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Gender Issues in School Education: Existing Policies and Practices

The current issue of the Newsletter focuses on Gender Issues in School Education. The articles have been written by various experts and researchers working in this area in context of different member- countries in the Asia Pacific region. These essays cover Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

Gender is part of the targets set for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal on education (SDG 4).

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It is understandable that the targets for Sustainable Development Goal 5, 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,' cannot be fulfilled without achieving gender equality in and through education. Recent data show that while the numbers of girls and women at all levels of education have increased during the last two decades, particularly after implementation of EFA goals and MDGs, gender inequality still persists in terms of access to quality education as well as learning outcome and further educational and job opportunities. It is widely acknowledged that a strong, gender-sensitive and child-friendly education system needs to be developed for ensuring quality education for all children irrespective of their socio-economic and gender background. In many developing countries, girls from socially disadvantaged groups become doubly disadvantaged because of practice of gender discrimination in society as well as in educational institutions. Many countries have already taken certain measures to promote gender equity and equality in school education so that educational needs of all girls and boys can be addressed effectively. With this background, this current issue of the ANTRIEP Newsletter focuses on these issues pertaining to gender equity and equality in school education.

Drawing reference from results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 cycle, the brief article on Australia reveals that the achievement level of 15-year-old girls is significantly lower than boys by a difference of approximately one-third of a school

year. The author has argued that though girls are more likely to opt out of Mathematics and Science subjects than boys, the research doesn't support the idea of structural differences in the brain between girls and boys. The author has also recommended some measures that can be taken for promoting girls' participation in Mathematics and also for improving their learning outcome.

In the article on gender in schools of Bangladesh, the author has explained how the country has achieved gender parity in school enrolment as well as for gaining access to labour market. This could be possible because the government has taken many initiatives for promoting girls' education. The Education policy of Bangladesh has recommended for making provision for improving participation of girls in education, their skill development and employment. The article has also pointed out that there is a substantial gap between policy and practices as the schools are devoid of gender sensitive facilities like functional girls' toilet, sanitation, health education and so on, in addition to persistence of problem of considerable distance of secondary schools from homes, which can deter girls from attending school.

The article on gender issues in school education in the context of China has focused on current education status of young girls in ethnic minority regions of West China. During the last few years, China has witnessed substantial improvement in girls' education, leading to reducing gender gap in school enrolment as well as completion. However, the educational opportunities are yet to reach a few areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, and more attention needs to be paid on improving education quality and learning capacity of girls of ethnic minority groups.

The article on Indian school education focuses on how gender has been a primary concern for education policy and planning in the post-independence period. India has witnessed considerable improvement in the Gender Parity Index for primary schooling, which stood at a meager 0.41 in 1950-51 and has reached a level of 1.00 in 2009-10. In addition, a wide range of interventions have been made to help in ensuring girls' attendance and retention in schools and their learning achievement. However, the focus of policy implementation still remains around issues of access and parity rather than equality. It is also noteworthy that the ways in which schools contribute to the construction of gendered identities is so far largely unexplored and hence requires more research.

Like Australia and China, the article focusing on gender issues in school education in Japan has also dealt with the agenda of 2030 with respect to Science and Mathematics education aiming at equitable lifelong learning for boys and girls. The article has drawn reference from TIMSS 2015 and PISA 2015, and according to both studies, girls in Japan, together with those in other East Asian countries, scored among the top in both Mathematics and Science indicating the fact that Japan has been able to ensure a relatively equitable quality education for boys and girls. However, the gender differences are prominent in the levels and fields of higher education graduates. Their proportion declined with the increase in levels of higher education from junior college to graduate and above, giving the lowest ranking among the OECD countries. Again, Japan had the lowest ranking among the OECD countries in the fields of business and law, science and engineering, manufacturing and construction as well. The author has linked such gender disparity at higher education level with lack of girls' confidence in scientific subjects and their low aspiration about their trajectory related to the scientific fields which starts declining after primary education, non-availability of women teachers at the higher level, lack of employment opportunities for females and their engagement in the professions with lower wages than scientific professions and so on. It has been suggested by the author that, better coordination needs to develop between Ministry of Education and other sectors such as labour and health 'in order to secure sustainable resources for accomplishing gender equality'.

The article on Nepal focuses on provisioning of quality education to all citizens irrespective of their gender and socio-economic background, for which the country has adopted a joint strategy for lifelong learning for all citizens in formal, non-formal, as well as informal modes. The country has developed School Sector Development Plan (SSDP 2016-23) which has also clearly stated that the educational opportunities for female and marginalised groups need to be provided by establishing an inter-linkage between skill, knowledge and work in a location-specific context. Under the specific political context of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, the education system requires undertaking many initiatives from the gender perspective for implementing SDG 4.

The article on gender issues in school education in Pakistan discusses the manner in which the country has progressed in providing elementary education to all children irrespective of their social and gender background. Despite many efforts, gender disparity is still persisting at every level of school education and it widens with increase in level of education. One of the reasons for decreasing enrolment in later schooling is the shortage of middle and secondary schools to meet the needs of girls and boys graduating from primary schools every year. Rural-urban disparities further accentuate the issue of girls' access and retention in secondary education. Although initiatives taken by government and other civil society organisations could improve girls' enrolment in schools, it does not guarantee these girls' active and regular participation in teaching-learning processes. Like other South Asian countries, in Pakistan, too, the poor quality of schools and teachers, lack of parental support, generational poverty and hostile social environment are the most important hindering factors towards girls' poor engagement in educational processes. The suggestion has been made for an initiative like STEP which has demonstrated that a multi-pronged approach to school improvement and community engagement in school management could promote gender aware schools with better quality and sustained participation of girls in schooling.

