2 Global and Commonwealth Mandates and Trends in the Education Sector

The mainstreaming of gender into all activities of government has received endorsement at the highest political levels. It is the central strategy of both the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In addition, both these documents include specific references to the education sector.

Beijing and Education

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) agreed on universal principles of gender equity and the Commonwealth member states are all signatories to the Beijing Declaration. Specific priorities of the Beijing Declaration are, *inter alia*, that:

- women's rights are human rights;
- women should have access to and enjoy the same standards of living as men;
- women have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, and the possibility of realising their own vision of their potential;
- women should participate in all levels of decision-making and are to have access to power;
- men and women should share family responsibilities equally, and women should be free to control all aspects of their health, especially their own fertility; and
- women should have access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communication, markets, and of course, the world of learning: literacy, schooling and formal and informal education.

The Beijing Platform for Action includes a section on the education and training of women. The strategic objectives identified in that section are:

- ensure equal access to education;
- eradicate illiteracy among women;
- improve women's access to vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education;
- develop non-discriminatory education and training;
- allocate sufficient resources for and monitor the implementation of educational reforms; and
- promote lifelong education and training for girls and women.

Recognising that non-discriminatory education contributes to more equal relationships between men and women, the Platform for Action identifies areas in which discrimination in education exists, including:

- customary attitudes;
- early marriages and pregnancies;
- lack of gender awareness on the part of educators;

+ girls' domestic responsibilities and the reduced time they are allowed for education; and
+ sexual harassment.

Discrimination in education resources is found in:
+ inadequate and gender-biased teaching and educational materials;
+ lack of adequate schooling facilities, particularly for girls' special needs;
+ stereotyped images of women and men in educational materials and teaching;
+ gender-biased curricula and teaching materials which reinforce traditional sex roles;
+ gender-biased science curricula and texts; and
+ insufficient resources for education, particularly for females.

The Platform for Action recommends strategies specific to each of the above, and advocates use of other avenues for change, such as exploiting the potential of the powerful mass media as an educational tool, and specifically targeting the involvement of women in technology education.

Commonwealth Mandates

The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development sets as a strategic objective of member governments to "take positive and/or affirmative action to provide equal opportunities in educational institutions…". To realise this and other strategic objectives, the Plan of Action proposed a number of action points that governments may wish to consider adopting, including action for human resource development – literacy, training and education, science and technology.

Specifically, the Plan of Action recommends the following actions:
+ undertake diverse and special training as well as informal and formal education programmes directed at women, including programmes to strengthen their self-esteem; and
+ encourage gender-inclusive curricula and devote particular attention to the participation of women in training-related programmes leading to occupations such as science and technology, industry and commerce.

The 1996 Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago reviewed progress in implementing the Plan of Action, and made further recommendations on its implementation. In particular, they recommended that Ministers of Education be requested to initiate more dynamic strategies for ensuring that women and girls are given equal access to educational opportunities, and participate more fully in training towards non-traditional occupations such as science, technology and commerce. They also recommended that additional resources be committed to distance education programmes such as those offered by the Commonwealth of Learning to help achieve these objectives.

A significant outcome of the meeting was the decision taken by Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers that member countries should be encouraged to achieve a target of at least 30 per cent women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors by the year 2005. This proposal was endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 1997 summit in Edinburgh.

Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers

Commonwealth Education Ministers, at their Thirteenth Conference in Botswana in 1997, commended the Secretariat for, among other activities, the pursuit of gender

Table 1   **Educational Indicators for Selected Commonwealth Member Countries**

Country	Adult Literacy Rate 1970		Adult Literacy Rate 1990		No. of Radio Sets per 1000 Pop. 1991
	f	m	f	m	
Australia	-	-	-	-	1268
Bangladesh	12	36	22	47	43
Botswana	44	37	65	84	122
Canada	-	-	-		1029
Ghana	18	43	51	70	268
India	20	47	34	62	79
Jamaica	97	96	99	98	420
Lesotho	74	49	-	-	32
Malawi	18	42	34	65	220
Malaysia	48	71	70	86	430
Mauritius	59	77	75	85	359
New Zealand	-	-	-	-	927
Namibia	-	-	-	-	127
Nigeria	14	35	40	62	173
Pakistan	11	30	21	47	90
Papua New Guinea	24	39	38	65	73
South Africa	-	-	75	78	303
Sierra Leone	8	18	11	31	223
Singapore	55	92	74	92	646
Sri Lanka	69	85	83	93	197
Tanzania	18	48	31	62	25
Trinidad and Tobago	89	95	93	96	492
Uganda	30	52	32	65	109
United Kingdom	-	-	-	-	1143
Zambia	37	66	65	81	81
Zimbabwe	47	63	60	74	84

Source: *The State of the World's Children 1995* (UNICEF, 1995)

equity in its education work programme, and proposed that attention be given, *inter alia,* to continuing to address gender concerns in the educational system, paying attention to the problems of both girls and boys. They also commended such Commonwealth programmes as higher education activities targeting women managers.

