Quality Education for Gender Equality
Background Paper for the Quality Education Stream E4 Conference
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Global policies and interventions aimed at meeting the EFA goals and the targets for MDG 2 and 3 have put much emphasis on understanding the extent to which girls are increasing their enrolment in schools in relation to boys and what kind of interventions have been successful in improving gender parity. Education for All has emphasised the achievement of a basic education for all boys and girls measured through exam scores and numbers of years of schooling and compared across countries, regional and the globe (Subrahmanian 2005). Such limited aims and limited measures take little account of the diversity of contexts and conditions in which young girls and boys live and attend school or their gendered aspirations and experiences of schooling (Aikman and Unterhalter 2007).

While this paper is addressing gender equality it is also concerned with girls' and women's empowerment. The inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the MDGs seemed to suggest that the importance of addressing gender equality in meeting the challenges of poverty and development had been recognised (ASPBAE and UNGEI, 2010). But, the limited target of parity and its quantitative measurement do not go nearly far enough in terms of assessing what the value of formal education is for the increasing numbers of girls and young women who are accessing schooling. As the other Streams in the E4 conference identify, there are many political, economic and social processes and factors which deny rights to girls and undermine their ability to have a qualitative educational experience and use this in their lives.

Methodology and focus
This paper has been developed on the basis of a review of recent published literature in order to examine what has been achieved over the last ten years since UNGEI was established in Dakar 2000. The paper examines the debates and achievement in relation to quality education for gender equality and examines achievements, developments and challenges in three broad areas:
- Enabling environment for gender equality in education
- Relevant and meaningful education for girls and boys, young men and women
- Democratic educational processes

The literature search focused on 4 countries – Pakistan, Malawi, Cambodia and Peru – one from each major region of the world, supplemented by literature with a global focus and some key country papers. We have drawn out some statistics from these countries (see appendix) for comparative purposes. By choosing to focus on four main countries in order to bring some focus to the paper, we have inevitably missed some rich and worthy research and evidence from other countries. We hope and expect that the Dakar Conference will fill these gaps and further shape this paper.

The paper begins with a conceptual section drawing out what we believe to be a cutting edge and challenging approach to quality education which has the potential to engender empowerment. This is followed by three sections which examine the recent literature in terms of the three areas identified above and draw out examples of key projects and important insights. The paper then has a short concluding section, highlighting the main findings of the review.

What is quality education?

Policies and practices of and for quality education are varied and contested. Important though exam results and years of schooling are, what is also needed are more insightful, multi-dimensional and critical approaches to quality education that offer opportunities to tackle gendered inequalities that undermine girls' and boys' wellbeing.

Policy makers, teachers, parents and learners have different perspectives and opinions about what a quality education is. There are many frameworks for thinking about quality education and many different notions of quality that underpin policies. Mostly these frameworks 'unpack' quality into interrelated dimensions or criteria in order to inform programmes and practices. Many frameworks consider issues of gender equality and equity more broadly as a separate issue and restrict quality to a list of educational inputs (Verspoor 2008), while others consider equity – subsuming gender equality within it - as one distinct dimension of quality (e.g. UNESCO GMR 2005; Nikel and Lowe 2009). Often, too, quality frameworks focus exclusively on schooling as if it were disassociated from the wider social, cultural, political and economic environment – at the local, national and global levels.

By thinking about quality from the perspective of social justice and gender justice a more critical and value-based notion of quality emerges (Tikly and Barrett 2009), one which has the potential to put equity and equality at its heart. By starting with the importance of social justice and examining educational practices in terms of the often implicit values that they are built upon we can begin to identify the dimensions of a quality gender equitable education. Working towards such an education recognises that gendered roles and relationships as well as educational practices and processes are outcomes of negotiations of power and identity within specific historical and social contexts.

This is not an easy task and here we are using three broad areas which are fundamental to meeting girls and women's needs for and expectations of a quality education. These are: an environment that is empowering and enabling, an education that is relevant and meaningful and which operates on the basis of democratic principles. These three broad areas are intended to address questions of social justice in terms of fairness, respect for difference and recognition of diversity, and the right and ability to participate actively and to be heard.

An enabling environment for quality education and gender equality.

An enabling environment refers not only to the physical, social and cultural environment of the school and the classroom, but also the wider environment in which a school is located and functions. What makes these environments enabling for girls as well boys; how are they changed and through what kinds of actions by whom?

