Gender equality in Basic Education

in Latin America and The Caribbean

(state of the art)

GENDER EQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

(State of the art)

UNESCO

Index

Introduction

Gender disparity can take very different forms as a function of social, cultural, historical and economic conditions of societies. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where there has been a significant increase in the availability of schooling, nearly all children have access to primary education. This region is unique in that girls are not just equal to boys, but sometimes they are even in a more advantageous position than boys in terms of school education.

At the regional level, there are more girls than boys attending primary school, and in many countries, drop-out and repetition are higher among boys than among girls. However, it appears that gender stereotyping, discrimination based on gender and gender bias are still evident, especially in rural and remote areas. Boys and girls are expected to play certain roles in accordance with the traditional, conventional norms and views, which are instilled in the minds of boys and girls through socialization both in the home and outside the home, including the school and the surrounding environment.

The status of women and their expected roles in family and society, therefore, remain largely the same, and discrimination based on gender has not vanished from the society, despite the success achieved by girls at school.

In the process of preparing UNESCO's Strategy Framework on Gender Equality in Basic Education, this special feature of gender equality and equity in Latin America and the Caribbean has attracted attention of the experts concerned, as the increase of educational participation of girls does not necessarily correspond with the advancement of their social/ economic status.

Furthermore, similar phenomena, i.e., more girls than boys in school and increasing of male drop out, have been seen sporadically and in a smaller scale in different parts of the world in the recent past. This has given rise to new concerns, and opened another dimension towards the gender equality in basic education.

In the light of the above, it was decided to prepare state-of-the-art papers on Gender Equality in Basic Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, shedding light on the specific feature of the region, based on the existing data, information and materials. The papers were also meant to complement UNESCO's Working Document: Gender Equality in Basic Education: Strategic Framework.

The Working Document emphasizes the integration of gender perspectives in the overall context of life-long learning for all with a view to attaining gender equality in an all-inclusive learning and social system, and to mainstreaming girls and women in education

systems. Education for gender equality aims to transform gender relations, so that both women and men enjoy the same opportunities to realize their full potential, and to create new partnerships between the genders, based on mutual respect, dialogue, and the sharing of public and private roles and responsibilities in all-inclusive social as well as education systems.

The state-of-the-art papers on gender equality in basic education in Latin America and in the Caribbean were conceived and prepared by the two experts, Dr Hyacinth Evans for the Caribbean and Graciela Messina for Latin American following the general framework prepared by UNESCO. The papers were presented at the Seventh Meeting of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the Major Project in the Field of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (PROMEDLAC VII, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 5-7 March 2001).

Although the scope of discussion in the two papers was determined largely by the availability of data and materials, the authors covered, to the extent possible, the following issues and structure suggested by UNESCO:

–   General review and analysis of the situation of basic education with special reference to gender disparities, 1991-2000;
–   Policy responses and national programmes and activities towards the gender disparities; and
–   Suggestions for strategies and co-operation to ensure gender equality in basic education.

In conclusion, while the gender balance in the region in the field of education is quite different from other parts of the world, the two papers consider that it is important to introduce the "gender perspective" in basic education, both formal and non-formal. The gender perspective needs to be shared and supported widely by all those involved in basic education – not only teachers and educators but also the governments and the civil society at large. In addition, the papers emphasize the need for more targeted approach to specific population groups and suggested special programmes focussing on boys. Teacher training inculcating the gender perspective, and more accurate and gender disaggregated statistical data are among the possible future activities to be considered in the region.

The authors also underlined the need for more in-depth analysis of case studies on and research into the root causes of the gender inequality and disparities beyond the usual educational or pedagogical domains "why certain children go to school while others don't." A pertinent question for Latin America and the Caribbean, or one common denominator for the disparities in educational opportunities between boys and girls, relates to the "poverty" issue. It is irrelevant, boys or girls, who do best in school, in a situation of extreme it is those who can bring in cash income to the family immediately and who can provide free labour for the family, who are often for the sake of family not sent to schools. The costs of education, and immediate and perceived economic returns prevent many parents of poor families from sending their boys and girls to school.

The two papers contained in this study are based on available existing data and materials. As such, their findings and conclusions are considered indicative of trends and an

overview of the gender disparities in the region today. Further close investigations and research into the unique regional situation are needed, and good practices and successful cases should be widely disseminated and shared by all those concerned, in order to achieve the gender equality in basic education, and to attain the ultimate objective of Education for All.

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I
An overview of current thinking on gender equality in Basic Education in Latin America (1990-2000)

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The purpose of this document is to report on gender equality within basic education in Latin America.[1] Treating equality necessarily involves making reference to gender inequalities, as well as their links with social class, demographic (urban-rural), age, ethnic, and cultural discrimination as well.

The text has been defined by UNESCO as a contribution, from a regional perspective, toward a "Strategic Framework on gender equality in basic education" which the organization is currently preparing. This framework complements the "United Nations Ten-Year Program for the Education of Girls", launched in Dakar as part of the follow-up of "Education For All".[2] Within this background in mind, "Education For All" is both a referent and the field within which that document may be classified.

Two themes are developed herein, referring to specific fields of knowledge:

– basic education, which includes compulsory schooling, public education, and the role of the State in education; and
– the question of gender, which includes the attributions societies apply to males and females, and involving relations of power and inequality. This overview encompasses reciprocal relations between basic education and gender, using specific examples. We conclude by outlining proposals for fostering inclusive basic education for the school-age population as well as for young people and adults. These proposals bring together gender equality and respect for diversity.

This study is based on research of secondary sources, and is presented as an overview of current thinking on the subject. This overview on current thinking has been limited by the

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[1]   19 countries, including all Spanish-speaking countries, Brazil, and Haiti.
[2]   The United Nations Ten-Year Program for the Education of Girls is an inter-agency initiative of the United Nations aimed at improving the quality of education and access opportunities for girls. Coordinated by UNICEF, and defined as a "permanent campaign", it includes the participation of UNESCO and of the World Bank, and establishes cooperative relations between different organizations within and outside the United Nations System.

lack of both up-to-date and systematic regional information regarding policies aimed at fostering gender equality, of statistics desegregated by gender, and of a critical mass of research on gender and education.

Within this framework, two questions are paramount:

– How is gender equality expressed within the field of basic education "for all" (girls, boys, young people, and adults)?, and,
– What is the role of basic education in the production, reproduction, or change in gender relations?

Five themes have been developed within the text:

– gender, basic education, and gender equality;
– the gender question within basic education in Latin America;
– the response of governments and NGOs in terms of policies, strategies, and programs;
– objectives and strategies defined in Dakar in regard to gender equality in basic education and in light of the background of this question; and
– thoughts and recommendations based on the above.

GENDER EQUALITY AND BASIC EDUCATION: BASIC CATEGORIES

"Basic education" is defined as the level or stage of an education system that includes early-childhood education, primary education, and the first phase of secondary education.[3] Undoubtedly, basic education has witnessed changes in both structure of the education system, and in the extension of the number of years of compulsory education.

"Basic education" is a category that has emerged in order to establish a distinction from primary education. The former term involves the right to an education that offers both meaningful learning and that acquired within society and the workplace. The debate over the meaning of "basic education" and how to differentiate it from elementary, or minimal instruction continues within the region.

The idea of a broadened basic education, present since the beginning of the Major Project in the Field of Education, and reinforced in Jomtien, refers to basic learning needs. Currently, there is agreement on the need for make basic education available "to all", including boys, girls, young people, and adults, and offered in both formal and non-formal

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[3] UNESCO requested that the diagnosis of basic education include early childhood education, primary education, and the first phase of secondary education. However, only 10 of 19 Latin American countries have established one or more years of early childhood education as part of compulsory education (see: Report on the Assessment of PROMEDLAC VII).

modalities. While in some countries, the institutionalization of basic education in unfinished, precarious, and not subject to assessment, other countries are involved with projecting and extending compulsory secondary education as a whole. The construction of a "broadened" form of basic education continues to be an incomplete and relevant task; one that make it possible to change the education system within a perspective of on-going, permanent instruction that goes beyond modalities that are compensatory and segregated. It is from this perspective that we will here analyze gender equality in Latin America.

"Gender" describes a social construct that transforms differences between the sexes into social, economic, and political inequalities. The concept of gender designates not only those things which societies attribute to each sex. It also implies a criticism of this cultural conversion of sex differences into inequalities (Cobo, 1995:55).

Legitimization of the concept of gender has contributed to clarifying relations of power (Celiberti, 1996), even when the term runs the risk of falling into the common usage that associates "gender" with women, rather than with gender-related social relations. Thinking about gender refers to the relations between men and women and to the social constructs of femininity and masculinity. Gender attributions are place demands upon and oppress both men and women, although it is women that have played subordinate roles. Consequently, gender is both a relational and a political category. "Gender is the primary field within which, or through which, power is articulated" (Scott, 1990, cited by Celiberti).

Construction of the category of gender, which is at the heart of feminist theory, was an achievement of women's movements. Closely related to this beginning, gender has been considered offensive and extraneous by many people. In education as well, gender has been considered to be a subject apart, even by gender specialists. Many have referred to the fact that awareness of gender itself coincides with instances of changes of domicile which produce disruptions in family life. A task for education is to foster awareness of the fact that gender questions are of everyone's interest, through reflection of personal experience. The first priority is to achieve this awareness in teachers and school administrators.

Equality is based on the principles of justice and freedom. Inequality, for its part, is associated with privilege and discrimination. Equality and inequality are not, however, separate and apart. They do not form a dichotomy (A and not A, or A and B). Rather, they are part of the same whole that determines how one lives. Equality, and in this case, gender equality is, as we have stated, a relational category. We subscribe here to a definition of gender equality as "equality between", and not "equality of" people.[4] Gender equality is an equivalence relation; a parameter that allows us to treat different subjects as equal, as having the same value. In contrast, the patriarchal view replaces humanity and equality with masculinity. (Jiménez Perona, 1995: 143-144).

From the standpoint of this characterization of gender, we can recognize the importance of questioning the idea that gender in education may be reduced to necessary curricular content, to a technical option, to something that can be added to an already-defined

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[4] While "equality-based" feminism speaks of "equality to", "difference-based" feminism speaks of "equality between" (Jiménez Perona, 1995:144).

structure. Given that gender inequality endangers the entire set of educational tasks, learning relations, institutional relations, pedagogical practice, school management, and curriculum, our focus must necessarily be holistic. The thesis defended by international organizations is that education is a key factor for fostering gender equality. International organizations such as ECLAC have turned their interests from the integration of women into development to the integration of a gender-based perspective into development. In accordance with this position, the Human Development Index, developed by the UNDP, includes an index in regard to gender (and not an index in regard to women), in which education indicators play a preponderant role.[5]

This thesis of the present paper is that gender equality, defined as treating those who are different as equals, coincides with the aspiration of basic education to be an area for that which is public and which is equal – of education for all. It follows that gender equality can offer a path for basic education to accomplish the mission that society has assigned to it.

THE QUESTION OF GENDER IN BASIC EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this first part is to treat gender differences in basic education – differences that refute the hypothesis about equality. Inequalities persist, but are hidden behind over-all averages.

Basic education was institutionalised during the 1990s. This was followed by a process of formal expansion of compulsory schooling. The extension of compulsory schooling was among the central strategies of education reforms during the decade.

In the current decade, basic education and compulsory schooling are just as linked as they have been in the past. Nevertheless, basic education is not limited to the expansion of legally required schooling. The concept of basic learning needs comes before curricular content. The major difference, however, is in the democratizing influence of basic education, known after the Jomtien Conference in 1990 as "education for all", applying to children, young people, and adults, and to both formal and non-formal learning modalities.

Since the year 2000, basic education is a level that has been in the process of institutionalization, but with very generalized coverage to which the majority of the school-age population in most countries has access. It is interesting to note that basic education continues and builds upon the expansion of primary education during the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, for most countries in the region, massive expansion of coverage of primary education during the 1960s and 1970s gave way to a gradual process of the institutionalization of basic education. Not enough time has passed for us to be able to assess the impact that the new structure of education systems –and the extension of compulsory schooling– have had on schooling levels

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[5] The development index relative to gender consists of life expectancy, GDP *per capita*, and two education indicators: the illiteracy rate and the gross enrollment rate, combining primary, secondary, and higher education. (Cfr. Development index in regard to gender in the Report on Human Development, UNDP, 2000: 161-164).

of the adult population. Moreover, in some countries, teacher unions have denounced the effects of "primarization" and of lower grade promotion rates of more vulnerable groups.

