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## Gender equality in education

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## **GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: Definitions and Measurements**

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### **Introduction**

This paper was developed as a short concept note for stimulating discussion on the meaning and measurement of gender equality in education. The terms gender parity and gender equality are reflected in one of the six EFA goals elucidated in the Dakar Framework for Action [2000]<sup>2</sup> as follows:

- ▶ Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality

Elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education is also picked up as a target identified as essential to fulfill Goal 3 of the Millennium Development Goals [Promote Gender Equality and empower women].

Bearing these new international commitments in mind,<sup>3</sup> it is important to work towards clarity on what is meant by gender parity and gender equality with reference to education, explore the linkages between them, and identify the best mechanisms to measure progress towards these goals. This is necessary to ensure that a clear analytical and operational distinction is maintained between concepts of gender parity and equality - without which there is likely to be considerable slippage in the usage of these terms as well as the measurement of progress towards them as desired outcomes.

This paper works on the basis of the argument that measuring gender equality in education is conceptually demanding, and will necessitate focus on a far wider range of indicators than may be suggested by focusing on education alone, or defined in a narrow sense.

Furthermore, widening the scope of measuring progress towards gender equality will necessitate some amount of conceptual creativity or openness to explore the range of pathways that may exist in different contexts and explain progress [or the lack of it] towards gender equality in education. Conceptual creativity is not suggested at the expense of rigour - on the contrary, a great deal of analytical rigour will be required to explain the range of interlinked pathways that may help establish or determine cause-effect relationships that in turn will help identify the range of interventions necessary for ensuring progress towards

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<sup>2</sup> The Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, adopted by the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 [Paris, UNESCO 2000]

<sup>3</sup> The framing of these commitments in these ways is new, though arguably a concern with gender parity/equality has been expressed over the past decades, and particularly in the 1990s in the various international conference declarations that marked the decade.

gender equality in education. Thus a prior belief that this paper rests on is that for successful intervention for progress towards gender equality, conceptual and analytical rigour is required, without which claims for progress towards these goals are likely to be unreliable.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. GENDER PARITY AND EQUALITY IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Dakar Framework for Action represents to-date the most important international political commitment towards promoting Education for All. The framework contains two gender-based goals. In Article 7 [ii] participants commit to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. The second commitment is to achieve gender equality in education by 2015. These goals are fully supported by the Millennium Development Goals, which reiterate the importance of ensuring completion of a full course of good quality primary schooling by 2015 [Goal 2], the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling by 2005, and the achievement of gender equality in all levels of education no later than 2015.

These two goals are distinguished as **gender parity** goals [achieving equal participation of girls and boys in all forms of education based on their proportion in the relevant age-groups in the population] and **gender equality** goals [ensuring educational equality between boys and girls]. In turn these have been characterised as quantitative/numerical and qualitative goals respectively. In order to consider progress towards both types of goal, both quantitative and qualitative assessments need to be made of the nature of progress towards gender equality. Achieving gender parity is just one step towards gender equality in and through education. An education system with equal numbers of boys and girls participating, who may progress evenly through the system, may not in fact be based on gender equality. A consideration of gender equality in education therefore needs to be understood as the right *to* education [access and participation], as well as rights *within* education [gender-aware educational environments, processes, and outcomes], and rights *through* education [meaningful education outcomes that link education equality with wider processes of gender justice] [Wilson, 2003]

The rights discourse provides a powerful overarching framework for discussing gender equality, particularly at it has been validated through international dialogues on the nature of international co-operation in recent years. In particular, the citation of human rights in education finds its basis in international law, which has provided the legal standards that States commit to when they ratify international treaties.<sup>5</sup> States that have committed to relevant international instruments have clear obligations to progressively realise the right to

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<sup>4</sup> See Subrahmanian 2003. This point is also made by Malhotra et al. 2002 with reference to measuring levels of empowerment and tracking changes in these levels, where they note that neither the Bank nor other major development agencies have developed methods, despite promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as an important policy objective.

<sup>5</sup> These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, amongst others. See Appendix 1 in the EFA GMR 2003-04 for a list of gender equality rights in different conventions and conference declarations.

education and gender equality in and through education [Wilson, *ibid.*]. Rights here are thus framed in terms of states' obligations towards their citizens, obligations for which they can be held accountable.

As the latest *Progress of the World's Women 2002* [2002:2] argues, the indicators of gender equality in the influential Dakar and MDG documents are important, but do not tell us all we need to know about the efforts to improve women's lives:

"Many aspects of women's progress – or lack of it – are left out when the focus is on hard facts: the emotional pull of the unpaid care work that women provide in their homes and communities; the excitement and exhaustion stemming from the struggle for equality and respect; the terrible toll of the ongoing violence that women experience, in public and in private, in war and during peace. First, the indicators, like the targets, are limited in scope. They do not tell us about the terrible impact of violence against women on their lives or the emotional toll of gender inequality and its effect on every aspect of women's lives. They do not tell us about the long exhausting hours that women spend caring for their families and communities. Second, there is a tendency to use only the indicators for education, which gives a misleading picture of women's empowerment. Third, ending disparity does not always equal empowerment, nor does ending disparity guarantee that a majority of women and men are benefiting."

