondary education and vocational training programmes have excluded equitable girls' participation. Girls and women are required to take up family gender roles that discourage them from participating in education beyond primary level. Since opportunities for post-primary education are available only in urban areas or city centres situated only on some islands, continuing their education becomes nearly impossible for girls as their safety away from home becomes an issue. Primary education, on the other hand, lays an essential foundation for those girls if they are offered the opportunity for higher education.

The country has achieved reduced fertility and child mortality as well as women's increased access to micro-credit, but this study finds no research-based evidence to demonstrate that universal participation of Maldivian girls in basic education has contributed to this achievement. The literature does not reveal any case, story or narrative of girls and women that explains how a basic-educated girl or woman has made sense out of her educational participation. Gender parity of enrolment in primary education has

not told us much about parity or disparity in other areas of education, or about other socio-economic and political benefits to girls and women. More importantly, the female-headed households in the country (which is almost the highest ratio in the world) do not seem to receive policy support to bring about educational, political and socio-economic transformation in their lives through measures like educational cost subsidies, especially to sustain girls' participation and achievement.

With the outstanding achievement of near universal access to primary education, the country now needs to focus more how education – particularly that of girls – changes the social relationships and upholds poor women's economy. One immediate step would be to reform the primary and the adult non-formal education curricula. The pedagogical content should include gender role analysis. Similarly, a gender audit should take place at the institutional level to provide gender data for balancing roles and structures more equitably. Political will to engender organizational structure is absolutely essential in order to allow gender equity in the workplace, which in turn can motivate girls to continue schooling at higher level as well as to pursue learning in fields that have traditionally remained the domain of males.

A conscious scrutiny with a gender lens is deemed necessary to analyse national issues related to access to education, distribution of education resources, sustaining general educational management and educational information systems. School and teacher training focused projects should make their output, outcome and impact indicators more explicit with progress milestones in terms of closing the gender gaps. Not only should the state develop an engendered primary school curriculum framework, but also the curriculum development process should include a series of consultative workshops with stakeholders extensively debating on critical social and gender issues to decide on objectives, intended learning outcomes, choice and relevance of contents.

Nepal

The education system is principally guided by the overarching framework of decentralization. The implication is profound for gender mainstreaming in basic education, especially, from the point of view of establishing it as a fundamental human right of every girl. The School Management Committees are authorized to do their own planning to achieve their educational goals through a tool known as the School Improvement Plan (SIP). This is a tool through which the local stakeholders attempt, albeit still with much lack of clarity and understanding, to articulate their vision of schooling for children. However, there are issues, problems and serious challenges related to lack of effective implementation of SIPs, not least the capacity and dynamics of local stakeholder groups and lack of a clear government vision in devolving responsibility to local levels. Gender, albeit one of the most critical issues, is often ignored by such plans. The important aspect, however, is that the law requires local stakeholders to do their own planning and produce SIPs. With the persistent involvement in the micro-planning process backed by strategic policy support, the local stakeholders are increasingly engaged in critically assessing the status of girls' education and demanding programmes and resources to address gender issues – girls' scholarships, availability of female teachers, girl-friendly school environments, etc.

The micro-planning process, therefore, is one important and potential tool through which pro-girls' initiatives could be pushed with definite targets and a framework for monitoring progress and early indications of impact on the lives of girls. But with the gender-blind context so pervasive at the community and school level, discrimination against girls often does not draw the attention of the local stakeholders when they prepare the SIP. Therefore, stakeholders should not only be involved in the preparation of the SIP

but they also need to be mobilized to be involved in the interactions and debates on girls' education issues, in the process of analysing the general social context from a gender perspective, and in the exercise to clarify their school's vision/mission/goals. A social audit would be beneficial for this purpose. Participatory and transparent poverty mapping in a rural context needs to be built as a socially felt obligation for the School Management Committees for them to determine a just safety net system for poor and deprived parents who are required to bear heavy opportunity costs for sending their children, particularly their daughters, to school.

While schooling of girls needs to be persistently emphasized in the micro-plans, the formal and adult non-formal education initiatives need to be converged to allow poor, non-schooled or non-literate parents a second chance of learning opportunities through literacy education and productive or occupational skill train-ing, so that they can earn enough income to support, among other things, formal schooling of their children.

Pakistan

The government has made serious efforts to address the issue of girls' education in Pakistan, which has resulted in an improved scenario at the macro-level. Large-scale interventions (e.g. stipends for girls, enrolment campaigns) have yielded remarkable outputs with increased enrolment and retention of girls in primary school. However, much needs to be done for programme interventions to be adequately responsive to specific needs and contexts. Most needy girls from remote communities, e.g. in the North-ern Areas, suffer due to the lack of equitable response to their specific needs. Therefore, the progress in narrowing the gender gap is yet to gain the required momentum in order to fully ensure the rights of every child to basic education within the desired time frame.

An important lesson that could be drawn from the Pakistan experience is that even the incremental change that has taken place in the country could not have occurred without a conducive policy environ-ment supported by intervention programmes that are both supply-oriented as well as empowering or demand-driven. The enthusiasm of rural parents to see their daughters becoming educated is not ad-equately matched by provision as rural and remote areas still lack even the basics like schools. The argument made at the international level that lack of resource must not be the cause of children's deprivation of their right to education does not seem to work in the rural Pakistani context.

At the policy level the state is yet to ensure legal guarantee of a free and compulsory primary education to all school-age children. The allocation of national budget to education is well below the average of South Asian countries. Because of this the poorer sections of the population have suffered the most. Resources need to be allocated to promote social mobilization and adult non-formal education programmes, particularly in conservative rural communities, to allow parents to understand the positive aspect of their daughters' educational attainment.

The growth of private sector involvement in educational development is no doubt a necessary condition but needs to be regularized with gender-sensitive, pro-people and socially responsible mandates. Most importantly, the government needs to take care that public education is not marred by the entry of the private sector. The government should find ways to make the 'adopt a school' scheme regulated to private schools materialize in its true sense so that private schools become instrumental in raising the quality of public schools.

Sri Lanka

Almost all Sri Lankan children go to school, hence as many girls as boys attend primary education and beyond. The social impact of educational has been phenomenal – reduced infant mortality rate and women's fertility rate with increased prevalence of contraceptive use by married women. However, the decrease in Gender Empowerment Measure (indicative of the extent to which women are politically active, and socially and economically empowered) raises some issues on the ability of the education system to promote equality beyond parity.

There is therefore a need to ensure women's visible, equitable and meaningful participation in the country's apex social, economic and political domain. Disciplines which lead to more lucrative and socially recognized career opportunities (e.g. information technology, industrial studies, engineering) and the sphere of politics along with the senior management positions in the bureaucracy are all male dominated. Therefore, educational attainment of girls at the basic level should inevitably be complemented by strategically supported further education opportunities for them in multiple disciplines and in multi-sector career paths. Such an approach could not be more necessary for girls and women belonging to the poor and deprived social groups as well as those affected by conflict.

The general education content reinforces gender role stereotypes, hence blocks gender equality in the macro-environment. The education system, therefore, needs to pay heed to the girls' everyday life experiences in classrooms and surroundings. This requires a change in the system's approach to educational research and innovations. Sri Lanka needs to focus beyond UPE and GPI to more on improving social development indicators, including gender equality measures. The country should address the issues of the ever-increasing number of educated unemployed female youth and women's exclusion in politics and senior management.

South Asia Region

At least three issues of girls' education surfaced prominently in this study:

- Firstly, there are countries in the region (Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan) where enrolment of girls has remained problematic, indicating a clear disparity between girls and boys in terms of access to basic education.
- Secondly, inequality in educational access of girls and boys is also a function of whether they come from a rural or urban context and also which social class or linguistic groups they represent. Cultural tradition and gender role stereotypes are mainly responsible for the continuation of such inequalities.
- Thirdly, in countries where gender parity in enrolment has been largely achieved (Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka), another form of exclusion of girls exists – which also applies to the other countries of the region. Girls' improved access to basic education has not meaningfully contributed to their social and political empowerment. Discrimination against girls has continued when it comes to making choices among different fields of study at secondary and tertiary levels. Girls are discouraged from pursuing an education that leads to a better-paying career in future, e.g. in technical, vocational and information technology fields.

While gender inequality exists both in key access-related indicators, across different geographic regions and socio-linguistic groups, and in the quality of educational services that boys and girls receive, the task of measuring inequality has remained heavily influenced by quantitative methods. Achievements in reducing the gender gap in education are mostly measured quantitatively in reference to the indicators

identified for the EFA GMR – with emphasis on measuring gender parity. The indicator-specific measurement does have its merit, but without also measuring more of the qualitative educational experiences of diverse users through participatory processes, development agendas such as gender equality remain the concern merely of macro-level players and the increasingly argued issue of ownership of the end users is left unaddressed. Analysis of non-quantitative structural gender issues reveals issues not shown by quantitative analysis.

The importance that South Asian countries have given to education is yet to be complemented by matching allocation of budget to the sector in most nations in the region. It is high time that the budgetary threshold for education proposed by UNESCO, i.e. 4 per cent of GNP, is honoured by such nations. Increased resource allocation to the education sector is essential to specifically support girls' education. The policy support for girls' education on the other hand is yet to be translated into implementation, particularly in some specific countries.

Effective knowledge management having the potential to capture the deep-rooted problems of discrimination of girls against an equitable participation in education is an issue for all the countries in the region. The educational management information systems in place are heavily top-down and oriented by macro-management agendas. What they do not capture is ground realities related to various barriers that continue to exist and adversely affect the issues of access, quality and equity in basic/primary education, especially for girls. States in the region need to set up district-based, community-based and school-based management information systems for local data collection and analyses.

All the countries in the region persistently face the problem of poverty and socio-cultural factors as persistent barriers to girls' education. Much needs to be done through policy initiatives, programmes and special initiatives to address related issues, particularly compensating for the opportunity costs of sending girls to school. Strategically crafted initiatives and social mobilization programmes are deemed necessary, particularly to tackle the deep-rooted social–cultural barriers. Opportunities should be provided to practise critical pedagogy through participation in literacy and non-formal education programmes for non-literate adults. There is a need for state nations of the region to address the issues of fear and insecurity that girls are forced to face on a day-to-day basis, be they due to the culturally unfavourable perception against girls and women or due to war and conflict. As they walk to school girls often are subjected to abuse by 'eve-teasers' and those who, for various reasons, do not support the education of girls. Alternative forms of education, for example setting up satellite campuses and feeder schools, and recruitment of local female teachers could address the issue. Quality of education, however, must not be compromised.

Issues of barriers to girls' education must be tackled at many levels. While issues as fundamental as gender-insensitive curricula need reforms, issues related to women's empowerment in social, economic and political spheres and their participation in the labour market, politics, policy and decision making, planning and management cannot be ignored. The overall thesis emerging from this study is that:
- Provision for girls' education is not universally available.
- Poverty and socio-cultural factors are persistent barriers to girls' education.
- The analysis of barriers to girls' education within education systems is not deep enough.
- National budgets are not sufficient to provide adequate and appropriate girls' education.

PART I

1

Purpose and Context

The single most important factor preventing girls from attending and achieving in school is gender discrimination. Girls and boys both have hurdles to overcome. For girls the hurdles are, for the most part, higher and more frequent – simply because they are girls. (UNICEF, 2007, p.1)

1.1 Background to the Study

As part of an effort to establish girls' right to education as a human right, and child protection as an integral part of the learning environment, this study has been commissioned[1] by the United Nations Girls' Initiative (UNGEI)[2] in order to:

- contribute to the achievement of education and gender-related goals of EFA and MDG in the South Asian countries by adhering to the framework of a rights-based approach; and
- offer feasible policy options and/or tools for advocacy, as appropriate, for Ministries of Education of the region.

South Asia remains the most gender-unequal and insensitive region in the world (UNICEF, 2005a). Cultural and social beliefs and practices interface with each other to form multiple and overlapping disparities that exclude girls from their right to education.

Patriarchy and a preference for sons, combined with parental perceptions of the opportunity costs of investing in girls' education, often seen as 'watering a neighbour's tree', have become risk factors for girls' education.

South Asia leads the world in the number of early marriages. Fifty-eight per cent of girls marry before the age of 18 (and are considered 'women' from the age of 10 in some countries), compared with 42 per cent in Africa and 29 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Education is a huge determinant in preventing early marriages (UNICEF, 2005b).

The nature of girls' labour, in the form of household chores, agricultural and home-based work, often means this work is unreported, unvalued and invisible. Trafficking of girls for sex work, bonded labour, or from one form of exploitation to another, is part of the problem as well. Girls' labour, therefore, continues to be a major barrier to accelerating progress towards achieving gender parity and equality in

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[1] *The study was commissioned under the auspices of UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia.*

[2] *UNGEI was launched in 2000 as a partnership of organizations committed to the MDG and EFA goals for girls' education and gender, with UNICEF as the lead agency. The UNGEI partnership is represented at global, regional and country levels. The South Asia regional UNGEI has six working groups under eleven thematic areas relevant to girls' education in the region, i.e. health, education in emergencies, quality education, barriers to girls' education and gender disparities, gender mainstreaming, and poverty and vulnerability. Each of these working groups is co-chaired by the UN and INGOs leading in those fields.*

education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2006). The root cause of this is deeply related to girls' expected gender role within their families and societies.

Even when they do manage to enter school, girls' self-esteem and confidence are often restricted by gender-stereotyped curricula, teachers' low expectation of girl pupils and a school environment characterized by aggression, ridicule, harassment or corporal punishment. These 'glass ceiling' issues prevent girls from obtaining quality education and completing school.

Numerous international commitments and evidence that affirms the power of girls' education have still not enabled the majority of girls in South Asia to complete primary education, let alone get into second-ary school. The imperative for examining this lapse in society is strong because we know that education is critical for girls, as girls who have been to school do better than those who have not, in every aspect of life. We also know that we must address girls' education within the broader aspects of disparity and exclusion which affect their lives.

1.2 The Agenda for Gender Equality

After learning extremely hard lessons from human history, especially during the two devastating world wars, the war-torn nations came together in 1945 to organize as the United Nations to envision a more civilized world where human rights, dignity, peace and equality between women and men were en-sured. Since then, gender equality has remained a key agenda of the global community – as explicit in the UN Charter (1945), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), and in the most recent Millennium Declaration that has spelled out specific Millennium Development Goals (UNICEF, 2006). However, the very fact that the international community has been required to persistently push the agenda forward in the past 62 years is in itself a testimony that much still needs to be done to achieve the goal of gender equality. The pledges and declarations made by nations in various international conventions have propelled both scholarly inquiries and activisms that in turn have led several gender discourses to evolve.

The ongoing discourse on gender and women's issues has, since the mid-1990s, captured the theme 'gender, education and development' (Heward, 1999a). This theme has evolved through a continuum of discourses since the post-second world war global context. Women in the immediate post-war context were looked down upon as worthy of mercy and welfare support – not capable of playing any significant role in development. Women in Development (WID) emerged during the early 1970s as the discourse that challenged and negated such treatment. WID's arguments focused more on the role that women could play in development, but lacked critical gender analysis, for example how deep-rooted the histori-cally defined gender roles were which resulted in deprivation and discrimination of certain groups of women and men. The fact that the 'unnatural inequality'[3] which emerged out of such deprivation and discrimination is nothing more than a socially constructed phenomenon was not so much of the subject of investigation in the WID discourse. The gender and development (GAD) came as a complementary discourse to WID that emphasized the importance of gender analysis.

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[3] *Jay Prithivi Bahadur Singh, a Nepali humanist activist of the early 20th century, elaborated this concept of unnatural inequality in his speeches at various international forums (see Singh, 1929).*

However, the over-emphasis of the analysis framework of GAD on the distinctive categorization of 'women and men with discrete relations' (Heward, 1999a, p.2) has undermined the need to be sensitive to the complexities of gendered power relations emanating mainly from the diversity of cultural and socio-economic status of women themselves. In the midst of such critiques of GAD came the structural adjustment programme of IMF which, according to Stromquist (1999), remained completely gender-blind in its conceptualization. The prevailing wisdom, however, placed gender mainstreaming as a high policy priority seeking the acknowledgment and better understanding of the rather complex, subtle, ambiguous and enigmatic gender issues responsible for discrimination and deprivation of specific groups of women and men.

2
Gender Equality: The Role of Education

2.1 Emphasis on Girls' Education

Added to the gender discourse since the mid-1990s is the acknowledgment, especially by the classical liberal economists led by the World Bank, that investment in girls' education contributes to achieving several socio-economic development goals. Hence, arguments in favour of gender, education and development gained momentum. Therefore, dialogues and arguments promoted by the gender, education and development discourse have rightly brought the education agenda in the forefront. Herz (2006) has argued the case for educating South Asian girls in that 'a drive to educate girls through the secondary level could pay off tremendously in South Asia – perhaps more than in most other regions, because South Asia has lagged in female education and so has forgone its benefits for longer' (p.ix).

With the global acknowledgement of the high value of education, national governments, donors, international lenders and aid agencies started investing in education of girls. Promoting girls' education has been a top international development policy priority of the multilateral agencies and donor community – as is evident in 'almost every critical international conference or rights document relating to development, gender and human rights (Subrahmanian, 2006, p.18). The global commitments to achieving both the EFA and MDG goals have particularly focused on meeting specific targets related to girls' education in developing countries.

However, experiences, programmes and policy responses to the complex gender issues (convincingly argued by critiques of WID and GAD frameworks) are yet to be explored and consolidated, more so in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, to unfold why the gender gap in key education indicators still persists in most of the countries of South Asia (see Table 2) despite the high investment priority that girls' education has received.

What factors have kept girls from attending primary schools; and in the case of most of those who have attended why has it been so difficult to retain them in school and for them to pursue secondary and higher education? It is in this context that this study attempts to generate a well founded and evidence-based knowledge base on barriers to as well as good practices of education of girls in South Asia.

2.2 Barriers to Girls' Education

Factors responsible for barriers to girls' education can be categorized according to how one perceives and defines barriers. Barriers take different forms – e.g. barriers to access, barriers to quality services and barriers to relevant curricula and/or pedagogy. Barriers due to historically embedded chauvinistic stigma attached to the public psyche can be very powerful and subtle social norms. Barriers to girls' education can take differential forms across nations/societies depending upon the socio-economic, religious and

cultural contexts. Furthermore, barriers can be perceived as either intrinsic or extrinsic to girls in relation to how they experience educational participation. As well, some barriers can be obvious while others are subtle and tacit. What needs to be acknowledged is that the concept of barriers to girls' education is highly complex, hence for the analysis to be comprehensive, the lived experiential meanings will have to be unpacked through qualitative, phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiry processes.

In its website UNICEF (2007) outlines the following generic barriers to educating girls:
- Family poverty
- Weak legal frameworks around education
- Uneven playing field from the start
- Issues of safety and security around school affecting girls
- Lack of relevance of school to the lives of children.

These are all very important factors but are mostly external and obvious ones. Radical feminists and critical social theorists probe much more deeply into the social contexts of girls and boys – ranging from the closer contexts of household, school or community to more macro and policy contexts of parliament, ministry of education or district education office – and examine the root causes of the barriers to girls' education (Grundy, 1987; Stromquist, 1995). In her effort to address the issue of racism in the class she had taught, Grundy was confronted with many subtle racial relations due to students' historically em-bedded socio-psychological contexts that made her wonder why her conscious efforts could not instil empowering experiences among the learners.

Stromquist, on the other hand, offers a critical social perspective for analysing gender power relations in different social contexts of girls and women at household, community, school, district education or ministry of education levels. In studying barriers to girls' schooling, the critical perspective seeks an analysis framework to accommodate, among others, questions related to power relations and under-lying assumptions of institutional operating processes, as well as of programme or state interventions, use of languages and metaphors. Interventions intended for gender equality, according to Stromquist (1995), often tend to be superficial and illusive. In asserting this point she mentions, as has also been quoted aptly by Heward (1999a, p.9), that 'women have obtained more symbolic than real victories from the state and have constantly underestimated the ability of education in the reproduction of conventional gender identities' (Stromquist 1995, p.454).

2.3 The Framework for the Study

This study of the factors/interventions/policies responsible for barriers to girls' schooling or those contributing to enable girls to attend schools in countries of South Asia has been informed by the need to investigate both the five areas that UNICEF (2007) has outlined and the more critical aspects as outlined by Heward (1999a, p.10). UNICEF's concept of barrier is more inclined to the supply approach to girls' schooling, and stresses promotion of resources and affirmative programmes in order to help girls break away from the historically and socially imposed 'culture of silence'.

In the same vein Herz (2006) has listed a number of affirmative policy options that are in line with UNICEF's concept. Subrahmanian (2006), on the other hand, takes the conceptual position that matches

more with that of Heward (1999a). Subrahmanian (2006) emphasizes 'creating broader social consensus about the importance of girls' education' and moves beyond 'access expansion measures' to the achievement of much 'broader individual freedom outcomes'. A balance of these two conceptual positions forms the basis of analysis for this paper (Table 1).

Table 1 Defining the scope for investigating barriers to girls' education and gender equality in South Asian countries

Adapted from UNICEF (2007)	Adapted from Heward (1999a, p.10)
1. Family earning – opportunity costs of education	1. Opportunities for girls to have a voice and be acknowledged as active agents rather than passive consumers of education and development
2. Provision of legal frameworks around education	2. Extent to which debates have been allowed to explore 'education issues well beyond access, enrolment and level of attainment to that of the micro-processes of schooling, curricular content, meanings and the way in which girls and women construct their understanding of education'
3. Expectation and treatments of girls and boys from the stage of early childhood	3. Meaning and values attached to educational attainment – beyond economic to social and political pay-off
4. Issues of safety and security around school affecting girls	4. Consideration of the historical, social and cultural context – gender, plurality and education
5. Relevance of school to the lives of children	5. Gender-aware and sensitive institutions

3

Girls' Education and Gender Equality in South Asia

Much has been done at national and international levels to promote the agenda of gender equality in education. The Millennium Development Goals have emphasized the need for concerted efforts on gender equality in the education sector. South Asian countries are party to international pledges of ensuring education as a fundamental human right of every girl and boy. They have made commitments in international forums, most notably since Jomtien in 1990, that necessary policies, plans and programmes will be put in place and resources will be mobilized to see that the time-bound MDG and EFA targets will be achieved. However, gender inequalities in all eight countries of South Asia have remained a serious challenge in their attempts to ensure every child's right to education. The past 15 years have witnessed numerous gender-focused initiatives in these countries which have yielded re-markable changes in the status of girls' education, although much still needs to be done to achieve fuller gender equality.

The quantitative scenario of girls' education in the global and national contexts has been consolidated in the EFA Global Monitoring Reports. They have largely presented the scorecards or quantitative achievements in the indicators of gender equity or equality in education, among others. Clearly, at the global level such measures of gender equality in education have been helpful to assess how countries are keeping up with their national targets and how the achievements compare among nations over time. Equally important is the qualitative assessment of progress on gender equality, which obviously is not only a much more complex and rigorous task but also is highly contextual. Comparing the results and ranking the nations as is done on the basis of indicators such as the Human Development Index (HDI), Gender-specific EFA Index (GEI) and Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) is not possible in the qualitative approach to assessing progress. Hence, it would not be practical to expect the Global Moni-toring Reports to consolidate and include country- or context-specific qualitative assessments as com-prehensively as they have done with the quantitative assessments of indicators. The country-specific analysis presented in this paper attempts to draw on both the indicator-specific assessments of progress and on more localized reporting of qualitative experiences.

Table 2 Status of basic education indicators by South Asian countries and selected territories

Countries or territories	EDI 2005	GEI 2005	GEEI 2001[1]	Adult literacy rate (age 15+) 2000–2004[2]		Youth literacy rate (age 15–24) 2000–2004[2]		GER in pre-primary education 2005		New entrants to G1 with ECCE experience 2004/05 (%)		Primary Education								% of female teachers 2005
												GER 2005		NER 2005		Survival to final grade 2004		Transition from prim. to sec. general education 2004 (%)		
				Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	Total	GPI (F/M)	
World	–	–	–	82	0.89	88	0.92	40	0.97	–	–	107	0.95	87	0.96	87.0	0.99	91.8	1.01	62
Developing countries	–	–	–	77	0.83	85	0.92	34	0.97	–	–	108	0.94	86	0.95	79.0	1.04	87.5	0.99	57
South & West Asia[3]	–	–	–	60	0.66	75	0.89	37	1.00	–	–	113	0.93	86	0.92	79.0	1.01	85.1	0.96	45
Afghanistan[4]	–	–	–	28	0.30	34	0.35	0.7	0.80	–	–	129	0.63	61	0.62	–	–	–	–	34
Bangladesh	0.76	0.91	0.48	47	0.76	64	0.90	11	1.01	–	–	109	1·03	94	1.03	65.0	1.06	89.3	1.06	34
Bhutan	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	38
India	0.80	0.81	0.41	61	0.66	76	0.81	41	1.01	–	–	125	0.93	89	0.93	79.0	0.94	85.1	0.96	44
Maldives	0.91	0.95	–	96	1.00	98	1.00	46	1.11	82	0.98	94	0.98	79	1.00	–	–	78.2	1.10	66
Nepal	0.73	0.81	0.36	49	0.56	70	0.74	49	1.01	19	0.95	126	0.95	79	0.87	79.0	1.17	76.7	0.94	30
Pakistan	0.65	0.68	0.20	50	0.55	65	0.69	27	0.91	–	–	87	0.76	68	0.76	70.0	1.05	69.0	1.07	46
Sri Lanka	–	–	0.94	91	0.97	96	1.01	–	–	–	–	98	–	97	0.96[5]	–	–	97.0	1.03	79

Source: UNESCO (2008b), EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008

EDI: EFA Development Index; GEI: Gender-specific EFA Index; GEEI: Gender Equality in Education Index; ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education

GER: Gross Enrolment Ratio; NER: Net Enrolment Ratio; GPI: Gender Parity Index

[1] Unterhalter, Rajagopalan and Challender (2005) quoted in Unterhalter (2006)

[2] Data of most recent years for the given period

[3] Includes Islamic Republic of Iran, which comes within the UNESCO sub-region

[4] The source of GER, NER and corresponding GPI is EMIS 2007 (Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, 2007a)

[5] ADB (2007a, p.1)

4

Overview of the Status of Girls' Education in South Asia

The preceding sections have explored the country-specific situation of girls' education in the South Asia region as an aggregate of the national context and, where possible, as more of a micro-analysis of girls' right to an education and their educational experiences on the ground. Clearly the eight countries of South Asia have displayed varying status of girls' education both at national and experiential levels. Advocacy for gender parity (rather than gender equality) has remained the predominant concern in most of the documents reviewed (most notably in the EFA GMR 2007). Whether the apparent increase in girls' participation will be sustained and will have a transformative and empowering effect has not been adequately explored in such documents.

Available stories of girls' educational experiences have pointed to both possibilities and challenges pertaining to gender equality in education, and gender analysis needs to be broadened and widened by taking into account the social and experiential dimension of girls. Narratives and stories generated on the ground need to be heard and the issues raised by them need to be addressed.

This chapter consolidates the progress documented in the previous country-specific narratives against the quantitative targets particularly related to EFA, noting the enabling initiatives and the continued systematic discriminations that South Asian girls are subjected to that have bearing on their access to educational opportunities. Some themes have emerged while collating the country analyses, which are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Information Base

The global monitoring of progress against EFA indicators requires countries to establish more or less a standardized EMIS at the national level. This requirement tacitly undermines the importance of establishing a system of monitoring that keeps track of how users' perceptions and aspirations about education and the way meanings are made out of educational participation have changed over time along with the observed quantitative achievements in gender parity. Nonetheless, it is quite understandable that in the common context of severe lack of capacity in most of the countries of South Asia (as also in those of Sub-Saharan Africa), increasing the level of sophistication of the EMIS could add complications. Presumably because of the adherence to this view, the EFA GMRs have managed to obtain required data from most of the countries.

However, not all South Asian countries have made available the data for all the indicators. This being the case, it is not possible even to paint a clear quantitative (let along qualitative) picture in terms of how the

region is progressing towards achieving the EFA targets, specifically, those reflecting the gender disparities in education. The data cells corresponding to Bhutan in Table 2 are all empty except the one on percentage of female teachers. Afghanistan shows a little better picture than Bhutan's in terms of availability of data. Sri Lanka and Maldives, albeit showing an outstanding enrolment scenario, still have some cells without data that are crucial for calculating key gender indices.

The scenario of incomplete data on important EFA indicators in five of the eight South Asian countries is in itself a testimony that some countries in the region have not empirically, at least statistically, mapped out the situation of school-age girls and boys in terms of how they are progressing to realize their rights to good quality basic education. This raises the issue of the nations' capacity to diagnose problem areas (such as gender inequalities in education) and strategically respond to them, for example with legal provisions and targeted programmes. And by implication, those nations may have fallen short in abiding by their endorsement of the UN Charter of 1945 and commitments in international forums such as Convention of the Rights of the Child and Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

4.2 Progress Towards EFA Targets

South Asian countries, where data is available, have made visible progress in the education of girls – as evident in the time series data of 1999 and 2004 on EFA indicators (UNESCO, 2008b). Yet participation in basic education of children in general and girls in particular is still unacceptably low. South Asia takes a fifth of the share (15.8 million) of the 77 million global children who were out of school in 2004, most of whom come from rural poor families having mothers with no schooling or literacy (UNESCO, 2008a). Seventy per cent of these are girls. The figures on GER and NER in primary education and transition from primary to secondary general education are almost at par with those of the other developing nations but the gender parities do not compare evenly. Bangladesh, Nepal and India in particular have demonstrated the dividends of prioritized spending on girls' education and action-backed commitments to gender equality. The credit for the regionally competitive figures in those indicators goes largely to the outstanding progress made by these countries along with the historically maintained progress of Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Gender parities in primary education enrolment and transition to secondary general education too have improved since 1999 but are yet far from attaining full parity. This is also explained by the gender composition of the 15.8 million out-of-school primary school age children in South Asia with 11.5 million girls (70%) compared with 5 million boys belonging to this category.[4] Availability of female teachers in schools, which is widely felt as one key factor to attract girls to school, is still very low with only 44 per cent of teachers being female. In South Asia as in Sub-Saharan Africa and West Asia, 'there are too few women teachers to attract girls to school and retain them' (UNESCO, 2008b).

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[4] *The 2004 figure of 15.8 million out-of-school children in South Asia is a drastic reduction from 40 million in the period 1999–2001 (UNICEF ROSA estimate). The proportion of girls, however, increased further from 60% in 1999–2001 to 70% in 2004, which indicates that education of girls has remained neglected and the bold and informed steps that are required to dismantle the social, cultural, economic, political and physical barriers to girls' education are yet to be put into practice in South Asian countries.*

4.3 Multiple Disparities and Girls' Educational Attainment

Rural–urban gaps in all the eight countries of South Asia, and the resulting variation in girls' educational attainment, are quite prominent. In 11 rural provinces of Afghanistan, for example, girls make up less than 20 per cent of total primary school enrolment compared with the national average of 39 per cent. In three of the Southern provinces, which used to be Taliban strongholds, the figures are even more alarming with only 3 per cent in Zabul, 5 per cent in Helmand and 7 per cent in Khost (World Bank, 2004). A similar story of low educational attainment of girls is to be found in 3 hill districts known as Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Although official data is not available, Bhutan too is not an exception, according to UNGEI, in terms of low educational attainment of girls in rural areas. In India, despite the progress it has made in achieving gender parity, girls' educational attainment in rural areas, especially in states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, is much lower than that of boys'. The effect of rural–urban disparity and its effect on girls' education is quite obvious in Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan. Sri Lanka is an exception, but the country is suffering from the ongoing conflict in the North and most of the country's small number of out-of-school children including girls are from the conflict-affected area.

The other form of disparity pertains to population groups within nations, which is more prominent in ethnically and linguistically diverse countries like India and Nepal. More than 100 ethnic/caste and language groups, which are still the basis in many communities for determining the social class hierarchy, reside in these countries. Social class divisions based on caste, ethnicity and language further complicate the issue of gender inequality in education. The degree of inequality in educational access of a girl further increases if she belongs to an under-privileged social group such as Dalits or an ethnic minority. What is clear in all the countries of South Asia is that a typical child whose right to an education is denied is most likely to be a girl from a rural area coming from an underprivileged social group.

4.4 Engendering Education: Parity and Equality

Gender equality in education is currently measured on the basis of girls' Net Enrolment Rate (NER), Gender-specific EFA Index (GEI), and Gender Equality Education Index (GEEI) (Unterhalter, 2006; UNICEF, 2005). The EFA Global Monitoring Report has listed the country-specific EFA Development Index (EDI), which also is indicative of how countries are doing in terms of achieving, among others, gender-related EFA objectives (UNESCO, 2008b). UNDP, on the other hand, goes beyond measuring gender parity and has used the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) that assesses the extent to which women are able to use educational 'resources to play an equal role in the political, economic and social life of their countries' (Unterhalter, 2006, p.11).

Unfortunately, other than NER none of the indices is available for South Asia as a whole. Bangladesh, India and Nepal are the only three countries of the region for which the EDI and GEI are listed in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007. All the three countries are listed under low performing countries with respect to EDI and are categorized as 'far from [achieving] EFA'. Other countries, except Sri Lanka, of the region for which the EDI is not available are also likely to fall under the 'far from EFA' category. In order to show progress towards achieving EFA goals, countries need to demonstrate high scores in primary education NER, literacy rates of adults, gender parity in adult literacy and primary and secondary education GERs, and survival rate to grade 5. In South Asian countries, scores in these indicators except in primary education NER are unsatisfactory, hence the region as a whole is lagging behind in achieving

the EFA goals. The region is specifically very weak, with the exception of Sri Lanka and to some extent Maldives, in promoting adult and youth literacy, increasing the survival rate to grade 5 and transition to secondary general education along with increasing the GER in pre-primary education. The weak show of scores in these indicators is a clear indication of several barriers to education that children, illiterate adults and youth, and in particular girls and women are facing in countries of South Asia.

The exclusive reliance on quantitative national data limits the power of the gender-related indices to fully explain the gender equality status of nation states. Even the GEEI as the best available measure of gender equality does not take into account socio-psychological aspects such as the one in Sri Lanka. With the outstanding score of 0.94 GEEI the country gives an impression of achieving near perfect gender equality in education. But as already discussed in the section on Sri Lanka above, the status of girls' education is not as rosy as the parity and equality figures suggest. Girls are still discouraged (as a result of pervasive gender role stereotypes) from pursuing an education that will lead to, for example, a higher paying career (ADB, 2004). Therefore, the high GEEI can easily be illusive about the gender equality in education in any particular country. As well, the fact that Sri Lanka's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) was only 0.272 in 2000 (Unterhalter, 2006, p.12) implies that despite the achievement in gender parity in education, gender stereotypes still persist in the country. As Subrahmanian (2006) aptly argues, 'change for gender equality means not just providing incentives and creating opportunities for girls to participate in school alongside boys … there is a critical need to create social consensus about the importance of girls education.'

