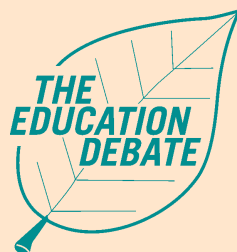




MAINSTREAMING GENDER FOR BETTER GIRLS' EDUCATION: POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Ramya Subrahmanian



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SERIES FOREWORD

There is a growing sense of momentum around education in South Asia. Governments are engaged and a lot has been done. The Millennium Development Goals have added an additional spur to action as indeed have greater awareness on gender disparity and the need for educated workers. There is though a long way to go if the rights of all children are to be realised.

Providing access to education is only part of the story. Once children are enrolled and attending, the quality of their education must make it a worthwhile experience. The special needs of girls in the social and cultural context of South Asia call for special measures, as do the needs of all children in situations of conflict and emergency. South Asia has many rich, positive examples of success in advancing basic education. It is important that these are shared and built on if there is to be an overall improvement throughout the region.

This series of papers aimed at promoting better education in South Asia grew out of collaboration between the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia and the newly formed UN Girls' Education Initiative, and had its genesis at a Regional Meeting on Accelerating Girls' Education in South Asia in February 2005.

Essentially the series is intended to be a forum that allows debate, exchange of ideas and to break new ground. It will aim to capture the momentum and extol good practice to all engaged in educational policy and implementation.

The series does not seek to represent a specific viewpoint, but rather is intended to enable specialist contributors to present issues in greater depth and breadth than is often the case in official documents.

Initially the series will focus on girls' education but it is hoped that eventually it will broaden into a platform for more general education issues related to South Asia, with a particular emphasis on social inclusion. Contributions and feedback are invited from academics and practitioners from throughout the South Asia region and beyond. The series editors are particularly interested in submissions which offer new ideas and strategies that can assist those needing answers, and which can add impetus to the ongoing efforts in the region to provide quality education for all.

Come, join the debate!

INTRODUCTION

The South Asian region has, despite deep social and economic inequalities, and high levels of poverty, made rapid progress towards universalizing girls' education and achieving gender parity, within a relatively short space of time. The burst in action in the countries of Bangladesh, in particular, followed by India, Pakistan and Nepal, has been the result of the confluence of numerous factors – a more conducive international aid environment that has seen significant amounts of aid disbursement to primary and basic education, governments more aware of the importance of promoting gender equality, supported by international processes such as the Beijing conference of 1995, feminist movements having pushed for greater attention to issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, amongst

others. Numerous civil society innovations have also helped offer demonstration models for governments to learn from and adapt, and these have ensured that the enrolment of girls has risen at a speedy level.

Significant challenges remain. These are well-known and merit just a very brief summary. Gender disparities in enrolment remain high in India, Pakistan and Nepal, despite the progress made. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have low survival rates, and India has the highest survival disparity in favour of boys. These disparities widen at secondary and tertiary levels. The gap at secondary level is particularly disturbing. The transitions between primary–upper primary and upper primary–secondary are the weak links in the chain of gender equality; and they coincide with the time

that a girl's future opportunities are crucially determined.

Educational progress is at a critical juncture. Although the 2005 MDG target has been missed, we have made enough progress to know broadly what needs to be done and how. The challenges are to take those lessons and link them together for a 'total' approach to education, which links up the various stages of education, and the various types of intervention for children's education, and streamlines movement between them as far as possible. Many children now have access, but are falling through the cracks between provision of different stages of education, or different types of provision. In the area of gender, there is a related challenge: moving from parity to equality. While many advocacy slogans about girls' education have been important in getting the region quite far in terms of reaching out to girls, this has only led as far as making progress towards gender parity. Attention needs to focus on the next goal – gender equality.

"Making that shift [to gender equality] requires getting a better grasp of what is meant by gender equality ... and how institutions and systems can be strengthened to ensure that they uphold standards of gender equality that facilitate and stimulate social change processes."

Making that shift requires getting a better grasp of what is meant by gender equality, how it can be measured and thereby progress towards it marked, and how institutions and systems can be strengthened to ensure that they uphold standards of gender equality that facilitate and stimulate social change processes.

However, there are numerous systemic issues that remain to be resolved, in order to achieve sustainable change in education for girls in the Indian sub-continent in particular. Sri Lanka and the Maldives achieved high rates of education and gender parity through systemic reforms that helped promote more effective management of service delivery. Yet in the remaining countries of the region, the development of systemic capacities, structures and appropriate processes remains mired in political and institutional failures. These provide the challenges to which this paper is broadly addressed. In this paper, the focus is on the capacities and resources that are associated with a) international aid modalities through which international resources and policy influence are being channelled; and b) gender mainstreaming within national and sub-national bureaucracies through which policies and programmes are designed.

The paper starts by asking: 'What is meant by better girls' education?' This section outlines some of the key issues raised by practitioners of equity and

quality based education interventions from the South Asian sub-region about what it will take to make a sustained difference on the ground. In particular, the focus is on concepts of gender equality that are required to frame operational strategies, in order to build the basis for long-term and empowering change processes.

Many of the requirements for a sustained change are not matched at present by existing capacities and strategies of institutions that facilitate policies, allocate resources, and determine the agenda at the macro level. These include donor agencies, governments and international and national NGOs that have a role and voice in shaping policy. In particular, the agenda for keeping alive the interests and needs of young girls, and the adult women who care for them in myriad ways, reduces in scope as we go higher up the policy chain.

What has come to be commonly known as 'gender mainstreaming' is in essence a complex and comprehensive set of strategies to effect, enable and sustain change. Yet, many of the efforts at policy level fail to reflect complex realities and needs.