EQUALITY/INEQUALITY IN THE BASIC EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Indicators of levels of schooling[6] show that in most Latin America countries during the 1990s, girls participated in basic education at levels near similar to, or even slightly higher than boys. Moreover, these figures show that gender differences have been reduced in recent decades. Only in countries with high illiteracy rates and/or the significant presence of indigenous communities do we see inequalities of access. These vary by 4% to 8%.

For example, in Bolivia, for 1990, the gross enrollment rates in primary and secondary education were smaller for girls (for boys they were 81% vs. 73% for girls). In Colombia, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, gross rates for boys were lower than those for girls (differences that varied from 8% to 5% in 1990, and by 4% to 5% for 1995). According to information provided by ECLAC (1994, Table 6), for the 6-11 year-old group, Guatemala and Brazil also showed differences of up to 5% in 1990 to the detriment of girls.[7] These trends are derived from incomplete information, since schooling indicators desegregated by gender are available for only some countries and some years.[8]

Considering the enormous expansion of the coverage of primary education, followed by continual growth of basic education, one may put forward the hypothesis that "gender equality" in access to basic education is the result of this process, as well as of specific policies toward underprivileged groups (in terms of ethnicity, geographic location, and socio-economic status). Furthermore, the equitable participation of girls is part of social changes, new perspectives regarding the roles of women and of their rights, and of the high value assigned by families to education for both boys and girls, due to its contribution to social mobility. In short, relative gender equality in access to education may be explained more by policies aimed at expanding primary and/or basic education than by specific policies to foster gender equality.

It should be pointed out that, if we look at the participation of boys and girls in basic education by socio-economic strata, we can see some slight inequalities – even in countries with high rates of coverage of basic education. Furthermore, in some countries, such as Honduras, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic (1997), for urban dwellers in the 7-12 year-old group in the first income quintile, a higher percentage of girls in attend school than do boys.[9] At the regional level, we see that differences in enrollment in basic education are

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[6]   National gross and net enrollment rates (PROMEDLAC VII Report, UNESCO/OREALC, 2000) and national school attendance percentages by age group and income quintile for urban dwellers, obtained by household surveys (UNESCO estimates, based on ECLAC information).

[7]   Cfr. Tables VI and VII, Assessment Report, PROMEDLAC VII, UNESCO 2000, and information from ECLAC/CELADE household surveys, 1997, Table 1 in Annex.

[8]   Gross schooling rates are desegregated by gender for all countries; net rates are desegregated by gender for only 11 countries in 1990 and for 8 countries in 1996. PROMEDLAC VII Report, *op. cit*.

[9]   Quintile 1 corresponds to the poorest sector of the population. Quintile 5 corresponds to the wealthiest sector.

greater by income than by gender. Furthermore, the slight differences in gender for enrollment in basic education only apply to boys and girls from poor households. At the middle and upper household income levels, we do not observe gender differences for children from 7-12 years of age.[10]

Gender differences are greater, however, when we consider age groups that correspond to secondary and higher education, although here, too, differences by income are always greater than differences by gender.[11] Consequently, we can state that gender differences become more apparent and generate greater disadvantages after basic education has been completed, especially in the case of higher education, and when combined with income levels. For 16 countries, in 7 "favorable" income equality (Quintile V- the wealthiest), females participated less than males in higher education. Only in 3 countries do females from Quintile V have a greater participation than males, while in the others the percentages are equal. Furthermore, in higher education, for the wealthier groups, the gender differences have increased compared to basic education, and vary by 5% to 15%. Differences in school attendance by income level are significantly higher than differences by gender. For most countries, the proportion of women from Quintile I who are enrolled in higher education is 30% and more than for women in Quintile V.[12] Only in 2 countries do we see a "different" trend, perhaps "democratizing" trend for both gender and income, in which more women from Quintile I and Quintile III are enrolled in higher education than are men from these quintiles, while for Quintile V, women participate equally or to a lesser degree than men from the same income groups (Argentina and Panama). In short, all of the above confirms the fact that, since basic education is a level at which attendance is free and compulsory, "all" participate –even most children from poor households – with minimal gender inequalities. These inequalities increase in secondary and higher education, and are more associated with income level than with gender.

Indigenous girls and women have been cited as particularly affected by gender inequality. In countries such as Guatemala, where the percentage of native people is high, indigenous girls have an average of 0.9 years of schooling, and indigenous boys 1.8 years. For indigenous women between 20 and 24 years of age, 7 of 10 have no schooling (UNDP, Human Development Report, 1998, cited by Rivero, 2000:117).[13] According to the study of

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[10] In 16 countries for which information is available, in Quintile 1, 93% of boys and 94% of girls from 7-12 years of age attend school. For Quintile V, 99% of girls and boys in this age group attend school (UNESCO 2000 estimates). See Table 2.

[11] For Quintile I, 94% of children from 7-12 years of age attend school, with a slight difference in favor of girls. For the same quintile, only 66% of those from 13-19 years of age attend school, with the percentage falling to 16% for the 20-24 year-old group, with the same slight gender differences prevailing. In Quintile V, 99% of children from 7-12 years of age attend school, with no gender differences in this figure; 84% of those from 13-19 years of age, and 48% of those from 20-24 years of age attend school, with gender differences of approximately 3% (UNESCO, 2000 estimates).

[12] In 12 of 16 countries, the differences vary from 46% to 12%. In Argentina, 14% of women from Quintile I are enrolled in higher education, while 61% of women from Quintile V are enrolled. In Chile, the corresponding figures are 12% and 47%; in Uruguay, they are 11% and 54%, respectively. Cfr. Table I.

[13] Rivero, José. "Reforma y desigualdad educativa en América Latina", in *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación,* No. 23, May-August 2001.

Valdés and Gomariz (cited by ECLAC, 1994), during the 1980s, between half and almost all indigenous women in four countries had no schooling (Bolivia, 95%; Guatemala, 74%; Panama, 53%; Paraguay, 75%). Furthermore, in these countries, the proportion of women with no schooling is greater than that of men by 9% to 27%. Different studies on the subject identify the main obstacle to schooling for indigenous people as curricula and schools that are outside of their cultural reality. In the case of girls and women, this is combined with the presence of norms that define the community as the principal locale for socialization and life skills development.

Gender equality in access to basic education, considering the school population as a whole, without specifying sub-groups, co-exists together with a set of "in-process" inequalities that alter the original relationship. In effect, we note that girls leave school earlier in rural areas. In some countries, this phenomenon is most marked among girls from 10-14 years of age and among children living in poor urban areas of one country (Brazil). We also note a greater tendency of boys to repeat grades and, consequently, to require more years to move through basic education. Given this situation, we may conjecture that children living in poverty are more obliged than girls to seek employment that is not compatible with the school calendar, nor with the regular hours of attendance and study that school requires. These processes, for their part, result in high drop-out rates and in a "grade repetition culture" that is harmful to both girls and to boys – especially in poor, rural, and/or indigenous areas.[14] Worth mentioning is the lack of regional information regarding gender differences in terms of school drop-out and grade repetition. This makes it difficult to identify inequalities, and even more difficult to treat them specifically.

There are gender differences in academic achievement in Latin America. A UNESCO-OREALC study[15], as well as an OECD study[16] note that girls exhibit better results in language, and boys do better in mathematics. The UNESCO-OREALC study permits us to specify these differences, showing that, in the cases of girls, the average regional scores in language were 6.04 points higher than for boys. In mathematics, the difference in favor of boys was only 1.79 points. Moreover, girls performed better in language in 8 of 11 countries, while boys performed better in mathematics in only 4 countries. Given the fact that the past tendency has been for boys to do better in mathematics, this latter information suggests that hypothesis that there has been a decline in the achievement of boys in mathematics.[17]

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[14] For 1995, for the 14 countries in which information is available, only half show "school completion rates" to the 6th grade of primary school of 83% or better, while in two other countries, less than half of all students complete the 6th grade. In another five countries, for every 3 or one of ever 4 children do not complete the 6th grade. In regard to grade repetition rates, in 1995, for 15 countries for which information is available, only 3 have less than a 5% rate. In 6 countries the rate varies between 5% and 10%. In six others, the repetition rate is between 10% and 15%. Cfr. Report of the PROMEDLAC VII assessment, Tables XI and XIII.

[15] UNESCO Study, *op. cit.*

[16] OECD study, 1998, cited by Alvaro Marchesi, "Un sistema de indicadores de desigualdad educativa" in *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación,* No. 23, May-August 2000.

[17] *First International Comparative Study of Language, Mathematics, and Associated Factors for Students in the Third and Fourth Grades of Basic Education.* Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of Quality in Education. UNESCO. Santiago, Chile 2000.

On the other hand, some studies have shown that boys are more stimulated and have more opportunities than girls in the classroom. Moreover, girls, who tend more to obey norms, are perceived as less creative by teachers, or teachers often guide their students toward tasks that "are compatible with their gender".[18] Other studies reach even more emphatic conclusions, saying, "although they may have high repetition and drop-out rates, in poor urban and rural areas, females exhibit better academic achievement than males in all countries in which figures desegregated by gender are available" (Valdés and Gomariz, 1992 and 1993, cited by ECLAC, 1994).

Finally, available information does not allow us to draw conclusions regarding gender differences in regard to the student population that enters basic education and does not continue into secondary education. A significant part of the total school population remains outside of school at this transition point[19], varying from 50% to 30% in 3 of the 7 countries for which information is available. Assuming the most favorable hypothesis that males and females are distributed equally in this transition, a similar percentage of females would suffer discrimination by level of entry, urban-rural location, and pertinence in indigenous communities, thus constituting a "bottle-neck" in terms of equity.[20]

In regard to initial schooling, there are no differences in terms of access by gender, since girls participate equally or slightly less than boys. Early childhood education has become compulsory in half of the countries in the region. From 1980 to date, coverage has tripled (from 16% in 1980, to 36% in 1990, and to 46% in 1997-3 to 5 years-olds in Latin America and the Caribbean).[21] Nevertheless, less than half of all children are enrolled in this modality. The differences are particularly striking when we compare rural and urban areas, public and private schools, and socio-economic levels. Gender differences appear when this factor is combined with socio-economic level. For example, in Chile (1998), 24% of girls in household income Quintile I are enrolled in such programs, compared with 45.7% of girls in Quintile V. If we look at the totals of boys and girls only, gender differences do not appear (SERNAM, 2000).[22] Here again we lack the information necessary to be able to consider education indicators by gender and socio-economic level for all countries.

The degree of confidence that poorer women attribute to early childhood education is a matter of debate. While some research shows that they have greater confidence in the ability of schools to educate their children than in their own ability, other studies identify cultural resistance in regard to sending their under 5 year-old children to day centers. Ethno-

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[18] Studies of Rosetti, 1988 and 1992 in Chile. Study by Rico, 1994, in Ecuador, cited by ECLAC, 1994.

[19] See the transition rate from primary to secondary education in the PROMEDLAC VII assessment report, UNESCO 2000, Table XII.

[20] ECLAC has disseminated this term in the region, and has developed studies of equity in secondary education. In the case of Chile, an urban country with a relatively small percentage of indigenous communities, the high percentage of students who do not enter secondary education (47%) confirms the fact that social class is the principal factor of discrimination.

[21] PROMEDLAC VII Assessment Report, pp. 95-100.

[22] Previous research on the same decade shows trend toward income differences in early childhood education enrollment (UNICEF/MIDEPLAN, 1993, cited by ECLAC, 1994).

graphic studies point out that women have confidence in schools, even for very young children. At the same time, they exhibit a proto-pedagogical, or intuitive knowledge regarding the education of their children that leads these women to value their own roles as informal educators and to not accept schools where their children are subject to physical or symbolic punishment, or where services are more social service-based than pedagogical in nature.[23]

In short, global figures on access of the school-age population to early childhood education do not reveal the differences that we observe when enrollment by gender is combined with geographic location, ethnic pertinence, and/or social class. Thus, enrollment statistics alone do not reveal the gender inequalities that occur at the levels of early childhood and basic education, and which become more evident in higher education, especially in terms of career choices made by women. Moreover, such differences occur "after" entry into the education system in the schooling of females and in unequal participation in the workplace in terms of salaries and types of work. To these inequalities are added differences in the treatment of boys and girls within the classroom and in the transmission of sexist stereotypes through programs of study, school texts, and in interactions that are only revealed by some types of research and through direct observation. Sexist stereotypes within school, transmitted through school texts, have been identified as one of the most difficult obstacles to achieving gender equality during the 1990s. Various investigations carried out in a number of countries in the region show this trend. (ECLAC, 1994: 23-24).