4.5 Summary

At least three issues of girls' education surfaced prominently in the above discussion:
- Firstly, there are countries in the region (Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan) where enrolment of girls has remained problematic, indicating a clear disparity between girls and boys in terms of access to basic education.
- Secondly, inequality in educational access of girls and boys is also a function of whether they come from a rural or urban context and also which social class or linguistic groups they represent. Cultural tradition and gender role stereotypes are mainly responsible for the continuation of such inequalities.
- Thirdly, in countries where gender parity in enrolment has been largely achieved (Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka), another form of exclusion of girls exists – which also applies to the other countries of the region. Girls' improved access to basic education has not meaningfully contributed to their social and political empowerment. Discrimination against girls has continued when it comes to making choices among different fields of study at secondary and tertiary levels. Girls are discouraged from pursuing an education that leads to a better-paying career in future, e.g. in technical, vocational and information technology fields. Sri Lanka, for example, 'provides further evidence that equal attainment does not translate into equal rewards in the labour market for girls and women' (Heward, 1999a, p.2).

While gender inequality exists both in key access-related indicators, across different geographic re-gions and socio-linguistic groups, and in the quality of educational services that boys and girls receive, the task of measuring inequality has remained heavily influenced by quantitative methods. Achieve-

ments in reducing the gender gap in education are mostly measured quantitatively in reference to the indicators identified for the EFA GMR – which emphasizes measuring gender parities. The indicator-specific measurement does have its merit, but without also measuring more of the qualitative educational experiences of diverse users through participatory processes, development agendas such as gender equality remain the concern merely of macro-level players – the increasingly argued issue of ownership of the end users is left unaddressed. Analysis of non-quantitative structural gender issues in ADB's Country Gender Assessment (2004) of Sri Lanka, for example, has shown that the country's achievement in gender parity which is so highlighted in the EFA GMR 2007 hides the reality of gender inequality and the persistent inequalities in the broader political and socio-economic life of the country.

5

Recommendations

The South Asian region is facing a colossal challenge with regard to achieving targets for basic education, especially for girls and gender equality; although some countries in the region have achieved gender parity in terms of school access, issues of quality remain to be addressed. Most countries are not likely to achieve Education for All targets by 2015. Interestingly, at rhetoric level, all countries have expressed serious intentions to bridge the gap between boys and girls and achieve gender equality, but the ground reality paints a different picture. Based on analytical accounts presented in preceding sections both at the regional level and for individual countries, the following recommendations are offered to enable the countries to formulate policy options that would hopefully potentially ameliorate the existing conditions and help them to make further progress in the critical areas of girls' education and gender equality.

i. First of all, it is extremely critical that the countries of the region devote sufficient resources, in terms of budgetary allocation and actual expenditure, to the education sector (to the tune of 4% of GNP as prescribed by UNESCO) and especially to the primary/basic education subsector.

ii. Most of the countries in the region already have constitutional provisions, some sort of legal framework and a plethora of polices and plans in place (presented in government documents) with reference to providing primary/basic education to both boys and girls as well as gender equality. However, the gap in translating these policy initiatives and plans into actual implementation falls short, severely in some and moderately in other countries. So there is an issue of having the vision, articulating a firm commitment yet needing to demonstrate concrete results on the ground.

iii. The existing EMIS in most countries is not sophisticated enough to capture detailed and disaggregated data on many aspects of basic/primary education, such as the quality aspect, the transformational experience of learners and teachers and the gender dimension, in a comprehensive manner. In order to develop comprehensive analyses and full understanding of the ground realities related to the various barriers that continue to exist and adversely affect the issues of access, quality and equity in basic/primary education especially for girls, the countries may have to move to lower levels of school governance and management. They might consider setting up district-based, community-based and school-based management information systems for local data collection and analyses (as, for example, the SCF C-EMIS in Nepal). This could allow the tracking of progress and achievements of both boys and girls covering both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the teaching-learning process and identify bottlenecks for quick and effective redress.

iv. Poverty and socio-cultural barriers are real in many countries of the region and need serious attention if the plans for ensuring girls' education and gender equality are to be realized. Therefore, policy initiatives, programmes and schemes that address the issue of opportunity cost of sending the

children to school, especially girls, could prove effective in addressing the access issue and gender parity in basic education for boys and girls across urban/rural settings.

v. The countries need to embark upon serious and systemic level efforts to gradually address the socio-cultural barriers that pose serious challenges to achieving targets for girls' education in terms of educational access and equity. Such barriers take the form of deeply held values, such as the low value assigned to girls' education, which result in low investment to education of girls by parents, households and communities. A strong preference for sons further exacerbates the situation and adversely affects the prospects of girls receiving education on an equal footing with that of boys even at the primary/basic education level. Another tradition or preference is for child marriage whereby girls are married soon after they attain puberty. These values are rooted in patriarchal and religious value structures and systems pervasive throughout the region.

Social communication programmes and awareness-raising campaigns are likely to help engage the issue and gradually break down barriers in the longer term. A good start has to be made as soon as possible. It has been argued that the provision of quality education at primary and basic level through a segregated school system (separate for boys and girls) and by recruiting the required number of female teachers is both a costly and non-sustainable option for countries facing scarce resources and competing demands. However, it may be one initial strategy for helping girls as it can provide a protected environment where girls can perform according to expectations of them alone, not in relation to boys. Another option might be to have separate gender streams within mixed schools.

vi. Innovative gender-focused initiatives and programmes, even those which include positive gender discrimination, are needed to be implemented by many countries of the region to combat the issue of gender disparity in access and quality of education and low gender equality. Public-private sector collaboration as well as involvement of NGOs working in the education sector have proved effective in addressing a variety of socio-economic and cultural barriers in some countries of the region such as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Other countries could learn from these experiences.

vii. The fear among girls and parents/families of potential molestation, harassment and discrimination both on their way to and from school and within school is widespread in countries of the region and acts as a barrier to school access, sustained attendance and learning and student achievement. The countries must undertake strong measures at the policy and management/administration level to address these issues to remove these major hindrances to girls' education. Examples such as Pakistan scouts accompanying girls can act as models for other countries.

viii. In war-torn and conflict-ridden countries, societies and regions, there is need to address the issues of fear and security to ensure school access and student learning and achievement. Programmes for counselling the affected may have to be designed and implemented.

ix. The idea of setting up satellite campuses, feeder schools and recruitment of local female teachers, also representing the disadvantaged groups if relevant and necessary, could facilitate implementation of programmes and projects seeking to achieve gender parity and gender equity provided that

quality aspects are also ensured. Focus only on quantitative targets puts girls in a disadvantaged position and negatively affects their pursuit of education at secondary and tertiary levels as well as their participation in the labour market in the longer term.

x. The countries may need to reformulate their policies related to gender education and gender equality and highlight the need for capturing the lived experience of girls while they go through the educational process rather than merely focusing on the issue of gender parity alone. The existing gender policies in education appear to be incomplete and fail to address the issue of equality in learning outcomes and further opportunities.

xi. The States may need to initiate curricular reforms so that the curriculum for the entire spectrum of schooling from primary/basic education to tertiary level fully and properly addresses the issues of gender parity, gender equality and gender equity not only as they pertain to the education sector but also with regard to women's empowerment in the social, economic and political spheres. In this way, issues of social discrimination and social status, participation in the labour market and playing effective roles in policy-making, planning, management and decision-making at various levels of authority and institutional mechanism may be addressed.

xii. Lack of certain essential facilities in the school such as classrooms, latrines, facilities for managing menstruation, drinking water and school wall boundaries also act as barriers to girls' education. Provision of such facilities, therefore, must be made an integral part of school development policies, plans, programmes and projects/schemes.

PART II

6
Country-Specific Scenarios

Table 2 presents a general quantitative picture of the situation of girls' primary education in the individual countries of the South Asia region compared with the world, developing countries and the South and West Asia region. In this section the discussion is focused more on the country-specific basic education situation of girls of the region with emphasis on local stories and experiences. Although statistics on, for example, enrolment and gender parity are helpful in making sense of the macro-condition of girls' education, analysis of country- or context-specific situations, and stories of life experiences of girls generated at local and individual levels, are not only much more revealing but also can be helpful in understanding why the educational statistics at the country, region and global levels continue to display gender disparities.

In the case of some of the countries studied, some sub-sections are not included due to the constraint of acquiring relevant material resources.

6.1 Girls' Education in Afghanistan

Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be provided up to secondary level, free of charge by the state.
Article 43 (1), Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, adopted 11 July 2006

The basic education scenario in post-conflict Afghanistan is quite encouraging in terms of the progress in enrolment, but much needs to be done to achieve gender equity in education. The fact that girls' education has been established as a basic human right in the constitution of Afghanistan is indeed a testimony to the state's political commitment towards the education of girls. Although the country finds it extremely challenging to ensure the constitutional provision of the right of each and every Afghan girl and boy to an education, one must not forget the historical context of the country. In the 1970s it suffered from the invasion of Soviets followed by the Taliban's extremism. Just when many countries in the region began to enjoy political stability, Afghans were forced to be engaged in war for more than half a century. Therefore, the present educational context in general, and that of the girls in particular, must be viewed and understood from the perspective of this historical reality.

Progress in girls' education since the overthrow of the Taliban is in fact phenomenal (Karlsson and Mansory, 2007). However it must also be acknowledged that the country's gender parity indices related to adult and youth literacy, and primary education gross and net enrolment rates, still depict the greatest educational disadvantage for women and girls in the region (see Table 2). The situation in the country, especially in the southern provinces, has continued to be risky for girls opting to pursue an education

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Box 1   Afghanistan educational situation at a glance

- More than 5.4 million children are enrolled in schools today, nearly 35 per cent of them girls, compared with a little more than a million 5 years ago and *almost no girls*.

- Still, half of school-age children are estimated to be out of school with significant *gender and provincial disparities.*

- The number of teachers has grown seven-fold, but only 22 per cent meet the minimum qualifications of Grade 14. Only 28 per cent are female, located primarily in urban areas.

- There is no new curriculum for secondary school. In the last five years curriculum development has concentrated on the first six years of school only.

- Although more than 3,500 schools have been established, only 40 per cent of schools have buildings. Thousands of communities have no easy access to schools.

- Thousands of children are being taught in cross-border madrassas where fundamentalism is rampant.

- Nearly 6 per cent of schools have been burnt or closed down due to terrorism in the last 18 months. Between 30,000 and 40,000 students graduate from high school every year; only one-third of them are admitted to universities, the rest join the pool of unemployed.

- An estimated 11 million Afghans are illiterate.

- In 1385 [2006/07], education (primary and secondary) received 19 per cent of the operating budget, 4.3 per cent of the core development budget and 7 per cent of the total core and external, operating and development budget.

Source: http://www.moe.gov.af/Vision.html, accessed 2 May 2008 (emphasis added).

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due to the prevalence of pockets of cultural extremism (see Box 1). 'Factors affecting enrolment and dropout impact much more on girls than boys, and girls face additional problems as they try to access education' (Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium, 2004, p.3).

While many girls in Afghanistan opt to go to girls-only schools, these very schools have become the target of violence (Rohde, 2002). Recent research clearly portrays the general perceptions of men, women, boys and girls that equal education for both boys and girls is absolutely necessary as it is also in line with 'the centuries-old Islamic principle of *farz* (obligation) in education' (Karlsson and Mansory, 2007, p.284). While Afghans in general find that Islamic principle supports girls' education, it seems that just the opposite is being promoted by some fundamentalist groups (see Box 1). Despite a general positive outlook on education of both boys and girls, Afghans are forced to deal with the threat of cultural extremism against girls' education. This has contributed to the persistence of the low educational attainment of girls, which is more evident in rural areas than in cities. Girls' educational participation by regions varies widely. Although the national average of girls' enrolment stands at 40 per cent, there are provinces such as Zabul, Helmand and Khost where the enrolment figures of girls are very low (see Box 1 and Box 2).

Box 2   **Girls' schooling in some provinces**

In reality, the [national enrolment] figure is distorted by high enrolments in major cities such as Herat and Kabul, where girls make up 35 per cent to 58 per cent of the total. It does not reflect the situation in rural villages across large areas of the country. In about 11 provinces, especially in the South and East, girls make up 20 per cent or less of the total primary school enrolments. In the former Taliban strongholds of South Afghanistan girls enrolment is at its lowest, with only 3 per cent in Zabul, 5 per cent in Helmand and 7 per cent in Khost.

Source: World Bank (2004a).

It is, however, important to note that only five years ago there was almost no girl going to school. The situation now has dramatically changed with almost 1.9 million girls enrolled. Nonetheless, the enrolment escalation during 2003 is yet to be complemented by an increased popular zeal and aspiration for girls and boys to remain in school at least for all five years of the primary cycle.

6.1.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

Although education is free for all Afghans, family poverty has remained one of the main hindrances to children's education, especially in rural areas and among girls. The country lacks resources to be able to support the poor to cope with the opportunity costs associated with basic education. In a country where the annual per capita GDP is about US$180, paying a user fee of US$6 per year per child in addition to other costs for uniform, books, transport, stationery, midday meal, etc., is too much of a financial burden for the poor (Mojaddidi et al., 2006, p.15). Achieving the required progress in gender equity in primary education is still too big a challenge.

When the family is faced with economic problems it is the daughter who has to make sacrifices. Even when parents want to treat both sons and daughters equally, the bias or the preference of sons over daughters becomes obvious when it comes to allowing children the benefit of an education in an economically hard situation (Karlsson and Mansory, 2007). According to them, 'not only female teachers and separate school buildings but also economy, security and safety, availability and group pressure were factors' (p.290) that the respondents of their research pointed to as being 'conditions' for girls' education. They also found that if parents needed to make a hard choice they would send their sons to school first. Only one parent that they interviewed expressed just the opposite view that Islamic principle required him to be more responsible toward his daughter than son, hence the daughter would be sent to school if a choice had to be made due to economic hardship.

The cost of primary education increases for higher grades and so girls' enrolment in higher grades tends to be lower. About a third of grade 1 enrolees in 2003 were girls. With 74 per cent girls (compared with 56% boys) dropping out before reaching grade 5 (HRRAC, 2004, p.2), the number of girls will be fewer in higher grades. What this implies is that most parents are prepared to stretch the limit of their capacity to bear the educational cost as long as it is for their sons. Poverty, therefore, is more of a barrier for schooling of girls than of boys.

Box 3   Parents' quotes on education of girls

A poor father from Pul-i-Khushk district, Kabul City, with two sons enrolled in school and a 14-year-old daughter who was not enrolled: 'Due to the economic problems of my household my daughter doesn't go to school. If our economic situation gets better, I'll send her too. I don't want to discriminate between boys and girls …'

Source: Hunte (2005), cited by Mojaddidi et al. (2006, p.15).

'If I had limited resources I would send my son and not my daughter; sons are for outside and they stay with us when we are old.'

Source: Karlsson and Mansory (2007, p.291).

Cultural context

For many years in the past, and most notably during the Taliban rule, Afghan society has been under the influence of the patriarchal social norms depriving girls and women, particularly, of access to even basic education. The situation has changed now and the government is doing its best to expand educational opportunities for girls. With the fall of the Taliban in 2001 the educational restrictions imposed upon girls have been legally lifted (Constitution of Afghanistan, Articles 43 and 44).

The good intentioned macro-efforts to promote girls' education are yet to be matched by evidence of cultural acceptance at the community level. Parental opinions, like those quoted in Box 3, do not reflect convictions supporting girls' education. Poverty is often blamed for the inability of families to send girls to school, while poverty does not seem to affect the schooling of sons in most cases. The very father who said 'I don't want to discriminate between boys and girls' blamed his poor economy that compelled him not to enrol his only daughter in school while he found ways to send his two sons to school (see Mojaddidi et al., 2006, p.15).

Deliberate attacks by the Taliban targeted specifically at girls' schools are also one of the reasons why parents stop sending girls to school. Although most Afghans do not subscribe to the Taliban's position on girls' education, many parents do not want their daughters to enrol in mixed-gender schools nor do they appreciate male teachers teaching girls. In such a context, factors such as security, distance to school, lack of availability of female teachers, etc. become barriers to girls' education (Karlsson and Mansory, 2007).

Further, girls' and women's active social role, high mobility and assumption of leadership role are not appreciated by many (see Box 4).

Box 4   A woman's struggle against male resistance

Dr Aqilah Jan, who always remained independent even during the time of the Taliban, switched from her profession as a health worker to becoming a political activist and the Chair of the Community Development Council in Chagcharan along with being a member of Ghor Provincial Council. But as a woman she had to struggle hard and fight against male resistance to be established as the female Chair of the CDC.

Source: DFID (2007).

State policies, strategies and barriers

With the fall of the Taliban in 2001, massive expansion of schools and student enrolment backed by a back-to-school campaign started in 2002. Girls were especially encouraged to enrol. The multifaceted educational initiatives resulted in 3 million children going to school by the end of 2002 – 1.5 million more than had been estimated. By 2007 the number of children enrolled in schools was about 6 million (Rafi, 2007). This was a phenomenal growth in enrolment, but one which unfortunately began to hit a snag.

Government's commitment to attaining gender equality in education is clearly expressed in the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2006/07–2010/11 with explicit gender-disaggregated targets pertaining to access and quality of primary education. While the document has aptly acknowledged the challenge that the government faces due to the stark gender disparity (compounded by the ongoing insurgency attacks) in school enrolment, gender distribution of teachers and in the administrative structure of the education sector, efforts to engender various components of each of the seven programme areas outlined are not evident. For example, the problem of serious gender disparity in access to primary education that the document has so clearly illuminated could have included more proactive gender-focused action plans integrated in various components of the programmes. Gender concern has been treated just as a stand-alone programme component, while it should be also be acknowledged as an overall structural issue. Under Component 3: Special Programmes Target the NESP 2006/07–2010/11 states:

> By 1386 [2007/08 AD], set up and operate a fund to promote girls' education and to provide approximately 14,000 scholarships and incentives (from 1386–1389) for girls from districts with very low girls' enrolment to be able to complete grades 7–12. (MoE, Afghanistan, 2007b, p.52)

The quota of 14,000 scholarships and incentives for girls which is spread over a period of three years could only be a drop in the ocean. Nonetheless, this provision may be helpful to check the huge dropout of girls, provided the process of identification of the real needy student is transparent, participatory and effective. In the meantime, scholarships and incentives should also be provided to primary level girls to address the problem of girls' access to primary education.

The NESP 1385–89 (2006/07–10/11) has attempted to address the educational needs of girls. It is indeed an important policy guide and makes explicit the need to achieve girls' education targets, for example an NER of 60 per cent by 2010/11.

> The primary indicator of success by 1389 [2010/11] will be an increase in the net enrolment rate in primary school for girls and boys to at least 60% and 75% respectively. *This will require the addition of nearly 5000 newly established schools and a similar number of outreach classes.* Specific attention will be given to rural areas and local communities will be involved in identifying suitable locations. (MoE, Afghanistan, 2007b, p.47, emphasis added)

The additional 5000 newly established schools and outreach classes pledged by the government through the NESP 1385–89 may fulfil the required number of girls' schools. However, strategic steps to this end are not clear in the plan. For example, the plan could have been more comprehensive from the gender point of view if gendered budgeting had been explicit.

The NESP 1385–89 (2006/07–10/11) is informed by the country's MDG that *'by 2020 all children in Afghanistan, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education.'* The educational policy and plans of the government have rightly emphasized the access of all children to primary education. The political will to address the issue of gender parity is aptly expressed by the document. However, the recognition that gender concern should not be confined only to the achievement of gender parity but should also include concerns about achieving the broader goals of gender equality and equity could have been made more explicit by the document. This does not mean though that the initiatives for achieving parity goals must always be accompanied by activities to achieve gender equality and equity. Ahmed and Chowdhury (2005) have pointed out that there is no theoretical consensus on whether gender parity, equality and equity should be considered as stage-specific concepts for developing gender strategies and actions. It may be prudent to be reminded by the questions they have raised:

> Is it reasonable and useful to look at the concepts of parity, equality and equity as stages in the development of gender strategies and actions? Can it be argued that parity in terms of access is the first priority before issues of outcomes and learning performance can be effectively addressed? And the more enduring and ingrained patterns of injustice in society with education and gender consequences are longer term concerns which must wait until progress can be made in access and participation? … [W]hatever the theoretical answers to these questions, in practice, a sequential approach is being taken and a segmentation of action is being followed, which have important consequences. (p.4)

As much as it is necessary for educational policies and plans to be responsive to the country's post-conflict context which demands that parity alone remains the gender-related policy priority for some time to come, it will be to the country's advantage to keep considering the equality and equity aspects as the informed longer-term goals.

School atmosphere

The insecure school atmosphere, particularly in the girls' schools, is often reported in national and international media. An internet-based news agency posted the following information:

> April 18, 2007 – Police in Afghanistan's southeastern province of Khost say Taliban militants shot dead the headmaster of a girls' school in eastern Afghanistan on April 17. Authorities say Ghulam Haider, of the Kundi girls' school, was killed while walking to a mosque for morning prayers. Another headmaster was killed in a similar shooting on April 15 in the province's Gorboz district. Afghan Education Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar said more than 40 Afghan teachers have been killed in Taliban attacks against schools and colleges during the past year (AFP). (Radio Free Europe Radio Library, 2007; http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/04/FAC308F0-1EC3-4D44-8D27-13DCCC035E75.html)

Many more such stories are posted in the media. In the World Bank web page an education specialist with the World Bank in Afghanistan describes his experiences of the ongoing sense of fear among parents that local politics in many areas are controlled by warlords and militia with little or no control of the state authority. Such an environment discourages parents from sending their daughters to school.

'Parents fear if they let their girls walk to school there's a chance that they could be nabbed,' he says. He had heard and seen incidents of tents and school building burning, bomb attacks on schools and threats to female teachers.

A poor security situation is not the only factor discouraging girls from going to school. World Bank (2004a) mentions that the type of school building matters for girls to decide whether to enrol or not – they demand that schools are built with 'pardah' or boundary walls to block the view inside. Obviously, teachers have to be female.

The NESP has a very ambitious plan for constructing new school buildings and rehabilitating many of the old ones. In view of the users' choice of type of school building, local people's participation will be required not only to manage the construction of the building but also to decide on its layout and design to suit local needs and aspirations and ensure that the school environment is appropriate for both girls and boys. UNICEF Afghanistan is reported to have offered seven different types of school design for communities to choose from. Community participation is also sought in the process of construction. These are all very important aspects of ensuring community involvement in school construction. The missing point, however, is that ensuring gender compliance in the process of school construction has not been experienced as an explicitly established institutional norm. Furthermore, construction is not the only issue to consider when establishing schools – for example, are parents consulted in the organization of the education of their girls in terms of the appropriateness of the schooling to cultural norms.

Availability of female teachers is another crucial factor determining girls' schooling. Parents want to make sure that their daughters do not have to be facing male teachers, especially when they grow older. Availability of female teachers was the 'most important' condition expressed by the respondents of the research carried out by Karlsson and Mansory (2007). But lack of female teachers is a serious issue in most of schools outside Kabul:

> While most of the teaching staff in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, are female, the chronic lack of female teachers in other regions is seen as another factor behind the low attendance rate of girls in schools. (World Bank, 2004a)

The contributions of girls and women serving at home-based schools as teachers are yet to be formally acknowledged, although NESP has given space to community-based schooling. Most of such teachers are found to have less than the required qualification, which apparently is a serious caveat. However, initiatives of UN agencies and (I)NGOs promoting community mobilization or community organized/based primary education programmes have demonstrated that women and girls – including those with less than the required qualification – can be successfully mobilized to promote girls' education in isolated communities. The support of local people, especially that of women, is remarkable. They are prepared to let out available rooms to run makeshift classrooms, and in some instances also involve their daughters as teachers (Robbins, 2001). International Rescue Committee started a similar home-based schooling programme in four provinces. However, advocacy to mainstream such schooling has proved futile as the government finds them not meeting its standards (ID21 Insights Education, 2004). Ways in which this situation could be changed need debate so that policy positions are not restrictive, rigid and lacking in sensitivity toward innovative local initiatives promoting girls' education.

6.1.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education

Political will and policy support

The need to improve the overall security situation received high priority attention in the government/ international agency report *Securing Afghanistan's Future* (Middlebrook *et al.*, 2004). There is a serious national and international commitment to improve the security situation of the country, one of the most crucial factors related to promoting girls' education (see Box 5).

Box 5   Progress in Afghan girls' education

Protection of schools, students and teachers from terrorist attacks and insurgency is being given top priority by government. The Ministry of Education, together with law enforcement agencies at the national and provincial levels, launched a school protection and child safety project throughout the country in 2006 in the wake of increasing attacks on schools and teachers.

Providing adequate and appropriate learning spaces is one of the top priorities of government. In order to ensure equity and increase national coverage the Ministry of Education has designed cost-effective schools that are safe, inclusive and accessible for different conditions prevalent in the country. Technical standards and guidelines have been produced for these cost-effective schools that include water, sanitation, disability access and earthquake-resistant classrooms.

In 2002 the Ministry of Education, with the support of UNESCO and UNICEF, began the process of developing a new curriculum framework for general primary education. Based on this framework a centralized and uniform curriculum that can be applied throughout the country has been developed. The curriculum aims to eliminate the cultural stereotypes against girls and women and mainstream gender equality issues in school textbooks.

Source: Information made available for this study by MoE Afghanistan in December 2007.

The government's commitment to providing quality education for the children of the country is also enshrined in the medium-term benchmarks that are articulated in the Afghanistan Compact that was agreed with the international community.[5] Achievement of these targets will enable the government to move towards fulfilling its MDG for education. The Ministry of Education with its 5-year National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) is poised to achieve the national educational development objectives along with specific girls' education objectives.

Political will to provide policy support accompanied by necessary strategies toward achieving the goals set for, for example, girls' 75 per cent NER by 2010 has been made explicit in major government documents (Middlebrook *et al.*, 2004; MoE, Afghanistan, 2007b). In the exercise to map out Afghanistan's

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[5] *By the end of 2010 net enrolment in primary school for boys will be at least 75% and for girls at least 60%; a new curriculum will be operational in all secondary schools; female teachers in all secondary schools will be increased by 50%; a nationally administered teacher training competency test will be passed by 70% of the country's primary and secondary teachers; and a nationally administered annual testing system for assessment of learning achievement of primary and secondary students will be in place.*

secured future, the government and its international development partners have acknowledged the inevitable compromises required for the limited educational provisions to be put in place in communities. But convictions for improving educational infrastructure, teachers' competency and improved learning resources and curriculum along with the need to address regional variations in the educational provisions and user-benefits have been clearly expressed in the government plans.

> Emergency measures to date, such as renting buildings or using tents, employing partially qualified teachers, and instituting multiple shifts, have been useful. These must be replaced by substantial longer-term investments which, in turn, will need to be sequenced so as to satisfy evolving demand over time. Medium term investments will also need to address acute regional and urban/rural disparities in the supply of education infrastructure and services.

> Gender disparities are prevalent across both regions and levels of education. In Kabul, 81% of school age girls attend primary school. In many provinces, however, the rate is well below 15%. Likewise, female attendance in schools and higher learning facilities drops dramatically as girls progress towards higher grades. Closing the gender gap in education will require concerted efforts to strengthen 'cultural' demand for girls' education in the provinces and at advanced levels, while ensuring that opportunities to attend (supply of learning spaces, female teachers) are well in place. (Middlebrook *et al.*, 2004, pp.21–22)

The government has set a clear vision of ensuring education for all through a compulsory education scheme (grades 1 to 9). It aims to proceed with educational plans and activities with seemingly ambitious but necessarily proactive time-bound targets, which reflects that at the national level the government is committed to achieving its vision (Middlebrook *et al.*, 2004) and, by implication, to promoting education of girls. The government with the cooperation of its international development partners is poised to utilize the education budget for sector reform 'with particular focus on pro-poor and pro-girls policies and quality improvement strategies' (Middlebrook *et al.*, 2004, p.24). However, budgetary provision in NESP does not necessarily mean that the government has the funds for it. Much is dependent on both the financial and technical support of donors and/or multilateral agencies. The strong will of the government to achieve the goal for girls' education can be observed from the government's ownership of the Afghanistan Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI), launched in the country in March 2007. The AGEI was launched by the government with the support of UNICEF in collaboration with more than 20 organizations. Its aim is to assist the government in achieving the goals for girls' education specified in the NESP by mobilizing resources as well as by advocacy at various levels.

Interventions and innovations

The government in post-conflict Afghanistan is confronting a critical challenge of ensuring the constitutional right of all to a free and compulsory education at grades 1 to 9, especially for girls. While the Taliban insurgents regard it to be against Islamic belief for girls to be in schools learning other than Islamic religion, many ordinary people believe that Muslim girls should not be sitting together with boys in school, with the exception of boys and girls of age below 9 years coming to mosques for religious education up to grade 3. Therefore, girls are normally required to go to schools that are meant for girls only, which makes them an easy target of the rebelling Taliban. The influx of girls in school triggered after the overthrow of the Taliban regime has been reversed due to the increasing attacks on girls' schools.

Many of the meagre public school buildings for girls have been destroyed, but that does not stop girls from aspiring to an education. The problem of lack of school buildings is being tackled by the government's plan to establish 4900 new schools and 4800 outreach classes between 2007 and 2010. But the problem also demands a more immediate solution. Some innovations initiated in response to the problem are remarkable.

In 2003 the International Rescue Committee (IRC) started home-based or community-based schooling programmes for girls that attracted girls to education who otherwise would have been left out primarily because of the lack of availability of schools within walking distance. In 2003 alone IRC supported 260 teachers who taught '3 hours a day, 6 days a week in their home, compound, or in a community space such as a mosque. The programme operates in four provinces – Kabul, Paktia, Logar and Nangahar, with single-sex classes and mixed-sex classes. The priority students are girls' (ID21 Insights Education, 2004).

Similarly the Ogata Initiative, a regional comprehensive development assistance programme established by the Government of Japan and supported by Afghanistan's Ministry of Education and UNICEF, has started community-based schools in remote areas that have offered first generation educational opportunities to local girls (Dolan, 2007). Similarly CARE has supported the Community Organized Primary Education (COPE) Project which:

> … creates and supports informal village schools providing quality basic education to both boys and girls. By building on traditional models of education – where classes are held in private homes and teachers are hired from the local community – COPE's approach has been largely accepted by the Taliban. (Robbins, 2001)

Robbins (2001) captures the story of a female community member who offered her mud home for COPE to run classes for thirty second grade girls in Malikhail, a small farming community surrounded by snow-capped mountains about 60 miles southwest of Kabul. Her two daughters who discontinued their education in grade 9 taught the girls attending the classes. The two sisters learned basic skills of teaching from the COPE project.

From the point of view of an ideal philosophy of pedagogical process, what goes on in the makeshift classrooms is bound not to be meeting even a basic required standard, but one must remain cognizant of reality at the community and the state levels and at the same time acknowledge the potential of available local resource and public interests to bring about positive changes and enthusiasm among the girls. However, the situation must not remain stagnant with crisis management. Local women engaged in such an interim learning arrangement must be allowed to feel empowered to be able to establish and manage schools that are better equipped with learning materials and qualified teachers.

Knowledge management
Annual and quarterly review of the implementation of NESP has been emphasized. It has been acknowledged that the implementation of the plan would not be a straightforward undertaking. Periodic reviews and reflections have been envisaged to generate knowledge 'in order to systematize learning by doing

and to adapt the plan to changing circumstances and events' (MoE, Afghanistan, 2007b, p.96), with a comprehensive implementation and monitoring framework for central level authority. The annual operational plans have allowed flexibility, hence are expected to pinpoint gender issues and the need to consciously allocate resources for promoting girls' education and increase the number and capacity of female teachers. The annual review of the NESP and the quarterly review of the Operational Plans are expected to 'assess the progress made and problems encountered' (p.96) which assures that knowledge about the implementation, at least at the macro-level, will have been systematically generated and managed. Consideration of gender aspects, though not explicit, will inevitably come into the picture as NESP's 5-year benchmark, in the opening statement of the document, specifically mentions that by the end of 2010 girls' NER will be at least 60 per cent and the number of female teachers will be increased by 50 per cent.

While the importance of decentralized planning is acknowledged, current lack of capacity at the provincial, local and school levels makes it an approach to be followed for the future. A coherent central level monitoring system with necessary guidelines can ensure that progress is assessed on indicators identified to facilitate the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact. The planning department of the Ministry of Education has in the past few years made considerable progress in improving the EMIS (MoE, Afghanistan, 2007b).

The qualitative and experiential knowledge base is being generated largely at the non-systemic level mostly by multilateral agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, World Bank and ADB, or by INGOs such as Oxfam and CARE (Robbins, 2001; DFID, 2007; Hunte, 2005; ID21 Insights Education, 2004; Kirk and Winthrop, 2004; Mojaddidi *et al.*, 2006; Rafi, 2007; Rohde, 2002; World Bank, 2004a). Such a knowledge base has served the purpose of the research objectives of outsiders, rather than being used by the frontline stakeholders or the story tellers themselves for articulating issues they may have identified and influencing the planning process.

6.1.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

Afghanistan has a constitution that recognizes the education of girls as their fundamental right. The first 5-year National Education Strategic Plan gives due recognition to the need for a speedy promotion of girls' education and has as a priority devised programmes and allocated necessary resources.

The war-torn country also needed immediate remedial education programmes, as in other sectors, especially to start boosting the confidence of girls who for a long time in the past have been deprived of access to even basic education. Some adolescent girls had to discontinue education without completing secondary level because of threats and restrictions imposed. Therefore, development, particularly human resource development, stalled in Afghanistan during the past two decades, leaving the country with an acute shortage of trained people, including especially female teachers. School buildings too were destroyed during the war. Now that the political climate has improved, the country faces a tremendous challenge of rebuilding the nation, with schooling of children an immediate priority.

The government, with the support and technical assistance of international development partners and NGOs, has been able to bring about a new wave of educational enthusiasm that has resulted in a massive increase in primary education enrolment. In 2003 alone there was an increase of 1.3 million in

girls' enrolment (ID21 Insights Education, 2004). The NESP 1385–89 has now outlined the details of eight priority programmes that can be expected to contribute to improving the quality of education.

One important lesson drawn from Afghanistan's efforts towards girls' education is that a post-conflict context presents huge challenges as well as opportunities in the task of promoting much-needed girls' education. Local communities' interests and involvement with small outside agencies' technical support trigger innovations that make schooling possible for girls even without adequate infrastructure and qualified teachers.

6.1.4 Recommendations

The government's political will and strategy of taking positive discriminatory and affirmative measures to promote literacy and education of women and girls should remain firm for many more years to come. Good practices, for example the Bangladesh girls' stipend programme, should be adapted to support education of girls belonging to rural poor families. The incentive for girls to pursue higher education should be even more attractive so that they are motivated not only to enrol in basic education but also to complete it and acquire further qualifications.

Gender sensitization needs to be integrated in the teacher, headteacher and school management training programmes. Stakeholders, particularly at the local level, should be trained to carry out gender audits. Analysis of classroom contexts from a gender perspective should be a defined task of all teachers through which they should be able to set indicator-specific targets to achieve and keep records of progress in increasing the number of girls, motivating them to complete the basic education cycle and enhancing their learning outcomes. Headteachers' administration of the school should be informed by such a teacher-generated knowledge base. Teachers and headteachers along with the school management body should organize regular sessions of public audit to promote local ownership for improving girls' education.

