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Commonwealth Country Case Studies

From a limited sample survey of four Commonwealth member states, it appears that the inclusion of gender in the planning and policies of education varies considerably. Reviewed in this section are the policies for Zambia, Ghana, Jamaica and a regional policy for the Caribbean community (CARICOM), as well as a project for girls' education in Pakistan.

An examination of the status of education for women and men in the four countries identified points to the existence of very different situations which probably influenced the statements of policy and the concerns of educational policy-makers (see Table 3).

Table 3 Educational Indicators for Selected Countries

Country	Literacy Rates Enrolment Gross				Primary Enrolment Gross 1986-1992		High School Enrolment Gross 1986-1992		Females per 100 Males 1986-1992	
	Female		Male		f	m	f	m	2ndry	3iary
	1970	1990	1970	1990						
Ghana	18	51	43	70	69	84	29	47	64	22
Jamaica	97	99	96	98	108	105	66	59	107	149
Pakistan	11	21	30	47	30	54	13	29	41	22
Zambia	37	65	66	81	92	101	14	25	59	39

Source: UNICEF, 1995

Jamaica's educational indicators demonstrate the high levels of involvement of women in the educational process; at the tertiary level, they outnumber men significantly, and there is total enrolment of both male and female students at primary level. The levels of literacy for both women and men have remained high and stable over the twenty-year period 1970–1990, and this situation has probably resulted in a certain lack of urgency about gender planning. Examination of the needs of the boys and men in the system, and the identification and assessment of factors affecting their under-achievement, would, however, be an important aspect of gender planning in this country. It would also be useful to examine how women's perceived advantage in the educational system affects their future career prospects vis-à-vis those of men in Jamaica.

In the other countries, there has been significant progress between 1970 and 1990 in terms of literacy for both women and men, but the percentage of literate women still remains significantly below that of men. The data point to under-representation of girls and women at every level of the education system, and this demands

improvement of access for, and participation of, women. The policy statements examined and the project outlined demonstrate an understanding and recognition of this as a central focus.

Ghana

The Ghanaian Programme for the Provision of Free, Compulsory and Universal Basic Education by the Year 2005 (1994), identified two gender-specific causes of non-attendance at school: early marriages for girls, and discrimination against girls by parents and guardians. The policy also contained an entire section on girls' education, which again pointed to these socio-cultural factors as being responsible for the low enrolment and attendance rates of girls.

Although the policy diagnoses the problem, and states the "need to focus special attention to ensure that there is increased enrolment of girls in basic schools", the identification and recommendation of measures designed to create family and community awareness, and to remove or reform attitudes which have been identified as the major inhibitors to girls' involvement in education need to be stressed as a response.

This policy both recognises the existence of a gender imbalance in education and makes a diagnosis of the problem. The difficulties of identifying the strategies necessary to correct the problem, which need to be targeted to situations existing outside the formal education system, are clearly demonstrated here, and are a concern in many countries.

Jamaica and CARICOM

The Five Year Education Plan for Jamaica 1990–1995, and the CARICOM Regional Policy on Education (1993) are two examples of policies which contain little recognition of gender as a variable which requires attention in the planning of education. These documents, which cover all levels of the education system, do not present any examples of gender-sensitive policies, nor do they provide any indication that gender has been considered in the majority of decisions made about education.

The Jamaica Plan makes three brief references to gender in the text of the document, but none of these is supported by a plan of action. With regard to one of the critical indicators, attendance rates at secondary schools, the document notes that the attendance rate for boys is 65%, while the corresponding figure for girls is 68-69%. The under-achievement of boys in the Jamaican education system is a serious cause for concern, but figures such as these reflect a commendable comparison to other gender differentials in education in Jamaica (see Tables 1 and 2).

At the end of the document, a summary of development issues is presented, and in one objective related to Personal Development, is listed the need to "strengthen programmes to promote gender equity". The schedule does not, however, indicate any guidelines, programmes or projects designed to achieve this objective.

The final mention of gender is in Schedule B, in which projects falling under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme are listed. A major activity for the proposed project of a Mechanical Engineering Skills Training Institute was the "construction of a facility for the training of young persons – male and female."

In the CARICOM education policy, the major mention of gender is also related to the regional TVET programme. This programme was formulated with a great deal of input from two Caribbean regional women's organisations, and the national TVET programmes are administered and monitored by a regional TVET authority.

The CARICOM policy document mentions gender twice elsewhere in the document. At the primary education level, the policy identifies the poor performance of boys as a serious concern. At the tertiary level, the establishment of "gender equity in training, recruitment and decision-making processes" is stated as being necessary for improvement at that level. There is no indication as to how such equity could be achieved.

In the Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, males have lower literacy, enrolment, attendance and achievement rates than females. The absence of a gender analysis in the preparation of these plans suggests that this situation is not a major concern of policy-makers.

The CARICOM policy was formulated by a task force comprising seven men and two women, and the criticism may be made that women were under-represented in the policy development process. The same cannot be said, however, for the Jamaican education plan, which was developed by a team of twelve women and nine men. Four women and one man made up the drafting committee, and three women and one man made up the editorial committee. Although all four groups were chaired by men, the absence of a gender perspective in the development of the plan cannot be attributed to a lack of female representation, and points to the need for gender sensitivity training for both sexes and at the highest levels.

Pakistan

A 1989 report on a Primary Education (Girls) Sector Project in Pakistan provides an example of an intervention aimed specifically at girls in education. Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, particularly for females (see Tables 1 and 2).

This project provides a good example not only of a strategy aimed at addressing gender inequity in education, but also of the constraints which (a) socio-cultural and religious factors, and (b) economic factors impose. Pakistan's education sector as a whole is under-resourced, and targeting girls' education is simply not able to attract the necessary resources.

