

# Policy Paper **28**

December 2016

## Textbooks pave the way to sustainable development

**F**ew instruments shape children's and young people's minds more powerfully than the teaching and learning materials used in schools. Textbooks convey not only knowledge but also social values and political identities, and an understanding of history and the world. Teachers and students trust textbooks as authoritative and objective sources of information, assuming that they are accurate, balanced and based on the latest scientific findings and pedagogical practice. In some contexts, textbooks are the first and sometimes the only books that a young person may read (Lässig and Pohl, 2009). In most classrooms they determine what and how teachers teach.

As this policy paper shows, however, textbooks in many countries still fail to deal comprehensively, clearly and fairly with concepts that are crucial for social cohesion, political stability and the future of the planet, including gender equality, human rights, environmental protection, peace and non-violence, and cultural diversity. All governments should urgently review and revise their textbooks to ensure that the content covers these ideas, which are integral to Target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

More than any other education target, Target 4.7 touches on the humanistic and moral purposes of education, and their reflection in policies, curricular contents and teacher preparation. The target also acknowledges the important role of culture and the cultural dimensions of education:

'By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.'

This policy paper is launched to mark International Day of Human Rights on 10 December, 2016, in the context of the mandate of the Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report to monitor the education-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is the third in a series of policy papers about textbooks released this year by the GEM Report. It follows the release of the 2016 GEM Report, *Education for People and Planet*, which contained new analysis of the content of curricular documents.

This paper's focus on textbooks is directly related to the global indicator established for Target 4.7, which seeks to measure the extent to which global citizenship education and education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed in national education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessments. Textbooks are related mostly to policy implementation and curricular intentions but also to teacher preparation and student assessment.

## METHODOLOGY

The policy paper mainly draws on new analysis for the 2016 GEM Report. This analysis compiles three datasets of secondary school textbooks in history, civics and citizenship education, social studies and geography. The vast majority of textbooks were drawn from the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research in Germany, which holds the most extensive collection of textbooks from around the world in these subject areas. Most textbooks are at the upper secondary rather than lower secondary level. Textbooks were analysed using standardized coding protocols developed after much piloting and inter-coder reliability testing (Bromley et al., 2016).

Findings from this analysis are also complemented by a desk review of selected research studies providing detailed accounts of how country histories and contexts shape whether and how textbooks incorporate relevant topics.

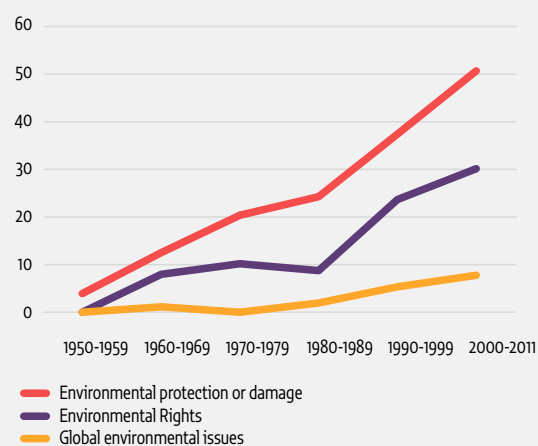
## Environmental emphasis in textbooks grows

Education helps students understand environmental problems, their consequences and the types of action required to solve them. The primary approach to address environmental challenges is through formal schooling. Evidence shows that curricular content affects students' knowledge on environmental issues. In the 2006 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test of 'science competencies for tomorrow's world', students in countries where curricula deal with sustainable

development were much more likely to answer questions about environmental science correctly than their peers in countries at similar development levels (OECD, 2009).

Although over half of curricular frameworks still do not mention climate change, as the 2016 GEM Report shows, emphasis on the environment has increased in secondary school textbooks over the last 40 years. The proportion of textbooks that discuss environmental protection or damage in the period since 2000 (50%) is more than double the level in the 1970-1979 period (20%) (**Figure 1**). In Latin America and the Caribbean, 80% of textbooks from the 2000s cover the environment compared with 32% of textbooks in Northern Africa and Western Asia (Bromley et al., 2016; Bromley et al., 2011).

**FIGURE 1:**  
Environment is a theme of growing importance in textbooks  
Percentage of textbooks that include an explicit statement on environment



Notes: Sample sizes for each period: 54 textbooks over 1950-1959, 88 over 1960-1969, 108 over 1970-1979, 103 over 1980-1989, 131 over 1990-1999 and 219 between 2000-2011.  
Source: Bromley et al., (2016).

## Recognising global problems and students' power to act

In the 1950s, almost none of the textbooks analysed discussed environmental problems as global issues, preferring to mention them only in a national context, while 30% did so in 2000-2011 (**Figure 1**). A Jamaican social studies textbook for grade 8, for instance, depicts the environment as a global rather than a national issue (**Figure 2**). It first provides a technical illustration of global warming, and then discusses how climate change will lead to droughts, floods, and hurricanes (Bromley et al., 2011).

A 2008 South African social studies textbook for grade 10 adopts an activist approach. The environmental emphasis is subsumed under a section on citizenship education. Rather than focusing on problems in South Africa, the section on the environment starts by emphasizing the increasing global awareness of the scarcity of natural resources. This vision of environmental education is explicitly linked to active citizenship through lobbying, protest, advocacy and direct action (**Figure 3**).