A gender audit of the education sector focusing specifically on basic education opportunities for girls needs to be a priority initiative to produce specific strategies for achieving gender targets stipulated in the NESP. The government needs to be more specific in arguing the case, with evidence, for gender equality and equity in basic education and in mobilizing necessary resources, for example from the international community or multilateral agencies.

An extensive national consultation process needs to be initiated to find ways to ensure security for girls attending or aspiring to attend schools. The process may be high on resource demand, and the outcome may be very demanding technically as well as financially. There needs to be a political will to accept such challenge and take difficult measures in order to uphold girls' morale and desire for an education.

Fulfilling the cultural requirements of girls in school needs to be a priority, especially when constructing new school buildings. One effective strategy can be to institutionalize the UNICEF model that acknowledges community mobilization and participation.

The government should boost its effort to increase female teachers by relaxing the requirement of minimum qualification, if situations demand. Good practices, e.g. COPE of CARE Afghanistan, of mobi-

lizing girls and women as teachers in specific contexts should be used as models for replication in other similar contexts.

6.2 Girls' Education in Bangladesh

Available materials on girls' education in Bangladesh are mainly based on the analysis of quantitative data and EFA-focused indicators. Therefore, there are few opportunities to include local narratives and gendered learning experiences.

Since the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), there has been significant progress made in addressing gender disparities in access to schooling in Bangladesh. Access to girls' education has increased through initiatives such as community schools for girls, and training of women teachers. Bangladesh and Maldives are the only two countries in South Asia where gender disparities in primary education are in favour of girls, with Bangladesh experiencing a significant increase in NER between 1999 and 2004. From among those completing primary level, 95 per cent (more in the case of girls) continue their schooling at the general secondary level.

Although gender parity in enrolment has been achieved in Bangladesh, the incidence of boys and girls discontinuing school during primary level is still very high. About 35 per cent (slightly less in the case of girls) do not make it up to grade 5 (see Table 2). In this regard, a study carried out in rural Bangladesh has established a relationship between girls' delayed marriage and educational attainment. In the weak enforcement of the minimum legal age of marriage, the best most Bangladesh parents have done is to wait till puberty for their daughters to get married. The study estimates that 'legally restricting marriages below age 17 would increase aggregate female schooling by 0.58 years, or 9%' (Field and Ambrus, 2005, p.3).

According to Chowdhury *et al.* (2001), Bangladesh has an ethnic minority population of about 1 per cent residing in three hill districts known as Chittagong Hill Tracts. Analysis of school enrolment of children belonging to four of the 11 such ethnic groups revealed that they lag behind substantially, indicating that their right to basic education has been denied. According to an independent survey carried out in 1998, the average NER of these ethnic groups was 33 per cent with gender parity of 0.91 in favour of boys – which was far less than the national average of 77 per cent with GPR of 1.04 in favour of girls (Nath, 2001). The NER figure of one of the groups, known as Mro, was only about 5 per cent (Chowdhury *et al.*, 2001, p.7). In 2005 the country achieved 94 per cent NER with gender parity index 1.03 in favour of girls (see Table 2). It would be interesting to compare this growth in national average with that of the ethnic minority for the same period.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in achieving the EFA targets, including gender parity in education. Only a small proportion (6%) of school age children is out of school. But it is essential to find out who these children are and whether they suffer from perhaps subtle and systematic marginalization and deprivation. The situation that the educational attainment of the ethnic minorities, particularly that of girls, is nowhere at par with the national average raises an issue of social inclusion. Although girls' participation in primary education and transition to secondary education is encouraging, the rate of their

survival throughout the primary cycle is worrisome, which draws attention to the prevailing scenario of early marriage among girls. Research has clearly indicated that girls tend to discontinue school because of early marriage – the country's law of minimum age of marriage is not effectively enforced. These are some of the issues that the country will have to look into so as to take proactive steps to further improve the basic education scenario of its people in general and girls in particular.

6.2.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

In Bangladesh, family poverty is a prominent factor affecting school attainment of both girls and boys. The government and NGO programmes are known to have contributed to the significant enrolment growth, but they have not been as effective in attracting poor children to school – those enrolled will most likely drop out before completing grade 5 (CAMPE, 1999; Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005).

The economic hardship of poor families is further compounded by the geographical isolation of the communities where they live. Most of the poor out-of-school or school dropout children are from less accessible parts of the country, notably from Chittagong Hill Tracts and the northern plain.

> The barriers to enrolling these children in school go beyond simply building accessible schools. They include – on the school's side – finding and keeping teachers who can work with children who are less healthy and less motivated to study and – on the household side – parents who value education and have the means to pay unofficial fees and opportunity costs. For many of these families, the benefits to them of sending their children to school are not so obvious; sometimes the benefits are indeed less than for families with better access to economic opportunities. (USAID 2002a, p.22)

Affirmative policies, such as free primary education, Food for Education, free textbook distribution, etc., are having a trickle-down effect that does not serve the interest of the poor in 'the huge, centrally controlled primary education system' (USAID, 2002a, p.27) of Bangladesh. The 'free' primary education is not actually free for many. Poor people are required to pay admission fees, cost of books, and examination fees. The poor and deserving families are deprived of full benefit from the Food for Education programme. The *Overview of Basic Education Sector* report cites CAMPE research and the survey of Transparency International Bangladesh to point out these and other instances of educational corruption that have gone on in the country, especially in rural areas (USAID, 2002a). Although incentives such as girls' stipend programmes encourage girls to enrol in school, unduly charged fees prevent them from being active participants of learning in school resulting in poor learning outcomes for them.

In Bangladesh girls have much to do at home, particularly if they come from families surviving in an acutely subsistence economy. Girls from such families are often needed at home and/or they are required to work to supplement the subsistence family economy. Obviously, enrolling in school, attending regularly and remaining there for the full cycle become less of a priority (GCE and Swainson, 2003).

> By the age of 10, girls in Bangladesh … may be working up to 10 hours a day in productive activity inside and outside the home, [and] have high rates of absenteeism. (GCE and Swainson 2003, p.24)

Although supply initiatives such as special incentives and targeting of girls in key intervention programmes have yielded high girls' participation in primary education, the demand side is still weak, hence there is little sense of people's ownership of these achievements.

Cultural context

Intolerance of girls' schooling is not so prevalent in Bangladesh, hence the EFA goal to achieve gender parity has been fulfilled well ahead of time. However, the belief that girls are inherently inferior to boys in mental ability and aptitude, and hence are less worthy of investment for education, is still very pervasive (USAID, 2002b, p.14). This perception about girls and women increases their vulnerability to social harassment, abuse and domestic violence. While on the one hand girls' participation in education is progressively encouraged and supported by state laws and policies with provision of attractive incentives, ironically girls walking down the street, for example going to or returning from school, become subject of 'female infanticide, kidnapping, public assault, and acid throwing [including] rape, incest, and harassment through language, trafficking and forced prostitution' (USAID, 2002b, p.9). The process of education does not include examining this social status of girls, debating the issues and giving girls a voice to build consensus for transformation so that schooling is both safe and empowering for them.

The prevalence of child marriage is another hindering factor (Raynor and Wesson, 2006, p.4). Child marriage is illegal but culprits get away without being punished, as it is traditionally an acceptable and 'normal' culture.

> Marriages are arranged by families and in many cases without prior consent of the girl. Muslim women can only marry a non-Muslim under the Special Marriages Act where both partners are required to renounce their religious beliefs. Forty per cent of girls are under 14 years old upon marriage. Though the marriage law stipulates minimum age at 18 for females and 20 for males, it is rarely effectively enforced and child marriages remain common, particularly in the rural areas. Customary marriages solemnized outside the purview of personal law – including child marriages – are accepted as valid, and while the perpetrators are liable to simple fines and imprisonment, they are rarely punished. A lack of effective birth and marriage registration systems remains a major hindrance to the abolition of child and forced marriages. (USAID, 2002b, p.8)

The criteria of eligibility for the girls' stipend programme served as an intervention which apparently has contributed to delaying girls' marriage and reducing fertility. But due to the poor quality of education (content as well as pedagogy) it is difficult to be assured that the outcome will be sustained. The impact of such an intervention needs to be experienced by girls themselves who are supposed to be 'benefiting' from the intervention, so that demand for girls' education overrides the largely supply-driven approach to girls' schooling. This requires a new way of monitoring and assessing progress, one that pays attention to the experiential aspect and personal narratives of the participants.

State policies, strategies and barriers

There is strong policy support for promoting girls' education in Bangladesh. However, in other respects proactive policy response is lacking. Such issues pertain more to the low quality of education and result from the poor quantitative and qualitative scenario: for example, the average rate of primary grade repeaters has gone up, in the case of girls from 6.2 per cent in 1999 to 6.9 per cent in 2005; primary

school dropout rate for girls and survival rate to grade 5 (albeit better than those of boys) stand at 33 per cent and 67 per cent respectively (UNESCO, 2008b). A study carried out under Education Watch 2002 found that 'one out of three who complete five years of primary schooling still remain non-literate and semi-literate' (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005, p.7).

Recruitment of female teachers in primary and secondary schools is a policy priority that has increased the proportion of female teachers. However, still only 39 per cent of teachers are female. More proactive policies and strategies are needed to speed up the increase in female teachers. The managerial positions in the education sector are predominantly occupied by males (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005). A similar situation exists in relation to expanding girls' progress into technical and vocational streams. Few girls continue from basic and primary education into technical and vocational education, indicating a lack of policies directed towards breaking the tradition of this being an exclusively male domain.

There are some structural and functional issues that have either kept essential gender encompassing policies from being formulated or made the implementation of existing gender-related policies ineffective. Decentralization and active participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process at all levels are now undisputed principles of educational administration and management. Education service bodies need to be flatter in their structure and operate in the spirit of learning organizations. But in Bangladesh the reality of the organizational culture is rather different:

> The PMED is not a learning organization. Quite the contrary, it rewards obedience rather than questioning, punishes risking new ideas, and prohibits innovative change. Staff below the level of Secretary and his or her close advisors have no real authority to make decisions. The Director General of the DPE is an implementer. His or her assignment is to implement policy, not to make policy or even contribute to policy-making. Few individuals in high-level positions in the PMED or DPE stay long enough to invest much thought or concern for the education system. Few are trained or experienced in education. Those at lower levels, who could detect problems and try new ways of addressing them are trained not to do so. There are no incentives to innovate and no support for change. (USAID, 2002a, p.27)

With the overt centralized, top-down, bureaucratic and non-participatory approach to management of the education system in Bangladesh, it can be assumed that moving beyond gender parity to gender equality and equity and addressing the much-needed quality issue will be extremely difficult.

Besides having highly bureaucratic and top-down internal administration and management practices, the education authority is not held accountable to stakeholders – including parents, community and students – for the decisions it makes. The provision of a stakeholders' forum through the National Council for Primary and Mass Education and the Project Coordinating Committee is supposed to ensure that stakeholders' voices are heard in the decision-making processes, but it is unfortunate that in practice the forum remains defunct. At the school level, the planning and management is supposed to be overseen by the School Management Committee but studies reveal that only about 15 per cent of SMCs are active. Most SMCs have not been able to steer the process of schooling to suit the community needs (CAMPE, 1999; Primary School Performance Monitoring Project, 2001; USAID, 2002a).

SMCs do not generally play an active role in the governance of their schools and schools are not held accountable to communities. Schools report only through the chain of command to the PMED. (USAID, 2002a, p.10)

The educational governance functioning under such a weak structure can only exacerbate the barriers to girls' meaningful participation in basic and primary education. Bangladesh has achieved gender parity in primary and lower secondary education, but the reality for girls has neither changed nor is it given the importance it deserves. Girls have continued to under-achieve compared with boys.

Bangladesh may have achieved parity of enrolment at primary and lower secondary levels, there is certainly not equality of achievement. The 2005 results for the Secondary School Certificate show that girls are less likely than boys to be entered for the final examination, and less likely to pass, and that these imbalances combine to make a 12 per cent gender gap in pass rates. There are similar disparities in terms of subject and school choice, and even bigger gaps at tertiary level. A focus on enrolment figures alone can lead to questionable conclusions. A quick look at the closing of the gender gap in enrolment in Bangladesh can lead to misleading assumptions that boys are now at a disadvantage. Overall, this is most definitely not the case, at least not in relation to girls. (Oxfam GB, 2006, p.2)

Such is the reality of school-going girls (of which gender parity is only one part) which is neither acknowledged at the management level nor at the policy level. Policy concerns, in being guided by the skewed interest in gender parity, disregard the meanings that girls have attached to their educational experience in such a gender-unequal context. Precisely because of this, the existing gender policy of education is incomplete and has not addressed the issue of equality specifically in learning outcomes and further opportunities.

School atmosphere
Schools in Bangladesh offer a diverse atmosphere of learning for girls and boys depending upon where they are located, who they have been supported by, how the teachers have taught them and how active and involved the management committees are. School atmosphere, for example a separate toilet for girls, potable water and school building, is much less conducive in rural areas than in urban areas. In CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) where most of the Bangladeshi ethnic minorities dwell, schools' 'facilities are poor and quality of instruction is low. There are fewer teachers than the norm, and turnover among teachers is high. Teachers come to school irregularly, and teachers hired by the PMED often pay a local, unqualified teacher to take their place for most days of the school year. Villagers do not participate in the management of the school' (USAID, 2002a, p.35). Therefore, minority girls are doubly deprived of their rightful participation in an education of good quality.

Girls are highly vulnerable to physical and cultural dangers when they attend school, which makes parents concerned about pregnancy outside marriage, eve teasing and sexual harassment (USAID, 2002b). Travelling long distances for schooling, which is typical in rural districts, is perceived as a risk factor for girls. Lack of female teachers in school also makes schooling uncomfortable for girls. The government's efforts to address these issues have proved inadequate and ineffective (Primary School Performance Monitoring Project, 2000). The education regulation has entrusted SMCs to maintain school

facilities to ensure a clean, healthy and gender-friendly school environment, but most SMCs are found to be ineffective (USAID, 2002b). The findings of PSPMP 2000 revealed that 38 per cent of rural schools had inadequate toilets and 57 per cent lacked potable water for students. In the schools where second toilets were constructed for girls, teachers locked them up for their own use (USAID, 2002b).

In regard to female teachers, again according to USAID (2002b), it is only in urban areas or NGO-supported schools that most teachers are female – they make up 58 per cent in urban areas, 29 per cent in rural areas and 93 per cent in NGO schools compared with 48 per cent in government, 39 per cent in private and 7.6 per cent in madrassa schools.

UNICEF worked with the government to support the Intensive District Approach to Education for All (IDEAL) – a project which was concluded in 2004. This initiative was designed to promote child-friendly and gender-sensitive schools with a massive coverage. By 2002, the coverage had expanded to 9.3 million children with 144,306 teachers in 36,109 schools (UNICEF, 2003a). Now PEDP-II is taking forward the approach developed by the IDEAL project. The project promoted MWTL (multiple ways of teaching–learning) which rested on the theoretical premise of multiple intelligence developed by Professor Howard Gardner, a cognitive psychologist at Harvard University. Stories of teachers' teaching experiences in the project schools suggest that the approach to pedagogy was highly methodological and theory driven. Claims that there had been a dramatic change in the way students learned fell short of students' personal expressions of how they felt about the learning process. Fulfilling experiences, if any, of girls in particular would have evaluated the worth of an innovation in a more true sense.

> The sunny room, the smiling teacher, and the bright faces of over 60 children squashed into orderly rows of benches. The walls have been painted with colourful pictures of flowers and alphabets, but some of the small faces still hold a pinched look – from no breakfast that morning. The teacher, standing in front of the expectant faces, displays and explains, questions, sings and recites; the children follow, mostly as though programmed to do so. Their hands go up, memorized answers are still warbled out, and there's the end of another class. (Haque, 1999)

In her report, Haque (1999) made a very interesting point about the teachers' perspective compared with the innovators' perspective about what works in classrooms. She went on to describe how having taught in one of the eight top ranking government schools a teacher claimed that the method of teaching she had previously adhered to was more practical and appropriate than the 'innovative' technique that the IDEAL project brought to her. The director of the project on the other hand was furious with teachers' reluctance to take on board the new technique of teaching. The irony inherent in the two perspectives that Haque (1999) portrayed pertains to how both parties took for granted the feeling of the most important stakeholders – the children – when a particular method dominated the learning process rather than allowing the teachers to be more creative, open and flexible.

No doubt IDEAL was designed and implemented with a spirit of bringing about quality improvements in primary education through defined strategies and methods. Many schools and teachers in rural communities have reaped benefits from the innovations promoted by the project. Rural teachers who were constrained by the lack of proper pedagogical skills have been able to obtain some good tools and

know-how from the project. However, the potential value that Haque's critique could add must not be undermined by the IDEAL innovations. The goal of achieving quality improvement in primary education, the core spirit of IDEAL, needs to be pursued through a rather balanced approach – capacity enhancement of the actors, particularly the teachers, through the provision of appropriate tools and techniques complemented by opportunities for them to grow as creative and reflective practitioners.

6.2.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education

Political will and policy support

The achievement of gender parity in primary education is clearly an outcome of the government's policy priority on initiating programmes focused on improving access.

The state has taken a firm stand to ensure positive discrimination in favour of girls in almost every basic education programme initiative. The General Education Project (GEP) 1992–97 offered valuable inputs to Bangladesh's fifth 5-year Plan that provided the basis to formulate key educational policies, strategies and programmes for the national plan, resulting in the formulation of important policies including free and compulsory primary education for all together with free girls' education up to grade 8 (USAID, 2002a).

Clearly the government is committed to promoting girls' education at least in terms of improving their access to basic educational opportunities. The quality issue, however, is largely left unaddressed by the government initiatives. Girls once in school are yet to graduate with fulfilling experiences, which raises the question of what the lasting impact of the country's initiatives on girls' education may be. Positive discrimination in favour of girls is indeed a necessary step that the government has rightly taken, but it certainly is not a sufficient step to achieving gender equality in education.

However, what seems very interesting is that the government allows NGOs to run a parallel 'non-formal' primary education with a unique curriculum of its own, which is recognized for the basic education demand it has created in the communities. The NGO programme, by and large, makes education of children and adolescents a community affair. The innovative feature of this approach to education is discussed in length in the next section.

It may be concluded that in Bangladesh the political will and the education policy have been geared towards achieving the goal of achieving universal primary education with high priority for gender parity. But due importance has not been given to going beyond access and gender parity towards achieving broader gender equality and equity.

Interventions and innovations

Concerted efforts have been made since 1990 by government, the NGO community and the private sector to deliver primary education. The important aspect has been that the eight different types of primary schools in Bangladesh (USAID, 2002a) have remained well regulated by the government, which has ensured access of the disadvantaged, particularly that of girls, to primary education. It needs to be underscored, however, that the interventions and innovations, especially those initiated by the government, are more oriented on supply than on demand.

As part of government interventions, the provision of satellite schools, which started with a one-school experiment by UNICEF, has specifically targeted girls' education. The satellite school concept rests on the principle of reaching out to girls. In 2002 the number of such schools was close to 3000 (USAID, 2002a).

An equally important element of this initiative was its deliberate attempt to recruit female teachers for the management and operation of the satellite schools. The expansion of satellite schools and recruitment of female teachers have had a critical bearing on both the increase in enrolment of rural girls and the gender parity in primary education.

The government has been awarding stipends to girls at the lower secondary level 'which serve as a strong incentive to girls to complete primary school' (USAID, 2002a, pp.21-22). Similarly, the Female Secondary School Assistance Programme is the largest and best known scholarship effort for girls in Bangladesh (Herz and Sperling, 2004).

The EFA-oriented supportive measures of the government include:

> monthly stipends and tuition waiver for rural girls at the secondary level, which became an incentive for girls to go to primary school … [and has increased] proportions of women in teaching with sixty per cent reservation for women in recruitment of teachers for government primary schools. (Ahmed and Chowdhury 2005, p 6)

Those affirmative programme interventions have their merit and are in line with the government policy priority on achieving gender parity alongside universal access to primary education, which indeed is an outstanding example of a success case (Raynor and Wesson, 2006). However, as already mentioned earlier, the programme intervention to achieve gender equality and equity is not evident, except some indicative progress in the programmes of some NGOs. Besides, measuring equality and equity is not as straightforward as measuring parity and access. Ensuring equality and equity entails incorporating voices of the disadvantaged girls and women in core policies and plans of education. This aspect of gender concern is extremely weak in the governance of education, suggesting that organizational provisions in the sector are not equipped with the political will and capacity to hear such voices and learn from them.

The girls' education initiatives of some NGOs are comparatively better at making education meaningful to the lives of girls – albeit BRAC, the largest NGO initiative, has been categorized as a 'gap-filler model' lacking 'a strong commitment to provide education as a human right or as an empowerment intervention' (USAID, 2002b, p.17). The social mobilization aspect in particular is a prominent strength of the NGOs' approach to non-formal primary education. Besides remaining pro-poor, pro-girls and pro-disadvantaged, some NGO initiatives in primary education have established a clear link between basic education and the participants' future social and economic wellbeing. Their non-formal primary education programmes allow life skills and livelihoods-related learning opportunities. For example, the Underprivileged Children's Education Programme (UCEP) integrates employable skills learning through apprenticeship and job placement in the basic education programme for urban working children. Similarly the Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) offers 5-year basic education which combines learning in

science and technology with market-oriented livelihood skills. Students are transferred to the Rural Technology Centre prior to graduating from the basic education programme where they get the opportunity to learn about marketable products (USAID, 2002b).

Bangladesh's primary education is known to be outstanding for its attainment of full gender parity and remarkable progress towards achieving the goal of universal access to primary education. But the primary education system, according to the Education Watch Survey (CAMPE, 2003), suffers from lack of quality, gender equality and equity (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005). Nonetheless, the examples of basic education opportunities for girls provided by some NGOs offer an answer to this concern. However, one has to be cautiously optimistic about such an answer, as it is yet to be substantiated by follow-on studies demonstrating the programmes' impact on the lives of girls and women (USAID, 2006b).

Knowledge management

The impact-related issue of NGO programmes raised in the preceding section further highlights the need for clarity about what knowledge is valued, generated and managed in order to facilitate the task of assessing the impact of any specific programme. The current knowledge management system is entirely top-down. It undervalues the need to capture locally experienced voices and experiences. In other words, the existing gender-related knowledge in the primary education system of Bangladesh is, for the most part, informed by quantitative macro-level concern for achieving the gender target.

Studies carried out to assess the progress, effect and impact of education programmes are predominantly quantitative in nature, often failing to capture the true voices of the disadvantaged girls for whom the programmes are intended in the first place. Due to the lack of institutionalized knowledge management, especially at the local level, such studies are often required to rely on data collected using non-participatory stand-alone sample surveys, interviews or focus group discussions (e.g. Chowdhury *et al.*, 2001; Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005). One of the important aspects of knowledge management, therefore, is to institutionalize the process of systematically capturing voices of disadvantaged girls and women so that they are recognized as 'active agents rather than passive consumers of education and development' (Heward, 1999a, p.10). This urge to re-orient the approach to knowledge management is essential in order for the Bangladesh primary education system to move beyond achieving the targets of access, enrolment and gender parity to tackling the issues of gender equality and equity by deepening the understanding of girls' experiences and meaning they assign to education.

6.2.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

Girls surpassing boys in primary education enrolment is the most outstanding outcome resulting from the concerted programmatic efforts of both the government and civil society organizations. This is true even in Upazilas with overall low average enrolment (CAMPE, 2003). Similar progress is also evident in girls' rate of transition to general secondary level. About 99 per cent of girls (compared with 91% boys) continue in general secondary school (see Table 2).

The girls' stipend programme, with its focus on increasing enrolment of girls in secondary and higher secondary education, envisaged girls' eventual engagement in income-generating activities or employment. It was expected that the programme would raise the status of women due to economic and social

gains. This, it was assumed, would create a synergy whereby women's choice about reproduction would be increased. As the programme design was informed by the population literature, the criteria of eligibility included the need for girls to remain unmarried until the Secondary School Examination or until they turn 18 (Raynor and Wesson, 2006). But due to the lack of research evidence it can only be assumed that the reduced fertility that Bangladesh is known to have achieved over the past decade (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005) can be attributed partly to the girls' stipend programme. At the same time, it needs to be underscored that if this attribution is true, it could largely be due to the enforcement of the eligibility criteria rather than girls/women's empowerment, which in turn raises the question of the sustainability of the outcome achieved. According to Raynor and Wesson (2006) the term 'empowerment' appears in documents 'late in the [girls' stipend] programme, and only in some components, and appears to be accorded a low priority' (p.2).

Ahmed and Chowdhury (2005) have noted that:

> Bangladesh is in the midst of profound social changes, of which gender role integration and breaking down of gender barriers represent a key element. Important components of gender role definition and perception are: (i) Elimination of gender gap in access to primary and secondary education, (ii) significant reduction of fertility achieved in the last decade and increased exercise of choice by women about reproduction, (iii) increased participation of women in the formal sector labour force, dramatically portrayed by women garment workers as the mainstay of this principal export sector of the economy, and (iv) new economic opportunities and change in social and family role of women through women's access to micro-credit. These elements have interacted and reinforced each other in a synergistic way. (p.5)

However, no research evidence is available to support the assertion that this change in gender role and perceptions in Bangladesh society has been due to the impact of educational programmes focused at promoting girls' education. Therefore, the social impact of educational interventions for girls is yet to be empirically established.

Most interventions and innovations, in paying much-needed attention to the issue of access, remain heedless of the importance of paying attention to empowering pedagogy, which is closely linked with the quality aspect. For example, lessons drawn from assessment of the girls' stipend programme imply that the focus on improving girls' access to education failed to ensure that education serves the important transformative purpose. For many, particularly for the poor, receiving a stipend became an end in itself. While this problem was well recognized by the assessment, the remedial action suggested was too narrow – that 'incentives must be tied to attendance, study, and passing of examinations' (World Bank, 2003, p.x). Education's transformative and empowering role, which was assessed as lacking in the programme, was yet again not emphasized.

Therefore, while impact is not tangible, outcomes of girls' education programmes can be attributed to the supply factor or the strong input provisions mobilized by the government and NGOs. The extent to which the users are empowered to control the process of determining their input needs along with their own output, outcome and impact targets is unknown as no evidence to this effect is available. This also

suggests that girls who are supposed to be benefiting from intervention programmes need to be meaningfully involved in the learning process, experiencing and feeling a sense of accomplishment rather than it just being determined by outsiders what they should learn and what their educational competency should be. This is precisely an aspect in which research is lacking.

6.2.4 Recommendations

The state authority should initiate a review of the success claim of the stipend programme of Bangladesh in light of some questionable aspects of its management, affecting mostly poor families, particularly the girls belonging to such families.

The achievement of UPE and gender parity in primary education does not match the cycle completion rate. Hence the government should pay attention to finding out who survives and why so many children do not survive up to grade 5. Monitoring of children's survival pattern by the school management committees or communities needs to be strengthened. Incentive programmes should be made more pro-poor with transparent and accountable management and administrative procedures.

The process of education should include analysis of the social status of girls. The issue of harassment, abuse and intimidation of school-going girls needs to be addressed effectively and girls' voices need to be given due recognition to build consensus for transformation so that schooling is both safe and empowering for them.

Awareness programmes specifically addressing the issue of child marriage need to be promoted so that the law stipulating the minimum age of marriage is enforced effectively. Advocacy to stop early marriage of girls should be a priority agenda to help girls complete at least the primary cycle.

The policy of priority recruitment of female teachers in primary schools has not yielded the desired result, hence the policy needs to be complemented by effective strategies so that primary schools absorb the required number of female teachers. Female teachers and staff members should be trained, empowered and given opportunities to take up decision-making and managerial positions.

The Primary and Mass Education Department should initiate an administrative reform process to allow innovations and ideas to evolve and promote bottom-up approaches to planning, administration and management of primary education programmes. The issue that girls are under-achieving in primary education compared with boys needs to be seriously addressed.

A policy supporting girls' entry into technical and vocational education is necessary to encourage girls to realize new possibilities and aspirations as a result of completing the primary education cycle and continuing through secondary education.

6.3 Girls' Education in Bhutan

Bhutan's education sector policies and strategies are informed by the country's vision 2020 development framework.

> Vision 2020 provides a framework of development principles, which address Bhutan's unique needs and priorities for attaining its underpinning development objective of Gross National Happiness. Human Development, Culture and Heritage, Balanced and Equitable Development, Governance and Environmentally Sustainable Development are the cornerstones of this vision. Vision 2020 provides desirable long-term outcomes and milestones in each sector of development. (Department of Education, Ministry of Health and Education, undated, p.2)

At the very outset in the document, Bhutan's Education Sector Strategy acknowledges that education is people's basic human right and a 'prerequisite for achieving the wider social, cultural and economic goals set for the country within [the] national vision' (p.2). The six strategic objectives of the education sector include expanding basic education for the entire population and continuously improving its quality and relevance with a defined timeline to realize important outcomes. The country set 2007 as the target year to achieve universal primary enrolment (UPE).

The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007* does not show data of Bhutan for almost all of the EFA indicators. However, Bhutan's Ministry of Education, Policy and Planning Division has published the country's latest educational statistics (MoE Bhutan, 2007). Unlike in most other South Asian countries, Bhutan's primary education is of 7 years (Pre-Primary to Grade VI) and basic education is of 11 years (PP to X). The 2007 net enrolment rate for primary education including private school enrolment is 83.7 per cent with almost perfect gender parity (MoE Bhutan, 2007). Thus 2007 as the target year for UPE has been missed.

The available quantitative information on quality and efficiency of primary education depicts an encouraging trend. With very low grade repetition and dropout rates, maintained since 1998, the country has demonstrated that its primary and basic education system is highly stable and efficient (primary education internal efficiency rate for 2006 is 70.4%). More than 90 per cent of students in each of the primary grades, without any gender disparity, are promoted to higher grades with an average of less than 2 per cent dropping out. The only serious challenge the country seems to face is achieving 100 per cent enrolment of the primary age children.

Gender disparity in relation to the key EFA indicators is not too wide in the primary and basic education system of Bhutan. At the primary level girls have done better in most of the indicators, while at upper grades in secondary level boys have done better; however, the differences at both levels are relatively minor. The EFA-related gender disaggregated quantitative information of Bhutan presents an interesting and successful case for the neighbouring countries to learn from. Not only is the proportion of girls equal to that of boys in primary school, but girls have stayed in school equally long and achieved at par with boys.

The UNGEI website states that 'significant disparities in enrolment and other education indicators exist between urban and rural areas, and between different income groups. Challenges include enhancing the access and quality of primary education to children in rural and remote areas' (UNGEI, 2006). Four of the 20 Dzongkhags have a NER of less than 75 per cent and in three of them there is an average gender gap of 15 percentage points against girls. One Dzongkhag in particular, Gasa, is lagging far behind with almost half of primary school age girls still out of school. At the national level, although

gender parity in enrolment has been achieved, the government statistics suggest that there are still 16.3 per cent or about 16,500 out-of-school primary school age children with almost equal numbers of boys and girls. 'However, most children enrolled in monasteries are boys, and only a few girls are enrolled. This means that the number of girls who are not in school is probably bigger than the number of boys' (MoE Bhutan, 2007, p.18). The problem of gender disparity is endemic more in rural and remote Bhutan. Otherwise, the national statistics depict a gender-balanced educational scenario, which makes it an interesting case for the neighbouring countries to learn from. What makes it possible for Bhutan to achieve this level of gender equality in primary and basic education at national level and what might have been the key barriers to girls' education in some of the rural and remote areas? Also interesting would be to find out how girls' opportunity to participate equitably in primary and basic education impacts upon their lives.

6.3.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

Although available documents are not explicit that poverty is an obvious factor for hindering girls' education, the widespread perception among youth especially in rural Bhutan is that employment opportunities are limited even for those who have been educated. Farming is considered 'a viable fallback option' for which formal education is not necessary (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001, p.4). Sustaining subsistence livelihoods is the priority over educational participation for most rural women and girls – the Gender Pilot Study found that 75 per cent of rural women of the reproductive age group 20–24 were illiterate, only 4 per cent have joined the formal economy, 85 per cent of those enrolled in school had dropped out without continuing at lower secondary level, and most of the women attending NFE classes tended not to complete the course (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001).

Cultural context

The perception that women are weaker and more vulnerable than men is still widespread in Bhutanese society (RGoB, 2007). Therefore, the formal provision of equal legal status with men has not ensured equality for women. They are tacitly discriminated against in access to education, managerial, political and social positions, enterprise development and governance (RGoB, 2007; CEDAW, 2004).

This sort of subtle gender bias prevalent in the Bhutanese society is reported by the *Gender Pilot Study 2001* (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001). Violence against women was identified as a serious issue during the UN CEDAW Committee's 30th session. These forms of discrimination are bound to have negative socio-psychological effects on girls, which is reflected by girls' concentration in the low-performing groups compared with boys in the 2003 Class 4 National Achievement Test in Literacy and Numeracy (MoE Bhutan, 2004a).

What is even more ironic is the limited treatment of gender disaggregated analysis in the core of the National Achievement Test report. Such a lack of gender analysis is evident despite its importance indicated in the recommendations of the *Gender Pilot Study 2001*. The national test study has not only ignored gender issues in its key guiding questions but has also taken the educationally deprived scenario depicted in the test score of girls (as evident in the annexed tables of the report) for granted by not giving it a place in the main body of the report (MoE Bhutan, 2004a, p.74). Gendered analysis of the test scores was limited to finding overall means in numeracy and literacy and making a general statement

that boys performed better in numeracy and girls in literacy. The report made the hasty and generalized statement:

> [T]he lack of clear differences in performances between boys and girls suggests that equal opportunity for education is being matched by equal performance, and that neither group is particularly advantaged over the other. (MoE Bhutan, 2004a, p.16)

Test scores have not been compared for girls and boys at Dzonkhag and rural/urban levels nor are the responses of teachers and students analysed by gender.

Obviously, the subtle prevalence of subordinating the role of women in general and girls in the context of schooling in particular has put them in a disadvantaged position. Because of the lack of gender-disaggregated data and the apparent culture of ignoring gender analysis in development efforts (RGoB, 2007), the state has missed opportunities to address the issue, in particular, of girls' discriminated participation in education as also of women's general social, political and entrepreneurial status.

State policies, strategies and barriers

As a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Bhutan government is expected to comply fully with the commitments it made in the international forums, which include taking necessary proactive steps to ensure the rights of women and children. One of the key concerns raised during the 13th session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women was that the state is gender neutral and the system lacks 'attention to gender perspective and to discrimination and inequality faced by women and girls' (CEDAW, 2004, p.4). Education sector policies and strategies reflect this shortcoming of the government in not giving due importance to targeting girls specifically to address the gender stereotypes, whether direct or subtle, for example girls' choices for further education or career paths. The decisions the authority takes, which affect local stakeholders, overlook gender concerns.