Four main factors are identified as restricting girls' access to education in Pakistan. These are the poor education system in general, lack of facilities (schools and schoolrooms, desks, etc.) for girls' schools (boys and girls are educated separately), lack of female teachers (only female teachers can teach girls), and religious and socio-cultural customs.

The project aims to provide more physical facilities, improve the education sector as a whole, and to train more women to be teachers. The problem of addressing the social attitudes which are fundamental to the lack of facilities, lack of female teachers, and the restrictions to girls' education again prove to be difficult in terms of identifying solutions. Admittedly, this is a complex and sensitive area for development intervention. Nevertheless, strategies toward societal change in a context such as this are vitally important if programmes and projects are not to have only limited effect.

Zambia

The Government of Zambia's National Policy on Education (1995) provides a good example of mainstreaming gender into education policy. The ideological framework is set in the preamble of the policy, where a commitment to gender equity in terms of two critical indicators, school enrolment and school management, is stated. Throughout the policy document, tables and figures present sex-disaggregated data, and gender is addressed in areas such as curriculum and school management.

The guiding philosophy of the document does not explicitly mention gender or any other social category, but speaks of the creation of "total human beings" who exercise "tolerance for other people's views – in defence of individual liberties and human rights". The priority objectives are placed in immediate, short, medium and long term categories and gender concerns are addressed at two priority levels. In the short term (1995–2000), "achieving gender equity in school enrolment and in management posts at all levels of the education system" is a stated objective, while "attaining gender parity in enrolment in maths, science and technical subjects at all levels" is a long term (after 2015) goal.

The profile of the educational system provides summary data, and notes:

- ◆ two-thirds of the illiterate adults in the country are women;
- ◆ gender gaps in enrolment, completion and repetition rates at the primary level;
- ◆ gender gaps in enrolment at secondary schools, including boarding schools; and
- ◆ the small number of women who are headteachers.

A section in the Plan is devoted to equity, and gender is identified as an issue, along with age and socio-economic status. Specific gender issues identified include:

- ◆ the decreasing enrolment of girls as they progress through the education system;
- ◆ the channelling of girls into non-technical, traditionally female subject areas;
- ◆ the under-representation of women in universities and teacher training colleges, but the decreasing gender disparity in enrolment in teacher training colleges;
- ◆ the socio-cultural factors which contribute to female dropout, such as early marriage, pregnancy, heavy household chores, long distances to school; and
- ◆ the limited availability of boarding places for girls despite research evidence that girls' performance is better when they are enrolled in boarding schools.

Policy recommendations also include a section on gender equity which focuses on the education of girls. The recommendations include:

- ◆ adopting measures to remove gender disparity in access, progression and accomplishment at all levels of the education system;
- ◆ penalising persons guilty of sexual harassment;
- ◆ enacting legislation to punish parents and guardians who withdraw children from school prematurely;
- ◆ giving a comparative advantage to girls in their selection to higher grades; creating more boarding places for girls;
- ◆ establishing special bursary schemes for girls, and providing awards and scholarships for girls in technical subjects;
- ◆ readmitting girls who may have been forced out of school prematurely;
- ◆ enacting legislation to punish any adult who has carnal knowledge with a pupil;
- ◆ strengthening guidance and counselling programmes in an attempt to change socio-cultural attitudes which can hinder the educational progress of girls;
- ◆ increasing the enrolment of female teacher trainees in mathematics, science and technical subjects; and
- ◆ advocating and working to change parents' and guardians' attitudes to girls domestic labour, so that they can have time to study.

Other policy guidelines refer to the curriculum, where it is stated that absence of gender bias must be ensured; and to the management of the education system, where “equitable sharing” of management positions between men and women is recommended.

The gendered nature of this policy document is evident, and it speaks to both equity and equality issues. The action to be taken in the implementation of some of the policy guidelines is not very clearly spelt out, but the intent is evident, and hopefully it will be followed up at various levels through action committees, and through the proposed partnerships with various sectors and agencies, as well as the community. It was stated in the plan that the issues identified had been gleaned through wide consultation across the country, so presumably women and men had contributed to the identification of problems and issues presented, and would therefore be willing to work towards bringing about change.

In a special project to upgrade the management behaviour of headteachers, which is part of a larger Zambia Education Rehabilitation Project (ZERP), one of the eight members of the project team was appointed to ensure the mainstreaming of gender throughout the project. The focus on gender in the statement of the project objective of creating a gender balance in terms of the numbers of headteachers, as well as in other areas of school management reflects the ‘equality’ concern. Gender sensitivity and awareness training comprised an entire component of the project’s training objectives, and would be expected to provide a framework within which the issue of gender could be addressed at the level of school management, in the hope that this would be important in establishing a school climate in which gender issues were central to decision-making in all activities.

Conclusions

Even where education policies appear to address gender inequity, attention to gender at the level of governmental decision-making and resource-allocation is often still limited, if it exists at all. While it is a step forward to say that a certain measure has considered gender inequity, that this will actually happen is still not necessarily the case.

This is not simply the fault of unwilling government officials, or even, in many instances, a lack of resources. Even where policy-makers might truly be concerned with gender, policy implementers may not be equipped and/or willing to make gender a priority or even an issue. In the case of education, implementers include school administrations, education ministries (which in some cases, e.g. Canada, are often decentralised entities each run by regional authorities), academics (who are key in curriculum development and textbook content and methodology), school boards, principals and teachers.

Pursuing gender equity is important. Providing for and improving education is a priority for all governments. Education is central to the pursuit of gender equity, and therefore it is important to address gender in education policy, but the problems inherent in pursuing these objectives are those of national/cultural differences, availability of resources and priorities.