Several recent attempts to assess the progress towards gender equality within educational systems have underlined the importance of context (ASPBAE and UNGEI, 2010, Unterhalter 2006), and have hence sought to capture the overall environment in a country that can enable or hinder women's participation, both within and outside schools. An enabling environment is influenced and shaped by the resources available, not only financial resources but human resources such as teachers and other material resources. How resources are prioritised and used influences the quality of education and gender equality. Most countries for instance spend the bulk of their educational budgets on teacher salaries, leaving little scope either for training, infrastructure maintenance or indeed the provision of books and other material resources. Apart from the availability and use of resources, quality education is intimately linked with the nature of opportunities available in the broader environment. While not going into issues of violence and abuse in this paper, there remain concerns around the transition from school to a work environment where women's skills and knowledge are not necessarily recognised and valued. In this section there is first a discussion of resources, focusing particularly on incentives and stipends directed at the female students and their parents, but equally addressing questions of teacher deployment, training and safety, especially for female teachers. We try to draw out the implications of such policies seeking to ensure an enabling environment for gender equality.

Globally, there has been a rapid expansion in girl's enrolment since 2000, yet dropouts and repetition rates remain high (UNESCO, 2010). Analysis of school enrolment and completion rates reveal that the majority of girls out of school and those not performing well come from rural, poor backgrounds (Lewin, 2007). Cultural norms around early marriage and female seclusion have been further barriers to girl's education. This has led to a spate of incentive and stipend programmes to attract girls and keep them in school, both for educational reasons, but equally to contribute to a longer-term transformation of social and cultural norms. The much discussed Bangladesh Female Secondary School Stipend Project, receipt of which is conditional on remaining unmarried, is seen to have increased the age at marriage of girls with consequent delays in first births. While the programme has indeed led to a rise in enrolment of girls in secondary schools, exceeding in fact that of boys in both rural and urban areas (Shafiq, 2009), its impact on delayed marriage, or enhancing employment opportunities, is hard to establish. Further, the school system has not kept pace with the rising enrolment of female students, teachers are poorly qualified, materials are scarce and infrastructure strained. Dropout and repetition rates are high, with a much smaller number of girls actually able to pass their secondary school examinations. The curriculum has no technical or life-skills, nor any transformatory significance, hence while it may indeed delay the age at marriage marginally, it is not

designed to empower girls. If the programme had focused instead on quality and the content of learning, and the broader economic and social context, with an emphasis on capabilities rather than enrolments, more opportunities for girls' and women's participation could perhaps have been created (Schurmann, 2009).

The school stipend programme in its varied forms, such as the free primary education projects in Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania and several other countries across the world, cash-transfer type interventions in Mexico, Brazil and Chile, the female school stipend projects in sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda, Congo and Ghana) and the Punjab region of Pakistan, have helped enhance girls' enrolments in both primary and secondary schools (Chaudhury and Parajuli, 2008, Filmer and Schady, 2008, Glick, 2008). Kadzamira and Rose (2003) and Al-Samarrai and Zaman (2007) demonstrate in the case of Malawi, how the abolition of fees for primary schooling in 1994 led to a massive expansion in enrolments, yet despite donor provision of classrooms, other infrastructural support and instructional material, less than a fifth completed primary school. A similar situation can be seen in India (Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008), Cambodia (Tan, 2007) and virtually all major countries struggling to meet the MDG and EFA goals.

What these various stipend programmes reveal is that while they are crucial for improving access, especially for poor households, they are not sufficient for achieving larger development goals. Without simultaneous attention to the quality and relevance of learning in primary and secondary schools, their gains in terms of gender equality will be shortlived. While in Malawi, the USAID supported secondary stipends mainly go to girls from wealthy households, who have access to resources to meet the additional costs of schooling (such as investments in uniforms and stationery apart from contributions to the school for possibly longer periods of time), leading to tensions between recipient and non-recipient girls and their families (Chapman et al, 2008), in Bangladesh, while poor girls do access stipends, a large number of them study in madrasas (Islamic, religious schools), which train them to be good wives and mothers rather than enabling them to gain critical perspectives. Additionally, children's labour is valuable for survival and meeting livelihood needs, while the perceived returns from schooling are not clear.

At an institutional level, in response to UPE commitments, and the growing demands for education, states have had to rapidly expand education provision. The pressure on schools in terms of increase in classroom size and decrease in number of trained teachers available, as well as lack of attention to child-centred pedagogies and more relevant curriculum addressing the needs to the rural poor, and ethnic and other minority groups, has led to a rapid decline in quality of provision, as evident from test results. One way of meeting the teacher shortage has been through the recruitment of low-paid, and untrained local teachers, often called para-teachers or contract teachers.

