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Topic (ii) Gender equality indicators

Monitoring Gender equality in framework of Education for All

Submitted by UNESCO¹

Contributed Paper

Gender equality is one of the fundamental goals in human development highlighted at numerous global conferences including the World Conference on Women in Beijing, the World Summit on Children, and the Jomtien and Dakar education fora. The importance of gender equality is re-affirmed in the UN Millennium Development Goals.

The 2000 Education for All (EFA) Assessment revealed that considerable progress has been made in improving access and participation to education. However, in many cases little or no success has been achieved in narrowing the gender gap. While discrimination against girls and young women is still strong in many countries of West and Central Africa and in Southern Asia, in other countries or regions, gender disparities have been eliminated or are at the disadvantage of boys. Governments decided then to increase efforts to close the gap, and commitments were made to achieve gender equality in education by 2015.

Commitments to Gender Equality in Education:

Three out of six EFA Goals during the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 were concerned with gender equality in education:

- Goal 2:** ensuring that by 2015 all children, **particularly girls**, ... have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- Goal 4:** achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, **especially for women**
- Goal 5:** eliminating **gender disparities** in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving **gender equality** in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

The Millennium Development Goals re-affirmed the concerns of gender equality in two of their objectives:

- Goal 2:** Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and **girls** alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- Goal 3:** Eliminate **gender disparity** in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

“Eliminating gender gaps and gender inequality means bringing the disadvantaged sex at par with the favoured. It ensures that both sexes leave the school system with an education that provides life skills and permits them to pursue higher levels of education or vocational training according to their capabilities and

¹ Prepared by Said Belkachla

is free from gender stereotyping. Most importantly, they should be equipped with skills and attitudes that will help them to pursue their potential regardless of their sex”².

The indicators

Gender specific indicators will have to be identified so that progress can be monitored. The development of indicators and collection and analysis of data are vital functions in providing information to governments to set priorities, design strategies and follow up on progress made towards achieving gender equality in access to quality education.

Current data gathered from regular school surveys and population censuses are essential for obtaining a general overview of gender differences in illiteracy and education. Such data allows UNESCO to calculate some quantitative gender indicators.

Gender issues can be considered using specific gender disparity indicators. Two measures of gender disparities are commonly used in comparing indicators in education:

- The *Gender Gap* is the difference between the male and the female rate. A negative gap indicates disparity in favour of girls or women. A positive gap indicates disparity in favour of boys or men;
- The *Gender Parity Index (GPI)* is the ratio between the female and the male rates (F/M): a GPI of 1 indicates parity; a GPI between 0 and 1 means disparity in favour of males; a GPI > 1 means disparity in favour of females. The further the GPI is from 1 the greater the advantage to one sex or the other.

Preference is given to GPI since it is independent of the magnitude of the indicators studied.

On the international level, the measurement of progress can be done by comparing the performances between male and female in literacy as well as in primary and secondary education through the basic indicators. Efforts can be measured either in absolute terms by calculating the difference between the rates in percentage points, or in terms of parity indices between male and female calculated starting from the indicators of literacy, school access and participation. Main indicators are compared to measure disparities³:

- *Adult literacy rate*: The number of literate adults expressed as a percentage of the total adult population aged 15 years and above
- *Youth Literacy Rate*: The number of literate youth aged 15-24 years expressed as a percentage of the total adult population aged 15-24 years
- *Apparent Intake Rate* for primary school measures new entrants as a percentage of the population of official school-entrance age. This is a rough indicator of the potential capacity of a country to accommodate school-age children.
- *Gross Enrolment Ratio* for primary and secondary school: Number of pupils enrolled in the given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the relevant official age group.
- *Net Enrolment Ratio* for primary and secondary school: Number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group.
- *Repetition rate*: Number of pupils who are enrolled in the same grade (or level) as the previous year, expressed as a percentage of the total enrolment in the given grade (or level) of education
- *Transition rate*: The number of pupils (or students) admitted to the first grade of a higher level of education in a given year, expressed as a percentage of the number of pupils (or students) enrolled in the final grade of the lower level of education in the previous year.

² UNESCO/PROAP, 2002: “Guidelines for Preparing Gender Responsive EFA Plans”.

³ UNESCO, 1997: “Gender-Sensitive education statistics and indicators”.

It is of interest also to examine the behaviour of girls as compared to boys, whether they tend to remain in school more or less than boys, and whether they perform better or worse than boys. One may compare gender disparities as regards access to schooling with disparities as regards school survival. Another way of analysing differences in the school life is to compare male and female school life expectancy.

- *Survival rate* to grade 5 for primary school: The survival rates measure the proportion of a cohort entering the first grade of primary school who eventually reach Grade 5, the level at which it is believed children acquire permanent literacy;
- *School life expectancy*: Number of years a child is expected to remain at school, or university, including years spent on repetition. It is the sum of the age-specific enrolment ratios for primary, secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary education.