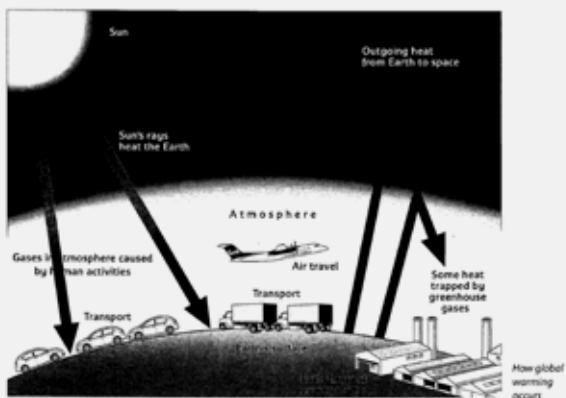
**FIGURE 2:**  
A Jamaican textbook teaches children to understand environmental problems globally and conserve resources locally

**Global warming**

Scientists are now predicting that there will be more frequent and powerful hurricanes in coming years because of a gradual rise in temperatures around the world, known as **global warming**. These powerful hurricanes will cause more floods and landslides in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean region. Global warming will also cause more severe droughts in the dry season. Global warming is a worldwide problem or concern to people in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean.

Many scientists believe that global warming has been caused, or at least is being made worse, by human activities. When we burn **fossil fuels** such as oil, gas or coal, we create large quantities of the gas carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is perfectly safe – it is a natural part of what we breathe out or **exhale** – but scientists believe that large quantities of the gas build up, high in the atmosphere, and create a kind of blanket that wraps round the Earth and traps the warmth of the sun. This is called the **greenhouse effect**. This ‘blanket’ is gradually making temperatures on the Earth’s surface higher, causing global warming. This is the reason why everyone is being encouraged to use cleaner energy sources such as solar power, wind power and hydro-electricity, which will not release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

► Why do you think these are called cleaner energy sources?



Source: Allen-Vassel and Fraser (2008) in Bromley et al. (2011).

As well as ensuring that environmental problems are seen as global issues, it is critical for textbooks to develop students’ sense of agency, and their environmental problem-solving abilities and competencies so that they can bring about change in their communities and everyday lives. In Hong Kong, China, for instance, an interactive geography textbook on building sustainable cities addresses students as individuals and asks them to take measures to conserve, respect and protect the environment (Figure 4).

In a similar vein, a grade 9 English textbook published in Ethiopia in 2011 encourages students to consider how their actions affect urban environment issues, and asks them to read and write about pollution and related problems in their areas. It also provides short reading texts that give advice on how people can keep their towns and cities clean and adopt sustainable lifestyles (Gebregeorgis, 2016).

**Some textbooks still misrepresent environmental issues**

Although textbooks are focusing more and more on the environment, some refute scientific findings on climate change. Others have attracted criticism for the way they describe the relationship between environmental damage and human activity.

In Germany, textbooks explicitly link global environmental issues, the scarcity of resources and conflict. Of 49 civics and geography textbooks used in 2015, the vast majority (73%) discuss the relationship between environmental stress and conflict. People in developing countries are portrayed as responsible for the environmental stress they face and unable to solve their environmental or conflict-related problems. Climate change and carbon

**FIGURE 3:**  
A South African social studies textbook links environmental education to active citizenship



**Activity 27: Working in your environment**

1. Brainstorm about any organisations or groups that you know in your school or your community that are taking care of some of the needs in your environment, such as dealing with litter, saving water, pollution from factories, dealing with sick and stray animals or growing trees.
2. Decide which of these organisations you would like to work with – either to help them do what they are already doing or to suggest something new that they could begin to do to achieve their goals.
3. Work with them for two to three months.
4. During this time, keep written records of what you are doing.
5. Evaluate the success of your work and share this with the organisation when you leave (you may stay on after three months if you would like to).

**New word**  
lobbying means trying to convince governments, companies or households to do things differently.

Assessment criteria for this activity include your response to the topic, that you have worked with your chosen organisation for the prescribed period, you have kept written records of the work you have done, you have worked effectively as a group, you have a well presented project and that you have put in time and effort.

Source: Potenza et al. (2002) in Bromley et al. (2011).

**FIGURE 4:**  
**A geography textbook in Hong Kong, China, provides a platform for students to discuss individual actions to achieve more sustainable lifestyles**



Source: Lin et al. (2014).

emissions are sometimes mentioned, but issues such as interventions by multinationals or consumption patterns in richer countries are not discussed. Instead, population growth and outdated technologies in developing countries are considered as key drivers of environmental issues and conflict. Many photos show people in developing countries as combatants, refugees or individuals in need of help, thus communicating an impression of danger, chaos and passiveness. Efforts by poorer countries such as India to solve their environmental problems are not mentioned (Ide, 2016).

Some textbooks in the United States fail to present accurate, science-based evidence on the environment and climate change. Four grade 6 science textbooks published in 2007 or 2008 and adopted for use in California indicated that human beings could be having an impact on climate

change but framed this topic as an issue in which not all scientists are in agreement (Román and Busch, 2016): *'Not all scientists agree about the causes of global warming. Some scientists think that the 0.7 Celsius degree rise in global temperatures over the past 120 years may be due in part to natural variations in climate'* (Prentice Hall, 2008).

The textbooks not only cast doubt on the causes of climate change but also emphasize its positive effects and describing its negative effects as uncertain: *'Global warming could have some positive effects. Farmers in some areas that are now cool could plant two crops a year instead of one. Places that are too cold for farming today could become farmland. However, many effects of global warming are likely to be less positive. Higher temperatures would cause water to evaporate from exposed soil, such as plowed farmland. Dry soil blows away easily. Thus, some fertile fields might become 'dust bowls'* (Prentice Hall, 2008). This could reduce the sense of urgency for students to do something about climate change and even create in them a view that it is a phenomenon that is beneficial to human beings. None of the textbooks analysed contained a call to action explicitly linking student behaviour or need to take mitigating actions (Román and Busch, 2016).

