# Chapter 3

# Why are girls still held back?

Progress has been made towards gender parity in enrolment at primary and secondary levels in all regions over the last ten years. However, the record differs quite strongly between countries. Although for many the goal is now within reach, at current rates of progress a large minority of countries will not achieve gender parity at primary and secondary levels by 2005. This chapter identifies the most important factors that continue to hinder progress. The task of achieving gender equality in education at all levels by 2015 is more profoundly challenging. There has been little attempt to further define this goal. Accordingly, this chapter examines what is meant by 'gender equality in education', identifying constraints to its attainment and providing a basis for the policy analysis in Chapter 4.

## The leap from parity to equality

As indicated in Chapter 2, **gender parity**, which refers to the equal participation of both sexes in different levels of education, is a quantitative concept. Gender parity indicators are static, measuring, for example, the relative proportions of girls and boys with access to, or participating in, primary schooling. However, viewed over time, they can serve as more dynamic indicators of change. To the extent that progress towards gender parity suggests a weakening of the factors that keep women and men in unequal positions, it represents the first steps towards achieving equality of outcomes for the sexes.

However, gender parity indicators have some limitations, even when they are available over time. First, even if progress towards parity appears to be being made, this sometimes masks declines in male or female enrolment and participation, rather than indicating positive gains for both boys and girls. Second, a focus on quantitative balances reveals nothing about the processes by which they are being secured, nor about the qualitative changes that would be necessary if gender parity is to lead to full equality.

**Gender equality** requires the achievement of equal outcomes for women and men, notwithstanding that they are starting from different positions of advantage, and are constrained in different ways. Women differ from men both in terms of their biological capacities and in the socially constructed disadvantages they currently face. Inequalities arise from unequal power relations between women and men, and hence assessments of progress towards gender equality need to establish whether the changes that are being achieved are significantly altering these relations. The erasure of the social norms that see women and men as making unequal contributions to society and having unequal entitlements to its benefits is critical to achieving a society free from gender discrimination. Thus, whether women and men are being treated equally will depend on whether the fundamental freedoms and choices they confront are the same.

**Gender equality in education will not be possible without wider social change in many societies.**

Education is in many ways a fulcrum for this process, as Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate. It reflects contemporary norms and values, but it also helps to change them. Full gender equality in education would imply that girls and boys are offered the same chances to go to school and that they enjoy teaching methods and curricula free of stereotypes, and academic orientation and counselling unaffected by gender bias. Most fundamentally, it implies equality of outcomes in terms of length of schooling, learning achievement and academic qualifications and, more broadly, equal job opportunities and earnings for similar qualifications and experience. These objectives are demanding, and are far from being achieved in most societies. It is clear that the achievement of gender equality in education – in the sense of equal outcomes – will not be possible in the absence of wider social change in many societies. The question of whether and how this might occur over the coming decade requires an assessment not merely of the prospects for, and limits of, educational reform, but also of more fundamental changes that affect many other sectors and areas of life and work.

### Constraints through a rights agenda

In order to examine these broad sets of constraints and possibilities, it is useful to employ a framework that draws upon the rights agenda articulated in Chapter 1. This distinguishes between individuals' rights *to* education and their rights *within* and *through* education.[1] The determinants of gender inequality within each of these dimensions need to be addressed if the gender goals are to be achieved.

The analysis of problems affecting the exercise of rights *to* education focuses on questions of educational access for boys and girls. The next two sections of this chapter examine constraints to the fulfilment of those rights operating within the family and within the wider society. Extreme circumstances of crisis such as those resulting from conflict and HIV/AIDS, which disrupt societies and families, are considered as well as educational processes.

The discussion then moves to a consideration of rights *within* education. The neglect of gender issues within education systems affects the achievement of gender parity and equality in a

1. Adapted from Wilson (2003).
See also Subrahmanian (2003).

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range of ways. Gender-aware school systems are crucial if participation of girls and boys is to be sustained. The elimination of gender inequalities within education can help to build the foundations of broader gender equality for the long term.

Finally, rights *through* education are considered in order to emphasize the interdependence of educational reform and broader social and economic change. Changes in any of the dimensions of gender inequality have an impact elsewhere. Equally, the maintenance of gender inequality outside the education system is one of the most profound constraints to achieving gender equality within it. Some important aspects of this interdependence are identified and analysed in the final part of the chapter.

# Rights to education: what happens outside the school?

It is clear that extreme inequality in enrolments between girls and boys is particularly associated with low overall enrolments and with the incidence of poverty (Box 3.1). Inequality is not determined by poverty, because there are cases of poor countries where parity of enrolments has been achieved, but it appears to be part of the story. Why is this so?

In general, inequality in educational participation and outcomes reflects broader inequalities in society. These embrace social norms and customs, which create powerful incentives that guide people's behaviour, and determine the roles that women and men can have in the family
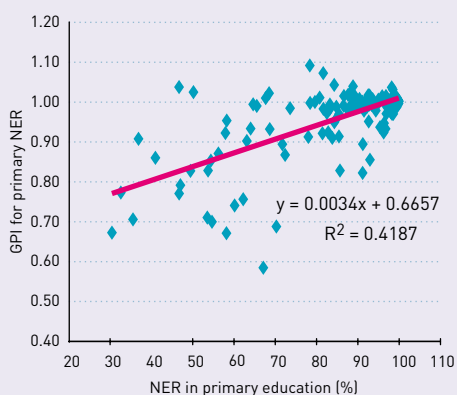
## Box 3.1. Gender and primary enrolments: some simple associations

In general, the lower a country's primary enrolment ratio, the greater the proportionate inequality between male and female enrolments. In the great majority of cases, such inequality is to the disadvantage of girls. Accordingly, the expansion path for enrolment growth within countries is typically unequal – where enrolments are low, boys are given preference in most countries and most regions of the world (Figure 3.1). There are, however, significant exceptions. The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Niger, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia are all countries where net enrolments are far less than 100%, yet where gender parity has been virtually achieved. Thus, the national context, including differences in policy, can clearly change the pattern.

Poverty contributes to under-enrolment. Figure 3.2 shows that primary net enrolment ratios rise with per capita income. However, there is considerable variability around the regression line. This is particularly true for countries at income levels lower than US$1,000 per capita, where many of the states of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia are concentrated.

Accordingly, the gendered inequality of enrolments also falls as per capita incomes increase (Figure 3.3). Again, however, there is substantial variation, particularly at lower income levels. Thus, incomes need to be quite high (in excess of US$3,500 per capita) before inequality in enrolment is consistently removed. Similar relationships to these are found at the secondary level.

**Figure 3.1.**
**Scatter plot of the gender parity index (GPI) against net enrolment ratio (NER) in primary education (2000)**



$y = 0.0034x + 0.6657$
$R^2 = 0.4187$

**Figure 3.2.**
**Scatter plot of per capita GNP against primary NER (2000)**



$y = 10.537Ln(x) + 8.4512$
$R^2 = 0.4027$
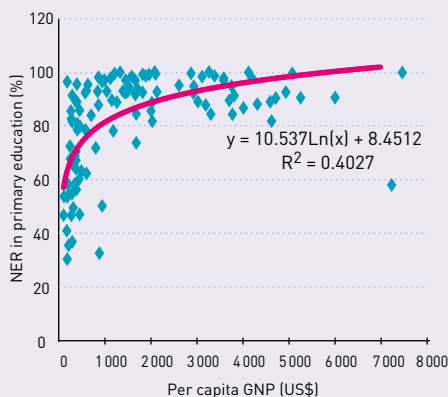
**Figure 3.3.**
**Scatter plot of GPI for primary NER and per capita GNP (2000)**
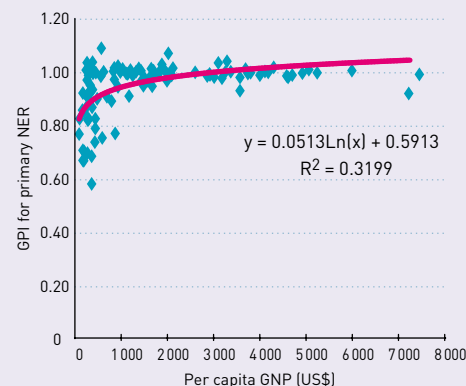


$y = 0.0513Ln(x) + 0.5913$
$R^2 = 0.3199$

*Source*: Statistical annex, Tables 1 and 5.

and community. Social norms are embedded in kinship and religious systems that are highly diverse across – and often within – societies. However, such norms can and do change – in response to environmental and economic change and to broader political and social developments. Change can result from deliberate actions of state and civil society groups, leading to reforms in the legislative and institutional framework of society. In these ways, changes in the expectations and incentives that govern human behaviour – including those that affect educational participation and performance – can be achieved.

The critically important locus for decision-making as regards participation in schooling is the family. It is here that notions of gender relations are transmitted from one generation to the next. This happens implicitly via the gender roles that members of the household themselves fulfil, and explicitly by consequence of the gender frameworks within which children of each sex are brought up. Households allocate time for different activities among their members, and they also allocate resources – for consumption, savings and investment, including those associated with the formation of human capital – between each of them. As indicated above, decisions made by households are influenced by the broad social and institutional framework of custom and opportunity in which they are located. Nevertheless, changing the factors that affect household constraints, opportunities and incentives is a critically important means of influencing their decision-making. These issues are explored below.

## In households, who decides?

The main ways in which children spend their time, and the amount of resources to which they have access, are determined by the households in which they live. The broad parameters for household behaviour are set by the social and institutional framework of each society. However, within that context, a key question is whether households make decisions in ways which balance the relative needs and interests of each of their individual members, or whether they do not. Traditionally it was thought they did. Economic and social policy proceeded as if households had a single set of preferences. The ways in which household resources, work obligations and opportunities for leisure were

> **The most important place for decisions about participation in schooling is the family.**

allocated among household members were not thought to be important. According to this 'unitary' model, it was taken as given, for example, that changes in the balance of expenditure would be consistent, not necessarily with an equal distribution of resources, but at least with maximizing household welfare, however defined (Becker, 1965). Yet concern about subgroups within households – such as women or children – invites the question of whether the distribution of power within the household results in some of its members having a less than equal share of its joint resources. In short, do women or girls have a tougher time than men or boys, in part because their influence over decision-making in the household is usually weaker?

Recent theoretical and empirical work shows that this is so. It appears that resource allocation decisions within households are inconsistent with the 'unitary' household model. In particular, additional income accruing to different household members has different implications for household expenditure patterns. Women seem to spend more on education, health and household services than do men. Thus the evidence against income and labour pooling and against family altruism is strong (Hoddinott et al., 1997) and an approach premised on bargaining within households better captures the reality.

### From private to public sphere

While households are not a collection of individuals co-operating in the interests of maximizing economic gains (Kabeer, 2001), neither are they a group of people acting as if they were single individuals. Households are, by and large, made up of families, and hence they are the sites of particular kinds of social relationships, which are very distinct from other relationships in any society. Institutional approaches that take account of this have been used to elucidate the process of household decision-making (Todaro and Fapohunda, 1988; Kabeer, 1994, 2000; Cain, 1984; Whitehead, 1981; Whitehead and Kabeer, 2000; Folbre, 1994).

Within such an approach, 'households' and other domestic arrangements are seen as institutional responses to the need for long-term stable relationships. These are based on meeting the basic survival needs of members, bearing and raising children and coping with illness, disability and old age in a world characterized by

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uncertainty (Kabeer, 1994, Chap. 5). Powerful ideologies of family and kinship bind household members to each other through socially sanctioned 'implicit contracts'. These ideologies carry mutual claims and obligations in ways that are often highly unequal. They are not 'invented' by individual households; they are embedded in wider social norms and values and hence exercise an influence that goes beyond (but serves to buttress) the authority of senior individuals within the household (Whitehead, 1981).

Households take diverse forms across the world. One important principle of difference relates to gender relations.[2] Most societies observe some gender division of labour within the home, with women taking primary responsibility for caring for the family, whereas men tend to be associated with the work outside the home, often on a paid basis. This division of labour goes some way towards explaining the gender inequalities in human capabilities observed in many nations.

### All-round dependence

However, societies differ considerably in the extent to which women also participate in paid work outside the home: the most marked gender inequalities are generally found in societies where women are confined to the home and denied the possibility of participating in work outside it (Townsend and Momsen, 1987; Kabeer, 2003a; Sen, 1990). These restrictions tend to be associated with other values and practices that further inhibit women's life chances, including patrilineal principles of inheritance and descent, where family line and property is transmitted through men; patriarchal structures of authority, where families are tightly knit and where most resources are under the control of the senior male; and patri-local systems of marriage requiring women to be absorbed into their husbands' families after marriage, distancing them from the support of their natal families. The restrictions on women's movements in the public domain in such societies reflect the importance attached to the biological paternity of children and the need to control women's sexuality. Denied access to resources of their own and restricted in their ability to provide for themselves, women tend to be regarded as economic dependents in such societies.

### Son preference

Such societies have been – and many continue to be – characterized by marked son-preference and by discrimination against daughters from the early years of life. This occurs to such an extent that such societies often have excess levels of female mortality and a higher proportion of men to women in the population than is considered 'standard' in the rest of the world (Kabeer, 2003b). Countries in which there is strong cultural preference for sons also tend to have the greatest levels of gender inequalities (UNIFEM, 2002, p. 13). These societies exhibit 'extreme' forms of patriarchy. They are to be found in countries of North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia (Pakistan, much of India and Bangladesh) and East Asia (China, Republic of Korea, Taiwan). Gender inequalities in education in such societies are simply one aspect of a generalized and systematic discrimination against women and girls.

Although other parts of the world are also characterized by a gender division of domestic labour, they do not exercise the same restrictions on women's ability to participate in the wider economy – even though such participation may be onerous, given women's other domestic responsibilities. Thus while gender inequalities exist in these societies, they have not taken the extreme, life-threatening forms noted above.

In these ways, differences in gender relations within and outside the household reflect society-wide norms, values and practices rather than privately determined choices. To that extent they change only slowly in response to changes in individual or household circumstances. At the same time, they are not immutable. Like other aspects of social behaviour, they have often shown evidence of change over time, with both positive and negative outcomes for women.

### Acting on social and economic forces

Thus it is the complexity of interaction between social norms and values and broader economic change which explains the diversity of enrolment outcomes illustrated in Figures 3.1 to 3.3 (see Box 3.1) The mechanisms that are capable of delivering greater equality are not necessarily put in place by economic growth – or by income growth at the household level – alone. Other social forces are of equal significance, as demonstrated later in this report.

**Countries with strong cultural preference for sons usually have the greatest gender inequalities.**

2. Indeed, while absolute levels of education across the world are closely associated with levels of economic development, it is impossible to explain observed patterns of gender inequality in education without some reference to patterns of gender relations prevailing in different contexts (Kabeer, 2003a).

## Box 3.2. Gender inequalities in education: the South Asian case

The broad pattern of social relations in South Asia provides a compelling illustration of their influence on gendered outcomes. Throughout that region, variations in gender inequality in education partly mirror regional variations in patriarchy. There is a well-documented 'north–south' divide among Indian states such that those in the north-western plains have historically displayed a pattern of extreme discrimination whereas southern states have had more egalitarian relations (Dyson and Moore, 1983; Miller, 1981). It is also significant that the northern states generally had higher levels of fertility, lower levels of contraceptive use, lower levels of female labour-force participation and more marked son-preference than states in the south.

This regional pattern confounds the relationship between economic development and gender equality at the 'state' level. Thus, Punjab and Haryana in northern India reported the highest state-level per capita incomes in 1981 as well as some of the lowest sex ratios (around 870 women to 1,000 men) whereas Kerala and Tamil Nadu, both southern states with lower per capita incomes, reported sex ratios of 1,032 and 977, respectively. The relationship between gender equality and poverty is further complicated by caste. Historical evidence and contemporary data all confirm that gender discrimination is particularly marked among the propertied castes in northern India. It has been shown that, in the early 1930s, sex ratios among the 0–7 age group were generally substantially in favour of males among

the propertied castes in the northern plains of India, and even more so among the propertied upper castes. In the southern states, on the other hand, the propertied castes either had balanced or female-biased sex ratios whereas the 'unpropertied' castes had balanced or slightly male-biased ratios (Miller, 1985). The pattern was continued into the 1980s, but there was a 'worsening' of sex ratios both among poorer castes and in some of the southern states over time, suggesting the spread of forms of gender discrimination to groups and areas where they were not previously prevalent (Agnihotri, 2000).

Elsewhere in the region, Pakistan displays many of the characteristics of the 'northern' pattern while Sri Lanka appears to have more in common with the southern states. The mountainous areas of northern India and Nepal are generally more egalitarian than the plains. Bangladesh, along with eastern states of India, has proved less easy to classify. They have certain characteristics in common with the northern states but appear not to have such markedly adverse sex ratios (Dyson and Moore, 1983).