In the second section, the question posed is: 'What is meant by mainstreaming gender?' Concepts of gender mainstreaming are briefly reviewed as are some issues relating to the record of gender mainstreaming within national government systems. This question is then located in the context of current trends in education policy and financing, particularly gender mainstreaming in the context of the shift towards Poverty Reduction Strategy papers as a basis for country development plans and for donor assistance, and Sector-Wide Approaches.

WHAT IS MEANT BY 'MAINSTREAMING FOR BETTER GIRLS' EDUCATION'?

First, what is meant by 'better girls' education'? Expansion of access is not a sufficient policy indicator of 'better girls' education', though clearly it is an important starting-point. What remains more important is to question what kind of education is being provided, and under what conditions. Merely getting girls to school is no guarantee of qualitative outcomes, a fact which is now well-established in international literature (see for example the Global Monitoring Report of 2003–04 published by UNESCO).

Reviews of promising and innovative practices on the ground have generated several lessons. These include the recognition that change for gender equality means not just providing incentives and creating opportunities for girls to participate in school alongside

boys. Important though such access expansion measures remain (Herz and Sperling, 2004), there is a critical need to create social consensus about the importance of girls' education. Where there is deep fear of the potential for change in gender relations in favour of greater equality between the sexes, which is likely to be generated as a result of more female participation in public life, from school to community to state, such social consensus is often developed through listing narrowly defined economic and social benefits, rather than emphasizing broader individual freedom outcomes. This is often a struggle in societies where gender equality is not considered a desirable aspect of the social order. However, without some effort to shift social consensus, first towards enabling access for girls to school and then

towards allowing girls an element of choice in decisions that affect their lives, there is unlikely to be sustainable gender parity, and meaningful movement from gender parity to gender equality.

Lessons from promising practices (Subrahmanian, 2005a; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005) also highlight the importance of linking promotion of girls' access to education to learning processes. To ensure sustainable improvements in female education, both access and quality reforms cannot be separately conceived, but require integrated conceptualization and planning. Efforts to prepare teachers to boost enrolments in school will prove only partially fruitful if the same teachers are not supported to improve their teaching skills and practices to ensure that those children all remain in school, with learning processes that are supported by school, community and family to the extent possible. This is particularly true for sustaining gender equity initiatives. Teachers may be given a role in mobilizing parents and getting girls to school, but if they do little to encourage girls in the class (or conversely, actively discourage girls) they are likely to be ineffective in promoting change.

Lessons from the South Asian Sub-region

A review of lessons from the South Asian sub-region held in 2004 generated

BY 'BETTER GIRLS' EDUCATION' WE MEAN ...

- a. Gender-sensitive targeting
- b. Deepening understandings of gender equality
- c. Reconceptualizing learning
- d. Making schools more responsive to local needs
- e. Child-centredness and the empowerment of girls
- f. Involving parents, especially mothers, in decision-making
- g. Intervening in social spaces to influence change
- h. Empowering and resourcing teachers, especially women teachers
- i. Building traditions that celebrate learning
- j. Using research to identify problems and hear voices of stakeholders
- k. Ongoing monitoring
- l. Legalizing rights.

several key lessons that have implications for efforts to scale up and sustain progress in the sub-region. These are elaborated below (see Box). They are not offered as a piecemeal menu for change, but as a set of actions and commitments that can together enable rapid change in the situation of girls' education.

Despite these rich lessons, schooling systems in South Asia remain weak, particularly in terms of systems

management and quality. Innovations are often operational outside the formal schooling system, and indeed succeed largely because they are not constrained by the difficulties of reforming large bureaucracies. The problem of 'islands of success' has been long recognized in development, and 'scaling up' is an issue that is being grappled with in many developing countries. Yet, the governance dimensions of education reform receive less attention despite recognition of its importance; changes in the 'mundane' everyday practices of bureaucracies, including auditing, monitoring and day-to-day task management, are necessary but are seldom the subject of education deliberations. The institutional basis of 'scaling up' attracts insufficient attention. Thus the focus on successful projects and innovative approaches continues, with little impact on the functioning of education bureaucracies, despite efforts to 'decentralize' and 'localize'. Efforts to reform, even when located within government, often operate as special programmes and initiatives.

Thus, 'scaling up' remains to a great extent a discussion about numbers, rather than institutions and processes (Subrahmanian, 2005a). For advocates of gender mainstreaming – who have long maintained the importance of systemic change in rules, procedures and resources distribution in order to ensure gender equality is reflected in all development policies, processes and

institutions – this remains a source of persistent frustration. When 'scaling up' is discussed without any attention to the roots of change required for gender aware development, or education service delivery, there is unlikely to be the kind of attention to gender-sensitive service delivery that is required for change in the ability of all girls to access schooling. As suggested earlier, the 'access' agenda is not just about enrolment (as defined as registration of the name of the child in school) – it includes the ability to attend school without disruptions. Where there are disruptions, ensuring that excluded girls have the ability to re-enter school and be encouraged to learn without encountering discrimination is critical. Removing restrictions on the freedom to learn, to play and to grow into young citizens with a wide palette of opportunities and capacities remains the overarching challenge. Of equal importance, from a gender equality perspective, is the concern that without attention to these systemic changes, boys will remain fettered within constructions of masculinity that are equally restrictive, and may continue to view women in stereotypical ways, perpetuating gender imbalances in ways that are socially and otherwise unproductive.

Yet the process of moving from small-scale innovations to designing institutional change based on lessons of these innovations is fraught with

questions. Are 'innovation' and 'institutionalization' terms in contradiction? Don't innovations succeed because they are small-scale and not embedded in large-scale bureaucratic systems? Is it feasible to think of changing systems given that in the short-term so much change appears to have been facilitated through temporary measures? On the other hand, are processes of change that rely on temporary measures likely to sustain?