In a similar vein, a review of seven earth science and environmental science textbooks commonly used across the United States found that none clarified the relationships between pollution, the greenhouse effect and climate change. None mentioned that climate change is already under way and has already influenced the environment, which could reinforce students' misconceptions that there would be no consequences of climate change in their life time (Choi et al., 2010).

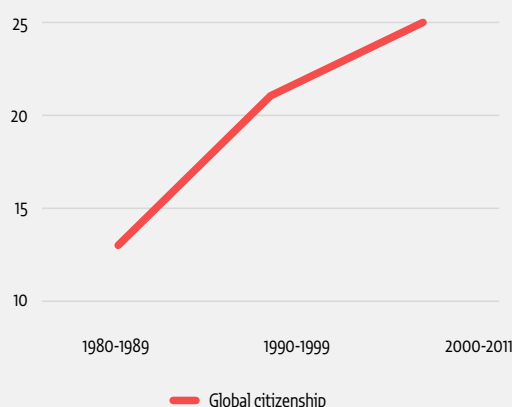
Some have argued that textbooks need to do much better in providing a comprehensive approach towards the environment, sustainable development, and the adverse impacts of natural, and human-caused disasters. For instance, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, textbooks are primarily a medium for teaching children scientific facts and make little to no effort to contextualize environmental education, for example by using as a learning experience the 1984 gas tragedy in Bhopal, the state capital (Iyengar and Bajaj, 2011).

## Despite progress, coverage of global citizenship remains low

Global citizenship education aims to inculcate students with a notion of belonging not just to their own country but to broader trans-national and global entities, and the challenges they face. It encompasses global principles such as human rights, democracy and social justice (Davies, 2006). Countries have been increasingly incorporating content pertaining to global citizenship into curricula to prepare citizens for an interconnected world but its inclusion remains low. Over the period 2000-2008, globally, 25% of textbooks mention global citizenship compared with 13% in the 1980s (Figure 5). Latin America and the Caribbean registered the largest increase, from 20% of textbooks mentioning global citizenship in 1980s to 50% in 2000s (Bromley et al., 2016).

**FIGURE 5:**  
One in four textbooks mentions global citizenship in 2000-2008

Percentage of textbooks that include an explicit statement on global citizenship



Notes: Sample sizes for each period: 129 textbooks over 1980-1989, 119 over 1990-1999 and 165 between 2000-2008.  
Source: Bromley et al., (2016).

Of 559 secondary school textbooks from 76 countries spanning the 1970-2008 period, the percentage mentioning events outside the country's borders increased from nearly 30% in the early 1970s to over 40% in late 2000s (Buckner and Russell, 2013). But this still left 60% of countries' secondary school textbooks in the relevant subject areas with almost no mention at all of events taking place outside their borders.

The number of mentions of globalisation has risen, however. Such mentions were non-existent in 1970s but were found in nearly 40% of textbooks in late 2000s. Economic globalisation made up 46% of these mentions while political globalisation accounted for 28% and socio-cultural globalisation 25% (Buckner and Russell, 2013).

## Global citizenship takes a place alongside national citizenship

While textbooks increasingly seek to impart global knowledge and values, they continue to concentrate on creating a sense of national identity by instilling national values and ideals. Across 76 countries' secondary school social studies and history textbooks, nearly 90% mentioning global citizenship also mentioned national citizenship issues in the late 2000s, suggesting that both conceptions of citizenship are compatible and are increasingly found in the same textbook (Buckner and Russell, 2013).

**FIGURE 6:**  
A civic education textbook in Spain indicates the integration of national and global citizenship concepts



Note: The image caption reads: 'The circles of citizenship: Local, State and the World'.  
Source: Mario (2008) in Buckner and Russell (2013).

In the Republic of Korea, a study documented the rapid rise of global citizenship education by examining trends in civic education textbooks based on the average number of mentions of major national and global themes by page. Global citizenship themes such as 'globalism' received either no or little attention in the 1980s and 1990s but

were clearly evident in the 2000s. While global citizenship themes were not mentioned as frequently as national citizenship themes, there is one mention in every five pages (Moon and Koo, 2011).

This co-existence of different levels of citizenship – local/ regional, national and global – is illustrated in a 2008 Spanish textbook that shows an individual embedded with expanding rings of citizenship derived from both human rights and national laws (Figure 6). The book states ‘we are all citizens of the world... As citizens of the world, we are protected by human rights that apply to all humanity... Human rights derive from our human condition, not from our nationality’ (Buckner and Russell, 2013; Mario, 2008).

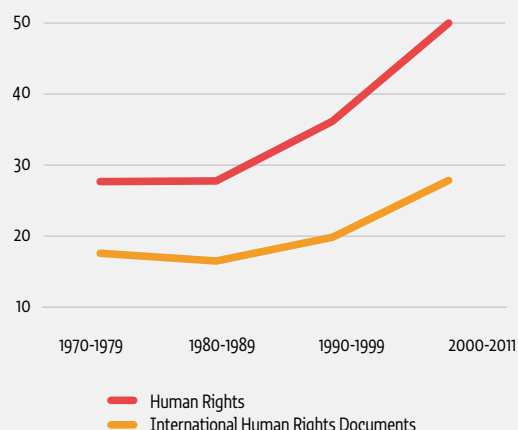
### Teaching human rights is central to global citizenship education

Human rights education, which achieved prominence during the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), promotes values, beliefs and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others. It develops an understanding of everyone’s common responsibility to make human rights a reality in each community (United Nations, 2012). It enables students around the world to learn that they are members of a global community and have standing as individual human persons in that community (Meyer et al., 2010). As such, it constitutes a key element in curricular models of global citizenship.