Thus, in South Asia, variations in poverty provide only part of the explanation for observed variations in gender inequality in education. Pakistan, for example, with higher per capita GNP than either India or Bangladesh, reports higher levels of gender inequality in education than either country (Annex, Table 1).

*Source*: Kabeer (2003*a*, 2003*b*).

**One of the commonest reasons for children not attending school is that their families need them to work.**

## Child labour:
## a major brake on schooling

Whether all children will be sent to school depends on the extent to which households continue to see themselves as requiring the labour of their children in order to achieve tolerable levels of welfare. Owing to the importance of child labour as a major constraint on school participation – with a strongly differentiated impact on girls and boys – this factor needs prominent attention in policy design.

### *Figures only tell part of the story*
One of the commonest reasons for children not attending school is that their families need them to work. Sometimes this work is paid, but mostly it is unpaid and takes place within the household or on the family farm. Global estimates of the

incidence of work performed by children are available – as for adults – only for work leading to a marketable output. This includes waged work, but also regular work done on a household farm or enterprise. People engaged in these economic activities are conventionally described as being economically active and, when they are children, as being child labourers. Most recent estimates suggest that about 18% of children aged 5–14 are economically active in those ways, amounting to some 211 million children in 2000 (Table 3.1), roughly half of whom were girls. About 25 million of these children were estimated to be involved in work for their families which was consistent with their development. But some 186 million of them were involved in some form of child labour which was harmful to their development. Although many of these child labourers work for only a few hours per week,

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more than half of them are estimated to be working full time on the production of marketable output (ILO, 2002a). There are no reliable global estimates for the number of children engaged in domestic chores and other household work that does not lead to marketable output. It is safe to assume, however, that the number of such children is several times greater than those formally described as being 'economically active' – and thus as comprising 'child labour' – and that the girls who find themselves in this category considerably outnumber the boys.

There are dramatic differences in the incidence of child labour by region. Africa has the highest incidence (41%) while Asia and Latin America have 21% and 17%, respectively. Asia, being more population-dense, has the largest number of child labourers. Of children in work, it is estimated that 61% are in Asia (128 million), 32% in Africa (68 million) and 7% (15 million) in Latin America. While the incidence of child labour in Asia and Latin America has witnessed a secular decline in the post-war era, this is not the case in sub-Saharan Africa. There, fertility remains high and per capita resources for education have often been in decline. Slow or negative economic growth, famine and disease, war and conflict and the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa have all contributed further to keeping the incidence of child labour high.

### Parents: the main employer

The vast majority of working children – i.e. those helping to produce marketable output – in developing countries are engaged in agricultural work, typically on family-run farms.[3] Accordingly, the work participation rates of children tend to be higher in rural than in urban areas. Child work in export-sector factories, many of which are in urban locations, is thus by no means the general case of child labour. Although in Latin America and Asia, a small but significant fraction of children work outside the household for a wage, this is much less common in Africa, where wage labour markets are more incipient. Parents are, therefore, the main employers of children, and affecting their circumstances and attitudes is the major challenge in reducing child labour.

Second, and contrary to what is often assumed, child labour is not the inverse of school attendance. Many children from all developing regions, but especially African children, combine

**Table 3.1. Number and percentages of children engaged in economic activity, child labour and worst forms of child labour, by age (2000)**

| | 5–14 years | | 15–17 years | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number (millions) | % of age group | Number (millions) | % of age group | Number (millions) | % of age group |
| Economically active children | 210.8 | 18 | 140.9 | 42 | 351.7 | 23 |
| of which: Child labourers | 186.3 | 16 | 59.2 | 18 | 245.5 | 16 |
| of which: Children in worst forms of child labour | – | – | – | – | 178.9 | 11.5 |
| Children in hazardous work | 111.3 | 9 | 59.2 | 18 | 170.5 | 11 |
| Children in unconditional worst forms[1] | – | – | – | – | 8.4 | 0.5 |

*Note*: A dash indicates that figures are not available. ILO estimates for 2000; United Nations estimates for 2001.
1. For example, forced and bonded labour, prostitution and pornography and other illicit activities.
*Sources*: ILO (2002a, p. 18); United Nations (2001b).

working on family-run farms and enterprises with attending school.[4] Inevitably, however, there is a trade-off between work participation and school attendance in such circumstances.[5] Achievement is also affected: the quality of the school experience for working children is undermined not only by their more irregular attendance, but also by their ability to apply themselves while at school being reduced by their responsibilities outside it.[6]

Third, most countries exhibit large gender differentials in child labour-force participation. In Africa and Asia, the educational participation and attainment of girls tends to be less than that of boys. However, the data on child labour do not always show girls as being more heavily engaged in work than boys because they are often more likely than boys to be classed as 'inactive'. This probably corresponds to their having a greater engagement in household chores, which is not conventionally counted as economic activity.[7] Often the poverty of households is a distinguishing characteristic – with those supplying boy labourers being on average poorer than those supplying girl labourers. In rural Pakistan, for example, it appears that boys take wage work only when their income contribution is necessary to household subsistence, whereas girls take wage work even when the household could survive without the money (Bhalotra, 2000). A broad interpretation of the empirical literature

3. This fact emerges from an array of household survey data from developing countries including the World Bank Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS) and the International Labour Organization's SIMPOC Surveys. Many authors report the higher incidence of rural as compared with urban work and of household-based as opposed to market work. For partial surveys of the empirical research see Andvig (1999), Bhalotra and Tzannatos (2002), Edmonds (2003). A comparison of African and Asian data is made, using the cases of Ghana and Pakistan, in Bhalotra and Heady (2001).

4. Relevant data for India are presented in Cigno and Rosati (2002) (where, exceptionally, the fraction of 'idle' children is greater among boys than girls), for Nepal and Viet Nam in Edmonds (2003), for Ethiopia in Cockburn (2002) and for Ghana and Pakistan in Bhalotra and Heady (2001).

5. See, for example, Boozer and Suri (2001), for Ghana.

6. This is shown, for Ghana, in Heady (2003) and discussed, for Ethiopia, in Cockburn (2001b).

7. For these reasons many empirical studies investigating the effects of gender produce mixed results. See Psacharopoulos (1997), Alessie et al. (1992), Canagarajah and Coulombe (1997) and DeTray (1983) where data for boys and girls are pooled, and a gender dummy variable is introduced. In general, significant gender effects are found where separate models for girls and boys are estimated [e.g. Nielsen (1998), Ilahi (1999), Cockburn (2001a), Ray (2000), Bhalotra (2000, 2001), Bhalotra and Heady (2000)] or when surveys explicitly include domestic chores alongside work aimed at producing marketable output.

In Ethiopia and Guinea, up to a third of school drop-outs said their need to earn money or work on the family farm were their main reasons for leaving school early.

suggests that the proportions in work and out of school are larger for girls than for boys in Asia, the proportion in work but not necessarily the proportion out of school is larger for boys than for girls in Latin America, and the proportions of boys and girls in work are roughly similar in most parts of Africa, although the girls who are out of school comprise a significant majority.

### Girls and domestic work

In all these cases there is strong gender segmentation in occupations. This is particularly so if domestic labour is included. Even where their labour participation rates are similar, boys and girls often specialize in different sorts of work. For example, in Ethiopia, Guinea and the United Republic of Tanzania, girls specialize in domestic work, such as looking after siblings, preparing and cooking food, cleaning the house and fetching water and firewood. Boys, on the other hand, are mainly involved in working on the family farm, looking after livestock and engaging in income-earning activities. In terms of the range and frequency of work activities practised in these three countries, including domestic chores, girls help their families more than boys (Colclough et al., 2003, pp. 136–7; Cockburn, 2001b). In rural Pakistan, girls in waged work are mainly engaged in seasonal agricultural work, whereas boys in waged work are primarily engaged in the non-agricultural sector (Bhalotra, 2000). Proxy evidence also exists from household surveys for many developing countries, which find that a substantial fraction of children are neither in work nor in school. This fraction is typically larger for girls than for boys – an indication that 'doing nothing', as reported by such surveys will, in many cases, correspond to doing housework. Other school-based surveys for a large number of countries show that household and domestic work is a significant reason for non-attendance, and more so for girls than for boys. In Ethiopia and Guinea, between one-quarter and one-third of school drop-outs surveyed indicated that their need to earn money or to work at home on the family farm were the main reasons for leaving school early. In both countries the girls who dropped out for these reasons did so mainly in order to help the family in the home, whereas the boys who did so cited work on the family farm, or earning money as having been their main intent (Colclough et al., 2003).

Finally, the history and geography of child labour show that its incidence falls as economic development proceeds.[8] Its existence is undoubtedly partly a result of poverty. However, the beneficial impact of increased wealth or income may often be rather indirect. In many cases those at school are on average from richer households than school drop-outs who, in turn, are from better-off backgrounds than those children who have never been enrolled.[9] On the other hand, household surveys often suggest that the relationship between income and child labour at the household level is weak and, related to this, surveys often reveal a considerable prevalence of child labour among households that are not subsistence poor (Andvig, 1999; Bhalotra and Tzannatos, 2002; Brown et al., 2003). Furthermore, the ownership of productive assets such as land sometimes increases child labour, owing to the increased need for household labour for those with larger land holdings.[10] This needs further investigation in a broader range of contexts, because the effectiveness of income transfer programmes aimed at reducing child labour is dependent on parents being altruistic – in the sense that those having the choice would not want their children to work.

### Targeting mothers

One of the explanations for the indirect relationship between income and child labour may be – as discussed above – that women and men have different preferences and power within households. A growing literature argues that the relative power of women in deciding how to spend household resources (including deciding on the level of investment in schooling) increases with their earning power. Recent work has shown that the incidence of child labour can be expected to be lowest where power is equally divided between husbands and wives (Basu, 2001). Data from Indonesia suggest that children work less and study more in households where the mother has more influence in decision-making (Galasso, 1999). Other studies allow for the possibility that child workers are independent bargainers who influence the allocation of resources within the household. In rural Pakistan, for example, ignoring work status, no gender differential is apparent in the allocation of resources. However, once work status is allowed for, it is found that working boys acquire a larger share of household resources such as food and child-specific goods than do non-working (or dependent) boys. In

8. This is evident from aggregate statistics on child labour presented by country and year (see ILO, 2002). Using cross-country data for eighty-three rich and poor countries, Dessy and Vencatachellum (2003) find a negative correlation of child labour and the log of per capita GDP (at purchasing power parity). (They also find a positive relation of child labour incidence and the log of the Gini index of inequality.)

9. In Ethiopia and Guinea, increases in household wealth improve the chances of all children's school attendance, but significantly more so for girls than for boys. See Rose and Al-Samarrai (2001); Tembon and Al-Samarrai (1999).

10. Bhalotra and Heady (2000) illustrate this argument with a theoretical model, and present evidence from rural Ghana and Pakistan. See also Cockburn (2001a) and Skoufias (1993).

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contrast, working does not bestow any benefit on girls. Although this may reflect differential preferences, it may rather be that dependent girls are as heavily engaged in domestic chores as working girls are in more explicit forms of work. This is in contrast to working boys who may in fact be more active than dependent boys (Bhalotra and Attfield, 1998).

## In the name of tradition

Social norms play a significant role in explaining why and how gender differentiation occurs, how it becomes legitimized through divisions of labour between men and women, and how this division of labour results in the contributions of girls and boys being valued differently. Norms of female dependence on males are institutionalized through a range of social mechanisms so that they come to appear natural and immutable. These norms are usually stubborn, but they can be challenged through pro-active measures.

Contrary to the assumptions of many parents, girls will go to great lengths to attend school (see Box 3.3). Once there, they work hard and often outperform boys in their studies, as Chapter 2 demonstrates. However, many parents recognize that existing social conditions are often unsupportive of those girls and women who offend social norms. Some Ethiopian fathers, for example, noted that more educated girls face problems because they cannot find a husband or employment opportunities; they will get older, have to stay with their parents and bring shame upon the family; thus the only options are for educated girls to migrate to bigger towns, often to lead a miserable life working as house servants or even prostitutes (Colclough et al., 2003).

### Early marriage as a form of insurance

Where female autonomy is considered unstable or risky, early marriage is used as a means of securing daughters' futures. This massively impedes the educational progress of girls in many countries. Data from India for 1996 show that 38% of girls aged 15–19 were married.[11] In rural areas of Albania and Tajikistan it is not uncommon for poor families to endorse the early marriage of girls to lighten the family's economic burden. In these circumstances, early marriage (at age 15 or 16) becomes a reason to leave school (Magno et al., 2002). Here, and in the other countries shown in Table 3.2, girls are

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### Box 3.3. Ethiopian girls speak up

Silenat Libsework, student:

*I am now in grade four. I was 7 years old when I was married. Now I am 14. I wanted to come back to school and left my husband. I am now doing well. I have never failed in my exams. I am the first daughter. My two younger brothers are in grades seven and four. The youngest sister is not yet of school age. I regret that I was married and now I advise others not to do so.*

Tadfe Tsega, student:

*Now I am in grade two. I am 15 years old I was married twice, at the ages of 10 and 12. I did not stay with my second husband. My cousin advised me to go to school. I am the first child to my family and I have three sisters and two brothers. I like my lessons. I stood seventh among 120 students. My younger sister was married but because of my advice she now goes to school. My parents are not very willing to send me to school. None the less I want to continue and will advise other girls to do the same.*

*Source*: Cited in Yelfign (2003).

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significantly more likely to be married than their male peers.

Although it is well known that marriage of children and adolescents before the age of 18 is very common in some parts of the world, its overall prevalence is difficult to assess. Many such marriages are not registered. Small-scale studies suggest, however, that national data significantly underestimate its prevalence. For

**Table 3.2. Married adolescents: percentage of 15–19 year olds married, various years**

|  | Boys | Girls |
|---|---|---|
| **Sub-Saharan Africa** |  |  |
| D. R. Congo | 5 | 74 |
| Niger | 4 | 70 |
| Congo | 12 | 56 |
| Uganda | 11 | 50 |
| Mali | 5 | 50 |
| **Asia** |  |  |
| Afghanistan | 9 | 54 |
| Bangladesh | 5 | 51 |
| Nepal | 14 | 42 |
| **Middle East** |  |  |
| Iraq | 15 | 28 |
| Syrian Arab Rep. | 4 | 25 |
| Yemen | 5 | 24 |
| **Latin America and Caribbean** |  |  |
| Honduras | 7 | 30 |

*Source*: Cited in Wilson (2003).

11. These comprised 46% of those in rural areas and 22% of those in urban centres.

**Girls are sometimes 'kidnapped' on their way to or even at school by parents for marriage to their sons.**

example, in 1998, in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, 14% of girls between the ages of 10 and 14 were already married. In Nepal, 40% of girls are married by the time they are 15. In Ethiopia and in some countries in West Africa, marriage at 7 or 8 is not uncommon, although in some cases girls are reported to be able to carry on their education even after moving to their in-laws' household (Rose, 2003*a*). Even boys marry under pressure from parents, earlier than they would wish although not as early as girls (Save the Children, 2003).

In themselves, changes to the legal age of marriage are unlikely to alter local practices if underlying conditions are not changed. For example, despite a recent policy change in Ethiopia, whereby the minimum official age of marriage for girls became 18, in some parts of the country girls are still married before the age of 10. Moreover, in some areas girls are not infrequently 'kidnapped' on their way to school, or even from within the school compound itself, by the parents of boys, for marriage to their sons. Cognisant of this risk, some parents refuse to send their daughters to school. Promoting the importance of girls' education through campaigns, role models, improving conditions of safety and security for girls and working directly with adolescent girls to strengthen their voice are all important measures to help communities to allow girls to complete their education.

### Cultural practices and rites of passage

A more complex set of issues affecting girls' education are traditional practices that mark adolescence and the rites of passage. Box 3.4 discusses some of those that continue, in the name of religion or culture, to prevent both boys and girls from enjoying rights and freedoms associated with childhood. Many of these are linked to the construction of sexuality of young boys and girls, and in most cases result in restrictions being placed particularly on the freedom of girls to enjoy their right to education.

Some cultural practices inadvertently affect the incentives to educate girls. For example, the practice of bride price or *lobola* in many parts of southern Africa, whereby educated girls may attract a higher bride price, can serve as a powerful incentive for some parents to educate their daughters (SADC, 1999). In contrast, the practice of dowry in India often acts as a depressant on investments in a daughter, be it their education or health, by emphasizing the importance of girls' eligibility for marriage to the exclusion of all other considerations of personhood (Palriwala, 2003). However, where education is seen as improving the prospects for girls in the marriage market, it may be used purely as a means to that end (Jeffery and Basu, 1996; Jeffery et al., 2003).