Unlike other countries, Philippines witnesses gender disparities in educational access, outcomes and achievements with boys at a disadvantaged situation because as compared to girls, boys are less likely to progress and complete education, more likely to drop out, and more likely to underachieve. Boys tend to lag behind girls with respect to many indicators. As per the recent data, boys constitute three-fifths of the total 1.1 million out-of-school children. The gross and net enrolment rates, along with survival rates, are higher for girls at every stage of school education, though during the last few years, considerable improvement could be found in boys' enrolment at the primary level. Girls also outscore boys in the National Achievement Test (NAT). Also, more boys than girls drop out of both primary and secondary schools. The reasons for this reverse gender trend include marriage and low family income, less interest of boys in attending schools, parents' low academic expectations for boys, the lower school-readiness of boys as they enter Grade 1, and the feminisation of basic education. There is also recognition that current learning approaches and routinised school activities of traditional classrooms may not favour boys. Another major factor may be the early engagement of boys from poor households in labour market to earn livelihood for supporting their families. The author suggests it is because of this aspect that the Government of Philippines needs to undertake strategies, scholarships, etc., for educating boys along with girls. It is necessary to attract more men to enter the teaching force as well. The author argues that although promoting and maintaining gender parity is important, gender equality in education requires addressing underlying structural inequities and empowering learners to challenge gender discrimination wherever or in whatever form it may be. The next write-up discusses the case of Sri Lanka, which unlike the earlier countries striving for reducing gender gap, enjoys high level of gender parity in the education sector. The number of females completing different stages of education and passing examinations is higher than those of their male counterparts. The absence of gender discrimination is reflected in the

average literacy rate for males and females both crossing 90 per cent and with a gender difference of only 1.9 per cent. This little gender difference is mainly due to the lower literacy level of the older female population. This itself indicates that the Sri Lankan Government has adopted the right kind of policy to promote gender equity in and through education.

The article on Vietnam describes how the country has witnessed remarkable progress on gender equality in education, along with its overall major socio-economic transformation from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle income country. The gender gap in schooling has been eliminated, and women have caught up and even surpassed men in terms of attaining college degrees. However, there is a gender gap still existing among certain ethnic minority groups. This article has suggested a series of recommendations aimed at helping to keep Vietnam moving along the path to gender equality.

The above discussion reveals that there are commonalities and differences as far as the gender equality in school education is concerned. While girls in some countries like Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India are facing difficulties in gaining initial physical access and participation;, in countries like Australia, China, and Japan, gender disparity in learning is a major concern which is more visible at the higher level of education, and it is more so in case of a few subjects like Mathematics and Science. It is, therefore, the governments of all these countries require to adopt varying strategies as per the specific need and the context of the country.

Editor

Change in Coordinator, Focal Point, ANTRIEP

Prof. K. Sujatha, who has served as Coordinator, Focal Point, ANTRIEP from January 2000 to June 2016, has retired from services of NUEPA in June 2016.

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Gender Differences in Mathematics in Australia

Research from ACER investigating boys' and girls' Mathematics participation and achievement reveals that girls are less likely to participate and engage in Mathematics, and more likely to achieve at a significantly lower level than boys, but this is not a hardwired gender gap, and the targeted intervention makes a difference. According to ACER Research Fellow Dr Sarah Buckley in the report "*Gender and sex differences in student participation, achievement and engagement in Mathematics"*, research does not support the idea of structural differences in the brain between girls and boys. Dr Buckley's report suggests that the targeted approaches can make a difference. These approaches include programmes that allow girls who are struggling with Mathematics to practice their Mathematics skills, initiatives that challenge negative gender stereotypes, efforts to increase student interest, enjoyment or intrinsic value, and efforts to promote the value of Mathematics for future educational and career aspirations.

Learning achievement

Results from the 2012 cycle of (PISA) reveal that 15-year-old Australian girls have shown a difference of approximately one-third of a school year than boys, also being more likely to opt out of Mathematics and Science subjects. It is a major concern that the participation of girls in advanced Mathematics and Science subjects is declining, which has severe consequence on further study and careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics fields.

PISA also examined students' attitudes towards Mathematics, and it has been found that more girls (around 33 per cent) than boys (20 per cent) did not think Mathematics was important for future study. In addition, girls also have reported lower confidence in their capability of succeeding in Mathematics as well as higher levels of Mathematics anxiety as compared to boys. If girls are less engaged and more anxious about Mathematics, we can expect them to be less likely to pursue Mathematics courses or choose career pathways that involve Mathematics.

The report has also mentioned,that the t neuroscience does not suggest the persistence of any hard-wired brain differences but rather shows the brain is highly plastic. And, according to neuroscience, psychology and education research, that means girls' and boys' attitudes, engagement, participation and achievement in Mathematics can be changed by what they think and do, their teachers, and by the messages they receive from society.

Closing the gap between boys and girls

Boys and girls may have certain preferences for learning – likely encouraged through socialisation – but according to Dr Buckley, this does not mean they cannot learn in other ways. It is also a generalisation to say that all girls or boys will have a preference for a particular learning style or environment. 'Rather, the message from neuroscience and psychological research is that given new environmental opportunities, there is the potential for change and growth,' Dr Buckley said.

Approaches designed to target the Mathematics gender gap must be multi-faceted, says Dr Buckley. The *Gender and sex differences in student participation, achievement and engagement in Mathematics* report suggests targeted approaches, including:

- programmes that allow girls who are struggling with Mathematics to practise their Mathematics skills
- initiatives that challenge negative gender stereotypes
- efforts to increase student interest, enjoyment or intrinsic value, and
- efforts to promote the value of Mathematics for future educational and career aspirations.

'The more Mathematics is perceived in our society as a subject that is useful, enjoyable and attainable by all, irrespective of gender, the more likely the gender gap will start to close', Dr Buckley writes.