The change of strategy about a boarding school facility made available for students of isolated settlements in remote areas presents an example. It has been perceived to be too expensive so the government plans to retain the scheme only for the isolated nomadic communities (DoE Bhutan, undated). Girls' enrolment in remote areas such as in Gasa is extremely low but whether girls are given priority in the boarding school scheme is not explicit nor is there any other clear strategy in favour of girls' education. Therefore, in the absence of policy or strategic response, the geographic isolation will continue to be a serious barrier for girls. The boarding school facility would be reduced by establishing smaller schools in the remote communities, but as the strategy paper acknowledged, fulfilling the need for qualified and competent teachers was going to be a huge challenge (DoE Bhutan, undated). With all these uncertainties, the education of many girls from remote and isolated communities too remains uncertain.

The strategy to limit primary education learning objectives to the mastery of basic literacy and numeracy, along with the acquisition of basic values relevant for everyday life in Bhutan (DoE Bhutan, undated, p.16), limits girls' ability to think critically and become politically empowered. Realigning curricula and instilling 'core values and ethos of Bhutanese society' (DoE Bhutan, undated, p.19) have been specifically stressed education strategies.

Two studies proposed in the strategy paper – one to find out the causes of dropout and the second one a baseline study on quality of education – did not show any conscious gender consideration. Girls' reduced participation at the secondary and tertiary level has not raised policy and strategic concern. Opportunities for higher education, as the educational strategy paper states, would be strictly based on merit. However, because of being historically underprivileged girls are less likely to compete with their privileged male counterparts. There is no provision of affirmative consideration in favour of girls. Without the prospect of such further opportunities, girls can lose motivation for acquiring even basic education.

Use of computers and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education has been repeatedly stressed in the strategy document, but it remained silent about how this new addition to the pedagogical process would be made gender sensitive. This raises the issue of ICT being a male-dominated domain, as has been the case in the technical and vocational education field.

While teachers' quantity as well as quality is being upgraded, no specific initiative is evident in available documents to encourage the promotion of female teachers. The Quality of Education (Standard) paper of the Ministry of Education (MoE Bhutan, 2006) outlines various schemes of teacher development, but remains silent on whether the issue of female teachers would be proactively addressed.

Similarly, the School Innovation Grants being offered to schools in Bhutan under the Education Development Project has remained gender blind in its invitation for proposals from schools. Schools' eligibility for the grant is assessed on the basis of a set of criteria, none of which address whether education of girls and the disadvantaged has been a priority of the school seeking the grant (MoE Bhutan, 2004b).

School atmosphere
A third of the class 4 students sampled for the National Achievement Test in Numeracy and Literacy spent more than four hours walking to and from school every day (MoE Bhutan, 2004a). Although the extent of the problem is unknown, the story of the three girls (see Box 6) presents evidence that there are communities in Bhutan where primary schools are not available at a walking distance for children. The case of the three girls can only be seen as a non-typical example of passion for education despite the difficulties. Not all parents from inaccessible communities can be expected to arrange rooms near the school for their children to live and study away from home.

There is no study available that tells about the situation for girls in school. Even the National Gender Study 2001, in its education section, has remained too general in explaining the situation of school facilities as perceived by parents, teachers and students. It talks about regular parent–teacher meetings but says nothing specific about education of girls. Similarly the problems of physical facilities, such as lack of toilets or classrooms, listed do not specify how they affect girls' participation. Most parents wanted female teachers, but there was a limited number of them in schools especially in remote areas, and in some there was no female teacher at all (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001).

In isolated areas where households are geographically scattered, children have to walk long distances to school, and for some it is just not possible to cover the distance in a reasonable amount of time. The government has therefore made provision of boarding facilities in schools. However, according to the National Gender Study 2001, students and teachers complain about the poor condition of dormitories and toilets.

What girls feel about the school atmosphere is not well researched and documented in the available literature. There are some sporadic pieces of information that depict efforts being made to improve school facilities for quality education (e.g. through the School Innovative Grant Programme), but no effort is specifically targeted at the promotion of girls' education.

Box 6   Bhutan: School shortage forces pupils to leave home

By Pawan Kucita

UNICEF's latest 'Progress for Children' report, on gender parity and primary education, is part of the many efforts by partners in the world community to ensure that opportunities for going to school are equally available to both girls and boys. The report complements the work of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative and the Gender Achievement and Prospects in Education (GAP) project, both supported by UN agencies, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector and communities and families.

New York, 28 April 2005 – Chandra, 9, Tika, 8, and Lela, 7, are sisters attending Beteni Community School in the district of Tsirang in south-central Bhutan. Because their home is a 6-hour walk from the school, their father, a farmer, has built a small hut for them to live in during the week. The hut is near the school and is made of mud and sticks, with an iron sheet as the roof.

The hut has no windows other than slits in the walls. The interior is dark even during the day. Chandra, Tika and Lela live, cook, eat, study and sleep in the hut during the week, only seeing their parents on weekends, walking home to their village, Pakhey, on Saturdays and returning the next day with food for the following week.

'I like studying,' Chandra says, 'but I don't like staying here, away from mother and father. I want to study and live with my parents.'

Daily routine

UNICEF is supporting the Bhutanese government in constructing 137 new community schools by the end of 2005, including one near the home village of Chandra, Tika and Lela. The goal is to ensure that communities have schools close by, so that girls and boys can live at home, instead of living by themselves in temporary huts, and still get an education.

During the week, the sisters' daily routine is simple. The trio get up at 6 a.m., cook breakfast and eat, and then go to school at 8 a.m. Since most of the children at the school cannot afford to bring lunch, there is no lunch break. The school day ends at 2 p.m.

After school, the sisters collect firewood with their friends, cook dinner and eat, and study in the evening. They also play with friends. Since there is no electricity for lighting, they go to bed by 7 p.m. All three sleep in one small bed of about 1.5 m x 1.5 m in size.

All three girls want to continue going to school, despite the conditions which they face in doing so. Whatever life goal she finally decides on, Chandra is definite in saying that she wants to be educated. Tika and Lela aspire to become officers in the Government.

⏩ **Box 6 (cont.)**   **Bhutan: School shortage forces pupils to leave home**

Looking forward to new schools
The sisters are far from the only pupils at Beteni Community School who live in temporary huts. Children and parents alike seem determined that the opportunity for learning must be used.

But for those who don't see their family members for days at a time, the new community schools, allowing children to live at home with their parents while going to school, cannot come soon enough.

Source: http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/bhutan_26248.html.

Curricular form and content
The entire education system suffers from a lack of gender analysis, including particularly the process of curricular reform and approach to pedagogy. Whatever functions take place within the system, along with the given structure and power relations, have all been taken for granted. Quality of education is synonymous with ensuring students' mastery of subject knowledge particularly in the 'tool' subjects of English, Maths and Dzonkha (MoE Bhutan, 2006, p.5).

Curricular reform, as mentioned in MoE's paper on Quality of Education (2006), focused more on fine-tuning the content in the three 'tool' subjects for effective acquisition of selected knowledge and skills by students at appropriate classes. Social analysis and critical thinking are not mentioned as an aspect important for consideration. Nor does the process place any importance on gender analysis of the content of the curriculum, its organization or the approach to delivering it in the classroom.

What may be concluded, therefore, is that while the education authority is concerned about aspects like values education, the need to foster critical pedagogy is not a priority. Schooling therefore seems to reinforce social reproduction at the expense of allowing students to experience empowerment, to understand critically gender and social power relations and to function as agents of social reform rather than mere recipients of packaged knowledge and skills.

6.3.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education
Political will and policy support
Education is a priority sector for the Royal Government of Bhutan. According to the Ministry of Education paper on Quality (Standard) of Education (2006), there has been a general concern about the declining quality of education. What exactly the term 'declining quality' means is not explicit in the document, but the rapid increase in the enrolment in secondary education has been mentioned as one of the key causes.

The cost of education is primarily borne by the government. However, in 1993 the government took a policy decision to start implementing a scheme of cost sharing based on affordability (MoE Bhutan, 2007, p.41). The issue of equity is addressed by attempting to balance through an equitable distribution of the state's service of free basic education to all.

Girls' share of enrolment in primary school, which used to be 39 per cent in 1990, is now 46 per cent. The rapid increase in enrolment is attributed partly to the government's policy of having communities build

and maintain their own schools, known as community schools (DoE Bhutan, undated). DoE's strategy paper mentions that the community primary school 'concept will be further strengthened with primary schools being developed to provide a broader range of community functions. They will serve as community amenities which may incorporate a computer centre, literacy centre, community library and a place for community functions' (p.16). However, this was more of a generalized strategy lacking specific gender focus. There is no proactive explanation about how community schools would be girl friendly.

Interventions and innovations
Definite and proactive pro-girl educational interventions/innovations are yet to be visible. Efforts are being made to improve the teaching–learning conditions in schools, but they seem to remain gender blind. Under the School Innovation and Grant Programme, the Ministry of Education has invited schools to submit their innovative plans that would improve the quality of education. This would certainly give schools the opportunity to express whether innovations need to be targeted to girls and disadvantaged children. But because of the apparent lack of gender sensitivity and analysis at all levels of the education system it is doubtful whether schools would make best use of this opportunity to address the gender issues, which according to the National Gender Study are tacitly embedded in Bhutanese society.

Knowledge management
The National Gender Study 2001 was the first ever gender study carried out in Bhutan. The study revealed the dark side of the country's apparent high level of gender equality. It asserted that the country does suffer from more subtle and indirect forms of inequality, but fell short of explaining or providing examples of what those subtle and indirect forms of inequality meant. The study was a general investigation of the gender scenario and was completed in six months, hence cannot be expected to be rigorous enough in capturing critical gender issues related to specific contexts. But it was a commendable start which made recommendations that more in-depth micro-studies need to be carried out to unravel the details of the trend that the national study identified.

With the establishment of the National Commission for Women and Children in 2004, Bhutan is now moving forward with more proactive programmes and strategies for gender equality and women's empowerment. The concerted gender initiatives have come about long after the country had endorsed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. The government, with the cooperation of UNDP, has now intensified engendering the system as a whole – for example, formation of a gender focal point in each ministry. Because of the infancy of the gender phenomenon in the country, a consolidated knowledge base on girls' education is yet to emerge in the education sector. Gender audit is still a rare term in the educational structure. So are the narratives, stories and experiences of school-age girls, especially those residing in difficult terrain. The story of the three sisters (see Box 6), which is an exception, tells about the courageous pursuit of an education by the girls. But there are certainly other girls in similar situations who for various reasons have been deprived of access to education. Therefore, the education sector needs to make a serious effort to generate research-based information and consolidate a knowledge base on gender. Currently studies depicting stories of girls and women, living in specific contexts, in relation to their experiences of schooling and learning are lacking.

6.3.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

The statistical gender balance in primary and basic educational attainment of school age children does not translate into girls' equal participation in technical and vocational education – only 33 per cent of the total students are girls and less than 1 per cent of the teachers are female (MoE Bhutan, 2007). The wide-scale girls' participation in basic education, however, has promoted their literacy and general life skills. In order to most effectively realize the impact of basic education on their lives, further avenues of learning linked directly to livelihoods, economic opportunities, and social and political empowerment need to be opened up.

Opportunities to participate in governance may have encouraged women and girls to attend school, but their participation is limited to village level which obviously is the bottom layer of governance. Women's inability to participate higher up the political and governance ladder could be both a cause and an effect of most rural women's and girls' educational attainment being limited mostly to primary level (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001).

According to the Gender Pilot Study 2001 the male counterpart in the village level governance felt that women's 'adequate' representation was not matched by their commitment, nor were they making their voices heard. The report indicated that the expansion of agrarian economic dependence into more enterprising economic activities has contributed rather negatively to women's decision-making role, with women more confined to multiple household tasks. It was cautioned in the report that because of the lack of women's access to technology, training and business opportunities they may also be 'bypassed by technological advances and economic growth' (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001, p.5).

The basic education which most women have acquired allowed only a limited political, governance and entrepreneurial role. The Gender Pilot Survey 2001 found that 'men dominated the public domain, involved in the larger macro-level decisions while women are in the private realm making micro deci-sions' (RGoB and UN Agencies, 2001, p.5).

An important lesson is that if the well intended educational initiatives for girls do not heed the perceived lack of socio-economic and political value of education, the girls would lose interest in remaining in school and pursuing secondary, tertiary, technical and entrepreneurial education.

6.3.4 Recommendations

The Bhutanese rural economy that confines female youth in agriculture farming as a 'viable fallback option' should be linked with educational attainment. Their participation in agriculture and subsistence farming should no longer deprive them of their right to education and limit their learning to literacy and numeracy, but enable them to expand their economic opportunities.

The subtlety of the culturally embedded subordinate role of women and girls needs to be unfolded and the issue needs to be addressed through consciously including gender disaggregated analyses in all national, regional and local level educational surveys. A gender audit should be institutionalized to address the cultural bias against educational opportunities for girls.

Proactive policy measures need to be in place not only to encourage girls to opt for what has traditionally been the stream of learning dominated by boys, but also to ensure a conducive safety net and support system for girls to compete equally with boys. Technical education and vocational training, including information technology, are such areas where girls' access and achievement need to be promoted by making conscious policy and programme efforts.

Existing provisions favouring boys and girls residing in remote areas, for example student dormitories in isolated areas such as Gasa, should not be discontinued in the name of cutting cost. Ensuring equity in education should be a clear government policy.

School environments need to be assessed from a gender perspective as available information does not adequately show whether how girls find school as a social institution has any bearing on their poor performance and lack of retention through the primary cycle. Such assessments should try to bring to the surface the subtlety of discrimination, if any, against girls in school.

The primary education curriculum, which seems focused more on imparting social values along with proficiency or mastery of subject knowledge, should be revised periodically to include pedagogical content and processes that will specifically allow students to develop critical thinking.

6.4 Girls' Education in India

With the vastness of the country both in terms of geographical boundaries and ecological and socio-cultural diversity, the government faces enormous challenges in ensuring its constitutional commitment to every citizen's right to education. In the same vein, it will not be possible for this section on girls' education in India to capture the totality of initiatives, progress and issues around the topic. The analysis here, therefore, will be informed, by and large, by a macro-level knowledge base supplemented wherever possible by documented evidence from the local context.

Notwithstanding the country's challenging educational context, the country stands fully blessed with the largest democratic political system in the world. The political freedom that the people of India have enjoyed in the past 60 years has made it possible to critically unpack the gaps experienced in, among others, the attempts to assure the right to an education for every girl and generate a comprehensive knowledge base about the diverse context and the related educational needs of girls. There is no dearth of affirmative policy responses to the educational needs of diverse groups of girls, whether from schedule tribes, schedule castes, nomads, urban poor, etc. In fact the secular, pluralistic and inclusive democratic polity of the nation has provided a pro-people engendered orientation for the Indian law makers to formulate a very progressive policy framework on girls'/women's education and empowerment through a democratic process of national consultation and consensus building (Ramachandran, 1998).

Despite the open political context and people's engagement in democratic processes, the progress in girls' access to and benefit from educational opportunities is felt to be inadequate compared with the huge economic development that India has achieved in recent years. India, along with China, has been recognized as being one of the world's fastest growing economies. But the growth in the number of girls

attending and completing primary school is not as commendable. Fewer girls attend school (gender parity 0.93 in favour of boys) and even fewer girls continue education at general secondary level (83% girls compared with 87% boys) (UNESCO, 2008b). The EFA GMR 2008 has yet again categorized India among the low achieving countries in terms of the EDI (Education Development Index) – India takes 105th position with an EDI of 0.797 in the ranking of 129 countries with data. Primary school classrooms in India are the most crowded (with average student:teacher ratio 41:1) compared with other South Asian countries (UNESCO, 2008b). According to a 1997 estimate, there would be a shortage of 1.5 million teachers if all children were to attend primary school even at the current student:teacher ratio (Ramachandran, 1998).

The rate of female literacy (age 7 and more) in India has increased by almost 14 per cent (from 40% to 54%) in the 10 years between 1991 and 2001. But the absolute number of illiterate females has remained almost the same (193 million in 2001 compared with 198 million in 1991). India is still a long way from achieving gender parity in literacy. The current gender parity index is 0.713 in favour of males (a gender gap of almost 22 percentage points). Female literacy rates also vary among Indian states with the highest at 87.7 per cent in Kerala and lowest in Bihar at 31.1 per cent. Rajasthan with the lowest female rate in 1991 has made significant progress with an almost 24 percentage point increase, from 20 per cent in 1991 to 44 per cent in 2001 (GoI, 2001; Velkoff, 1998).

India presents a very complex educational context where progress made in girls' education in the past 10 years is quite visible but more needs to be done to realize gender parity in several educational indicators (e.g. literacy, school enrolment, learning outcome, retention, survival and transition to higher educational levels) and attain gender equality. The rapidly growing economy is yet to bring equitable benefits for girls and women living in difficult situations in terms of their participation in education, overall wellbeing and empowerment. Despite some states' exemplary achievements in girls' education and female literacy, situations vary across states as well as among different social groups and between urban and rural areas. However, with the political system resting on the principles of democracy, secularism and pluralism, the people of India have had the opportunity to participate in the political process for the past 61 years and have their voices heard. This has resulted in the establishment of a rich body of knowledge on diversity, deprivation and exclusion based on gender, caste and creed. The process has allowed the critical evolution of gender-sensitive and inclusive educational policies. The country is making progress to realize effective implementation of affirmative and responsive policies and strategies so that targets, especially those of MDG and EFA, will be achieved in the given time frame.

6.4.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

The majority of Indian people live in villages, where most of the domestic roles are consciously or subconsciously assumed by women. The potential of women's active economic role through engagement in, for example, the entrepreneurial or formal sector is grossly undermined. Poor families are doubly affected by this sort of conservative outlook – the opportunity to tap domestically available human resource for income earning is lost; and women's domestic role continues to be devalued with the consequence that the family remains unable to escape from the poverty trap and support the schooling of daughters (see Box 7).

Box 7   **Subordinate role of women in India**

The patriarchal framework excludes women from taking economic decisions at the family as well as the village level. This is despite the fact that many women in lower socioeconomic groups contribute substantially to family income by working in the fields. It is accepted that women, especially rural women, are the single most economically disadvantaged group in today's India.

Source: Das (2007, p.31).

In a poor family young school-age girls are required at home to help the family with essential household chores or for subsistence wage labour (see Box 8 for a story of how girls can be convinced that there is no value in receiving an education). Boys may be spared from such chores and given the opportunity to go to school.

Box 8   **No regrets about non-enrolment**

Saroj, a 16 year-old village girl of Rajasthan, has never enrolled in school but has been weaving carpets as a wage labourer already for ten years. The opportunity cost would have been heavy for the family if she had been enrolled in school 10 years ago. There is no regret on her part for not going to school as she feels that she is now skilled enough to earn 60 rupees a day. She questions, 'What could I have gained from going to school?'

Source: Kothari (2007).

Educating a daughter, especially in a poor family, is perceived not only as an unnecessary luxury but also as a liability. As dowry is still a widely practised cultural norm, the birth of a daughter in the family is, in the first place, a huge financial burden. Secondly, a girl by virtue of her feminine status is expected to marry a man who should be in a better social position and level of education than her. This phenomenon is lucidly explained by Dreze and Sen (1995): 'If an educated girl can only marry a *more* educated boy, and if dowry payments increase with the education of the groom, then, given other things, an educated girl is likely to be more expensive to marry off' (p.135, emphasis original). For a poverty-stricken family, it is unthinkable to meet the dowry demand of an educated groom.

This phenomenon of poverty contributing to non-participation of girls in education is more prominent in north Indian states, where there is a strong feudal agrarian culture, subordination and oppression of girls, women, and Dalits, and subjugation of social institutions into chaos and political affairs into corruption that largely serves the interests of the elites and feudal lords (Dreze and Sen, 1995). In southern states such as Kerala, where such types of social relations are almost absent, girls enjoy equally with boys attaining and achieving educationally and women have an equal stake and influence on economic, social and political activities. It is no surprise, therefore, that in the measures of other key social indicators, too, Kerala far exceeds those of the northern states. Neither poverty nor non-schooling of girls is a serious issue there.

Cultural context

As Dreze and Sen contend, education of girls in India's 'dominant Brahminical tradition' (p.132) is historically seen as a threat to the social order. Although this belief is increasingly challenged in most Indian societies, the hidden value of male chauvinism – which is reflected mainly in the attitudes and behaviours of male social elites belonging to the so-called upper caste – is culturally engraved. Boys are always preferred over girls if a choice for an opportunity has to be made. Such a preference takes effect soon after the pregnancy of a woman begins. Abortion based on sex-preference is rampant in India resulting in millions of missing women every year. Increasingly fewer girls than boys are born – according to the Indian National Census (2001) the national child-sex ratio is 927 girls for every 1000 boys for the age group 0–6 years (see Box 9).

Box 9   Missing girls in India

[T]he mortality rate among children aged 1–5 is 50 per cent higher for girls than for boys. If India closed this gender gap, it would save an estimated 130,000 lives, reducing its overall child mortality rate by 5 per cent. Discrimination on the basis of gender poses a threat to girls' education, nutrition, protection and survival. Its effects extend well beyond the childhood years, and often persist throughout the lifecycle.

Source: Köhler and Keane (2006, p.4)

When in a society the preference for sons can even lead many couples to commit the crime of female foeticide, it is not difficult to imagine the extent to which the discriminatory general social perception against education of girls can be pervasive and deep-rooted. Formulation of proactive and transformative gender policies alone does not address the issue of deep-rooted gender discrimination against girls' education. A transformative social mobilization process unfortunately has not come about satisfactorily in India. The National Family Health Survey 3 report presents an example that 54 per cent of women and 51 per cent of men consider it right for the husband to beat his wife, and 40 per cent of women suffer from domestic violence of which only 2 per cent lodge a formal report with the police (MoHFW India, 2007). This shocking social practice creates expectations with the upcoming generation about the established power relation in a marriage. Its implication can only be grossly negative in efforts to promote education of daughters.

To be a Dalit girl is to remain doubly deprived. As Rampal (2005) has aptly portrayed: 'Dalit girls suffer the multiple burdens of poverty, caste and gender, and caste discrimination from peers and teachers continues to obstruct social access to education, by hurting their dignity and self worth' (p.4). Ironically, the transformative role of an educational institution is far from being experienced by girls from deprived social groups. On the contrary, even there they are systematically harassed, dehumanized and pushed to submitting to the 'culture of silence'. What is the motivation for girls to enrol in the school, and for those who dare to do so where is the environment to complete even the basic education cycle?

State policies, strategies and barriers
Although education of girls is regarded by the policy framework as a basic human right, the situation on the ground is not as promising. The policy statement and the power entrusted to states to practise

protective discrimination in favour of girls and women have produced results in so far as rapidly increasing girls' enrolment in primary stage is concerned. But the issue of quality has been left grossly unaddressed, despite the serious recommendations made by the last Education Commission back in 1966, as was pointed out later by Naik (1982), the Member Secretary of that Commission (see Box 10).

Box 10 Quantity and quality of education

No one seemed to believe that Government would really transform or improve education to any significant extent; *everyone believed that some education (and even bad education) is better than no education.* Many politicians had only a faint idea of what 'transformation' meant; and as for quality, the common retort was: we cannot sacrifice quantity for quality … *We were in fact called fools who try to educate those who do not come to school and do not want to learn … The first duty of a government, we were told, was to educate those who were willing to learn. The task of those who do not even want to learn should come later.*

Source: Naik (1982), quoted and with added emphases by Rampal (2005, p.3).

The 86th amendment of the Constitution of India 'radically altered' the original Article 45 which, according to Rampal (2005), was much more explicit in the:

state's commitment to universalize elementary education … The new Article 21A now reads: 'The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years, *in the manner as the state may by law determine.*' (p.1, emphasis original)

Rampal (2005) asserts that the Constitutional amendment of Article 45 and the subsequent formulation of the Education Act have been discouraging for the most discriminated groups, including girls. She went on to mention that the requirement from the Education Commission in 1966 that education be made egalitarian and that all children – poor and rich, girls and boys alike – learn through one system of schooling remained shelved. The country has an educational system in which the rich and more 'willing' can 'buy' education of their choice while the less 'willing' or 'unwilling' are to be educated through apparently quality-compromised 'alternative schooling'. Girls and other disadvantaged groups look for an education to be able to come out of their deprived social status only to be disillusioned by the available provisions – they drop out of school not because they want to but because they learn little, if at all (Rampal, 2005). The primary education subsector, despite an almost seven-fold increase in the outlay of central budget from US$600 million to US$4 billion, is not producing results that demonstrate acceptable quality of education, let alone equality and equity in quality education (GoI, 2006). In Uttar Pradesh, the education system has failed to ensure acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy among most children even after class 5 (World Bank study quoted in Köhler and Keane, 2006).

While noticeable progress has been made in the level of female literacy and enrolment rates – including those in most of the problem pockets (e.g. rural areas and in the states with low records) – the problem of enrolling and retaining girls from disadvantaged groups in primary school persists. Disparities among girls from varying socio-economic backgrounds are still prominent. The gender parity in

enrolment within schedule castes and schedule tribes is below that of all communities both at primary and middle stages, and more so in the latter (Nayer, 2002).

Rampal (2005) offers a serious criticism of the supply-driven 'tick-box' approach to stakeholders' partnership in assessing the quality of education. The approach, she asserts, often views education quality as a commodity for its economic significance, ignoring the importance of assessing the process and impact for their transformative potential. She argues that the approach to 'promoting' education of women takes sway depending upon the interest of the ruling party. As Dreze and Sen (1995) have also pointed out, the conservative and so-called upper-caste ruler class believes that knowledge is not for the lower castes to acquire. Rampal (2005) makes reference to the political agenda during the time of the central right-wing conservative government that it:

> had attempted reversal of policies and programmes on women, insisting that their traditional domestic roles be restored and supported. The document of the Tenth Plan Working Group on Adult Education, for instance, consciously sought to obliterate all mention of the term 'mobilization', which was assumed to have been too 'political' (or left aligned), but which had become an intrinsic part of the vocabulary and design of the programme. (Rampal, 2005, p.9)

There is no doubt that girls' and women's education has remained high on government agendas, but the approach to policy support that once served the purpose of social transformation and empowerment was, according to Rampal (2005), replaced by a rather conservative managerial format that remains uncorrected even today, that reinforced social reproduction and gender stereotypes. Therefore, although the continuation of policy thrust has resulted in increased girls' enrolment in school and women's participation in literacy programmes, the curriculum guiding the learning process is influenced by the political agenda of the ruling party. Critics like Rampal (2005) see a serious problem in the curriculum shifts 'towards more minimalist and even behaviourist competence-based formats, at the expense of a more critical pedagogy required for autonomous learning and democratic citizenship' (p.7).

School atmosphere
The situation of girls' education varies widely across the states and communities. The quality of the physical condition of a large number of schools is unsatisfactory, particularly in the isolated and remote communities. Qualified and pedagogically sensitive teachers, let alone female teachers, are not available in such schools. Obviously because of the government's lack of response to meet the high cost associated with ensuring educational equality and equity, girls and boys mostly in isolated communities are not getting the same quality of education as in other less remote areas. The so-called innovations such as Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) of Madhya Pradesh and Alternative School focus almost exclusively on the urgency of ensuring access to primary education, with little emphasis on quality. In EGS, for example, the fact that a single teacher with class 12 education is expected to take the responsibility of managing and teaching at least 40 students (25 in the case of indigenous groups) collected from the community under the scheme in itself is a testimony that quality cannot be assured. The growing body of pedagogical literature increasingly emphasizes that children need to be in the care of teachers having essential pedagogical qualities while the schools need to provide an appropriate learning atmosphere (see, for example, van Manen, 1991). But in India, Naik (1982) saw it otherwise, sounding extremely impatient in his plea that more of the same sub-standard ad hoc arrangements of schooling for the 'unwilling' mass of children would do more harm than good to them and society.

UNICEF India has indicated that in 2003, absence of primary school teachers … exceeded 20% in 12 states in India, and 40% in six states. In the state of Bihar in 2003, 50% of the primary school teaching posts were vacant and of the 50% of posts that were filled, 39% of those teachers did not show up for work. Additionally, of those who did report to work, only half were conducting education related activities. (Köhler and Keane, 2006, p.15)

Therefore, although there has been a substantial increase in girls' enrolment (7 million girls compared with 4 million boys in a period between 1986 and 1997), the number of girls leaving school without completing the primary cycle is very high – 41 per cent of girls compared with 38 per cent of boys dropped out in 1997–98 (Nayer, 2002). The figure is much higher in rural areas and in the case of those from schedule castes and schedule tribes. What is clear is that despite several innovative schemes such as EGS and Alternative School, many deprived children are still out of school. And most of those who do go to school are hardly motivated to remain there and complete the primary cycle. The goal of free and compulsory elementary education appears to be grossly mismatched with the way resources are allocated to basic education, especially to meet the cost incurred, if the issues of social (including gender)[6] and rural/urban disparities are to be effectively addressed (Dreze and Sen, 1995, p.120). The government subsidies to education are not equitable as basic education has remained neglected while elites and privileged classes enjoy a highly subsidized system of higher education[7] (Dreze and Sen, 1995; Rampal, 2005), some of which is of world class. While there is enough empirical evidence that popular demand for basic education is very high in India, parents refrain from seeking the services of poorly performing schools even if they are easily accessible. Girls have remained disadvantaged by this situation as parents would be willing to send sons to schools in other village or private schools and pay, but not as willing in the case of daughters. 'The breakdown of government village school typically affects female children more than male children' (Dreze and Sen, 1995, p.133).

Curricular form and content

In shying away from presenting reality as it exists and encouraging learners to crucially question it, textbooks tend to paint a distorted and false picture of the lives of the disadvantaged and the poor. (Rampal, 2002, p.153)

The quote above paints a lucid picture of the content and the form of the prevailing primary education curriculum of the Indian education system. Without an explicit curricular intent to foster a culture of what

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[6] *The Structural Adjustment measures introduced in 1991 caused a slow-down of educational expenditure during 1991–93 resulting in a decline in the absolute number of female primary and upper primary teachers – nearly 14,000 female teaching jobs were lost (Dreze and Sen, 1995, p.123).*

[7] *'Even within the field of elementary education, there is a good deal of elitism in educational policy. In particular, the current thrust of official policy for dealing with the non-participation of disadvantaged groups in the elementary education system is mainly to encourage the creation of second-track "non-formal education" facilities, rather than to affirm an uncompromising commitment to their inclusion in the formal schooling system … Some of these alternative channels of schooling are certainly useful in the short term, but a complacent reliance on this two-track formula as a basis for universalizing elementary education carries the real danger of institutionalization rather than eliminating the elitist features of Indian education' (Dreze and Sen, 1995, p.120 footnote).*

Paulo Freire calls 'reading the word and the world', the socially disadvantaged groups like girls are unlikely to benefit in a critical sense from what is being delivered in the formal classroom through the curriculum. As revealed by the report of the National Advisory Committee (also known as the Yashpal Committee), the texts prescribed for schools clearly lack the effort 'to make children think and explore' (MoHRD, 1993) which indicates that children are taught to acquire information uncritically, primarily to retain and reproduce in examinations.

The curriculum and textbooks in general, as the Yashpal Committee evaluated in 1993, are detached from the self and everyday being of the child who is supposed to be at the centre of all learning. Subject-specific contents are organized in such a sequence that students are required to learn the technique of arriving at right answers rather than understanding the concept (see the content analysis of science and mathematics texts in DoE India, 1993). The focus on technique is obviously a 'quick fix' approach to learning, or learning the politics of examinations or conformism. Obviously there is little or no scope to challenge the established knowledge. The opportunity that an exploratory and critical pedagogy would have offered, particularly to girls, is lost. This would have allowed girls a critical understanding of the politics of framing the curriculum and selecting the contents, and the place and meaning of those in the lives of girls. Analysis of gender power relations, an aspect which cuts across all the subject matter and the pedagogical process, lies outside the purview of the curriculum. Learning of mathematics, for example, has been attuned, rather mystically, to be a masculine knowing while women's engagement with complicated concepts of everyday mathematics is dismissed as non-academic female stuff. As Rampal (2002) quotes Harris (1999): '… a woman carrying milk knows precisely, if informally, its volume, its value and how many mouths it can feed' (p.155). To conclude, it would be pertinent to borrow from Dreze and Sen (1995) that unless education and pedagogical process are made to be a more compelling political issue the form and content of the curriculum will remain removed from everyday reality, particularly of girls.

6.4.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education

Political will and policy support

India's national agenda has not left any leeway in committing whatever possible means for promoting girls' education and achieving gender parity, equality and equity in education. According to Nayer (2002), 'there is effort now not only to provide equality of educational opportunity but to transform the entire content and process of education for achieving gender equality and a realignment of gender roles to make them more equitable and harmonious' (p.35). The gender discourse in India is not only confined to ensuring girls' and women's fundamental human right of an equitable access to education, but also acknowledges the inextricable link between underdeveloped rural India and women's traditionally defined identity and status (Nayer, 2002). It implies, therefore, that achieving the national development goal is perceived to be far-fetched if girls' access to good quality education is not ensured and the status of women is not raised.

The Indian Constitution has protected women from any form of discrimination. The provision of a protective discrimination clause in the Constitution empowers Indian states to take affirmative measures in favour of girls and women. Political will to uplift the status of women and education of girls is clearly reflected in the policy framework and national plan of action (DoE India, 1992).

The tangible dividend of all those policy supports informed by the protective discrimination in favour of girls has yielded remarkable results in female literacy along with girls' enrolment growth, faster than that of boys, in the primary stage since 1990. Nayer (2002) noted that 'the growth rates for girls have always been higher than those for boys … [mainly] on account of sustained state effort to promote education of girls as an important part of planned development' (p.37).

But for some critics the result has not come about as much as or in the manner it should have, as shown in the next section.

Interventions and innovations

An increasing number of initiatives are being taken to promote girls' education in India by both government and civil society organizations. However, due to the enormity of the country's physical size and its socio-economic diversity, an impression can be gained that these initiatives are too sporadic and piecemeal. In order to make a concerted effort, 30 different organizations across the country have come together in a network at the national level with the Department of Women's Studies (DWS), NCERT (National Centre of Educational Research and Training) as its Nodal Centre (see NCERT website). This network is a mix of grassroots organizations, universities and government centres, providing a forum to reflect upon innovations and interventions with opportunities to integrate theories and practices. The network has outlined areas of common concern in which specific issues have been identified, with definitive strategies for addressing them along with specific roles of the Nodal Centre and partners on each area of concern. Although the available information does not make reference to any outcome or impact of the network's activities, the stated network purpose and its working modality present an exemplary model for other countries to adapt.