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### Box 3.4. **Puberty myths**

Rites of passage for boys and girls differ around the world, but in most cases, they reflect gendered norms and beliefs about appropriate roles for adult life. There are many different practices associated with puberty, reproduction, marriage and the control of female sexuality. For example, in Nepal, Ghana and Nigeria, girls can be enslaved to atone for the sins of a male relative or to provide security for their family in other ways. In Ghana, the practise of 'trokosi' involves offering young female virgins – sometimes as young as 5 – to shrines where they are kept in servitude to priests in reparation for the sins of family members. One study estimated that in southern Ghana there were over 4,700 women in bondage in 1997. Female genital mutilation (FGM) remains widespread in both Islamic and Christian communities. It arises

from myths relating to hygiene and sexuality, and is practised by people from all social classes, including the educated elite. Severe health, sexual and psychological effects are associated with FGM.

Poverty, conflict and complex crises such as those triggered by HIV/AIDS can also perpetuate such practices. For example, in the Sudan, increased poverty and displacement as a result of civil war appear to have increased the rate of early marriage, resulting in early pregnancies and a disruption of schooling. FGM has also spread among communities for whom this practice was not traditional.

*Source*: Save the Children (2003).

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### Adolescence and pregnancy

Social pressures on girls and boys are particularly strong during their puberty and the development of adolescent sexuality. In many countries, adolescent pregnancy, either within or outside marriage, almost always results in the discontinuation of a girl's schooling. In both Malawi and Chile, pregnancy was often mentioned as the most important reason for girls leaving school early, although statistical evidence is sparse (Kadzamira and Chibwana, 2000; Avalos, 2003). In the United Republic of Tanzania, the strong enforcing of compulsory education has meant that early marriage is not an important factor affecting girls, but pregnancy was cited as an important reason for girls dropping out of school. In addition, the high costs of schooling and the inability of poorer girls to buy school uniforms also may encourage them to seek sexual relationships with older men who can provide them with money.

Data compiled by the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE, 1994) in eastern and southern Africa indicate that the school careers of many girls are cut short because they are expelled from school on becoming pregnant. Pre-marital pregnancy among girls is stigmatized in African communities even though its determining factors remain unaddressed. In Guinea and Malawi, where girls are now encouraged to return to school after pregnancy, few girls do so, partly because of parental fears that they would become pregnant again, and partly because girls are afraid of ridicule (Colclough et al., 2003).

### Sexual taboos

A recent series of studies about management of puberty in primary schools in Uganda, Kenya and Zimbabwe concluded that the current management of sexual maturation within the primary system fails to meet the needs of children, but especially those of girls. In particular, children were denied:

- accessible and accurate information about the process of sexual maturation;

- essential facilities to ensure that children, especially girls, are not excluded from participation because of their maturing bodies;

- an appropriate value system through which boys and girls can be guided into safe and healthy adulthood.

The studies document the ways in which poor management of sexual maturation has had a detrimental impact on children's acquisition of basic learning competencies, and how girls who experienced menstruation without adequate preparation, or facilities, were regularly absent or even dropped out of primary school (Kasente, 2003).

## Rights to education: children in special circumstances

Much of the preceding discussion has focused on families and the operation of gender inequalities within them. However, increasing numbers of children do not always fall within the conventional boundary of the 'family', and for them educational decision-making may be affected by a range of other factors. Households suffering from the strain of crises such as those unleashed by conflict and civil war and by the HIV/AIDS pandemic may no longer be able to send their children to school.

### Foster children

It may seem obvious to observe that whether or not children are brought up by their parents significantly affects their life chances. This, however, is an important factor in many developing countries, where households are large and complex. Nephews, nieces and sisters-in-law may often be counted among children along with sons and daughters of the head of household. In sub-Saharan Africa there is, further, a high prevalence of the practice of fostering children and of taking in orphans. In principle, it might be expected that parental altruism towards their own children would lead to non-biological children of household heads being more prone to involvement in child labour and less likely to be enrolled in school than biological children. This is confirmed by evidence from African countries.[12] Evidence of the biological-child effect, however, appears to be less apparent for child labour than it is for schooling. For example, an analysis of Peruvian data finds no effect (Levison and Moe, 1998). On the other hand, in rural Pakistan, sons and daughters of the household head are more likely to be in work than other children in the household. In rural Ghana, sons of the head of household are less likely to be in work but for daughters there are no differences, compared

**Households suffering from the strain of civil war and the HIV/AIDS pandemic may no longer be able to send their children to school.**

12. Case et al. (2002) indicate that, in a cross-section of African countries, biological children of the household head, as opposed to other relatives and non-relatives, are more likely to attend school.

## Box 3.5. How foster children fare in West Africa

**The fostering of children is an ancient phenomenon in many parts of the world. In West Africa, where it is widespread, the traditional causes vary widely. They include illness, death, divorce or separation of parents, socialization and the wish to strengthen family ties (by blood or marriage). For the societies involved, child 'circulation' is a characteristic of family systems, fitting in with patterns of family solidarity and systems of rights and obligations.**

In addition to reinforcing social bonds, this practice also appears to help maintain high fertility rates by spreading the economic burden of child-rearing more evenly. In some cases children may still have one or both biological parents alive, possibly even within the same household, although the household head may not be their parent.

Given the variations in definition, it is difficult to arrive at clear estimates of the exact extent to which fostering is taking place, as all children not living with a parent are deemed to be in 'foster care'. Demographic and health survey reports for eleven countries[13] provide more accurate information about parents' survival and residence, especially for children aged between 6–9 and 10–14, which is the usual school-age group. If children living with neither parent (whether alive or not) are considered to be in 'foster care' in these countries, then:

- foster children account for 10%–20% of the 6–9, and 13% –25% of the 10–14 age groups;
- in the overwhelming majority of these cases, both parents are alive but do not live with their child.

One factor explaining the large number of children involved is that many migrate from school-deprived areas in order to attend school elsewhere. On the other hand, there are gender differences. For girls, fostering may often be a reflection of the demand for domestic labour, whereas for boys it may reflect a concern with improving their schooling and life opportunities. The relationship between the custody of very young children and housework raises problems, particularly in households where both spouses work outside the home.

Similarly, the reality of many fostering situations is often not conducive to children's development. The costs for children's education, the extent of the guardian's responsibility for the child, and the emotional relationship between them are also likely to have a major influence on the opportunities made available for children in foster care. Actual situations are also highly diverse. Correspondingly, it is likely that a lower involvement on the part of the foster child's natural parent, especially financially (or in kind), would lead to a higher risk that the foster child will suffer mistreatment in the host family.

An analysis of data from a survey on the 'social dimensions of adjustment' in Côte d'Ivoire showed that education expenses earmarked for foster children were lower than those allotted to the household head's own children (De Vreyer, 1994). Usually, the host family expects foster children to perform some domestic tasks (washing dishes and clothes, carrying water, helping out with the cooking and shopping), or even to contribute to certain productive or commercial activities. Considered as a kind of payment, those chores might of course be compatible with a socialization and upbringing process in its broadest sense. But it has also been shown that 'sometimes these children are less well-fed, and work more than the others in the household, under the pretext of giving them a good upbringing. ... These children are practically thought of as domestic servants, and that can only have a negative influence on their scholastic performance' (Vandermeersch, 2000, p. 431). Thus, their chances of repeating, failing and dropping out of school are high. This problem is more acute for girls, who are required to perform more domestic chores. Moreover, fostering also carries the risk of 'psychological suffering' for the child (Savané, 1994). Thus, fostering for purposes of school enrolment does not protect children from abuse, mistreatment and other forms of exploitation that might lead them to fail or drop out of school.

Shocks and crises aggravate these circumstances. In particular, the HIV/AIDS pandemic sharply increases the number of foster children owing to parental mortality, thereby stretching the capacity of foster parents to provide for their families.

One key policy response is to increase provision of educational opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, developing early childhood centres to allow women to work and to have their younger children looked after by others could provide significant support.

*Source*: Pilon (2003).

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13. Benin, 2001;
Burkina Faso; 1992/93;
Côte d'Ivoire, 1994;
Ghana, 1998;
Guinea, 1999;
Mali, 2001;
Mauritania, 2000/01;
Niger, 1998;
Nigeria, 1999;
Senegal, 1992/93;
Togo, 1998.

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with other 10–14-year-old girls in the household (Bhalotra and Heady, 2000). These differences may partly exist because – as in the case of several West African countries – education features prominently in the reasons for fostering, particularly in the case of boys (Box 3.5). It can be expected, therefore, that it is also likely to be part of a solution.

## HIV/AIDS: when women are hardest hit

In 2002, an estimated 42 million people worldwide lived with HIV/AIDS. The 5 million new infections and the 3.1 million HIV/AIDS-related deaths accounted for a rise of 2 million compared with the year before (UNAIDS/WHO, 2002). Behind these cold figures hides the immeasurable detrimental impact of HIV/AIDS on development in general and on education in particular, described in the *EFA Report 2002* (UNESCO, 2002*b*, pp. 117–22, 147–57).

The global proportion of women among the infected adults (aged 15–49) is estimated to be equal to, or somewhat higher than, the proportion of men. But there are striking differences among regions, and there is a tendency for the proportion of women to be higher in less-developed regions. In sub-Saharan Africa, women make up as much as 58% of those living with HIV/AIDS, against 20% in North America.[14]

The picture is especially bleak for adolescent girls, aged 15–19; in some of the worst-affected countries in southern Africa and the Caribbean, girls in this age group are infected at rates four to seven times higher than boys, a disparity linked to widespread exploitation, sexual abuse and discriminatory practices (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 12).

A primary factor in girls' vulnerability to HIV infection involves sexual violence and coercion. A Human Rights Watch report on Zambia stated: 'An alarming and apparently increasing number of abuses against girls come from members of their own families. Given the high HIV prevalence in the Zambian population, sexual abuse carries a high risk of HIV transmission. Nevertheless, the family, the broader community, and the law enforcement agencies are often complicit in attempting to hide the abuse. Effective protection mechanisms targeted at abuse against girls in the family are virtually nonexistent' (Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 25).

Not even schools are safe places for girls. A South African Demographic and Health Survey asked women about rape in childhood, and found that schoolteachers were those most commonly responsible (33%) (Jewkes et al., 2002). The data show that approximately 1 in 200 South African women aged 15–49 was raped by a school teacher before the age of 15. For schoolgirls, more particularly, the South African Medical Research Council reported that half of those surveyed in 2000 had been forced to have sex against their will, one-third of them by teachers (Coombe, 2001). If both these figures are accurate, they imply that the incidence of rape has increased very substantially over recent decades. Given that South Africa has the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world, the implications of these levels of sexual violence are particularly disturbing.

In many high-prevalence countries, poverty conspires with HIV/AIDS to affect the lives of girls very seriously (UNICEF, 2003*a*). When HIV/AIDS hits a family, girls are often the first to be taken out of school to care for an ailing parent or family member, or to take on responsibility for their siblings, sometimes as head of household. The direct costs of schooling may also soon become unbearable for such affected families, where in the worst cases girls may even be forced to provide for themselves and their families by engaging in relationships that might heighten, for themselves, the risk of HIV infection.

Girls' education is an important means of breaking such patterns of economic deprivation and dependence. It is however, sadly ironic that although education is an effective means of addressing the HIV/AIDS crisis, the epidemic puts new barriers in the way of girls' abilities to access education, whilst also undermining the education system itself (Fleishman, 2003). Nevertheless, there are indications that HIV infection may be declining more markedly among young, educated women than among those with less education. Studies point to the example of Zambia, where prevalence for young women aged between 15 and 19 dropped from 27% in 1993 to 15% in 1998. The decline was greatest among those with secondary and higher levels of education. Some have concluded that, if this apparent relationship between more education and less HIV is robust, in the absence of a physiological vaccine against HIV infection, society has at its disposal a 'social vaccine' in the

**A main reason for girls' vulnerability to HIV infection is sexual violence and coercion.**

14. At the end of 2002, UNAIDS figures on the percentages of women (15–49 years) among those living with HIV/AIDS were: 58% in Africa; 55% in North Africa and the Middle East; 50% in the Caribbean; 36% in South and South-East Asia; 30% in Latin America; 27% in Eastern Europe and Central Asia; 25% in Western Europe; and 20% in North America (UNAIDS, 2002, p. 8).

**Box 3.6.** **Fighting HIV/AIDS in Brazilian schools**

The Culture and Communication Project implemented by UNAIDS has been a success story since it began in 1987. Working in 400 schools in 97 cities, it has published and distributed more than 900,000 newsletters and newspapers written by and for the students and their teachers. The publications cover issues such as reproductive health, STI/AIDS, human rights and advocacy. Since 1987, the project has run training courses for almost 2,000 students. With the support of UNICEF and the MacArthur Foundation, it aims to reach 1,000 schools by 2005.

*Source*: UNAIDS (2002).

form of education (Coombe and Kelly, 2001). In addition, there is some recent evidence of decline, or levelling off, of HIV prevalence in some urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa, which, for those between 15 and 19 years, may indicate some impact of prevention efforts (Donnelly, 2003). Box 3.6 provides an example from Brazil.

However, it does not follow that 'health literacy' is a natural product of general literacy, as the experience of South Africa and Botswana demonstrates. Both countries have relatively high levels of literacy and high HIV prevalence rates. This underscores the need to invest both in general literacy and health literacy specific to HIV/AIDS. This requires attention not only to basic facts about HIV/AIDS but also to enabling girls and young women negotiate their social and sexual lives more independently, armed with a better understanding of the implications of sexual activity (Fleishman, 2003).

But are education systems sufficiently prepared to play a crucial role in combating the epidemic? Stephen Lewis, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, reports that in 'all of the countries visited, teachers were dead, teachers were dying, teachers were ill and away from school. ... It felt, in every instance, as though the education sector was under siege. In Zambia, they lost 1,967 teachers in 2001, over 2,000 teachers in 2002; the teacher's colleges are graduating fewer than 1,000 a year. In parts of Malawi, HIV-positive teachers are estimated at over 30%'.[15]

### Civilians are not only most of the victims, but increasingly the targets of conflict.

Thus, extra resources would already be needed to merely keep education systems in affected countries functioning as they are. But actually to fight HIV/AIDS by means of education, even more resources are needed both on the supply side – to promote new training related to HIV/AIDS, to develop new curricula and content, and to provide counselling service; and on the demand side – to enable orphans and other affected children to attend school. All this needs to be accomplished at a time when other public sectors, especially health care, are claiming an ever-increasing share of the government budgets.

The worst-affected countries cannot mobilize these resources themselves by internal reallocation (UNESCO, 2002*b*, pp. 147–57). While one could argue that countries in normal circumstances need eventually to be able to sustain their education systems independently from external support, this principle needs to be set aside as long as HIV/AIDS ruins the lives of so many orphaned and infected girls and boys; and so long as it continues to have such a dramatic impact on the availability of the most important resource education systems have at their disposal – teachers.

## Civilians at the heart of conflict

Armed conflict is a major barrier to development in general and to gender equality in education in particular. Armed conflict is estimated to affect some thirty countries in the world, mostly those who can least afford it; 80% of the world's wars are in Africa and Asia;[16] most conflicts during 2001 were internal (SIPRI Yearbook, 2003). In such internal struggle for control over territory and populations, civilians are increasingly placed at the heart of the conflict. Militias multiply and small arms proliferate. Civilians not only make up the majority of victims, they are increasingly the targets of conflict. Far from being unfortunate collateral damage of war, the destruction of civilian populations has been the very aim of some of the wars of the 1990s, as in Rwanda and Bosnia. Civilian casualties in wartime have climbed from 5% of the total in the early twentieth century to up to 90% during the wars of the 1990s.

### *Impact of armed conflict on girls and women*
The effects of armed conflict are different for men, women, boys and girls. In Bosnia and

15. Stephen Lewis, notes for a press briefing at the United Nations, 8 January 2003.

16. An armed conflict is defined as a political conflict in which combat involves the armed forces of at least one state (or one or more armed factions seeking to gain control of all or part of the state), and in which at least 1,000 people have been killed by the fighting during the course of the conflict (Project Ploughshares, 2002).

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Herzegovina in 1995, Muslim men and older boys were rounded up and detained or executed, whereas women and girls were forced to leave (ICRC, 2001). Women and girls, on the other hand, are continually threatened by rape and sexual exploitation during armed conflict. During the conflict in the former Yugoslavia there were an estimated 20,000 victims of sexual assault, and in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, many adolescent girls who survived militia attacks were raped (UNICEF, 1996). In times of war, in addition to the dangers of gunfire, bombings, landmines and sexual assault, women and girls also face the risk of increased domestic violence. Domestic violence is common during peacetime, but it increases during and after conflict. Many things contribute to the increase in domestic violence: the availability of weapons, the violence that male family members have experienced or caused, the lack of jobs, shelter and basic services (UNIFEM, 2002). Girls and women are therefore doubly vulnerable in times of war.