Reference:
Buckley, Sarah, "Gender and sex differences in student participation, achievement and engagement in mathematics" (2016), Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Melbourne Vic.

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Gender in Schools of Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh has, in the past few decades, taken many affirmative steps to address the gender gaps in the socio-political scene of the country. The outcome is encouraging and something to take pride in – Bangladesh is in the forefront among the developing countries to have achieved gender parity. Bangladesh has the eighth lowest gender gap in political empowerment, the reason being "Education". Today, more girls go to schools, and are in the employment market. The number of girls enrolling in primary schools is high, but there is a big dip in the number of girls enrolling in secondary schools. Chances of girls returning to classrooms after dropping out, remains low compared to boys.

The number of girls at the primary level has been 7128053, 51 per cent of total enrolment. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was 94 per cent in 2005, and reached 109 per cent in 2015, with the GER of girls (113.4 per cent) higher than that of boys. The completion rate of primary education was 89 per cent (88 for girls) in 2009, which increased to nearly 99 per cent for both in 2015. It must be mentioned that female teachers account for 60 per cent of total teachers at the primary level. However, despite such improvement, the incidence of drop-out is still prevalent across grades, and the girls' drop-out rate at Grade IV has been 8.5 per cent in 2015.

In 2015, the GER at secondary level rose substantially to 72.78 per cent from 43.1 per cent in 2001, with the GER for boys at 67.75 per cent, significantly lower compared to 77.84 per cent for girls. At the same time, the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) was 67.00 per cent; 62.16 per cent for boys and 71.85 per cent for girls. Total enrolment in Grades VI–X for girls was 52.01 per cent, but the completion rate was much less at 54.08 per cent as compared to 65.98 per cent for boys. The drop-out rate reduced to 40.29 per cent in 2015 from 41.94 per cent in 2014, but remained higher for girls at 45.92 per cent. Early marriage is still a matter of concern for girls enrolled in secondary schools. Distance between home and secondary school is huge, hence safety of these girls emerges as a challenge. Residential schools for girls are hardly available in Bangladesh. However, girls continue to find ways and emerge as winners. One important point that needs to be made here is that boys are almost as invisible as girls in schools at all levels.

The National Education Policy 2010 in its Chapter 16 on Girls' Education categorically states that provision will be made for participation of girls in education, skill development, and employment. To facilitate the participation of girls in technical education, general hostels may be established where necessary. Bangladesh High Court gave directives on sexual harassment guidelines to serve as 'law' until real law was enacted in 2009, a milestone in the history of judiciary. This verdict has made significant impact in reducing, though not fully, cases of eve teasing. There are instances of teachers being sued by parents/ students for cases of sexual harassment, and punished by the court with life imprisonment. Recruitment of female teachers in large numbers, ensuring provision of separate toilets for girls, and ban on physical and humiliating punishment in classrooms are some of the steps taken by the government to promote their education along with stipends of Taka 1200 per year per child to be transferred to the mother's account. Free textbooks are distributed to all children enrolled in government primary schools, newly nationalised primary schools, and other non-formal schools following the national curriculum.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board, responsible for producing all textbooks, have also taken measures to introduce gender parity through illustrations, examples and change in content following long advocacy by civil society. In recent years, many examples of girls are used to show their engagement in non-traditional roles.

In addition to enrolment and participation of children, there are many other issues that jeopardise gender and social equity in school education. For example, most schools in Bangladesh have overcrowded classrooms due to inadequacy of classrooms and practice of multi-grade teaching–learning in the same classroom. Many teachers are found not particularly sensitive towards gender issues, particularly in case of adolescents. It has been observed in some schools that though separate toilets are available for girls, they are mostly kept locked or unusable. Around 84 per cent of schools have functional improved & toilets for students but 55 per cent of these toilets were kept locked, possibly deterring many girls from attending during menstruation.

Recent data shows that 33 per cent of girls could not attend schools during menstruation. Also, hardly any education is available in schools on health and reproductive health, which may have long-standing impact on health of adolescent girls and women of the country. Although a separate chapter on Sexual and Reproductive Health has been introduced in the Social Science textbooks for Grades VIII–X, many teachers are still not comfortable discussing these issues in a classroom, quite often advising girls and boys to read it at home. While only 6 per cent of schools (both primary and secondary) provided menstrual hygiene education session for girls in schools, only 36 per cent of the girls knew about menstruation before menarche.

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Gender Equity in Education with Special Focus on Ethnic Minority Regions of West China

The education policy makers in China have been always attaching great importance to education equity. The *National Outline for Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development (2010–20) of China* highlights that 'education equity is the foundation of social equity'. With joint efforts of educators, the central and local governments, the net enrolment rate of primary schools in China reached 99.81 per cent in 2014. The Chinese Government also works hard to ensure education equity for disadvantaged social groups in terms of education access, process and outcomes. China is a big country with a large number of ethnic minority groups, mostly located in Western China with underdeveloped socio-economic situation. Many researches have shown that, the education improves productivity, work ethic, attitude towards housework and job opportunities of females and their general employment situation. As a result, the educated and young female workforce contributes a lot to migration labour from rural areas to cities in developing countries. Education affects the level of participation of female workforce as well. This article is based on a research that has investigated the status of equal education access, process and outcome for girls of ethnic minority groups in Western China. In December 2016, the research team selected 19 primary schools randomly as targeting groups in 3 countries, namely Sanjiang in Guangxi Province, Pan in Guizhou Province and Zhong in Chongqing City. Using cluster sampling, students in Grades IV and V filled out the questionnaires in these 19 schools. In total, 1442 questionnaires were distributed. The following findings have emerged from this study:

a) The compulsory education of nine years has been popularised in this region. Most of the girls of ethnic minority groups know about their education opportunities and they enjoy equal educational access. However, the degree of recognition and identification of education of young girls of ethnic minority groups needs to be improved.

b) The sense of educational equity among girls of ethnic minority groups reaches the mean value.
Considering the cognitive and psychological developing law of children at primary schools, more attention should be given to girls of ethnic minority groups.