Other notable innovations to promote girls' education are those of the District Primary Education Project, Shiksha Karmi Project, Lok Jumbish and the Bihar Education Project (Nayer, 2002). These initiatives suggest that when the problem of gender equity in education is too severe in specific pockets, paradigmatic debates need to be put aside. The urgency is to design an appropriate development project and get on with whatever may work. The opportunities that projects offer, particularly in making resources available, need to be grabbed – for example to mobilize communities with a popular iconic modality that is likely to bring about change. In the case of the Shiksha Karmi Project, the local activists as facilitators proved highly committed – in the words of Nayer (2002), 'the dedication of SKP personnel is exemplary, to say the least … [that has yielded] batches of girls who have passed Class V and their guardians want these schools to be upgraded to middle stage' (p.41). The DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) on the other hand has, along with other school effectiveness activities, targeted girls with an alternative form of schooling and has achieved gender parity in all the districts where the programme is running. It has managed to achieve its objectives in most of the districts. The result of the NCERT-administered language and mathematics learning assessment survey (1997) in the DPEP districts indicated that the programme's target of narrowing the gender gap to less than 5 percentage points had been achieved in almost all the districts, although social group disparity by and large has remained unchanged (Nayar, 2002).

Both DPEP and SKP have addressed schooling concerns of girls. The need for the girls to experience a sense of empowerment, which is not very evident in the two initiatives, cannot be undervalued though. The support organization therefore needs to be oriented with the right kind of paradigm and capacity to

be an empowering facilitator. Lok Jumbish appears to be in the forefront in this regard. The Bihar Education Project also seeks to emphasize the empowerment aspect along with the schooling of girls. The transformative role of development practitioners which, however, is not explicit in all the initiatives cited above, is therefore critical. Activism and honest commitments without reflection and willingness to improve do not ensure such a capacity among support organizations. Precisely for this reason the 30 organizations mentioned above have realized the value in coming together in the network to share experiences, reflect upon practices, remain self-critical and continue learning how to better facilitate processes of promoting girls' education.

Knowledge management

At the systemic level the progress of girls' education is measured almost exclusively through quantitative data. This process does not involve collection and use of qualitative information. Although the illuminative and explanatory power of qualitative data is widely acknowledged, it is not practically possible for the educational bureaucrats at the macro-level to handle the rigour involved in including qualitative data in the information system. However, individual schools are well placed to analyse girls' education in their contexts making use of both quantitative and qualitative data – a potentially meaningful exercise for strengthening micro-planning with the potential to influence macro-planning. Most schools in India, unfortunately, are known to lack both capacity and motivation to make such a task an integral part of school management processes. The approach to generating and managing the knowledge about issues of education in general and those of girls' education in particular has remained by and large top-down and number-oriented. There is a growing concern, however, about the need for localizing knowledge management, hence the establishment of District Information Systems for Education (DISE).

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) is a key form of knowledge base for the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MoHRD) to inform the world about the progress made in the education sector. The MoHRD collects school level information from all relevant organizations and makes available a publication entitled *Education in India* by making use of the EMIS data (Mehta, 2005). But ensuring quality of data remains a key challenge. For instance, Dreze and Sen (1995) avoided using official data of the Department of Education, arguing that enrolment figures, in particular, 'are known to be grossly inflated, partly due to the incentives that government employees at different levels have to report exaggerated figures' (p.113). Nevertheless, since 1994 with the responsibility of streamlining the collection and management of school data entrusted to NIEPA (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration), local bodies have been mobilized with *mandatory* procedures for ensuring the quality of data sent to the centre (Mehta, 2005).

Although the reliance on EMIS and its quantitative data for identifying issues of girls' education has its merit, it takes more of an interpretive inquiry orientation such as that professed by phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches to capture the structural and more socially ingrained issues underpinning gender disparity in education. For example, the gender-disaggregated information on student learning achievement or dropout may raise the issue of girls' 'poor' performance as a factor contributing negatively to the 'efficiency' of primary education. But as Rampal (2005) has argued:

> unequal gender divisions of labour in the household should similarly raise questions of the 'efficiency' of girl children at school, and the impact that long hours of domestic chores coupled with low levels of nourishment have on their achievement outcomes. (p.5)

The empirical evidence of such and similar other situations of girls, although residing outside the domain of the MoHRD's EMIS, has been made available by an ever-growing number of critical scholarly publications in India (e.g. Ramachandran, 1998, 2003, quoted by Rampal, 2005, p.5). The process of improving educational policies, strategies and plans of action can definitely benefit from such scholarship in devising response initiatives to appropriately address the issues of gender disparities in elementary education.

The current approach to improving the quality of education data has remained top-down, defeating the spirit of decentralization. Mandatory rules are imposed upon local education authorities and schools in the pursuit to ensure the quality of data. School management bodies are given blame instead of empowerment. The effort to link the EMIS with the District Information System for Education (DISE) is without any clarity as to how the link may be made. Schools are at the forefront where educational data is generated, the quality of which will always be an issue if schools see the task of filling up the 'data-capture formats' as an imposition instead of using the task as an internal school management exercise – a potentially revealing and meaningful experience for the stakeholders who not only collect data but also look for patterns and gaps in it, for example those related to girls' social context and their educational participation (Ramchandran, 2003), to be incorporated in the school level micro-planning.

6.4.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

The purpose of acquiring literacy and numeracy has been largely achieved by rural women through schooling at the elementary level. This is indeed a limited scope of learning opportunity available, most prominently, in rural public schools intended particularly for the poor and disadvantaged. There is a second and superior category of school which Rampal (2005) has aptly described and shown how such schools are made less available for girls from poor and deprived families (see Box 11).

Despite this labyrinth of superior/inferior learning opportunities in the schools across rural and urban communities, promoting girls' education has remained a priority in India for over a century. The increase in girls' educational participation, particularly in the 1990s and subsequently, can be attributed to the

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Box 11 **Categorized schools and the choice for girls**

State provision of elementary schooling has never been as starkly stratified as now, ranging from the few better endowed Navodaya Vidyalayas and the Kendriya Vidyalayas or Central Schools for the children of central government servants and army officers, to the poor and dismal state government schools, and now the latest 'transitional schools', for the poorest and the socially 'hardest to reach'. Such differentiated state policies have buttressed the gendered quality divide within families, which are selectively pulling out boys from government schools in favour of private options, while girls are left with the most disadvantaged children. This has been seen even in the most prosperous states of Haryana and Punjab, which, on the one hand, have recorded a decreasing gender gap in literacy and school enrolment, but have also shown alarmingly declining levels of the child sex ratio (in some districts it being as low as 770 girls to 1000 boys!). These developments raise serious questions about the present policies of development and the socializing role of education, which allows a strong cultural preference for boys to couple with declining

> ▸▸ **Box 11 (cont.)** Categorized schools and the choice for girls
>
> fertility rates and weak laws (on selective-sex abortion), to result in exacerbated gender inequalities. Indeed, a comprehensive policy framework linked to legislative reform is essential for gender equality, for establishing not only rights to quality education that can empower women, but also rights to ensure women's control over resources and property.
>
> *Source: Rampal (2005, p.7).*

long-standing pro-girls policies and strategies cited by Nayer (2002) as 'springboard action of the NPE … the programme of action of 1992 … Total Literacy Campaign … ECCE … women's movement and … women's studies' (p.44). Girls' increase in primary education enrolment (far more than that of boys), literacy level, retention rate and the rate of transition to higher educational levels are some positive impacts of the policy and programme initiatives of the past decades.

Increasing girls' enrolment in school and achieving gender parity in enrolment are highly glorified, as if they are the end in themselves, in most of the girls' education literature in India (Nayer, 2002). Participating in and completing basic education is undoubtedly crucial but this is just a necessary, yet not a sufficient, condition. Unexplored aspects are what and where girls' basic education are linked to. Participation in basic education has hardly empowered girls with a perspective to critically analyse and challenge the traditional and discriminatory gender roles. Stories of women breaking away from such roles to take on one in the more formal sector or in politics/leadership are not connected with their school education. In fact, to assume such roles girls and women are required to be involved in critical or transformative pedagogy, which often falls outside the domain of school education. For instance, the self-help group movement in India has made a huge impact on the lives of millions of rural women, but never has this concept been part of the formal education curriculum. A member of a self-help group speaks proudly of an independent role: 'Before, we never left our houses, now we go to the town to deposit our money in the bank' (Das 2007, p.32).

While an increasing number of girls are now in schools and are acquiring literacy and numeracy skills, their educational participation is yet to be an empowering experience and the curriculum offered is yet to be meaningfully applicable, functional and critically oriented. This phenomenon is referred to as dichotomization of educational provision into 'access first' vs. 'quality later' (Rampal, 2005). In the pursuit of expanding free and compulsory primary education for those who cannot afford to pay, quality is being compromised as something that can wait for future consideration. Deprived children, the majority of whom are girls, are precisely the ones who are offered this quality-compromised free education through what is formally known as 'transitional school'. This scenario, for Rampal (2005), explains the influence of the 'efficiency' principle of the liberal economists on the policy and the double standard it indicates – 'school' for 'willing' and 'alternative' for others.

One important lesson from the political history of India pertains to the politically and economically motivated shift in educational policy that has resulted in the perpetuation of unequal social and gender relations in education even after 60 years of democracy. The policy which began with a vision of social

and gender equality in education changed over time due to the specific political interests of governing parties. Such interests included enforcing sub-standard education on those who cannot afford to purchase it and blocking deprived girls from engaging in critical pedagogy out of the fear that their traditional domestic roles may fade away. This social value is endemic to the right-wing conservative party that ruled the country during the time of drafting the country's Tenth Plan. Phrases like 'critical pedagogy', 'social mobilization' and 'empowerment' are viewed to be too progressive and left-oriented (Rampal, 2005). The other interest has been on pushing for 'efficient' allocation of resources for education. Reaching out to the poor and deprived, including girls, with quality education programmes is perceived to be highly inefficient – the emphasis has been on 'free' and 'compulsory' education of low cost to all poor and deprived. The state chose not to 'waste' resources by pumping in funds to provide 'uninterested' sections of social groups with expensive high quality education.

The lesson, therefore, is that rather than relying on political elites for the much-needed transformative education of girls, deprived women and girls themselves need to have their voices heard and their concerns reflected in the policy. In this context, it will be crucial for them to be mobilized and organized, and to intensify their own movement for social justice and equality in education – even if some parties find these overly progressive and left-oriented.

6.4.4 Recommendations

For girls and women to assume roles in a more formal sector and in politics they are required to be involved in critical or transformative pedagogy. Therefore, the existing curriculum of basic education should be reviewed and reformed to make it more critically oriented and to help 'children think and explore' (MoHRD, 1993). It is also equally important that the scope of currently run literacy programmes be widened to include an empowering non-formal education component so that the participation of women in such programmes encourages them to question their domestically confined and subordinate social role.

Since social norms are inextricably linked with discrimination and social exclusion, discursive processes of social mobilization to challenge the established discriminatory norms will be necessary to realize a longer-term behavioural change among the social actors. Tough legally backed protective measures should be in place to make the school environment free from the subtle as well as obvious in-campus discriminatory practices against girls, especially those belonging to socially deprived groups such as Dalits.

Policy and strategic support should be provided to narrow the gaps between the educational provisions and quality for rich ('willing') and poor ('unwilling'). Legal provision of the right of all citizens to basic education should be understood as right to quality basic education. The state needs to respond to the concerns of the critics that 'alternative schooling' for the poor and 'unwilling' has not delivered education of the same quality as has the mainstream system.

6.5 Girls' Education in Maldives

A stark discrepancy is observed between Maldives' Ministry of Education data (MoE Maldives, 2005) and that reported in UNESCO's EFA GMR 2008. While the Ministry's School Statistics 2005 lists 100 per cent

NER in primary education since 2004, the figure according to UNESCO's EFA GMR (2008b) has been declining since 1999. According to UNESCO (2008b), the NER which was 97 per cent with GPI 1.01 in 1999 was 90 per cent with GPI 1 in 2004 and 79 per cent with GPI 1 in 2005. The GIR too has declined from close to 90 per cent in 1999 to about 70 per cent in 2005. It is the only country in the region reported in the EFA GMRs where rates have declined to such an extent. Although the data of the Ministry should be relied upon more, as it can be assumed that UNESCO's source of data could not be other than the Ministry itself, there are discrepancies between the data presented in School Statistics of 2005 and 2006. This therefore puts into question the reliability of the Ministry's data (see Box 12). However, if the Ministry's claims made through its School Statistics (2005 and 2006) are to be taken at their face value, then the country's enrolment achievement and gender parity in primary education are in essence among the highest in the world.

Box 12 Maldives' educational statistics

The Millennium Development Goals Country Report Maldives (2005) claims that a net enrolment ratio of 100 per cent has been achieved for both boys and girls, and provides a 105 per cent net enrolment rate for boys and 102 per cent for girls. The mismatch in the population projection is derived from the fact that, at times, the same student is enrolled in more than one school – one on the island of origin and one in the capital, where the family (or just the student) may have moved in order to get better quality education – though s/he attends only one of them. How many Maldivian children are enrolled in two or more schools is not known, therefore the official figures are questionable.

Source: Pifferi (2007, pp.13–14).

The literacy rates along with gender parities both for adults and youth are highest in the region and exceed the world average (see Table 2). Maldives has made such progress in achieving universal primary education with perfect gender parities despite the devastating tsunami of 2005 that swept over most of its islands. However, ensuring quality remains a key concern in primary education. There are also primary education indicators in which the country will need to make further progress – for example, the rate of students' transition to general secondary level needs to be increased from its current figure of 78 per cent (UNESCO, 2008b) closer to that of the NER.

One in three children enrolled in primary school does not continue education in secondary level. And not only has the secondary education system absorbed fewer children but also its contribution to fulfilling the nation's human resource requirement is much too low.

> [The country's] downside risks are grounded in the narrow economic base, shallow financial sector, structural issues that have been masked by tourism-led growth, and *severe human resources deficiencies.* On average, some 40% of the labour force is expatriate – both at the lower and higher skills end – and a large number of secondary school graduates are absorbed by the public sector, *not on account of their skills, but as a social policy objective of keeping youth unemployment down.* (ADB, 2007a, p.183, emphasis added)

The 'severe human resources deficiencies' underscored in the above quote apply equally to the status of teachers in Maldives. Even though the primary education system has achieved a very high proportion of female teachers (64%), about 40 per cent of teachers in atolls are still untrained (MoE Maldives, 2006). Further educational opportunities for girls after primary level are particularly scant in the islands, as is clearly reflected in the MDG Country Report 2005 which assesses that girls are disadvantaged in terms of their participation in secondary and tertiary education. This has also resulted in their limited labour force participation and the national parliament.

The *Dhivehi Observer* of 9 December 2005 reported that the country was developing an Education Master Plan 2006–15 based on a model of a sustainable quality education system, but it appears that this did not happen. However, according to recent information made available by UNICEF Maldives, the first draft of a Master Plan has now been developed by an ADB consultant supported by UNICEF and the detailed strategies are being worked out by the MoE. Therefore, there has been no opportunity yet to assess how gender sensitive are the sector review and the master plan.

6.5.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

The country's EFA mid-decade assessment framework prepared for the planning workshop (24–28 April 2006 held at Colombo, Sri Lanka) specified that a draft education act was being prepared which was expected to include a clause on compulsory basic education (up to class 10). Clearly everyone would be legally bound to have basic education and must pay to acquire it although not all, particularly female-headed families from isolated islands, can afford the cost. Although Maldives' status has now changed to middle income country from LDC, the 'high and rising per capita income masks significant income disparities among the 270,000 Maldivians' (UNDP, 2002, p.2).

The gender and development assessment of ADB (2007a) lauds Maldivian women as being the most emancipated in the South Asia region. But it has also pointed out that 'there are concerns related to the fact that few women actually participate in the labour market, that the share of female-headed households is amongst the highest worldwide, and that female-headed households are especially vulnerable to poverty' (p.1). Maldives had its vulnerability and poverty assessed in 1998 and updated in 2004, revealing that female-headed households are more likely to live in poverty than male-headed households (ADB, 2007a; UNDP, 2002).

Therefore, in order to make sure that the current gender parity in basic education is sustained, its cost should not be an extra financial burden on low income families residing particularly in the isolated islands. At the end of the day, as is currently evident, it will be girls from such areas who are obliged to give up education when its cost becomes unaffordable and opportunity is not available locally (ADB, 2007a).

In one of the atolls, Alifu Dhaalu, for example, there is only one school with higher secondary level amidst its 11 island communities, and only 3 of the 23 students are girls. The proportion of girls' enrolment too is lower than that of boys in most of the island schools (MoE Maldives, 2006, p.52). Therefore, poverty and isolation do characterize quite a number of island communities where female-headed households

are to be found in large numbers (ADB, 2007a). Girls in particular from such households find these characteristics a hindrance to their educational attainment.

Cultural context

Every Maldivian is by constitution a Muslim, but religious fundamentalism is not the preferred practice. The state envisions the creation of a moderate and modern Islamic society. Maldivian women are free to participate equally in education and any kind of professional career path. However, the country is not without the threat of the Wahhabi fundamentalist movement that has become 'stronger than ever before and accuses the government of not being "Islamic" enough' (Jorys, 2005, p.14). Whatever the 'not being Islamic enough' may mean, the progress that the country has made in girls' education could come to a halt if the fundamentalist movement prevails.

As moderate as the religion of the nation has been that allows freedom of educational attainment to girls and women, the cultural expectations of girls and gender stereotypes are just as counterproductive and subtle, so obstructing their upward social mobility and discouraging them from pursuing education beyond basic level (ADB, 2007a).

> Cultural expectations regarding young women living away from home impact upon the numbers of female students studying abroad and hence female attainment of tertiary qualifications. (ADB 2007a, p.2)

While the proportion of girls' educational participation in basic education runs at par with that of boys, the cultural practices and gender stereotypes prepare school-going girls to be submissive to and reproduce the biased social norms. The limited opportunities for women to work outside home also limit their level of educational attainment. A typical Maldivian woman is expected to be a good housewife, taking the responsibility of managing the household business – cooking, cleaning, child-care, washing and fetching water and firewood in rural and isolated islands. Women's participation in politics and senior management level is obviously very low. In ADB's (2007a) analysis, women constitute only 15 per cent of the legislators and senior officials in Maldives. Only a third of government officials are female. Gender division of labour is clearly evident in public service employment with women making up 54 per cent of the temporary positions, primarily to carry out tasks that are culturally 'suitable' to them, for example in the sectors of education, health and welfare, to be supervised and managed by senior ranking male employees (ADB, 2007a).

Such cultural barriers have obviously obstructed girls' effective attainment and achievement in basic education. Universal access to primary education, on the other hand, clearly lacks an approach to pedagogy that also empowers girls and boys alike to challenge the social norms that are so subtly discriminatory against women. Supporting and promoting social debate on equality and justice should perfectly match the moderate Islamic position that the nation has embraced.

State policies, strategies and barriers

Since 1997, gender has been mainstreamed in national development plans, the beginning of which was marked in the Fifth National Development Plan (1997–99) with the incorporation of a separate section on gender. The Seventh National Development Plan considers gender equality as one of its eleven

guiding principles. In April 2006, a National Policy on Gender Equality was passed. All these are the signs of the state's commitment to gender equality. However, for some reasons, education sector policies and strategies are not explicit enough to consciously address the gender equality issues. The Education Master Plan 2007–2011/2016 which is being drafted has acknowledged that ensuring gender parity at all levels of education is one of the unfinished cross-cutting concerns. It also points out that recruitment of female teachers and appointment in managerial positions has remained an issue which the country needs to address.

The country's EFA mid-decade assessment framework claims that gender and quality of education is a cross-cutting theme hence would be incorporated in all the EFA goals, achievement of which is the country's strong commitment and a development priority of the sector (Shafeeu, 2006). However, the framework is not explicit as to how gender concerns would be addressed in the assessment. It does not even specify what the gender distribution has been among the 21 per cent non-attendance of secondary education from atolls.

The education sector issues that the government felt necessary to be addressed through its Sixth National Development Plan strategy failed to identify gender concerns. Such concerns are time and again raised in country strategy and programme documents of development partners (ADB, 2007a; UNDP, 2002; Oxfam GB, 2006). The fact that the country's achievement of universal primary education has not equitably benefited girls and women does not seem to influence the sector strategy. The four issues identified in the Sixth National Development Plan are (World Bank 2007, p.1):

1. *Limited access to secondary education and low internal efficiency of the education system:* nearly 50 per cent of seventh graders repeat or drop out. On average it takes thirteen years of schooling to produce a primary school (seven-year programme) graduate and more than five additional years of schooling to produce a lower secondary school (three-year programme) graduate.
2. *Inequitable distribution of education resources (facilities, materials and qualified teachers):* schools in the atolls are more poorly equipped than the schools in Male' where per-student expenditure is two to three times higher.
3. *High costs and financial sustainability:* costs of education have risen considerably with the high numbers of students participating in school and expansion of the education system. Costs will become unsustainable without more efficient use of resources.
4. *Sustainability and weak management capacity:* more strategic planning is hindered by the dearth of good quality data on the education system both at central and atoll levels.

While the above indicates that the basic education system undoubtedly suffers from the problem of internal efficiency and quality, the issues outlined have not been analysed from a gender perspective. Since systematic discrimination against women still prevails in Maldives, the education system cannot afford to continue remaining gender blind. The four issues identified above raise a number of different gender-related questions. Does the 13-year average duration to complete primary education apply both to boys and girls? Does the lack of equitable distribution of resources affect boys and girls differently? How does the high education cost affect the basic, secondary and post-secondary education of girls? Is the dearth of good quality data also not gender disaggregated? Policy and strategic responses to the issues of education ought to pay appropriate heed to such gender issues and the knowledge generated from their analysis.

School atmosphere

Projects have been implemented in the past decade that have focused on improving access to and quality of education in primary and secondary schools (World Bank, 2007a; UNICEF, 2005). The project completion report of the World Bank's Third Education and Training Project (2000–07) gives an impression that much has been done through the project in the areas of improving the quality and efficiency of primary and secondary education, improving transition to lower secondary level and equitable access to secondary school, strengthening institutional capacity for planning and implementation of educational programmes, and training qualified nationals for labour force participation.

However quality remains an unresolved issue both at primary and secondary levels – pass rates in 'O' and 'A' level national examinations decreased in the period between 1999 and 2005 and dubious results are seen in the national achievement tests in grade 7. The report claims that there was no significant gender disparity in both primary and secondary levels, but does not provide any substantive discussion on gender issues.

The drastic increase in the rate of transition from primary to secondary level in recent years is reportedly because of the implementation of the automatic promotion policy coupled with an improvement in access to secondary schooling at atoll level. The World Bank (2007a) report raises doubts about students' acquisition of the required learning proficiency at the primary level:

> While the new automatic promotion policy was still meant to ensure that students had reached a certain level of learning proficiency before being promoted to the next grade, this has not been always consistently carried out, resulting in larger numbers of students being promoted in the first years of its implementation, than possibly should have occurred. (World Bank, 2007a, p.9)

The pedagogical environment in schools, therefore, can be understood as not being optimally appropriate to ensure an acceptable level of learning outcome among girls and boys. Whether it also needs improvement to address gender issues is not known as the literature does not highlight any such concerns. It may, therefore, be concluded that research on the school environment from a gender perspective will be helpful to understand what schooling means for girls and boys.

Curricular form and content

The achievement of UPE by itself has not ensured access of Maldivian girls and boys to basic education of good quality and an opportunity to be engaged in critical learning processes guided by a carefully developed curriculum accompanied by appropriate textbooks and learning resources. The World Bank's Third Education and Training Project through its quality and efficiency enhancement component attempted to improve the primary school curriculum and textbooks (World Bank 2007a). Similarly, through the implementation of child-friendly schools, UNICEF intends to contribute to quality delivery of the primary school curriculum.

The project activities related to primary education curriculum development appear to be too narrow in scope, although 'improving the primary school curriculum and textbooks as well as developing textbook publishing capacity' was one of the strategies to improve educational quality and efficiency. The list of outputs did not indicate that a curriculum framework existed that took into account gender consider-

ations. It was also not clear if there was any effort to develop a curriculum framework that emphasized the critical examination of the primary school syllabus or learning resources looking for any possible gender-biased content and illustrations.

6.5.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education

Political will and policy support

The attainment of universal primary education today in Maldives links historically to the government's proactive initiative beginning in 1927, the year when the first formal school was started in the capital city Male', albeit with a curriculum narrowly focused on teaching Arabic, Islamic religion, Divehi and basic arithmetic (MoE Maldives, 1996). With the introduction of its first constitution in 1932, the Maldives government became constitutionally bound to take administrative responsibility for the basic education subsector. The country saw rapid expansion of schools during the 1940s and 50s, where children in each of the inhabited islands had the opportunity to learn basic literacy in Arabic and Divehi with a Quranic focus along with basic numeracy (MoE Maldives, 1996).

UNDP rated the strides made by the Republic of Maldives in the past two decades as highly positive in many aspects of human development. According to the EFA GMR 2007, the country is reported as having 96 per cent adult literacy and 98 per cent youth literacy with perfect gender parities. The EFA GMR 2007 also reports a 90 per cent net enrolment rate in primary education, also with no gender gap. The statistical data on these and other key EFA indicators reveals that girls are doing equally as well as boys in primary education in Maldives.

What seems surprising though is that government documents (e.g. MoE Maldives, 1996), prepared prior to or during the period when progress was already evident in girls' education, are not explicit about a targeted or focused strategy to this effect. The country's constitution does not even guarantee a free and compulsory primary education for all nor are girls offered special incentives for their participation. Therefore it follows that the positive scenario of girls' education is not because of a strong political will or strategic policy support for gender consideration. It seems that gender discrimination is a non-issue in the basic education subsector mainly due to, as has been portrayed by the ADB Gender and Development Assessment (ADB, 2007a), the most emancipated status in the South Asia region.

> Women in the Maldives operate without the secondary burdens of class, caste, race or purdah faced by their sisters in nearby countries. Men and women socialize freely; can expect equal pay, equal access to education and to live to about the same age. There is no detectable gender preference for male children or parental bias in the nutrition or education of children. (ADB 2007a, p.1)

According to the Education Statistics 2006 (MoE Maldives, 2006) every primary school age boy or girl in the country is enrolled in primary school. Moreover, 99 per cent of girls who have completed primary school have continued into secondary education. The government, therefore, does not need to formulate special policies and strategies in an effort to promote primary education of girls. Enrolment in general (for both sexes) in higher secondary and tertiary education is extremely low – the higher secondary education NER and GER in 2006 are only 9 and 14 per cent respectively (MoE Maldives, 2006). The government is, therefore, rightly focusing, with the assistance of ADB, on promoting access to post-secondary education.

Interventions and innovations

As already indicated in the previous section, the government has not initiated focused interventions or innovations specifically to promote girls' education. Given the achievement of 100 per cent enrolment of girls in primary education, the government is understandably not under any obligation to make any such focused effort. However, the country is known to have taken remarkable initiatives that have contributed to what the country has achieved in terms of bringing all children to school. Expansion of primary schools in islands is one such initiative. In a country where settlements are sparsely scattered across small islands, the initiative that the government took to establish at least two primary schools in each atoll has contributed to the early achievement of UPE.

However, the country's primary education system has not only made very little effort to address quality issues, but has also not assessed whether boys and girls have been learning and feeling empowered equitably. Nonetheless, even in the absence of a systematic assessment of the system, it is generally perceived to be deficient in its quality and relevance. Therefore the government has now focused on addressing the issue of quality. With support from UNICEF, a child-friendly approach to primary education has been initiated nationwide. The pilot initiative of child-friendly schools (UNICEF, 2005), which was started with 22 schools, was scaled up to 105 with UNICEF assistance during the post-tsunami period. The child-friendly approach is now reflected in the new country programme for nationwide implementation.

The other important aspect related to quality of primary education, particularly for girls, pertains to the type of opportunity which they may be able to access upon completion of the primary level. Because of the lack of accessible secondary school or opportunities for vocational training, students have to inevitably move out of the isolated island communities, mostly to the capital Male', if they wish to pursue further education or training. For most girls such a moving out is culturally unacceptable. Household affairs, for example looking after the daily chores and child care, are perceived to be the domain of women. It is estimated that less than 4 per cent of men contribute to household tasks (ADB, 2007a). Therefore, 'cultural expectations regarding young women living away from home impact upon the number of female students studying abroad [also in secondary school or vocational training] and hence female attainment of tertiary qualifications' (ADB, 2007a, p.2). The government has responded to this issue through initiatives, with ADB support, to reserve quotas for girls with expanded opportunities to participate in employment skills training and/or secondary and post-secondary education.

Knowledge management

The Policy Planning and Research Section of the Ministry of Education has established an Educational Management Information System (EMIS). Based on this the section publishes School Statistics (quantitative data) presenting the annual trend of progress in key education indicators. These data are disaggregated by gender and geographic divisions of atolls. Therefore, quantitative knowledge about girls' access to and completion of primary education along with their transition to higher level has been maintained appropriately and made public by the concerned section of the ministry. The EMIS and other available knowledge resources do not tell much about how girls perceive their remarkable participation in basic and primary education. What does it mean for them to be basically educated in the context of functioning socially in their everyday life?

Concerns about general gender issues are also raised in development initiatives outside the education sector. It is encouraging that poverty monitoring activities are being made gender sensitive. Interesting economic, entrepreneurial, political and social opportunities are being explored for increased participation of women (UNDP, 2002). However, it is not known whether education sector initiatives are making any effort to establish links with the gender concerns being raised in other sector initiatives and the potential areas in which women can enhance their participation. Even the information about the review and revision of curricular materials of primary education from the point of view of gender sensitivity comes from the response of the Division for the Advancement of Women to the UN Secretary General's questionnaire on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.[8] The Ministry of Education with the backing of the evident achievement of UPE and gender parity can claim its effectiveness in producing the intended results in the primary education subsector. However, the ministry still lacks evidence and knowledge about the outcome and impact of those achievements. It does not even have any research-based information on whether boys and girls are benefiting equally from their participation in primary education.[9] Hence, the question of whether girls' overwhelming participation in primary education is also assured with quality and relevance has remained unanswered. This is substantiated by the report of the South Asian countries' meeting on *Accelerating Girls' Education in South Asia: 2005 and Beyond* which pointed out some quality issues in the schools of Maldives. It says that a typical school in the country suffers from a number of limiting practices such as 'emphasis on facilities rather than learning; students' movements constrained; teacher as the centre of learning; textbook oriented lessons; lack of communicative and social skills' (UNICEF, 2005, p.58). These are serious quality issues, but they do not seem to be the outcome of a systematic investigation and consolidation of research-based information owned by the government. Therefore, the response to address the quality constraints through policies, strategies or programmes may continue to lack the required robustness.

6.5.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

As mentioned earlier, universal primary education and attainment of universal adult literacy are the clear outcomes of Maldives' persistent investment in basic education, expansion of primary schools in all atolls, curricular reform, teacher training and gradual improvement in access to secondary education and vocational training programmes. However, gender disparity exists in access to and attainment in secondary and post-secondary education and vocational training programmes. The stereotypical perceptions of gender roles limit girls' and women's mobility and restrict their educational participation beyond primary level as such opportunities are available only in urban areas or city centres. The culturally defined domestic role of girls and women coupled with the lack of opportunity to pursue secondary and post-secondary education also have other social implications for girls, which is highlighted in the gender assessment of ADB (2007a):

> Isolation and a lack of access to resources continue to frustrate women's participation in the economy. In addition to a simple lack of gainful employment opportunities for women in the atolls, there are areas where women face legal obstacles to their participation in development, including with

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[8] See http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/responses/maldives.htm.

[9] The MoE webpage has listed that in 2006 the research unit of the Educational Development Centre had carried out a study that asked 'Do boys achieve better results than girls in the secondary schools?' But the report which was supposed to be published in 2006 is not available on-line (webpage cited was updated in August 2007).

respect to property rights, inheritance and provision of legal evidence. Challenges also exist in women's participation in decision-making, with women under-represented in local and national government, and particularly so in policy making positions. (p.1)

Stories depicting how participation in primary education impacts on lives of girls are not readily available. However, it is clear that primary education lays an essential foundation for those girls who have been offered the opportunity for higher education (UNFPA, 2005b).

Some important lessons can be drawn from the Maldivian experience. The achievement of UPE does not say much about the economic, social and political benefits of basic education to girls, specially in the absence of a knowledge base in this regard. There is evidence of reduced fertility, child mortality and women's increased access to micro-credit, but in the absence of research-based knowledge and information, a relationship between the progress in such social indicators and all girls' access to basic education cannot be established. The achievement of UPE/perfect gender parity presents an encouraging basic educational scenario for girls in Maldives. But we do not know what features and characteristics unique to the country's education system have motivated all girls to enrol in primary schools and complete the cycle. The literature cited for this study does not reveal any case, story or narrative of girls and women that explains how a basic-educated girl or woman has made sense out of her educational participation. Gender parity of enrolment in primary education has not told us much 'about parity or disparity in other areas of education' (Oxfam GB, 2006, p.2) and about other socio-economic and political benefits to girls and women.

6.5.4 Recommendations

Since Maldives has almost the highest number of female headed households in the world, and such households are most vulnerable to poverty, the state needs to subsidize the educational costs to these households, particularly for girls.

An analysis should be made of the pedagogical content of both primary and adult non-formal education curricula from the perspective of the cultural and gender roles of women and girls. Similarly, a gender audit should take place at the institutional level so that issues related to the culturally reinforced gender-imbalanced structures and the subordinate role of women in organizations are highlighted. Political will to engender organizational structures is absolutely essential to allow gender equity in the workplace, which in turn can motivate girls to continue schooling at higher levels as well as to pursue learning in fields that have traditionally been male dominated.

National issues related to access to education, distribution of education resources, sustaining general educational management and educational information systems should be scrutinized and assessed from a gender perspective.

School and teacher training focused projects should make their output, outcome and impact indicators more explicit about progress milestones in terms of closing the gender gaps.

Not only should the state develop an engendered primary school curriculum framework, but also the curriculum development process should include a series of consultative workshops with stakeholders extensively debating on critical social and gender issues to decide on objectives, intended learning outcomes, choice and relevancy of contents.

6.6   Girls' Education in Nepal

Geographically small yet culturally and topographically diverse, Nepal is known for its notorious feudal history which is responsible for the country's rampant gender discrimination and social exclusion. However, with the recent political upheaval and in the making of a New Nepal, struggles against inequality of opportunities that exist between rural and urban dwellers, men and women, and among different castes and ethnic groups have intensified. Voices of these groups are being heard increasingly loud and clear, yet disparities persist – girls belonging to marginalized groups such as Dalits, or highly marginalized ethnic minorities, are doubly deprived of their right to basic education. The political atmosphere is now much more open to speeding up the task of achieving gender parity and equality in education. With the election of a new Constituent Assembly, the nation expects to establish a more engendered, inclusive and equitable governance and public management system that, in turn, will intensify demands for promoting girls' education.

Although remarkable progress has been made in the key EFA indicators in recent years, the situation of girls, particularly those belonging to poor families, both at home and school, is still deplorable – achieving the goals of both gender parity and equality is still a distant reality. The Gender Equality in Education Index (GEEI) stood at 36 per cent in 2001, which although is a significant increase from the GEEI of only 20 per cent in 1993, is still very low from the point of view of achieving the MDG target on gender equality for which there is a need to more than double the rate of GEEI increase (Unterhalter, 2006).