The issue of teachers, their training and deployment, is an essential element of quality education, yet policies in this regard often seem to be short-term in nature. Cambodia is an interesting case, which saw a rapid expansion in the teaching force and teacher training institutes in the 1980s, yet by the 1990s, there was a severe shortage, leading to the appointment of contract teachers. Usually local, with low formal qualifications, the

appointment of contract teachers was abandoned in 2001, even though, in some areas, for instance, those inhabited by ethnic minorities, they played an important role, being bilingual, and hence able to communicate with the children. The government instead chose double shifting of certified teachers, but with low salaries and delayed payments, this was not adequate incentive for teachers to perform their duties. In fact, most of them either cultivated land or engaged in another income generating activity, including charging informal fees from students, in order to survive (Geeves and Bredenburg, 2005). Hence, despite rapid increases in enrolment, dropouts and repetition remained high: opportunity costs for students from poor families was great, as scholarships were not sufficient to cover school costs including the supplementary fees charged informally by teachers apart from the fact that their incomes were essential for family survival (Tan, 2007). In India too, reviews of para-teachers, have shown that while often better qualified than the public school teachers, they are paid less, and an amount that is insufficient for their survival. This reduces their incentive to teach and makes them look for alternate work, be it through moonlighting in other professions or then providing private tuitions to the students (Rao, 2010), also making for higher rates of absenteeism.

High teacher absenteeism in state schools has contributed to the mushrooming of low fee-paying private schools. As they pay fees, parents feel entitled to monitor teacher behaviour and hold such schools accountable for their child's performance, hence those with limited resources, would rather send only one child, in South Asia this is likely to be a son, to a private school, and keep others either at home or in employment, rather than wasting resources at the state school, where learning is seen to be negligible (Lloyd et al, 2005, Aslam and Kingdon, 2008). In their study in East Africa, Sasaoka and Nishimura (2010) too find educational decentralisation to have rather contradictory outcomes in the context of a no-fee policy, wherein schools no longer see themselves as accountable to parents, leading the better off to move their children to private schools.

The distribution of private schools in rural areas however is uneven, and in an interesting insight from Pakistan, Andrabi et al (2008) note that this is linked to the availability of low-cost teachers, and in this case, educated women, as they constitute the cheapest source of labour. While not provided with any pre or in-service training, the location of the school and the presence of female teachers serve as a positive incentive for female enrolment, even in poor households. This is contradictory to studies in other parts of South Asia, especially India, which show that private schools, though here too dependent on low-paid, female teachers, create a new segregation, with girls, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes increasingly confined to the state schools, leading to a rise in educational inequalities by gender and social group (Ramachandran, 2004, Mehrotra and Panchamukhi, 2006).

Apart from access and inclusion, and the larger question of valuing women's work, the expansion of private schools also raises issues of quality. Rose (2005) points to the mushrooming of private schools in the urban and peri-urban areas of Malawi, as contributing to increase in enrolments, but having adverse impacts on educational quality. That there is little difference in learning achievements of students in private and state schools, both very low, is also the finding of the Education Watch Report on quality of

education in Bangladesh (CAMPE, 2001). This raises questions particularly of gender equity, since better-off communities can pay for better quality education, performance gaps between male and female students in poor and wealthy areas is also likely to rise (Dyer and Rose, 2005).

Despite the emphasis on teacher training and certification in Cambodia, the pedagogy has remained teacher-centred and the curriculum gender-blind, with no attention to different pedagogies to suit the cognitive styles of boys and girls. While some special projects are run by local NGOs with the Ministry for at-risk girls that include curriculum enhancement through life skills activities, scholarships, village-based remediation, pre-vocational training etc, these have not been mainstreamed into the educational system leading to an accelerating dropout of girls in higher classes (Velasco, 2004), especially in rural areas and amongst minority groups (Collins, 2008).

A good example of fostering the development of gender-sensitive curriculum and attention to quality comes from Malawi and Balochistan (in Pakistan), both projects supported by USAID for extended periods of time. Support to teachers through field trainers and mentoring programmes did contribute to reduced pupil dropout and improved performance, but this was not adequately backed up by learning materials and infrastructure, and in the case of Malawi, the district in which the intervention was made kept changing, leading to lack of programme continuity and the possibility of learning from experience and taking corrective action. In both instances teacher training fell short on subject matter knowledge, child-centred teaching skills and overall professional identity and morale (Anzar et al 2004, Anzar et al, 1999).

The positive relationship between school facilities and inputs and educational attainments is demonstrated by the experience of the Peruvian Social Fund (FONCODES), educational interventions under which involved building and renovating classrooms and sports facilities, providing textbooks, uniforms and school meals, all targeted to poor districts of the country. While these interventions may not directly reflect quality or scholastic achievement, such investment of additional resources to create a positive learning environment is important to help children deprived of education due to a lack of resources catch up with their better off counterparts (Paxson and Schady, 2002).

The issue of content and relevance of education is discussed further in the next section, yet the question of how parity or the lack of it, translates into labour market outcomes for women, or their life chances more broadly, has rarely been asked in most educational systems. Investment in girls' secondary and higher schooling is seen to have positive returns in terms of income growth, yet how far it develops women's capabilities in terms of critical life choices is rarely explored. In the Philippines, Estudillo et al (2001) demonstrate that parents invest more in daughter's schooling while providing more land to their sons, with a view to equalising their future life chances as land gets increasingly masculinised and white-collar work feminised. Yet the intuitive linkage between education and better labour market outcomes for women does not always play out in reality due to multiple cultural and social factors that valorise particular professions (teaching) as well as roles (home-making) for women, alongside globalisation processes,

often based on the low-paid work of women and segregation across particular sectors (UNICEF and UNGEI, 2008, Rao et al 2007, Munshi and Rosenzweig, 2003).