Equity in terms of education process is about receiving the education equally in teaching and learning. The investigation shows, firstly, when receiving education, the value of girls of ethnic minority groups in terms of class participation, group study, receiving feedback, and tutoring after class reaches the mean value. As for equal opportunity of participating class management, the group is above the mean value. However, comparing to Han girls, those from ethnic minority groups have lower sense of all aspects except for exploring their interests in schools. Secondly, the investigation proves that high expectation has positive correlation with students' learning outcomes. According to the investigation, the values of girls of ethnic minority groups in terms of teacher expectation, parents' expectation and self-expectation are lower than the mean value of girls of Han Group.

c) In terms of learning outcomes, the value of ethnic minority groups is close to the mean value, but lower than that of Han girls in regard to learning, social skills, and creativity. So, more effective measures need to be taken to facilitate physical and mental development of girls of this group. Three aspects are considered on the learning outcome, namely, learning, social skills and creativity. For learning, the values of girls of ethnic minority groups are lower than the mean value and the value of Han girls in terms of effort, satisfaction and finishing learning tasks. Students' social skills include self-cognition and planning, emotion perception and control, inter-personal communication, dealing with conflicts, adjusting to changes, commitment and confidence. Good social skills could help students face challenges and gain healthy life. It is seen that the values of girls of ethnic minority groups are lower than the mean value and value of Han girls in terms of emotion perception and control, adjusting to changes, confidence, self-cognition and planning. Besides, persistence, adventuring and curiosity are keys to shape creative minds and creativity. According to the investigation, the values of girls of ethnic minority groups in curiosity and adventuring reaches the mean value, but the value in persistence is lower than mean value and the one of Han Group.

The above discussion reveals that, the enrolment rate of children of ethnic minority groups has increased greatly through popularising free compulsory education, free school lunch, and constructing boarding schools. The teaching quality and school facilities in ethnic minority areas of Western China have been improved by projects like school remodeling, implementing special teachers' recruitment and developing bilingual teachers. However, due to the influence of traditions and history, more attention needs to be paid to improve educational quality and learning capacity for girls of these groups.

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All Member Institutions are requested to send the short article for next issue of ANTRIEP (January-June, 2017) on the theme: "Use of Technology for Teaching-Learning in Schools" latest by May, 31, 2017.

Gender Equality in Science and Mathematics Education in Japan: Agenda 2030

On 29 November 2016, IEA released the results of TIMSS 2015. On 6 December 2016, OECD released the results of PISA 2015. TIMSS covers the population of Grades IV and VIII, while PISA covers the population of 15 years' old. As these assessments are designed to allow comparison throughout time, their results can provide essential information in order to report the progress towards Agenda 2030, aiming at equitable life-long learning for boys and girls.

In both studies, girls in Japan, together with those in other East Asian countries, scored among the top for both Mathematics and Science. Based on TIMSS 2015, practically no gender difference was found in both Mathematics and Science for both Grades IV and VIII. Throughout different years, the overall achievement level for both subjects has been improving and almost reaching the higher performance levels obtained in 1995 with gradually diminishing gender differences.

On the other hand, the gender differences based on the PISA are mixed. PISA 2015 results show that the overall achievements in both Mathematics Literacy and Science Literacy have lowered compared to those of PISA 2012, and that boys outperformed girls in both subjects. However, the size of the gender differences was not as large as that in other OECD countries.

As shown above, it seems that Japan has been ensuring more or less an equitable quality education for boys and girls, even in the Mathematics and Science fields. However, things start changing drastically at the higher education level. OECD's Education at Glance shows that gender differences are prominent in the levels and fields of higher education graduates. While in 2010, 63 per cent of those who obtained the junior college qualification were females, the proportion fell to 44 per cent for the Bachelor's degree. For Master's and Doctorate, the percentages were 30 and 28 respectively, giving the lowest ranking among the OECD countries. Furthermore, the female proportions were rather high in the fields of (a) services (90 per cent), (b) humanities and arts (69 per cent), (c) education (59 per cent), and (d) health and welfare (56 per cent). However, less female students graduated in the fields of (e) agriculture (38 per cent), (f) social sciences, business and law (35 per cent), (g) science (26 per cent), and (h) engineering, manufacturing and construction (11 per cent). Again, Japan had the lowest ranking among the OECD countries in the latter three fields.

These data seem to suggest that high and equitable achievement in Mathematics and Science during compulsory schooling may not be the only determinant for women to choose the scientific fields in tertiary education. One explanation could be the girls' and women's confidence in scientific subjects and their aspiration about their trajectory related to the scientific fields. The TIMSS 2015 results indicated that Japanese Grade IV girls had similar liking of and confidence in Mathematics as boys. At Grade VIII, more than 60 per cent of girls do not like the subject, and more than 70 per cent of them do not have confidence, while boys' percentages was around 50-55 per cent for these indicators. OECD's PISA 2012 reported that 15 per cent of male and only 3 per cent of female students were expecting a career in engineering and computing.

Another explanation could be the proportion of female teachers at the higher levels of education. While nearly all the teachers in Japan were female at the pre-primary level, the percentages reduce to 65 per cent for the primary, 41 per cent for the lower secondary, 28 per cent for the upper secondary, and 19 per cent for the tertiary levels. The last two categories made Japan the worst-ranked among the OECD nations. Provision of more

quality female teachers in Mathematics and Science at these levels is often considered very important in order to cultivate the motivation of girls in pursuing these fields.