It is important to note that these gender relations occur in basic education for the school-age population within education systems that:

– have not achieved generalized access at this level. Although it is true that there has been an expansion of the supply of basic education services and of compulsory schooling, in 6 countries within the region, the net enrollment rate for primary education was less than 80% in 1996 (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, and Nicaragua).[24] Moreover, access inequalities and problems of late age entry persist for the poor children living in urban, rural, and indigenous areas;

– the quality of learning is unequally distributed, following socially discriminatory lines;

– social class continues to be the greatest source of inequalities in education. This is the case for most countries, with great differences in coverage between basic and higher education, which are even greater when income level is added as a explanatory factor.

– Moreover, gender equality in access to basic education, as indicated in global statistics, occurs within societies in which gender inequalities persist in the workplace, social and political participation, and in the distribution of income.

The situation of students who become pregnant is a clear indicator of discrimination. Pregnancy is "solved" in most countries in the region through formal expulsion from school,

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[23] Batallán, *et al.*, 1998 and 1999.
[24] In Bolivia and in El Salvador, the net total enrollment rate (girls and boys) for primary education was approximately 60% in 1996. See PROMEDLAC VII, Table VII.

or through informal punishment mechanisms that lead to the individual dropping out of regular education. In some countries, the regulations that authorize expulsion have been withdrawn, but this continues to be an option for school principals. In other countries, there are regulations that prohibit expulsion, but these are not always followed. In still others, no legislation exists to protect the right to education for pregnant girls.

Women teachers predominate in Latin American schools, both at the level of early childhood and basic education. The figure varies from 97% to 77% (1990 and 1997).[25] The same is true for basic education for adults (Messina, 1993). Teaching is widely considered to be among the "woman's professions", in which care-giving tasks are extensions of maternal roles. To this fact may be added the problems of unsatisfactory working conditions and salaries of teachers which hinder the autonomous production of knowledge. Taken as a whole, this set of situation is in itself a manifestation of gender inequality. In the distribution of teaching tasks, gender is a classifying criterion. We note that as the level of specialization in the transmission of knowledge increases, the participation of women decreases. The less prestigious and lower paying teaching posts are occupied by women. Women participate more as well in early childhood and basic education in activities designed for parents (meetings, parent workshops, etc.).

In view of the above, we present the hypothesis that for the school-age population, basic education is presented "as if " it were gender-equal, as being the level of education in which all participate. The fact that most children attend basic education, independently of their family income implies that this level has fulfilled a democratizing and "homogenizing" role. Basic education has been , since its origins as "primary instruction" an eminently public institution, in which the principle of equality is in evidence. Nevertheless, basic education is also that place in which gender differences and other types of inequalities may be hidden. In regard to gender, basic education is a place in which equality of access has coexisted with more subtle forms of inequality. The overwhelming presence of female instructors and mothers results in the school being a "feminine" institution that maintains in the imagination of children continuity relations with the home. Public schools, created to differentiate itself from the domestic environment, carries out this break while at the same time establishing a relations of continuity with the family.[26] Consequently, the school not only reproduces the social inequalities that gender inequality carries with it but questions the public school offer itself.

INEQUALITIES IN THE BASIC EDUCATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

Here we understand the term "basic education" in a broad sense. Thus, it is of interest to consider illiteracy and the participation of young and adult women in basic education. In the

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[25]   UNESCO, Institute of Statistics, statistics on-line, 2001.

[26]   The school as a "second home" and the teacher as a "second mother" – or "aunt" that is the name given in Chile to the early childhood education teacher.

1980s, the regional average for illiteracy among the population 15 years of age and older showed slight differences when considered from the perspective of gender. These differences still remained a decade later.[27] Furthermore, the difference between percentages of female and male illiteracy decreased from 5% to 3% from 1980-1995.[28] Moreover, a number of countries have percentages for female illiteracy that are considerably higher than the regional average ((Guatemala, 48%; Bolivia, 28%; Paraguay, 24%) and/or with differences of 10% to 15% compared to the figures for males (Peru and Guatemala with differences of 13%, Bolivia with 15%) (Valdés and Gomariz, cited in ECLAC, 1994). A common characteristic of the above countries is a higher percentage of indigenous people. In terms of absolute numbers, in 1990, the number of illiterate females was approximately 24,000,000, representing 56% of all non-literates in the region. This number is falling slightly. The number of non-literate women in 2005 is estimated to be 21,500,000 – or 54% of the total number of non-literates in the region.[29]

At the national level, differences in illiteracy by gender increase when the figures for age, rural sector, poverty, and/or ethnic origin are considered together. Under some of these conditions or combination of conditions, some studies assert that female illiteracy is significant even in countries with low over-all literacy rates.[30] Women residing in rural areas, indigenous women, rural and indigenous women, and in particular, women over 50 years of age are the most affected by illiteracy.[31] At the beginning of the 1980s, rural women as a group had one of the highest illiteracy rates, reaching 50% or more, often twice as high as national averages.[32] Furthermore, between 1980 and 1990, illiteracy among rural women decreased to a lesser degree than total female illiteracy.[33] For 1990-2000, information is not available on illiteracy trends for rural women. Similarly, in the rural sector, not only are

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[27] The regional average for illiteracy was 20% in 1980, 22% for women and 17% for men. In the 1990s, illiteracy in the region was 14%, with 12% of men illiterate and 15% of women. The number of non-literates was estimated to be approximately 40 million in the year 2000 (UNESCO-OREALC, 2000).

[28] Source: UNESCO-OREALC, 2000, utilizing the 1999 ECLAC/CELADE data base.

[29] UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Statistics on-line, 2001.

[30] A study on female illiteracy in Chile concludes that, in that country, which is considered to have a low rate of illiteracy, with an over-all figure of 5.7% (according to the 1992 census, which was the reference used by the study in question), illiteracy is hidden and over-estimated. The study asserts that the number of non-literates grows within contexts of poverty, especially in areas that are both rural and indigenous. Among women in these areas, illiteracy is even higher. For example, in the rural area of Temuco, where there are large numbers of Mapuche people, the illiteracy rate is 19.5%; 25.9% for women, and 13.6% for men. (Letelier, 1996: 49-66).

[31] For 1998, in Brazil, illiteracy among the female population 60 years of age and older was 35%, and 18% for women between 45 and 59 years of age. In Bolivia, 62% of women 60 years of age and older are illiterate. The figure is 39% for women between 45 and 59 years of age. In Honduras, half of the female population 60 years of age and older is illiterate (ECLAC/CELADE, 1999).

[32] At the beginning of the 1980s, 60% of rural women in Brazil were illiterate. Corresponding figures were: Bolivia: 50.9%; Venezuela: 48%; Honduras: 47%; Panama: 35% (UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1999); Peru: 56% (ECLAC, 1994). At the beginning of the 1990s, 46% of rural women in Peru, 50% in Bolivia, and 60% in Guatemala were illiterate (ECLAC, 1994).

[33] Valdés and Gomariz, 1994, cited in ECLAC, 1994.

these rates higher; the differences between female and male illiteracy increase as well. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s, male illiteracy was lower than female illiteracy by 35% in Peru, 26% in Bolivia, and 25% in Guatemala.[34] It is important to understand that the distribution of illiteracy is manifested in a number of ways:

– although female rural illiteracy is high, gender –based illiteracy differences are less than urban/rural and generation differences;
– illiteracy increases in a greater degree when we consider specific populations, and when various characteristics are considered together. For example, in Bolivia, illiteracy among rural women 50 years of age and over was 86% in 1990[35];
– in countries with indigenous traditions, illiteracy rates among urban women are significantly different from male illiteracy rates (by 11% in Bolivia and in Guatemala).[36]

Furthermore, women make up a broad contingent of young people and adults who have not completed primary school in Latin America (estimated in 110 million in 1990 and 1998, UNESCO/OREALC). Thus, even in countries with low illiteracy rates, the percentage of the population with incomplete primary schooling is on the order of 40% (Infante, 2000). At least one-half of this group of people with incomplete primary schooling, is made up of women – a group of about 55 million. If we add together women who state that they are illiterate to those with an incomplete primary education, we have an estimated number that reaches 76 million. This group makes up the "silent" (or potential) female demand for basic adult education.

If we consider illiteracy to include "functional illiteracy"[37] we may conclude that a much larger proportion of women than those who are self-declared "illiterates" do not master writing nor have the skills required in order to participate in the workplace and in social life. In effect, half of those interviewed in the regional study on "functional illiteracy", and who have 7 years of schooling or less, have "low" skills in terms of mastery of language and mathematics (placed in levels 1 and 2 in 50% of the cases). In regard to gender differences, the study on functional literacy notes that women are more limited in terms of being able to continue studying and to receive training.[38]

A regional study carried out at the beginning of the 1990s notes that women participate in a lesser degree in formal basic adult education. This means that as adults, they have fewer possibilities to begin or to continue their primary or basic education. Furthermore, on

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[34] In the rural sector of Bolivia, female illiteracy was 50%, while male illiteracy was 23%; in Guatemala, the corresponding figures were 60% and 46%, and in Peru 46% and 10% (Valdés and Gomariz, cited in ECLAC, 1994).

[35] ECLAC, 1994.

[36] ECLAC, 1994.

[37] Functional illiteracy: a definition based on the skills required for personal development in society and in the workplace, in which written code is predominant. While the traditional notion of illiterate establishes a simple division between literates and non-literates, the concept of functional illiteracy involves different levels of mastery of writing.

[38] Regional study on functional literacy in 7 countries in the region. See: Infante, 2000, and Final Assessment Report, PROMEDLAC, UNESCO, 2000.

an average, women enter basic adult education courses at a "later age" than men. Women have less previous schooling, and exhibit longer periods of "inactivity" in education (understood as the time that passes between leaving regular study and entry into adult education programs). In basic adult education, women show better academic performance and lower repetition rates than men. At the same time, women remain longer in basic education. This reaffirms that they enter with less previous schooling and/or enter and exit adult programs, alternating periods of "good performance" with other periods outside of the system, in a permanence modality simultaneously discontinuous and prolonged that redefines "efficiency" in terms of timely achievement. We also note that women students work for longer periods without receiving remuneration, or earn in a sporadic fashion, and that their gainful employment is more conditioned by nearness to urban areas and by domestic tasks. In short, for adult women, the major obstacle is access to basic education. Although they face a series of discriminatory factors, women have increased their participation in primary or basic education in past decades, especially in community-based programs as well as adult education in general (Messina, 1993[39]).

Furthermore, women participate to a greater degree in literacy training programs (INEA, 1989, cited by Messina) or in home-based or community education programs (Pieck, 1996), while men participate more in basic adult education programs. Basic education programs organized by companies and which include young people and adults also have less participation of women. In literacy training programs, the participation of women has been hindered by the dual work/domestic role to which they are subject, and by lack of their self-confidence in their ability to learn. Although women participate to a greater degree than men in literacy training programs, they tend to drop out more frequently and to not continue in such programs.[40] Women also participate less than men in "emergency" occupational training programs for young people of both sexes (for example, the Young Chile Program) and in small business programs with managerial or marketing training (for example, the "Start Your Own Business" program of the Peruvian NGO CID). Similarly, women are a minority in occupational training programs of national training institutes or those associated with public institutions or private companies, especially women who are in less-skilled positions.[41] On the other hand, there are some programs of different kinds have been designed exclusively for women: a) programs occupational training that focus on high-risk women (for example, women heads of households), organized generally by government entities to aid women; b) gender-focused occupational training programs organized by NGOs.

In short, participation of women in basic education programs for young people and adults, and in other education programs for the adult population is evidence of the presence of gender inequalities, since women participate to a greater degree in "protected" programs –which are less valued socially– than in programs for all age groups, and in programs that

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[39] Regional investigation on basic adult education in 13 countries in the region, including field studies.

[40] Guzmán, Virginia, *op. cit.*, 1999.

[41] For example, in Chile in 1997, women made up 28% of the total of workers trained by the National Employment Service. However, the difference in the proportion of men and women decreased in only 3 years. The percentage of women in these programs in 1994 was 19% (SERNAM, 2000: 29).

link them to the informal sector of the economy and with literacy training, but not in the continuation of formal studies. It thus is necessary to continue implementing measures designed to guarantee the access of women to basic education. When they do overcome access barriers, women require special conditions to allow them to continue their studies – for example, the schools must be near their domiciles. In some cases, women themselves adapt to the conditions by entering and exiting programs in order to complete their programs of study over a longer period of time.