The Twelfth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, in Pakistan in 1994, called on member countries to make special efforts to enhance the participation of girls and women in science and technology (p. 9, para.17). It also called for a priority investment in women and girls as an initiative in human resource development (p. 23, para. 85). Mention of lack of proper security for girls was listed as a reason for them being kept out of school (p. 30, para. 122).

No. of Television Sets per 1000 Pop. 1991	Primary Enrolment Ratio (Gross) 1960		Primary Enrolment Ratio (Gross) 1986-92		Primary Enrolment Ratio (Net) 1986-92		% Primary School Children in Grade 5 1986-92	High School Enrolment Ratio (Gross) 1986-92	
	f	m	f	m	f	m		f	m
480	103	103	107	107	98	98	99	83	81
5	31	80	71	83	74	64	47	12	25
16	43	38	121	116	95	100	84	57	50
639	105	108	106	108	99	98	96	104	104
15	31	58	69	84	-	-	69	29	47
35	44	83	84	112	-	-	62	32	54
131	79	78	108	105	99	100	96	66	59
6	109	73	116	97	62	77	65	31	21
-	26	50	60	72	50	47	46	3	5
149	79	108	93	93	-	-	98	59	57
217	90	96	108	104	87	90	98	56	52
443	106	110	103	104	100	99	94	85	83
21	-	-	126	112	-	-	53	47	36
33	31	54	62	79	-	-	65	17	24
18	11	39	30	54	-	-	48	13	29
2	15	24	65	76	78	66	69	10	15
98	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10	15	30	39	56	-	-	-	12	21
378	101	120	107	110	100	100	100	71	70
35	95	107	106	110	-	-	95	77	71
2	16	33	68	70	50	50	79	4	6
315	108	111	96	96	90	90	89	82	80
10	18	39	64	78	58	51	-	8	16
434	92	92	105	104	97	98	-	88	85
26	40	61	92	101	83	80	-	14	25
26	65	82	118	120	-	-	94	42	54

Education and Gender in the Commonwealth

Literacy and enrolment are the two main indicators cited in the gender and development literature with regard to education. These factors are essential to, but not sufficient for, the achievement of gender equality and equity in a society.

Literacy

Literate people are better able to control, manage and improve their health, nutrition and education. Where women are most often the carers of children, their literacy translates into increased competence in looking after their children. Further, advances in women's education and lower fertility rates are closely related.

Table 2   Gender-Related Development Indicators for Selected Commonwealth Countries