Japanese women are not finding the same economic opportunities because the bulk in higher education is not going beyond the junior college level, and that too, mostly in services and humanities fields which usually lead to professions with lower wages than scientific professions. In fact, the latest Global Gender Gap Report 2016 illustrated a contrasting result between the education and health sub-scores and the economic and politics sub-scores. The working condition for the female professionals has been blamed for this imbalance.

In order for both genders to enjoy not only equal learning achievement but also subsequent life opportunities including economic empowerment, as required in many targets within Agenda 2030, the Ministry of Education will need to work together with other sectors such as labour and health. In order to secure sustainable resources for accomplishing gender equality, this coordination seems inevitable.

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Gender Issues in School Education in India

For many decades after independence, the main gender issue that preoccupied educationists was finding ways to bridge the large gender gaps in school enrolment, identify strategies to encourage full participation of girls along with boys, and achieve gender parity in primary schooling. Overall, the Gender Parity Index for primary schooling, which stood at just 0.41 in 1950-51, reached a level of 1.00 in 2009-10. It is better recognised today that to capture persistent gender inequalities, data needs to be disaggregated along multiple axes, including caste, class, location, and the interactive influence of these variables has to be considered. For example, while early marriage and drop-out of girls as puberty sets in, has long been recognised as a barrier to the schooling of girls, the educational system has yet to effectively address the more intractable 'barriers in the mind'. In addition, there is a gender and class/caste aspect to mobility and movement towards urban centres that is needed in order to continue schooling beyond the primary level.

Gender equality is a frequently reiterated objective of education policy. To meet the expressed goals of equality, a wide range of interventions have been made, including ensuring availability of primary schools within one kilometre of habitation, and upper primary schools within three kilometres, separate toilets for girls, recruitment of women teachers, ECCE centres in or near schools in convergence with the Integrated Child Development Services programme so as to free girls from sibling-care responsibilities during school hours, mainstreaming of out-of-school girls, teachers' sensitisation programmes to promote equitable learning opportunities, and gender-sensitive teaching-learning materials. Community mobilisation efforts are expected to help in ensuring girls' attendance and retention and the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV) hostels provide residential schooling for disadvantaged girls in educationally backward blocks. Incentives for girls include mid-day meals, scholarships, cycles, and cash transfer schemes linked to completion of stipulated grades.

Yet the focus of policy implementation remains around issues of access and parity rather than equality. Commonly used indicators include enrolment, drop-out, attendance, average years of schooling, transitions between levels, number of male and female teachers — indicators important to track and monitor progress — but which tell little about whether or not underlying patterns of discrimination and disadvantage are changing, or about quality and experience of schooling. Nor do they tell us whether, in each particular context, education is an enabling agency. A concern with substantive equality leads to an effort to understand the ways in which girls and boys from disadvantaged groups and locations can be enabled to exercise initiative, take responsibility, negotiate their preferred choices, and in this manner exercise agency. More research is needed to understand the outcomes of education, and the linkages between gender, education and work, political participation, and decision making within the home.

With more boys and girls in secondary education today, a new set of gender issues has come to the fore, that is, the management of adolescent sexuality in schools in ways that strengthen individual agency of both boys and girls. While skilling and employability issues are on the agenda, the ways in which schools contribute to the construction of gendered identities is largely unexplored so far. Overall, while much has been achieved on the parity front, gender equality in and through education remains a challenge.

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Gender and School Education in Nepal: Policies, Programmes and Challenges

There is a general agreement that lifelong learning, including continuing education, is increasingly assuming a key role in today's information and knowledge society across the globe. The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal has adopted a joint strategy for lifelong learning in the country. The strategy is aimed at demonstrating how learning can be encouraged and supported for all citizens of all ages and at all stages in their lives. This takes place at different locations, and teaching is offered in various forms. Lifelong learning includes all formal, non-formal and informal learning. The strategy is oriented around various phases in a person's life - ranging from early childhood to old age, as well as around key elements for lifelong learning that represents main development agendas. Within this framework, realistic prospects are to be developed for the long-term that build on the existing educational structures, activities and experiences and define a structured framework for lifelong learning that is flexible and open for the necessary continuous further development. The strategy includes informal learning, self-guidance, development of competencies, networking, modularisation, learning counselling, new learning culture/popularisation of learning, and fairness of access.

Article 51(j) of the Nepalese Constitution states that education should be scientific, vocational, professional, skill-oriented, employment-oriented and female-friendly that produces efficient and competitive human resource for the nation. The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP 2016–23) has also clearly stated that the educational opportunities for female and marginalised

groups need to interlink skill, knowledge and work in a location-specific context. The prime focus of the plan is to develop and expand skill and be employment-oriented as well as entrepreneurship development education to all who are deprived from the mainstream development. The national strategy for prormating gender in technical education, also emphasises updating and improving the curriculum content, teaching-learning method and materials, and access to quality vocational education by initiating timely modification of teaching curricula, service delivery system and feedback providing mechanism.

The educational approach of the SDGs era has new urgency to provide quality education in order to equip marginalised and deprived children and young people through lifelong learning with the capacity to lead meaningful and productive lives in a complex world. It is now widely accepted that the globalisation of economies, cultures and societies raises a new challenge, requiring adaptation of vocational, entrepreneurship, innovative and lifelong useful education by involving public and private sectors to meet both national demand and international concern. The present national scenario indicates that technical education, life skill vocational education and trainings can only address the ever growing unemployment and productivity problems of Nepal, as the challenges raised by this globalised world.

The vital role and significance of education system is largely neglected in Nepal, which has been facing severe issues, including poverty and terrorism. Among the factors responsible for political instability in Nepal, education remains a crucial one. School education in Nepal is facing some serious problems. Issues like lack of adequate funds, inadequate physical and other facilities, poor examination system, drop-outs, low enrolment rate, inconsistency in education policies, aimless education, no free and compulsory education, political interference, corruption, outdated curricula, poor management and supervision, lack of research, and deficiency of professional teachers continue to plague the education system for more than the last five decades.