The possibilities for speedy gender equality are immense in the country. With the democratic political context the pervasive and historically rooted patriarchal cultural practices are being critically scrutinized, questioned and debated for transformation, mainly through the initiatives of emerging feminist activists, NGOs and support of the international community. The pressure to bring about such transformation is intense, as is evident on the streets of the capital on a regular basis (see Box 13).

Box 13 Badi exploition in Nepal

Featured on the front page of *The Himalayan Times* of 23 August 2007 is a photograph of the president of the Badi Rights Struggle Committee in action – 'half-naked' climbing the closed gate of the parliament premises' main entrance. The opening sentence of the news reads: 'Women from the Badi community today staged a half-naked demonstration in front of the Singha Durbar to press the government to meet their demands' (p.7).

The newspaper quotes the president as saying that the government wants 'us to remain their servants and fulfil their sexual desires.' Badi is a Dalit (so-called untouchable) caste group residing in Western Nepal. Badi girls and women have been historically exploited and subjected to take up prostitution as a socially accepted profession for this particular caste. Their literacy is a little more than 20 per cent, which is far below the national average. The agitating Badi women claim that they have been sexually exploited by the elites, including political leaders, and if their 12-point demands – primarily opportunities for alternative professions – are not met they will be making the names of such exploiters public.

Source: The Himalayan Times, 23 August 2007.

What is happening on the streets implies that women's voices are being increasingly heard. However, this does not mean that rights of women belonging to different social groups and geographic areas have been established. Nonetheless, some evidence of progress is surfacing – for example, the interim constitution guarantees 33 per cent representation of women in the constituent assembly. Pressure is on to do more to ensure that a gender balance is struck in all aspects of governance and processes of development.

In the education sector the Ministry of Education and Sports has made serious efforts, at least in principle, to address the gender issues in the administration and management of education sector development programmes. In December 2006, the ministry made public its document on gender mainstreaming (MoES, 2006). In its preamble the document acknowledges the prevailing deplorable condition of Nepali women and the negative consequences of this for development: only 42.5 per cent of women are literate (against 65.1% men), 47.4 per cent primary enrolment of girls, 30 per cent female primary teachers and only 6.2 per cent share of female civil servants. The need to take proactive, affirmative and responsive steps for equitable participation of girls and women in educational development endeavours is highlighted in the document.

6.6.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

Schooling in general is an expensive affair for most Nepalis as the household economy of almost 85 per cent of the population depends on highly labour-intensive subsistence farming. It is highly demanding of children's time, particularly of girls', making schooling for most girls either impossible or forcing them to attend irregularly or drop out (Bista, 2004). About a third of Nepalis live in abject poverty with an income of less than US$1 a day, and this is one of the main challenges that the government faces while trying to promote girls' education (DoE Nepal, 2007). Children in poor families are required to supplement household income by being engaged in child labour – 'girls contribute at least 50% more labour than boys, and this contribution increases with age' (Bista 2004, p.7). There is obviously an inverse relationship between child labour and schooling, but a direct relationship between poverty and the expensive habit of drinking alcohol in some caste groups (see Box 14). The incidence of poverty is more pronounced among socially deprived caste groups, thereby causing barriers to education for children, mostly girls, from such groups. Dalit girls, for instance, are hardest hit (Barlet *et al.*, 2004). Opportunity costs for a poor family to send girls to school are too high.

Box 14 Poverty as a barrier to Dalit children's education

Many Dalit women say that alcohol is a serious problem for their husbands – and by extension for the rest of their families. This common response to frustration and hopelessness eats into household resources, and makes it even more likely that Dalit children will work from an early age. A recent survey in Siraha found that by far the highest number of child labourers come from Dalit castes – they comprise over 60 per cent of all listed child labourers, despite being less than 20 per cent of the population.

Source: Bartlet et al. (2004, p.8).

The legislative provision of free primary education is unrealistic for the poor as several indirect and informal fees are charged by the school (Bista, 2004; Barlet *et al.*, 2004). Families are required to forgo the 'free' primary education opportunity for their children, particularly that of girls, because schooling not only means compromising children's contribution to family income but also means spending the meagre household resource on indirect educational expenses such as admission fees, examination fees, stationery and uniform.

Box 15 **Dominant social outlook towards girls' education**

'Parents hate to invest in their daughters. They're considered the property of their future husband's household and parents think that it's pointless to spend money on their education. Their logic is that if you won't get the fruits in the future, why should you bother to pour water on the seedling.'
Shiv Shankar Mahato, headteacher of a private school

'Girls in Terai are in a difficult position, and it's worse if they are Dalits. In the lower grades, there are more girls. But when they reach adolescence, parents hurry to get them married. The family's whole prestige is tied up in the sexual purity of their daughters, and they don't want to take any chances. Boys can continue their studies after marriage, but not girls. Even before they are adolescents, girls have to spend more time on household chores. Regular attendance is the exception for girls. First they have to do their housework, and only then can they go to school.'
Raj Kumari Sada, Dalit motivator

Dev Kumari's mother says that she always treats her son and daughter equally. But there are real differences in her long-term expectations for them. She hopes her 12-year-old son will go through school and become a teacher. But when she is asked about her 14-year-old Dev Kumari, she just looks at her and laughs. Dev Kumari says angrily that her mother makes it very hard for her to stay in school. 'Last year she tried to pull me out, and said there wasn't enough money. But I know my father sends enough from the Gulf. She wouldn't give me money to register, and I had to go to Indrani (the partner NGO) three or four times to ask for help. They gave me money for books and stationery, and finally my mother paid the registration. Now she says I can stay in school, but I don't know whether to believe her.'

Source: Bartlet et al. (2004, p.27).

Cultural context

The poorer the parents are, the more fatalistic and conformist they tend to be and their daughters highly prone to becoming victims of the established system of patriarchy and discrimination. This is more pronounced in rural areas, as shown by the anecdotes collected by a study carried out by Save the Children US (Bartlet *et al.*, 2004; see Box 15). Along the same lines Chitrakar (2005) has pointed out some derogatory Nepali social values and principles that stand in the way of girls' education. The general perception, according to her, is that the inevitability of living in other people's homes after marriage makes daughters a family liability and the investment on their education a waste of family time and resources. She goes on to highlight that such a perception makes girls the victims of discrimination simply because of the biological difference. Sons on the other hand are preferred, pampered and

valued in a typical Nepali family because of the general perception that it is only they who keep the family heritage alive and are the vital support for parents in old age. Educating sons is perceived to be a productive investment while that of girls is mere wastage and counter-productive.

In most families, particularly in the Western hills, women and girls are literally reduced to sub-human status during their menstrual period. They are restricted from entering the house and live in a makeshift hut or cattle-shed during the entire menstrual period. Puberty also brings worries in the family because the girl is of reproductive age with potential to be involved in socially unacceptable pre-marriage sex. Child marriage, therefore, is still very prevalent in most of the rural communities. Feminists and social activists in Nepal urge that these social practices resulting in cultural barriers to girls' education in Nepal need to be stopped through government and civil society initiatives (Chitrakar, 2005). In fact, there is no shortage of in-country good practices that have been successful in transforming communities which can be scaled up and broadened for greater impact (see Box 16).

Box 16 **Promoting girls' education through child clubs**

The Child Club established with the membership of domestic child workers of Morang district has demonstrated exemplary social works. Through their talent to perform social street drama, children of the club have managed not only to stop child-marriage but also to regularize teaching and learning activities in the school. They successfully drove the school enrolment campaign by identifying and enlisting out-of-school children; performing street drama orienting parents particularly about the importance of girls' education.

These kids had been oriented on the issues of child rights with the help of an NGO working for the education of the poor and deprived urban children. Issues of child-marriage and child rights were amazingly internalized by the children. Thanks to the NGO being different in their approach to teaching than the way children are taught in the school, children had had the opportunity to explore the issues of child rights from what they had seen, known and experienced.

Source: Chitrakar (2005, p.39).

State policies, strategies and barriers

Every citizen's right to basic education has not been *firmly* ensured by the 1990 constitution, nor by the interim constitution currently in place. According to the 1990 constitution: 'Basic education will be the right of every citizen *as allowed by the legal provisions*.' The qualifier attached to the article is a clear indication that basic education has not been established as a fundamental right. Primary education is not completely free nor is it compulsory in Nepal. Constitutional provisions, however, give way to the formulation of affirmative gender equality policies in the education sector. As a signatory of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against Women 1979, Nepal is obliged to make necessary amendments in its constitution. The political change that has come about after the Peoples' Movement II in 2005 has established a conducive context for policy change in the country. The 2006 interim constitution has acknowledged the severity of the problem of historically rooted gender discrimination and has made several unprecedented commitments. As Malla (2007) has aptly pointed out, transformation of the country into a secular state is an important precondition for gender equality,

particularly, from the point of view of promoting and establishing women's rights. In her analysis, 18 new clauses and 7 amendments have been highlighted that are directly related to gender issues. This new constitutional provision definitely lays a sound foundation for the country to be transformed into being a gender-equal state. However, there are still some weaknesses[10] in the interim constitution that are potentially obstructive in achieving the goal (Malla, 2007).

The constitutional assurance of equal rights of girls and women in all aspects of socio-economic and political life necessitates education sector programmes to be concomitantly gender sensitive. In 2006 the Ministry of Education and Sports made public its gender mainstreaming strategy following the recommendation of the 2002 gender audit (MoES, 2006). Similarly, in 2007 the Department of Education also made its strategic implementation plan for gender equality formally available (DoE Nepal, 2007). Certainly, the documents of both the ministry and the department demonstrate the state's serious commitment to gender equality both at the structural and pedagogical levels. Although it is a bit too early to expect any tangible outcome and impact out of these initiatives, the way in which the strategy papers have been prepared raise doubts about its effective translation into practice. There is not much to comment on regarding the comprehensiveness of the contents in both the documents, but they definitely do not give the impression that the gender mainstreaming and the strategic implementation plans have evolved out of the experiences or the concerns raised at the local level. On the contrary, they clearly reflect the agenda of central authority informed by donors' concerns and Nepal's pledges made in international forums (see Box 17). Neither of the documents explains or claims that it is an outcome of a participatory consultative process nor is it based on any qualitatively rich research study. This is understandable though, since, as Bista (2004) states, the ministry and DoE suffer from the lack of professionally sound research studies on gender and girls' education. At the same time, however, the ministry's bureaucratic process has remained too inward looking and has failed to tap into available examples of good practices (e.g. Bartlet *et al.*, 2004; Jenkins, 2005) to inform its process of developing policies and strategies.

> **Box 17 DOE's consultative process in preparing the strategic implementation plan for gender equality in girls' education**
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> The Strategic Implementation Plan has been prepared by the MoES/Department of Education (DoE) in consultation with relevant stakeholders and service providers. The support provided towards developing this document by UNICEF at the initial stages is highly appreciated. During the course of developing this book, a three-day workshop was organized in which the participants were drawn from several Ministries, central and local level agencies as well as from (I)NGOs working in the field of education. The first draft that was prepared in this workshop was updated and second draft was prepared, which was later presented to the Gender Action Committee formed in the DoE, representing all concerned agencies within the MoES system. This committee discussed the draft in great detail including its framework/structure and provided suggestions for

[10] *Some examples of such weaknesses are: the constitutional requirement that there must be one-third women candidates for the constituent assembly election does not ensure that a gender-equitable result will be attained; married women are still deprived of the right to inherit ancestral property; polygamy is still allowed in the name of 'under special circumstances'.*

⏩ **Box 17 (cont.)** DOE's consultative process in preparing the strategic implementation plan for gender equality in girls' education

further improvement. The final draft, including the feedbacks of the Action Committee was presented to the Steering Committee consisting of the representatives of the Government, national and international non-Governmental organizations. The suggestions provided by this Committee were incorporated and the plan was finally updated in its present form.

Source: DoE Nepal (2007, p.i).

Local voices are totally lacking in the gender mainstreaming and strategy documents of MoES and DoE, meaning that they cannot be expected to be owned by local stakeholders. Clearly, both the ministry and DoE have not been able to break away from the traditional top-down approach to addressing gender inequity and social exclusion in the educational processes. Many lessons have been learned from national and international experiences that issues of covert and overt barriers to education and gender disparity that girls experience on a day-to-day basis cannot be effectively addressed through a non-participatory bureaucratic approach. Certainly proactive gender policies accompanied by gender mainstreaming and implementation strategies are efforts to break cultural, social and pedagogical barriers to girls' education, but without their contextual meaning for girls and other local stakeholders they could rather foster disillusionment and the efforts themselves can potentially become the barriers. Macro-plans and strategies often take the 'one-size-fits-all' approach that lacks sensitivity to local values and principles. Interventions based on those can sometimes be counterproductive and disrupt the local social harmony (see Box 18).

Box 18 Negative impact of imposed intervention

'I was never really conscious of being a Dalit. My best friend was Imal Lama. While I was in the child club, I used to go to his house, and we would eat and play and work together. Our families also spent time together. Now my younger brother and Imal's younger brother are also friends. They're still small and there's a lot they don't know. *Recently, our school provided extra tuition classes for Dalit students. They wanted to go together, but Imal's brother couldn't go because it was only for Dalit children. Before this, they had no idea about Dalit or non-Dalit.* Now they know about caste differences. It's not good. My brother gets extra tuition classes in school without paying and Imal's brother is doing the same thing, but in a different place and he has to pay for it. I had no idea of caste when I was a child, but my brother knows all about it through the programme. It's not good.'
Amit BK, child club advisor and Dalit volunteer teacher

Source: Bartlet et al. (2004, p.47), emphasis added.

School atmosphere

Although there is a lack of a sound empirical base, public primary schools in general are perceived to be often girl-unfriendly. 'They do not protect girls' privacy and safety and do not meet cultural expectations' (Bista, 2004, p.7). In his review of research literature on girls' education, Bista (2004) has found

that most public primary schools lack basic and critically sensitive infrastructure such as separate toilets for girls. Consequently, as suggested by the studies he reviewed, girls' participation, attendance and learning achievement are negatively affected: 'majority of girls, especially at the secondary level, do not attend school during menstruation' (p.7).

Primary school children are typically taught by poorly trained gender-insensitive male teachers. The 10-month basic teacher training that the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) delivers through its Education Training Centres across the country carries an insignificant, if any, gender component. Other more proactive initiatives, such as the Community Owned Primary Education (COPE) programme of UNDP (COPE, 2003), that have consciously and strategically integrated a gender component into their add-on or customized training programmes have stood aloof as pilot projects. Good practices, particularly those related to gender concerns, have not been effectively mainstreamed either in management of general primary schools or teacher training programmes of NCED. The commitment to integrate gender concerns in teacher training programmes as outlined in the DoE's Strategic Implementation Plan for Gender Equality in Girls' Education (DoE, 2007) is yet to be reflected in NCED's plan of action.

Corporal punishment, which is common in public schools of Nepal, is a serious barrier to children's education which also negatively affects girls' schooling. Lama (2007) has closely looked into this issue while mobilizing child clubs in the campaign against violence in schools. According to him many young students in both public and private schools are subject to physical and psychological torture by school authorities and teachers. Lama (2007) sees a need to investigate the issue of violence against students in school more systematically, in the absence of which he is compelled to rely only on media reporting, anecdotal accounts and stories of victims or their friends. Bista's (2004) analysis about school context suggests that girls are continuously subjected to psychological abuse through direct and indirect sexual harassment, which is caused mainly due to the lack of presence of female teachers. They are doubly victimized as, for one, school authorities remain insensitive to their basic biological needs (e.g. toilets and female caretakers during pains caused by PMS and other feminine reasons) and secondly, they are often ridiculed by boys and sometimes, very subtly, even by teachers precisely when they are in agony and frantically looking for help and places to have their needs fulfilled. There is absolute lack of gender education, which perpetuates such insensitive behaviour in school. Parents, therefore, are reluctant to send their daughters to school (Bista, 2004). Commitments made by the state through macro-plans and strategies have their importance, but they alone make no sense if stakeholders on the ground take no ownership. Educational tools such as curriculum, textbooks and pedagogical processes that they are using on a daily basis, for instance, must also constantly awaken them to gender concerns.

Curricular form and content
The absolute lack of gender education in schools has been highlighted in the preceding section. To a large extent, whether the school environment is gender sensitive and girl-friendly is determined by whether the curriculum form and content along with the training of educators both in pedagogical skills and management – particularly at the local level – have given importance to gender considerations.

Just as the teacher training curriculum has remained gender blind, the primary education curriculum too does not bring the explicit message of practising gender responsive pedagogy into the school and

classrooms. Most schools simply impart subject knowledge to students which they will have to reproduce in examination papers to demonstrate their proficiency. Sibbons (1999) has picked on how girls in Nepali schools are subjected to ridicule in terms of their ability to learn subjects like mathematics and science; this, according to her, is not the case in many industrialized countries. She has argued that girls are made to believe that these subjects are not for them: 'they cannot, therefore, should not succeed' (p.196) in those subjects. This issue was captured by the Secondary Education Project of the time and subsequently addressed through the inclusion of a unit to help teachers with social analysis skills so that they could find out for themselves the gender relations in the lives of boys and girls that are responsible to promoting gender stereotypes. That initiative did produce positive results, but unfortunately the project learning of the importance of including a gender unit was not acknowledged formally. Sibbons (1999) writes:

> The unit was not included in the set of printed training notes (to call what was produced a manual would be giving it undeserved status). When questioned on why it had been excluded, the answer was that it was not relevant to the subject teachers' training programme. What was required was an exercise that provided teachers with examples of how they could enhance girls' learning of science, or of mathematics or of English … Attempt to explain the rationale for a unit that provided teachers with a method of exploring their own practice, in a way that enabled them to develop inclusive teaching approaches specific to their own context, fell on stony ground' (p.197).

Even today, the in-service training of teachers has continued to focus almost exclusively on techniques of subject content teaching, as can be seen in the NCED's 10-month training programme curriculum. Regional workshops of the Secondary Education Project organized with the purpose of raising awareness about gender issues provide helpful models to broaden the primary education curriculum and the pedagogical processes (see Box 19).

Box 19 Need for a gender aware pedagogy

Raising awareness of gender issues in a non-confrontational way in a constructive context where opportunities are provided to develop locally specific policies and sector responses would seem to be an obvious way forward. However, this requires a considerable change of attitude of senior officials at the centre. Although decentralization is on the statute books, the threat of devolving power to 'minor' officials at the periphery, or even more so to teachers in schools, is such that it remains a paper promise. The excellent responses of the district-level officers, teachers and headteachers, their perceptiveness and their willingness and openness to address schooling problems provide an ample platform from which to launch innovative and responsive policies.

Source: Sibbons (1999, p.201).

6.6.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education

Political will and policy support

Political commitments for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in education are clearly reflected in the gender policy and strategies of the Ministry of Education and Sports (see MoES, 2006) and in the Department of Education's 'Implementation Plan for Gender Equality in Girls' Education' (DoE Nepal, 2007).

The Ministry's strategy paper has recognized the importance of the need for the state to uphold basic principles of equality, equity and social justice and make conscious efforts to ensure inclusion of women in all aspects of economic and social development. It has been quoted as being a serious situation that the gender disparity in school enrolment and adult literacy has been both the outcome and the cause of the lack of female teachers and the extremely low percentage of females (6.2%) in public service employment (MoES, 2006). Education's role is recognized to be critical in combating the rampant discrimination, exploitation and violence against women and in ensuring inclusion and equal participation of women at every level of the structure of the development administration and its process. Gender mainstreaming in all aspects of education is a high priority agenda of the Ministry of Education and Sports and accordingly the document on 'Gender Mainstreaming Strategy' has been developed to bring all levels of education (pre-primary to university level) and the governance structure (from school to the ministry) into its fold. A total of 24 short-term and 4 long-term strategies have been listed and each of these strategies has been supported by specific programme outlines.

The Department of Education, as the central level implementing agency, has made its commitments explicit through the Strategic Implementation Plan for Gender Equality in Girls' Education (DoE Nepal, 2007). It has recognized the importance of developing a legal framework and putting in place necessary policy support 'to bring the discrimination in education between boys and girls to an end' (DoE Nepal, 2007). The plan, with specific activities, allocation of budget (gender budgeting) and identification of key stakeholders, gives the impression that Nepal is the most progressive nation in the entire South Asia region committing itself so specifically to the promotion of girls' education. There are a total of 16 strategies and 137 activities (varying from 5 to 17 for each strategy) that the DoE is committed to (DoE Nepal, 2007).

However, the strong government commitment and political will do not match the reality for girls' education on the ground. Such a gap between the strategies and reality only reaffirms the view that gender equality has remained a donor-driven agenda. In an attempt to justify the efforts made for gender equality in education, frequent references have been made to EFA goals and Nepal's commitments made in international forums. This clearly suggests that the efforts would have a trickle-down effect rather than giving ownership of the agenda to the local communities. The ministry seems to operate under donor pressure to remain eloquent and wishful about gender equality in education but the effort is not strong enough in building its foundation at the local level. Gender policies and strategies in education are lacking in explanations of how the ordinary school community – particularly that of teachers, students and parents – can take ownership of the essence of gender equality in education. Nor is there adequate evidence from the community level that would demonstrate effective implementation of the policies, strategies and programmes on gender equality in education.

Interventions and innovations
Nepal has remained a patriarchal society for many centuries, the legacy of which is evident even today in the functioning of and social relations within family, community and state structures. Added to this is the social division and power relations of people based on caste, ethnicity and to some extent religion and faith.[11] Given this historical context, the agenda for gender mainstreaming and equality needed to

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[11] *Hindu domination has now been relaxed with the state's conversion into a secular nation.*

be forcefully and systematically pushed mainly through national development plans. Women's issues received recognition for the first time in the country's Fifth Development Plan, while successive plans have given high priority to gender issues. Increasingly, discriminatory cultural practices are being challenged and measures to ensure gender equality are being promoted. It has been acknowledged that the cost of repairing the historical damage to half of humankind could not be small. Therefore, in the basic education subsector, noticeably since the early 1980s, numerous girls-focused and positively discriminatory intervention programmes have been implemented.

A study conducted by CERID (2006) takes note of several girls' education initiatives, their strengths and weaknesses and the impact they have had on schooling of girls. The study has reported that intervention programmes include addressing opportunity costs for girls' educational participation through the provision of incentives such as scholarships of a fixed amount (for 50% of girls each entitled to Rs.250, equivalent to less than US$4 per academic year). Such incentives, although very sporadic and thin in the way they have been distributed, are much appreciated by the local stakeholders.

The study report also noted that research evidence, depicting the positive impact of female teachers on girls' education, has provided a sound empirical basis to invest in the secondary education of girls leading them to become teachers. The Feeder Hostel programme provides the food, lodging, and educational expenses for girls from rural areas who have completed primary level to pursue secondary education and eventually become teachers in their native village (see Box 20).

Box 20 **Feeder hostels**

The Government of Nepal has been running the Feeder Hostel Programme (FHP) for over three decades, with initial support coming from the Government of Norway. There are 18 hostels located in different parts of the country. The FHP is not a teacher training programme in itself, but its objective is to prepare local girls in rural areas to become primary school teachers. As part of the programme, girls from rural areas are brought to feeder hostels to live while they receive secondary level schooling. The government bears the expenses of boarding, lodging and educating these girls.

Source: Bista (2004, p.10).

The study also highlights that efforts are being made to ensure a girl-friendly environment at schools particularly by recruiting female teachers, constructing girls' toilets, providing midday meals and cooking oil to take home, and mobilizing NGOs and local clubs (mothers' groups, youth clubs) for advocacy and awareness campaigns for girls' education.

The initiatives listed above are designed to respond to the problem of equity, equality and access of girls to basic education from the point of view of the educational bureaucracy. Because of the inflexible chain of command within the MoES structure, the well intended interventions and allocation of resources become the outcome of management expediency. The hierarchical structure and the controlled approach to educational management discourage staff members from being innovative and contextual in

their design of response programmes. Minimizing risk and playing safe become the hallmarks of responding to gender disparities in education with intervention programmes.

On the other hand, national and international organizations along with multilateral agencies are better placed to customize their interventions. They often have the luxury of time and resources to be thorough in their investigation and analysis of the socio-economic and political contexts of girls' lived reality. But their efforts are bound to be limited to being pilot, experimental or sporadic, and so obviously lack universal coverage. UNESCO Kathmandu's action research project of 2005 is one such initiative (see Box 21). This was a six-month project carried out in two Dalit communities of Lalitpur district located within Kathmandu valley to mobilize the local community and stakeholders and promote education of Dalit girl children. The project is an effort to blend two essential aspects of the local reality – blending of theory and practice as stakeholders strive to change the reality – and involve students, teachers, parents, school management committee and local community in the entire process of the project from research to identification of the most needy girls to addressing their educational issues (see Jenkins, 2005). This process indeed was a radical departure from MoES's approach to addressing the issues of girls' education.

Box 21 **Educational context of Dalit girls in two communities of Lalitpur district**

A concentrated series of home visits, formal meetings and trainings identified many of the perceived barriers to the education of Dalit girl children:
- Parents and guardians generally illiterate, with little awareness of the importance of education, particularly for girl children
- Financial constraints, including avoidance of Dalit government scholarship because of the stigma attached
- Pull factor of domestic responsibilities, coupled with ability to earn money from 13–14 years of age
- Difficulty to reconcile situation at home with need to study, i.e. no parental support, densely populated houses with bad lighting
- Peer pressure from non-school-going friends
- Lack of aspiration as the only professional option is the traditional sweeping job
- Parents and guardians unable to follow the school application process
- Discrimination, or the perception of discrimination, by higher caste peers and teachers at school
- Finances drained by other sources (religious festivals and in some cases alcohol) rather than education of children

Source: Jenkins (2005, p.6).

Because of the rigour involved in the participatory process (see Box 21 and Box 22), MoES may find its mainstreaming difficult, although its potential to demonstrate tangible impact is very high. But, in the policy context of decentralization and the Local Self Governance Act, the UNESCO project provides a

practical and ideal model for local political or governing units (e.g. communities, different interest groups, and Village/Municipality Development Committees) to adapt the model to ensure meaningful participation of local stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of micro-plans such as SIPs (School Improvement Plans) and VEPs (Village Education Plans). After all, the ministry is very keen to ensure that local capacities are developed for the local stakeholders to make their plans more realistic and complete and for them to take control and full ownership.

Box 22 From the Nepal case study of UNESCO's 'Winning the people's will' project

The process of problem identification, and subsequent discussions, led parents and guardians to re-evaluate their perceptions of girl child education. The increased family support allowed a number of children to return to school. In Teta, 6 girls were sent to school for the first time in April 2005, and 8 girls chose to return to education after dropping out. In Kumbheswor, 3 previously unschooled children joined Kumbheswor Technical School (KTS), and 2 girls returned to attend the new school year. In addition four Dyola boys from Teta were admitted to KTS. Local Education Committees (ECs) were established to assist with the enrolment process and to offer support to those girls returning to school.

The project staff worked closely with the target communities and applied a flexible approach as a tool to achieve the primary objective. Many of the causal factors affecting school enrolment were deeply entrenched social problems related to the Dalit caste and associated financial and empowerment issues. These require long term, sustainable initiatives to help develop the perception of women within the community. In Teta income generating training and health education activities were undertaken, and Kumbheswor saw the launching of a six month women's literacy programme. To ensure the success of these programmes the municipalities need to change their approach to the hiring of underage Dalit girls, and allow their mothers the flexibility to attend Non-Formal Education (NFE) classes.

Source: Jenkins (2005, p.7).

Knowledge management

As already discussed above, gender has become an important cross-cutting theme in the planning and administration of education programmes, especially at the macro-level. The core EMIS database established and updated at the Department of Education has been consciously and rightly gender disaggregated. Educational data collected from individual schools with the school as the unit of analysis allow the administrative chain of command from central to local level a detailed mapping of, among other things, the status of girls' education. Although the theoretical requirement of an individual school's ownership of the data is far from being actualized, the very process of engaging schools in the making and re-making of the EMIS is bound to improve the implementation of decentralization of educational management and administration. Education for All is the key theme – which obviously complies with the high priority international development agenda of UNESCO and UNDP – that has provided aspects of education in the form of measurable indicators around which the EMIS is organized. The updated information of the system has proved extremely useful for MoES to identify issues related to girls' education and respond through policies and programmes.

The source of gender-based information of MoES and DoE is further strengthened by the support of other independent organizations. Most notably CERID (Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development), Tribhuvan University, working closely with the ministry, has been engaged in a Formative Research Project since 1999. CERID essentially has been the ministry's key provider of research-based information since 1971, originally as an integral part of the ministry's National Education Committee and later in the decade more independently as the educational research centre of Tribhuvan University. The status of girls' education has been under systematic investigation either through studies dedicated specifically to gender issues (CERID, 1997) or as a cross-cutting issue integrated within most of the other educational studies. Gender considerations in educational policies and programmes are generally informed by such studies, which involve both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. The knowledge base on girls' educational status has been increasingly strengthened over the years, which in turn has allowed the government to target the most needy children with appropriate educational programmes (e.g. scholarships and other incentive schemes).

The wide gender gap (the net and gross enrolment rates in primary, lower secondary and secondary levels) that existed in the 1970s and 1980s narrowed substantially in the 1990s and this narrowing shows most notably in the data of 2006 (DoE Nepal, 2007). Not only has the survival rate to grade 5 for all children increased substantially but also the difference in survival rate between boys and girls is no longer wide. Therefore, the fairly sound knowledge base – the evolving EMIS complemented by a range of formal studies on girls' education – can be understood to have contributed to the government's effort to remain informed about and address gender issues in education.

However, despite such progress there is a lot more critical information that the current knowledge base is yet to be enriched with. Research studies are still lacking on, for example, beyond functionalism to empowerment and a rights-based approach to girls' education, diversity audit, empowerment of schools and local stakeholders for gender analysis, gender budgeting in micro-plans (e.g. School Improvement Plans, Village Education Plans and District Education Plans), gender-sensitive pedagogy, impact of engendered pedagogy on girls' education and learning achievements. The issue of the narrow focus on the functionalist view inherent in donor-funded projects and programmes targeted at girls is aptly described by Sibbons (1999). Some NGOs such as Save the Children alliance and World Education have, in the course of taking more of a rights-based approach to promoting girls' education, analysed the local context from more of an existential and hermeneutic viewpoint (see Box 23). But the local stories and narratives that the NGOs have generated, which possess profound power to bring to the surface the critical-contextual issues, are not adequately disseminated. They are far from influencing and impacting upon policy and the mainstream public programmes for girls' education.

Box 23 **Girls' educational and social context in remote and rural Nepal**

Since 2005 the Karnali Quality Education Project and in 2007 the Youth Empowerment Project have been implemented in the four districts (Jumla, Mugu, Kalikot, Dolpa and Humla) of Karnali Zone by Karnali Integrated Rural Development and Research Centre (KIRDARC) with the financial and technical support of Save the Children Norway (SCN). KIRDARC substantiates its periodic progress reports (prepared for the donor) with stories of youths depicting the struggles they have encountered or endeavours they have made educationally or otherwise. Such stories send powerful

➤ **Box 23 (cont.)** Girls' educational and social context in remote and rural Nepal

messages to the programme developers and educational administrators which in most instances challenge the dominant approach to knowledge management and programme planning. They passionately, and often subtly, seem to urge policy makers to stop prescribing models of curriculum form and content and the pedagogical process these dictate. They are all unitary, linear and autonomous in their approach and lack sensitivity to the essence of local narratives and the voices they echo. For example, the story of Meena Pariyar from Raragaon VDC of Jumla district, in particular, is heartbreaking. She left school and eloped at the age of 16 only to be deceived by her lover and end up in a family where domestic violence, intensive labour, physical and verbal abuse are commonplace. It took the Youth Empowerment Project more or less a customized approach to bring her back to the educational process and support her with necessary life-skills.

Source: KIRDARC (2007).

6.6.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

A multitude of efforts is being made in Nepal to promote girls' education. Government, civil society, multilateral agencies and donor communities are all involved with definitive programmes and strategies within the legally acknowledged framework of decentralized management of the education system. The implication of decentralization is profound for gender mainstreaming in basic education, especially, from the point of view of establishing it as a fundamental human right of every (girl).

Under the policy framework of decentralization, schools are required to prepare a School Improvement Plan (SIP), which should ideally lay the foundation of the more macro-level Annual Strategic Implementation Plan of the Department of Education. Although most schools are struggling to realistically articulate their critical needs through the SIP, the process has allowed local stakeholders to increasingly clarify their vision of how they would like the school to evolve. However, as a study (CERID, 2005) has pointed out, both the government bureaucrats and local stakeholders have not fully relied on SIPs to disburse/obtain school grants. On the part of the stakeholders the seriousness is often lacking in identifying, analysing and taking ownership of local educational issues (e.g. through the use of participatory processes such as PRA and participatory visioning workshops) and in reflecting those in the SIP. This puts the stakeholders in a weaker position to be assertive enough to make sure that their SIP is positively appraised and supported with the required public resources. The education authority that approves funds to support the SIP, on the other hand, is often sceptical, but fails to ask the right questions, about the authenticity of the SIP submitted by the school. In most cases the bureaucrats tend to undermine local capacity to prepare a technically sound SIP (CERID, 2005). Gender obviously is one of the most critical, but often neglected, issues that the SIP can/should be explicit about (CERID, 2006). Nonetheless, the widespread emphasis on the preparation of the SIP has allowed local stakeholders' increasing participation in the planning process and engagement in the analysis of the educational issues of girls.

There are several other initiatives that may seem small but are high in potential to impact upon the educational participation of girls. Such initiatives include availability of female teachers (Bista, 2005;

CERID, 2006), provision of small incentives and/or food rations to needy girls or their family (GCE and Swainson, 2003, p.34), and advocacy/campaigns or drives to bring children to school and interventions to change the attitudes and behaviours of service providers towards girls.

Studies have highlighted the relationship between availability of female teachers and promotion of girls' education. Parents, in particular, feel more comfortable sending their daughters to school if they are taught by and under the protection of female teachers. A review of studies on girls' education presents the following finding:

> Parents seemed to feel that the presence of at least one teacher who is female makes both parents and girls feel secure and confident. Parents found it more comfortable to relate to women teachers rather than men. These women provide role models for girl students. In some studies, school principals are reported to have said that women teachers are more sincere and hardworking than men. The studies repeatedly show that male teachers are more likely to be involved in politics than women. Some studies have also demonstrated that women teachers are better prepared to provide the care, love and affection that children need in their formative years. (Bista, 2004, p.19)

Clearly female teachers are impacting upon the perception of parents about the education of girls. Research findings affirm the contribution made by having females on the teaching staff to girls' enrolment, learning achievement and retention in school (Bista, 2004; CERID, 2006). However there are still many schools, particularly in rural and isolated areas, where not even a single female teacher is available, as required by the law. Female teachers are mostly concentrated in urban schools mainly for two reasons – lack of qualified females in rural areas who could apply for and take on teaching jobs, and qualified urban women not finding it financially and professionally rewarding to take the risk of moving to rural areas to teach. This teaches an important lesson that female teachers willing to serve in rural schools should be treated differently compared with male teachers of the same calibre so that a key rural issue related to gender equity and equality in basic education is addressed. The CERID (2006) study reveals that female teachers are mostly concentrated in schools of urban areas or district headquarters and recommends that the government should find ways (e.g. residential facilities, social security and special allowances) to motivate them to serve in rural areas.