What happens when temporary measures run their course? In countries where there are many alternative educational measures that provide schooling to out-of-school children, it is often hard to trace and know what happens to children once they move on from alternative programmes. This raises important issues about 'education mainstreaming', a term that reflects the expectation that alternatives will serve as feeders into the formal schooling system.

LESSONS FROM THE SOUTH ASIAN SUB-REGION

At a workshop held in 2004 on 'Promising Practices and Implications for Scaling Up Girls' Education', which brought together representatives of NGOs and governments in the sub-region who had been involved in innovative programmes that had demonstrated impact on girls' education, several lessons emerged which have been documented in the workshop report (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005) some of which are briefly presented here. These lessons show the interlinkages discussed above, between efforts to enrol girls, efforts to improve quality schooling through establishing locally responsive curricula and learning processes, and reforms that can make schooling systems more flexible and hence better adapted to local needs and constraints.

Gender sensitive targeting: A crucial dimension of gender-aware educational intervention and innovation is the targeting of those sections of populations who most require attention. Targeting particular sub-sets of groups, and giving preferential focus to girls in order to balance out social distortions in the allocations of resources and opportunities, are measures that have a proven impact on girls' education. Such targeting helps to focus attention on these groups of girls, in a way that enables their families and communities to view them in a new light, and to see the value of investing in their futures.

Deepening understanding of gender equality: Deepening focus on gender equality is often at odds with target-based approaches to development – because the strategies

involved often do not show tangible, measurable results but are more process-based. The more visible aspects of focus on gender parity – the demand for girls' education – may mask underlying social resistances to gender equality, and changing underlying social mores and views requires greater investment of time and effort.

Reconceptualizing learning: The failures of state systems largely represent failures to deliver modes of learning that are attractive, relevant and important for the diverse communities and individuals that make up a society. The importance of viewing education as a process that links to broader life processes helps education to be seen by communities as more widely relevant than the narrower audiences to which formal or official curricula may be currently oriented. Linked to this is the need to make schooling more responsive to local needs through recognizing the diversity of learners, and recognizing that different children will have different needs through the learning-cycle and may be differentially supported by their home environment.

Child-centredness and the empowerment of girls: Child-centredness, in the broad sense of keeping in mind the needs of diverse groups of children, also requires putting in place additional resources to help children deal with the adverse consequences of social prejudice and judgement, where required. While reconceptualizing learning is central to change, putting children at the centre does not only mean giving children responsibilities, or involving them in school decision-making processes, though these are also important elements of child-centred schooling. It also, importantly, requires that teachers and parents are brought in to the education process based on recognizing and valuing the principle of child-centredness. To empower girls in particular requires creating new skills for young girls that can enhance their ability to negotiate with their families to make changes in the kinds of decisions that may be conventionally made for girls, such as postponement of their marriage, which can enable them to advance in their schooling.

Involving parents, especially mothers, in decision-making: Mothers have been consistently identified as a key driver for change, especially for improving daughters' educational prospects. Reasons for targeting the involvement of mothers are not just about drawing on their roles as home makers and carers – but as a way of improving women's capacities and skills to hold service delivery accountable.

Intervening in social spaces to influence change: Interventions only at the level of the school are bound to leave untouched the many forms of discrimination that arise outside the schooling space. Creating a common platform for local project managers, parents, teachers and children provides a medium for the discussion of expectations and aspirations for girls' education, problems and the experience of change.

Empowering and resourcing teachers, especially women teachers: It is striking that most women who become teachers do so because their families see it as an 'appropriate' profession for women, as the work involves children, within an organization which allows regular vacations, which does not involve much investment in training and is seen to be relatively easy in terms of time and effort involved. Yet, for the very same reasons – the accommodation of women's dual responsibilities as home makers and earning members of the family – women teachers are highly constrained in the effective fulfilment of their professional roles. Women teachers are often constrained in terms of moving to take up teaching jobs in different areas, particularly away from urban centres, as the husband is often seen as the primary earner determining where the woman takes up her job. Even where women work hard, they shy away from taking on responsibilities (and equally, getting credit) for what they do. Concerns about security in more remote areas deter single women teachers from professional mobility. In all, despite being continuously recognized as key actors in universalizing girls' education, women teachers' needs and interests are rarely addressed.

Other lessons include ensuring that research forms the basis of intervention – at the points of design, monitoring and impact evaluation. Research that enables the voices of stakeholders to be heard – as opposed to just quantitative data that generates statistics but little insight into social dynamics that explain outcomes – can provide better direction to finding creative solutions to access and retention problems. Providing legal entitlements to back innovations – in the form of law that supports social changes that are required to support change in girls' access to and sustained achievements in education – forms another important set of measures identified.

From Gender Parity to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Adding Up to a 'Whole'?

Gender equality is a stated goal of the EFA agenda for 2015, though nowhere in the EFA documents is there a definition or analysis of what this might mean or entail. The lack of clarity has tended to result in conflation of the concept of gender parity, on the one hand, and gender equality, on the other

(Subrahmanian, 2005b). Gender parity measures the equality of outcome in enrolment between women and men, with parity being calculated in terms of the measure 1 (the male standard). Gender equality measures have tended to be defined in terms of the measurement of outcomes in subsequent educational progress of attendance, repetition and completion. Academic achievements are another measure of equality beyond parity.