Assessing progress towards gender equality, therefore, requires measuring meaningful progress towards the right to education, in turn assessing both *quantitative and qualitative* information on a wide range of phenomena that underpin the rights of men and women, to, within and through education. Educational indicators, namely quantitative combinations of one or more statistics, provide easy to grasp portrayals of educational systems. On their own, however, they present only surface portrayals of 'reality' as they are based on averages and global pictures. "Indicators, and the statistics that make possible their computation, on their own provide little or no explanation of the phenomena that they record. ... To exact meaning from indicators and to make them useful for policy-making, they need to be carefully connected to specific groups, time and space. ... They need to be placed in their socio-economic and political context in order to reach an accurate interpretation, both of what they mean, and what may have caused them" [Stromquist 2003]. To understand and assess progress towards gender equality in education is, therefore, to interpret dynamic social phenomena.

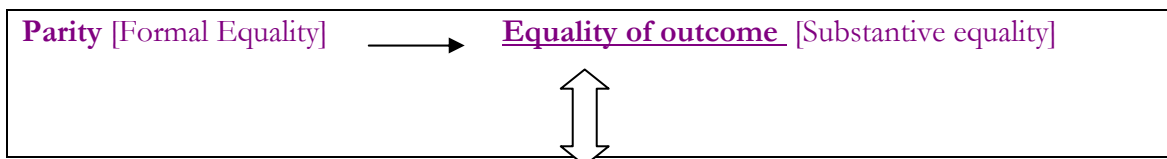
A significant challenge thus relates to the collection of data, and its interpretation. Much in turn depends on how gender 'parity' and gender 'equality' in education are being defined. Despite this, however, nowhere in the Dakar Framework for Action is the concept of gender equality actually defined. The lack of a universally accepted definition of gender equality in relation to education goals makes measuring progress towards its achievement hard if not impossible to achieve. Without clarity about what gender equality in education means the goal of 2015 will be at best subject to contestation and dispute that is likely to cloud global consensus, and at worst leave this important goal unfulfilled for lack of clarity about what it is that constitutes progress on this front.

## 1. DEFINING KEY TERMS

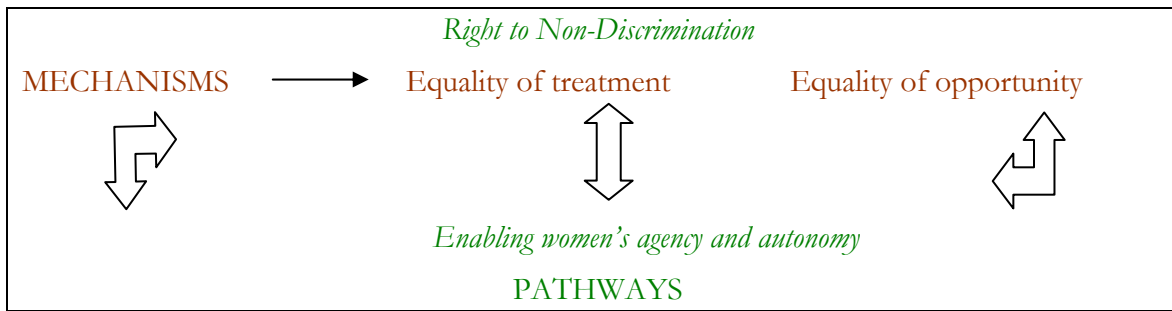
Gender equality rests on, but is not the same as, achieving gender parity, or females being represented in equal numbers as males in education, although the latter offers a ‘first stage’ measure of progress towards gender equality in education. Gender parity reflects *‘formal’ equality*, in terms of access to and participation in education. ‘Formal’ equality can also be understood as equality that is ‘premised on the notion of the ‘sameness’ of men and women, where the male actor is held to be the norm. This is reflected in the way gender parity is used in measuring EFA progress, where the gender parity index computes the ratio of female-to-male value of a given indicator, with the mean value being 1.

However, there are two limitations of ‘gender parity’ indicators. One arises from the understanding that measuring access to and participation in education, whilst important, are limited indicators of change in education, as they do not by themselves tell us very much about processes of education. At best, they are first-order outcome indicators. Second, they are ‘static’ measures. A relational understanding of ‘gender’ requires recognition of the dynamic processes by which gender inequalities are constituted across different arenas of human life. Gender inequalities arise from the unequal power relations between women and men, and hence assessments of gender equality need to capture the relational dimensions of gender inequality.