Under the country's Basic Law, the exercise of governmental powers and the fulfilment of governmental responsibility is incumbent upon the individual in as much as the law does not provide any other arrangement. The Basic Law contains a few fundamental provisions on questions of education, culture and science like guaranteeing the freedom of art and scholarship, research and teaching (Article 51), the freedom of faith and creed, free choice of profession and place of training, equality before the law and the rights of parents. A host of transformation that can streamline SDG 4 in the gender perspective requires initiation at various stages on this journey.

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Forthcoming ANTRIEP Policy Seminar

on theme

Demographic Change: What are the Implications for Education Policy and Planning? Findings from Comparative Research in Asia

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Institut Aminuddin Baki, Ministry of Education, Genting Highlands, Malaysia

Gender and Schooling in Pakistan

Pakistan has made slow, albeit steady progress over the years towards making primary and elementary education accessible across the country. However, it is still far from bringing maximum number of its children and youth to schools. According to Alif Ailaan and SDPI (2015), current NER for primary is 68 per cent (female 64 and male 72 per cent), for middle, 38 per cent (female 35 and male 40 per cent) and for secondary education, it is 26 per cent (female 23 and male 29 per cent). One explanation of decreasing enrolment in later schooling years is the shortage of middle and secondary schools to meet the needs of children graduating from primary schools each year. Absence of girls' schools further explains why fewer girls continue their education through middle and secondary schooling. This gender disparity further widens in rural and remote areas having dominant tribal and feudal systems.

Girls' access to education and retention in schools during the critical transition years, that is, primary to lower secondary, lower secondary to secondary, and secondary to higher secondary, remains one of the major challenges in Pakistan's attempts to address gender disparities in education. Greater number of girls than boys is reported to be out of school in the country. Rural-urban disparities further accentuate the issue of girls' access and retention in secondary education. For instance, the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report explains that only 25 per cent of rural girls complete lower secondary education. Our interactions with teachers and students from rural and semi-urban schools suggest that enrolment in schools generally does not guarantee these girls' active and regular participation in teaching-learning processes. Poor quality of schools and teachers, lack of parental support, generational poverty and hostile social environment remain the most important factors towards girls' poor engagement in educational processes. Historically, various state and civil society-led educational reforms and initiatives, such as abolition of school fee, provision of free textbooks, and stipend for girls with support from international development community, have attempted to address apparent and persistent hostility surrounding girls' access to education. More recently, Aga Khan University Institute for Educational Development's prolonged engagement (2008-16) with public education stakeholders and communities in the selected districts of Sindh and Baluchistan under its Strengthening Teacher Education in Pakistan (STEP) programme suggests a more robust and community-oriented approach towards education development can create sustainable opportunities for women professionals' development and girls' education. With generous support from Global Affairs Canada and the Aga Khan Foundation, the programme is aimed at ensuring improved quality and delivery of services in elementary education appropriate to the needs of poor, particularly women and children.

Gender equality as STEP's cross-cutting theme promoted equitable teaching-learning environment in classrooms, nuanced school improvement, management and governance practices while simultaneously involving parents and communities through its broad-based community engagement strategy. Around hundred and forty teacher-mentors actively worked with their mentee-teachers teaching in their respective school clusters with a focus on recognising and addressing gender issues in their everyday interactions with students. Active school improvement processes prepared the head-teachers, teacher-leaders and district education officials to turn the schools into gender-friendly learning hubs. Researches examining STEP's impact suggest that improved quality and gender equitable approach to education enhanced girls' enrolment, retention and participation in schools. In sum, STEP has demonstrated that a multi-pronged approach to school improvement and community engagement beyond conventional school management committees not only leads to improved and gender aware schools and schooling process but also levels the ground for quality and sustained participation of girls in schooling and in professional development opportunities by gradually addressing structural impediments and social barriers.

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Challenging the Reverse Gender Gap in Basic Education of Philippines

In many countries across the world, a gender gap in education is still a lived reality despite the notable progress that has been generally achieved in gender parity in primary and secondary education at the conclusion of the EFA and MDG era. In the Philippines, disparity in basic education along gender lines also exists, but unlike in other countries where boys outnumber and outperform girls in many education performance indicators, the opposite is the case in the Philippines with boys at a disadvantage. Across many education indicators, boys tend to lag behind girls.

Data from the Department of Education reveal that at the primary level, school participation rates from school years 2009-15 have achieved parity levels, although girls are slightly ahead in net enrolment rates. At the secondary level, both gross and net participation rates are higher for girls during the same period. In terms of cohort survival rates at the primary and secondary levels also, girls performed better than boys. Girls outscore boys in the National Achievement Test (NAT) as mean percentage scores (MPS) of the former tend to be higher across all subjects (UNGEI, 2013). More boys than girls drop out of both primary and secondary schools.

A significant number of Filipino children are out of school, and the gender gap in this situation is also worth noting. In the 2014 Annual Poverty Indicator Survey (APIS) conducted by the Philippine Statistics Administration, it was revealed that around 1.1 million 5-15 years' old were out of school, boys constituting three-fifths of this number. It has been also found in 2012 that:

- Among 5-year-olds, more boys (36.7 per cent) are not in school (31.5 per cent).
- Among the out-of-school children (OOSC) aged 6 to 11 years, there are more boys (56.9 per cent) than girls (43.1).
- More boys (13.3 per cent) at secondary level are out of school than girls (7.6 per cent) in the same age cohort.

In the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS), the proportion of out-of-school youth (aged 15-24) was higher than that of out-of-school children (aged 6-14) (PSA, 2015). The combined proportion of out-of-school children and youth (OSCY) tends to be higher among females (10 per cent) than males (7.9 per cent). However, when considering only the out-of-school children, boys tend to outnumber girls across all regions of the country.