The Global Campaign for Education in its study entitled *A Fair Chance: Attaining Gender Equality in Basic Education by 2005* (GCE and Swainson, 2003) has presented an example from Nepal about the recipients of stipends and the positive impact they have had on girls' education (see Box 24). The

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Box 24 Small incentive for girls

Primary school stipends: Small stipends have been offered to needy girls in many countries to support their primary schooling. In Nepal, for example, nearly 40,000 needy girls have received small scholarships (Rs.250 per annum) in order to support their primary schooling. The impact of this programme has been significant in terms of increasing intakes, retention, and reducing dropout rates of girls.

Source: GCE and Swainson (2003, p.34).

nominal stipend of Rs.250 (less than US$4) per annum has made a difference in the enrolment and retention of girls in primary school. A reduction in dropout of girls is also expected with the provision of food rations to parents in remote areas who allow their daughters to enrol in primary school (GCE and Swainson, 2003).

Initiatives accompanied by advocacy and social mobilization for stakeholders' active participation/involvement in planning processes yield tangible and sustained results. This has been the case with the partnership effort of the Nepal government and UNICEF to increase the enrolment of children belonging to Dalit and Janajati (indigenous peoples) groups in which parent–teacher associations and school management committees have been consciously mobilized (Köhler and Keane, 2006). Essentially it is the sense of empowerment that the stakeholders inevitably experience that contributes to greater impact. This requires that the schools receive adequate resource support from the government to complement stakeholders' participation with quality service, especially as schools experience drastic growth in student enrolment (as had been the case with the Welcome to School programme of the government and UNICEF in 2004). UNESCO's contextualized and action research approach, as discussed above, is also an example of a potentially effective and empowering initiative in girls' education (see Box 22 and Box 23). Provision of stipends and food rations does contribute to bring poor and marginalized girls to school but one needs to be cognizant of the dependency syndrome such an approach brings. An empowering process, which is not so evident in Nepal's stipend/scholarship and food ration programmes, must be an integral part of any such programme.

The implementation and outcomes of several well intended initiatives on promoting girls' education do need to ensure that they are making the desired impact. Clearly the challenges are enormous, but the experiences have allowed important lessons to be learned.

SIP is one important and potential tool through which pro-girls initiatives could be pushed, with definite targets and a framework for monitoring progress and impact on the lives of girls. But with the gender-blind context so pervasive at the community and school level, the attention of the local stakeholders is often not drawn to discrimination against girls when they prepare the SIP. Therefore, social mobilization for stakeholders' involvement in debates on girls' education issues, analysis of general social contexts with a gender perspective, and exercises to clarify the school's vision/mission/goals should precede or accompany the task of preparing the SIP.

6.6.4 Recommendations
Participatory and transparent poverty mapping in the rural context needs to be built in as a socially felt obligation for School Management Committees for them to determine a just system for poor and deprived parents who are required to bear heavy opportunity costs for sending their children, particularly their daughters, to school.

At the local level the formal and adult non-formal education initiatives need to be converged to allow poor, non-schooled or non-literate parents a second chance of learning opportunities through literacy education and productive or occupational skills training, so that they can earn enough income to support, among other things, formal schooling of their children.

While formulating gender-related policies and strategies, the Ministry of Education and Sports should rely on research, studies or consultative processes that give primacy to the voices of girls and women on the ground, rather than being donor and bureaucracy driven.

Although it is obvious that girls are suffering due to the gender-insensitive attitude and behaviour of peers and teachers of the opposite sex, the education authorities are not proactive in addressing the issue. As a first step the Ministry of Education and Sports should urgently undertake a gender analysis of school contexts, particularly those in the rural areas. Secondly, the authority must ensure that resources are available to address girls' practical and strategic gender needs in school premises. There is an urgent need to sensitize School Management Committees and school administrations on vulnerability of girls in school so that school improvement plans reflect gender sensitivities and allocate resources to transform the school environment to make it more girl-friendly.

There needs to be an explicit harmony between gender policies and programme implementations such as the teacher training initiatives of NCED, the curriculum revision processes of the Curriculum Development Centre, and the literacy and non-formal education programmes of the Non-Formal Education Centre, all of which by and large do not address gender issues.

6.7 Girls' Education in Pakistan

Pakistan's net enrolment rate (NER) in primary education is 68 per cent (UNESCO, 2008b). The NER gender parity index (GPI) of 0.76 indicates that those not enrolled are mostly girls. Disparity is even wider in remote and more conservative provinces. There is a huge gender gap in both youth and adult literacy rates – adult and youth literacy rates are 50 per cent and 65 per cent, and the GPIs are 0.56 and 0.69 respectively (UNESCO, 2008b). The Gender Equality Education Index (GEEI) of Pakistan is 0.20, which is the lowest in the region (see Table 2), indicating that girls' education in the country is lagging behind – with barriers for them to come to school regularly (low net attendance rate), to complete the full cycle of primary education (low survival rate), to move on to secondary level (low net enrolment rate in secondary education) and low gender development index (meaning women's inferior conditions of health, education and income compared with men). Despite the constitutional assurance of education as the right of every citizen along with explicit provision of free and compulsory education for all, gender equality measures such as GEEI are extremely low in Pakistan. Clearly women have not been able to exercise fully their right to an education.[12]

Addressing gender issues in Pakistan is highly challenging, in particular because of the strong hold of cultural conservatism experienced in some areas such as North West Frontier Province, which by and

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[12] *The Constitution of Pakistan, part II, chapter 2, article 34 states, 'steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life.' In article 37 it assures promotion of social justice and eradication of social evils with some of its sub-articles stating that 'the state shall (a) promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of backward classes or areas; (b) remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period; … (e) make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work, ensuring that children and women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex, and for maternity benefits for women in employment.'*

large determines social norms, values and principles. Nonetheless, the situation of gender disparity also needs to be looked at as a 'glass-half-filled' for what has been achieved over the past decades. Despite the resistance of cultural orthodoxy against women's equal status, the country has made progress in the key gender-related educational indicators. The adult literacy rate of Pakistan has improved from 35 per cent in 1990 to 50 per cent in 2000 with a 16 percentage point improvement in the gender gap during the same period (UNESCO, 2008b). The improvement of GPI of youth literacy is even better – an increase of 23 percentage points over the decade. Although the literacy rate improvement of rural women is remarkable with an almost three-fold increase in the period between 1981 and 1998, the percentage gain is greater in the case of urban women. According to a UNESCO-commissioned study there was a 34 per cent urban–rural gap in women's literacy in 1998 compared with 30 per cent in 1981 (Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002, p.xiii).

Table 3 Progress in literacy rate (age 10+) (%) in urban and rural Pakistan

	Urban	Rural	Total
1981	47.1	17.3	26.2
Male	55.3	26.2	35.0
Female	37.3	7.3	16.0
1998	64.7	34.4	45.0
Male	72.6	47.4	56.5
Female	55.6	20.8	32.6

Although during the 1990s mixed-gender primary schools were introduced, schools are generally segregated for boys and girls. There are only 14 per cent of the primary schools where both girls and boys study together, although such mixing of students has encouraged more girls to enrol in school (Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002, p.xiv). Next to Sri Lanka and Maldives, Pakistan has outscored other nations of the region in terms of the proportion of female teachers in primary schools (Table 2). However, as Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar (2002, p.xv) have argued, suitably qualified female teachers are in short supply in remote and rural areas.

There has been a reduction in the percentage of girls dropping out of primary school from 20 per cent in 1990/91 to 15 per cent in 1998/99 (Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002, p.xvi). According to the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey results of 1998/99 cited by Khalid and Muhahid-Mukhtar (2002), the problem of girls dropping out of school was more acute in rural areas than in urban centres, with one of the prominent reasons being parental restriction – not so common a reason for school dropout boys.

The girls' primary education and women's literacy scenarios discussed above are informed mostly by quantitative statistical evidence. The discussion gives a macro-perspective of the extent to which girls' education and women's literacy have progressed over time. The period of this progress coincides with a number of different policy initiatives accompanied by social action programmes and national plans of action of the government, all of which focused on promoting girls' education and women's literacy. Obviously, the achievements, to a large extent, are attributable to the government initiatives. But there is a need to look into the details of, for example, classroom processes and/or learners' and teachers' lived experiences on the ground to understand what the educational opportunity means for them. It is through such a process that the stakeholders at all levels may be able to assess how the macro-initiatives have been translated into the micro-context, whether the achievements are likely to be sustained, and what improvements may be required to make further progress towards gender equality. The body of literature is yet to be enriched with stories of experiences, though some may be found (see Box 25).

Box 25 Two girls in a government school in Punjab province

On a steamy day at the Shahpur Government Girls' Primary School Sidra Yasmin rises before her classmates, a group of attentive six-year-olds, and confidently counts to one hundred. 'I used to stay at home with my elder sisters to look after my sick father,' says Sidra. 'My mother works as a maid so we have to do the housework. Then one day I told my parents that I'd decided to go to school. I want to know how to read and write. They aren't angry that I'm here. In fact, they're proud of me.'

Sidra and her 92 classmates are packed three to a desk, but each has her own set of textbooks. By the time they complete Class 1, they will have acquired the basics of numeracy and literacy, as well as a general grounding in religious studies.

Next door in the pre-school class, an elfin five-year-old with pale skin and blue eyes is sniffling into a handkerchief. As she stands up, she fumbles for her satchel and bursts into tears. The teacher bends to her ear to deliver some words of reassurance. Stepping back to let the girl pass, the teacher explains, 'She's going home to her mother' as she watches her new charge cross the dirt courtyard and leave the compound. 'It's only her second day and she's frightened. There's no point in being strict if we want her to like school.'

Source: www.ungei.org.

By making reference to the case of the two girls – one eager and the other frightened – the UNGEI article links to the success of the recent education reform initiatives taking place in the province of Punjab. The article describes how girls' enrolment in certain communities escalated as community-focused activities progressed under the Universal Quality Primary Education Project, a collaborative endeavour of the Punjab Education Department and UNICEF with financial support from the Norwegian government. Paying heed to the details of classroom process and experiences such as the one captured by the case study brings to the surface important pointers for the well intended initiatives to meaningfully respond to the educational needs of the intended beneficiaries.

6.7.1 Barriers to Girls' Education
Poverty

Inequalities are highly pervasive in Pakistan, as is clearly reflected in educational provisions for its people. 'To state the obvious, the rich go to private schools and the poor go to public schools creating an apartheid-like situation in the education sector' (Aly, 2007, p.30). Poverty is widespread especially in rural Pakistan, as are regional disparities in terms of access of people to opportunities and basic services like health and education. 'Sending children to school [for a poverty stricken family] is a considerable burden on already over-stretched domestic budgets. Education costs are a potent issue and one of the most important causes of children dropping out of school' (Heward, 1999b, p.211). Parents even in abject poverty not only value educating their children, including daughters, but also they show concerns for quality (Heward, 1999b). But when they confront the educational cost they find themselves compelled to refrain from schooling their children, more so in the case of their daughters. In most cases children are required to support the family by working and earning. Latif (2007) quotes UNICEF that

17.6 per cent of Pakistani children are working to support the subsistence economy of their families. 'Indeed, children working as domestic help is a common phenomenon in Pakistan, and this sector employs more girls than boys' (Latif, 2007).

Apparently the biggest irony in Pakistan is the absence of a legal guarantee of free and compulsory primary education, which indeed is a highly critical aspect for the people suffering from abject poverty. In a country where, according to a UNESCO (2008a) estimate, over 4.5 million children (most of whom are girls) are out of school, even the poorest of the poor are expected to pay for the primary education of their children. The country is categorized as the worst in the region in terms of the share of education expenditure in GDP – at 2 per cent, the lowest in the South Asia region (UNESCO, 2008a), although the National Education Plan 1998–2010 has proposed increasing government spending to 4% of GDP by 2010/11. Heward (1999b) asserts, which is also endorsed by the UNDP Human Development Reports, that the country has the poorest record on investment in human development in South Asia. She goes on to explain that the corrupt state machinery, excessive spending on defence and massive social inequalities are the main contributing factors to this continuing poor record on social spending.

> The annual Human Development Reports reveal that Pakistan has consistently had the lowest level of expenditure on human development and the highest on military spending of countries classified as having low human development. (Heward 1999b, p.204)

Poverty, therefore, is one of the key factors responsible for hindering the education of girls in Pakistan. But there is not much that the state has done to address this problem – including the lack of provision of free and compulsory primary education. Intervention programmes, for example the concept and implementation of informal schools (e.g. BRAC Bangladesh model), too have not been able to address the issue effectively. The bottom line is that there is simply a lack of public resource to free the poor from the burden of bearing the educational costs. An informal schooling scheme implemented as part of the National Rural Support Programme since 1991, known for its bottom-up approach, is also with all its good intentions guided by an implicit cost-sharing principle and makes sure that parents pay 'nominal' fees for the education of their wards. But as witnessed during a monitoring visit, Heward (1999b) learned from some of the village women that the monthly fee of 20 rupees for attending the informal education was too much for them. On the other hand, if the communities could not support school expenses like teacher's salary through fees the school could be closed. Therefore, sustaining even an effective programme like informal schooling remains problematic.

Cultural context

The Islam religion, as Latif (2007) contends, promotes education for both women and men without any discrimination. As an Islamic nation, therefore, Pakistan should not experience gender disparity in education. But in some parts of Pakistan, particularly in rural and tribal areas in the north, girls are strictly forbidden from taking advantage of educational opportunities.

There has never been any shortage of emphasis on girls' education in policy documents since the formation of Pakistan in 1947, but financial and social investments fall far short of what has been pledged through the policies (Aly, 2007). A deep-rooted cultural tradition that daughters should be protected from the outside world and their movements should be restricted, more so as they reach

puberty, has always blocked girls' equitable participation in education. It is too much of a financial burden for the government to establish girls-only schools in many communities, hence there ought to be more mixed-gender schools. However, parents in rural Pakistan do not accept mixed-gender schools for their daughters. There it is customary for everyone in the family to respect the inherited status given to daughters, which has been maintained through the generations under the protection and commands of the male elders (see Box 26). Although educational participation of daughters is not opposed, their mobility outside the village is not permitted. This is an awkward dilemma that keeps a large number of girls out of school. What seems to be lacking in such a context is implementation of gender-sensitizing adult non-formal education for rural parents, who are mostly illiterate. In the meantime, the state needs to remain culturally sensitive and support the establishment of more girls-only schools (especially middle and secondary schools) near to the girls' residence in rural communities so that the conserva-tive parents are more comfortable about sending their daughters to school. As is discussed in the following sections, incentives in the form of stipends or conditional cash transfers will not work in culturally orthodox rural communities if schools are inaccessible and/or of mixed-gender type. It is, therefore, necessary for the government to invest in programmes that boost parental confidence in their daughters' ability to face the pedagogical context in mixed-gender schools and also, as an interim arrangement, to increase the numbers of girls-only schools close to the girls' residence.

Box 26 **Cultural norms and girls' education in rural Pakistan**

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan, 4 May 2006 – A new World Bank report prompts the idea of offering families in Pakistan stipends to ensure girls have safe transportation to schools. It's an idea the Bank would like to propose to the Government of Pakistan.

With a simple statement, a mother from Lodhran in southern Punjab, Pakistan, told why she did not send her daughter to school.

'Our village elder, my father, said that if our daughter goes outside the village to study, it will become a problem of our honour,' said Naseem.

The report finds that concern about family honour is a major factor behind why many parents don't send their girls to school – particularly in rural areas where villages may have no school facilities and the girls would be forced to travel outside of their communities.

The Bank's Country Gender Assessment (CGA) report on Pakistan finds overall concern about security and reputation is restricting women's movement outside the home in Pakistan – and limiting their access not only to education, but also to medical care, opportunities for paid work, voting, and other forms of political and community participation.

Source: UNGEI (2005c), http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/Pakistan.html.

State policies, strategies and barriers

As already mentioned, since the formation of the nation in 1947 Pakistan has consistently articulated policy commitments on girls' education. But even after six decades the situation of girls' education has not satisfactorily improved. Although since the early 1990s the government has placed a high policy

priority on universal primary education with particular focus on girls' education, resulting in massive growth in public schools including even the availability of a large number of private schools in rural areas (World Bank, 2005, p.43), the wide gender gap in education continues to persist.

The action plan (2001–05) of the Education Sector Reform encourages public–private partnerships to improve the access and quality of primary education, with schemes like 'adopt a school' by the private sector in order to salvage the under-utilized public schools. However, in the rural context where parents tend to have differential preference of education for their sons and daughters, it is not clear whether the policy encouragement of private management of schools would yield better girls' enrolment. The perceived better quality of education in private schools is bound to be costlier for parents. Moreover, proliferation of private schools in rural areas is confined to communities where there are already pre-existing public schools (World Bank, 2005). Rather than fulfilling the school needs of a community, the private sector tends to penetrate rural villages apparently to compete with the poorly equipped public schools and probably to subject them to eventual closedown. Although supportive evidence is not available, it can be argued in the context of prevailing parental attitudes towards girls that the policy of public–private partnership can be potentially detrimental for promoting girls' education. This point is not raised here to discourage private sector participation, but to caution that policy analysis cannot afford to remain gender blind if the state is to remain sensitive to the issues of systematic inequity and exclusion.

The condition for obtaining public funds for school construction in a village for the past two decades has been that the community needs to provide a minimum area of land and the population of the community has to be at least 500 (World Bank, 2005). This clearly suggests that sparsely populated communities are not qualified to have schools constructed, hence children will have to walk to a nearby community where a school is available or go through informal education. In such a community, obviously, girls are educationally more disadvantaged than boys. The condition, therefore, does not favour girls' education (see Box 27).

Box 27 **School proximity and girls' education**

Systematic evidence from a number of sources shows that school enrolment for girls is highly sensitive to the distance of the household from the school. Clearly school distance increases the financial and physical costs of attendance by increasing transportation costs and commuting time. In the context of rural Pakistan, however, cultural restrictions on the mobility of adolescent girls are likely to pose an additional barrier to school enrolment.

Source: World Bank (2005, p.48).

It has been argued that distance to school is the primary constraint against girls' education. This conclusion has been drawn by World Bank on the basis of a study's findings: that travel cost for girls (not boys) rises with the increase in distance to school; that 'the sensitivity of enrolment to school proximity increases sharply for girls age 13 and up. This effect is entirely absent for boys' (World Bank, 2005, p.51). The study states that 'while building schools – private and public – remains important, building a school in every settlement is unlikely to occur. Qualitative studies suggest that the real issue is not one of distance *per se* but one of safety and of prevailing cultural norms around the appropriate chaperoning

of young women' (p.54). Therefore, there is a need for more gender-sensitive criteria for the construction and establishment of public schools in rural areas.

The current criteria of eligibility of school construction should be reviewed in the light of their consequence to girls living in sparsely populated settlements. The state should ensure that girls and boys of communities not eligible to have school buildings constructed are allowed alternative learning opportunities without compromising the quality.

6.7.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education

Political will and policy support

According to Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar (2002), the National Education Policies of 1992 and 1998–2010 along with the Social Action Programme (SAP) 1993/94 had strong girls' education components. The SAP in particular focused specifically on the identified social indicators related to girls and women and designed intervention programmes to improve those (Khalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002). The development of the National Plan of Action, which included concerns for girls' education, by the Ministry of Women's Development was Pakistan's response to the Platform for Action put forth during the UN conference on women held in Beijing in 1995. Support of both donors and NGOs was mobilized, along with private sector initiatives, to develop and implement formal and non-formal education programmes for girls. The Perspective Development Plan (PDP) for the period 2001–11 is, according to Khalid and Mujahi-Mukhtar (2002), gender-neutral in education, but its overall gender consideration through explicit strategies related to women's development, gender studies, information systems, and sensitization at all levels will require that girls are better educated and stopped from dropping out of school. The PDP, however, 'does not focus explicitly on girls' education; instead, it is based on improving overall standards of education for all' (p.viii).

The Government of Pakistan is in the process of reviewing its national education policy. 'The Inter Provincial Education Ministers Conference of January 2005 endorsed the review … A Policy Review team was put up in September 2005, with the mandate to undertake the revision exercise' (MoE Pakistan, 2006). A policy White Paper has now been drafted and was disseminated in December 2006, with a revised version prepared in February 2007 (Aly, 2007). Although the White Paper is not a formal policy document of Pakistan's Ministry of Education, it is an outcome of an extensive nationwide consultation process to be used as the basis to reform the current policy and, therefore, the issues and concerns regarding, for example, equity in education, are powerful enough to be treated as seriously as a formal policy document. The preamble in its Equity section displays a sense of serious commitment (see Box 28).

Box 28 Inequity of Pakistani girls and women

The Convention against Discrimination in Education has not been ratified by Pakistan. Although, constitutionally, all citizens are equal before the law, in practice there is discrimination in various forms in the education system, mostly due to social customs and poor implementation of education programmes. Poor children, girl students, students from rural areas and students from minorities are particularly affected by inequalities and inequities in the education system.

Source: Aly (2007, p.28).

The White Paper makes a bold acknowledgement of the deplorable gender inequity in Pakistan, especially in rural areas and among the poor (see Box 29), which in itself is an essential positive step toward addressing the issue.

> **Box 29** **Educational status of Pakistani girls and women**
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> The educational status of women in Pakistan is unacceptably low, in fact, amongst the lowest in the world. The problem emanates at the primary level, as low participation and high dropouts at that stage prevent females from reaching higher education and equitable opportunities for such furtherance do not become available to the female gender. According to the Ministry of Women Development, only 19 per cent of females have attained education up to Matric, 8 per cent up to Intermediate, 5 per cent a Bachelor's degree and 1.4 per cent achieved a Master's degree. 60 per cent of the female adult population is illiterate. Of the 3.3 million out-of-school children, 2.503 million are girls. 73.6 per cent of primary age girls attend school, compared with 92.1 per cent of boys. Moreover, a sizeable majority of rural girls drop out of primary schools.
>
> … There are vast differences in education services between rural and urban areas which continue to broaden the gulf between the urban elites and the comparatively marginalized and disempowered rural population. Unfortunately, the issue of quality service delivery in rural areas receives scant attention specifically and it has been seen that the worst public sector schools are in the rural areas. Also, there are disparities within urban slums and posh areas. This is essentially a focus issue in strategic planning and needs urgent attention with incentive based improvement in quality education service delivery in all disadvantaged areas. Also contextual rural settings do not find an appropriate place in the curriculum, which has a serious urban bias that makes the subject less relevant and more difficult for the rural learner. There are perceptions of biases against universities located away from the Centre in Punjab.
>
> *Source: Aly (2007, p.28).*

The analysis of the girls' education situation in the country led the White Paper to make the 8 recommendations for the Ministry of Education to consider as formal gender and education policies (see Box 30). This is to be found only in the gender section of the paper, hence gives an impression that gender has not been considered as a cross-cutting issue.

What seems lacking in the White Paper is an in-depth analysis of barriers to girls' education in geographically and economically difficult situations. A girl is doubly deprived if she comes from a poor family living in a rural area (see Box 29). The White Paper's policy recommendation to address the issue of the poor and geographically disadvantaged girls is limited to making provision of schools 'as near as possible to population clusters … [by also ensuring their functionality] through investment in physical infrastructure and incentive-based quality instruction' (Aly, 2007, p.30). The need to explore specific educational contexts of girls to devise informed educational responses is not indicated.

Box 30 **Policy recommendations for girls' education**

1. Compulsory and free elementary education of girls by 2010; free secondary education with progressive targets setting by 2020.

2. Hiring of teachers and teacher training should be oriented towards reducing gender gaps.

3. Additional resources for provinces with wider gender gaps.

4. Continuous linkages between federal and provincial Education Departments and research organizations for gender disaggregated data and analysis so it can inform policy inputs.

5. Establish realistic and attainable specific goals.

6. Set up more powerful gender groups in the Ministry of Education.

7. Commit fund allocations and human resources to implement and monitor progress towards goals and introduce a monitoring checklist.

8. Greater emphasis should be placed on vocational training and technical education for women.

Source: Aly (2007, p.29).

What is also starkly evident in the White Paper is that it has recognized the growing demand for quality education which is perceived to be available almost exclusively through private sector initiatives. It argues that the elite-oriented private schools fulfil the 'high quality' education demands, though not necessarily with quality to promote high social values, of those who are willing to pay a 'premium' cost while, at the same time, also exploit the 'gullible' poorer section of the society. The analysis has brought to the surface the burning issue of double standards that the improperly regulated private system has created in the field of education. It, however, lacks an insight into the deprivation that girls may have suffered because of the two-tier education system provided by private schools. When poor people are also lured by private schools how does this effect the right to quality education of girls from poor families? Not only does the paper's analysis of the issue lack gender perspective, but also none of its nine policy recommendations related to the private sector involvement in education make reference to the gender aspect. As Pakistan's National Report of Education on the Development of Education (MoE Pakistan, 2004) admits, the country's 'overall record in promoting and delivering gender equality is a weak one' (p.3). Given the distinct gap in key education indicators of girls and boys, a situation that is clearly supported by stories from the ground (see Box 31), Pakistan cannot afford to remain gender neutral in its review, analysis and formulation of national educational policy.

Box 31 **Alarming situation of girls' education in rural Pakistan**

The situation is especially alarming in rural areas due to social and cultural obstacles. One of the most deplorable aspects is that in some places, particularly northern tribal areas, the education of girls is strictly prohibited on religious grounds. This is a gross misinterpretation of Islam, the dominant religion in Pakistan (96% of the population), which like all religions urges men and women to acquire education.

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┌─ **Box 31 (cont.)** **Alarming situation of girls' education in rural Pakistan** ─┐

The situation is the most critical in NWFP and Baluchistan, where the female literacy rate stands between 3 per cent and 8 per cent. Some government organizations and non-governmental organizations have tried to open formal and informal schools in these areas, but the local landlords, even when they have little or nothing to do with religion or religious parties, oppose such measures, apparently out of fear that people who become literate will cease to follow them with blind faith. Unfortunately, the government has not so far taken any steps to promote literacy or girls' education in these areas. It is even reluctant to help NGOs or other small political or religious parties do the job, because in order to maintain control, it needs the support of these landlords and chieftains who, as members of the two major political parties, are regularly elected to the national assembly.

'I want to go to school to learn but I cannot because my parents do not allow me to do so,' said 9-year-old Palwasha, who has visited the biggest city of Pakistan, Karachi, with her parents and seen girls like herself going to school. She lives in a village located in Dir district (NWFP), where education for girls does not exist. 'We have only one school for boys,' she said, adding, 'One of my friends goes school, but she is now in Peshawar [capital city of NWFP].'

Source: Latif (2007), cited in *http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/en-news/pakistan.shtm*. *Accessed 2 December 2007.*

Interventions and innovations
The Local Government Ordinance 2001 has opened up the possibility for the local authorities (districts and provinces) to take control of decisions about the development programmes that the people want for themselves. This encourages innovative local initiatives that put people at the centre in terms of participation in the processes of understanding the context and the issues related to people's well-being, identification of participatory interventions, setting targets, planning activities, mobilizing resources and carrying out participatory monitoring and evaluation. Effective utilization of the opportunities offered by the ordinance and the policy of decentralization and devolution of administration, management and authorities in the education sector does produce tangible results. Some examples of participatory initiatives are discussed here.

A community-centred programme of the Government of Pakistan with support from UNICEF and AusAID has been successful in bringing as many as 30,000 girls into primary schools.

> What's more, 84 per cent of pupils in these schools complete their studies, which is remarkable in a country where only 50 per cent of eligible children are in primary school and half of those who enrol soon drop out. (UNICEF, 2003b)

What is so remarkable about this achievement is that this has taken place in rural areas through community initiatives and commitments. And the 84 per cent of pupils completing primary school definitely exemplify the potential and effectiveness of a community-centred programme.

While this programme can be considered as an example of a demand-driven initiative, supply-oriented programmes such as provision of stipends to girls also have their merit. World Bank, for example,

supports the governments of developing countries with funds for girls' stipend programmes. Pakistan is one of these countries (see Box 32). World Bank (2004b) claims that 'more than 150,000 girls enrolled in grades six to eight in the poorer districts of Punjab are now receiving a stipend, as an encouragement to stay in school.' This initiative, according to World Bank, was part of facilitating the government's three-year education reform programme started in 2003. The government wanted to address the issue of high illiteracy, low primary enrolment and high dropout for which, presumably, the persistent wide gender gap in education needed targeted intervention and the law has empowered local governments to take necessary initiatives.

Box 32 **Girls' stipend programme in Punjab province of Pakistan**

In 2003, the Punjab government with assistance from the World Bank implemented the 'Girls' Stipend Programme' which provided a cash stipend of Rs.200 to families to ensure that their daughters attend school. As a result girls' enrolment in secondary schools in the 15 poorest districts in Punjab has increased by 60 per cent from 175,000 to 280,000 since 2003. This project was extended to include high school girls as well.

'Girls are less able than boys to take public transportation or walk to school in Pakistan's social context, and the cost of private transport – roughly equivalent to the 200 Rupees stipend – was the binding constraint for poor families,' said Khalid Gillani, Secretary of Education in Punjab Province.

Source: World Bank (2007b), http://go.worldbank.org/K9L01MQLO0.

An empirical study (see Box 33) to assess the impact of the female stipend programme in Punjab province found that between 2003 and 2005 there had been 'an increase of 6 girl students per school in terms of absolute change and an increase of 9 per cent in terms of relative change' (Choudhury and Parajuli, 2006, p.23). Hence they concluded that there had been a statistically significant impact of the stipend programme on girls' enrolment. They, however, did not leave this result without posing a critical policy-relevant question: 'What happens in villages in stipend districts which do not have a public middle/high school?' This question draws on the finding of other studies that enrolment is a key function of access (Sathar *et al.*, 2000) and that in most of the rural villages of Punjab, schools beyond primary level are not available (Andrabi *et al.*, 2005).

Box 33 **Impact of female stipend programme in Punjab province**

The average [girls' stipend] programme impact between 2003 and 2005 was an increase of 6 girl students per school in terms of absolute change and an increase of 9 per cent in terms of relative change. These are modest but statistically significant programme effects. We also make use of data from repeated cross-section household surveys (usually thought to be more independent and objective relative to administrative data such as the school census). Given that these household surveys are statistically representative only to the provincial level, any district level analysis

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┌─ **Box 33 (cont.)** Impact of female stipend programme in Punjab province ─

should be tempered with statistical caution. However, for what it is worth, we find an average treatment effect on proportion of school attendance for 10–14 year old girls ranging from 10 to 13 percentage points. Taken together, these results strongly suggest that the stipend is attaining its objective of increasing female enrolment in public schools in Punjab. The evidence from the household survey data also points that the stipend programme is helping children from poorer households to attend schools. Incidence of stipend subsidy also shows more equal distribution across rich/poor population groups.

Additional sources of data will help to test the robustness of our results (which essentially hinge on the veracity of the school census data), and more importantly, help address other pertinent issues besides enrolment increases. For example, Andrabi, Das and Khwaja (2005) point out that the majority of Punjabi villages do not have middle/high schools. Sathar, Lloyd, Mete and Haque (2000) have shown that access to school is one of the key determinants of enrolment (and other subsequent non-schooling outcomes such as contraceptive use) in rural Punjab. An immediate policy-relevant question then is what happens in villages in stipend districts which do not have a public middle/high school? To address this and other relevant questions we mentioned earlier, we are in the process of collecting relevant household and schooling data via primary surveys (instead of relying upon existing administrative data and limited household data).

Source: Choudhury and Parajuli (2006, p.23).

The other initiative, one that has pulled massive numbers of girls and boys to school, is the 2005 enrolment campaign of Sindh province, 'the second most populous in Pakistan' (UNGEI, 2005c). This was the province where 50 per cent of girls and 25 per cent of boys of primary school age were out of school. The campaign managed to bring over 300,000 children to school in just 6 weeks during which time committed educators, professionals and activists came together to be engaged in intensive social mobilization and massive advocacy work (UNGEI, 2005c). The process which produced such a remarkable result involved mobilization of development partners, stakeholders and volunteer workers (see Box 34). Examples such as Pakistan scouts accompanying girls to school can act as models for other countries.

It is increasingly felt necessary that the initiatives to bring massive numbers of girls in school in culturally sensitive rural Pakistan must also be accompanied by ways to make them feel that schooling is worthwhile and brings rewards to them socially, economically and politically. The World Bank funded Northern Areas Education Project (1998–2003) attempted to expand the overall school enrolment with specific focus on that of girls. It also took into account the inevitability of improving the school system so that quality is enhanced and girls in particular do experience better learning achievements and see the benefit of completing primary education. The culturally sensitive parents in the Northern Areas did not want their daughters to be taught by male teachers. Because female teachers were in acute short supply, girls did not attend primary school and those who did could not continue education at secondary level due to the unavailability of a secondary school. This had resulted in a shortage of secondary educated girls to take up teaching positions. Addressing the problem of lack of female teachers was, therefore, one of the key components of the project. Girls are offered courses leading to matriculation through

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Box 34 Social mobilization for enrolment campaign

In Hyderabad, walks and rallies have been organized to raise public awareness about education, and the freshly whitewashed school buildings are overflowing with children. 'The district is wearing a festive look with colourful banners and posters all around, and you can observe as well the intensive public contact being made by motivated teachers, government officials, district government representatives, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and community leaders,' reports Mr. Kanwal Sindhi, coordinator of the Sindh Journalist Network.

'It has been a fantastic coming-together of all partners, stakeholders and volunteers,' says Professor Abdul Majeed Hur, Executive District Officer in charge of Hyderabad's campaign. (UNGEI 2005c)

Source: UNGEI (2005c), http//www.ungei.org/infobycountry/Pakistan.html.

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distance learning mode (a collaborative effort of Allama Iqbal Open University and local learning centres) while other alternative approaches have been explored and piloted, including the opening of several new schools (Jabeen, 2003).

In the Northern Areas, the communities believe strongly in the traditional culture and religion and so have tended to resist externally supported education programmes for girls. This was more obvious in the beginning of the programme implementation. But with the project staff remaining sensitive to the local culture, beliefs, values and principles and taking extreme caution in approaching such communities, it became possible to work collaboratively with them – community and religious leaders eventually extended support to the NAEP and DoE by making available buildings or renovating them free of cost to run study centres. The crux of the matter that brought most community people together for girls' education was that the project took a participatory approach with a strong component for community mobilization (Jabeen, 2003).

Also in the Northern Areas, the Aga Khan Education Services, Pakistan (AKES, P) have been providing education for over fifty years with the establishment of Diamond Jubilee schools and, more recently, the Northern Pakistan Education Programme (NPEP) Phase I (1997–2003) and Phase II (2003–08), which strongly emphasize enrolment of girls. AKES, P schools enrol well over twice as many girls as boys; account for 32% of female enrolment in middle schools; and are the single biggest provider at high school level. Girls in AKES, P schools outnumber boys by more than 3 to 1 (DoE Northern Areas, 2008).