### Education in the cross-fire
The destruction of educational infrastructure represents one of the greatest developmental setbacks for countries affected by conflict. In Mozambique, some 45% of primary-school networks were destroyed, and during the crisis in Rwanda more than two-thirds of teachers either fled or were killed (Machel, 1996). The lost years of education make the recovery after war even more difficult. Once the fighting stops, the lack of schools and teachers, the inability of authorities to rebuild the education system and to train, retrain and deploy new or returning teachers, is a difficult challenge that can take many years to overcome.

Providing education in situations of emergency and crisis is critical, both as a way to resist the enemy and to provide some sense of normalcy in disrupted lives. It is also the foundation on which to rebuild societies. Because schools are often targeted, alternative sites for classrooms have to be found, alternating the venues regularly. In Eritrea in the late 1980s, classes were often held under trees, in caves or in camouflaged huts built from sticks and foliage. Similar arrangements were made during the fighting in the former Yugoslavia, where classes were held in cellars of private homes, often by candlelight, witnessing the importance of maintaining education no matter how difficult the circumstances (Machel, 1996). In interviews with

the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children in 2000, Burundian women expressed concern about children's and adolescents' lack of access to school, where the situation had further deteriorated due to insecurity. They reiterated the need to raise levels of school attendance and literacy, and again offer children and adolescents alternatives to violence and prostitution (Watchlist, 2002).

### Girls at high risk
It is estimated that half of the 104 million out-of-school children, two-thirds of whom are girls, live in countries in the midst of or recovering from conflict. Of the seventeen sub-Saharan countries in which enrolment rates declined in the 1990s, six are states that are affected by or are recovering from major armed conflict (Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia) and of the fourteen countries with a very low enrolment GPI of between 0.6 and 0.84, three are currently in conflict (Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia) and two are recovering from it (Ethiopia and Mozambique). Of the twenty-five countries with the lowest levels of female adult literacy, ten are either experiencing armed conflict or recovering from it.[17] It is also significant that of the twenty-five countries targeted recently by UNICEF for accelerated action to improve girls' participation in education,[18] eight have experienced recent conflict within their borders (Kirk, 2003).

There is ample evidence from the Machel report and from other sources that armed conflict particularly disrupts the education of girls. During conflict girls may not be allowed to go to school because parents fear attacks on the way. The HIV/AIDs threat makes this of even greater concern. Of the seventeen countries with over 100,000 children orphaned by AIDS, thirteen are in conflict or on the brink of conflict (Machel, 2002). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is thought that adult HIV/AIDS prevalence has risen steeply to 20%, and that in 2001, 930,000 children under 15 had lost either their mother or both parents to the epidemic. The vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence in situations of conflict makes them also especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. This was indicated in a recent study in the highly affected region of North Kivu (Democratic Republic of the Congo), where estimated infection rates are 54% among adult women, 32% among adult men, and 26% among children (Watchlist, 2003). Infection rates

**Devastation of educational infrastructure is a huge developmental setback for countries affected by conflict.**

17. Angola, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, the Sudan.

18. UNICEF's '25 by 2005' initiative is likely to happen in the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Sudan, Turkey, the United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen, Zambia.

of military forces can be far higher than those of the local population. Traditional chores such as collecting firewood and water represent a real danger during wartime. All these factors impact negatively on education. In southern Sudan, the demand that girls care for younger siblings and children has considerably increased during civil war, as adults and particularly women have become more engaged in livelihood activities than during pre-war periods (Biong Deng, 2003).

In the case of the Aboke girls in northern Uganda, 139 girls were specifically targeted, removed from a girls' boarding school, and forced into the rebel forces (De Temmerman, 2001). In northern Uganda, families have married their daughters to militia members in order to protect themselves and their girls. The same also happened in Somalia (UNICEF, 2001*b*). In post-conflict periods, sexual violence and exploitation of women does not necessarily abate. In Rwanda, for example, during and after the conflict, girls tended to stay close to their homes, remaining for the most part with their mothers; education was the first of their activities to be sacrificed (Oxfam UK, 1999).

### Uprooted and out of school

Recent conflicts have resulted in huge refugee populations, making demands on an already overstretched education system. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) cares for 20 million 'persons of concern', mainly refugees and asylum seekers but also internally displaced persons. These have been uprooted because of internal warfare but have not reached a neighbouring country, and are therefore not protected by international law. The United Nations Special Representative for Internally Displaced Persons estimates there are 25 million IDPs worldwide, with major concentrations in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, and countries of the former Soviet Union. The majority are women and children. In nearly half of these countries, IDPs faced sexual violence. A 2002 study in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone found that displaced women and girls in camps were constrained to exchange sex for scarce food and other basics – even for humanitarian aid. Twelve million children aged 5–17 are without access to education due to conflict (Global IDP Project, 2003).

### Killer mines

One of the most neglected but significant education-related outcomes of conflict is disability, particularly that caused by landmines. In Africa, an estimated 37 million mines are embedded in the soil of at least nineteen countries. Since May 1995, children have comprised about half the victims of the 50,000–100,000 anti-personnel mines laid in Rwanda. Angola alone has an estimated 10 million landmines and an amputee population of 70,000, of whom 8,000 are children (Machel, 1996). For every child killed in armed conflict, three are injured and permanently disabled. About two-fifths of the 26,000 persons killed and injured by landmines each year are children. Over 10 million children have been psychologically traumatized by armed conflicts (UNESCO website).

### Education, gender and conflict: a challenge and an opportunity

Notwithstanding its many horrific outcomes, the general destruction caused by armed conflict may open up some avenues for women that challenge their traditional roles and responsibilities. Women may find themselves working outside the home for the first time, becoming the income-earners and living in a more public sphere. Male involvement in fighting often leaves women – and even young girls – heading households. After the genocide in Rwanda, females for a time accounted for 70% of the population. In southern Sudan only one-third of the population is male (Obura, 2001). Thus, conflict tends to result in women taking on additional responsibilities (El-Bushra et al., 2002). In post-conflict Somalia, in the absence of men, women have become increasingly involved in income-generating activities and in household decision-making. This is also true in El Salvador (ICRC, 2001). The role of women in the 1979 Iranian revolution led to their recognition of their own power and rights. In spite of the influence of religious fundamentalism and the rule of religio-political leaders, Iranian women have had significant achievements in the realm of education (Mehran, 2003). In Eritrea, those fighting for national independence designed a school curriculum which reflected a commitment to socialist equality and the rights of women. Classes were co-educational and girls were encouraged to participate fully in all fields, particularly the technical ones (UNICEF website).

Despite its many horrific outcomes, the destruction caused by armed conflict may open up avenues for women that challenge their traditional roles and responsibilities.

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## Box 3.7. Girls in the armed forces

It is estimated that in the 1990s approximately 100,000 girls directly participated in conflicts in at least thirty-nine countries around the world. In terms of absolute numbers, Africa is the region with the highest number of children directly involved (McKay and Mazurana, 2000), but the issue is clearly a global one. Precise data are limited, but in countries such as El Salvador, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone and Uganda, it is estimated that 30% of child soldiers are girls. The Peruvian Shining Path has one of the highest female participation rates. In Asia, young girls are recruited by the Sri Lankan Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), 900–1,000 girls are participating in armed conflict in the north-east Indian state of Manipur, and large numbers of Nepalese girls are involved in the 'People's War' of the Maoist insurgents (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2000).

The term 'girl soldier', however, tends to deflect attention from girls' multiple roles, not only as fighters, but also as cooks, porters, spies and as 'wives', servants and/or sex slaves. Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programmes tend to assume male experiences, and to ignore the quite different ways in which boys and girls participate in armed forces and reintegrate into communities. In Angola, for example, when the surrender of weapons was a criterion for eligibility, girls who had been involved with the military, but not as fighters, were excluded. Those programmes that include girls nevertheless tend to ignore central gender issues. Little attention may be given, for example, to addressing the complex shifts in gender identities, roles and responsibilities created by conflict (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). The tendency to channel girls only into gender-typical activities, such as soap-making or dress-making, is also a potential source of problems (Barth, 2003).

The stigma of being involved with armed forces and their various atrocities may be stronger for girls than for boys. There are high rates of pregnancy, and for young mothers there are serious practical, cultural and psychological barriers to school attendance and reintegration (McKay and Mazurana, 2002). Communities can be particularly hostile to girls who have had a child of the enemy. They can often be rejected by their families, becoming vulnerable to prostitution.

*Source*: Kirk (2003).

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Education is a political asset, and can be used as a stabilizing factor on which to build a new post-conflict society, but education systems can also be used to alienate groups from each other. One recent study (UNICEF, 2001a) notes that in many conflicts around the world, such as the Balkans and Rwanda, education systems can be used negatively, as a weapon of cultural repression and to promote intolerance. Segregated education, as in apartheid South Africa, can be used as a means of reinforcing inequality and promoting stereotypes, including gender stereotypes. Post-conflict reconstruction opens up the opportunity to transform conventional education systems and to renew both teaching methods and curricula.

## When gender meets disadvantage

Earlier sections of this chapter show that many cultural practices perpetuate gender inequality, and that more extreme circumstances often exacerbate it. Such trends are often associated with other kinds of disadvantage, which can be mutually reinforcing.[19]

### *The hidden face of disability*

Girls with disabilities are a large and diverse group whose educational needs have gone largely unnoticed by those committed to promoting either gender equity or disability equity. Evidence is scarce,[20] but it seems clear that these girls are not faring well. Widespread cultural biases based on both gender and on disability greatly limit the educational opportunities of such girls.

Disabled children are at severe risk of exclusion from school and other social activities. Especially in the case of girls, the victims may be seen as a burden on the family because marriage prospects may be hampered. It is quite usual for a disabled woman to be hidden by her family. In the Palestinian Autonomous Territories, for example, because of the symbolic importance of female beauty and health and the pivotal role of women in the family, a disabled woman is seen as a failure on several counts (Atshan, 1997, p. 54, cited in Rousso, 2003).

Although available data are limited, they indicate that women and girls with disabilities fare less

> **Education is a political asset and can be a stabilizing factor on which to build a new post-conflict society but education systems can also alienate groups from each other.**

19. In India, for example, the most educationally disadvantaged children are triply disadvantaged: by geographical location, by gender and, importantly, by caste (Ramachandran, 2003).

20. A recent review found mainly anecdotal information in response to a request for information on barriers to education for disabled girls, sent out to a broad range of disability, disabled women's and educational organizations in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region, Australia, Eastern and Western Europe, Canada and Latin America. Out of the two dozen or so responses received, a few made reference to recent reports on the status of disabled women and girls in their country, and some created reports on disabled girls and education in response to the request. Most simply shared their perceptions on the issue or acknowledged that they had no information (Rousso, 2003).

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well in the educational arena than either their disabled male or non-disabled female counterparts.[21] For example, UNESCO, the World Blind Union and others estimate the literacy rate for disabled women at only 1%, compared with an estimate of about 3% for people with disabilities as a whole (Groce, 1997). Statistics from individual countries and regions, while often higher, nonetheless confirm the gender inequalities (Nagata, 2003). In terms of school enrolment, UNESCO suggests that more than 90% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school (UNESCO website).

There are many definitions of disability, not only across but also within countries (see Box 3.8 for those used in OECD countries). These varied definitions demonstrate that disability is a social construct, as much rooted in cultural, social, political, legal and economic factors as in biology. While the World Health Organization (WHO) is currently leading an effort to achieve a new international definition that considers many of these factors, no consensus has yet been reached. Here, girls with disabilities are defined as those with physical, sensory, emotional, intellectual, learning, health or other disabilities that may be visible or invisible, stable or progressive, occurring at birth or during childhood. Their access to education is affected by their gender, their type of disability, the socio-economic status of their family, their ethnicity, whether they live in an urban or rural area, and a host of other factors.

Given the diversity of definitions, no clear global statistics are available. WHO has estimated that between 7% and 10% of the world population have some type of disability and that 80% of these people live in developing countries (WHO, 1999). UNESCO and others estimate that the number of children with disabilities under the age of 18 around the world varies from 120 million to 150 million. Even assuming that girls make up somewhat less than half of all children with disabilities, as some research suggests (Groce, 1999, see also Box 3.8), the number of girls with disabilities worldwide is very substantial.

### Poverty and disability: a vicious circle
There is a circular relationship between poverty and disability which also accentuates gender bias. On the one hand, insufficient nutrition

causes disability, as is the case for 500,000 children every year who lose some part of their vision due to vitamin A deficiency, and for over 40 million babies who risk mental impairment due to insufficient iodine in their mothers' diets. Child labour and maltreatment can lead to mental illness, physical and psychological disabilities. Women and girls, in the face of limited resources, are more likely than their male counterparts to be deprived of basic necessities, such as food and medicine (Groce, 1997). On the other hand, disability can also contribute to poverty, because of the additional expenses that it entails and because of the difficulties facing disabled income-earners. Thus, disabled girls are more likely to grow up in poor families, a reality that places them at further educational disadvantage.

### Lack of programmes and policies for disabled girls
Just as there is little available information, so there is a dearth of programmes specifically aimed at addressing the educational needs of disabled girls. In the United States, while there is a range of initiatives to promote educational equity for girls, these have largely overlooked disabled girls (Froschl et al., 2001). Similarly, strong disability rights legislation has produced a range of efforts to promote educational equity for disabled children, but few initiatives have included gender-specific components to address the unique barriers facing disabled girls. Other countries have similar experience. For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) notes: 'Despite the fact that the disabled girl-child deserves special attention, no country in the SADC has given the matter specific attention' (SADC, 1999). Elsewhere, while there are examples of special schools for disabled girls, there was no evidence that their programmes are gender sensitive, in the sense of being designed with girls' unique needs in mind (Rousso, 2003).

## The rural–urban divide

National statistics often conceal strong regional patterns of inequality. In Ethiopia, for example, under-enrolment is very much a rural phenomenon, and a gender gap is largely absent in urban areas, where primary GERs are over 100% for both boys and girls. In rural areas, on the other hand, only 25% of school-age girls are enrolled in primary school compared with 31% of

**There is a circular relationship between poverty and disability which also accentuates gender bias.**

21. The literature on disabled girls and education is sparse even for industrialized countries (Rousso, 2001). Research results are mainly the product of small qualitative studies. Such research, while invaluable in identifying barriers, rarely includes comparisons with both disabled boys and non-disabled girls, thereby making it difficult to identify the joint impact of gender and disability bias.

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## Box 3.8. **Disabilities and gender in OECD countries**

OECD countries have distinguished three categories of disability:

A. Organic disabilities such as blindness, deafness and severe mental handicaps.

B. Disabilities that are at least partially acquired, such as behaviour problems and specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

C. Disadvantages – rather than disabilities – associated with social background.

**Figure 3.4. Students receiving additional resources in primary education in cross-national category A as a percentage of all children in primary education**



Category A: Students receiving additional resources in primary education as a percentage of all primary education pupils, OECD countries. The overall median value for these countries is 2.3%. However, the amount of variation across countries seems remarkable, as the incidence of *organic* disabilities is not likely to vary strongly among countries, particularly among those at similar levels of income. However, as the figure represents the number of children receiving additional resources, their magnitude is influenced by differences in policies and diagnostic practices between countries. A relatively low score may indicate more severe selection criteria for special care, stronger financial constraints, or lack of political will to invest in care for disabled children. Although the data are not shown here, even stronger variation among countries occurs for children in Category B.

In eight of the ten countries (or regions) having the data, less than 40% of the children in Category A are girls. Only in Flanders does the female share (slightly) exceed 50%. In Category B, the seven countries that have the data report even lower female shares, ranging from just over 25% (Czech Republic) to just over 40% (Spain).

Although there is some evidence that boys are more vulnerable than girls to the effects of illness and trauma during their developmental years, this is unlikely to fully explain the differences. It may be that boys' behaviour results in their being identified as disabled more frequently than girls. This may be especially relevant to Category B children, which in many countries include those with behaviour problems. Alternatively, it may be that in some countries a greater social priority attached to boys' education results in their being more easily accorded additional resources to enhance their school performance. More research is needed to identify the causes of these trends.

*Source*: Evans and Deluca (2003).

**Gender disadvantage in education is particularly high among marginalized groups and increases with poverty and social disadvantage.**

boys, and it is estimated that a mere 1% of girls and 1.6% of boys in rural Ethiopia completed the eight-year primary cycle in 2000. The two predominantly pastoralist regions (Somali and Afar) exhibit the lowest primary enrolment rates (11% and 7%, respectively, in 1995/96), whereas the rate for pastoralist girls is estimated to be below 1% (World Bank, 1998). The achievement of enrolment and gender equity targets is therefore to a large extent dependent on improvements occurring particularly in the two pastoralist regions, and in rural areas more generally (Rose, 2003a).