While measurements of outcome are important, and a valuable yardstick for capturing the extent of equity or inequity, they are not sufficient for the purposes of planning and intervention if 'gender equality' is the stated goal. While such measures may enable better knowledge about how girls are faring relative to boys, they still provide little insight into the processes that are required to ensure that these outcomes result, given the diversity of contexts and forms of gender inequality. For gender equality to have substance as a concept, the route by which such outcomes are achieved needs to be better understood. Boys and girls have unequal life-chances at the outset in most communities in South Asia, though of course this picture is highly variable. Equality of outcomes is likely to be variably achieved depending on the starting positions of males and females in a given community or society.

The pathways to formal measurable equality thus require considerable investment in understanding and response. This means that in addition to understanding gender equality as '**equality of outcomes**' there needs to be an understanding of the concept as '**equality**

of treatment' as well as '**equality of opportunity**'. These in turn rest on a commitment to non-discrimination, to ensure the erasure of social norms that construct women and men as unequal in value in terms of their contributions and entitlements, and to ensure that all social actors are committed to eliminating stereotypes and attitudes that reinforce and perpetuate inequalities in the distribution of resources between women and men (Subrahmanian, 2005b). Assessing gender equality thus requires assessing whether fundamental freedoms and choices are as equally available to women as they are to men.

This deeper meaning of gender equality is made clear by its twinning with the term 'women's empowerment' in the MDGs, and the selection of education as a target to measure progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality. Empowerment is defined as a person's capacity to make effective choices; that is, as the capacity to transform choices into desired actions and outcomes (Alsop and Heinsohn, 2005). For women in South Asia and elsewhere, this capacity is often denied owing to a set of social structures that view women as incapable of making decisions and choices, and thus under the guardianship of male protectors. Discrimination based on this assumption, this construction of women as unequal to men in matters of decision-making, ownership and

"[Empowerment] for women in South Asia ... is often denied owing to a set of social structures that view women as incapable of making decisions and choices ..."

individual rights, continues, despite some legal advances that stipulate equality.

Empowerment is a complex process, bringing together individual capacities and structures of opportunity. Alsop and Heinsohn (2005) break empowerment down into two core components – the **capacity to make purposive choice**, and the **opportunity structure**, which refers to the institutional context in which that choice is made. The former refers to the kinds of assets (material or non-material) that an individual has and can use to make purposive choices, and the latter refers to the kinds of choice that are made available through existing structures and contexts within which the individual is engaged (legal, policy as well as normative). Through the interplay of these, particular outcomes of empowerment are derived which break down, according to Alsop and Heinsohn, into ‘degrees of empowerment’ measured by the existence of choice, the use of choice, and the achievement of choice. Relevant questions thus become those of process and context: Does the choice exist? Does the person make use of the choice? And what outcome does the exercise of that choice result in?

Applying these conceptual questions to the project of gender education and promoting girls’ education will help take us beyond the limited indicators that we now have and use, which capture the

‘peopling’ of schools and education related bodies (such as VECs), and at best gendered outcomes, but move us little towards understanding whether substantive gender equality is being achieved, and whether girls and women are being empowered en route to these desired educational outcomes.

Hence the call for expanding the focus from quantitatively measurable outcomes to qualitatively recognizing processes of change as critical to the broader societal shifts that are being sought with the shift from parity to equality. This requires recognizing that whilst making space for more girls and women to enter the public sphere is important, it is an insufficient condition for transformation of inequalities that can have a sustainable inter-generational effect in terms of gender equality. While social change may anyway be quite a slow process, efforts to qualitatively improve the conditions of participation of women and the capacities they have to negotiate change in their favour, will help to expedite progress and sustain achievements in gender parity in education.

What Do We Mean By ‘Mainstreaming’?

The Beijing 1995 Platform for Action identifies two strands in gender mainstreaming that have practical and operational implications: the integration

of gender in policy analysis and formulation, and ensuring that the priorities of women as well as men are heard in participatory consultation and development processes (Sibbons *et al.*, 2000).

Over a decade of mainstreaming experience many lessons have surfaced. Many of these are about the nature of the state and its institutions, and the kinds of spaces that are available for promoting transformative change. A key criticism about gender mainstreaming has been the 'narrowness' of the strategy despite the complexity of gender relations and the contextual variations in the processes and outcomes related to gender inequalities. Most mainstreaming 'machinery' looks the same irrespective of the country; most is located at the national level, rarely reaching sub-state levels where development change may be more manageable, and may more closely reflect the needs and priorities of particular sub-groups. The institutional coverage of mainstreaming actors and efforts has also been narrowly focused on particular departmental units or sections.

"A key criticism about gender mainstreaming has been the 'narrowness' of the strategy despite the complexity of gender relations and the contextual variations in the processes and outcomes related to gender inequalities."

A second key criticism has been that gender mainstreaming efforts have necessitated simplifying concepts relating to gender inequality and gender relations, which have in turn fuelled unreal expectations of the ways in which social change takes place (Subrahmanian, 2004b). This is particularly evident in relation to some of the issues raised in the last section about the conflation of gender parity with gender equality, underlying the more complex processes that underline gender inequalities that need to be transformed.

A third criticism has been about policy evaporation – the process through which gender fades out of the explicit commitments and actions that follow rhetorical claims of the importance of gender and development – and the lack of analytical clarity about what 'gender' means. Recent literature on international instruments of policy and resource coordination emphasizes both analytical weakness and policy evaporation. The lack of attention to organizational structures is also noted to act as a constraint on following through more impressive policy statements (Kanji and Salway, 2000).