This section has presented a snapshot of only some selected initiatives and interventions on promoting girls' education in Pakistan. While the demand-oriented approaches prompted by community participation and social mobilization have remained a central theme of those initiatives, some degree of assertiveness prompted by a supply-oriented development approach is also deemed as a valuable add-on. Many communities in the country are rural, isolated and culturally sensitive. The persistently wide gender gap found at the macro-level hinges on such and other local contexts. Hence the localized initiatives optimally balanced by both supply- and demand-driven approaches have proved their worth as positive results have been demonstrated. However, voices of girls and women are yet to be clearly heard in the seemingly participatory initiatives.

Knowledge management

Management information systems at all levels have been emphasized in the educational policy of Pakistan. The National Education Policy Review White Paper (MoE Pakistan, 2006) could not be more specific in outlining the need for such systems. The list of policy options for improved governance of the education sector included the development of 'an integrated, country-wide, Management Information System, at all levels, leading to linkages with all tiers of education management' (Aly, 2007, p.15). Collection of data from schools and through education census becomes an important task in establishing an EMIS. However, as is evident in the UNESCO EFA GMR 2008, Pakistan is far from consolidating educational statistics on important EFA indicators (e.g. new entrants in grade one with ECD background, survival to final grade of primary level and rate of transition to general secondary level from primary). The knowledge management suffers from a severe lack of capacity at all levels – and more so at the school level. The National Education Policy Review White Paper presents the following issue of management:

> Management in the education sector is limited to personnel, equipment, physical infrastructure and financial flows. A functional school is one where teacher arrives to teach, textbooks are available and the students attend. There is a presumption that placed together in a school, the three will combine to brew the desired output. *There is very little attempt to define that output and even lesser to measure it and to rectify the deficiency that exists right through the sector, at all tiers*: federal, provincial and district. (Aly 2007, p.12, emphasis added)

The importance given to the establishment and improvement of EMIS can be expected to yield a positive result, making explicit in quantitative terms how the country is progressing in achieving the targets in key educational indicators. Also, the system does allow gender disaggregated figures, which makes it possible for the government to assess the gender gap in, for example, enrolment, survival and attrition rates along with learning outcomes. However, as the National Education Policy Review White Paper has pointed out, 'the poor management capacity of the Provincial Education Directorate and other Key Managers, including the Head Teachers' (Aly, 2007, p.12) has been a serious and recurrent issue hindering the process of managing the delivery of education in such a way that gender equity is ensured. What is implied from this is that the key managers and headteachers are engaged merely in management tasks to perform business as usual, but little interested in being critical and equity-concerned practitioners of education. They have not staked the claim, as has been asserted in the quote above, to ownership of the information related to their own contexts nor in defining the desired learning output and outcome for girls and boys, let alone in their measurement.

Developing an experiential and qualitative knowledge base about the situation of girls and boys and the educational context, if any, offered to them is mostly outside the regular business of the key educational managers and stakeholders, including teachers and headteachers. Often it becomes the task of professional researchers or other sector development programmes. Research firms, (I)NGOs and multilateral agencies (e.g. World Bank, UN, UNESCO and UNICEF) are mainly involved in educational research and innovations that are qualitatively informed. The government documents on educational policies, strategies and programmes cited for this study hardly make reference to research that has generated knowledge on context-specific situations and experiences of girls which often determine their educational participation and achievements (Heward, 1999b). For example, the findings of the

study on Knowledge of Personal and Sexual Development among Young People in Pakistan offer ideas and potential ways forward for appropriating curricular content and pedagogical processes to suit the learning needs of rural girls and boys (see Box 35). Unfortunately, the research stood aloof from the education sector and served, presumably, the purpose of the health sector programme only.

Box 35 **Access of young Pakistanis to sexual health information**

In [the study on Knowledge of Personal and Sexual Development amongst Young People in Pakistan], 24 focus group discussions were conducted to explore young people's experiences of gaining knowledge of personal and sexual development. Young women typically gained information from a limited number of sources within the home, while young men accessed a wide variety of information sources outside the home. Gaining information was frequently event-based, for example at the onset of puberty or marriage. Overall, young people were critical of the quality of information they received, which often led to confusion and stress in understanding sexual development. Findings highlight a gap in formal systems of information provision. Although young people highlighted the merits of school-based information delivery, low school attendance and high dropout rates amongst girls mean that alternative mechanisms of reaching young Pakistani women need to be identified.

Source: Hennink, Rana and Iqbal (2005).

The classroom process and school management do not seem to be vibrant and proactive in making use of information (both quantitative and qualitative) for the purpose of mapping and understanding the socio-economic and political contexts of girls and boys. Due to the absence of such a practice, school management and pedagogical processes fall short of being responsive to the issues and needs of students, particularly those of girls. Responses to gender issues at the local or school level are generally informed by knowledge and understanding of macro-level issues and, therefore, they are in most cases likely to misfit.

6.7.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

The state authority is seriously concerned about the persistent gender gap in basic education and, as such, gender issues in education are being addressed through policies, strategies and programme interventions (Aly, 2007; Kalid and Mujahid-Mukhtar, 2002). The change in the macro-scenario of girls' education over the years (see Box 36) can be, to a large extent, attributed to the state's commitment to gender equality in education.

Government-initiated policy research and knowledge bases on gender and education are mostly macro-oriented while multilateral agencies, academia and NGOs tend to include experiences from the ground in their analysis of the situation of girls' education. Government policies and strategies are not effectively informed by context-specific qualitative information.

Box 36 Progress in girls' education

Pakistan's overall record in promoting and delivering gender equality is a weak one. There are, however, areas in which significant progress has been made and indicators point to a steady though slow improvement:

- The ratio of girls to boys at all levels of education has improved.

- The ratio of literate females to males has risen.

- The share of women in urban employment (as a proxy indicator for share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector) has improved marginally.

- The role of women in national decision-making has improved significantly.

Source: MoE Pakistan (2004, p.4).

Large-scale interventions (e.g. stipends for girls, enrolment campaigns) have yielded remarkable outputs with increased enrolment and retention of girls in primary school. However, the problem of lack of middle and secondary schools for girls persists, especially in the remote communities of the Northern Areas, so the potential for them to become de-motivated to complete primary school remains high.

> Whereas participation rates of girls in urban areas have increased due to a policy of co-education at the primary level, high drop out rates beyond primary level persist as a result of lack of opportunities, mobility issues as well as traditions and cultural norms constraining the access of girls (especially in the rural areas) to middle, secondary and higher education. (MoE Pakistan, 2004, p.4)

The gender-focused policy responses and interventions over the past decade, nevertheless, have had some impact on the educational and socio-economic status of girls and women. Such an impact is evident in the improvement in some key gender-specific macro-indicators (see Box 37). The Ministry of Education, Pakistan (2004) claims that there has been 'steady though slow improvement [in] the ratio of girls to boys in all levels of education … female to male literacy … share of women in urban employment … the role of women in national decision making' (p.4). However, the progress in narrowing the gender gap has not yet gained the required momentum in order to fully ensure the rights of every child to basic education in time to achieve the EFA targets.

An important lesson that could be drawn from the Pakistan experience is that even the incremental change that has taken place in the country could not have occurred without a conducive policy environment supported by intervention programmes that are both supply oriented as well as empowering or demand driven. It is also important to note that parents in general are in favour of educating their daughters, but the state on its part is lagging behind in making even the basics like schools available, especially in the remote communities. The argument made at the international level that lack of resource must not be the cause of depriving children of their right to education does not seem to work in the rural Pakistani context.

Box 37 Change in key educational indicators

According to the 1998 census, female literacy rates remain low at 32.6 per cent. Although enrolment of girls has increased at a higher rate at all levels, their participation rate is much lower, so that gender gaps continue to persist. Whereas participation rates of girls in urban areas have increased due to a policy of co-education at the primary level, high dropout rates beyond primary level persist as a result of lack of opportunities, mobility issues as well as traditions and cultural norms constraining the access of girls (especially in the rural areas) to middle, secondary and higher education. The ratio of girls to boys in primary education is 0.72 which means that for every 100 boys, 72 girls are enrolled. It has improved from 0.51 in 1990. Secondary school enrolment has also followed the same pattern, rising from a ratio of 0.42 in 1990 to 0.64 in 2001–02. Tertiary level education shows the largest degree of improvement, rising from a base level of 0.46 in 1990 to 0.78 in 2001–02.

The trends in respect of male and female literacy from 1981 to 1998 for various provinces of Pakistan indicate that the male literacy rate in Punjab has increased from 36.82 per cent in 1981 to 57.20 per cent in 1998 against a rise in the female literacy rate from 16.82 to 35.10 per cent (i.e. more than double) during the same period. In the Sindh province, the male literacy rate has increased from 39.75 in 1981 to 45.29 per cent in 1998, while in the same province the female literacy rate has increased from 21.65 to 34.78 per cent. In NWFP, the increase in the male literacy rate has been from 25.86 to 51.39 per cent, whereas the female literacy rate has increased from 6.5 to 18.82 per cent (i.e. three times) for the same period. In Baluchistan, the increase for the male literacy rate is from 15.2 to 23.7 and for females from 4.30 to 15 per cent (more than three times) for the same period.

Source: MoE Pakistan (2004, p.4).

6.7.4 Recommendations

As a fundamental move to ensuring girls' widespread participation in primary education, the state should instil a legal guarantee of a free and compulsory primary education to all school-age children. The country needs to assess the prevailing allocation of national budget to education and make all efforts to increase the share to be at least at par with the average of South Asian countries. The poorer section of the population should be assured of the state support for children's educational attainment through incentive schemes such as judiciously managed stipends for poor students, particularly for girls, income-generating opportunities for the families and day meals for children at school particularly in food scarce, isolated and poor communities.

The government should promote social mobilization and critically sensitizing adult non-formal education programmes in conservative rural communities to help parents to understand the positive aspects of their daughters' participation in mixed-gender schools. At the same time, as an interim arrangement, the government should also invest in expanding girls-only schools close to the girls' residence.

The proliferation of private schools, which is permitted by the state law, needs to be regularized with gender-sensitive, pro-people and socially responsible mandates. The purpose of starting a private

school in a rural community, for example, should not be to compete with the local public school and eventually force the latter to shut down, which would certainly mean stopping more girls from going to school than boys. The government should find ways to materialize the 'adopt a school' scheme in its true sense so that private schools become instrumental in raising the quality of public schools.

6.8 Girls' Education in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia that has demonstrated outstanding educational achievements that are at par with most of the developed nations. There is almost no child of school age who is not enrolled in school, meaning obviously equal participation of girls. The Gender Equality in Education Index is very high, which indicates high girls' NER, rates of survival at primary level and transition to secondary level, along with high GDI (measured as gender inequalities in life expectancy at birth, adult literacy and gross enrolment ratio at primary, secondary and tertiary levels). What we see in the field of education today in Sri Lanka is a result of how it was valued historically. Education was established as a basic human right more than 60 years ago. Since 1945, anyone willing to pursue an education from primary to tertiary levels could do so without paying any user fee. Therefore, long before education was formally made compulsory in 1998, there was high participation of boys and girls, men and women in primary and secondary education (ADB, 2004). The high social value given to education along with the achievement of gender equality in access to education is evident not only in the educational statistics but also in the leadership provided by women to this nation.

> In 1931 Sri Lanka became one of the first countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to permit women to vote. In 1960, Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the first female Prime Minister of a modern nation. Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected Sri Lanka's first female president in 1994, and won a second term in office in elections in December 1999. Sri Lanka has a vibrant women's movement. (www.womenwarpeace.org, 2006)

Sri Lanka has suffered from an ongoing conflict for more than two decades. The small proportion of children who are not in school are mostly from the areas hit directly by the conflict. Women and children are most vulnerable as and when conflict escalates. There are reports of children, including girls, being recruited as combatants; while torture, rape and killing of women and girls have been used as a weapon of war even by the security forces, with scores of women and children becoming victims. The prospect for sustained economic development and greater gender equality in all aspects of social life has been obstructed due to the conflict.

While gender equality in access to education was long-ago achieved (making access almost a non-issue), choices for women to pursue quality senior secondary and higher education remain subtly limited. Women are discouraged from and disadvantaged in taking courses that would allow them careers which men have historically enjoyed. Women are psychologically pressured not to participate in technical, vocational and information technology related courses (ADB, 2004). The expansion of educational opportunity has fallen short of promoting gender equality. Therefore, Sirimavo Bandaranaike as the first female Prime Minister of the modern nation and Chandrika Kumaratunga as the two-time elected President could only be viewed as isolated cases.

> Women are severely underrepresented at the political and decision-making levels in Sri Lanka. Elections held on 2 April 2004 … resulted in the formation of a new government and saw less than 5% of women elected to parliament. According to the UN Development Assistance Framework, this makes mainstreaming gender at the policy level difficult. (www.womenwarpeace.org, 2006)

The gender equality status in the public sphere is reflected to some extent by the score that the country gets in UNDP's Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM).[13] The GEM refers to the extent to which women are able to use the knowledge and skills achieved through their participation in education 'to play an equal role in the political, economic and social life of their countries … Sri Lanka, with consistently high levels of NER and GEI, has a relatively low level of increase in GDI and spectacular fall in GEM' (Unterhalter, 2006, pp.11–12). According to UNDP (2001, 2003) the GEM of Sri Lanka fell from 0.409 in 1995 to 0.272 in 2000. Therefore, even though the country has remained highly proactive in putting together necessary policies, strategies and resources for over six decades since 1945, resulting in outstanding achievement in terms of universalizing not only primary but also secondary education, it needs to do more to effectively address the issues of gender stereotypes and socially defined subordinate gender roles of women.

6.8.1 Barriers to Girls' Education

Poverty

Although almost all the school age children are attending primary school in Sri Lanka, incidents of dropping out of school have remained a serious issue. 'Poverty is the main reason cited by adolescents for dropping out of school (De Silva, Somanathan and Eriyagama, 2003, p.4). Gunawardena (2002) has drawn a conclusion from his analysis of young women's interviews that economic problems are the cause of not being able to obtain education for the disadvantaged groups. Gunawardena refers to the young woman who says that she and her two siblings have dropped out in grade 7 and 8 (see Box 38). In the face of such an educational deprivation due to poverty, the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education in its National Report entitled *The Development in Education* (2004) makes the claim that equity in education is a key concern of the government. It goes on to explain that equity is ensured in all government and government assisted schools by making education free up to the first degree level, which includes free textbooks, free school uniform, subsidized transport and provision of nutritious meals for grade one children in schools where malnutrition is prevalent. Furthermore, as the report reads, 'the deserving students from low-income families are also provided with bursaries to meet their other expenses, which are continued up to university level. These are in addition to a widespread social safety net including free health services, poor relief and many other subsidies' (MoE, Sri Lanka, 2004, p.9).

Ironically, though, despite such an overt state concern for equity, 'still there is a percentage of children from marginalized groups who are out of the school system' (MoE, Sri Lanka 2004, p.7). Also as reported by BBC in January 2005:

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[13] *The GEM is an index of the percentage of seats in parliament held by women, female legislators, senior officials and managers, female professional and technical workers, and the ratio of estimated female to male earned income' (Unterhalter, 2006, p.11).*

Box 38 Economic problem and school attainment of girls in Sri Lanka

On the whole, the analysis indicates that mere expansion of schooling does not guarantee equal outcomes.

The failure of disadvantaged groups to obtain education appears to be linked to economic problems. Among the 76.3% who mentioned problems related to education, one third (33.6%) cited economic problems. This was confirmed by the interviews.

'Biggest problem I have is collecting money to attend tuition classes. On certain days when I attend classes, I do not have money for lunch.' (Squatter Settlements, Studying for A.L.[Advance Level], Young Voices, National Youth Survey, 2000)

Yet another young woman stated that she could not continue her studies and that her brother and sister also stopped schooling when they were in grade 7 and 8:

'Three of us could not study well due to our poverty and my mother's departure to the Middle East.' (Free Trade Zone, O.L. Qualified, Young Voices, National Youth Survey, 2000)

Source: Gunawardena (2002, pp.111–12).

Many Sri Lankan communities in the central highlands remain largely neglected and lag far behind the rest of the population. The estate population in Nuwara Eliya is one such area, where female literacy rates (76%) are much lower than male literacy rates (87%). In many of these communities, poverty is high and the education level is very low. There are very few schools, and those that exist are very poor. It is not uncommon for girls to work long hours for low wages instead of going to school. (http://www.roomtoread.org/countries/sri_lanka.html. Accessed January 13, 2008)

According to the National Report itself, the system has not been able to retain as many as 17% of an age cohort of children in the school system when they reach grade 9 or age 14. This gives the estimate that 10 per cent of the children between 5–14 years are out of school (MoE, Sri Lanka, 2004; also see Box 39). While the gender composition of this group of out-of-school children is not explicit, the reasons for such a persistent non-participation, although complex, 'are broadly described as socio-economic, with the principal factor being poverty' (MOE, Sri Lanka, 2004, p.8). Other contributing factors that the MoE has identified as fundamentally linked with poverty include family break-ups, migration, mothers leaving for foreign countries as housemaids, the on-going conflict and child labour.

State policy, strategy and barriers
Educational policies during the country's post-independence era were viewed as more progressive than how they have been reformed in the recent decades (Jayaweera, 1999). Most of the equity-oriented policies have their seeds sowed during the 1940s to 1960s – e.g. free primary, secondary and tertiary education, scholarships, free midday meal, subsidized transport to school and introduction of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in all levels of education (Jayaweera, 1999, p.173). 'Progress

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Box 39 **Key factors for children's non-participation in school**

The reasons for the non-participation of [the 10% of the children in the age group between 5 and 14 years] are complex and broadly described as socio-economic, the principal factor being poverty. There are also additional factors such as family break-ups, migration and mothers leaving for foreign countries as housemaids. Also the long-standing conflict in the Northern parts of the country has disrupted families and about 50,000 children in this age group are combatants. Child labour is another problem.

Source: The Development of Education: National Report, MoE, Sri Lanka (2004, pp.7–8).

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slowed in the 1980s, particularly with the implementation of IMF/World Bank-sponsored structural adjustment programme' (Jayaweera, 1999, p.174). Its impact on the lives of the disadvantaged groups was profound as the cost of living and incidence of poverty rose during the late 1970s and 1980s, and the state's attempt to mitigate the educational and social consequences proved futile in preventing the ever-increasing number of child prostitutes, child labourers and street children (Jayaweera, 1999).

> There have been vicissitudes in policy formulation and implementation. The reduction of social sector expenditure and the low priority given to what were mistakenly seen as 'social policies' in the implementation of structural adjustment programs in the 1980s slowed progress. (ADB, 2004, p.8)

The policies outlined in the more recent document *Regaining Sri Lanka – A Vision and Strategy for Accelerated Development* has continued to piggyback on the structural adjustment programme and stresses the accelerating of privatization and deregulation. Although it pledges improvements in social sectors such as education, health, housing and employment, 'the benefits of growth and social and gender equity are overshadowed by the imperatives of macro-economic policies' (ADB, 2004, p.32). The Country Gender Assessment of ADB (2004) concludes that the *Regaining Sri Lanka* document does not give the gender issue the importance it deserves – gender is a missing component in the section on education, among others. ADB's assessment points to the burning issues of equity, quality and barriers to education, particularly at the senior secondary and higher education levels, along with the lack of policy support to overcome perpetual gender imbalance in enrolment in vocational and technical education that has consequently reinforced gender division of labour in the world of work and lucrative professions.

6.8.2 Enabling Factors for Girls' Education
Political will and policy support
As already mentioned, Sri Lanka has a remarkable history of state support to education. It was the first in the region to introduce free primary, secondary and tertiary education in 1945, as stated in the Education Act 1945. Similarly the Special Provision Act no. 8 of 1960 has stipulated that the government takes responsibility as the sole provider of education to children aged 5 to 14. The provision of free education and the state taking the responsibility of education of all children allowed widespread participation of both girls and boys in school education.

A compulsory primary education regulation for this age group was further introduced in 1998. The public education system was historically strengthened with an ever-increasing expenditure with a share of 2.9 per cent of GDP in 1954 that rose to 4.5 per cent in 1964/65. The share of national budget to education fluctuated between a substantial 16 per cent and 20 per cent over the years. Although the Company Act 1982 allowed the private sector to establish schools as business enterprises, its share shrank to a mere 2 per cent (Jayaweera, 1999).

> Investment in education has been a central pillar of government policy in Sri Lanka. The education ordinances of 1939 and 1947 and free education in state primary, secondary, and tertiary education introduced in 1945 were among the earliest policies that highlighted the role of education in achieving economic and social equity. More recent policy statements from the National Education Commission in 1997 and 2003 reaffirmed that advancing equity through education is a fundamental principle of national policy. (ADB, 2007, p.5)

Sri Lanka has been engulfed in an internal conflict since 1983, though fortunately this has not seriously affected children's education. But public resources are being absorbed disproportionately by defence spending, and this certainly has had an impact on the education sector spending. In the year 2004, public expenditure in education as the share of GDP declined to 2.1 per cent. However, the government subsequently appears to have made efforts to maintain the earlier record of spending. The figure for 2005 increased to 2.6 per cent, and reached 3 per cent in 2007 and 4 per cent in 2008 (ADB, 2007).

The constitutional provision of education as a basic right for over six decades and the government policy of free and compulsory education for the 5–14 years age group have been instrumental in bringing almost all girls to school (see Box 40). The formal school environment that has been around for such a long time has contributed to making education an obvious popular demand. The high primary school participation (98% with GPI 0.96) and completion (95% in 2002; see ADB, 2007, p.2) rates of girls and boys plus the high adult and youth literacy rates (see Table 2) can be viewed as the outcome of this demand.

> Education has been a basic right for over 6 decades, and the demand for education as an agent of upward social mobility has resulted in relatively high education participation rates in primary and secondary education long before formal compulsory education regulations were introduced in 1998. Free primary, secondary, and tertiary education since 1945 has been a major factor that contributed to the achievement of gender equality in access to education and relatively high literacy rates. (ADB, 2004, p.vii–viii)

> Even though economic constraints continue to be a barrier to promoting equal educational opportunities for boys and girls, free education has been a major agent of progress toward gender equality and poverty reduction. The synergies that are evident in the impact of the access of women to education on their utilization of health and other basic services, and at least for a minority, to remunerative employment, have improved their quality of life and enhanced their contribution to national development. (ADB, 2004, p.8)

Box 40 **Policy support for girls' education in Sri Lanka**

Policies increasing access to education have been universally implemented for over six decades and education has been a major agent in reducing gender and socio-economic disparities. The new policy package, in the same tradition, introduced compulsory education legislation for the 5–14 age group, developed a programme to promote a more equitable distribution of secondary education facilities throughout the country and introduced qualitative and innovative changes in curricula and in management. Gender was included for the first time as a component of the curriculum in secondary and teacher education, but in practice, little has been done as yet to integrate them in educational materials. Formulation of a second phase of reform is in progress.

Source: ADB (2004, p.31).

The internal conflict that the country has been facing over the past 25 years is being handled carefully by the state. The complex nature of the problem has made the peace process a rather difficult endeavour. Amidst such a conflict the state is making strides for economic and social progress and stability through policies like *Regaining Sri Lanka – A Vision and Strategy for Accelerated Development* (2002). Its Action Plan has given due importance to the need for ensuring gender equity as a critical cross-cutting theme, especially in the process of implementation of all the strategies. A Gender Equity Committee was formed to oversee the gender-equity concerns. The Committee has also ensured 'that the objective of equity is not lost in the macro-economic scenario and that women in disadvantaged families are not excluded from the development process through inability to share in the costs of programmes' (ADB, 2004, p.34). Besides the Gender Equity Committee, as an outcome of a persistent lobbying of women's groups in the South, the need to form a separate Gender Peace Committee was acknowledged and agreed by the government and LTTE with 10 members represented equally by women from LTTE and those from the South. The committee was formed mainly to deal with the gender issues specifically related to the peace processes (ADB, 2004). The formation and functioning of such committees could be viewed as contributing to sustaining the outstanding participation of girls in education even under the harsh context of conflict.

Interventions and innovations
Whatever is seen today in Sri Lanka with regard to gender equality in basic education is mostly the outcome and impact of the state's proactive initiatives during the early days of the post-colonial period. The discussion in the earlier section clearly suggests this argument. The improved access to primary education (98% enrolment) with near perfect gender parity (GPI 0.96) is attributed to 'the enlightened social development policies followed by Sri Lanka since independence and the establishment of a wide network of schools spread throughout the country' (MoE Sri Lanka, 2004, p.8). The strategic government decisions that have introduced free and compulsory primary education, scholarships to disadvantaged children, midday meals, free textbooks, free uniform and subsidized transportation (ADB, 2007) allowed benefits to girls as much as they did to boys with an achievement of universal primary education in the country in the 1990s well ahead of the 2015 global target.

As is argued by many, the rosy scenario of girls' education depicted by the macro-analysis is not evenly distributed across the nation. Especially in the conflict-affected North and East Provinces, children, and girls in particular, are deprived of the same educational opportunity as in other provinces of the country. Armed conflict being the most important issue linked with educational deprivation of most of those girls, the government has rightly sought the cooperation of international communities to implement educational programmes in such areas. Save the Children Norway, for example, has worked with a locally based Eastern Self-reliant Community Awakening Organization (ESCO) since 1999 in some conflict-affected districts to help the deprived children meet their educational needs. The noteworthy feature of the programme, as pointed out by Mathieu (2006), was that the ESCO staff initiated 'talkshops' through which adolescents were encouraged 'to identify and suggest how to meet their priority needs' (p.65). Some of the achievements which Mathieu (2006) described were expansion of schools, reinstatement of bus services, construction of local clubs and establishment of revolving funds for the club activities. The achievements specific to girls, as she pointed out, were that the girls expressed having developed their self-esteem in the form of 'overcoming shyness and restrictive social norms' and gaining confidence to publicly speak and socialize with boys without any hesitation (Mathieu, 2006, pp.65–66). The initiative presented a model to be adapted and replicated in other contexts facing similar problems. What seemed to matter was for girls to participate and have their voices heard, and to boost their confidence to take control of their own well-being, which of course includes their motivation to participate in and complete at least basic education.

Knowledge management
Sri Lanka has maintained a remarkable track record of educational opportunities for wider public access. However, the gendered response of the educational provision is not as satisfactory. ADB's Country Gender Assessment of Sri Lanka (2004) noted that 'the content of education has tended to reinforce gender role stereotypes and has failed to promote gender equality in the macro-environment or to empower girls and women to challenge obscurantist, gendered social practices' (p.viii). For the education system to address such gender-specific concerns it needs to be fed with illuminative qualitative accounts of the field reality, especially those pertaining to the lives and lived context of girls and women.

The country's achievement of 98 per cent NER and 0.96 GPI (2004 data) in primary education enrolment is highly regarded as an outstanding educational performance in terms of achieving the goal of UPE. What is more, the country's achievement in the enrolment in secondary education – the best in the South Asia region – and girls outperforming boys, too, are quantitative measures consolidated at macro-level. Similarly most of the other educational progress indicators (e.g. literacy, grades and level completion rates, enrolment in early childhood development programmes) are measured in quantitative terms. The significance of these results has been limited to the achievement of targets only at the output level. But since there has already been over six decades of persistent and conscious public investment in education in the country, the result ought also to be evident at the impact level. Other than improvements in selected health indicators (e.g. incidence of increased use of contraceptives, reduced fertility, infant and maternal mortality rates) the country still lags behind in several social development indicators, including gender equality measures. The ever-increasing number of educated unemployed youth, more so among female youth (Lakshman, 2002, p.83), and women's exclusion in politics and

crucial bureaucratic positions, for instance, pose a serious challenge against the provision of the prevailing educational opportunities (see Box 41).

One of the reasons why the policies and reforms attempted in the sector could not address such social and gender issues is the lack of importance given by the system to qualitative accounts of experiential knowledge. This systemic deficiency is reflected in the classroom pedagogy where teachers remain indifferent about the experiences children, girls in particular, bring along. As a consequence, and just as Jayaweera (1999) has pointed out, students in Sri Lankan schools are subjected to rote learning and very rarely enjoy being empowered.

Box 41 **Educational and gender role stereotypes in Sri Lankan women**

Adolescents in Sri Lanka face lower levels of gender discrimination at home and at school relative to adolescents in the rest of South Asia. However, despite performing as well as, if not better than, their male counterparts at school and university, Sri Lankan women continue to be burdened with productive, reproductive, and societal expectations. A 1994 survey of women showed that although women were entering the labour force at faster rates than men, the rate of increase in the proportion of women holding senior administrative, planning, and scientific research jobs remained sluggish. Female representation at higher levels of government was also found to be minimal. Moreover, anecdotal evidence and media reports suggest that female adolescents are subjected to gender-based violence in their own homes and homes in which they are employed as domestic servants.

Source: De Silva et al. (2003, p.4).

Education has been a major factor in reducing poverty as well as gender inequalities in Sri Lanka. The gender issues that need to be addressed in this sector are constraints to the access of girls in poverty groups to quality education, high dropout rates in senior secondary education, limited opportunities for tertiary education, gender imbalances in enrolment in science and technical related courses, and failure to use education purposefully as an agent to promote the empowerment of women. (ADB, 2004, p.51)

Educational policies, programmes and efforts to promote girls' education are excessively informed by quantitative knowledge. Research based on a more heuristic and illuminative qualitative analysis of the reality on the ground is not only in short supply but that which is available also has very limited influence, if any, in shaping the education system. Perhaps it is at the level of philosophical orientation of the decision makers and planners that change is required, without which approaches such as phenomenology, hermeneutics and ethnography will remain at the fringe in the processes of education and development.

6.8.3 Outcomes, Impact and Lessons

The fact that almost all primary school age children are not only in school but also remain there to complete the full cycle of learning is indeed an admirable achievement of the Sri Lankan education

system. Gender equality has been achieved in all levels of education (ADB, 2004). These educational achievements coupled with near-universal literacy of adults have yielded remarkable progress in key social indicators. Infant mortality rate has dropped from 65 per 1000 live births in 1970 to 12 in 2004 while women's fertility rate has decreased from 4.1 to 2 births per woman during the same period (UNDP, 2007). Also during the same period the prevalence of contraceptive use by married women aged 15–45 years has increased to 70 per cent (UNDP, 2007).

With all these achievements, however, the country still lags behind in terms of Gender Empowerment Measure, i.e. in women's role in the political, social and economic life of the country – in fact the GEM shows a decrease in the index from 0.41 in 1995 to 0.27 in 2000 (Unterhalter, 2006, p.12). This situation clearly teaches an important lesson that although high and equal educational attainment of boys and girls at the primary and secondary level is a crucial factor to lead a country towards a more just and equitable social structure, it is evident that even the six-decade long persistent investment in education has failed to bring about a desirable gender equality in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is critical that the social security and power of basic-educated Sri Lankan girls and women be further improved. To ensure women's visible, equitable and meaningful participation in the country's apex social, economic and political domain, there needs to be much more aggressive affirmative policy support for opportunities in favour of girls and women. There is no shortage of evidence that disciplines which lead to more lucrative and socially recognized career opportunities (e.g. information technology, industrial studies, engineering) and the sphere of politics along with the senior management positions in the bureaucracy are all male dominated. Therefore, educational attainment of girls at the basic level should be complemented by strategically supported further education opportunities for them in multiple disciplines and in multi-sectoral career paths. Such an approach could not be more necessary for girls and women belonging to the poor and deprived social groups (see Box 42) as well as those affected by conflict.

6.8.4 Recommendations

The general education content which, according to ADB (2004), reinforces gender role stereotypes, failing to promote gender equality in the macro-environment and to empower girls and women to challenge obscurantist social practices needs to be engendered. The education system, therefore, needs to pay heed to the girls' everyday life experiences in classrooms and surroundings. This requires a change in the system's approach to educational research and innovations.

The quantitative measures through which achievements in educational indicators are assessed should be appropriately complemented by qualitative measures so that progress reporting also captures how educational attainment of boys and girls with near perfect gender parity impacts upon their lives, particularly those of girls. Sri Lanka needs to focus beyond UPE and GPI to more on improving social development indicators, including gender equality measures. The country should address the issues of the ever-increasing number of educated unemployed female youth and women's exclusion in politics and senior management.

The state should now initiate reform of the education system at all levels with serious gender considerations. Most importantly, teachers need to be re-oriented with alternative approaches to pedagogical processes so that students will no longer be subjected excessively to rote learning.

Box 42 Deprivation of education among girls in poverty groups

Education has been a major factor in reducing poverty as well as gender inequalities in Sri Lanka. The gender issues that need to be addressed in this sector are constraints to the access of girls in poverty groups to quality education, high dropout rates in senior secondary education, limited opportunities for tertiary education, gender imbalances in enrolment in science and technical related courses, and failure to use education purposefully as an agent to promote the empowerment of women.

National policies such as free education and the provision of a range of incentives have provided women with access to general education. Further incentives such as stipends and measures to improve the quality of secondary education as in the Secondary Education Modernization Project will increase access to educational opportunity for girls in low-income families who drop out of secondary grades. A specific gender issue is the concentration of girls in arts streams and their under-representation in science streams in senior secondary grades. The vulnerability of women to unemployment, and their marginalization in the labour market without adequate opportunities for upward occupational mobility, are addressed on the supply side in the ongoing Skills Development project by support for competency-based and 'non-traditional' skills development with a labour market orientation. In Sri Lanka, a current and seemingly intractable issue is the demand for low-cost, low-skill female labour and the gendered bias against the employment of women in technical employment. The target approach of 70 per cent participation by women in small entrepreneurship programmes could perhaps be adopted also for the apprenticeship programme in the wage sector.

… Underpinning the gender issues that affect the incorporation of women in the expanding knowledge-based economy are gender role stereotypes embedded in the context of education and the 'hidden' curriculum. Very little has been done in Sri Lanka to counter this process of gendered socialization in schools, teacher education institutions, and centres of higher education and vocational education. Initiatives at this level could facilitate gender mainstreaming at all levels.

Source: ADB (2004, p.51).

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About the Author

After working for more than two decades as an educational researcher at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, Roshan Chitrakar is currently working in Kabul, Afghanistan, as the Material Development and Training Advisor of the USAID-funded Learning for Community Empowerment Programme. He holds a PhD in Secondary Education from the University of Alberta, Canada.

Between the years 1998 and 2003 he worked as the Director of the DFID-funded Community Literacy Project, Nepal. His interest in pedagogy and educational development caused him to travel extensively in the rural communities of Nepal. He has had opportunities to work closely with Nepali women development activists and local civil society organizations formulating participatory programmes and engaging in organizational and human resource development activities.

He has worked as an international consultant in Myanmar and East Timor to contribute to the field of educational research and programme assessment, development of strategies for youth and women literacy programmes. As a practising educator he believes that action research and reflective practice are key to transformative educational processes.