In Chile, data disaggregated by geographical location shows widening gender and rural–urban gaps in educational participation for teenage children. Household wealth also intervenes, with rural non-poor girls having marginal advantage over boys, but rural poor boys having an advantage over girls. Both poor and non-poor households have higher participation rates in urban compared with rural areas. The pattern is intensified in the 20–24 age group. Contexts of poverty and marginalization are, of course, not static. In China, for example, access to education of disadvantaged groups – minorities, migrant populations and the urban and rural poor – has

worsened as the transition to a market economy, the collapse of previous social support systems and increased rural–urban migration pose severe challenges for educational provision (Maher and Ling, 2003). In Bangladesh, too, there has been a significant decline during the 1990s in the number of urban students achieving the basic competencies. This suggests an inability of the school system to cope with the large additional migrant population. Their destination is often the urban slum communities, which become educationally disadvantaged, particularly where these semi-permanent settlements are not legally recognized by urban authorities (Fransman et al., 2003).

## Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities

Indigenous peoples fare poorly in education relative to non-indigenous children. In Chile, indigenous children and young people perform less well than children of non-indigenous groups, especially at secondary and higher education levels, and with marked gender disparities. A high proportion of girls leave school early, as a consequence of 'behaviour problems' (Avalos, 2003). In Romania, indigenous girls' access to education tends to be limited by their communities' traditional attitudes to women's status. These Roma girls tend to drop out of school earlier than boys, because of their substantial household and family responsibilities. They may also be married early or bear children before the age of 15 (Magno et al., 2002).

Data disaggregated by gender alone hides other inequalities. In the United Kingdom, attention paid to male disadvantage in education (discussed in detail below), masks both the educational disadvantages faced by some girls and the particular success of boys from elite and professional classes. Although gender differences have recently been eliminated in terms of performance, neither social class inequality nor ethnic differences have been transformed in such a way. Recent research suggests that these other social divisions have become more extensive. Statistics that focus only on the national gender gap can therefore distort the picture (Arnot and Phipps, 2003). Thus, gender disadvantage in education (and more widely) is particularly concentrated among marginalized groups, and intensifies with poverty and social disadvantage.

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### Box 3.9. Harassment of disabled girls

Little policy attention has been paid to the combined sexual and disability harassment that female students with disabilities may encounter. Yet pilot studies from the United States suggest that students with disabilities face higher rates of harassment in school than non-disabled students, and that disabled girls face higher rates of harassment than both disabled boys and non-disabled girls. Girls with multiple disabilities are at particularly high risk.

Harassment by teachers and other adults appears to be particularly widespread in residential schools (Sobsey, 1994). Reports from other regions, including Australia, Latin America and Mexico (INMUJERES, 2002) also acknowledge sexual and/or disability harassment in school as a barrier to learning for girls with disabilities.

*Sources*: Joint Commission of the Chancellor and the Special Commissioner for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse (1994), cited in Linn and Rousso (2001); Rousso (1996), cited in Linn and Rousso (2001); INMUJERES (2002); Alicia Contreras, personal communication (24 April 2003); Bramley et al. (1990); Hastings (1995).

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# Rights to education: the supply of schooling

Earlier sections of this chapter have shown that household decisions to send children to school are strongly influenced by the economic, social and cultural contexts in which they find themselves. They are also, however, affected by the terms on which schooling is made available to them, and by its quality. These 'supply-side' issues – which include matters of costs, distance to school, the school facilities available, and broader matters of school quality and content – can have a significant impact upon whether or not girls attend. This section examines the nature and impact of some of theses constraints.

## Schooling costs: unequal impacts

The direct costs of schooling to households are made up of tuition or other fees, and the costs of purchasing books, materials, school uniforms and transport to school. Household decisions to educate the children respond to changes in the cost of these items. Although many empirical studies, based on household data, suggest that demand reductions are comparatively small in response to small increases in costs, some evidence indicates – as would be expected – that enrolments among the poor are much more sensitive to cost increases than is the case with richer households.[22]

Evidence on the gendered impact of such charges is available from micro studies, although this is mainly from studies modelling the impact of lower travel costs, showing a strong and positive gendered impact: girls enrolments rise, and do so more strongly than those of boys, in response to reductions in travel costs to school.[23] Similarly, clothing costs may differ for boys and girls. Clothes for school in Ethiopia, and uniforms in Guinea and the United Republic of Tanzania, were the highest direct cost items facing parents in the mid-1990s (USAID, 1994; Sow, 1994; Mason and Khandker, 1996). More recent work in the United Republic of Tanzania showed that uniforms remained the most expensive cost item, and that girls' uniforms were perceived by parents to be slightly more expensive than those for boys (Peasgood et al., 1997). Taking all these items into account, the direct costs of schooling in the United Republic of Tanzania were estimated to be 14% more for girls than for boys at primary level (Mason and Khandker, 1996).

There is strong evidence from more qualitative sources that direct costs are one of the most important causes of non-attendance and early drop-out from school. School costs are reported to be significant in this respect in China, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan and, for girls, in Bangladesh (Filmer, 2001; World Bank, 2002e). In Malawi, from over 1,000 primary-school drop-outs interviewed, half of the boys from rural areas and 44% of the boys from urban areas cited the lack of money for school expenses as the main reason for their having left school prematurely. This was also the most important factor for girls, although a smaller proportion of girls than boys – about one-third in both rural and urban areas indicated this (Kadzamira and Chibwana, 2000, p. 61).

Children often also indicate their 'need to work' as the dominant reason for leaving school. If these two sets of causes are combined – i.e. costs and income – a majority of children are typically found to cite economic circumstances as the main reasons for their having left school. They accounted for 75% of the school drop-outs interviewed in Zambia, 70% in Uganda and Ethiopia, 57% in Ghana, 45% in Malawi and 40% in Guinea.[24] In Tajikistan, in 2002, 68% of parents surveyed considered family poverty and the increased costs of education as the primary reason for girls' non-attendance (University Degree Women Association, 2002).

Finally, separate evidence is available from a wide range of sources on the importance of household income as a determinant of school enrolments. In Senegal, the enrolment of children aged 6–14 from the poorest households is 52 percentage points lower than for those from the richest households. In Zambia there is a 36 percentage point gap (World Bank, 2002e). Here too there are gender differences: in Ethiopia, increasing a household's wealth index by one unit increases a boy's chances of attending school by 16%, whereas a girl's chances are increased by 41% (Rose and Al-Samarrai, 2001). In Guinea, whereas the effect is insignificant for boys, girls' chances are increased by 9% (Tembon and Al-Samarrai, 1999). These results indicate that poverty in a family will have a more detrimental effect on the decision to enrol a girl in school than a boy.

For all these reasons, measures to reduce the direct costs of schooling are one of the most

**Direct costs are one of the main causes of non-attendance and early drop-out from school.**

22. Jimenez (1987) summarizes the results of ten studies, most of which suggest average price elasticities substantially less than unity. More recent studies from Africa include Birdsall and Orivel (1996), for Mali, and Grootaert (1999) for Côte d'Ivoire. Evidence by income group is not widely available, but Gertler and Glewwe (1990, p. 269) estimate that the price elasticity of demand for education among the poorest quartile of the rural population in Peru was, in 1985–86, generally between two and three times as large as that for the richest quartile. More recent evidence from rural Ethiopia confirms this larger and significant negative effect among a sample of poor households (Weir, 2000).

23. The results of five such studies are conveniently summarized by the World Bank (2002a, Table 4.2). On the other hand, to argue that this result is directly relevant to the gendered impact of general fee increases overlooks the fact that reductions in travel time may be intrinsically more preferred by parents for their girls than for their boys. Accordingly, this constituent of total costs is not, in itself, necessarily gender neutral.

24. See Kasonde-Ng'andu et al. (2000); Tumushabe et al. (2000); Rose et al. (1997); Avotri et al. (2000); Kadzamira and Chibwana (2000); and Tembon et al. (1997). Results are further discussed and compared in Colclough et al. (2003).

**Reducing direct costs of schooling is one of the best ways of increasing school enrolment, especially of girls and the poor.**

potent ways of increasing school enrolments – particularly for poorer households, and particularly for girls. There is ample experience, now, of the potentially huge numbers of children who may enrol in school when costs are sharply reduced. For example, following the implementation of fee-free primary-education policies in Malawi and Uganda, primary enrolments increased in the mid-1990s by 52% and 200%, respectively.[25] Despite this evidence and the many human rights instruments, ratified by the vast majority of nations, which commit states to the provision of 'free and compulsory' education at primary level,[26] school fees continue

to be levied in at least one hundred and one countries around the world (Table 3.3).

### Enduring school fees: how free is 'free'?

The level and type of fees imposed vary between countries. A recent study undertaken across seventy-nine countries showed that seventy-seven of them had at least one kind of fee at primary level. The results are summarized in Table 3.4. The most prevalent fee is PTA or community contributions – charged in over 70% of cases.[27] The costs of textbooks and uniforms are also commonly assigned to parents, as are fees for sports and other activities. Tuition fees

### Table 3.3. Countries with primary school fees by region

| Africa | Asia | Eastern Europe and Central Asia | Middle East and North Africa | Latin America and the Caribbean | Developed countries |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Angola^ | Bhutan^w | Armenia^w | Djibouti | *Bolivia*^w | No tuition fees are charged, but some direct costs have been reported from: |
| Benin^w | Cambodia^w | Azerbaijan^w | Egypt^ | *Brazil*^w | |
| Burkina Faso^w | China^w | Belarus^ | Israel^ | Colombia^w | |
| Burundi | Fiji | Bosnia^w | Lebanon^ | *Dominican Rep.*^w | |
| *Cape Verde*^w | Indonesia^w | Bulgaria^w | Qatar^ | Grenada | Austria^ |
| C. A. R. | Lao PDR^w | Georgia^ | Saudi Arabia^ | Guatemala^w | Belgium^ |
| Chad^w | Malaysia | Kyrgyzstan^ | Sudan^ | Guyana^ | Japan^ |
| Côte d'Ivoire | Maldives | *Latvia*^w | United Arab E.^ | Haiti | Korea, Rep. of^ |
| Comoros^w | Mongolia^ | Rep. Moldova^w | Yemen^ | *Mexico*^w | Netherlands^ |
| Congo^ | Myanmar | Tajikistan^w | | Nicaragua^w | New Zealand^ |
| D. R. Congo^ | Nepal^w | TFYR Macedonia^w | | Paraguay^w | Poland^ |
| Equatorial Guinea^ | Pakistan^w | Romania^w | | Peru^w | |
| Eritrea^w | Papua N. Guinea^w | Russian Fed.^w | | St. Lucia | |
| Ethiopia^w | Philippines^w | Turkey^w | | St. Vincent/ Grenadines | |
| Gabon | Singapore | Ukraine^ | | Suriname^ | |
| Gambia^w | *Solomon Is.*^w | Uzbekistan^ | | Trinidad/Tobago^w | |
| Ghana^w | Vanuatu | | | | |
| Guinea | Viet Nam^w | | | | |
| Guinea-Bissau^w | | | | | |
| Liberia | | | | | |
| Madagascar^w | | | | | |
| Mali^w | | | | | |
| Mauritania^w | | | | | |
| Mozambique^w | | | | | |
| Namibia^ | | | | | |
| Niger^w | | | | | |
| [Nigeria]^w | | | | | |
| Rwanda | | | | | |
| Senegal^w | | | | | |
| Sierra Leone | | | | | |
| South Africa | | | | | |
| Swaziland | | | | | |
| Togo^w | | | | | |
| Zambia^w | | | | | |
| Zimbabwe | | | | | |

*Note*: Countries with a commitment to the elimination of school fees in square brackets; countries with ^ have legal guarantee of free education; w are identified in a review of school fees in 79 out of 125 countries where the World Bank is providing loans for education; countries in italics appear only in the World Bank (2002*e*) study.
*Sources*: Tomasevski (2003); World Bank (2002*e*).

25. Note that other policies aimed at stimulating demand, including the non-enforcement of uniform and a policy to allow pregnant girls back to school after delivery, accompanied the abolition of fees in Malawi.

26. The right to education is guaranteed, *inter alia*, in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2 of Protocol I to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 13 of the Additional Protocol on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to the American Convention on Human Rights, Article 17 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It is also recognized in many non-legally-binding documents. Particularly important is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26). See Chapter 1 for further discussion.

27. These fees are particularly prevalent in Africa, covering 81% of countries surveyed.

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are charged in only about 40% of cases – somewhat less than the incidence of the other charges mentioned above. It is noteworthy, once again, that these charges are levied in a substantial proportion of countries where it is formally illegal to do so.

Fixing school costs, as part of UPE policy, may not work in practice. Schools often operate discretionary and ad hoc policies, and costs can often vary between schools. Treatment of poor children in such contexts tends to be highly arbitrary. Thus even where sanctions are not applied on non-payment of fees, the existence of fee policies obviously serves as a deterrent to their avoidance (World Bank, 2002e). Unexpected costs such as funeral expenses for teachers, or farewell events, may be requested in an ad hoc fashion, as evidence from Zambia shows (Kasonde-Ng'andu et al., 2000). In some cases, children may not be allowed to attend school if they are not able to afford books, pens or 'adequate' clothing. Finally, significant non-monetary contributions are often made by parents (and children) in the form of preparation of food or cooking for school meetings, cleaning the playground and school buildings, maintenance of buildings and garden, and collecting water and firewood. In some countries, these activities are not voluntary but imposed (Kasonde-Ng'andu et al., 2000).

At present, a substantial part of the costs of primary education are borne by households. It is estimated that this usually amounts to at least 20% and often as much as 90% of total annual unit costs (Bray, 1996). In Cambodia, for example, despite a constitutional commitment to provide free education for all, parents and the community together bear 75% of the real costs of education, with the state thereby contributing a minor amount (Hammarberg, 1999, para. 111). Furthermore, in six African least developed countries the average parental contribution represented slightly less than one-third of the total annual costs at primary level (UNESCO, 2002b, Figure 4.1, p. 143). None of these considerations imply that policies to institute 'free' schooling should not be pursued with urgency. They merely make their implementation more complicated than it might seem – as Chapter 4 shows.

**Table 3.4. Summary fee survey results**

| | Countries with fees | Percentage of countries in survey | Countries with illegal fees | Percentage of fee-charging countries with illegal fees |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| At least one fee | 77 | 97 | n.a. | n.a. |
| Tuition fees | 30 | 38 | 11 | 37 |
| Textbook charges | 37 | 47 | 12 | 32 |
| Compulsory uniforms | 39 | 49 | 0 | 0 |
| PTA/community contribution | 56 | 71 | 22 | 39 |
| Activity fees | 34 | 43 | 13 | 38 |

*Source*: World Bank (2002e).

## Reducing distance

Even where direct costs do not serve as a barrier, it is well documented that the distance of the school from the home has an impact on enrolment (Gertler and Glewwe, 1990; Lavy, 1992; USAID, 1994). The average distance of schools from homes declines as the expansion of primary and secondary systems proceeds. However, remote habitations and dispersed populations continue to suffer disadvantages based on the lack of physical access and this remains a problem, particularly at secondary level, in many countries. Where distance is a factor, girls feel the effects more severely. Focus group evidence from Africa indicates parents' reluctance to send girls to schools far from home. Reasons cited were sometimes that girls were considered to be weaker than boys and hence unable to expend the energy required to walk to and from school. A more fundamental concern, however, was for their safety en route – an issue that is addressed more directly below (Colclough et al., 2003, p. 143; Anderson-Levitt et al., 1994).

## Enough schools for all

Where there are insufficient school places, enrolment is often staggered, resulting in children entering school later than they are meant to. Starting school late is likely to have greater negative impacts on girls' survival rates – because, for reasons discussed above, they are more likely to be withdrawn from school at puberty than are boys. Primary school availability may also be biased against girls where single-sex schooling is the norm, and where the priority

**Where there are not enough school places, enrolment is often staggered, so children enter school later than they should.**

of expanding enrolment is biased towards schools for boys. In Pakistan, despite a doubling in the number of single-sex public primary schools between 1988 and 1998, the percentage of girls' schools among all public primary schools has remained roughly unchanged, at about 30% (Mahmood, 1997) This proportion reflects the earlier government practice of building approximately one girls' school for every two boys' schools (Warwick and Reimers, 1995). Villages in rural Pakistan are hence more likely to have boys' than girls' schools. Little is known about the extent to which investments have been made to upgrade and improve conditions in existing public primary-school facilities nor about how these resources might have been distributed between schools for boys and girls (Lloyd et al., 2002).