Finally, the distribution of schooling levels for young and adult women is another indicator of inequalities. Although women have increased their presence at all levels of education, and although they undoubtedly have more education opportunities and participate more than in the past, inequalities still persist in the distribution of schooling by gender. These inequalities do not appear when we look at the almost similar distribution in primary education by gender for adults 25 years of age and over. Inequalities appear in the rural sector, where women possess the lowest levels of completed primary schooling (especially in countries such as Bolivia, Brazil, and Guatemala).[42] Differences in schooling levels by gender increase slightly for the same age group (25 years of age and over) for secondary and post-secondary education.[43] Furthermore, one notes differences between young and adult women. Young women tend to have more schooling and to be more autonomous. Still, generation gaps are smaller than cultural and urban-rural differences.[44] Schooling levels of women have an important influence in terms of learning of their children, their reproductive health, and their employment opportunities.[45]

The facts noted above point toward the fact that poor young and adult women have been "separated" from education, with the resulting unfavorable consequences in terms of isolation and feelings of low social worth. The State guarantees equal access to basic education for the school-age population, while passing over education for other age groups. Members of the middle and upper classes continue their education using their own funds. This results in a restriction of full public access to education. Rural women have historically been subject to the invisibility of private life and of violence (Bonfil: 1999: 127-129). Middle and upper-class women have been able to claim for themselves the rights defended by the women's' movement. Women who are members of at-risk groups continue to be kept outside the realm of education. This opens the way for a mobilizing role organizations of these women within civil society.

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[42] Schooling levels of the population 25 years of age and over, by gender and geographic location. Such cross-comparisons are only possible for some countries. UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook, 1999.

[43] Schooling levels of the population 25 years of age and over, by gender and geographic location. Such cross-comparisons are only possible for some countries. UNESCO, Statistical Yearbook, 1999.

[44] Guzmán, Virginia, *op. cit.*, 1999.

[45] ECLAC has developed indicators for the relation between the schooling levels of women and the number of live births. A number of studies confirm the relationship between schooling levels of mothers and the learning of their children. A pioneer study in this field was the ECLAC Montevideo study, coordinated by Germán Rama at the beginning of the 1990s. There is also a growing body of information regarding lower participation of women in the economically active population and their participation in "under-employment" and "multi-employment".

If we bring together gender differences in the school and adult populations, as the UNDP has done with its gender-related development index[46], we see that:

–   in almost all countries in the region, there are gender differences that negatively affect girls and women (according to the UNDP, Uruguay is an exception), and;
–   the lowest scores on the index are those of countries that have high rates of female illiteracy and/or a high proportion of indigenous communities.

In summary, basic education is fragmented in terms of gender equality:

–   in basic education for the school-age population, equality of access does not apply for low income and rural or indigenous children; furthermore, there are other inequalities in terms of drop-out, grade repetition, school achievement, and relations within the classroom;
–   for basic education and for illiteracy levels for young people and adults, gender differences also follow lines of social discrimination, but involve a larger number of people (some 76 million adult women are illiterate or have not completed primary school) and a more radical separation in terms of education and that which is public. This information is relevant because it confirms that there is a need to find solutions for girls and women alike.

It is important to emphasize that education statistics available from ministries of education are not sufficiently desegregated by sex. It is therefore necessary to make use of information from household surveys that are carried out periodically by national statistical institutes or by universities, of education or social science research on the rural sector, of poor sectors or indigenous communities. It is striking how inequalities reveal themselves when one makes use of research on the theme, and how such inequalities remain hidden when we consider only global education indicators, constructed from information derived from the education systems themselves.

GOVERNMENT GENDER AWARENESS POLICIES

The question of gender has been incorporated into education policies. One the one hand, reforms seek improvements in quality and in equity of education for all. Consequently, girls and women have been benefited by these policies. On the other, governments have initiated specific policies to promote the principle of gender equality. In several countries that have created quality broadly based improvement policies, gender equality has been adopted as a specific objective. However, understood as policies intended to encourage diversity, the gender perspective conflicts with the tendency of reforms to homogenize, re-centralize, and conserve the attributions of centrally-based decision makers.

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[46]   Note that this index is comprised of life expectancy, GDP *per capita*, the illiteracy rate for women, and the female enrollment rate, combining the levels of primary, secondary, and higher education.

Within countries in the region, the gender perspective has been incorporated into educational processes under different modalities. Some of these have been:

–   In curricula, and in the fundamental objectives and minimum contents of basic and secondary education;
–   In different areas of the curriculum, specifying the contributions of women in cultural and social development, and in their historical role. Specifically, manuals have been developed for the production of non-sexist materials;
–   In teaching materials;
–   In sex education. In this area, non-sexist perspectives have been developed. In some countries, this has included the creation of multi-disciplinary commissions for the prevention of teenage pregnancy, the design of programs for students in secondary education and/or the last cycle of basic education in order to foster sex education, the development of materials, and training workshops;
–   In on-going education programs for teachers, in order to identify sexist practices in language, attitudes, and interactions within the classroom. This has included workshops for teachers and their supervisors, as well as the production of support materials.

Policies to promote gender equality may be classified according to whether they seek to improve educational access, processes, or completion (Guzmán and Irigoin, 2000). In regard to access to basic education, programs have been developed to assure that underprivileged girls enter school. There have also been awareness promotion programs for mothers in order to bring them into the school community. These measures seek to eliminate selection and discrimination. The measures related to this process are undoubtedly the most frequent, and include everything from incorporation of the gender perspective in the curriculum, the production of textbooks, and teacher training, to protecting pregnant students and making it possible for mothers to free themselves in part from domestic tasks in order to begin or continue their studies. Programs have also been developed that seek to aid young people and adults in continuing their studies beyond the level of basic education.

It should be pointed out that policies for fostering gender equality many originate within ministries of education, working together with national offices for the promotion of the rights of women. Within ministries of education, such programs come from different areas: basic, or primary education, inter-cultural bilingual education, rural education, teacher training, and others. Even when commissions are created with education ministries aimed at fostering dialogue among different sectors, coordination problems persist. In some countries, comprehensive programs have been developed to promote the equality of females in education. These include, for example, curricular and teacher training changes at all levels, research, and the strengthening of the role of women the cultural sphere (e.g., the PRIOM program in Argentina, 1991-1995, Morgade, 1999:33). It should be noted that, in some countries, gender equality promotion policies have been questioned by the more conservative sectors of society.[47]

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[47]   The PRIOM program was discontinued due to the opposition of conservative groups (Morgade, *op. cit.*).

Gender equality policies in education seek to confront the inequalities we have identified here. A government, faced with an inequality, creates a program to "eliminate" it. This mentality results in a set of measures that are mutually unarticulated. To this situation is added the fact that gender policies are not integrated with others policies related to respecting diversity. The most predominant activities treat curricula more than they do teaching practices. Although "gender pedagogy" has been developed in Latin America, its impact has been felt more in universities and NGOs than within governments. This pedagogy is part of a broader theoretical movement that is expressed in gender studies and in research on the theme in post-graduate programs. Begun in Mexico and Argentina, these multiplied during the 1990s in universities in various countries. In all cases, gender studies involve a reconstruction of the experiences of women and men in order to deconstruct socially assigned roles. Women's studies have been followed by others dealing with masculinity. Undoubtedly, gender studies not only create new categories; they also have brought into question social science paradigms (Cobo, 1995:61). However, gender concepts are little applied in the classroom, or are when so applied are done so through individual initiative (Morgade, 1999:32-33).

The incorporation of all girls and women in education continues to be an unfinished task of the first priority (Subirats, 1998: 18-19). Within this framework, some countries have carried out campaigns to give more attention to the question. Infrastructure improvements, a generalized strategy within reforms, more linked to equity than to gender, have contributed to improving access of girls to education. At the same time, co-education has become the rule, and is seen in most countries as a democratizing measure. Gender specialists, however, recommend the separate education of girls and boys at certain times and under certain circumstances as a way to create awareness and affirm the desire of girls to learn (Morgade, 1999:32). Moreover, among the more radical theorists, incorporating the gender perspective cannot be accomplished through "new content"; but rather through experience: emphasizing gender awareness. Working with families and defining norms protecting the right to education of pregnant adolescent girls are themes that have been treated in various countries. In practice, however, pregnant girls continue to be expelled from school.

According to some educators, the decentralization of curricula is a path toward inclusion and respect for diversity. Given the fact that fostering gender equality is a democratizing measure, decentralization and the gender perspective are "two possibilities that together, can help promote underprivileged groups" (Aylwin, 1997:55). Given this fact, we must look at the type of decentralization and differentiate between different styles, those which are more and those which are less linked to the participation of the entire education community. The incorporation of the gender focus in plans of study has also been much debated. While some defend a multidisciplinary approach, others argue that this is devoid of gender content. The integration between the discipline "content" and gender is also an inconclusive theme.

For one country (Colombia) an assessment of how to incorporate the gender perspective into basic and secondary education concludes that school texts continue to transmit sexist stereotypes and to employ masculine language. Furthermore, when content regarding women is included, it is often anecdotal or spotty. In this area, the gender of the author of

texts appears to matter little. Thus, it is important that a gender perspective be created among men and women teachers alike (Reveco and Rodas, 1997).

Sex education programs exist in most countries. There is debate, however, regarding whether the gender perspective is explicit, or whether it simply emerges in the process of dialogue with students. Furthermore, students in basic education participate little in these programs, which have been designed for the secondary level. It should be added that in some countries, sex education programs have been opposed by conservative groups.

Incorporation of the gender perspective in initial teacher education is limited to some isolated cases, in some academic fields. On-going teacher training programs that contain a gender perspective are rare as well. In some countries, teacher training programs containing a gender perspective have been developed which are dependent upon universities or on organizations that promote women's questions. NGOs and universities have developed significant theoretical studies on the gender question. The activities of these institutions have been directed toward research and to the development of non-formal education programs for women that contain a gender perspective in fields such as literacy training, leadership, job training and others.

EXAMPLES OF "GOOD PRACTICES"

1.   Female leadership teacher training program

A secondary school teacher training program to develop female leadership (Chile, 1998-2000), sponsored by SERNAM (the National Women's Service), that trained both teachers who carried out pilot workshops in schools, and coordinators of freely chosen curricular activities. The training program is part of a program to foster student leadership in secondary schools, and includes didactic materials. The workshop allowed teachers to:
a) reflect upon the rights and duties of men and women in public life and in the family, questioning their roles as mothers;
b) understand that their communication with girls is based only upon norms, and not on a basis that would permit teachers to know their female students according to their personal limitations and potential;
c) reflect upon their own lives and that of their families;
d) appreciate the difference between that which one intends and that which one does; and
e) recognize that it is necessary to work on the subject based more on affect than on content or cognitive skills.

Suggestions resulting from the assessment:
a) the purpose of such meetings should be clear and precise, given the fact that some teachers did not know the purpose, or were obliged to attend;
b) such a workshop should not be held against the will of teachers;
c)   time and space should be provided for other themes, such as sexuality and the family;
d) it is important to strengthen teacher self-esteem;
e) such training should be practical, and teachers should participate in a workshop similar to that which they are going to coordinate;

f) training should be provided in active methodologies, fostering the development of creative teachers who do not restrict themselves only to the methodologies or techniques presented;

g) finally, it is important to provide training in the areas of gender, difference, citizenship, and participation.

2.   Female leadership workshops (program with a gender perspective for basic and secondary education)

Women's Leadership Workshops (Chile, 1998-2000): a pilot program aimed at fostering leadership skills among secondary school students. In practice, the program included students from the 7th grade of primary school to the 4th year of secondary school.

The program was assessed in 1999 in a sampling of schools (12 in 3 regions of the country, including the Santiago area, interviews were carried out in each school with the teacher in charge of the workshops, the principal, and with students).

The workshops provided forums for thinking about women's identity. They included the use of materials for students, which were judged to be useful. The workshops are part of "elective" curricular activities chosen by schools within the framework of a more flexible curriculum. The student participants stated that one of the most important points was the personal journal they kept, as well as the opportunity to analyze their relationships with the male members of their families. It was noted in the workshops that female activities are stigmatized; gender stereotypes were identified as well. The workshops improved the participants' creativity and self-esteem, as well as strengthening their self-confidence. They had the opportunity to question the role that women play in family life and to better relate to fellow students and to their teachers, identify themselves more with their schools, and express and defend ideas related to their condition as females.

Limitation:

a) in some schools, the workshop was not considered to be an elective subject, was held outside regular hours, or during orientation periods;

b) teachers "were not prepared";

c) the workshop was known within in school only by the principal and by some teachers;

d) there is a need to emphasize preventive measures related to sexuality;

e)   in some cases, the subject of leadership had a secondary role;

f)   in some cases, personal development and self-esteem were emphasized more than the gender perspective.