The growth of human rights education since 1970 can be seen in how often secondary school social studies textbooks have mentioned human rights and international human rights documents (Figure 7). While 28% of the textbooks in the 1970-1979 period devoted a text to the discussion of human rights, this jumps to 50% in the 2000-2011 period. The increase was largest in sub-Saharan Africa, from 15% to almost 60%, and coverage was lowest in Northern Africa and Western Asia, at 36%, up from 14% (Bromley et al., 2016).

Similarly, textbooks mentioning international documents on human rights – such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations (UN) Charter and the Convention on the Rights of the Child – jumped from 18% in the 1970s to 28% in the 2000s. Earlier studies have highlighted country examples. For instance, a Japanese upper secondary school civics textbook from 2006 has a substantial discussion of international human rights developments and their codification in the UN system

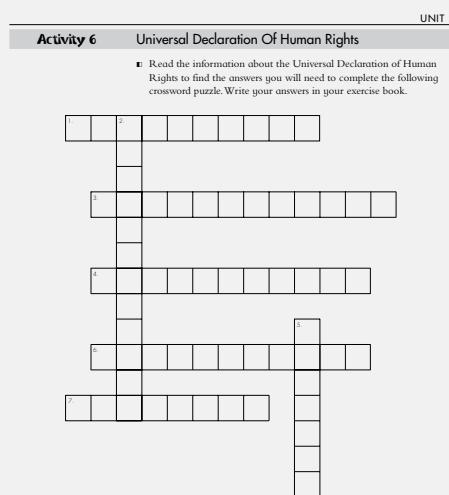
**FIGURE 7:**  
Textbooks have increasingly stressed human rights, especially since 1990  
Percentage of textbooks mentioning human rights and international human rights documents



Notes: Sample sizes for each period: 108 textbooks over 1970–1979, 103 over 1980–1989, 131 over 1990–1999 and 219 between 2000–2011. Source: Bromley et al. (2016).

through specific mentions of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Charter (Meyer et al., 2010). A social studies textbook for grade 10 in Samoa uses a crossword puzzle to teach students about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8:**  
In Samoa, a social studies textbook for grade 10 uses a crossword puzzle to teach about human rights



Source: Samoa Department of Education (2001).



Education about the Holocaust is also being given an increasing emphasis in teaching human rights. It is expected to provide learners with knowledge and skills to help them become responsible and active global citizens who think critically, value human dignity and respect, reject prejudice that leads to violence and genocide, and contribute to a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and secure world (Bromley, 2013; Bromley and Russell, 2010). Analysis of 89 textbooks published in 26 countries since 2000 shows that Holocaust education is increasingly taught in the context of universal human rights frameworks rather than as an isolated European historical event, thereby reflecting growing expectations about the humanistic and universal significance of learning about the Holocaust (Carrier et al., 2015).

## Many textbooks still fail to help students appreciate diversity

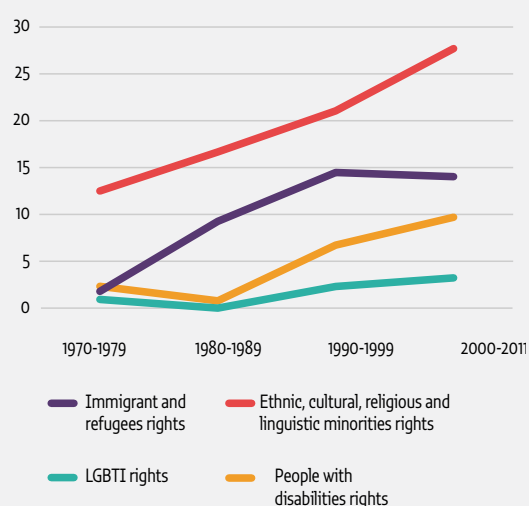
Since the 1970s, there has been an increased interest in multicultural education to teach respect for diversity, empower minorities and disadvantaged groups, and deal with problems of equality and equity. Yet new analysis for the GEM Report shows that despite some progress, coverage of diversity remains elusive in many parts of the world, as demonstrated by the percentages of textbooks mentioning the following groups as bearing rights: immigrants and refugees; people with disabilities; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI); and other ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities (Figure 9) (Bromley et al., 2016).

Coverage of **immigrant and refugee rights** has steadily increased between 1970-1979 and 1990-1999, from 1% to 14% but advanced no farther in the period 2000-2011. Coverage is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe and Northern America, where one in five textbooks mentions immigrant and refugee rights (Bromley et al., 2016).

Although coverage of immigrant and refugee rights has increased in European and Northern American countries, some textbooks produce and reproduce prevalent stereotypical figures of migration and migrants. In Austria, for instance, migration and diversity were depicted as problems in 22 secondary school geography and history textbooks in use between 2011 and 2013: 'Migration is one of the most important factors of population development and one of the essential problems, facing the economy and society, politics and culture, in the past and today'. Such textbooks

**FIGURE 9:**  
Only 9% of textbooks cover rights of people with disabilities, and 3% of textbooks cover rights of LGBTI people

Percentage of textbooks that include an explicit statement on the equality of minority groups



Notes: Sample sizes for each period: 108 textbooks over 1970-1979, 103 over 1980-1989, 131 over 1990-1999 and 219 between 2000-2011. Source: Bromley et al. (2016).

tend to represent only certain groups of immigrants: people from sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa and Western Asia prevail, with marginal representation of other immigrants, such as those from other European countries (Hintermann et al., 2014).

Similarly, a study in France uncovered a pattern of negative stereotyping of immigrants in 29 primary and secondary textbooks on different subjects from 2007. Most images of racial minorities depicted them as poor or living in difficult conditions. There were many insidious insinuations, such as a photo in a mathematics book showing two girls doing a geometry test. While the student from an immigrant origin fails, her native peer succeeds (Université Paul Verlaine - Metz, 2008).