Education, compared with many other sectors, has been most receptive to issues of gender, as girls' education has been identified as an important trigger for other kinds of social change and positive development outcomes, and

also a matter of individual right. However, most measures to address the large disparities between females and males in education have tended to focus attention on providing incentives targeted at girls, and at increasing the representation of women in social processes such as School Committees and Village Committees. While the impact (and policy value) of these initiatives is yet to be systematically studied at a large scale, it is clear that there is a difference between standardized mass-scale approaches that set up participatory processes, and those that focus on smaller scale but more intense processes of engagement with communities. This difference is qualitative, pointing to the fact that to make gender 'mainstream' it is the quality of effort that matters, not just the quantity.

Similarly, it is often suggested that there is a need to increase the number of females at all levels of the education system with a focus of attention on building their capacity. There is a danger that this can be tokenistic, with women continuing to play a relatively minor role either because of the types of responsibilities they are given, or because of their own lack of confidence and/or other commitments which constrain them from carrying out their work effectively. In many countries, quotas are set for representation of women on school management committees. Even where women are included on the committee, they either do

COMMON BARRIERS IDENTIFIED:

- Lack of political will
- Underfunding of units and ministries given responsibility for mainstreaming efforts
- Marginalization and frequently shifting location of units within bureaucratic structures
- Institutionalization of patriarchal interests in the norms, rules and practices of organizations
- Deep-seated resistance by different divisions to taking on cross-cutting issues such as gender, that would encroach on their budgetary allocations.

Source: Kabeer (2003)

not turn up to the meetings or, if present, often do not speak as conventional patterns of behaviour are re-played within the school setting. In some cases, the lack of women on the school committee is because, although they are selected, they refuse to join the committee since they are already overburdened with other work (Rose, 2003). There is no reason to expect that women on the committee have a particular concern for the education of girls and, even if they do, that they will have the authority to address it. This highlights the importance of transforming gender relations, rather than a piecemeal approach to including women.

"Recent literature on international instruments of policy and resource coordination emphasizes both analytical weakness and policy evaporation."

In the absence of appropriate channels and procedures within which communities can feed back to the system their concerns and complaints (e.g. on teacher absenteeism), there is likely to be little change in shifting accountability structures. Systems that link community participation to the formal education system are weak, if not non-existent. The continuing authority of 'providers' over 'clients' undermines the community space, relegating it to a supportive rather than catalytic

instrument in universal education policies. This has particular implications for women, as it does little to expose them to direct contact with the formal administration, thereby enabling them to learn new skills and thus break gender stereotypes within the community.

The effort to 'mainstream' gender in education has largely been focused on making women more 'visible' in processes. This continues to be an important goal. However, without deeper processes to help women and men in communities understand the costs of gender discrimination, these processes of visibilization can only partially help to foster the kind of change that is crucial to sustain girls' education.

REFRAMING AN APPROACH TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING

A reframed approach to mainstreaming can be best understood by understanding the difference between when we use the term girls' education and when we refer to a gender approach. While most definitions of gender mainstreaming recognize the importance of both targeted approaches as well as gender-aware reworking of institutions in general, gender mainstreaming continues to be associated with the former rather than the latter. However, these are not either/or options. Both are equally important. Targeted interventions send out clear messages about the value placed by the state/intervention on female education. However, on their own, they may do little to alter systems of provision in such a way that girls enjoy equality of treatment and equality of opportunity once they are within the system. For that, the gender-aware reform of educational systems is critical.

Conflation of the two will result in conflation between a) outcomes and processes (as argued earlier), and b) between the need for political constituency building through visibilizing a particular form of gender/educational injustice, on the one hand, and the way in which education inequalities can be addressed through the long-term, on the other. Both are necessary, and both must go hand in hand. It is easier for the purposes of visibility for governments to target specific initiatives at girls – however, evidence of the medium to long term

"It is easier for the purposes of visibility for governments to target specific initiatives at girls - however, evidence of the medium to long term impact of those initiatives on the targeted groups is lacking."

impact of those initiatives on the targeted groups is lacking. How do their life-chances and opportunities improve as a result? What openings are available to them following their participation in a targeted intervention? For these questions to be answered, firstly, the questions themselves must matter. An approach that demonstrates care about the impacts of these interventions on girls is sorely needed. In the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, this was seen in terms of a framework that linked rights to education, with rights within education, and rights through education (UNESCO, 2003; Wilson, 2003; Subrahmanian, 2003, 2005b). While the recent push in South Asia has focused largely on rights to education, there is much more progress to be done on rights within education. As for rights through education, this is an area which demands significant rethinking.

Secondly, we need an approach to education that links the progression of children through the education system in a more coherent whole. By fragmenting provision into compartmentalized bits, we run the risk of caring for segments of children's life, as a consequence of which dropouts often continue after one intervention has ended and the next has begun. For example, while many alternative providers do work at community level with parents to monitor children's progression once they enter the formal system, these work at small scale. The functioning of systems needs

to be revitalized in order for more systemic linkages to be put in place.

However, the records of most countries in the sub-region on this score are not impressive. Apart from Sri Lanka, and to an extent the Maldives, where gender parity has been achieved, in other countries of the region, a fundamental obstacle lies in unequal social relations, compounded by others of ethnicity, caste and religion. These also have permeated institutions of the state, and therefore the biggest challenge is to reframe institutions so that they work more fundamentally to the interests of the unequal, the marginalized and the disempowered.

But the big challenge is how to do this. The record in gender mainstreaming so far has been at best mixed. Most gender units established have limited power that is unequal to their very ambitious mandates. They are given the mandate to shape the fortunes of half of the target population – women – with scarce resources, no status within the system, and with little respect for the large tasks they are charged to achieve. This is by and large a global story, with some exceptions. In the name of gender mainstreaming, gender has been made the responsibility of a few specialist units, and largely seen as a matter of technical change, to be achieved through the creation of special procedures. While these may have resulted in visibility for gender issues, it

is hard to attribute achievements of greater awareness to these units, where wider social changes may have been encouraged equally, or more, by the actions of the women's movement with the support of media, for example. For these units the challenge has been two-fold: one, to continue to advocate the importance of gender to sceptics within the system; and second, to continuously evolve mechanisms to influence the agenda, monitor what is happening, and so on. To expect these specialized units to play either role without the necessary skills and power is to expect nothing short of a miracle. Mainstreaming gender in this way has led to the opposite – the 'ghettoization' and isolation of people working on gender.