Suggestions resulting from the assessment: create awareness among principals; see to it that the workshop is known to all teachers; plan the workshops as part of school activities and determine beforehand to what curricular area they should belong; incorporate mothers and male students into the workshops; provide school learning resource centers with materials on the subject; create a support network, based in the Ministry of Education; strengthen activities associated with self-esteem and autonomy.

All of these actions are part of the process of institutionalization of gender equality within the countries in the region. At the beginning of the 1990s, governments had completed the process of creating national mechanisms to foster women's' development (ECLAC, 1998). The demands of women were a necessary condition for reforms within States. National Women's Departments of Women's' Affairs increased within countries, albeit with operational limitations and facing cultural resistance to a more equitable participation of women.

By the end of the 1990s, the subject of gender had become institutionalized as a cross-cutting activity within different areas of government, without being limited to National Department of Women's' Affairs. According to ECLAC (1998:13), this process increased by some 60% within countries of the region. This development, however, has taken place within the central administration more than in more decentralized areas of government. Furthermore, a typology regarding national mechanisms designed to foster gender equality developed by ECLAC (ECLAC, 1998: 17-19), mentions only 4 countries out of 39 include by the study have achieved a "formal" level of legitimacy (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, and Paraguay), in which the authority of the organization has been established by constitutional mandate and where means are available to exercise power (ECLAC, 1998:18). Toward the end of the 1990s, the accumulated power of the government apparatus in regard to the fostering of gender equality was still limited, and was concentrated in areas regulated by national authorities. (ECLAC, 1998:20).

THE GENDER DEBATE: THINKING SINCE DAKAR

Beginning in the 1970s, the situation of women was seen from the viewpoint of integration and development. The celebration of the International Year of Women (1975) and organization of the 1st International Conference for Women (1975) are indication of this new perspective (ECLAC, 1983). Gender equality became a growing issue as a developmental value and goal (Guzmán and Irigoin, 2000:231). Since the 1970s, a number of regional and national action plans have been guided by the principle of gender equality. This orientation has been based on social processes, and particularly on the growing participation of women in public life, which increased significantly during the entire century. The feminist movement legitimated women's' rights by making gender discrimination visible and by making gender equality a public demand. Governments have begun to incorporate the gender dimension into government policies in a number of areas. Nevertheless, inequalities persist. Such inequalities are part of the context of social exclusion and the "feminization" of poverty. Empowerment of women has co-existed with inequality during the last 20 years. Although progress has been made since the 1980s, structural inequalities persist.[48]

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[48] An in-house ECLAC document on the legal situation of women in Latin America and the Caribbean at the beginning of the 1980s presents a diagnosis that, with some variations, is still valid. The report points out that "even recognizing the achievements obtained with the United Nations Decade for Women, females are still objects and subjects of discrimination". It goes on to state that deal with the predominance of women in the informal sectors of the economy and in low paying assembly-line work ("maquiladoras"), with unfavorable

Since the 1970s, the idea of "eliminating" all discrimination related to women has become a part of public debate and has been carried out in practice. The Convention for the elimination of all discrimination against women, coming from the United Nations (1979) is a global mandate that represents one of the landmarks in this process. During the following years, world conferences for women and world conferences and forums on education have reaffirmed the principle of gender equality in all areas of social life and/or in the specific field of education. At the same time, strategies and actions have been proposed aimed at guaranteeing gender equality. These have gradually entered all fields of education. The search for equality has taken place within contexts in which differences have persisted, while being combined with social class and cultural differences as well.

The XX century came to a close with the World Forum of Education (EFA, Dakar, 2000)[49], which re-affirmed commitments of education for all, as well as the agreements adopted by the international community. Among these were the IV World Conference for Women (1995). Dakar represented a continuation in regard to the goals defined in Jomtien. Within the World Framework of Action, goals were reconfirmed to generalize access to education, to emphasize equality and in learning outcomes, and to the principle of increasing the scope of basic education. At the same time, there was a recognition that the right to education continues to be denied to millions of people, and that one of the multiple causes is the "lack of will to overcome inequalities between the sexes" (*op. cit.*, page 12). Furthermore, it was declared that, "in spite of international attention that has been given to the problem, girls comprise 60% of the child population without access to primary education" (*op. cit.*, page 13). Thus, one of the lessons learned is the importance of integrating the principle of gender equality into sector-based policies and strategies (*op. cit.*, page 13).

Gender equality is one of the six objectives established in Dakar. It is an ambitious proposal, given that it refers to "overcoming gender disparities in primary and secondary education by the year 2005, and, by 2015, achieving gender equality in education, particularly in guaranteeing to girls full and equal access to high-quality basic education and good use of the same". It is said that gender inequalities continue to be among the greatest obstacles to the right to education. It is argued as well that, although the education of girls and of women has an enormous effect from one generation to the next, the participation of girls in basic education has increased little. Thus, it has been suggested that gender equality be included in "the entire education system, at all levels and in all areas", and that measures be adopted to guarantee both access and permanence of girls in school and literacy training of women. This demands a political commitment, sufficient resources, and changes in atti-

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working conditions, the persistence of illiteracy (which has increased as a result of structural adjustment policies, according to the assessment of the 1st World Conference for Women), traditional women's' roles in the economy, rural-urban differences in education levels, diminished roles in formal politics, and the unchanged fact that there have only been 3 women Heads of State during the entire history of the region (in Argentina, Bolivia, and Dominica) (ECLAC, "The Legal Status of Women in Latin American and the Caribbean, Defined According to Resolutions and Mandates of the United Nations System" Volume I, 1983:3 & 23).

[49] World Forum of Education For All, which assessed the progress of the inter-agency program of "Education For All" ten years after its creation in Jomtien (1990).

tudes, values, and behavior. Although the Dakar Framework for Action includes as an explicit objective the fostering of gender equality, the set of objectives involves girls or young and adult women. In effect, improving the quality of education is an objective for all age groups of men and women. Girls are subject to these policies, within the objectives that include "all" children (objectives 1 & 2), referring to comprehensive protection and education during early childhood – especially for the underprivileged – and to access to free and compulsory primary education for all children, especially for those who are at risk or belong to ethnic minorities. Young and adult women are also subject to such policies within the objectives that refer to literacy training and equal access to basic education and to life-long education (objectives 3 & 4). These objectives set goals – of a 50% improvement by 2015 in adult literacy levels, especially for women, as well as guaranteeing equal access to basic and life-long education for all adults.

Gender equality is also part of the strategy of the Framework for Action, which states the commitment to "apply comprehensive strategies to achieve gender equality in education, based on the recognition of the need to change attitudes, values, and practices" (Regional Framework for Action, pp. 9 & 19-20). The entire education system is guided by this strategy. It is recommended as well that attention be given to boys where they are at a disadvantage, and to see that the content, process, and context of education fosters and supports gender equality. This includes study programs, texts, and the attitudes and behavior of teachers, as well as the interaction of students. In short, Dakar reaffirmed gender equality as one of the key objectives for the 2000-2015 period, and offered a global education strategy that includes all levels, modalities, components, and participants of education systems.

Dakar, in turn, is supported by the assessment carried out on all continents in regard to the "Education For All" Forum. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbean, the EFA Assessment (Santo Domingo, 2000), stated that gender equality is part of one of the challenges to be accepted: inclusion and attention to diversity. In this respect, it proposed "to formulate inclusive education policies and to design diversified modalities and curricula to meet the needs of the population that has been excluded for individual, gender, linguistic, or cultural reasons" (Santo Domingo Framework of Action, p. 37). The fostering of gender equality is a commitment that countries have undertaken to carry out on various levels. It involves early childhood education, basic schooling, and the education of young people and adults, as well as specific activities associated with learning and with the quality and inclusiveness of education. In particular, countries have committed themselves to:

–   identifying groups that are still excluded from basic education for individual, gender, geographic, or cultural reasons, and to implement flexible, pertinent programs in various areas that respond to the specific needs and conditions of these individuals" (*op. cit.*, p. 38);

–   design diversified and flexible modalities of education and curricula and additional physical plant within the community that value diversity, and with the potential to develop society, and individuals, using both formal and innovative non-formal experiences in order to meet the needs of all: children, adolescents, young people, and adults" (*op. cit.*, p. 39).

Dakar supported the proposals of the IV World Women's Conference (1995, Beijing), in which equality of women was definitively linked to development, to the elimination of all kinds of violence, and to peace. Furthermore, equality for women was linked to the rights of minorities, the struggle against poverty, and the call for justice and democracy. In the area of education, governments committed themselves in Beijing to assuring equality of access to education, eliminating female illiteracy, increasing the access of women to professional training, science, and technology, and to life-long education, establishing non-discriminatory education and training systems, allocating sufficient resources to education reforms, and to fostering life-long education and training for girls and women.

The proposals presented in Dakar converge with those associated with the last World Adult Education Conference (CONFINTEA V, Hamburg, 1997), in which a set of commitments were established that involved gender equality. In particular, it was proposed to create awareness among young people and adults regarding gender inequality, to eliminate all obstacles that impede women from access to all levels of education, encourage gender equality through adult education, and to encourage women to organize themselves in order to foster a collective identity and to create women's organizations to foster change.

The follow-up of the World Adult Education Conference (CONFINTEA V, 1997) in Latin America produced a Regional Framework of Action (UNESCO, 2000) that represents another important milestone in regard to gender equality. The regional agenda calls for education for young people and adults (EPJA), conceived as "life-long education" and as "amplified" basic education, in which the fostering of gender equality is related to job training, citizenship education, literacy training, inter-cultural education, and local development. Gender equality is part of a redefinition in the field of education for young people and adults which involves explicitly guaranteeing this aspect by ratifying a commitment to the most underprivileged, while at the same time broadening the field to include new groups of young people and adults, new tasks, new institutional activities, and new programs. Similarly, gender equality is part of the education of young people and adults, which accepts the challenge of offering basic education to a large number of young people and adults who are illiterates or who have not completed this type of education. Gender is defined as a cross-cutting category that touches upon many kinds of education programs for young people and adults: for the rural population, indigenous peoples, those with low incomes, school drop-outs, and others. It is recommended that a focus be placed on women who are members of the most vulnerable groups, in actions coordinated with efforts of education reform and of the creation and development of a "critical mass" in regard to the question of gender. In particular, emphasis is to be placed on gender equality training activities for teachers and education ministry personnel, those working on decentralization, and on schools themselves, politicians, members of intermediary organizations, women's NGOs, public recognition of teachers who work in gender equality, and others.

The discussions coming out of international conferences continue in the follow-up processes of such meetings. Beijing resulted in a follow-up of indicators, which has been considered to be an effective instrument by both governments and NGOs. For NGOs, such indicators allow them to follow the fulfillment of the commitments undertaken by governments.

RECOMMENDATIONS[50]

Fostering gender equality in basic education should be guided by two principles: overcoming gender inequalities, and basic education for all (children, young people, and adults), involving all modalities, both formal and non-formal. "Broadened" basic education for all is a responsibility of society during the 1990s that has yet to be fulfilled, in spite of education reforms, target strategies, and the development of national programs aimed at improving the quality of education. Consequently, gender equality in basic education should be approached as part of the larger problem of social exclusion which causes difficult to solve structural problems and which requires medium-term policies. At the same time, we must identify examples of gender inequalities in basic education and maintain a gender focus. This focus should not be weakened in the name of "comprehensive" education policy proposals. The principle of gender equality has the potential to contribute to make basic education more "public" (taking this term to mean a place for all, where the common good prevails). This has been the aspiration of public education since its beginnings. Gender equality carries with it the possibility of a democratization of education that is mediated by the social context. Within this framework, we recommend the following:

1. The fostering of gender equality should be part of policies that blend education and employment, view literacy training not as something apart, but rather as a cultural task that involves social participation include intercultural bilingual programs, and promote diversity. This assumes the understanding that the policies mentioned are not isolated, but rather different dimensions of a unitary process. Similarly, it assumes overcoming the separation between "literacy and the elimination of illiteracy among the adult population" on the one hand, and basic education for the school-age population on the other. Furthermore, confronting gender inequalities can be a path toward learning how to lend equal treatment to any kind of difference.

2. Considering that progress in the area of gender has come about in education thanks to the efforts of social movements, and that the gender perspective is insufficiently institutionalized within governments, and given the multi-dimensional character of gender inequalities, it continues to be vital to foster of policies that cut across sectors and institutions in order to foster equality.