Even in countries where overall gender parity is achieved, large disparities may appear in the distribution of male and female students among the different fields of study in technical and vocational and higher education. It may be useful, when studying female participation in the different fields of study, to possess a tool to measure how men and women tend to concentrate in specifically “feminine” or “masculine” fields respectively. The index of gender segregation by fields of study can be used in this area.

- *Index of gender segregation* by fields of study: The percentage of all persons enrolled at a given level of education who would need to change their field of study if the ratio of females to males were the same in all fields, assuming that there is no change in the total enrolment.

The subject of gender differences in school performance is measured through national exams or on the basis of the results of international student assessment. Results from these tests show a picture of girls often outperforming boys. But more studies are needed to have a global picture of gender inequality of school achievement.

It's worth noting that specific additional data are necessary if one wants to study inequalities more in depth. Such data might include measures for girls' school attendance, low female participation in scientific and technical fields, analysis of children and communities' needs, parents' perceptions and expectations, public policies, resources allocation and school infrastructure, etc. This information would allow qualitative issues of gender equality to be monitored, e.g.:

- What is the physical quality of schools, including building safe and accessibility? What is the availability of safe drinking water and separate toilets for girls and boys?
- What is the quality of the curriculum? Is it gender sensitive? Does it value girls' life experience outside school?
- What is known about boys' and girls' learning strategies? Do they differ? And if yes, how is that addressed in the pedagogical techniques utilized? How open are curriculum and educators in accommodating such differences? How are teachers/educators prepared or trained to take these differences into account?
- What is the quality of the learning environment? Does it offer challenges and role models for both boys and girls? Are there male and female teachers who can serve as role models at both primary and secondary levels? Does it provide equal opportunity for girls and boys to participate and develop leadership skills?

Some figures of gender disparities

Adult literacy: Literacy rates among women have been improving at a faster rate than among men – from 69% in 1990 to 74% in 2000 for women compared to 82% to 85% for men during the same period. However, most of the world's adult illiterates are women: in 2000 they numbered 549 million compared to 313 million illiterate men, or 64% of the total of 862 million illiterate adults.

The gender gap is more pronounced in South and West Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Arab States and North Africa than in other developing regions. The gap in favour of men can be substantial – around 23 percentage points in the Arab States and North Africa, and in South and West Asia in 2000. There was a 17 percentage-point difference between male and female literacy rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. This compares to less than 12 points in East Asia and Pacific and around 2 points in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Youth literacy: In 2000, there were around 140 million illiterate youths in the world (16% of total adult illiterates) and 86 million of them (60%) were female. These individuals either did not have access to education in the past decade or failed to acquire the minimum reading and writing skills at school.

Access to school: The latest available data, for school year 1999/2000, revealed three scenarios:

- *Access to school for girls is lower than for boys.* Most countries fall into this category. In some countries of Central and West Africa, as well as Ethiopia and Yemen, the apparent intake rate for girls was three quarters or less than the rate for boys.
- *Gender parity in access has been reached.* This pattern is found in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, in some Arab States and in the Asia and Pacific region.
- *Disparities in access favour girls.* In the South and East Africa region, slight disparities in favour of girls are noted in Namibia, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius and Zambia. Gender imbalances in favour of girls are also observed in some Asian, Latin American and Caribbean countries.

School life expectancy: In half of the countries for which data are available in 1999/2000, girls entering school stay at school for less time than their male counterparts. Countries where SLE is lowest are also those where gender gaps are most pronounced, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa, but also in some Arab and Asian countries. In the other half of the countries, school life expectancy is the same for girls and boys, or in favour of girls. Among those where the gender gap favours girls are some Asian and Southern African countries, Arab states, and most Latin American and Caribbean countries.

School participation: In terms of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), it should be noted that:

- Disparities in favour of boys are still the general rule in Central and West Africa and, to a lesser extent, in the Arab States. It is also the case in some Asian countries, especially from South and West Asia.
- Disparities are particularly high in Yemen, Chad, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Benin, and Pakistan, where enrolment ratios for girls are two thirds or less than those registered for boys. In most of these countries, the absolute gender gap (male minus female GER) exceeds 30 percentage points and is as high as 43 points in Yemen and Pakistan.
- There are a few countries in Southern Africa where boys are at a disadvantage. Slight disparities in favour of girls also appear in some Caribbean and Central Asian countries, as well as in China.