What these examples highlight is the need for a broader vision of gender equality in education as linked to all aspects of political, economic and social life, rather than an instrumental view that focuses only on the material benefits of girls' education such as poverty reduction, enhanced productivity, or reduced infant and child mortality (Malhotra et al, 2003). But what they also reveal is the importance of community participation and control in school management and the classroom for these interventions to succeed. Here are considerations, too, of how resource commitments are made, and by whom? Does this include women in the community and elders and are they merely sources of financial resources? We take a closer look at this aspect of democratisation in the last section.

Relevant and meaningful education

The focus of the previous section on the importance of an enabling environment for quality education and gender equality leads into a consideration of the environment within the school and a probing into the nature of school knowledge, of relationships, of the 'culture' of individual schools and the school system. Are these environments which promote respect for rights, that develops girls' and boys' capabilities and reinforce diverse identities?

This section asks how relevant and meaningful education is constructed and experienced in different contexts and for differently situated individuals and in what ways individual girl's or boy's learning outcomes are influenced by intersecting inequalities, among these language, culture, ethnicity and wealth. If a quality education provides learners with capabilities to use to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual wellbeing (EdQual 2009) how do we account for gendered differences in these outcomes?

Gender differences can be found in the gendered identities that girls and boys, teachers and parents reproduce. Negative self-images and beliefs about girls as failing, unconfident students reinforce socially prescribed and gendered identities that are reinforced by girls themselves as well as boys, teachers and parents. In Malawi, Kamwendo (2010) illustrates how such identities lead girls to believe that they cannot do as well as boys, and that their future is mapped out in terms of marriage rather than academic excellence. But there are other discourses about girls permeating in school, too, which girls have to negotiate and accommodate in different ways, discourses influenced possibly by gender awareness campaigns (ibid:11). This research indicates a need to understand how competing and sometimes contradictory messages from global policies about gender equality influence and impact on girls' and boys' identities, their educational performances and outcomes.

These aspects of the school environment – its ethos and culture – are part of the 'hidden curriculum', the rules and norms, values and identities constructed in and around the school and through its practices. Inequitable gendered and sexual practices seem to have

striking similarities across different contexts and countries, such as Ghana and Botswana (Dunne 2007) and there is a growing body of evidence of violent relationships being played out and reproduced in schools and around schools (Leach and Mitchell 2006; Mirembe and Davis 2001). Research into schooling and HIV and AIDS indicates the complex gendered nature of schools and schooling which means that under certain conditions schools can be spaces for change and transformation of gender relations but they can also be places where they are exposed to risky sexual behaviour and can become vulnerable (Unterhalter et al. 2009; Morrell et al 2009).

Achieving a relevant and meaningful education for girls and boys involves an investigation into the gendered nature of the formal curriculum itself and an understanding of ways in which curriculum and pedagogy reinforce, maintain and reproduce gender hierarchies. While national education policies may clearly subscribe to gender equity and equality and include strong statements about gender mainstreaming through the system and its institutions, there are still few examples of curricula developed on the basis of gender analyses. South African curriculum reform processes offer some insights into the challenges and complexities of such analysis (Morrell 2009) but in many countries neither curriculum developers nor teachers have training and capacity to incorporate a gender analysis or to consider the implications of different learning styles for boys and girls learning (Velasco 2004). Marshal and Arnot (2008) point to the need for historical and sociological analysis of national curricular norms, recognition of gendered forms of knowledge and their representation in curricula, and different types of gendered performances within different school subjects. Where curriculum reform involves an abrupt and radical change from content-oriented teaching to learning outcomes, for example in Peru in the 1990s where the curriculum was revised to become competency-based, there are new challenges for teachers in terms of what they value as outcomes (Balarin and Benavides 2009) and how they interpret nationally prescribed competencies in the gendered environment of their locality and classrooms. In what ways might these competencies be a route to the marginalisation and silencing of girls?

In many countries textbooks are the mainstay of teaching and one of the few teaching resources available giving them a privileged position and importance in the classroom as sources of knowledge and values and privileging the knowledge of those who design and decide on their content (as is discussed further in the next section). The gendered discourse and the portrayal of gendered roles in textbooks are influential in shaping girls' and boys' experience of education (Barber et al 2007; Nair 2005; Maluwa-Banda 2004; Durrani 2008). Women's under-representation in textbooks is widespread and where they are represented this rarely reflects their changing position in many societies today where they are income earners and professionals.