3. The United Nations System has proclaimed the next 10 years the "Literacy Decade". This coincides with the development of the 10-Year Program for Girls[51]. Moreover, the UN Secretariat has announced the intention to focus such programs on the poor. Within this framework, it is recommended that gender equality , "literacy training"

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[50] In developing this section, we have considered: a) conclusions and recommendations of the PROMEDLAC VII Assessment Report; b) the Framework of Action and the follow-up plan of Dakar; c) the Regional Framework of Action coming out of CONFINTEA V in Latin America and the Caribbean; d) the Equal Opportunities Plan (SERNAM, 2000); and e) the document by Guzmán, V., 1999, *op. cit.*, which is part of the regional follow-up of CONFINTEA V.

[51] See information about the 10-Year Program in footnote nº 2, p. 11.

(re-defined as basic education for all people), and activities to reduce poverty. Fostering gender equality can represent an opportunity to re-define the meaning of education for young people and adults. This will require seeking new strategies to focus education systems on the common and diverse task that rejects modalities that are merely compensatory and segregated. The concept of life-long education is key to the design of inclusive education systems. Moreover, fostering gender equality demands and makes possible a re-thinking of the relations between quality and equality in education, as well as the very structure of education systems. Instead of being hierarchical systems that follow a pattern of center and periphery, education systems can be created as interactive forums devised as networks, in which cooperation is utmost, and that are guided by the principles of the exploration, production, and exchange of knowledge.

4. Education has been systematically subordinated to economic and social development. In regard to the UN Ten-year Program for Girls, the Secretary General of that organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, has declared that, in order to make the right to education a reality and to contribute to the eradication of poverty, "the world needs a coordinated strategy that is up to the challenge"[52]. A similar principle is defended by Bourdieu when he states, in regard to social movements, that the task is "to bring together without unifying" (meaning, without making uniform).[53] In order to achieve a coordination of this type –strong, broad, and with solidarity– requires the support of an education plan with specific features. The Four Pillars of Education, identified in the Delors Report, are a landmark in this respect of a kind of education conceived as "liberating" (in the sense understood by Paulo Freire), and with autonomy in respect to market place. Within this framework, fostering gender equality involves, and simultaneously creates, the necessary conditions for a thoughtful and participatory style of carrying out and thinking about basic education.

5. Gender equality may be conceived not only as a strategy for development or as a right that is proclaimed and not fulfilled. Gender equality represents a possibility for a unique social and cultural transformation, that involves a commitment between that which is public and that which is private – between the State and civil society. Consequently, politics to foster gender equality in basic education need to be part of this mentality regarding the capacity for change.

6. Basic education can be organized as a forum that fosters gender equality within civil society, disseminating the principle that change can be carried out by society, without waiting for changes in government, and as a responsibility of organized groups and of individuals.

7. The gender perspective can be adopted by basic education –and by education in general– as a radical perspective that treats identity itself – one's body, one's emotions,

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[52] Article on the UN Ten-Year Program for Girls Education, published in *The Guardian*, February 29, 2000.
[53] Bourdieu, Pierre, summary of an article published on the internet through Pronunciamiento Latinoamericano, 2000.

and one's sexuality. It involves a view of women and of men as subjects, and not as objects of study. Thus we see the importance of making use of the life experiences of the members of the education community in matters of gender, and of fostering "on-going" sexual education (or a common education at all education levels and in all modalities) with respect to the gender perspective.

8.   In view of the fact that gender relations are in a process of rapid change, before which both men and women are involved in learning new forms or clinging to the old, it is of utmost importance to recognize, investigate, and find new ways to define femininity and masculinity, the roles of men and of women, the inequalities that appear, as well as their specific configuration. It is also necessary to investigate how women and men –different kinds of women and men– and view the right to education and the right to employment.

9.   Given the fact that policies, strategies, and programs for fostering gender equality aim at eliminating different kinds of inequalities, and that they haven't taken a comprehensive approach, we recommend actions which are specific and simultaneously linked, such as: a) a multi-disciplinary approach to the gender perspective in initial and in-service teacher training, in the curricula of basic education, and in textbooks. Specifically, we urge on-going training of teachers in the area of gender carried out in permanently established workshops that allow for reflection from personal experience; b) training and awareness-building in the area of gender for education system administrators; c) the development of specific basic education programs for groups of girls, boys, or women who participate to a lesser extent in basic education (rural girls, boys, and women, indigenous women, women over 45 years of age, and others); d) promotion of critical thinking on this theme for children, young people, and adults who are both students and parents within communities; e) the development of workshops for students at all levels of education that treat the relationships between gender, sexuality, and self-care; f) fostering through education of new and more co-operative divisions of labor in domestic life; g) the development of research (through projects, research funds, and others), systematization of good practices in the fostering of gender equality, the development or application of interpretative techniques different from those currently in use (cohort and ethnographic studies), the definition of new indicators of gender equality; the gathering of statistics that go beyond institutions of education, and the desegregation by gender of many current statistics used in education.

10. The debate regarding the development of programs that are exclusively for women, vs. programs for the entire population is still unresolved. For some, "protected" programs, to which only women participate, are useful – especially in the initial phases of learning (literacy training programs for women, non co-educational programs in which girls learn separately from boys). For others, both men and women should be integrated into education programs in order to learn about diversity. In both cases, there is a need to assure that the gender perspective is explicitly present. Similarly, mechanisms should be created so that "protection" does not result in segregation, and that "integration" does not result in exclusion.

In brief, the main proposal is to guide education during the coming decade toward the education of both girls and of young and adult women, without establishing priorities among them, and implementing strategies that take advantage of the reciprocal effects of education of one group on the other.

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SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN URBAN AREAS BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME LEVEL AND AGE GROUPS, BY SEX, 1997[a]
(In percentages of the population of the same age)

ASISTENCIA ESCOLAR EN AREAS URBANAS POR NIVELES DE INGRESO FAMILIAR, Y GRUPOS DE EDAD, SEGUN SEXO, 1997[a]
(En porcentaje de la población de la misma edad)

| | | *Quintile 1* | | | *Quintile 3* | | | *Quintile 5* | | |
| | | Age groups Quintil 1 Grupos de edad | | | Age groups Quintil 3 Grupos de edad | | | Age groups Quintil 5 Grupos de edad | | |
		7-12	13-19	20-24	7-12	13-19	20-24	7-12	13-19	20-24
ARG[b]	Total	98,7	61,8	11,3	99,5	75,1	27,6	100,0	92,5	60,4
ARG	Men/Hombres	99,1	60,8	8,5	100,0	72,2	24,1	100,0	90,2	60,0
ARG	Women/Mujeres	98,4	63,2	13,6	98,9	78,2	30,8	100,0	95,4	60,8
BOL	Total	96,6	87,7	35,2	97,7	84,7	40,7	99,0	83,4	55,1
BOL	Men/Hombres	96,0	89,8	42,1	98,2	86,6	42,0	99,7	87,3	54,1
BOL	Women/Mujeres	97,4	85,7	30,1	97,1	83,0	39,5	98,3	80,2	56,0
BRA	Total	90,5	64,9	14,5	97,5	71,9	19,2	98,9	87,5	45,2
BRA	Men/Hombres	89,5	63,2	14,5	97,6	70,0	18,0	99,2	88,6	44,8
BRA	Women/Mujeres	91,5	66,6	14,5	97,5	73,9	20,4	98,7	86,5	45,5
CHL	Total	98,7	76,4	14,0	99,8	82,0	24,5	99,8	90,7	52,3
CHL	Men/Hombres	98,5	77,6	16,0	99,6	79,4	25,6	99,8	91,0	57,0
CHL	Women/Mujeres	99,0	75,3	12,1	99,9	85,0	23,3	99,8	90,4	47,4
COL	Total	91,1	67,8	18,0	95,8	71,2	25,8	97,3	77,9	49,7
COL	Men/Hombres	89,8	67,8	21,5	94,4	73,4	24,8	97,3	82,6	53,7
COL	Women/Mujeres	92,6	67,8	15,3	97,2	69,2	26,7	97,4	74,0	46,7
CRI	Total	95,1	66,3	19,3	97,3	70,9	34,8	100,0	91,0	58,6
CRI	Men/Hombres	95,2	63,0	18,3	98,7	65,8	35,1	100,0	89,4	59,2
CRI	Women/Mujeres	95,0	69,3	19,8	95,7	75,9	34,2	100,0	92,9	57,9
ECU	Total	98,1	73,2	21,1	98,5	73,1	31,9	99,1	80,4	40,4
ECU	Men/Hombres	98,1	73,3	21,9	97,9	70,1	36,6	99,0	86,1	43,1
ECU	Women/Mujeres	98,1	73,2	20,6	99,1	76,2	26,1	99,3	74,5	38,2
SLV	Total	86,3	66,8	13,0	96,1	78,4	28,0	98,3	83,2	50,5
SLV	Men/Hombres	84,0	66,9	14,5	95,8	78,0	28,6	97,4	82,1	53,2
SLV	Women/Mujeres	88,5	66,7	11,9	96,4	78,9	27,4	99,4	84,2	48,1
HND	Total	85,2	47,1	9,0	95,6	56,9	19,8	97,0	72,9	41,2
HND	Men/Hombres	83,3	41,7	9,7	97,3	54,5	18,1	96,9	76,3	41,9
HND	Women/Mujeres	87,3	53,9	8,6	94,0	59,1	21,1	97,2	70,3	40,8
MEX	Total	94,3	51,7	10,2	98,8	68,4	19,7	99,6	89,0	48,2
MEX	Men/Hombres	95,5	54,2	11,5	99,2	69,8	20,5	100,0	86,3	53,8
MEX	Women/Mujeres	93,1	49,0	9,2	98,5	67,0	18,8	99,2	92,0	41,6
NIC	Total	88,1	67,8	24,8	93,8	68,7	31,6	96,6	80,2	43,3
NIC	Men/Hombres	88,6	65,6	27,1	93,3	67,6	30,8	97,3	82,3	51,0
NIC	Women/Mujeres	87,6	70,0	23,0	94,3	69,6	32,3	95,7	78,5	35,9
PAN	Total	96,8	60,7	12,2	99,7	77,6	26,0	99,7	83,3	47,6
PAN	Men/Hombres	96,0	57,6	10,4	99,8	74,3	22,4	100,0	88,4	50,0
PAN	Women/Mujeres	97,7	63,8	13,7	99,6	81,2	30,6	99,5	79,1	45,2
PRY	Total	92,8	59,9	4,4	99,1	66,3	16,9	97,8	69,7	40,1
PRY	Men/Hombres	93,7	63,9	3,5	99,4	64,9	14,8	97,9	75,7	45,2
PRY	Women/Mujeres	91,8	55,8	4,9	98,8	67,7	18,7	97,6	66,1	35,0
DOM	Total	91,7	83,1	27,0	96,2	77,5	30,3	98,0	84,0	39,4
DOM	Men/Hombres	89,4	81,2	28,1	96,5	72,2	32,4	98,8	85,4	38,7
DOM	Women/Mujeres	93,7	84,6	26,4	95,8	82,2	28,4	97,2	82,8	40,0
URY	Total	97,7	55,2	10,2	99,9	74,2	26,6	99,8	92,6	48,5
URY	Men/Hombres	97,8	52,3	9,5	99,8	69,1	19,2	99,6	93,0	43,5
URY	Women/Mujeres	97,7	58,0	10,9	100,0	80,0	35,2	100,0	92,2	53,8
VEN[c]	Total	95,6	63,8	16,4	97,8	66,1	24,4	97,8	79,1	43,2
VEN	Men/Hombres	95,8	62,2	12,5	97,8	61,8	19,0	97,6	76,6	39,3
VEN	Women/Mujeres	95,3	65,3	19,5	97,8	70,5	30,5	98,1	81,5	47,4

[a] The household income is classified by quintile, based on *per capita* income.
Quintil 1 is composed of the poorest households; quintile 5 corresponds to the richest.
[b] Includes Greater Buenos Aires.
[c] National total.

[a] El ingreso de los hogares está ordenado por quintiles según su ingreso *per cápita*.
El quintil 1 corresponde a los hogares más pobres y el quintil 5 a los hogares más ricos.
[b] Incluye el Gran Buenos Aires.
[c] Total nacional.

REGIONAL SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN URBAN AREAS BY FAMILY INCOME, AGE GROUPS AND GENDER, 1997[a]
(country average)

% attendance by quintile, age and gender		Quintile 1 7-12	13-19	20-24	7-12	Quintile 3 13-19	20-24	7-12	Quintile 5 13-19	20-24
Total		93.6	65.9	16.3	97.7	72.7	26.7	98.7	83.6	47.7
Men	93.1	65.1	16.9	97.8	70.6	25.8	98.8	85.1	49.3	
Women	94.0	66.8	15.9	97.5	74.9	27.8	98.6	82.5	46.3	

[a]   Family income has been arranged by quintiles based on *per capita* income. Quintile 1 represents the poorest homes and quintile 5 the richest ones.
–   Latin American countries only, except for Cuba, Guatemala and Peru.
–   In Argentina's case the Greater Buenos Aires area has been included.
–   In Venezuela's case the entire country is represented.
–   Regional estimates represent the average value of indicators, by country.