Formal equality measures numerical ‘gaps’ between female and male outcomes. However, for equality to be achieved, we need a definition that recognises that women and men start from different positions of advantage, and are constrained in different ways. Thus achievement of **substantive equality** requires the recognition of *‘the ways in which women are different from men, in terms of their biological capacities and in terms of the socially constructed disadvantages women face relative to men.’*<sup>6</sup> This in turn depends on two further processes, indicators of which can tell us *how* equality of outcome has been achieved. These processes refer to the *quality of experience* of education, in terms of entering education, participating in it and benefiting from it. For gender equality to be meaningful, mechanisms for ensuring **equality of treatment** as well as **equality of opportunity** for men and women are important. These in turn rest on a commitment to **non-discrimination**, to ensure the erasure of social norms that construct women and men as unequal in value in terms of their contributions and entitlements, and to ensure that all social actors are committed to eliminating stereotypes and attitudes that reinforce and perpetuate inequalities in the distribution of resources between women and men. Assessing gender equality thus requires assessing whether fundamental freedoms and choices are as equally available to women as they are to men. This involves focusing on pathways to equality, extending the concern with treatment and opportunity to also focusing on *agency* and *autonomy* exercised by women in enjoying their freedoms.



<sup>6</sup> Kabeer 1999 p.37



A move towards **substantive gender equality** thus requires recognising that discrimination arises from differential valuation of what it is men and women contribute, giving rise therefore to differential [unequal] investments in women and men, differential [unequal] rewards paid to women and men, and differential [unequal] resources allocated to men and women. Gender refers to the construction of a social category of differentiation based on biological sex i.e. a process by which biological differences between women and men [in terms of reproductive capacities and some physiological traits related to these capacities] are converted into processes of social differentiation that result in differential valuations of the capacities, skills, abilities, entitlements and rights of women and men. Such differences in value are as apparent in societies where girls are excluded from education relative to boys because of the devaluation of their socially constructed roles as carers, as they are in societies where the relatively higher academic achievement of girls remains unrecognised and undervalued in the wider economy. Thus even if opportunities are made available to women, and women make the best use of them, women may be prevented from exercising their full rights to these opportunities because of discrimination operating outside the sphere of education.

However, a gender-aware approach to equality needs also to recognise that gender inequalities have been historically legitimised by societies in ways that require careful analysis. The construction of gender inequality has rested on ‘naturalising’ a range of differences between women and men in order to legitimize their differential treatment and inequality of resource distribution. The unequal burdens borne by women and young girls in reproductive activities, including the maintenance of human resources through their unpaid work within the home, provides a powerful example. It is assumed that women perform these roles voluntarily and as a result of their natural instincts, rather than on the recognition that the division of labour is socially determined and based on unequal power relations between women and men, which invisibilises the importance of the role that women play and the important contributions that men need to make towards sharing these burdens. ‘Naturalising’ these differences in turn has depended on their being accepted by all social actors as essential to uphold, and over time has translated into entrenched norms that define appropriate behaviours for men and women. These **gender ideologies** become the basis of social norms, practices and rules; these processes in turn inform masculine and feminine identities. Masked as ‘culture’, these identities and ideologies become stubbornly defended as traditional and immutable. Further, these gender ideologies are encrypted in institutions that govern daily life, and thus translate into deeper structural inequalities that are not likely to be removed unless there are clear efforts to rethink and rewrite the basic rules that underpin institutional functioning.

Thus a first step towards assessing progress towards substantive gender equality beyond formal equality, entails understanding the *social construction of gender identity* or what it means to be a woman or a man in a given context, which in turn is underpinned by prevailing ideas about [a] what roles are appropriate for men or women to perform in a given context; and b) how what is done by women and men is valued, socially and economically. For monitoring global progress towards gender equality, indicators need to be developed within a conceptual framework that encompasses the contextual differences in the operation of gender inequalities. The construction of gender identities operates in different ways in different contexts, giving rise to inequalities between women and men in gaining access to, participating in and benefiting from various resources.

First, prevailing norms about what women and men do, and how their activities and roles are to be valued determine the opportunities to which they have access. Thus households may discriminate, as they often do, against girls in favour of boys in access to education. These are clearly relative phenomenon, as boys are also likely to be excluded from school in contexts of poverty and/or conflict, but where children are sent to school, boys are often advantaged over girls in access to schooling.<sup>7</sup>

Second, constraints arise out of what women or men do which serve to curtail or restrict their freedom to access opportunities. This means that even if opportunities are presented to women, the nature of their reproductive responsibilities/burdens, which are often time-intensive and home-based, can often prevent women from gaining equal access to opportunities that may in theory be available to them. Thus for instance schools may be available to girls and boys, but constraints arising from the nature of the work that girls do may impede their ability to participate in schooling. Examples abound of girls being unable to participate in school because their work within the home is far more time-intensive than work boys may undertake in wage activities – thus girls' work is often not compatible with schooling, whereas boys' work is more likely to be so.

Third, even where women are able to negotiate their burdens in order to participate in different opportunities on offer, gender inequalities are often institutionalised in the norms, processes and structures of interventions and institutions and present barriers to equitable outcomes. Teachers' attitudes, the nature of the curriculum, harassment, concerns about safety, and the quality of the infrastructure may all serve to push girls out of school.