Narrowing this gap is, therefore, a vital step in countries where single-sex schools are important for girls' schooling. A study of household demand and gender differences in primary-school access in Pakistan concluded that the decision by parents to enrol their daughters is most influenced by the presence of a single-sex public school in their village, followed closely by their perceptions of the quality of the school (Lloyd et al., 2002).

Co-ordinating the expansion of school places at both lower and higher levels of schooling can also be important. In Mali, for example, despite recent school expansion there remains a serious lack of places in the second stage of basic education. Many children in the first stage of basic education are enrolled under a double-shift system, and there are not enough spaces to include all who graduate in the second stage. Where some children have to remain out of school, it is more often the girls who lose out (Lange, 2003a).

## Improving hygiene

The provision of gender-aware infrastructure can be extremely important for ensuring girls' full participation in schooling. The absence of latrines for girls can be decisive, particularly for menstruating girls. Fewer than half the schools visited during a recent Ethiopian study had latrines, and only one of these schools had a separate latrine for boys and girls. Only one-third of schools studied in Guinea had latrines, and in most cases these were not suitable for use (Rose

et al., 1997; Tembon et al., 1997). Where enrolments increase rapidly, pressure on school infrastructure can result in overcrowding, and in poor sanitation and hygiene if there are insufficient toilets.

As with reducing the distance between schools and homes, the case for investing in water, toilets and basic school infrastructure is most persuasively made by governments that, having done so, have experienced remarkable progress in closing gender gaps and universalizing education (see also Box 3.10). In Bangladesh, drinking water is now available in or near over 90% of schools. Almost half of government schools have their own drinking-water facilities.[28] Shortfalls still remain however – over 30% of co-educational schools had no toilet facilities, and only 19% had separate facilities for boys and girls (Chowdhury et al., 2002).

## Non-state providers: a booster for girls' education?

In most countries in the developing world, non-state providers have had a longer engagement with education service provision than the state. Their motivations and target groups are diverse. In some countries, NGOs are major contributors to educational provision, as in the case of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). These providers are generally committed to promoting equity in education, ensuring that education reaches the poorest, most disadvantaged groups. Commercial providers are also growing rapidly in many countries. Their motives vary, ranging from enterprises seeking to fulfil a particular social responsibility – for example to their own employees – to those that run schools with a view to delivering high-quality education to improve the skills base and/or make a profit.

Community groups, such as religious bodies, also often run schools, targeting particular groups within the community, or located in areas where their particular social groups are dominant. Others may be set up by the state, but managed and run by local communities, which are responsible for recruiting local teachers and managing the schooling process. Different types of non-state schools, therefore, have a range of objectives, and may be aimed at different groups in the population.

> In some countries NGOs are major contributors to educational provision.

28. These, however, remain somewhat maldistributed, with 61% of urban schools and only 42% of rural schools having such facilities (Chowdhury et al., 2002).

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## Box 3.10. The importance of the physical environment for disabled girls

The relative inaccessibility of some school buildings for disabled girls – including stairs, narrow corridors, small desks and inaccessible bathrooms – is often a major barrier. As with getting to and from school, differences in male and female socialization in Latin America, and probably elsewhere, allow boys to ask for help more readily from friends, who in turn, being male, may be better able to help.

Inaccessible toilets, as well as the nature of some disabilities, might mean that a disabled girl would need help with toileting. As many cultures emphasize modesty and privacy, the need for such personal assistance can be highly problematic; it can also intensify safety concerns. Reports from

Australia, Mexico and Uganda identify inadequate toileting facilities as a barrier to education for girls with disabilities.

Menstruation, which some disabled girls might need help to manage, can also be a compounding factor. Menstruation can trigger the fears of some parents of disabled daughters, emphasizing their sexual vulnerability and further discouraging school attendance. Schools may lack the resources or willingness to provide personal assistance, and a disabled girl's need for help in such personal tasks can reinforce negative stereotypes about her potential, raising staff anxieties around sexuality.

*Sources*: DWNRO (n.d.); Bramley et al. (1990); Alicia Contreras, personal communication (2003).

### Higher income, private schooling

The paucity of official data makes it hard to arrive at conclusions about the impact of private schooling on gender equality, but evidence from some countries helps to identify some stylized facts. Access to private schools remains mainly limited to the non-poor in most countries, and reflects prevailing biases that affect girls' education. Access to private schooling for girls is largely associated with household wealth. In Pakistan, for example, increases in private school enrolment are associated primarily with rising levels of household income. For girls, a shift from low to middle levels of household consumption resulted in a rise in enrolment in public primary, but a shift from middle to higher income levels is associated with increased frequency of private schooling. Furthermore, whereas mothers' education to primary or higher levels reduced apparent discrimination between sons and daughters in enrolment, there remains a significantly greater likelihood of daughters being sent to public primary schools and sons to private ones (Lloyd et al., 2002, cited in Fransman, 2003).

In Mali, a country which is unlikely to achieve gender parity goals in primary or secondary education by 2005, the proportion of state schools in overall schooling provision has steadily declined, as non-state schools, particularly community ones, have overtaken state schools in the first stage of basic education. The latter, however, have higher female enrolments relative to other types of school, and

hence the decline in their share means that the state needs to play a greater role in promoting gender equity in non-state schools (Lange, 2003*a*). At secondary level, on the other hand, private schools have contributed to an improvement in gender parity. This reflects class privileges – new private senior secondary schools have given better-off town dwellers access to 'safer' schools for their daughters because the discipline and security in these schools is considered to be better. Thus gender gaps may be closing at the level of better-off households who are able to afford the privileges that private schools offer their daughters.

Private schools in many poor countries are neither necessarily better than public schools, nor preferred choices to state schools for many parents. In Pakistan, there is little evidence to establish that private school availability increases overall enrolment in rural areas where a public school is already present (Lange, 2003*a*). In India, too, government schools are the preferred choice of poor parents for their daughters (Ramachandran, 2003). Furthermore, children disadvantaged on account of economic status, caste and gender return to public schools at upper primary and secondary levels to take advantage of scholarships and other subsidies provided by the state (Balagopalan and Subrahmanian, 2003). The increased availability of public girls' schools and the improvement in their quality thus remains a key policy challenge where gender ratios remain highly unequal.

**More and better public schools for girls remains a key policy challenge.**

**In Malawi, discussions with parents and school committees showed that the burden of community activities was placed mainly on women.**

### Community schools

Community schools often play an important role in supplementing the public education system. Defined in various ways, they are usually characterized by the community either contributing significant funding to, and/or controlling the management of schools. Community schools span religious as well as state sectors, and may in some cases include schools established under decentralization programmes.

Several rationales exist for community schools in Africa. They increase access to education where government resources are lacking, and are often portrayed as being more relevant to local development needs than public schools. Community schools are often characterized as being cost-effective, providing at least comparable if not better instructional services for less money. Community participation is expected to improve educational quality and increase student achievement, through enhancing teacher accountability and allowing for localized management of schooling processes. Another goal of community schools is improved governance, partly by developing local democratic organizations such as school management committees (Miller-Grandvaux and Yoder, 2002).

### Do community schools benefit everyone?

Several studies report that community schools are successful in improving access to schooling, and some note that girls' enrolments, in particular, have improved (Rose, 2003*a*). However, there are often hidden class and gender inequalities in the ways in which communities function. The 'community' does not represent a homogeneous group of people, devoid of power relations, and does not necessarily present shared interests and concerns on the part of its members. Thus the promotion of community participation can fail to acknowledge the ways in which local power is reinforced (Wolf et al., 1997; Mosse, 2001).

Although innovative programmes aimed at encouraging community involvement in schooling address a range of constraints faced by children from poor households, they can nevertheless increase the direct costs for such households. Community schools are often established in poor, remote communities, but can require greater real contributions from the community

than government schools serving wealthier areas (Hyde, 2003). Mali is a fairly typical case, where the Save the Children-US community schools require school management committees to mobilize resources for school construction, and subsequently for teacher salaries (Tietjen, 1999). Although construction costs and teacher payments overall are lower than in government schools, their being met by the community rather than by the government has a strongly regressive impact.

### Unpaid labour of women

Community schools may also exacerbate gender inequalities, not least as a consequence of the expectations placed on community members for contributing to and sustaining educational endeavours. The shift from household to community contributions that has occurred following the abolition of fees and subsequent promotion of community participation in some countries, often has implications for the relative burden placed on women and men. For example, in Malawi, men were most often responsible for paying school fees before their abolition, whereas women provide more support to the community schools that were subsequently established (Rose, 2003*a*). Similarly, in Benin, women tend to provide the human contributions, whereas men contribute more in financial and material terms (Salami and Kpamegan, 2002).

With respect to community participation in existing government schools, a recent survey in Malawi indicates gender inequalities in community contributions within households. Of 238 households interviewed, 70% of those involved in providing non-monetary contributions were women (Rose, 2003*a*). Wives of heads of households provided most of the labour, followed by female heads, with male heads least likely to contribute labour. On the other hand, women participate far less in decision-making than their prominent role in giving their labour and time would suggest (Box 3.11). Discussions with parents and school committees generally reinforced the view that the burden of community activities was placed mainly on women.

In recognition of these extra and unequally shared costs, some programmes allocate a monetary value to the labour contributions of community members. However, marketization of community participation has in some cases intensified intra-household inequalities in

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## Box 3.11. Unequal partnerships on school committees

School committees are a chance for communities to exercise their voice in deciding how the school should function. Despite much literature emphasizing the important role of women in promoting positive educational outcomes for their daughters, the participation of women in school committees reflects more general gender inequalities in decision-making processes and in the exercise of influence over schooling.

Attempts have been made to ensure diversity of membership of school committees in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. However, they generally work within existing community structures and power relations. Malawian legislation stipulates that one-third of places on school committees should be reserved for women. But this tends not to ensure their active participation, even where the quota is met.

At seven of twenty schools visited there were no women on the committee. At one, women absented themselves on account of household responsibilities. Furthermore, it was evident from discussions held with school committees that even if women were present, they often would not speak.

Similarly, in Ghana school committees rarely meet national requirements for women representatives, as membership is based on existing positions of leadership in the community and school which are usually held by men (Condy, 1998; Pryor and Ampiah, 2003). Evidence from Uganda also indicates that men mainly dominate discussions in committees, with only a few women speaking. Women feel inhibited from taking part in formal discussions where tradition assigns decision-making roles to men (Suzuki, forthcoming).

*Source*: Rose (2003*a*).

community participation. For example, at a school visited in Malawi, it was noted that brickmaking undertaken by men was remunerated as it required skill, whereas carrying water by women, often for long distances, was not given any value despite the amount of time and energy involved (Rose, 2003*a*). Kadzamira and Ndalama (1997) also found that men participated more in services for which they were paid in Malawi, whereas all contributions provided by women were free.

### Religious education...
Over recent years there appears to have been a significant increase in the time given to religious instruction in school systems around the world.[29] In parallel with this, the role of faith-based organizations as providers of education has remained strong. Historically, they have played an important part in education in many countries, offering schooling to children from deprived social groups, reducing private costs, expanding school places and improving school infrastructure. Their role has been particularly significant at times when economic crisis has resulted in reductions in public services (Kandiyoti, 1995). Their influence on gender equality in education, however, has been mixed.

### ... helps to boost gender parity...
Faith-based organizations affect the education of girls in two ways – by providing opportunities for

them to attend school and by influencing the content of education in ways that reflect local beliefs and practices.

Parents are often attracted to sending their daughters to religious schools because the values they represent are judged important for girls' socialization. Cross-national comparative data are not available, but it is evident that religious schools have had a positive impact in boosting girls' enrolment in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where 95% of female children attend primary school (Box 3.12) (WEDO, 1998). In Mali, recent enrolment growth has been partly facilitated by many more children entering *medersas* [religious schools] (Lange, 2003*a*). In Bangladesh, *medersas* have also helped the country's educational progress, accounting for about 15% of post-primary enrolments by the turn of the century, of which over 40% were girls.[30]

### ... but does it promote gender equality?
However, evidence suggests that religious schools boost the enrolment of girls partly because of the sex-stereotyped messages they generally provide, which reflect gender-differentiated community norms. Accordingly, most religious schools tend to reinforce stereotypes of women as submissive and dependent, rather than undermine them.

29. In approximately half of all countries, religious education is compulsory at some point during the first nine years of schooling. In fifty-four of these countries, approximately 8% of total teaching time is devoted to religious instruction, which compares with around 4% over the period 1970–86 (UNESCO-IBE, 2003).

30. CDP Task Force 2001, cited in Fransman et al. (2003).

**Religious schools are more likely to uphold gender differences than eradicate them.**

Parents may value this kind of socialization for both boys and girls, but often send daughters only to religious schools. Boys, on the other hand, may be sent to both religious *and* secular schools to expose them to the full range of the curriculum. Although most religions do not explicitly discourage female education, many do so in practice by requiring girls' schooling to offer a different curriculum to that offered to boys. Religious doctrine may explicitly sanction the gender division of labour and the subordination of women. Women are usually expected to be the bearers and markers of tradition and religious identity. Thus as agents of socialization within the family, their schooling in religious beliefs and tradition may be considered more important than promoting their own educational advancement. Gender inequalities follow from educational experiences designed to socialize girls into narrowly conceived roles of wives and mothers.

Thus religious education can contribute strongly to boosting parity for girls, by offering them safe spaces to enter the public domain and receive an education. However, religious schools are essentially conservative institutions, established to preserve and protect traditions, many of which are likely to uphold gender differences between women and men rather than eradicate them. Faith-based organizations generally lag far behind other non-state providers of education in

giving an explicit commitment to gender equality, with the notable exceptions of faiths such as Baha'i, and the Quaker movement (Tietjen, 2000). The vocational training they provide is often in the domestic arts. Examples include the Salesian Sisters in Honduras, who operate a Sunday school for poor girls who are trained in sewing, dressmaking, needlework and cooking. Training provided by the Roman Catholic organization Opus Dei, in Kenya, segregated men into training for technology and mechanical trades, and women into developing skills for catering and hospitality [cooking and cleaning] (Tietjen, 2000). These initiatives, although well intentioned and admirable in other ways, nevertheless reflect and strengthen traditional interpretations of gender roles.

### The impact of religious schooling on gender equality is difficult to predict

Women's increased access to formal education, even in contexts where religious belief influences the entire education system, can nevertheless lead to changes in women's status. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the paradox of schooling under highly conservative conditions is that women's very participation in education provides an impetus for social change. Education shows people how to question received wisdom. There is evidence that educated women in Iran are delaying their age of marriage, and seeking changes in the traditional role of women in family and society (Mehran, 2003).

In Saudi Arabia, the government first allowed girls to participate during the 1960s. Sensitive to widespread opposition, it determined that girls' education would be within 'Islamic margins', aimed at training women for suitably feminine tasks. These margins became broader as access to higher education brought women into the professions. Although gender segregation continued, women rapidly caught up with men's education in terms of participation and performance. During the 1980s, however, in response to rising conservative sentiment, women's freedoms to travel abroad for study, to manage businesses, even to eat in restaurants, were all curbed (Doumato, 1995). Changes in the balance between politics, economy and society continue to make equality gains for women hard to predict in some cases, and hard to sustain in others.

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### Box 3.12. Iran: conservative policies boost girls' schooling

The 'Islamization' of education in post-revolutionary Iran has led to increased demand for girls' schooling, mainly because it has assured traditional families that the school climate is not in conflict with the values cherished at home. The main education policies introduced by the religio-political leadership, shortly after the 1979 revolution, were as follows: banning co-education at all levels except at universities; assigning female teachers to girls' schools and male teachers to boys' schools; changing the content and pictures of school textbooks to portray a traditional division of labour between men and women in private and public spheres; introducing compulsory veiling for all female students and teachers; directing students towards 'male- or female-oriented' fields of study based on their sex; and barring women from entering 'masculine' disciplines at university. Although some of the above measures have weakened over time, they have acted as an assurance for more conservative families that their daughters would be studying in an Islamic setting.

*Source*: Mehran (2003).

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*Religious institutions can exert influence over policy-making*

Religious institutions exert important influence over policy-making in some countries. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, for example, the influence of the religious leadership is patent, as discussed earlier. Notwithstanding its distinguished role in opposing persecution, the Church in Latin America has also helped to prevent some gender equity initiatives from being attempted. In Chile, for example, a programme initiated in 1996 by the Ministry of Education and the women's national service (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer – SERNAM) focused on informing secondary-school communities (teachers, parents and young students) about sexuality and related issues. Resistance from conservative families and Church representatives, who felt the campaign condoned the use of contraceptives and early sexual relations, led to the initiative being abandoned (Avalos, 2003). In Costa Rica, the Roman Catholic Church used its influence to block the implementation of sex education policies in the 'Young Love Programme', started in 1999. It mobilized religious associations and neo-conservative groups to oppose contraception and the use of condoms in preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS. It also challenged the contents and methods of sex education in state primary and secondary schools on the grounds that it threatened Christian morality. These controversies compelled the state to modify its approach (Guzman and Letendre, 2003). Similar controversies are reported from Argentina and Mexico (Tietjen, 2000, p. 150).