Around 22.9 per cent of the nearly 4 million OSCY have declared marriage as their main reason for not attending school (PSA, 2015). The gender difference is evident as almost four out of ten females have cited this reason. The second topmost reason for not attending school is insufficient family income (19.2 per cent) as many parents are not financially able to pay for other educational expenses outside the tuition fee. The proportion of out-of-school children and youth whose family income was not sufficient for sending a child to school was 22.7 and 17.0 per cent among males and females, respectively. The lack of interest in attending school ranks third in frequency (19.1 per cent). There are more males (three in ten) than females who have no interest in attending school.

To further understand this discrepancy, several factors have been forwarded: the parents' low academic expectations for boys, the attitude "boys will be boys," their lower school-readiness as they enter Grade I, and the feminisation of basic education where 90 per cent of teachers are females. There is also recognition that current learning approaches and routinised school activities of traditional classrooms may not favour boys, who are largely perceived as unable to focus on written

tasks and difficult to discipline. Another major factor may be the tendency of poor families to pull out boys more than the girls from schools and involve them in work that would augment the family income.

Gender stereotypes and gendered expectations of roles underlie the persistent gap between boys and girls in basic education. It behoves the education system to squarely recognise this disadvantage that boys face in the Philippine setting where boys are less likely to progress and complete education, more likely to drop out, and more likely to underachieve. This means policy and programme initiatives and strategies that would effectively address the barriers that boys particularly deal with. It has been noted that policies and mechanisms on gender equality in the Philippines tend to focus largely on women and girls. This may specifically mean looking at the conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme of the government and revising the mechanism to reflect the opportunity costs for boys who are pressurised to work instead of attending school

This may mean instituting scholarship and affirmative programmes that would attract more men to enter the teaching force. This may mean strengthening teacher training programmes that advocate gender-sensitive pedagogies and classroom approaches. Whatever interventions would be adopted should be anchored on and guided by an adequate understanding and analysis of the causes and factors that have brought about this gender inequality in the first place, and of how gender helped shape the quality of educational experiences, achievements and aspirations. For while parity issues are important, gender equality in education requires that we go beyond the numbers to examine underlying structural inequities and to empower learners to challenge gender discrimination.

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Gender Issues in School Education: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka enjoys high level of gender parity in the education sector, having followed an enlightened policy on gender issues. The right to vote without restrictions, granted with universal suffrage in 1931, and the provision of education facilities for women without discrimination has established gender equity in Sri Lanka. Also, life expectancy for females is higher in Sri Lanka. Student enrolment at all stages of education system shows gender parity, and in fact there are more female students than males at the secondary level. The university intake clearly shows the number of females eligible for admission exceeds that of male students, and this trend continued for a reasonable number of years. For example, in 2015 the number of female students was 15936 while it was 9687 for males. The number of females completing different stages of education and passing examinations is also higher. However, the average literacy rate for females is less than that of males. Sri Lanka ranks as one of the most literate countries in South Asia, with the highest literacy rate in South Asia. This difference is mainly due to lower literacy levels of the older female population and rates show no disparity in the younger age-groups. With comparably developed countries, Sri Lanka's literacy gender difference is very low. This indicates that Sri Lanka will have a highly educated female population and that could change the literacy profile of the future generation.

The Education in Sri Lanka is a large focus for the country as a whole, its Constitution upholding education as a basic right for all people. The educational system in Sri Lanka was developed after its integration

into the British Empire in the nineteenth century, and the Central Government and the Provincial Councils have since then a shared responsibility of providing free education for the population in this country. Most of the school statistics has shown that female quota in school education is larger than males. As compared to other countries, more females in Sri Lanka could gain different opportunities to enhance their education without any disturbances from the society. Thus Sri Lanka has eradicated gender disparities at the school level.

Sri Lankan society is primarily recognised as patriarchal and male-centred. Due to this, a hidden gender difference has been created in the society and also in the school education. The construction of gender differences may be reinforced in schooling with staff and students consistently associating or attributing certain behaviours and characteristics to one gender over the other and then acting accordingly. Gender differences in local education indicate that children produce constructions of gender (masculinity and femininity) that 'fit' social norms in the peer group and in wider society. These include giving preference and more time to particular behaviours, interests, and school subjects whilst shunning or avoiding others. Most people think that boys are more active than girls in schools, but the reality is different. Girls are actively involved in school activities like boys.

The gender difference in school education not only depends on social norms, but is also associated with Sri Lanka's educational policies. Their attempts and achievements in promoting gender equality and freedom since establishment of free education policy in 1942 might have impacted students' participation at all levels of education, resulting in a well-articulated and planned education system which could be introduced with strong government support. Sri Lanka is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and a multi-lingual country. The government has always ensured implementing its policy of school education according to societal needs and in view of social factors, because of which the Sri Lankan Government could deal with gender- based discrimination and other associated factors that may otherwise pose severe challenges in school education.

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The Gender Dimension in Learning Achievement and Transition in Vietnam

Vietnam has undergone a major socio-economic transformation over the past quarter century, rising from one of the poorest countries in the world to a middle income country. Today, it continues to develop rapidly, becoming more integrated with the global economy and undergoing significant regulatory and structural changes. Vietnam has also made remarkable progress on gender equality, but important gender differences still remain. On the positive side, Vietnam has had considerable progress in addressing gender disparities in education.

Women have made major gains in educational enrolment, but are still highly segregated into particular fields. The gender gap in schooling has been eliminated and women have caught up and even surpassed men in terms of attaining college degrees.