II
Issues in gender and gender equality in the Caribbean

Dr. Hyacinth Evans[*]

Background

The Caribbean countries participating in Education For All are: Anguilla, Antigua/Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Belize, British Virgin Islands, The Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands. These twenty two countries represent English, French and Dutch speaking islands. The Caribbean as represented by these countries has been a full participant in the consultative process leading to the World Declaration and Framework for Action, and in subsequent follow up consultations and workshops. These are the countries referred to when the term Caribbean is used in this paper. Although the Caribbean has agreed to define basic education as extending to grade 9 (i.e. the end of the lower secondary level), this paper will focus on grades 1-6 in discussing the formal sector in keeping with the other regions involved in EFA.

The paper is organized around the following:

–   General Overview on Basic Education with special reference to gender issues
–   Policy responses and trends in the past ten years,
–   Suggested strategies for realization of gender equality in basic education.

GENERAL OVERVIEW ON BASIC EDUCATION WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GENDER ISSUES

In 1990 when the World Declaration on Education for All was adopted, all except one of the countries of the Caribbean had achieved universal primary education. In addition, the gender disparity in education that faced the countries of the region was that of the under-participation and underachievement of boys in relation to girls. Thus the concerns of the region

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with respect to gender equality were and are quite different from those in most countries participating in the EFA initiative. At the World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien, Caribbean delegations collectively argued for the inclusion of the region's special concerns in the Final Declaration and Framework for Action. Sixteen of the twenty concerns were included in the final document. One of the concerns which was not adopted related to the special situation that existed in the region with respect to boys. The concern expressed at Jomtien but which was not adopted was as follows:

While recognizing that in many parts of the world it is girls and women that are denied access to basic education, in the Caribbean it is men and boys that have fallen behind. This issue is therefore more appropriately approached as gender equity, for it to be applicable in the Caribbean.

The present focus on gender equality or equity now opens the door for a discussion of the problems of boys and girls. Nevertheless, gender in the Caribbean is quite complex. For the situation is not simply the opposite of what exists elsewhere. The following are the main issues related to gender and education in the Caribbean that affect both boys and girls but in different ways and in different degrees:

– access to and enrollment in early childhood education
– access to and enrollment in primary education
– repetition and completion rates among some social groups
– learning and academic achievement
– social class differences in access and academic achievement

ACCESS TO AND ENROLLMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Universal early childhood education already exists in three of the Caribbean countries, with most of the other countries nearing achievement of this goal. Prior to 1990, early childhood enrollment for 4-6 year olds had reached a level of about 80% in nearly all countries. Of the countries that participated in EFA at the time, only five had not reached this level. This achievement was due in part to the enactment of compulsory education laws for children five years and over in sixteen of the countries.

Today, educational provisions for this age group have expanded in all countries, due to increased government expenditure to this sector. Special mention must be made of Haiti which increased its enrollment from 20.7% in 1990 to 64.3% in 1998, and Dominica which increased its enrollment from 44.0% to 73.7% within the same period. In addition, some countries such as Trinidad and Tobago instituted programmes that aimed at increasing access to early childhood education for those living below the poverty line. In Trinidad and Tobago, this was done through the building of community-based early childhood education centres in targeted communities. However, there is still variation in gross enrollment rates in early childhood education among countries of the Caribbean. Below are the gross enrollment figures for the 22 countries:

TABLE 1
Access to early childhood education
(Percentage of 3-5 year olds in pre-schools)

Country	% of males enrolled	% of females enrolled	Country	% of males enrolled	% of females enrolled
Anguilla	93	98	Haiti	64.3	65
Antigua and Barbuda	92.7	98	Jamaica	@	
Bahamas	100.0	100.0	Montserrat	@	
Barbados**	52.7	68.1	Netherlands Antilles	102.5	103.9
Belize	22.9	22.1	St.Kitts & Nevis	*	*
Bermuda	100.5		St. Lucia	*	*
British Virgin Islands	@		St. Vincent & The Grenadines	Not available	Not available
Cayman Islands	*	*	Suriname	Not available	Not available
Dominica	71.44	75.6	Trinidad & Tobago	Not available	Not available
Grenada	72.3	73.8	Turks & Caicos Islands	68.6	70.8
Guyana	93.6	92.0			

Source: Miller, 2000, Jules and Panneflek, 2000.

* No population data were available. However, the percentage of the cohort enrolled is considered to be very high

** The figure represents public school enrollment only. Private schools exist but their enrollment is not recorded.

@ The gross enrollment rate for both boys and girls is 84.2% for Jamaica, 89% for the British Virgin Islands and 81.0% for Montserrat. The gender percentages are not available.

We see from Table 1 that there is a high level of participation in early childhood education up to age 5, with three countries –Bahamas, Bermuda and Barbados– having achieved universal early childhood education. Belize is the country with the lowest provision for early childhood education, with roughly 80% of the children of this age group lacking access to early childhood education.

This country is followed by Haiti where more then one-third of its children lack access to early childhood education.

There is also a slight disparity in early childhood enrollment favouring girls in all countries except Guyana and Belize, where a slight gender disparity is in favour of boys.

During the period under review, nearly all countries expanded their early childhood education provisions. One result of this expansion has been the ability of the various governments to provide this service to the poorer groups and to the disabled. Nevertheless, in those countries of the Caribbean where there still is no universal provision, the majority of those who do not have access to early childhood education are the poor and disabled.

Many countries also improved and expanded provisions for the training of early childhood educators. Regionally, this was facilitated through the establishment of degree

programmes in early childhood education at the University of the West Indies and some teachers colleges. Gender sensitization of caregivers has been included in some of these programmes. In addition, workshops and other training methodologies were used to improve the preparation of caregivers. Standards were also developed for the care of the young child and in particular the gender sensitivity of caregivers. This will be discussed under the section related to best practices.

ACCESS TO AND ENROLLMENT IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The target dimension set by the Framework for Action was universal access and completion of primary education, or whatever level is considered basic. For most Caribbean countries, achieving this goal was not a serious challenge as all these countries except Haiti had already achieved or almost achieved universal access to primary education to grade 6. In addition, the majority of Caribbean countries had already enacted compulsory laws, before the 1990 Jomtien conference. Haiti is the only country that is an exception to the general picture of near universal primary education. Although at the end of the 1990's Haiti had made significant progress in expanding access to primary education, at the end of the decade, approximately one-third of Haiti's children were still not enrolled in school.

Access will be described in terms of the gross and net enrollment rates. The gender differences that exist in these rates will be discussed.

Table 2 below presents the gross and net public school enrollment rates for the 22 countries:

TABLE 2
Access to primary education:
Gross and Net enrollment rates in 1998

Country	Gross enrollment	Net enrollment	Country	Gross[*] enrollment	Net[*] enrollment
Anguilla	95.6	94.0	Haiti	126.2	66.3
Antigua and Barbuda	Not available	Not available	Jamaica	98.9	92.6
Bahamas	97.4	99.2	Montserrat	100.0	Not available
Barbados	101.3	101.3	Netherlands Antilles	109.6	103
Belize	101.3	88.0	St.Kitts & Nevis	98	89
Bermuda	99.5	100.0	St. Lucia	118.6	Not available
British Virgin Islands	112	110	St. Vincent & The Grenadines	91	84
Cayman Islands	58.9	53.4	Suriname	Not available	Not available
Dominica	71.44	75.6	Trinidad & Tobago	79.6	73.1
Grenada	127.2	97.5	Turks & Caicos Islands	128.3	120.3
Guyana	104.2	91.9			

Source: Miller, 2000, Jules and Panneflek, 2000.

[*] Gross enrollment rate refers to the total number of students enrolled at a particular grade level. Net enrollment refers to the number of students of a given age, enrolled at a particular grade level. The differences between the gross and net enrollment rates reflect the number of over age students in the primary system in the various countries.

Table 2 shows that at the end of the decade, most countries had full or almost full enrollment a situation that existed at the beginning of the decade. Nevertheless, there were six countries –Belize, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Haiti, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago– where the net enrollment rate was less than 89%. The table also shows that net enrollment was, in nearly all countries, close to the gross enrollment which indicates that there are few students below or above the stipulated age range in the system. The exception is Haiti where there is a large number of overage students in the system - in part a result of the lack of early childhood education facilities.

Enrollment in primary education was more or less equal for both boys and girls, with the gender parity index ranging from 0.9 -1.1 for all countries in all six years except Suriname and St. Lucia. In the case of Suriname, there were considerable differences in the enrollment rates for boys and girls; many more girls than boys do not attend school. (The Gender Parity Index should be 1.0 if there are more or less equal numbers of boys and girls at each level of the primary system).

REPETITION AND COMPLETION RATES

Repetition rates are fairly low in the region –between 1.5 and 5.7%, in part because most countries have an automatic promotion policy. However, four countries had higher repetition rates– Belize (9.7%), Haiti (46.5%), Suriname (25.9%) and the Turks and Caicos Islands (7.1%). All these countries except Haiti do not have automatic promotion policies. In general, repetition rates are higher among males than females**.** Higher repetition rates and lower academic achievement levels among boys are due in part to poor reading skills on the part of a sizeable number of boys, and in some countries, a higher rate of absenteeism among boys.

For the majority of Caribbean countries, roughly 90% of students complete grade 5. In Belize, which does not practice automatic promotion but where students have to meet performance standards, the completion rate was 72%. In the case of Haiti, only 55% survived to grade 5 in 1996. Gender differences in these completion rates are not available. However, because boys have a higher repetition rate, it is likely that they have a lower completion rate than girls.

While the Caribbean has more or less provided all children of school age with access to primary education and, therefore, has more or less satisfied this target dimension, universal completion of primary education is still to be achieved. However, this target should be reached by most Caribbean countries within the medium term given the survival rates of 90% or better. (Miller, 2000, 37)

LEARNING AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Learning outcomes are difficult to compare across the region because of a lack of standardized tests across the region at this level.

The empirical data that are available indicate mixed results regarding learning outcomes. Miller (2000,40) states that there were mixed results for the improvement of learning

achievement in English and Mathematics at the primary level. The actual levels of achievement were not very good, with only two of the countries - Barbados and Bermuda showing that 80% of students reached the prescribed achievement levels in English. Achievement levels in Mathematics were lower.

In Jamaica, averages of achievement on the recently introduced GSAT (Grade 6 Achievement Test) in most public primary schools fell below 50% in all subjects. So progress in the improvement of learning outcomes –one of the EFA goals– was very modest.

In general in the Caribbean, girls attain higher levels of achievement than boys. This was so at the beginning of the decade and continues so today.

SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES AND ACCESS TO THE SECONDARY LEVEL

In general, boys and girls from low socio-economic backgrounds are more at risk academically than their counterparts from other social groups. They are more likely to attend irregularly, to be absent, and to drop out of school than other students. They are also more likely to suffer from negative school practices which affect self esteem and attitudes to school and learning.

A study carried out in Jamaica in 1997 (Evans, 1998) showed that boys received corporal punishment and verbal abuse more frequently than girls and that boys and girls in the low stream of a grade suffered negative school practices more than boys and girls in the medium or high stream or the mixed ability classes. In addition they are more likely than their counterparts from other social groups to be unable to access secondary level education.

Access to the secondary level of education –especially to the senior levels of secondary education– is limited in some countries because of the unavailability of school places at this level. In Jamaica for example, there are secondary places for roughly 56% of the age cohort at the grade 10 level. Enrollment data at this level indicates that in 1998, the poorest groups are least likely to be enrolled at this level of education (65.2% for the lowest quintile versus 94.3% for the highest quintile) (PIOJ, 1998, 39). While in this case it is the low socio economic group that is disadvantaged, boys more than girls in this group are more likely to be out of school.

POLICY RESPONSES AND TRENDS DURING THE LAST DECADE

During the period under review, the majority of countries in the Caribbean implemented projects aimed at the expansion of educational provisions and the improvement of learning and achievement with aid from international donor agencies.

However, not all of these projects were implemented under the auspices of the EFA initiative. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) sponsored an initiative to develop a regional education strategy, out of which developed a regional Human Resources Development Strategy. Some of the countries adopted comprehensive education reform strategies developed by National Commissions, Task Forces and Working Groups.

