The Gender-Responsive School

AN ACTION GUIDE

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Foreword

Education plays a critical role in the shaping of gender identity and gender relations. There is a need therefore to ensure that those involved in schooling do not perpetuate processes that promote inequity and restrict the potential of girls and boys. Rather, schools should be supported in adopting practices that challenge stereotypical views of masculine and feminine behaviour and identities. Secondary education takes place when girls and boys are between childhood and adulthood and as such at a critical stage of identify formation. It is therefore a key opportunity to effectively address issues related to empowerment and relationships.

The starting point for this Action Guide was a research study, 'Gender Analysis of Classroom and Other Schooling Processes in Secondary Schools', conducted in a small number of sample secondary schools in seven countries (India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Samoa, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago) in 2007-2008. The findings of this study are available as a book, Jha, J and Page, E (eds) (2009 forthcoming) *Exploring the Bias: Gender and Stereotyping in Secondary Schools,* Commonwealth Secretariat, London. The research looked at various classrooms in selected secondary schools and clearly revealed that schools can reinforce, rather than question, prevalent gender notions and learning experiences. Those involved in the study agreed that a pilot action project was required in order to address the recommendations that emerged.

The Action Guide is based on the experiences of secondary teachers and schools who participated in the action pilot project, which was supported by the Education Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The project aimed to explore ways of helping secondary schools become more gender-responsive and to document their experiences in the process and determine the lessons learned. It included examples of action research initiated by teachers and of whole school activities initiated by both principals and teachers. Some of the approaches adopted to developing understanding of gender aspects and perspectives are described in the guide.

The guide therefore responds to the expressed needs of many professionals working in education for support in ensuring that classrooms and schooling processes are more informed by and responsive to gender. It offers practical solutions drawn from diverse contexts facing different challenges: from Rajasthan (India) and Sindh (Pakistan) in Asia to Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean and Seychelles in Africa.

We sincerely hope that teachers, principals, educational administrators, teacher trainers, policy planners and others working in the field of education will find this guide useful. We welcome feedback and encourage readers to provide comments and suggestions to help steer our future work.

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