Addressing the role of faith-based organizations in education is complex and important, but the sector should be seen as dynamic, not static. Religious schools operate in a political environment and they are often opened in the context of religious competition, within or between faiths. Religious schooling may be particularly important to religious minorities in societies where maintenance of their identity is considered at risk. As research in India has shown, the rise of religious schools is often a response to failure of the public system to reach areas where religious minorities and other socially disadvantaged groups are located (Jeffery et al., 2003).

The tension between the rights to gender equality, to religious freedom, and to choose schooling on cultural or religious grounds, needs debate in many societies. As much of the content of religion is dependent on textual interpretation, there are many opportunities for religious schools, engaging with other education stakeholders, to address gender equality issues more systematically than in the past, as Chapter 4 indicates.

# Rights within education

## Schools are not safe havens

International efforts to increase participation in schools, especially for girls, and to improve the quality of the school experience, have tended to assume that schools are universally benign. Indeed, education institutions are supposed to be places of learning, growth and empowerment, particularly for girls. When launching the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative at the 2000 World Education Forum in Dakar, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan emphasized the importance of girls' education as a *tool for preventing conflict and building peace* (UNESCO, 2000*b*).

Recent research, however, shows that far from being safe havens for learning, schools are often sites of intolerance, discrimination and violence. Girls are disproportionately the victims. Many girls who surmount the barriers preventing them from attending school face harassment and sexual abuse from their peers or from their teachers once they are enrolled. This violence against girls perpetuates the gender gap in education and impedes their right to education. Closing the gender gap means confronting sexual violence and harassment of girls in schools.

> *Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women … Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.*
>
> Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/104, 20 December 1993.

**Schools are often places of intolerance, discrimination and violence. Girls are disproportionately the victims.**

Permissive
attitudes to
violence against
girls help
perpetuate it.

Although gender-based violence is often not reported, and thus not distinguished from other forms of school violence, there is no doubt that underachievement and high drop-out rates for some children are linked to gender-based violence. One recent report from South Africa (Human Rights Watch, 2001a) found that the threat of violence at school is one of the most significant challenges to learning for children. In Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe, high levels of sexual aggression from boys, and sometimes from teachers, against junior secondary girls went largely unpunished (Leach, 2003). In Latin America, a study on Ecuador (World Bank, 2000) reports that 22% of adolescent girls had been victims of sexual abuse in an educational setting.

## What is gender-based violence in schools?

Explicit gender violence is chiefly sexual violence, but other forms such as unregulated and excessive corporal punishment, bullying and physical assault – sometimes with guns and knives – verbal abuse and teachers' use of pupils for free labour can all be gender-specific. Aggressive and intimidating behaviour, unsolicited physical contact such as touching and groping, assault, coercive sex and rape, all constitute abuse. This is also true of any sexual relationship formed by a teacher with a pupil. In most national contexts this kind of relationship offends teachers' conditions of employment and – in the case of minors – is a criminal offence. Such behaviour exploits the teacher's position of authority and betrays their duty of care.

Sexual abuse may also occur outside the school with adult men (sometimes called 'sugar daddies') engaging in transactional sex in exchange for gifts or money. A report from one South African township (Wood and Jewkes, 1997) showed that physical assault, rape and coercive sex had become the norm, making it very difficult for adolescent girls to protect themselves against unwanted sexual intercourse, pregnancy and HIV infection. Boys seemed to define their masculinity by the number of their sexual partners and by their ability to control girlfriends. They saw sex as their right, and forced sex as legitimate.

Sexual violence in schools is not a new phenomenon. Niehaus (2000) shows that sexual relations between teachers and schoolgirls in

South Africa were common even in the 1950s. It is often made more commonplace by popular prejudice. One South African survey indicated that eight in ten young men believed that women were responsible for causing sexual violence and three in ten thought that women who were raped 'asked for it' (Human Rights Watch, 2001a). Female victims of sexual violence are often reluctant to report the crime to the police or the family. In a country where the women's virginity is associated with the family honour, a woman can either be forced to marry her attacker or may be murdered by her shamed father or brothers, so called 'honour killings'. A common prejudice is that women 'provoke' men to attack or harass them.

### Not just a developing-country problem

A large body of research on school violence and bullying exists in Europe and North America. It shows that boys are more often involved in violence, both as perpetrators and victims. In the United States, 25% of 16-year-olds – three times as many boys as girls – reported that they had been victims of some form of violence during the year (Finkelhor and Dziuba-Letherman, 1994). In France, 17% of adolescents had been victims of violence – twice as many boys as girls (Choquet and Ledoux, 1994). These findings suggest that it is mainly boys who expose themselves to risky behaviour and exert their performance of masculinity to subordinate other boys. In the case of sexual violence, however, girls are overwhelmingly the victims.

### Ending impunity

Permissive attitudes regarding violence against girls help to perpetuate it. An American study found that 'In schools, harassment often happens while many people watch … When sexual harassment happens in public and is not condemned, it becomes, with time, part of the social norm' (Stein, 1995). The few studies that have been carried out suggest that much gender violence in schools is unreported or under-reported, because students fear victimization, punishment or ridicule (Leach et al., 2003; Human Rights Watch, 2001a). Girls may also have incorporated violent gender relations to such an extent that they have accepted it as part of the school experience.

Violent schools may thus have far-reaching consequences for gender relations between men and women later in life. Interventions against

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gender violence in schools are essential to lay the foundation for equitable relations between men and women in society.

## Making schools safe and equitable: the role of teachers

Efforts at the national level to tackle teacher misconduct are at best patchy. Studies from sub-Saharan Africa indicate that prosecutions of teachers for sexual assault or rape are rare, and that those that are pursued often fail. There is a lack of political will to tackle the problem and much shifting of responsibility from one government office to another. Parents and communities find it difficult to report teachers for misconduct.

Teachers often require pupils to perform tasks for them in school in ways that reinforce gender differentiation. Girls may be asked to clean floors and fetch water, whereas boys are required to clear bushes, cut grass and carry bricks. A study from nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa showed that girls were in general more involved in such chores than boys (Colclough et al., 2003). In Malawi, girls were sometimes expected to substitute for male teachers' wives when they were away, performing tasks such as cleaning the house, fetching water and pounding maize. In Guinea, parents mentioned teacher harassment as a factor that influenced the withdrawal of daughters from school after basic skills of literacy and numeracy were acquired. Gender differentiation does not have to take violent forms for it to have negative effects. Many studies show how teachers' attitudes infuse everyday practices within schools, impacting on the formation of gender identities. This may happen even where teachers believe that they are treating girls and boys equally.

### *Everyday classroom practices reinforce prejudice*

In Tajikistan, teachers are stricter with girls than with boys, applying different standards of behaviour to them and often forbidding girls from participating in activities that are considered natural for boys (Magno et al., 2002). A study in Albania revealed a widely held prejudice among teachers that boys are more intelligent than girls, and that girls were only able to do well by working extremely hard (Magno et al., 2003). In Romania, teachers saw boys' and girls' potential occupations differently – appropriate jobs for

boys were those that were well-paid or prestigious, such as financier, pilot, politician or computer specialist, whereas less well-paid jobs such as hairdresser, flight attendant or secretary were seen as more appropriate for girls. These views often arise from deeply held attitudes – in Bangladesh most teachers themselves did not expect their own daughters to take a job after finishing their education. A majority of both male and female teachers interviewed conceded that if they had 100 taka to spend, their first priority would be to spend it on their son (Shondhane, 2001).

Such discriminatory attitudes affect relationships between boys and girls within the classroom. Lessons observed in Jamaican schools were characterized by a lack of praise from teachers for boys, and teachers gave boys a disproportionate number of reprimands. A significant number of former students claimed that girls were given better treatment and sometimes escaped punishment that would have been meted out had the offender been a boy. Teachers were also said to be more likely to give more menial tasks such as yard-cleaning and running errands to boys, thus reinforcing commonly held gender stereotypes. Such actions by teachers lower the self-esteem of the boys affected (Sewell et al., 2003).

Teacher training, however, rarely focuses on issues of gender awareness. None of the teachers in Ethiopia and less than one-fifth of those in Guinea had attended gender sensitization courses (Colclough et al., 2003). Of twenty-five transitional countries in Eastern Europe, only eleven had pre-service teacher-training courses in gender awareness, while only two of them had in-service training courses, despite the fact that twenty-three of these countries offer gender-studies courses at university level (Magno et al., 2002).

## Sexism in textbooks and curricula

Alerting teachers to the implications of gender differentiation in the classroom is nevertheless unlikely to make a significant difference if the curriculum itself remains gender biased. Getting the curriculum 'right' is important, although extremely challenging. In some countries, parents may not send daughters to school if they feel that the curriculum is promoting ideas that are at odds with prevailing social norms. In

**Teacher training rarely focuses on gender awareness.**

Guinea, parents perceived subjects such as home economics, childcare and sewing, gardening and handicrafts as important for girls, and criticized their absence from the schooling curriculum (Tembon et al., 1997). Yet expansion of schooling achieved on the basis of conventional notions of appropriate social roles for girls and boys would seriously thwart progress towards the 2015 goals. This phenomenon is not just restricted to more 'traditional' societies – in France, a report published in 1997 by two parliamentarians noted that school books and teaching materials under-represented women and too frequently characterized them only in their roles as mothers and wives. This was despite two decades of stated policy concern about gender bias in textbooks (Baudino, 2003).

**Silences in the curriculum about gender inequality – the 'evaded curriculum' – are a danger.**

Sexism in textbooks thus continues to require attention, but the issue does not only concern the nature of the examples used. Silences in the curriculum about the issue of gender inequality – or what is sometimes termed the 'evaded curriculum' (American Association of University Women, 1992), are equally important. The experience of transitional countries in Eastern Europe is salutary in this regard. Some have been facing reversals in their overall educational situation, together with declines in their GPI.

While women made rapid gains under socialist governments, particularly in respect of employment equity, less attention was paid to gender equality within the family, with underlying ideologies of gender difference remaining relatively untouched. These are reflected in the gender bias which remains within the curriculum, as Box 3.13 illustrates.

## Women teachers as role models

The importance of female role models is widely accepted as a means of promoting greater gender equality: they expand the aspirations of young girls, and demonstrate that barriers to female advancement are usually socially constructed rather than reflecting their different capacities or interests. Evidence from Jamaica shows that girls in sampled schools look up to and emulate women (usually their mothers) as boys do to men (usually their fathers). Role models for older children are less frequently family members but remain defined by gender (Sewell et al., 2003). Thus non-stereotypical role models for both boys and girls are potentially an important means of changing attitudes about gender.

While the number of female teachers has increased gradually in India, the proportion remains extremely low in most parts of the country. Almost 90% of single-teacher schools – which account for at least 20% of all schools – are staffed by men. Furthermore, 72% of two-teacher schools have no female teachers (Ramachandran, 2003). Single and two-teacher schools tend to be located in remote and rural habitations, where girls are particularly disadvantaged. In Togo, the GPI for teachers worsened over the 1990s, from an already low level of 0.19 to 0.14 in favour of male teachers. Gender parity trends for teachers reflect the fact that increasing competition between young men and women for the few posts available has seen women become increasingly unsuccessful in being offered those posts (Lange, 2003*b*).

Research in Ethiopia, Ghana and the United Republic of Tanzania also revealed that the distribution of female teachers varies strongly between schools. This partly derives from working conditions – female teachers tend to be posted to urban schools that are more accessible, where the acceptability of female teachers may be easier to achieve, and where

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### Box 3.13. **Enduring stereotypes**

In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, textbooks present men and women as having different gender roles. In particular, women are predominantly portrayed undertaking domestic activities at home. For example, Polish textbooks usually present women as mothers and housewives in family roles, doing housework. Estonian textbooks contain traditional gender stereotypes by portraying girls and women at home and in childcare roles, very rarely depicting boys and men cooking, cleaning or taking care of children. In Albania, Hungary, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the majority of textbooks do not portray women outside their home environments. In Azerbaijan, one textbook implicitly condemns women who work outside the home, stating: 'In modern families there is a dangerous decrease in the number of children. Among the main causes are urban ways of living, the fact that women work too, and higher levels of education.' In cases where women working outside the household are depicted, they tend again to be in stereotypical roles. For example, primary-school textbooks in Romania depict women as schoolteachers, villagers, fruit or flower sellers, whereas men are viewed as astronauts, policemen, physicians, actors, conductors and masons.

*Source*: Magno et al. (2002).

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conditions of travel or accommodation may be more secure (Colclough et al., 2003). In contrast, in Pakistan, women teachers in urban areas are sometimes reported to find the environment around schools unfriendly, both physically and culturally, leading them to seek housing with watchmen, high boundary walls or companions for their safety (Warwick and Reimers, 1995, cited in Chapman and Adams, 2002).

Traditional forms of pre-service teacher training can be a disincentive for women's participation in countries where cultural norms prevent them from staying overnight away from home, or where being trained by male teachers is not considered appropriate. In countries with poorly developed tertiary education systems, small proportions of female teachers in turn reflect low gender parity in higher education, and the priority given to male employment (Gisselbrecht, 1996; Rose, 2003a). As the case of Mali illustrates, biases may also arise from the preferences of parents and communities, in contexts where they either pay for or control schooling (see Box 3.14).

An unequal distribution of female teachers is also typically found *within* schools. In Guinea and Malawi, female teachers are generally assigned to the lower classes (Grades 1–4) whereas male teachers tend to be in the higher grades. The explanation given by teachers interviewed was that lower classes were easier to teach and pupils were less difficult to handle than those in senior classes. The view that female teachers find it hard to teach more senior groups overlooks the fact that lower grades often have larger class sizes, and perpetuates a notion that female teachers' intellectual abilities are lower than those of male teachers (Kadzamira and Chibwana, 2000).

### Risks of a feminized profession
The extent of feminization of the teaching profession tends to increase as school enrolments of girls and/or the economic roles of women expand. In some cases, however, this trend is accelerated by wage reductions imposed by economic transition and adjustment (see Box 3.15). In India, studies show a higher percentage of women teachers in 'Alternative Schools' relative to formal government schools in some states. In the case of Bihar, with a low level of female literacy, teachers in the Alternative Schools are all female, due to a requirement to recruit only women teachers. Similarly, in the

> **Box 3.14. Sexism and parental preferences in Mali impact negatively on recruitment of female teachers**
>
> The ratio of female to male teachers in Malian primary schools ranged from 0.38 in state schools to 0.05 in *medersas* in 2000/01. Both communities and parents tend to favour male teachers. Thus in community schools, which are becoming increasingly important in the Malian education expansion process, the female/male ratio among teachers is also very low, at 0.24. In private secular or Roman Catholic schools, where students are drawn from better-off families, there is a preference for male teachers, reflecting the views of the families who fund the schools. Increased school autonomy and decentralization mean that the government has less opportunity to influence these outcomes: the diverse parties involved in school management, including households, community leaders, local politicians and local authorities, often have more 'traditional' attitudes towards male and female roles.
>
> *Sources*: Sangaré et al. (2000); Lange (2003a).

state of West Bengal, where only 25% of single-teacher schools have women teachers, all of the Alternative Schools for which data are available have women teachers, following a decision to appoint women above the age of 40 with five to eight years of schooling to such posts (Ramachandran, 2003). These shifts towards feminization are being made within a changing professional structure – contracts are short and insecure, and the pay is far less than that received by teachers in the formal government schools. There are similarities in Mali, where gender parity is higher among 'relief teachers' who have lower pay and less permanent tenure than other teachers (Lange, 2003a). These examples indicate that the diversification of employment opportunities for women and the goal of creating more female role models for schoolchildren should not be allowed to threaten the implementation of gender equality in employment contracts and non-discrimination in training opportunities and teaching responsibilities.

**Box 3.15. In the former socialist bloc, female teachers on the rise as real wages fall**

As is the case elsewhere around the world, schools in Central and South-Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are becoming increasingly feminized environments. In all the countries in the region, the majority of primary-school teachers are women and in most of the countries this is true of secondary-school teachers also. However, circumstances differ from country to country. Female teachers constitute more than 90% of all primary teachers in Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine, and between 75% and 90% in Azerbaijan, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Uzbekistan.

In most countries, the percentage of female teachers has been increasing during the transition period. Between 1991 and 2000, for example, the proportion of female secondary-school teachers in Albania doubled to 52%, and in Azerbaijan it grew rapidly to reach 79% in 1998.