One approach to addressing some of these issues is to go beyond simply removing male-centred language in texts but to also include positive pictures and references to women (Blumberg 2008; Stromquist 2007). These authors suggest that user-friendly culturally sensitive manuals can be developed for use by teachers to apply to their textbooks which are still biased and use them with their students. This is also suggested as a means of overcoming the substantial costs of producing new textbooks. Nevertheless, not all

national curriculum development centres are receptive to or feel able to represent women in new and challenging situations and roles in their textbooks or other teaching and learning materials. In Cambodia the team revising the 1997 curriculum felt that society was not ready for change. In such circumstances other organisations work in different ways to engage with issues of gender inequality in education such as the work of UNICEF on the sexual exploitation of girls (UNICEF EPSSEG in Velasco 2004).

Long and deeply held views of mathematics and science as male subjects in which boys are expected to perform better than girls are now subject to strong critique and analysis of the ways in which they exclude and 'other' girls (Warwick 1994; Halai 2007). In many countries, girls do have poorer exam scores in mathematics than boys – though the evidence suggest that the reverse is true in technologically advanced countries – but there are distinct differences in girls achievement across low income countries and results are not consistent (Halai 2009). In Malawi girls' achievement in maths improved considerably when they were taught in single sex schools and social conditions which had previously undermined girls' performance were removed (Croft 2000). There are various explanations for girls low achievement in relation to boys including teachers' low expectations of girls that can compound their own sense of inferiority in the classroom, routine use of discriminatory or sexist language and male dominated relations of power and decision making (Wamahiu 1996; Dunne and Leach 2005; Humphreys 2005; Leo-Rhynie 1999: Ogbamicael 2000).

In Pakistan, however, gender inequalities in mathematics are pronounced despite this being a highly gender segregated society. Analysis of mathematics textbooks indicate that books reinforce positive male learner images and reinforce certain dominant gender roles such as women as care givers in domestic settings (Halai 2007). Moreover, there are blatant inequalities in terms of teacher qualifications and training in mathematics between male teachers who teach in boys' schools and female teachers who teach in girls' schools. The Pakistan research offers important insights which go beyond local beliefs that gender equality has been achieved because girls have access to girl-only schools with female teachers. On the contrary, in this context gender segregation is reinforcing and reproducing the inequalities which girls and women experience at all levels of the education system and a more expansive and empowering notion of gender equality is needed to challenge and change practices (ibid).

The language of instruction and literacy practices of the school are powerful mechanisms for legitimating particular knowledges, particular bodies of knowledge and practices. They can have an important impact on girls' dropout and retention. Where the language of instruction in school is a national or international language, girls and boys who are speakers of other languages excluded from the schools may be disadvantaged. Girls may be more than boys where they have less informal, out-of-school access to the language of schooling, especially where this is a prestige language and language of wider communication. Girls domestic roles and responsibilities may restrict their access to this language in contrast with boys of their same age and school class. This can put them at a severe disadvantage in terms of their ability to participate in oral and literate activities in the school and affect their performance. This situation is documented by Ames (2005) in

the Peruvian context and illustrates how Quechua speaking girls' are discriminated in school because of their poor ability in Spanish, the language of instruction, and how this can be a factor in their drop out and subsequent marginalisation from a social domain dominated by the Spanish language and associated with 'modernity' and development. The lack of recognition of vernacular languages in school can, therefore, have a particularly pernicious impact on girls' education in terms of retention. It can also exclude and alienate when girls' and women's knowledge is embedded in and expressed through oral languages and oral practices which are not recognised by formal education and not valued or given equal status (Aikman 1999). Languages without a written form are mainly excluded from formal education, which is dominated by strong literate schooled processes, as are languages with scripts coming from different literate traditions and histories (Kosonen 2005).

Cambodia and Peru - countries with large ethnic or indigenous populations - offer insights into the multi-faceted nature of inequalities where gendered inequalities intersect with those of language, ethnicity and livelihoods to mean that girls from marginalised minority groups have some of the lowest achievement rates for education. Ethnicity, language and gender intersect and inform and shape educational experiences in different ways across Africa too (Dei 2004; Leggett 2005). Lewis and Lockheed (2007) document the ways in which indigenous girls are multiply disadvantaged in school through curricula which do not recognise their knowledge, skills and resources, through language policies which do not utilise or value their language(s) and offers little that is relevant or meaningful to them in terms of their values, their expectations and opportunities for their futures and their motivations for learning. What may be available in these circumstances, often geographically remote from government schooling are nonformal classes and NGO provided schooling. In Cambodia this gap has been filled for some girls through classes initiated for adult literacy but expanded to meet the broader educational needs of children and adults (Escott 2000). While such initiatives are more responsive to local demands and are locally relevant, they are also often subject to well-documented problems of short term funding, lack of sustainability and inability to offer transferable or recognised qualifications for entry into further levels of formal education. Fox (2003) critiques a situation in Lao where a citizenship curriculum has been developed on the assumption that gender equality exists in society and identifies how this assumption acts to exclude the differently gendered practices of ethnic minority cultures and their languages.