Finally, the pervasiveness of social norms that curtail freedoms for women and are based on undervaluation or devaluation of what women do, can lead women themselves to internalise negative self-perceptions and doubt their own abilities. Thus women often exclude themselves from opportunities that may be on offer, and active encouragement may be necessary to support women to challenge internalised social norms that may informally be placing barriers on their participation. Thus the importance of focusing on how the content and processes of education enable women to challenge negative evaluations of their contributions and worth, by strengthening their ability to advocate on their own behalf, cannot be excluded from considerations of progress towards gender equality in education. Opportunities outside and beyond education could also play a significant role in shaping

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<sup>7</sup> Although as data from the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003-04 show, gender disparity is far more likely to occur on account of girls lagging behind boys than the other way around. This point is elaborated later in this paper.

aspirations for girls and boys, either through challenging or reinforcing stereotypes about typical feminine and masculine attributes, traits and abilities. Focusing on the aspirations that girls and boys voice could tell us something important about how opportunities and rewards are perceived to be gender-differentiated by young people, with the result that gender inequalities are perpetuated rather than challenged as they leave educational institutions and enter adulthood.

Drawing, therefore, on the importance of viewing gender equality in terms of a 'relational process' that plays out through educational systems, and the norms and values institutionalised within them, this paper argues for breaking down 'gender equality' into its constituent parts and identifying indicators relevant to each component. For this purpose, we draw here on Duncan Wilson's (2003) three-fold characterisation of rights in education, mentioned earlier. These are:

- ▶ Rights to education
- ▶ Rights within education
- ▶ Rights through education

In this paper we see the operation of rights as circular, with rights in each of these aspects linking positively to other rights. These rights are indivisible, and hence translate into a substantive programme of action that would promote both gender parity and gender equality.

### **3. INDICATORS: DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

The project of translating a conceptual framework on gender parity and equality into indicators offers its own specific challenges. In this section we explore the challenges of defining indicators, and also the further challenges of measuring these indicators and interpreting them. These challenges pertain equally to parity indicators as they will to equality indicators.

A major consideration to highlight at this stage is, of course, the quality of existing data, and data collection systems. Discussions of appropriate indicators are of course rendered somewhat irrelevant in the absence of quality data collection and management systems. Some of these concerns are discussed in Lievesley [2003], and citing Thorogood [2002], the following problems with data listed: the inability of some countries to provide any data at all, incomplete data over time, incomplete data within a country, inconsistencies of data within a country, inadequate implementation of international standards and classifications which hamper comparability across countries, changes in the use of international classifications which lead to inconsistent data over time, poor or incomplete metadata and the absence of information on quality of data, an over-reliance on data from administrative sources and lack of data from alternative sources with which to validate information, and long time lags before data are processed and made available. Colclough [2003] points to the difficulty of getting reliable Net Enrolment Ratio data for some Sub-Saharan African countries, and the subsequent continued reliance on the less accurate Gross Enrolment Ratio data to measure progress towards targets and goals. The quality of data thus has started occupying more attention in an era of greater international cooperation - particularly as the measurement of

progress towards international goals such as the Millennium Development Goals will require reliable and valid data [see for instance, UNDP 2003]

### *Gender parity*

As a quantitative or numerical concept, gender parity in education is easier to define, referring as it does to the *equal participation of boys and girls* in different aspects of education. Gender parity indicators are static, measuring the numbers of girls and boys with access to, and participating in education, at a particular moment of time; however, if viewed over different points in time, they can serve as dynamic indicators of change.

Indicators of gender parity in education include:<sup>8</sup>

- the numbers of boys and girls **enrolled** in education at each of the different levels of the education system, and at intake in grade 1 [particularly net enrolment and net intake, which measures the numbers of girls and boys enrolled as a proportion of the school-age population relevant for the level of schooling concerned, and grade 1 respectively]
- the numbers of boys and girls who **survive** up to grade 5 [and thus the numbers that drop out]
- regularity of **attendance** of boys and girls [net attendance rate]
- the numbers of girls and boys who **repeat** years of schooling
- the average years of schooling attained for boys and girls
- the transitions of boys and girls between levels of education [ECCE-primary; primary-secondary; secondary-tertiary/vocational]<sup>9</sup>
- the number of female and male teachers, which represents a concern with gender parity in the teaching profession, an indicator which reflects a direct concern with **parity in the supply of teaching**.
- Literacy levels of boys and girls, men and women

Indicators of gender parity tell us about the ‘peopling’ of institutions of education by gender, and indicate whether men and women, boys and girls are represented in equal numbers. Thus the right ‘to’ education is measured in terms of access, survival, attendance, retention, and to some extent transition between levels of education.

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<sup>8</sup>See for instance UNESCO (2002) *The challenge of achieving gender parity in basic education: a statistical review, 1990-98* (Paris: UNESCO)

<sup>9</sup> Parity data on its own however can also be misleading, and should be read in the context of overall enrolment rates. For example in Ethiopia, transition to secondary schooling is relatively high (95 percent of boys and 86 percent of girls who complete primary school continue to the secondary level) (Rose 2003). However, this can be misleading, since only a small proportion of children complete the primary cycle in the first place.