**The rights of people with disabilities** are mentioned in only 9% of secondary school social studies textbooks, having increased slowly from a very low level of 2% in the 1970-1979 period. Across the world, people with disabilities are underrepresented in textbooks, perpetuating their invisibility and disadvantage. In South Africa, out of 40 textbooks in use in 2015, images of disabled people were

found in only two (Adonis, 2015). In Spain, in 36 secondary school physical education textbooks published between 2000 and 2006, only 45 of 3,316 illustrations (1%) showed people with disabilities. Moreover, in the illustrations showing people with disabilities, women (24%) were less represented than men (58%; 18% included men and women) (Táboas-Pais and Rey-Cao, 2012).

A comparison of textbooks in England (United Kingdom) and the Islamic Republic of Iran shows similar results in both countries. In seven Iranian secondary school textbooks of English as a foreign language, only 21 images out of 4,015 (0.5%) were of disabled people, and only two of these represented children. In the English primary school textbooks, only seven images out of 867 (0.8%) showed people with a disability. Iranian and English textbooks tended to represent disabled people hospitalized or 'bedded' as a result of a car accident or, arguably, a temporary sickness (Hodkinson et al., 2016)

Some textbooks have made progress in including information or images on people with disabilities. A Mexican textbook features an empowering image of

disability, showing a mixed group of children with and without disabilities playing basketball (Figure 10).

The rights of **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI) people** appear in only 3% of secondary school social studies textbooks, with almost no change since 1970s. Coverage of LGBTI rights is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean (20%), followed by Europe and Northern America (10%). In sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Africa and Western Asia, less than 5% of textbooks acknowledge LGBTI people (Bromley et al., 2016).

This low coverage echoes earlier findings that schools are failing to incorporate issues related to sexual diversity in their curriculum materials (Banks, 2009; Terra and Bromley, 2012). Of 548 secondary social studies textbooks, only 3% depict discrimination against LGBTI people (Terra and Bromley, 2012). In South Africa, coverage of sexual diversity was 1% in three grade 10 life orientation textbooks, with no reference to LGBTI people under the topic of human rights. While textbooks call for tolerance of diversity, sexual diversity is repeatedly excluded. In addition, most sexual and gender diversity discussions occur in contexts of violence and sexual abuse (Wilmot and Naidoo, 2014).

While textbooks that do not feature sexual and gender diversity convey the implicit message that people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions are not part of society, some textbooks explicitly depict LGBTI people negatively (UNESCO, 2016). Some textbooks and curricular materials in China, Hong Kong (China), the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Thailand perpetuate negative stereotypes and include inaccurate, stigmatizing and discriminatory information on LGBTI people (UNDP and USAID, 2014; UNESCO, 2015).

Some countries have made progress in using examples in textbooks that portray LGBTI people. In Sweden, for example, whereas older textbooks depict only heterosexual couples and nuclear families, recent textbooks extend marriage to include same-sex marriage and family structure to include remarried couples and half- and step-siblings.

Coverage of **ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities** has been increasing since the 1970s, but only one in four secondary social studies textbooks mentioned ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities in the 2000-2011 period. Coverage is highest in Latin America

**FIGURE 10:**

**In Mexico, a primary school civics textbook shows a rather empowering image of disability**



Source: Herrera et al. (2014).



and the Caribbean (40%) followed by Europe and North America (35%). Coverage in Northern Africa and Western Asia remains the lowest, at around 3% (Bromley et al., 2016).

This overall figure is echoed in country case studies. In Turkey, out of 245 textbooks taught in every subject in the 2012/2013 academic year, most do not incorporate the cultures, lifestyles and histories of ethnic and religious minorities. One exception is the recent inclusion of the Alevis, a religious minority, in a grade 12 religious culture and moral textbook (Çayır, 2015). In Japan, lower secondary textbooks on English as a foreign language published from 1987 to 2002 represented a diversity of countries but not the diversity of ethnic groups within the country (Yamada, 2011).

In addition to a lack of diversity, some textbooks have been criticized for stereotypical, simplistic interpretations of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities. In Hong Kong, China, a chapter 'Living in Hong Kong' had a fill-in-the-blank task entitled 'Racial Harmony' that included a sketch of a Filipina saying 'I am a Filipino. I am a domestic helper in Hong Kong'; a British man: 'I am an English teacher'; a Japanese woman: 'I have a sushi restaurant in Hong Kong'; a Chinese woman: 'Shanghai is my hometown'; and an Indian boy: 'I study in an international school' (Dervin et al., 2015).

In the United States, nine secondary history textbooks in use in 2008 failed to mention that leaders of influential Muslim organisations within and outside the United States condemned the 9/11 attacks and called upon Muslims to alleviate the suffering of the victims. Omission of this kind of information can prevent students from considering alternative perspectives and challenging stereotypes about other cultures and peoples (Romanowski, 2009).

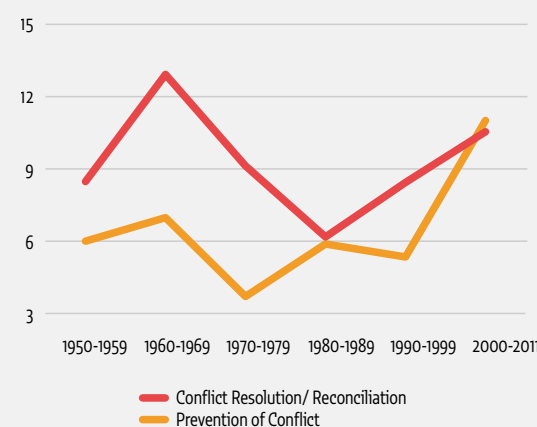
Teaching about ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities is often more challenging in post-conflict situations. An analysis of 573 secondary social studies textbooks from 80 countries over the 1950-2011 period showed that instead of incorporating multicultural narratives, textbooks in post-conflict countries emphasize national identity (Lerch, 2016).