The only gender education gap that still exists is among certain ethnic minority groups. However, there is a significant degree of segregation of men and women in their fields of study, which is connected to the significant segregation in terms of occupation and industry of employment as well. Another concern is that educational materials still promote gender stereotypes. A significant degree of segregation in fields of study also exists, which is connected to the significant segregation in occupation and industry of employment as well. Vietnam has passed important laws and policies in relation to gender equality but implementation is far from satisfactory due to a lack of knowledge of these laws, a lack of implementing capacity, the limited presence of women in public decision-making forums and in politics generally.

There still exists a gender gap in the learning outcomes in science and technology subjects between male and female students in the ethnic minority group and remote areas. The gender stereotyped idea and perception of society, as well as among teachers and parents about women's role in society is considered a barrier for female students in accessing education in general, and to choose subjects like science and technology, in particular. This perception needs to be changed for further promotion of gender equity. This report makes a series of recommendations aiming at gender equality in education in Vietnam.

Recommendation 1: Increasing the quantity and quality of data research for monitoring and analysing gender issues. Despite the increasing attention to gender issues within the policy domain, data on key gender issues continues to lag behind. In addition, research is needed on culture and norms and how they influence work decisions.

Recommendation 2: Revising educational curricula and materials to better promote gender equality. Continued efforts are necessary to transform the content of educational materials and textbooks in order to break down gender stereotypes, encourage girls to enter various fields of study, address various aspects of sexuality and gender identity which contribute to gender-based violence, other forms of violation of women's human rights, and sex-selected abortions.

Recommendation 3: Promoting gender equality in schools in order to improve the opportunities for female students to have access to Mathematics and Technology.

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News from Member Institutions
(July - December 2016)

Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

Australia

- A new report written by ACER Chief Executive Professor Geoff Masters AO has called for a new level of cooperation between governments to address worrying trends in Australian schools.
- The latest Australian Child Wellbeing Project report – from a study undertaken by a team of researchers at Flinders University, the University of New South Wales and ACER – released in Canberra today, reveals marginalised students are more likely to report low levels of wellbeing.

Bangladesh Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Bangladesh

- CAMPE Vice Chair Ms. Aroma Dutta received the prestigious Begum Rokeya award on 14 December, 2016 conferred upon her by the Government of Bangladesh.
- A discussion meeting on "We take position to end violence against women" was held at CAMPE training centre on 8 December, 2016 with all staff of CAMPE.

National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM)

Bangladesh

- Nurul Islam Nahid MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Education, has inaugurated the 148th Foundation Training Course.

Bangladesh Rural Management Committee (BRAC)

Bangladesh

- As the world celebrated the International Day of the Girl Child on 11 October, 2016, BRAC, Australia, and the UK reiterated their commitment to investing in girls' empowerment and working with the Government of Bangladesh to end child marriage.
- BRAC Manthan Digital Innovation Award announced 14 winners for 2016 on 8 October, at the Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden.

International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

Paris

- As part of the ongoing research programme, 'Exploring the organisation and management of teacher careers', IIEP hosted a three-day Expert Meeting from 12 to14 December, 2016.
- In 2015-16, UNESCO-IIEP coordinated research on the use and utility of school grants in four countries of French-speaking Africa and the Caribbean: Haiti, Madagascar, DRC and Togo. A policy seminar was held in Paris from 10 to 12 October, 2016.

National Institute of Education (NIE)

Sri Lanka

- The 30th National Institute of Education Day Ceremony was organised at NIE, Meepe on 31 December, 2016.

National University of Educational Planning and Administration

New Delhi, India

- Department of Educational Administration, NUEPA in collaboration with the Directorate of Education, Govt. of Chhattisgarh has conducted State Level Conference of DEOs and BEOs on 15-16 December, 2016 at Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

- A Capacity Building Programme on 'Strategic Planning, Financing and Quality Development of Education for Education Officers of Sri Lanka' was organised by NUEPA in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Govt. of Sri Lanka on 5-6 November, 2016.

- A Workshop on 'Field Experiences of Decentralisation of School Management at the Elementary Level' was organised by 'Department of School and Non-formal Education from 7-11 November, 2016.

- A Workshop on 'Improving the Participation of Children in Elementary Schools' was organised by Department of School and Non-formal Education from 14-16 December, 2016.

Aga Khan University (AKU)

Pakistan

- Aga Khan University is set to collaborate with the globally recognised independent accreditation and academic standards body, the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

- Convocation ceremony held in Nairobi at the Aga Khan University. Prof. Collette Suda, Principal Secretary, State Department for University Education, Ministry of Education was the Chief Guest of the ceremony.

- In a three-day event, children, doctors, nurses, engineers, entrepreneurs, architects and other professionals came together to design a 12-storey kids' healthcare centre of the future at the first-ever paediatric hackathon hosted by Aga Khan University (AKU), Hack Paeds 2017.

Aga Khan Education Services

Pakistan

- Aga Khan Early Learning Centre awarded highest accreditation from the UK National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA).

SEAMEO-INNOTECH

Philippines

- The 5th batch of GURO21 and TEACHeXCELS learners in Region XII successfully wrapped up their courses last 28-30 November, 2016 in General Santos City.

- From 16-23 November, 2016, 30 school leaders and officers of the Ministries of Education from the 10 SEAMEO member- countries participated in the INNOTECH programme "*Excellence in Strategic Thinking and Innovation*" held at Manila, Philippines.

Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES)

Vietnam

- On 21 December, 2016, Professor Châu Văn Minh, President of the Vietnam Academy of Sciences and Technologies, was awarded a certificate of merit to Marine Herrmann, IRD LEGOS at the Hanoi University of Science and Technology, for her remarkable contribution.

- The medal for the cause of education in Vietnam was awarded to Jean-Pascal Torréton, IRD Representative in Vietnam, by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam for the support of the IRD in the field of higher education and training by research after proposition of The National Economic University, long-term partner of IRD.

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