Thus while gender parity can be seen to constitute one aspect of equality in relation to education, it does not conform to a satisfactory or *substantive* definition of equality. It is not holistic in the sense of rights that we discuss earlier – while it captures a descriptive sense of the right *to* education, it only partially illuminates whether this is taking place on the basis of rights *within* education and provides no indicators of rights *through* education, which as we have argued earlier is an important measure of substantive gender equality. While it tells us what is happening to girls and boys as separate categories, it provides us little information about the nature of gender relations between boys and girls as social groupings within the education system. This may lead to the erroneous assumption [often made] that gender parity = gender equality, when often the very opposite may be the case.<sup>10</sup> This point is important, given that the socially constructed inequalities between boys and girls are often reproduced through social institutions, including educational institutions, in ways that do not challenge prevailing discriminatory norms and practices. Focusing on **rights within education** can help capture the dynamics of gender equality as they operate within the education system.

Further, what ‘parity’ indicators cannot tell us is why changes are happening and what factors explain these changes; and whether these changes represent changes in the sphere of education, or more generally in wider society. Education represents an important life opportunity for women and men, and a vital social and economic resource for societies. Gender inequality in education constructs, and in turn, is constructed by inequalities between women and men in other spheres that intersect with education. Changes in any of the dimensions of gender inequality, for better or for worse, are likely to have knock-on or ripple effects in other dimensions. Given that gender inequality is constructed both through formal social norms and rules [for instance, laws and statutes] as well as through ‘unwritten norms and shared understandings’,<sup>11</sup> it is also important to ensure that progress towards equality encompasses both changes in formal laws and institutional practices, as well as the informal, shared understandings within societies of the value, opportunities and life chances to be enjoyed by men and women.

Thus an important dimension of educational equality requires focusing on **rights through education**, recognising that gender equality within education is shaped by, and in turn shapes, rights and gender equality in other dimensions of life. This involves asking to what extent education strengthens gender equality outside the sphere of education.

However, while we cannot rely exclusively on gender parity indicators for explanations of the processes of change that underlie formal equality, they provide an important starting-point for asking the kinds of questions that are likely to provide the insight required for more detailed policy analysis and response. In particular, they can sound signals for change. In this regard, the gender parity index [GPI] is a useful indicator of the *relationship* between males and females in educational access and participation at a given moment in time [static]. Further, analysis of *trends* in gender parity over time can serve as an important signal of the probability that wider changes have taken place [dynamic]. However, given that GPI does

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<sup>10</sup> For example, the content of education may socialise girls into accepting a subordinate social status, and boys into thinking that men legitimately bear greater rights than women in society.

<sup>11</sup> Kabeer, 2003 p.2

not necessarily tell us about UPE/UEE [though UPE/UEE can tell us about GPI], there are caveats in the interpretation of GPI that need to be borne in mind, which can only be addressed through closer interrogation of national and sub-national data. In particular, attention needs to be paid to what movement of the GPI towards parity may tell us about the relationship between males and females in that country in terms of educational access and participation. For example, for a country where there is movement of the GPI towards parity in a context of disparity in favour of boys, alternative possible explanations emerge:

1. Movement of GPI towards 1 could reflect rapidly increasing enrolment of girls, thus catching up with boys, whose enrolment rates are either staying the same, increasing slowly or declining [positive or mixed scenario]
2. Movement of GPI towards 1 could reflect declining enrolments, with boys' enrolment declining much more rapidly than girls' enrolment [negative scenario]

The negative scenario outlined in point 2 above, is illustrated by data from Sub Saharan Africa [SSA] Colclough et al. [forthcoming]. Data over the period 1980-1997 showed that the gender balance of enrolments in SSA improved despite an overall dismal performance in total enrolments. Closer study of the data showed that this was on account of a decline in male enrolment and the maintenance of female enrolment rates. It must be noted here, however, that gender disparities in primary enrolment are 'overwhelmingly to the disadvantage of girls' [UNESCO 2003:53], and male disadvantage relative to females is largely evident only at secondary levels or, where it remains by 2015, will be only at secondary level [ibid. p. 110].

Assessments of the meaning of gender parity thus need to be interpreted in the context of overall levels of achievement in UPE or overall enrolment, and unpacked to assess what the precise nature of the relationship is between boys and girls in relation to access and participation. For instance, in scenario 1, progress towards gender parity signals that changes have taken place that are diminishing the power of the social, economic and political forces that have hitherto prevented girls' equal access to and participation in education. These changes thus reflect ongoing social processes that result in greater opportunity and freedom for girls. These changes may also reflect changes in conditions at the level of individual households. More often than not, they represent changes in the environments and circumstances within which individuals function, particularly factors in the external environment. However, in scenario 2, we may need to consider that under some rare circumstances, changes may reflect unintended benefits to one gender as a result of constraints experienced by another. Circumstances such as conflict may offer examples of this – though interpretation would require paying attention to the overall GER, which may be already very high.

It is also likely that combinations of factors may shift to enable greater gender parity, as Section 1 above noted, including changes in social norms and values, greater economic incentives and opportunities, and more adequate and appropriate provision of educational facilities. Changes may occur simultaneously in one or more of these dimensions – they may even affect and shape each other. Social change processes thus are dynamically constituted and evolving over time, making multi-dimensional analysis an important component of efforts to evaluate what they mean and the direction in which they are heading.