For all the reasons cited above, there is the need to move from the language of 'mainstreaming' to the language of 'governance'. Although 'governance' has become fashionable with donor

"Discussions on 'gender mainstreaming' remain relevant, but only in the context of a broader discourse on institutional change ..."

discourse on 'good governance' as a precondition for economic and social development, there is no denying that better institutional functioning leading to better service delivery is desperately needed to justify public investment in education. Discourses on private sector involvement are deeply linked to the idea of state failure, even though the dependence of poor families, and girls in particular, on state provided schooling is fairly well-established in the region (Bennell, 2003). Discussions on 'gender mainstreaming' remain relevant, but only in the context of a broader discourse on institutional change, addressed to issues of reaching excluded groups, tackling inequality and improving accountability of functionaries and providers.

INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT FOR GENDER AND EDUCATION

International education policy has long emphasized the value of education for girls, a consensus that has found mention in almost every critical international conference or rights document relating to development, gender and human rights. This consensus has been achieved through the widely accepted correlations drawn between female education and economic and social development outcomes, which has seen economists support the contention that female education is good for the nation, the community and the individual. However, like national education policies, there is some concern that the international policy discourse has not been matched by institutional translation even through international instruments. In this

section, we briefly review the current international policy and institutional context in which girls' education is flagged as a priority, in order to explore some of the evidence of the limitations of gender mainstreaming efforts.¹

Analysis of gender mainstreaming in programme approaches is relevant both for governments as well as donors. The shift to programme approaches has been based on the view that project approaches, while effective in reaching local communities, do not aggregate upwards to a more holistic policy approach and systems. Programme approaches are particularly favoured by donors as a way of maximizing the utilization of aid resources, and reducing transaction costs. Greater donor

1 This section draws heavily on Subrahmanian (2004a).

harmonization is seen also as a way of reducing the transaction costs of multiple donors setting up their own processes for influencing and interacting with government. The shift to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) as a basis of determining both government and aid partners' priorities and goals is also seen as a way of enhancing government policy ownership and involving civil society stakeholders in the process of setting national and sub-national goals and strategies. The emphasis on shifting focus 'upwards' to budgets and systems, therefore, holds promise for the kinds of shifts required in gender mainstreaming, as discussed above.

In this section, two dominant measures through which education policy is nationally set and internationally supported are reviewed. Poverty Reduction Strategies are meant to set the basic policy frame for poverty reduction which, importantly, includes education. Sector-Wide Approaches refer to national strategies for a sector, including an overall sector policy framework, priorities, objectives and performance measures, expenditure programmes, institutional reform and capacity building measures and management, reporting and accounting arrangements (Sibbons *et al.*, 2000). SWAs include a mix of modalities, both projects as well as budgetary support constrained by conditions particular to a sector.

Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS)

PRS has been touted as a success of gender advocacy, in that gender issues are highlighted as central to national poverty reduction strategies, and the papers (PRSPs) developed by countries eligible for funding under this initiative are required to include detailed gender analysis in their analysis of poverty, and in their planning and expenditures for development. Rodenberg (2002) notes that the approach to gender in the PRS process draws on a wider 'win-win' scenario being articulated in international development discourse, that sees 'a high level of reciprocity between greater gender equity, economic growth, and effective poverty reduction' (p.2).

Four elements are central to the development of a PRSP (Rodenberg 2002):

- Comprehensive poverty analysis
- Clearly specified priorities for planned structural economic reforms and social programmes
- Adequate targets and indicators for the process of implementation and monitoring
- Description of the participatory process that has led to the preparation of a PRSP.

Reviews of Poverty Reduction Strategies reveal disappointing levels of attention to gender, and analytical limitations. Some of the issues are summarized below.

Limited attention to gender issues: A review of lessons from the analysis of the first PRSPs and Interim PRSPs (I-PRSPs) noted that for all areas included in the PRSP,² fewer than half of the documents included a detailed discussion of gender issues. Particularly little attention was paid to issues of participation in consultations, and in monitoring and evaluation, both significant for ensuring oversight and accountability for processes and results. A significant proportion of the documents, according to this review, contained 'no reference at all' to gender for many areas (Bamberger *et al.*, 2002: 338). While health and education tended to have more discussion of gender, issues of violence, water supply and sanitation, agriculture, land rights, rural development, safety nets and food security, and the environment received very limited discussion of gender (*ibid.*). Given the interlinkages between girls' access to and participation in education and other intersecting issues of health, safety, access to safe water and agriculture, these limitations can be seen as quite alarming. In particular,

they conclude that 'the discussion of how to integrate gender into the selection and design of priority public actions is quite limited, and there are many missed opportunities' (*ibid.*).