## Textbooks can stoke or prevent conflict and violence

History textbooks can highlight social, cultural and ethnic diversity, and promote mutual respect and tolerance. By including explicit and implicit messages of peace, inclusion and reconciliation, the historical narrative chosen can cross societal divides and help promote peace and non-violence. On the other hand, inaccurate and imbalanced textbooks can contribute to disrespect, conflict and violence by promoting narrow nationalism, political and religious bias, physical force and militarization, and propaganda (Greaney, 2006).

If education is to contribute to the development of peaceful societies, textbooks should provide a platform to discuss conflict prevention, as well as resolution and reconciliation. Despite an upward trend since the 1980-1989 period, only 10% of textbooks include an explicit statement on conflict prevention or conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanisms (at the individual, national or international levels) – including, for example, textbooks in Lebanon and Peru (Figure 11). The proportion of textbooks referring to conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanisms is highest in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in sub-Saharan Africa, standing at around 15% (Bromley et al., 2016).

**FIGURE 11:**  
**Few textbooks provide opportunities to discuss ways preventing and resolving conflicts**  
*Percentage of textbooks that include an explicit statement on conflict prevention and resolution/reconciliation*



Notes: Sample sizes for each period: 54 textbooks over 1950–1959, 88 over 1960–1969, 108 over 1970–1979, 103 over 1980–1989, 131 over 1990–1999 and 219 between 2000–2011.  
 Source: Bromley et al., (2016).

## Breeding intolerance and prejudice through textbooks

Textbooks that glorify war and military heroes, exclude pluralistic perspectives, or undermine other peoples or ethnicities, contribute to an environment in which teaching peace, non-violence and reconciliation becomes difficult. Textbooks and curricula have played a major role in exacerbating social tensions and violent conflicts. In pre-genocide Rwanda, for instance, Hutu-dominated governments used textbooks to spread a version of history designed to generate prejudice against Tutsis, who were portrayed as outsiders who had conquered the country, imposed feudal role and oppressed the Hutu peasantry (King, 2014).

In Pakistan, textbooks have been criticized for normalizing militarism and war, and including biases and historical errors and distortions, thus promoting intolerance and bigotry (Afzal, 2015). Pakistani language and social studies textbooks from 1995 to 2010 contain many narratives about military battles from early Islamic history and wars between Pakistan and India. Prominent Pakistanis, with the exception of military heroes and leaders of the nationalist movement, are excluded (Naseem, 2014).

Pakistani textbooks published after the country's 2006 curriculum reform continue to emphasize wars with India while largely ignoring peace initiatives (Nayyar, 2013; Peace and Education Foundation, 2016). Moreover, textbooks perpetuate a narrative of conflict and historic grievances between Muslims and Hindus, rather than discussing the potential for conflict resolution and reconciliation (Peace and Education Foundation, 2016). Indian history textbooks from 2002, for their part, put the blame on Pakistan, and contain clear bias against Muslim elements of the history of the region (Joshi, 2010).

In Afghanistan, textbooks with violent, aggressive and militarist content were developed from 1986 to 1992 and continued to be used for several more years. They were highly politicized, promoting social division and violence. For instance, they used examples of counting bullets and bombs to teach mathematics and extremist references to teach literacy (Spink, 2005; Woo and Simmons, 2008). Since 2001, Afghan textbooks have emphasized peace, but new books have been of poor quality and much politically divisive text remains (Burde, 2015; Spink, 2005; Vanner et al., 2016).

Some textbooks fail to recognize the existence of others. Textbooks from Israel and Palestine present history and the current situation from unilateral perspectives that provide many more negative than positive descriptions of the other, and offer little information about everyday religious, cultural and social life. In 74 Israeli and 94 Palestinian textbooks, the vast majority of maps omit the existence of the other entity. Of 83 maps in Palestinian books, 58% had no borders within the area, no reference to Israel and referred to the entire area as Palestine. Similarly, 76% of 258 maps in Israeli textbooks did not indicate any borders between Israeli and Palestinian areas, although borders were indicated between Israel and neighbouring countries, and the label Palestine did not appear anywhere on the maps (Adwan et al., 2014).

In many countries in Europe and North America, the collective memory narrated in some world history textbooks has established a picture of Islam and Arab societies that is riddled with violence and conflict, which risks promoting stereotypical images of Muslim communities and intolerance towards them. In 72 world history secondary school textbooks from 16 countries, 50% to 75% of all coverage of Islam and Arab societies is related to conflict, nationalism, extremism or terrorism, representing these societies as violent and unstable. There are positive references to Islamic contributions to civilization through art, science and architecture, but the overwhelming representations of Islam and Arab society are negative (Wiseman, 2014).

## Progress towards promoting peace

Some countries have made an effort to remove contentious content from textbooks, and to promote peaceful coexistence and social cohesion. One such example comes from Cyprus. In 2003, the Turkish Cypriot side adopted a new approach to history teaching, with the aim of developing a culture of peace. History textbooks published in 2004 and revised in 2005 focus on the shared experiences and histories of both sides of the island. Even the front cover of the 2004 books shows unification, representing the map of Cyprus with no dividing line. Phrases such as 'motherland Turkey' were replaced with phrases such as 'our island'. History is no longer presented as a story of conflict. Instead emphasis is placed on examples of coexistence and cooperation, with a shift towards a shared social, cultural and economic history (Figure 12) (Papadakis, 2008).

**FIGURE 12:**  
In Cyprus, a new history textbook illustrates the shared experiences of both sides



Source: Papadakis (2008).