An exclusive focus on numbers in measuring realisation of the right to education can therefore present apparent progress and at the same time, hide real patterns of discrimination and disadvantage. Interpretation is a key aspect of determining what progress towards parity represents in respect of the qualitative experience of schooling for boys and girls. Statistical measures of parity may not paint an adequate or accurate picture of the gender dynamics in operation in education. Individual indicators by themselves cannot tell us very much – for instance, enrolment data does not tell us anything about the quality of schooling; equal numbers of women and men teachers does not tell us whether the processes of teaching are gender-aware. A few implications emerge, some of which are obvious but may bear repetition: one, different indicators need to be read together in order to make a more rounded assessment of progress towards gender equality; two, quantitative indicators require qualitative information in order to make sense of them. Third, and most importantly, interpretation of what indicators mean requires a clear conceptual framework for understanding what changes might mean in different contexts. Fourth, we need to be aware of the limitations of indicators, and not see monitoring as purely an indicator driven process, but a process by which explanations for phenomena are probed in ways that can enhance learning about gender relations in education in different settings, and lessons learned about the kinds of factors that can give rise to change in favour of greater gender equality.

Application to the educational context would entail therefore qualitative assessment of all of these aspects of substantive gender equality in education. As noted earlier, we see rights within education and rights through education as indivisible components of substantive gender equality. To make substantive equality a reality within education, we need to focus on two inter-related arenas of equality – rights within education, and rights through education – and identify how gender equality can be defined in each of these, in ways that are relevant to education, and what indicators would best capture the challenge of achieving progress towards gender equality in education.

#### *Equality indicators: Rights within education*

As noted above, gender parity indicators can signal whether social forces may be shifting to allow greater access of girls to schooling, enabling them to catch up with boys in an important dimension of life opportunity. From a gender perspective, educational indicators reflect the probability that wider changes are enabling households to view investment in girls' and boys' education in different ways than they did previously. Yet, educational indicators do not tell us about processes of change/reproduction in everyday life. Further, educational indicators do not bring into focus the actual experience of schooling. As argued earlier, indicators that focus on inputs and output models [access and outcomes], and that too purely through focusing on learners, miss out the crucial variables that link to the process of learning, particularly in terms of crucial equality indicators related to treatment and opportunity.

Gender parity in the dimensions outlined above can easily mask great inequalities in what boys and girls gain from the schooling process. Gender relations do not only refer to relations between women and men, they also tell us how inequalities of power are inscribed in the functioning of all social institutions, which have historically been constructed on the basis of the 'dominant' members of populations to which they catered. As noted earlier in section 1, schools and other educational institutions often reflect prevailing social norms although they can also offer spaces in which social norms are challenged and reshaped. Over time, however, schooling institutions and the content of education have come to reflect the experiences of the socially dominant 'male' actor, privileging male experiences of the social organisation of life and work. Textbooks and the attitudes of teachers may reinforce social norms that deem it appropriate for girls to stay home and take primary responsibility for household chores, and boys to play more dominant roles in the world of work and in public decision-making. Thus the definition of gender equality in education needs to start by recognising that formal equality, or equal numbers of boys and girls in school, is merely a starting-point for assessing gender equality as an educational goal. To understand rights from a gender perspective as they play out within the educational process, the focus needs to shift to elements of that process, key markers of which include:

- learning content
- teaching method and process
- subject choice
- assessment modes
- management of peer relationships
- learning outcomes

Gender equality or *rights within education* thus refers to the right of men and women to non-discrimination in educational opportunities in each of the aspects outlined above. This further suggests that educational institutions should function in ways that do not impose or perpetuate gender stereotypes that exert psychological influence and/or promote institutional barriers to the range of possibilities that boys and girls, men and women, can enjoy in relation to the education on offer. This therefore relates to equality of treatment, which in turn is reflected in equality of outcome. Thus both process and outcome indicators can add up to provide a useful picture of gender equality within education.

There are several measures of gender inequalities or gender-based rights deprivations within education. Some of these are easier to measure than others, and are fast joining indicators of parity outlined above. These include:

- performance in examinations
- subject choice.

The former allows us to measure the extent to which girls and boys can convert educational access into educational capital. While this focuses on only one aspect of what education offers – in relation to competitive credentials – it does provide a relative sense of how boys

and girls function within the education system and hence can signal whether there are inequalities that are not being addressed, or indeed being created, within schooling processes. The latter indicator, subject choice, alerts us to whether boys and girls are being streamed into specific subjects and whether there is any equality in the representation of boys and girls across different subjects as they specialise within education systems.

As indicators of gender equality within education, they take us further than the indicators conventionally used to measure gender parity in education. However, interpretation of these data also requires contextualisation and careful unpacking, to understand what the relative differences mean. Conflicts over interpretation rest in the extent to which subject specialisation can be attributed to choice, and the extent to which it can seem to be determined explicitly or implicitly by social or institutional structures. Contextual information can help to put some of the interpretation of 'choice' to rest, by clarifying whether the 'choices' on offer are being imposed through the way in which they are offered.