Analytical weakness: In their review of six World Bank Poverty Assessments from four sub-Saharan African countries (Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania and Uganda), Whitehead and Lockwood (1999) note a range of limitations in gender analysis, including variations in the way in which the language of 'gender and development' is used and the different methodologies used to measure and define poverty (see also World Bank, 2002). Their analysis and findings are not dissimilar to the findings of the review of PRSPs cited above. However, and importantly, they link the poverty of the gender analysis to overall weaknesses in the commitment and capacities of the World Bank with respect to gender issues. By perpetuating the long institutionalized association of women with 'human resources' alone, the Bank's central mandate and concern with economic growth issues have remained worryingly ungendered. The diversity of methodologies and approaches used could partly be explained by the weak operational guidelines prepared by the Bank in helping national teams develop

2 These include: Poverty Diagnosis (including gender and poverty, labour markets, income and employment, health, education), and Priority Public actions (safety nets, labour markets, income and employment, health and education), Indicators, targets and monitoring and evaluation, and Participation in the consultation process (Bamberger *et al.*, 2002).

their assessments (Whitehead and Lockwood, 1999).

A further element is the fit or the perceived lack of it between the issues raised by gender analysis, on the one hand, and the policy mandates within which these analyses are commissioned, on the other, revealing the selectivity and partial nature of policy recommendations. This is a crucial aspect explaining the analysis–policy gap. Gender analyses where done satisfactorily are contained within reports as annexes, and are not integrated into the overall analysis (World Bank, 2002). Whitehead and Lockwood's review of the Poverty Assessments found that much of the analysis was diluted or not taken into account in the drafting of the policy sections, particularly analysis drawn from the Participatory Poverty Assessments which record the voices of poor women and men. They note that despite the variety of methods and approaches employed in the different Assessments:

'...there is a remarkable consistency of views expressed on how to reduce poverty, with usually implicit, but occasionally explicit, implications for the treatment of gender. These consistent views can be traced to an orthodoxy in the World Bank regarding the nature of poverty and policy on poverty reduction...' (1999, p.545)

In particular, they note the probability of the standardizing effects of peer reviews on the policy sections on poverty reduction, and the implications of the standardization for the 'filtering out' of gender issues from the assessments. Processes of dilution are evident across the different stages of production of the Assessments – from the Participatory Poverty Assessments to the Poverty Assessments; and from the empirically derived analysis sections to the policy sections (Whitehead and Lockwood, 1999). This fits in well with Longwe's (1997) famous discussion of 'policy evaporation'.

The lack of consensus within organizations such as the World Bank on the operational definitions and perspectives as well as approaches in research and policy associated with gender analysis are only likely to multiply as several agencies come together to combine their resources towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Whitehead and Lockwood (1999) note the difficulties of coordinated approaches between national teams, consultants, different donors involved and task managers who all bring different understandings of gender to bear on their work, which only serve to compound the weakness of the operational guidelines discussed above. The struggle for consensus is likely to be the hardest challenge to surmount.

While the Millennium Development Goals represent one attempt to fashion a consensus on priorities, managing coordination is another challenge. Reliance on external consultants for 'gender expertise' that may be lacking within bureaucracies also substantially increases the potential for political and institutional distancing from the issues and perspectives that are relevant for gender mainstreaming.

New mechanisms for aid delivery have emerged out of a concern with the limited effectiveness of project approaches and the belief in the greater efficiency of resource pooling between donors and strengthened processes of debate and dialogue about key areas of priorities with governments. Bringing the state back into the picture has meant that issues of national ownership have been framed as central objectives of these new policy tools. Civil society activism has also influenced the development of participatory processes in national planning, such as Oxfam's support for civil society involvement in PRSP processes (Zuckerman, 2002). However, many commentators note that

objectives of national ownership, and within national contexts consultations with stakeholders, particularly the traditionally voiceless, have scarcely been met, belying the claim that these approaches constitute new participatory methods for building sustainable development (Christian Aid, 2001; Rodenberg, 2002). Bamberger *et al.* (2002) note that of 19 PRSPs and I-PRSPs, 10 had no reference to gender issues in relation to participation in consultation processes. A Christian Aid report notes that the involvement of poor people in PRSP related processes has been 'minimal and superficial' (2001, p.2), noting particularly the selectivity of issues on which consultation is invited and the lack of support provided by international agencies to local groups whose views contradict the policy directions of the PRSPs. Given the complexity of gender issues, and the difficulties of organizing and representing the voices of women, it is clear that gender issues are likely to be excluded to a greater extent from processes of negotiation and discussion. Even in sectors like health and education which appear to engage more with gender issues, stakeholder participation is traditionally very weak given that the nature of knowledge within those sectors is largely seen as technocratic and expert-led (Standing, 2001). The weakness of consultation approaches has reduced the legitimacy and credibility of such processes from the perspective of participatory development.

"Reliance on external consultants for 'gender expertise' that may be lacking within bureaucracies also substantially increases the potential for political and institutional distancing from the issues and perspectives that are relevant for gender mainstreaming."

With regard to education, many reviewers note that education has received the greatest direct attention of all sectors with respect to gender. This may be influenced by the fact that in those countries which emphasized the issue most, education as a whole has been seen as a matter of national policy concern. However, that gender equity is most articulated with reference to education demonstrates the power accorded female education in policy discourses. This is evident also in the MDGs, where education has become a proxy indicator for women's empowerment. However, many of the measures recommended reflect the targeted measures which were discussed earlier. For instance, the IMF and World Bank Source Book suggests the following strategies:

- Reducing the direct and opportunity costs of girls' schooling
- Siting schools closer to communities
- Adding latrines for girls
- Hiring more female teachers and female education administrators
- Involving mothers in school management and supervision
- Using multi-faceted strategies.

All of these suggest supply side increases in resources targeted at girls.

However, at the level of 'gendered' analysis of resourcing, these strategies do not directly address the social constraints faced by women in staying within schools and benefiting equitably from outcomes of schooling. None of the interim or full PRSPs of 16 countries reviewed for DFID and the World Bank in 2002 referred to quality issues at all in their education sections. Most PRSPs for example, while showing more attention to gender issues in education than in other sectors, offer highly generalized strategies or references to gender disparity.