Questions of relevant and meaningful education must also be asked of teacher education, whether this be initial training or in-service training. What are the issues female teacher trainees face in training colleges with hierarchical cultures and power structures?

Research in Malawi illustrates how women teachers' voices are rarely to be found in teaching materials and curriculum documents ignore the experience and skills they have developed through their practice in the classroom. In Malawi where teachers in the primary and pre-school levels of the system are mostly women there is an urgent need for their experience to be brought to consider questions of how to break cycles of under-achievement for girls (Croft 2000). This issue is also raised by Kirk (2004) through interviews with teachers in Pakistan which emphasises the importance of strategies to

engage with women teachers and their knowledge of classroom processes and contexts for the development of quality policy and educational change. She stresses the importance of adding to what are at present a limited knowledge and literature on the experiences of women teachers and their teaching and insights into how different their teaching and their experiences are to those of men (Mitchell 1995).

Kirk takes forward an important agenda and calls for the development of explicitly gendered theories of teaching and a concern with not only strategies to encourage girls' participation but connecting with teachers' own gendered perspectives, concerns, experiences and challenges (2004:376). How do teachers not only teach about gender equality but live this in their private lives, how do they change their own personal behaviour? Teacher's need opportunities to examine their own gender identities, understand how discrimination takes place in school and what their role can be in addressing it (Chege 2004; Aikman and Unterhalter 2007).

Democratic processes as integral to quality gender equitable education

This section engages with questions of equality and quality of participation, voice and decision-making and the structures and practices therein. What are the aims of community-school partnerships and what is the nature of women's participation and 'voice' in formal structures such as School Management Committees? Here we consider issues around the institution of the school, modes and forms of decentralisation and questions of accountability. To what extent are gendered inequalities considered in the structures or processes of education institutions and hierarchies? Is gender 'mainstreamed' and if so what does this mean for achieving socially just outcomes?

An important lesson emerging from all the studies reviewed above, from Pakistan, Malawi, Cambodia, Peru and beyond, point to the key role of community-school engagement in ensuring quality, be it through monitoring teacher attendance, ensuring girls go to school and are safe in school, or even just their moral support and recognition of the value of schooling. As discussed in the last section, for communities to participate effectively in schooling, they need to be convinced of its relevance and responsiveness to their lives. As Pryor (2005: 196) notes in his study in Ghana, 'Education was seen as a means of leaving, not a reason to return to the village…Schooling had no perceived intrinsic merits as the curriculum seemed irrelevant to village life'. In rural Malawi too, while a girl's intervention programme was initiated, it did not adequately respond to girl's needs in terms of domestic work, protection after puberty, distance and poverty (Sankhulani, 2007, Scharff, 2007). In Cambodia, while communities do provide material contributions, their participation in internal decision-making remains limited, due to local socio-cultural norms which uphold social hierarchies including teacher dominance in educational issues, with the exception of a few NGO-led interventions (Pellini, 2005).

Decentralisation and participatory decision-making can potentially enhance accountability, transparency and the flexibility of the educational system, making it more responsive to the diverse and changing needs of learners, yet in reality, rather than genuine empowerment and control, especially over the teaching and learning process, it is

only managerial and administrative autonomy that is granted to schools or parents (UNESCO, 2003), often with a focus on cost effectiveness including raising resources at the local level.

Villagers in Bangladesh therefore tend to select better off men in the community to represent them in the School Management Committees, as the poorest and women neither have the time nor the resources, be it financial or in terms of social networks, to contribute to the school's functioning (Wood et al 2004). This is because their role has been interpreted largely in administrative terms, and as a means for mobilising resources, for instance, contributing to classroom furniture, sports facilities, conducting school events etc, rather than redistributing responsibilities and genuinely sharing power in order to improve classroom practice (see also Khan (2007) for the case of Punjab, Pakistan). Here it has instead led to increasing power in the hands of local elites rather than genuinely expanding democratic spaces (Bray, 2003). Further, with mothers not officially recognised as 'guardians', women have been excluded from these SMCs, thus reproducing traditional, male-centred social organisation, though informal Mothers' Committees have been set up to assist with the functioning of the school. Cornwall (2002) distinguishes these as transient spaces, which lack official recognition, versus institutional spaces, which aim to link citizens with the local government. In this instance, women lack access to the institutional spaces, which can provide them with a legitimate voice and are restricted to informal support roles, which don't necessarily create equal opportunities for women or shift existing power relations and authority structures.