Similarly, in the United States, textbooks' coverage of the Viet Nam War has increasingly focused on soldiers' suffering rather than glorifying the war. In 102 history textbooks published between 1970 and 2009, the proportion of items negatively portraying the Viet Nam War rose from 15% to a third. In the 1960s and 1970s, textbooks included photos showing helicopters over Vietnamese terrain with unharmed soldiers and no other people present. Beginning in the 1980s, textbooks started

to include numerous photos of wounded and crying soldiers, mourning soldiers and family members; and disabled veterans. Despite these changes, the violence done by Americans to Vietnamese still remains largely invisible (Lachman and Mitchell, 2014).

In Sri Lanka, textbooks long fostered enmity between ethnic groups. Sinhalese textbooks portrayed Sinhala kings as heroes defeating the Tamils, who were depicted as invaders. Sinhalese Buddhists were presented as the only true Sri Lankans (Cardozo, 2008). Six history textbooks spanning grades 7 to 11 published in 2007-2008 no longer include strong explicit stereotypes of Tamils but largely brush over Tamils' story, culture and religion by providing a Sinhalese-centric history of the country. The textbooks present role models that are almost exclusively Sinhalese, such as the kings Vijabahu I and Parakramabahu or prominent Sinhalese politicians. The absence of Tamil or Muslim role models offers pupils from

**FIGURE 13:**  
In Sri Lanka, a civic education textbook for grade 10 discusses advantages of peaceful conflict resolution



Source: Sri Lanka National Institute of Education (2014).

minority communities few figures with whom to identify. Textbooks also fail to recognize alternative interpretations of historical events and to encourage students to engage critically with the past (Gaul, 2014). Sri Lanka has made some encouraging progress in textbooks, however. After decades of conflict and civil war between its two largest ethnic communities, Sri Lanka has initiated several reforms to include conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanisms in its textbooks (Figure 13) (Vanner et al., 2016).

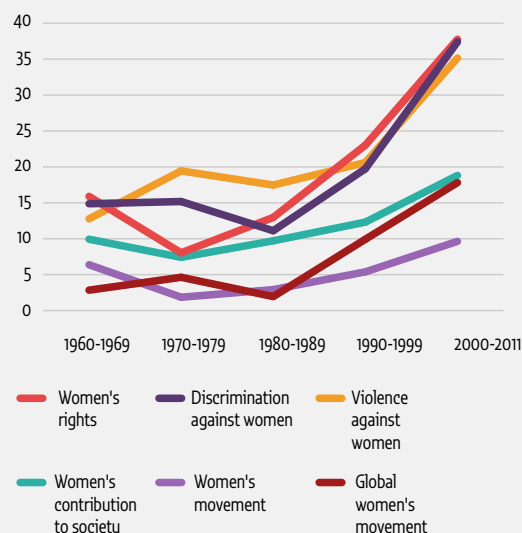
### Textbooks still suffer from gender bias

Textbooks can disseminate gender bias, prejudice and discrimination through stereotypical and unbalanced depictions of men and women in stories and illustrations. Gender biases in textbooks can shape gender identities in ways that impede progress towards gender equality in education and the empowerment of women for social and economic development. Gender bias in textbooks is one of the best camouflaged and hardest to budge rocks in the road to gender equality in education (Blumberg, 2008).

#### COVERAGE OF THEMES RELATED TO GENDER EQUALITY HAS INCREASED...

Analysis for the GEM Report shows that content relating to gender equality has increased in textbooks across the world (Figure 14). The percentage of textbooks mentioning women's rights increased from 15% in the 1946-1969 period to 37% in the 2000-2011 period, while depiction of discrimination against women increased from 16% to 38%. The highest rates of inclusion of women's rights in textbooks are found in Europe and Northern America (43%) followed by sub-Saharan Africa. Textbooks in Northern Africa and Western Asia have the lowest coverage rates, at around 14% (Bromley et al., 2016).

**FIGURE 14:**  
Textbooks are increasingly including explicit messages advocating for women's rights  
Percentage of textbooks that include an explicit statement on women's rights



Notes: Sample sizes for each period: 54 textbooks over 1950-1959, 88 over 1960-1969, 108 over 1970-1979, 103 over 1980-1989, 131 over 1990-1999 and 219 between 2000-2011 and 2000-2013. The latest data sets on women's rights and discrimination are for 2000-2013; for the other statements, the data sets are for 2000-2011.  
Source: Bromley et al., (2016)

#### ... BUT MAJOR ROOM FOR PROGRESS EXISTS NEARLY EVERYWHERE

An extensive number of studies, in countries including Algeria, France, Pakistan, Spain, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, have pointed to the invisibility of women in teaching and learning materials and how this perpetuates women's marginal status in society. In many textbooks, stories, images or examples in textbooks either do not include women or depict them in submissive, traditional roles, such as housework and serving men (Abdelhay and Benhaddouche, 2015; Barton and Sakwa, 2012; Centre Hubertine Auclert, 2013; Durrani, 2008; Gómez-Carrasco, 2016; Mutekwe and Modiba, 2012).

**FIGURE 15:**  
**In Iran, a grade 2 Farsi textbooks portrays the differences between the traditional roles of women and men**



Source: Paivandi (2008).

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, for instance, women make up of only 37% of 3,115 images in primary and secondary school textbooks in use in 2006-2007 (Paivandi, 2008). Moreover, roles are described as gender specific in this poem in a grade 2 Farsi textbook: *'The family is like a hand, of which each finger is a family member. In this hand, father is the thumb, the first finger of the hand. Another finger – the index finger – is our mother, the lady of the house! Another finger is our brother, who is sitting here, next to mother! The who is this? Another finger. Yes, that is right. She is our sister. I am the last one, the little finger'* (Figure 15).