Further, it can be argued that current indicators are largely student-centred in their assessments of progress, thereby seeming to impose the burden of progress on children and their families. Indicators that measure the efficiency of schooling systems, in terms of their quality, the level of teacher training, the teacher-learner ratio, the male:female ratio within the class room, may all provide important pointers to the in school factors that constrain the possibilities for 'rights within' education. These indicators are far harder to establish given the range of contextual variables that explain their effects, and the analytical difficulty of attribution - for instance, the issue of the appropriate teacher-learner ratio has not achieved consensus and varies between systems. The need for 'supply' related indicators to enhance our measurement of 'rights within' is complemented by the need to ensure that these 'system' indicators are developed for use at local levels, where they can be expanded upon to arrive at more rich pictures of the schooling process.

A way of overcoming the 'supply-demand' separation of analytical variables can be arrived at through rethinking the concept of 'learning' and 'performance'. A further set of indicators that can help to monitor 'rights within' involve an expanded understanding of the range of factors that influence 'learning' within the school. These variables can include both family and social<sup>12</sup> factors as well as those relating to the learning environment which includes teacher behaviour as well as the influence of home variables [such as hours of work after school].

#### MEASURABLE INDICATORS

Equal Access to	Equality within*	Equality through
- enrolment - survival	subject choice Learning Outcomes	Male/female employment across different levels of

<sup>12</sup> A focus on social discrimination would be important to highlight other axes of inequality across which gender differences are played out. For example, inequalities of race, caste, class, ethnicity are all likely to deepen gendered difference between students, and give rise to varied experiences of the learning process for boys and girls of different social groups.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- regularity of <b>attendance</b></li> <li>- <b>repetition</b></li> <li>- the average years of schooling attained</li> <li>- the transitions of boys and girls between levels of education</li> <li>- the number of female and male teachers.</li> </ul>	<p>[performance in examinations]</p> <p><i>Teacher-learner ratio</i></p> <p><i>Gender balance within the classroom</i></p> <p><i>Qualifications of teachers</i></p> <p><i>Level of training of teachers</i></p> <p><i>Factors shaping performance including:</i></p> <p><i>Health of students</i></p> <p><i>Nutritional status</i></p> <p><i>Child's involvement in family work</i></p> <p><i>Social discrimination within the classroom/ society [context-specific indicators would be necessary]</i></p>	<p>education by gender</p> <p>Gender differentials in wages across different levels of employment/education</p> <p>Political participation</p>
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\* Italicised indicators refer to those that are measurable, but not treated as conventional indicators. The category 'Factors shaping performance' are those indicators that could be best developed at local-level for educators to manage their own schools. This is by no means an exhaustive list, just an indicative one.

A further issue links to the location of monitoring systems in terms of their use of indicators. Ideally, indicators should feed not just at a central 'macro' policy level, where they are pored over by donors and governments and form the basis for informing policy choice or measuring progress in terms of policy goals. Indicators should ideally be developed for use by educators at local level, as ways of helping them identify and monitor the quality of the learning experience for all children. This would entail an expanded sensitivity to the learner and her environment as well as the learning process, and the ways in which learners interact with the learning process. The complexities of education and learning processes are well-known - as noted earlier, the range of variables that intersect to shape the learner and her learning outcomes include family context and social factors as well as the curriculum content, its transaction and the learning environment. Locating the learner within this environment requires indicators that are sensitive to these diverse variables, and at best should be developed with a view to helping educators review their own performance *as well as* enabling more distant policy makers to remain satisfied that progress towards educational goals is taking place in a meaningful way. Given the present concerns about low-quality education in much of the developing world, this does seem a remote prospect.

*Rights through education*

Indicators of 'rights within education' thus tell us the important story of equality of treatment and opportunity within education, which should be an important area of concern for educators and education systems. However, learning is not merely a technical function of education systems, but is also shaped by social norms and values as we have consistently

argued. Thus, ways in which wider social structures shape opportunities and aspirations are equally important to understand, especially as they will shape the content of learning, and deeply influence the attitudes and behaviours of educators and learners, amongst others. Gender inequalities within education are also likely to reinforce wider social inequalities, reproducing notions of gender differentiation and legitimating them in social discourse and also in social practice. Indicators of gender equality thus need to be extended beyond the education system to a selected range of other indicators of gender equality, as a way of alerting educators to the deep links between education and other social institutions and processes. Thus rights through education are equally important to include in our assessment of substantive gender equality.

However, overly broad definitions of these rights are likely to confound the project of definition beyond the point of usefulness, and fall into the trap of viewing education as a 'magic bullet' - while this critique is mounted specifically against the view that female education is the solution for population crises and other development 'problems' [see for instance, Jeffery and Jeffery 1998], it can be easily extended to other areas. Attributing links between education and other development or social goals is fraught with methodological and conceptual problems, and too narrowly focused on an 'input-output' model of effects. However, there are some important ways in which rights within education can lead to the securing of rights through education, as borne out by the second MDG which sees education as a vehicle for greater gender equality and empowerment. A focus on other rights can help us focus on the ways in which educational processes need to be strengthened to exert a positive influence on other social structures and institutions.