In Balochistan province of Pakistan, the community was involved in selecting the teachers locally, ensuring their safety and regular attendance in the schools. But as male village leaders could not freely interact with the female teachers or enter the classrooms, women's village education committees were set up, and their involvement in the school has been crucial for increasing girl's enrolment and providing support to the teachers (Anzar et al 2004). Barrs (2005) found in rural Punjab that community governance and participation in terms of appreciation of teachers, cooperation to solve problems and bring children, especially girls, to school, ensure that their salaries were paid on time and provision of other school needs such as equipment and water led to enhanced teacher motivation, though its impacts on quality in terms of the process of teaching are less easy to identify. Khan (2007) also notes for Punjab that change is gradually visible in school councils, both in terms of inclusiveness and the newness in decision-making in terms of taking on board issues of pedagogy and curriculum as well, formerly the domain of the professional educators. However, one needs to ensure that women's leadership is recognised at all levels of the education system, and supported, giving them positions of responsibility, so that their participation is both effective and meaningful (see also Chisholm, 2001 for South Africa).

In the case of India, Jain (2003) points out that while women can potentially be change agents as demonstrated by the experience of Mahila Samakhya - a project focusing on education for women's empowerment, despite the rhetoric of decentralisation, basic education is often governed by the local bureaucracy on the basis of standardised guidelines, with little scope for context-specific responses. Sayed further points to the difficulties of changing 'the pathologies of the current system of supervision….which

focus on the formal over the pedagogic, the procedural over the professional, and the evaluative over the developmental' (2010: 61), in the case of India. This tension has wider relevance and remains an outstanding issue in terms of shifting the cultures of decision-making and the power and accountability structures embedded in processes of control that could contribute to a more gender equitable education. There is perhaps need for greater awareness raising in the community and amongst women in particular on their rights as members of village education committees and school councils, mobilisation and network-building to enable them to raise issues, participate in decisions pertaining to learning outcomes and demand accountability and transparency in the utilisation of funds (Khan, 2007).

Budget monitoring and tracking are raising important questions about political commitment as reflected in expenditures for gender equality in education. In a recent review in South Asia, it was found that public expenditure on education in general between 2000-08 was low, especially in India and Pakistan, despite rapid economic growth in the region. Though not adequately financed, India at least has policies in place to address the gender gaps. Bhutan, however, with its coordinated interventions including the rapid expansion of community primary schools, construction of boarding facilities, provision of school meals and appointment of female teachers, has in the last decade ensured that the growth rate of girls' enrolment in primary education (49.6 per cent) has been twice as fast as that for boys (ASPBAE and UNGEI, 2010). Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, with sustained investments in girl's education over a long period of time, are the two exceptions in South Asia which register a gender gap in the reverse direction – marginally against boys.

The education system needs an inbuilt mechanism to monitor and protect the basic human rights of present and future generations. Public schools particularly need attention, as they are often the only chance for girls to attain an education, as against boys who are increasingly being enrolled in fee-paying private schools. The existence of a transparent and inclusive society with active civil society participation, especially within the education system such as the existence of active parents' associations and teachers' unions, could offer important mechanisms for accountability, apart from reducing the pressures of patronage, conflict of interest and blatant corruption. Despite the presence of a buoyant civil society, the levels of transparency within South Asian democracies remains weak, but also the acceptance of various forms of civil society participation including women's voices is extremely limited. Bangladesh is perhaps an exception in this respect, with CAMPE – a coalition of more than 1000 NGOs in Bangladesh – having successfully developed 'Education Watch' as an independent citizens' report (currently in its ninth year of publication) to regularly monitor the 'education for all' agenda and voice civil society policy advocacy (ASPBAE and UNGEI, 2010). Yet even with civil society, one needs to question how gender- equitable their practices are and how far gender mainstreaming has changed not only organisational practices but individuals' values (Pialek 2008).

While partnerships have a key role to play in promoting gender equality in education, it is important to understand the diversity of experiences, forms and outcomes, with 'the word

'partner' being interpreted in many different ways - as collaborator, contractor, supporter, client, patron' (Rao and Smyth, 2005: 5). Power differences between different actors need to be recognised and confronted through funding patterns and priorities, leadership development, external mediation, or improved communication, in order to move the agenda forward. These are issues not only for educational actors and agents but again remind us that gender equality and quality education are in and of a wider environment. What is the nature of public debate on education and gender and what are the implications for opportunities for change within and outside the school.

Conclusion

These paragraphs have raised some of many areas, issues and questions that need to be engaged with in order to understand and act for a more gender equitable quality education. They are intended to serve as a starting point for debate and discussion. Malawi, Peru, Cambodia and Pakistan have offered insights into countries with different historical, social and cultural formations. They all highlight the importance of synergy between programme policies and implementation strategies and the need for long-term commitment and stability in order to move the gender equality agenda forward. They emphasise the need to recognise the gendered identities of students, teachers, parents, administrators and policy-makers in specific contexts in order to understand the processes of decision-making and the power relations embedded therein, the cultural and social norms and hierarchies, but also identify potential areas for change.