Disparities between girls' and boys' enrolment at school are usually lower when only children of regular school age are taken into account. The differences are slightly more significant in Sub-Saharan African countries and the Arab States than in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Asia. Although more boys are enrolled overall, they also make up more of the over-age pupils. Thus, higher GER for boys is partly explained by the fact that boys are more likely than girls to remain in school beyond the official school age, in part because they are more likely to repeat years of schooling. Countries with higher girl repetition also have among the lowest overall enrolment and the greatest disparities in favour of boys in terms of access and enrolment.

Survival rate to grade 5: While admission rates are usually lower for girls, survival rates are more often equal or higher for girls. This means that once girls are in school they usually progress as well as boys, if not better.

Transition to secondary: Although gender disparities are still substantial during the transition to secondary education in many countries, they are not as large as those observed for primary enrolment. This is the case in most countries where disparities in access are highest, notably Central and West African countries. In countries where disparities in access were close to parity, the imbalance in transition to secondary education tends to be in favour of girls.

Participation in secondary: Overall, gender disparity patterns observed in developing countries for primary education become more marked in secondary education. Comparing the gender parity index of gross enrolment ratios for primary and secondary education shows:

- Countries with high disparities in primary education see their gender gaps widen in secondary education. These countries are typically from Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly from Central and West Africa, but also include Yemen, Iraq and Mauritania among the Arab States as well as India, Laos and Cambodia in Asia.
- Countries that are close to, or have reached, parity in primary education seem to close the gap in secondary or show disparities in favour of girls. Most countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, but also some Asian and Pacific countries, some Arab States and various Southern and Eastern African countries belong to this category.
- Imbalances in favour of girls become sharper in secondary education. This situation is found particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in Southern Africa (Namibia and Lesotho) and Asia (Philippines and Mongolia).

Factors affecting gender equality in education

Various factors may hinder gender equality in education with relative importance from country to country. They can be grouped into four main categories that affect both demand and supply⁴:

- *Socio-economic factors:* poverty, direct costs (fees, uniforms, transportation), high opportunity costs/lower rate of return, girls needed for household/agricultural tasks, residence in remote/low population areas, limited employment opportunities for graduates, lower remuneration for women.
- *Cultural factors:* parents' low level of education, lower priority for girls' education, girls' education perceived as incompatible with traditional beliefs and/or religious principals, early marriages and pregnancies, role of the girl/women as wife and mother, sceptical attitudes towards the benefits and outcomes from educating girls.
- *Political/institutional factors:* budget constraints, structural adjustment programmes, insufficient public support for the poor, political instability, inconsistent educational policies, poor quality of education programmes, inappropriateness of education systems to local learning needs, lack of clear strategy for women and girls' education, lack of public support for women in scientific activities, limited employment prospects, poor data collection mechanisms, inadequate elements for progress assessment and policy formulation.
- *Factors linked to the school:* limited school/classroom space, low proportion of female teachers, teachers untrained/sensitized to gender issues, stereotypes at school (curricula, textbooks), school curricula in conflict with traditional culture, orientation of girls/women to non scientific fields, lack of accommodations for or exclusion of pregnant adolescents and young mothers, sexual harassment, insecurity, distance from school, lack of school canteens, poor quality of hygienic facilities, school calendar incompatible with farming cycles.

All these factors have some consequences on performances of education systems. The main results can be summarized as following:

- limited access to schooling, low female enrolment, school drop-out, low female participation in scientific/technical fields, high proportion of illiterate women, reduced contribution to national economic and social development, etc.

⁴ Idem

Strategies

One of the criteria of EFA national action plans evaluation is to see which strategies the countries plan to carry out to eliminate gender disparities, but also by which means they envisage to ensure the follow-up and the evaluation of progress in this direction. Specific objectives and strategies to met EFA goals will depend on the results of the situation analysis. The table below gives some examples of possible objectives and strategies⁵.

Objectives	Strategies
Closing gender gaps in primary and secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of subsidies/incentives • Providing transport and/or boarding facilities • Providing single-sex learning environments
Reducing the drop-out rate for girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the quality of the learning environment and the relevance of the education provided • Improving relations between school and home and convincing parents to keep girls in school to at least the end of the primary cycle • Adjusting learning programmes to be friendly to learners of both sexes
Increasing girls' pass rate from primary to secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving access to, and quality of secondary schools • Providing female teachers as role models, ensuring that learning contents and teaching methods are fair and facilitating learning of both sexes, influencing changes in social and cultural practices such as child marriage • Lobby for legal changes which will still keep girls in school after pregnancy
Closing learning achievement gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of teachers in gender responsiveness • Change of teaching-learning practices with emphasis on inclusiveness • Child-centred learning, and team work
Increasing the number of girls in science and math streams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing girls with positive role models, and relating science and math contents and teaching methods to both boys and girls • Demystifying myths, such as women scientists cannot find husbands

⁵ UNESCO/PROAP, Idem