As the Global Monitoring Report 2003/4 argues, the links between rights to education, rights within education and rights through education are not linear. Rights to education do not guarantee rights within education, and neither do rights within education secure rights through education. Yet, we need indicators for all three dimensions to help track progress at different levels of policy monitoring. Gender parity and greater gender equality in schooling can, and often do, co-exist with gender inequalities outside of education. Powerful examples of these are provided in countries where gender parity in secondary education has been achieved. In the United Kingdom, girls have been systematically doing better than boys.<sup>13</sup> In France, whilst girls have caught up with boys and now outperform them in secondary schools, gender inequalities continue to prevent girls' equal entry to specialised training institutions, for example.<sup>14</sup> In some Latin American countries, the level of women's participation in secondary schooling is surpassing that of men. In a number of Gulf States, notably Bahrain and Kuwait, more women than men are enrolled in university education. Yet in all of these countries, there continue to remain inequalities [to varying degrees] in employment, wages and political representation.

The importance of focusing on 'rights through education' becomes pertinent particularly when we review evidence of the inequalities which continue to face women in the world of employment, work and political representation - in short, the public arena. Whilst much has changed in terms of women's access to paid work, questions remain about the sustainability of such gains in the face of rapidly changing economic environments [Razavi, 2003].

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<sup>13</sup> Arnot and Phipps [2003]

<sup>14</sup> Baudino [2003]

Further, gains made by women in the field of education are often undermined by deeply embedded gender inequalities - this point is illustrated by the continuing advantage in the world of work enjoyed by men even in contexts where they perform less well than women in education. Indeed, some have argued for the Caribbean and for the UK, where girls outperform boys in secondary school, that it may be precisely the security of male advantage in the world of work that creates disincentives for their performance in schools. While the issues of gendered performance patterns remain a matter of debate, there is clearly good reason to continue to use 'rights through education' as a relevant set of indicators for assessing progress towards gender equality in education, in order to ensure that a fuller picture of gender equality is arrived at in assessments of progress.

### **Enabling substantive gender equality in education**

Achieving substantive gender equality in education entails tackling gender ideologies that constrain enjoyment of the full array of positive freedoms that are valued in a rights and capabilities approach. This entails firstly putting women back into the picture as rights-bearers and not deliverers of development, and extending our interest in how women's education impacts on others, to assessing how education impacts on women themselves. For instance, while many studies indicate that education does bring changes in the quality of life for men and women, even if incremental, less focus has been placed on how these changes benefit women directly.

This makes two things apparent. One that a multi-dimensional approach is necessary for addressing gender equality in education, and two, that for formal education to translate into gender equality, **enabling conditions** need to be identified. Enabling conditions as identified above include those that enhance substantive freedoms and choice, and they include a focus on equality of treatment and opportunity. These enabling conditions form the basis of the actions that states should take in order to secure rights for women to, within and through education.

Therefore, in addition to gender parity and gender equality, definitional clarity needs to be extended to the concept of *gender equity*, particularly for operational purposes, and for measuring the effectiveness of measures adopted to achieve gender parity and gender equality. Gender equity is defined here as a policy concept which places emphasis on redistribution of resources between women and men in a way that addresses gender-based asymmetries in investment and capacities of women and men. That is, gender equity measures are those that recognise that in order to promote equality between women and men to, within and through education, special measures may be required to redress prior inequalities that constrain women's access to and utilization of resources on an equal basis with men. These, as noted earlier, include paying attention to the unpaid responsibilities women bear, particularly in the arena of human reproduction, which remain undervalued and hence uncompensated, and continue to serve as a barrier to women's full and equal participation in education, amongst other processes. Recognition of barriers, however, includes paying attention to those barriers that arise as a consequence of the internalization of self-perceptions [reinforced often by society/community] of their lesser abilities or value by girls/women. Thus gender equity measures need to be both gender-aware *and* transformative of gender relations in the ways in which they operate, within the possibilities offered by the environment in question.

A final point to note: by focusing on equality of treatment and opportunity through a gender lens, we need to emphasise equally the importance of paying attention to the kinds of behaviours and attitudes that impose gendered expectations on males within the schoolroom. As Sewell et al. [2003] and Figueroa [2000] have argued for the Caribbean, dominant constructions of male identity and masculinity can bring enormous pressure to bear on boys significantly affecting their performance in school. Similarly, in the UK, expectations for boys to underperform as an aspect of their 'laddish' identity can turn into self-fulfilling prophecies [Arnot and Phipps 2003]. Thus the promotion of gender equity in education will necessitate viewing as discrimination against males, the constant reinforcement of particular dominant masculinities that encourage boys to underperform, to view themselves as socially superior and possibly more powerful than their female peers and to behave in ways that constrain the full participation of female peers in schooling processes.

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