**FIGURE 16:**  
**In Kenya, in a primary school social studies textbooks, women's roles are associated with teaching and services**



Source: Kanjaya and Ogula (2011).

Even in some mathematics textbooks, such as those in Turkey, traditional roles among the females in the house (mother, daughter) are portrayed in the context of cooperation. Accompanied by an image of a mother and a daughter cooking together, the following statement illustrates this pattern "There were four eggs on the table. Ayse brought her mother two more eggs. It summed up to six eggs" (Aydin et al., 2016).

Moreover, women are rarely depicted as working women. When women who work outside of their homes are portrayed, the focus is on roles associated with teaching and other services. As shown in an example from Kenya, men are represented as the ones who hold positions as political leaders, businessmen, teachers, policemen or doctors (Figure 16).

Men are depicted in a much wider variety of activities and occupations than women. In Italy, grade 4 textbooks from 10 major publishers published in early 2000s assigned 50 different professions to men but only 15 to women. The difference is not only quantitative but also qualitative: the 'masculine' professions are much more prestigious and rewarding than the 'feminine' ones (Biemmi, 2015).

In Lebanon, civics textbooks from grades 1 to 12 published between 2004 and 2012 did not present men and women as equals in the political domain. Out of the 155 references to women's political participation, 114 exhibited gender inequality, with men being portrayed as political leaders, participating in decision-making, debates, summits and international conferences. Women's political participation was restricted to voting in elections (Shuayb, 2015).

Textbooks often leave out influential women in history or do not accurately portray the lives of women, as shown by a study of 9 Jordanian and 13 Palestinian history, civics and national education textbooks used from seventh to twelfth grade and published between 2004 and 2008. In Jordan, men and boys feature 79% of images in history textbooks compared with 21% of women and girls. The situation is even more striking in Palestine, where history textbooks have no focus on women's roles. A 2004 history textbook for grade 10 gives examples of Western scientists and inventors such as John Dalton, Isaac Newton, and Albert Einstein and refers to the two scientists Marie and Pierre Curie. Despite this Palestinian history textbook being the first to show a picture of a woman, it mentions Marie Curie primarily as the wife of Pierre Curie, rather than as a



**FIGURE 17:**

**A textbook revision in Viet Nam aims to include more illustrations reflecting greater gender equality (left hand: actual, right hand: proposed)**



Source: Viet Nam Ministry of Education (2016).

scientist in her own right: 'Around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the two French scientists Pierre Curie and his Polish wife discovered some chemical elements with high radioactivity such as uranium, polonium, and radium' (Alayan and Al-Khalidi, 2010).

There are grounds for optimism, however. Some countries, such as Viet Nam, have made important steps towards including gender equality in their textbooks (Figure 17). Recognizing that gender inequality is one of the main obstacles to the eradication of poverty. Viet Nam has issued several directives and policies, and has ratified international conventions that support gender equality. At the national level, the Viet Nam National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) for the 2011-2020 period sets goals for gender equality in education, training, labour and employment. Goal 3 of the NSGE specifies reviewing textbook content and images and removing gender stereotypes, as well as implementing gender mainstreaming in education policies, programmes and plans.

## Recommendations

Improving textbooks to ensure they promote sustainable development can be a challenging task. Governments may not have the political clout or courage to reshape the status quo in the topics and themes conveyed through instructional materials. The contrasting views of dominant interest groups and disaffected minorities may not be easily bridged. Neighbouring countries rarely exchange views on issues of common interest in textbook content – and when they do the results of such collaboration may not eventually have an effect on the actual textbooks. During periods of civil strife and in post-conflict countries, anger and distrust towards particular communities may prevent debate. In some countries, religion, nationalism and ethnic identities may be so intertwined that fostering respect for other groups is considered too daunting (Greaney, 2006). In the end, those determining textbook content may decide that a potentially protracted, contentious and even expensive process of textbook revision is unwarranted.

The GEM Report recommends that textbooks should be reviewed and revised as soon as curricula have been reformed to meet the needs of the new sustainable development agenda. Guidelines explicitly related to environmental issues, peace and global citizenship, sustainable development, human rights and gender equality need to be integrated within textbook review processes:

In the case of environment and climate change, there must be a definitive effort to improve the text so that it reflects scientifically accurate portrayals of the challenge at the global and national levels and includes specific mentions of agent roles and individual responsibilities.

In the case of peace, human rights and global citizenship textbooks should remove pernicious stereotypes, avoid omitting relevant facts and include:

- human rights education;
- accurate and authentic portrayals of events;
- accurate and authentic portrayals of groups and individuals including people with disabilities, LGBTI people, people from minority groups;
- tolerance;
- religious sensitivity;
- responsible citizenry;
- social, civic and moral responsibility;
- global awareness;
- balanced presentations of issues; and
- accurate use of illustrations.

Textbooks should also:

- pay attention to the extent to which historical narratives (i) glorify the use of physical force and military might and (ii) minimize the effects of armed conflict on individuals, economies, and nations;
- include stories (true or fictional) about conflict resolution, respect for diversity and local, national or global role models, with questions and guidance for class discussion and personal reflection to help students identify with positive role models;
- include illustrations to stimulate class discussion and personal reflection.

In the case of gender equality, textbooks should not confine women to employment that is a simple extension of their domestic and maternal activities. In addition to eliminating discriminatory gendered representations, textbooks should expose common forms of gender discrimination in society and promote the rights of girls and women and the right to gender equality. Textbooks should ensure parity between men and women, girls and boys in:

- text and illustrations;
- casting of 'hero' characters and minor figures;
- position and size of characters in illustrations;
- presenting or referring to well-known figures in the fields of politics, science, literature, sport, the arts and economics.

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