Country	Life Expectancy at Birth (Years), 1994		Adult Literacy Rate (%), 1994		Combined Enrolment Ratio (%), 1994		Earned Income Share (%), 1994	
	f	m	f	m	f	m	f	m
Australia	81.0	75.2	99.0	99.0	80.0	77.0	39.8	60.2
The Bahamas	76.5	70.1	97.7	98.4	77.0	73.0	39.5	60.5
Bangladesh	56.5	56.3	24.3	48.4	34.0	45.0	23.1	76.9
Barbados	78.2	73.2	96.6	97.9	76.0	74.0	39.5	60.5
Botswana	53.7	50.5	58.0	79.3	72.0	70.0	38.9	61.1
Cameroon	56.5	53.7	49.5	74.0	42.0	51.0	30.9	69.1
Canada	81.7	76.3	99.0	99.0	100.0	100.0	37.8	62.2
Cyprus	79.2	74.9	94.0	94.0	75.0	75.0	27.1	72.9
Fiji Islands	74.1	69.9	89.2	93.7	78.0	80.0	21.4	78.6
The Gambia	47.2	44.0	22.7	50.9	27.0	41.0	37.8	62.2
Ghana	58.5	54.8	51.0	75.2	38.0	50.0	43.5	56.5
Guyana	66.7	60.0	97.4	98.5	67.0	66.0	26.4	73.6
India	61.4	61.1	36.1	64.5	47.0	63.0	25.7	74.3
Jamaica	76.1	71.7	88.4	79.6	67.0	64.0	39.2	60.8
Kenya	54.8	52.3	67.8	85.2	54.0	56.0	42.0	58.0
Lesotho	59.4	56.8	60.9	80.3	60.0	51.0	30.3	69.7
Maldives	61.5	64.2	92.9	93.1	70.0	70.0	35.4	64.6
Malta	78.6	74.1	86.0	86.0	75.0	79.0	20.9	79.1
Malawi	41.5	40.6	40.4	71.7	63.0	71.0	42.0	58.0
Malaysia	73.5	69.0	77.5	88.2	63.0	61.0	30.2	69.8
Mauritius	74.2	67.4	78.4	86.8	62.0	61.0	25.4	74.6
Mozambique	47.5	44.5	22.1	55.8	21.0	30.0	41.3	58.7
New Zealand	79.2	73.6	99.0	99.0	96.0	91.0	38.8	61.2
Nigeria	52.6	49.5	43.8	66.1	44.0	55.0	29.5	70.5
Pakistan	63.3	61.3	23.3	49.0	25.0	50.0	20.8	79.2
Papua New Guinea	57.3	55.8	60.7	79.8	34.0	41.0	34.8	65.2
South Africa	66.8	60.8	81.2	81.4	82.0	80.0	30.8	69.2
Sierra Leone	35.2	32.1	16.7	43.7	22.0	34.0	29.7	70.3
Singapore	79.3	74.9	87.2	95.6	71.0	73.0	30.7	69.3
Sri Lanka	74.6	70.0	86.9	93.2	68.0	65.0	34.5	65.5
Swaziland	60.5	56.0	73.3	76.4	70.0	74.0	34.9	65.1
Tanzania	51.7	48.9	54.3	78.8	33.0	35.0	47.3	52.7
Trinidad & Tobago	75.4	70.8	97.2	98.6	67.0	67.0	29.7	70.3
Uganda	41.1	39.3	48.7	73.2	30.0	39.0	40.7	59.3
United Kingdom	79.3	74.1	99.0	99.0	86.0	85.0	35.0	65.0
Zambia	43.3	41.7	69.3	84.4	44.0	51.0	38.8	61.2
Zimbabwe	50.1	48.1	79.0	90.2	64.0	72.0	37.4	62.2

Source: *Human Development Report 1995* (UNDP, 1995)

Literacy is a basic tool for upward social mobility and an improved standard of living. A literate person not only has access to a wider range of jobs, and to better-paying jobs, but with the ability to read and write, a person can take advantage of continuing education. Educational qualifications are key to improving one's standard of living. In terms of empowerment, a literate person has greater access to sources of knowledge, and is better able to participate in decision-making in the family, community and wider society. In uplifting women's and men's lives, literacy is thus a fundamental priority. While literacy rates for both men and women have increased over the past 20 years, there are still many Commonwealth countries where women's literacy is considerably lower than men's (see Tables 1 and 2).

Enrolment

Enrolment in school is, like literacy, crucial to bettering one's life. Again, the figures for both sexes have increased in the past 30 years. Moreover, the differential between males' and females' enrolment is decreasing.

In some Commonwealth countries there are more females enrolled in school, at all levels, than males. Thus, while the quest for gender equality in education rightly focuses mainly on young women and girls, a case of reverse bias could be argued were the situation of boys and men not addressed too, particularly in those regions of the Commonwealth countries where enrolment, attendance and achievement rates are increasingly lower for boys than for girls. Of the 25 countries listed in Table 1, just over half, 13, have higher ratios for female secondary school enrolment, and 12 have higher, equal or practically equal ratios for female primary school enrolment (see Table 1).

Such data have been cited in support of the male marginalisation thesis as proposed by Miller (1994). The inference is that girls' successes are gained at the expense of boys' opportunities; but in most instances, the girls are outperforming boys despite the many obstacles, structural and cultural, which girls experience in gaining access to, and participating in educational activities. In Jamaica, for example, the number of places allocated to boys and girls in high schools result in many girls being denied places, despite the fact that their performance in the Common Entrance Examination for high schools is better than that of boys who are given places (Leo-Rhynie, 1996).

Other indicators

Ostergaard (1992), while acknowledging the importance of such indicators as literacy and enrolment, which provide data on the education stock, expresses the need for information on the 'flow of education'; indicators such as attendance, transition and retention rates, continuation data, areas of specialisation, and non-formal education.

Furthermore, in order to gain a full picture of gender imbalances and inequalities in the education sector, as well as on how such inequalities are perpetuated through education, it is necessary to focus on such indicators as:
+ management structures (i.e. female/male representation in decision-making at Ministry, School Board and institutional levels);
+ access (e.g. male/female admissions at different levels);
+ resource allocation (e.g. per capita expenditure on female and male students); and
+ achievement (i.e. female/male performance in national examinations).

These are examined in greater detail in Section 5 and the Appendix.