A major message that emerges from this analysis is that attaining gender equitable quality education requires multi-faceted strategies that address different dimensions of girl's and women's lives each with its specific, attendant constraints. Within South Asia, Sri Lanka's 'good performance' proves this point: taking account of access and resources, simultaneously across different educational levels, quality and sustained expenditure over a long period of time was crucial for universalizing education upto secondary levels. Stipends and scholarships are not enough in the absence of meaningful and relevant learning processes.

Providing quality education is not cheap. Poor investments expectedly reap poor results. Educational investment in teachers and functional schools' infrastructure is necessary to ensure quality, as well as recognition of the rights and contributions of different members of society to the schooling and larger educational process. Teachers are a crucial link, yet their needs are often neglected, with the growing trend to appoint low-paid, contractual staff, with little or no training. Families, in particular mothers, who are responsible for bringing up their children, are rarely provided the opportunity to be actively involved in the educational process. They are taken for granted and rarely respected for their contributions. Civil society organizations too have a role to play – in developing innovative models of educational delivery; in changing social norms and values; but most importantly, in ensuring transparency and accountability at all levels within the system.

While there are issues common across these countries, there is also much diversity which calls for attention to specific dynamics of change at national and local levels. There is an

urgent need for fine-grained studies to produce new understandings of complex and shifting relationships, of entrenched problems and of innovative experiences.

Appendix: Statistical Information

Table 1: 2007 Gender-related development index and its components for case study countries

	Cambodia	Malawi	Pakistan	Peru
GDI rank	116	134	124	65
GDI value	0.588	0.490	0.532	0.804
Female life expectancy at birth (years)	62.3	53.4	66.5	75.8
Male life expectancy at birth (years)	58.6	51.3	65.9	70.4
Female adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above) 1997-2007	67.7	64.6	39.6	84.6
Male adult literacy rate (% aged 15 and above) 1997-2007	85.8	79.2	67.7	94.9
Female combined gross enrolment ratio (%)	54.8	61.7	34.4	89.9
Male combined gross enrolment ratio (%)	62.1	62.1	43.9	86.4
Female estimated earned income (PPP US$)	1,465	646	760	5,828
Male estimated earned income (PPP US$)	2,158	877	4,135	9,835

Source: http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/

Table 2: Gender empowerment measure and its components for case study countries

	Cambodia	Malawi	Pakistan	Peru
GEM rank 2007	91	..	99	36
GEM value 2006	0.427	..	0.386	0.640
Seats in parliament (% held by women) 2008	16	13	21	29
Legislators, senior officials and managers (% female) 1999-2007	14	..	3	29
Professional and technical workers (% female) 1999-2007	41	..	25	47
Earned income (estimated), ratio of female to male, 2007	0.68	0.74	0.18	0.59

Source: http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/

Table 3: Selected gender aggregated education indicators for case study countries

	Cambodia	Malawi	Pakistan	Peru
Youth (15-24) literacy rate – female (year)	83 (2007)	82 (2007)	58 (2006)	97 (2007)
Youth (15-24) literacy rate in – male (year)	90 (2007)	84 (2007)	79 (2006)	98 (2007)
Net enrolment ratio in primary education – female (year)	87 (2008)	93 (2008)	60 (2008)	97 (2007)
Net enrolment ratio in primary education – male (year)	90 (2008)	88 (2008)	72 (2008)	97 (2007)
Girls' share of primary enrolment in % (year)	47.4 (2008)	50.2 (2008)	43.8 (2008)	49.0 (2007)
Net enrolment ratio in secondary education – female (year)	31.8 (2007)	24 (2008)	27.9 (2008)	76.1 (2007)
Net enrolment ratio in secondary education – male (year)	36.3 (2007)	26 (2008)	36.9 (2008)	75.7 (2007)
Girls' share of secondary enrolment in % (year)	44.2 (2007)	45.6 (2008)	41.8 (2008)	50.0 (2007)
Female teachers primary education in % (year)	44 (2008)	38 (2008)	47 (2008)	65 (2007)
Female teachers secondary education in % (year)	32 (2007)	29 (2008)	51 (2004)	45 (2007)

Source: http://unstats.un.org

Table 4: Selected indicators of educational quality for case study countries

	Cambodia	Malawi	Pakistan	Peru
Survival rate to grade 5 of primary education in % (school year ending in 2006) - female	64	43	72	93
Survival rate to grade 5 of primary education in % (school year ending in 2006) - male	61	44	68	93
Primary cohort completion rate in % (school year ending in 2006) - female	48.5	13.8	50.5	…
Primary cohort completion rate in % (school year ending in 2006) - male	47.6	22.3	46.7	…
Teaching staff – primary education (school year ending in 2007)	49,000	44,000	450,000	180,000
Trained teachers primary education in % (school year ending 2007) - total	98	…	85	…
Pupil/teacher ratio primary education (school year ending in 2007)	51	67	40	22
Pupil/teacher ratio secondary education (school year ending in 2007)	29	…	…	18
Total public expenditure on education as % of GNP (2007)	1.7	…	2.8	2.7

Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010

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