Gender Mainstreaming in SWAps

Building partnership between donors and other stakeholders including government, SWAps have several inter-related components that allow for coherent and systematic gender analysis.

Gender budgets have been promoted as a tool that can help governments and international agencies map the extent to which gender commitments are translated into specific results and outcomes that can be traced, and budgets can be adjusted to reflect these commitments and their implementation (Sarraf, 2003).

Some of the gender issues raised in relation to SWAps are similar to those raised for PRSPs. An OECD-DAC review (2002) notes that in most cases they

"... in most cases [SWAp] focus on 'narrowly defined investments in women or girls rather than addressing the underlying conditions that produce unequal access for males and females'."

focus on 'narrowly defined investments in women or girls rather than addressing the underlying conditions that produce unequal access for males and females' (p.4). Further, without active and effective 'champions', gender equality issues tended to disappear off the agenda. The dilemma of specialist gender personnel was also raised – having specific posts for gender specialists tended to leave them isolated and removed the onus of gender-aware work from other staff; not having specialist staff meant that gender would disappear as a visible agenda issue. The OECD-DAC Working Party on Gender Equality in its review of donor support for gender equality in education (1999) noted that there was much confusion among agency staff working within the field of education regarding the concept 'mainstreaming'.

In a major study carried out for DFID, Sibbons *et al.* (2000) noted that access issues are emphasized over quality concerns, and that the strategies being promoted have implications for promoting girls' education. For example, they note that by emphasizing primary education, and not post-basic education,

the threshold for education appears to be set very low, which demotivates parental interest in educating girls. The review of gender mainstreaming in PRSPs and SWAp thus highlights that much remains the same with respect to gender despite new avenues for policy influence, and easier entry points with respect particularly to education.

Gender budgets in particular have been strongly promoted as an opportunity to move out of the very limiting notions of women and development that were restricted to traditional line departments that were to do with women or family affairs. Advocates of gender equality called for 'a broadening of the role of government budgeting in all sectors, and advocate using government budgeting to reduce inequality in both economic and social contexts' (Sibbons *et al.*, 2000). This new approach involves not only central agencies of government, but also sectoral ministries and local government. Unlike aid modalities, gender budgeting is a tool that was first developed by national governments, and is now part of the toolkit that international agencies are promoting to further gender analysis in planning processes. These support overall efforts to promote budgetary reform through the articulation of Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks, which seek to plan expenditure on the basis of assessment of current and future revenue and expenditure streams.

Diop's (2004) account of gender mainstreaming in Rwandan education confirms some of these points. She points out that gender budget exercises remain largely perceived as requiring a disaggregation of allocations earmarked for 'women', rather than understanding

the importance of and developing methods for analysing and interpreting gender disaggregated impacts of resource allocations. This is also a feature of policy making in India (see Jha and Subrahmanian, 2006).

WAYS FORWARD

In summary, this paper has raised a few key points in moving the gender agenda forward in education. One is to evaluate and derive policy lessons from the rich experience of innovations in gender and education that exists in South Asia. These policy lessons need then to be mainstreamed, so that they permeate all aspects of educational policy and implementation.

Implementation of gender equitable policy needs to move beyond ‘targeting’ women and girls, to thinking systematically about the linkages between different sub-sectors of education, and developing measures of progress that move beyond quantitative outcomes captured at different points. Some of these are suggested in the discussion on women’s empowerment above – more work needs to be done

with these approaches to evaluation and monitoring at sub-national and sub-district levels. While increasing gender balance in staff should remain a key goal, efforts to look into the management systems and the extent to which they allow women to act effectively, unconstrained by gender stereotypes, and responsive to women’s gender-specific constraints, are important.

Measures to improve the functioning of gender mainstreaming units are important. Their limitations in the past are not a reason to discontinue them. There is still a huge task ahead in terms of making gender-awareness a feature across systems. However, providing these units with adequate resources as well as important roles in oversight of policies and implementation measures

is critical. Analysis that is utilized to support 'gender mainstreaming' efforts needs to become much sharper (Subrahmanian, 2004b), and better linked to a wider understanding of institutional strengths and limitations. The Commonwealth Secretariat developed a Gender Management System that highlighted the need for appropriate institutional arrangements to be put in place to strengthen gender mainstreaming:

- A lead agency for spearheading change, e.g. national women's machinery
- A management team that engages with representatives of different departments as well as members of civil society to coordinate the implementation strategy
- A network of gender focal points across departments
- An inter-ministerial steering committee to oversee links between different ministries
- A Parliamentary Gender Caucus made up of committed parliamentarians who can lobby in the formal political arena
- Civil society interactions with this machinery to ensure two-way flows of influence and information.
(Source: Kabeer, 2003)

Three levers that the GMS suggests are important to emphasize: **awareness**, **communications** and **incentives**.

However, underlying all of this is the need to locate 'mainstreaming' within the wider sphere of work and influence that goes under the rubric of 'governance reform'. Unless gender is made an implicit aspect of efforts to address administrative reform, and unless administrative reform is analysed from the perspective of the impacts on gender issues, there is likely to be little progress. Gender mainstreaming will continue to be seen as an add-on, not a fundamental part of systems change.

At the international level too there is clearly much that remains to be done. While in many contexts donors have kept the issue of gender alive, the rhetoric may not be matched by systems to ensure that their actions and allocations are gender-aware. The 2005 goal and the degree to which they are off-track in many parts of the world provides a catalyst for rethinking existing approaches, and shifting them from targeted, parity-oriented measures to more systemic change for the achievement of gender equality in education, through the pathway of empowerment.

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