These countries - the Bahamas, Barbados, the Eastern Caribbean States (St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla and Montserrat) and Trinidad and Tobago all engaged in in-depth

consultations with their respective societies regarding the direction of the reform, before seeking funding for the reform. Reform in the other countries was influenced to a great degree by educational reform projects funded by international aid agencies.

In both cases, countries implemented a range of programmes aimed at improving quality and provisions. Thus significant actions were taken throughout the region to achieve the goals of EFA, but these actions were not explicitly connected to EFA (Miller, 1999,8). However, none of these large internationally funded initiatives in the formal sector were aimed at reducing gender disparity.

In the case of Jamaica, the government recognized the problem of the disparity in educational achievement and commissioned a study of the causes of these gender differences. Like the rest of the Caribbean, girls in Jamaica, on average, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and achieve higher levels of education than boys. The study was designed to discover the reasons for these disparities.

The results showed that gender differences in achievement can be attributed to a range of factors including early childhood socialization practices, gender messages received from the wider society, the structure of the labour market and the value placed on education by boys and girls. These were in addition to other factors such as attendance and ability to read. The study also showed that boys and girls were treated differently within the classroom. The results of the study were widely circulated to all the schools, in order to inform teachers (who are predominantly female at both the primary and secondary levels) of the extent and causes of the problem. School staff have been encouraged to address the issues at the local level. Since then, a few schools have put measures in place to highlight the problem of boys' participation and achievement and encourage boys in various ways.

TARGETED PROGRAMMES

Because of the problems of low academic achievement across the region, some governments have instituted programmes aimed at targeted groups of children. While these are not gender specific, they do succeed in having an impact on young boys who are more likely to have reading difficulties or to perform poorly in school. Examples of these programmes are: New Horizons Project, and the All- Age Schools Project in Jamaica.

In the New Horizons Project, schools that are performing below standard are targeted. Activities are aimed at improving teachers' skill in teaching literacy and numeracy, parent education, and school management. The All Age Schools Project aims at improving performance of these schools located in rural areas, and focuses on literacy and numeracy.

FOCUS ON DISADVANTAGED AND AT RISK YOUTH

The Caribbean during the 1990's was characterized by high rates of youth unemployment and a high poverty rate, with approximately 25 -30% of people in most Caribbean countries living below the poverty line. It is becoming increasingly apparent across the region that particular attention must be paid to boys and young men from poor socio-economic circumstances who are more likely to be alienated from school, and to drop out of school because

of financial constraints. Many of these boys/young men who leave school system for these reasons or because there are no school places for them at the upper levels of the secondary school drift into crime, often violent crime.

Two recent small scale case studies in Jamaica indicate that these boys face violence within the school itself and this is one of the reasons why some leave school (Miller, 2000, Bailey, 2000).

There have been some interventions aimed at young boys and men. For example, the Bahamas introduced the YEAST programme, designed to assist high school dropouts or young men having difficulty with the school curriculum. The programme aims at improving boys' self esteem as well as their technical skills.

In Jamaica, the government with international aid, has introduced the Uplifting Adolescents Project aimed at providing skills and support for young people who are outside the school system and unemployed. A similar programme was instituted in Antigua and Barbuda.

In Guyana, an Economic Recovery Programme implemented by the government aimed at developing the severe shortage of technical and vocational skills in the country and was targeted at youths from socially deprived backgrounds, dropouts and young offenders (Overton, 1998).

During the decade, most of the other Caribbean countries continued programmes previously established to provide young people with basic technical and vocational skills for employment. Some of these programmes were expanded, but no quantitative data are available. The continued existence of youth unemployment and alienation is attributable to failing economies, the effects of structural adjustment and globalization.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

In the Caribbean, adult basic education has focused on literacy, often defined as completion of years of primary schooling or ability to read at a certain grade level. When we define literacy solely in terms of ability to read and comprehend, and write, it can be asserted that literacy levels in the Caribbean are relatively high compared to other regions of the world. However, there is still a big gap between current levels and what is desired for a fully literate adult population.

When the definition of literacy is widened to include other dimensions such as *technical literacy*, *political literacy* –the skills to analyze issues, and *humanist literacy*– the ability to be reflective and construct positive self and cultural knowledge, very little work has begun in these domains.

With respect to closing any gender disparity in the area of basic education and literacy, the Caribbean had already closed this gap before the start of the decade of the 1990's. As was noted earlier, girls attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and achieve higher levels of achievement than boys. The same holds true for adult basic education and literacy. In general, women and girls in the Caribbean participate more frequently in adult basic education and literacy programmes and have a higher literacy rate than men.

SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES ACROSS THE REGION

Successful practices in the region focused on the development of standards in early childhood education, the collection of data disaggregated by gender, and the education of young adolescents with respect to sexuality and parenting.

As mentioned earlier, the Secretariat of CARICOM sponsored an initiative to develop a regional education strategy. This was done independently of EFA. Out of this initiative came the regional Human Resources Development Strategy. As part of this wider initiative, a Caribbean Plan of Action on early childhood education was developed. This plan set new targets for the delivery of health and family life education in schools and other formal and informal programmes. One of the standards was the requirement that teacher education emphasize appropriate gender socialization. In addition, all the standards developed were made applicable to early childhood education.

UNICEF now ensures that the data collected on young children in the Caribbean are disaggregated by gender.

In Jamaica, there have been various efforts aimed at reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and educating young teenage mothers and fathers to assume their new roles as parents and in caring for the young child. The Baby Fathers Programme under the auspices of Woman Inc. –a programme that provides ongoing education and skill training for pregnant girls who have had to leave the formal education system– also provides education for the young father. Joint and single counseling is provided.

The Coalition for Better Parenting has developed a programme that aims at providing information and education to adolescents within the school system about sexuality, pregnancy and parenthood. This has become part of the schools' guidance and counseling programme and is a preventive measure aimed at reducing teenage pregnancies among students in grades 6-9, allowing for more choice among teenagers, and increasing the survival rate in school. Fathers Inc. –a group that aims at changing the stereotypical notions held of fathers and encouraging fathers to assume on additional dimensions to the father role– have been mentoring boys in school.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES FOR REALIZATION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN BASIC EDUCATION.

These strategies relate to the establishment of management information systems focusing on the collection of gender disaggregated data, the targeting of specific groups, and the development of more programmes that target specific groups and, and special programmes that focus on the boys.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND THE TARGETING OF SPECIFIC GROUPS

There is a great need to establish data collection and management capacities in those countries where they do not exist, with the capacity for collecting and monitoring gender disag-

gregated data. Such information will allow for more monitoring and evaluation of progress in all dimensions including that of gender equality and equity. The example set by UNICEF in this regard can be followed by other agencies. Such data will also allow us to target specific groups such as the rural boy or girl, disadvantaged boys and girls in the inner cities who suffer from a range of problems and the boys or girls in the low stream in schools who suffer from low levels of achievement, and low self esteem.

FOCUS ON THE BOYS

The problem of the boys - especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds is receiving increasing attention throughout the region and indeed in many parts of the world. The following three strategies aim at addressing some of these problems.

Parent education

Although the reasons for the low participation and achievement of boys are many faceted, the research shows that the socialization in the home is one significant contributing factor. For example, in two recent regional research studies, it has been shown that there are very rigid distinctions in the tasks assigned to girls and boys and the supervision and monitoring that each receives (Bailey et al, 1998, Brown and Chevannes, 1998). Such supervision may allow the girl to become more competent, to organize herself to get tasks done, and to learn how to work with others. In addition, it appears that parents spend more time in developing social skills and values in girls than in boys, as well as in monitoring and training the girls' behaviour (Brown and Chevannes, 1998, 29). It is no wonder that Bailey *et al.* (1998) found that among some social groups, girls were more able to articulate their goals and the means for achieving them than girls.

In Jamaica, Evans (1998) found that 6-7 year old girls were more likely to report that they had engaged in academic and social activities than 6-7 year old boys, whereas these boys were more likely than the girls to report that they had engaged in functional tasks and chores. These gender differences however were not statistically significant.

Such differential socialization may explain in part the differences in boys' and girls' preparation for and commitment to schooling, as well as the differences in their educational achievement found in many research studies conducted in the region. Parent education properly designed and executed has the potential to sensitize parents and teachers to the need for more equality in the socialization of boys and girls. Such education can be incorporated into ongoing programmes and activities at the school level-programmes

Increased mentoring of boys and girls

Programmes such as those by Fathers Inc can be extended to other schools through the appropriate Ministries - in particular the Ministry of Education in the respective countries, such as the New Horizons Project in Jamaica.

Altering or counteracting the gender messages of the wider society

Parent education programmes need to be reinforced and supported by messages and programmes at the wider social level, if major changes in attitudes and expectation are to occur. For example, advertising that demean girls and women or transmit uni-dimensional and stereotypical views of boys and men should be outlawed or at least discouraged by elected officials. The media can be enlisted to promote gender equality in its programming. Writers and publishers can be educated to the deleterious effects of biased gender messages. At present, some of the basic readers used by primary school children depict boys and men as well as girls and women in a biased way (Robinson, 1995).

These are examples of efforts at the school and societal level that can address the problem of the boys. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that although girls on average do better academically, there are some girls who are also subject to biased messages and to negative school practices that affect their self esteem. In addition, many are increasingly facing sexual harassment and violence at school. As we recognize the ill effects of gender bias and stereotyping on the boy, let us not forget the problems of the many girls who are not achieving and who need as much help in the educational system as the boys. Addressing the problems of gender inequality means working simultaneously to uplift both boys and girls.

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III
Major findings

The Caribbean

Following the general framework mentioned above, the Caribbean paper focuses its discussions on the 22 countries participating in EFA, which are: Anguilla, Antigua/Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Belize, British Virgin Islands, The Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Turks and Caicos Islands.

In the Caribbean, the concern regarding gender equality is the educational performance and participation of boys in relation to girls. This is evident in enrollment rates, repetition and completion rates and learning and achievement. In addition, there are particular problems related to boys and girls of some social groups –in particular the poor. At the early childhood level, there is a high enrollment level, with only two countries– Belize and Haiti having a participation level of less than 65%. In most of these countries there is slight disparity in enrollment in favour of girls. This level of enrollment existed 1990 in all countries except Haiti and Dominica.

At the primary level, all countries except Haiti had already achieved universal primary education in 1990. Although Haiti has made some progress in this regard, approximately one-third of primary age children are still not enrolled in school. Enrollment in primary education was more or less equal for boys and girls for all countries except Suriname and St. Lucia. Repetition rates are fairly low in most countries because of automatic promotion policies but repetition rates are higher among males than females. Completion rates are fairly high; gender differences in completion rates are not available. In the case of learning and achievement, girls on average, attain higher levels of achievement than boys. This was so at the beginning of the decade and continues so today. The actual levels of achievement are only modest and suggest needed improvement.

Although all countries undertook major educational reforms during the decade with the help of international funding, none of these large initiatives in the formal sector were aimed at reducing gender disparity. However, there were several initiatives and interventions aimed at boys, disadvantaged and at risk youth.

Latin America

The paper presents the status of basic education in the region, referring to global indicators about school attendance, and concludes that gender gaps have been reduced throughout the years.

The gender gaps appear to be associated with the socio-economic status of the country. As we can see in Honduras, El Salvador and Dominican Republic where in 1997, of the age group 7 to 12 years old, there were more girls than boys in school , in the poorest sectors of the urban areas. At the regional level, in the poorest populations, there are more differences in the coverage of basic education, according to income than according to gender.

The gender disparity is particularly evident and of serious concern with regard to indigenous population and ethnic minorities. In Guatemala, for example, indigenous girls reach 0.9 year of schooling, while indigenous boys reach 1.8 years. Amongst women of age 20 to 24, 7 out of 10 do not have any schooling. One of the principal obstacles has been the lack of adequate curriculum to the cultural reality in which they live, as well as the problem of language.

The gender gaps are all too evident when comparing urban and rural settings, public or private schools. Gender disparities come along with other unfair and unequal practices and phenomena such as school drop-out among girls living in the rural areas, in particular those girls of ages between 10 and 14 years old. The rate of school dropping out is also higher among boys in urban slums and poor townships (Brazil). There is a growing tendency for boys of this category to repeat, thus requiring more than the normal time to complete the basic education cycle.

Concerning the problem of gender inequality, the paper states that gender equality in the basic education of women requires special strategic links with poverty reduction programmes and income-generating activities, or links between education and the preparation for employment. The paper also introduces some of the programmes being implemented in the region, and educational reforms under which new initiatives have been undertaken. These efforts include, to mention a few, curriculum development and reform, non-sexist language in the school textbooks, sex education and teacher training on gender issues though such efforts are not made universally throughout the region.