Economic transition has often been associated with declining real wages for teachers, which has led to an exodus of men from the classroom. In some of these countries, teachers' salaries are no longer sufficient for basic subsistence. In others, salaries for teachers are very low compared with those available in the private sector:

'There are cultural expectations in Azerbaijan that a male is head of the family and as such is expected to provide for the family. ... Many males are forced to leave teaching to pursue other more highly paid careers. Among women, teaching is seen as a career that fits well with raising a family since a choice can be made between teaching a single (half day) or a double shift (full day)' (UNESCO, 2000*g*).

School management hierarchies also reflect gender inequalities. In Uzbekistan, whereas the majority of teachers are women, most school heads are men. Women are poorly represented in management structures in Croatian schools, whereas in Azerbaijan the majority of men employed in education are school administrators and managers.

*Source*: Magno et al. (2002).

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**Where gender parity is still far off and education systems are poor, both boys and girls fare badly.**

# Rights through education: achieving equality of outcomes

Data from Chapter 2 show that where education systems are well developed and where girls enjoy equal participation in schooling, the boys often find themselves outperformed by them. What explains this tendency?

Results from learning outcomes surveys and others, reported in detail in Chapter 2, show the following:

- Girls achieve much better reading scores than boys in all the countries surveyed in the latest PISA survey (UNESCO Institute for Statistics/OECD, 2003*b*); boys do somewhat better than girls in mathematics in most countries; the performance of boys and girls is roughly equal in science. These results are drawn from countries which all have primary NERs higher than 95. Thus they each have a well-developed education system.

- Data for developing countries show that the over-performance of girls is weaker than in the OECD group, and sometimes does not occur.

These findings, however, cannot be generalized to other countries. For many, where gender parity is still far from being achieved, and where education systems are poor, both boys and girls fare badly. Improvements in performance or variations in performance gaps may reflect socio-economic advantages. In Mali, where overall repetition rates are high, the gender gap in repetition is narrow for the first stage of basic education, but increases to about 5 percentage points by the second stage of basic education, with more girls repeating years and dropping out than boys. However, at secondary level, the opposite happens, with – over the period 1967–94 – almost always a smaller proportion of girls repeating than boys (Gisselbrecht, 1996, cited in Lange, 2003*a*). This probably reflects the low access of girls to secondary schooling in Mali, where those who do attend are usually from more privileged backgrounds (Lange, 2003*a*).

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In Ethiopia, some subjects reveal wider gender gaps in performance than others, notably mathematics, in an education system where aggregate achievement for boys is slightly higher than for girls, though with some regional variations (Rose, 2003*a*). Gaps between boys and girls do widen through the system – in 2000/01 only 20% of girls passed the Grade 10 examinations compared with 53% of boys, and 46% and 67% respectively passed the Grade 12 examinations (Rose, 2003*a*). In Togo, both boys and girls fare badly in schools, but the impact of girls' failure has more serious implications in that parents are less tolerant of repetition on the part of their daughters than of their sons. Hence poor performance by girls more frequently leads to their withdrawal from school (Lange, 2003*b*).

### Boys' relative underperformance: cause for concern?

Evidence that girls are outperforming boys has created a stir in many countries, not least because it appears to confound typical assumptions about the nature of gender inequality. Careful interpretation of the evidence is required to establish which girls are outperforming which boys, in what institutional context this occurs, and whether there are wider socio-cultural factors that affect these outcomes. Some of these issues are discussed below. Evidence that girls are outperforming boys does not always indicate a reversal of gender inequality; it rather suggests changes in patterns of gender differentiation.

The United Kingdom and France are both countries where the relative underperformance of boys has received much attention. Recent reports from the United Kingdom Government's Department for Education and Skills reflect this concern (UK Government, DfES, 2000). Box 3.16 reviews some of the debates and indicates likely causes. The Caribbean region is also well known for girls' better performance, having closed the gender gap before the 1990s and having maintained a female enrolment advantage over the decade. In Caribbean states, on average, girls start schooling earlier, attend school more regularly, drop out of school less frequently, stay in school longer, and achieve higher levels of functional education at the end of schooling than

**The poor performance of boys has been much noted in the United Kingdom and France.**

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**Box 3.16.** **Why do girls consistently outperform boys in the United Kingdom?**

Girls' relatively better performance in examinations at age 16 has been a recent phenomenon in the United Kingdom, achieved over the last decade. During the l960s, boys outperformed girls by about 5%; for the next fifteen years, boys and girls were performing at almost equivalent levels. However, from about 1987 only about eighty boys to every hundred girls achieved five high-grade passes at 16+. Thus, after the mid-l980s, girls turned the tide of credentialism, in their favour.

This new pattern of achievement has become evident even from very young ages. Those studies that have tracked boys' and girls' progress through primary and secondary schools indicate that girls make better progress than boys in reading, mathematics, and verbal and non-verbal reasoning. Data collected from national assessments at the age of 7 demonstrate that girls have a better start at reading than boys and that their lead in English is maintained at ages 11 and 14 (Arnot et al., 1998). Thus a sizeable gap between boys and girls in reading and English is sustained throughout compulsory schooling. By 2000, approximately 15% more girls than boys obtained high grades in English examinations at age 16 (UK Government, 2000). The fact that boys have not reduced this female 'advantage' in language-related subjects is one of the principal reasons why they have lost ground relative to girls in terms of their overall school qualifications.

The UK Department for Education and Skills, which has developed a website addressing the problem of boys' underachievement, attributes the problem to the following characteristics:

- Girls put greater emphasis on collaboration, talk and sharing;
- At each age girls have greater maturity and more effective learning strategies;
- (Some) boys disregard authority, academic work and formal achievement;
- There are differences in students' attitudes to work, and in their goals and aspirations, which are linked to the wider social context of changing labour markets, and male employment prospects;
- There are different gender interactions between pupils and teachers in the classroom, particularly as perceived by (some) boys;
- Laddish behaviour, bravado and noise, as boys seek to define their masculinity, have a negative influence;
- Male peer-group pressure weakens an academic work ethic;
- Boys make efforts to avoid failure; but a 'can't do/can't win' insecurity leads to a 'won't try/won't play' culture.

*Source*: Arnot and Phipps (2003).

As education systems move towards gender parity and improved quality, girls are likely to perform better than boys.

boys. This pattern also holds true for adult literacy. In these countries, women are more literate than men. For example, the National Literacy Survey in Jamaica in 1994 reported that the literacy rate among the population aged 15 and older was 81.3% for women and 69.4% for men. Thus, the gender gap in the Caribbean is the reverse of what it is in most other parts of the developing world (Miller, 2000).

### Reforms for better learning

In both France and the United Kingdom, policy reform has contributed greatly to closing gender gaps and to fostering a stronger culture of equality between male and female. The improved performance of girls relative to boys in the United Kingdom may partly reflect adjustments in the curriculum and examinations. Girls tend to master reading skills at an earlier age. Thus, the introduction of a National Curriculum requiring boys to engage more in language-based studies tends to improve girls' relative performance. Similarly, assigning greater assessment weight to course work (as distinct from written examinations) may also have benefited girls (UK National Commission for UNESCO, 2003). Research suggests that girls tend to do better than boys on sustained tasks that are open-ended, process-based, related to realistic situations and that require pupils to think for themselves; boys, on the other hand, show greater adaptability to more traditional learning approaches with a strong emphasis on memorization (Arnot and Phipps, 2003).

Education policy reforms do not in all cases result in closing of gender gaps in learning and performance. The 'tremendous paradox' of Jamaican education revealed by one recent study is that, despite strongly positive investments in the education sector and high enrolment rates throughout lower-secondary school, students demonstrate low learning interest and participation (Sewell et al., 2003). Special concerns arise about examination performance and reading ability, which in particular reflect socio-economic disadvantage. Poor reading ability starts in the lower grades, and is particularly concentrated among boys. By the time students reach Grade 6, one-third of them read below their expected level. By Grade 9 a huge divide is in place, where large numbers of students, especially boys, are not able to read or write. Some are functionally illiterate. Because of their reading deficiency, they are at a huge

disadvantage. Despite boys and girls entering Grade 1 in equal numbers, and with roughly the same kinds of experiences and skills, major distinctions are observable in their attitude to and interest in their studies. This leads to large differences in the quality of work produced and in their academic performance by the time they reach Grades 5 and 6. However, the evidence suggests that male performance tends to be mainly a reflection of lower attendance, rather than lower performance *per se* (Sewell et al., 2003). The interconnections between schooling performance and gender identities provide indicative explanations for some of these trends (Box 3.17).

## Does gender parity translate into gender equality?

Data reviewed in previous sections suggest that as education systems move towards gender parity and improved quality, girls are likely to perform better than boys. However, what does this mean in terms of greater gender equality? Many examples exist of the ways in which girls are unable to convert their academic edge over boys into greater equality in other spheres of life. In these circumstances their 'rights through education' remain blighted. In Chile, for example, despite girls achieving better results than boys in secondary school, they perform less well in the university selection test. A comparison of a cohort of students taking the System of Measurement of Educational Quality (SIMCE) test in 1998 and the university selection test in 2002 found that the poorer results of women in the latter were not reflected by their earlier schooling achievement. One explanation suggested was that men were more concerned to ensure that they achieved the scores needed to enter prestigious university programmes and hence took crash courses to prepare for the entrance tests (Avalos, 2003).

### Drawing women to science

The differences in subject choices made by male and female students are revealing in this respect. In France, data relating to gender balance in the science baccalaureate streams show that, despite their performing marginally better than boys in science at secondary level, only 44.2% of science pupils in 2000 were girls. In other words, while they are over-represented among general baccalaureate pupils (58%), the reverse is true when it comes to science subjects. Thus other

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## Box 3.17. Caribbean paradox

Recent attention drawn to the 'underperformance of boys in Jamaica and the Caribbean countries has been associated with concern about the growing number of young males engaged in serious crimes, and has helped focus on the complex links between schooling and society' [Sewell et al., 2003]. Historically, men have occupied a wider social space, controlled more resources, maintained a higher social position and exercised greater power than women. However, recent experience suggests that this privilege has come at a price.

A study of socialization patterns in Dominica, Guyana and Jamaica found that, despite some minor differences related to ethnicity and class, the socialization of boys and girls was quite 'gendered' in terms of the nature of household chores, degree of parental supervision, severity of discipline/punishment, and expectations in relation to sexuality and its expressions.

Girls in the study of Dominica had more positive attitudes towards schooling and reported that they were supervised more closely by their parents and received higher levels of encouragement. Parents also ensured that girls were more occupied with housework than boys, who were often left to their own devices. Focus-group discussion with parents suggested that interest in reading might have been engendered at an early age, with parents more likely to buy a book or doll for a girl, whereas a boy would receive a gun or other toy. The differing nature of such gifts seems to be bound up with the parents' concepts of masculinity.

The positive reinforcement that girls receive from the home and within the school is mutually reinforcing. Teachers at school encounter boys who appear to be less motivated and less likely to make an effort than girls, which tends to reinforce their own perceptions. Parental attention to girls and their schooling appears driven partly by a recognition that in Jamaican society the rules of the game are different for the two sexes and by a fear of early pregnancy – now more heightened with the growing threat of HIV/AIDS among the adolescent population.

Traditional norms are therefore under transition. While gender norms have always been less restrictive than elsewhere, the mismatch between male gender identities and the education system has grown. As schools become increasingly feminized spaces, boys tend to develop their identities within a much more restrictive concept of masculinity.

*Sources*: Sewell et al. (2003); Bailey (2003); Figueroa (2000).

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factors prevent girls from turning their academically strong performance into opting to study science in the higher grades (Baudino, 2003).

Subject streaming in Chile occurs halfway through the secondary-school system, when the common curriculum is divided after two years into academic and technical specializations. Secondary technical education has become much sought-after, as it provides greater chances of subsequent employment than the academic stream. Census data suggest that 82.2% of girls compared with 33.8% of boys were enrolled in commercial specializations, whereas 58.5% of boys compared with 13.1% of girls were enrolled in industrial specializations. Thus, of those girls who join the technical streams the majority opt for traditional commercial and secretarial specializations rather than for those preferred by boys.

The feminization of higher education in the 1990s has been a striking feature in countries of Central Europe, the former Yugoslavia, South-Eastern Europe and the Baltic States and the former Soviet Union. For example, the gross enrolment ratios for women in higher education exceeded those of men by more than 15% in Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, the Russian Federation and Slovenia during the late 1990s. In Latvia, this difference reached 25% in the 1998/99 academic year. One recent study from the region suggests that these trends may reflect a preference by male students for vocational and technical training, rather than university study, in order to gain more quickly the qualifications that will allow them to join the labour market. On the other hand, within higher education, women are concentrated in subjects leading towards their chosen professions in sectors such as education and health, whereas men dominate in academic programs related to governance, finance and banking (Magno et al., 2002). Similar tendencies are also found in many other countries and regions of the world (Arnot and Phipps, 2003; Guzman and Letendre, 2003).

The idea of subject 'choice' needs to be interpreted with care. Although a function of students' aspirations, these themselves are strongly influenced by expectations of what opportunities are likely to be on offer. Box 3.18 shows that both the home environment and the

**Women are concentrated in subjects leading towards jobs in education and health, while men dominate in courses about governance, finance and banking.**

## Box 3.18. Student 'choices' are never unfettered

Despite girls doing well in school in many contexts, parents may continue to hold stereotypical views about the abilities of girls relative to boys. In Mali, for example, almost one-third of 300 households surveyed said that the reason they differentiated between boys and girls was because boys were more intelligent. These expectations, being constantly reinforced within the home environment, inevitably influence subsequent behaviour.

Furthermore, the world of work also gives gendered messages, which influence boys' aspirations in different ways to those of girls. In Chile, a survey of aspirations of out-of-school 14–17-year-olds revealed that two-thirds of boys hoped to find a job, compared with only one-third of girls; on the other hand, over half of the girls hoped to get back to school compared with less than half of the boys. In the older group of 18–24-year-olds, more women hoped to study and more men hoped to find work.

These aspirations indicate that boys see the world of work as their dominant opportunity and are keen to enter it early, whereas girls are more likely to want to stay on in higher education in order to improve their chances in the labour market. Somewhat perversely, labour market discrimination seems here to be fuelling greater gender parity in education. This outcome, however, is far from

being generally the case. It is more common for restricted job opportunities for women to lead to lower educational persistence and performance. An example is given by Togo where a general lack of employment for women, and a scarcity of jobs for school-leavers and diploma-holders since the implementation of economic reforms, is reported to have undermined the demand for girls' schooling.

Occupational expectations are widely reported to influence subject choice.

PISA survey data explored the occupations students' expected to have at age 30, and found that female students in the participating countries were far more likely than males to report expected occupations related to medicine, biology, nutrition and teaching. Male students on the other hand were more likely to expect careers associated with physics, mathematics or engineering. It is unsurprising that subject choices reflect these occupational expectations.

*Note*: PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an initiative covering twenty-eight OECD and fifteen non-OECD countries, aimed at measuring 'how well young adults at age 15, and therefore approaching the end of compulsory schooling, are prepared to meet the challenges of today's knowledge societies'.

*Sources*: Avalos (2003); UNESCO Institute for Statistics/OECD (2003*b*, p. 12); Lange (2003*a*, 2003*b*).

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labour market can profoundly influence student performance and choice. Thus, achieving a better balance in the participation of males and females in many educational programmes is likely to be influenced as much by changes outside the educational domain as within it.

### Does the labour market reward girls?

Despite genuine and soundly based concern about male underachievement, it is clear that many societies have different expectations for males and females. The underachievement of men in the educational arena has not yet resulted in their falling behind in the economic and political spheres. It seems that women may often require higher levels of attainment than men if they are to be successful in competition for jobs, equal remuneration, decision-making positions and access to an equal share of productive resources.[31]

By the same token, a recent survey of Asian countries' performance in relation to gender equity shows that higher rates of unemployment prevail for women at all educational levels. For

example, in Indonesia and Sri Lanka (both countries having reached close to gender parity in enrolments), the unemployment rates for women are higher than those for men across all levels of education. The Indonesian figures show further that women's unemployment rates rise with their level of education, up to and including those with university degrees. Equally, women with vocational education are more likely to be unemployed than men (Lee, 2002).

Has women's greater presence in the workforce had an impact on gender wage gaps? There is a large amount of evidence on this question which cannot be fully treated here. However, the reliability and interpretability of the data on pay relativities by gender pose major problems. A recent UNIFEM report (UNIFEM, 2000) made a heroic effort to tackle this question, but was constrained by the limited range of countries for which internationally comparable datasets were available (especially to assess change over time), as well as by the incomplete coverage of different economic sectors, with a bias towards urban formal sectors. Despite such shortcomings, the report argues that in industry and services,

**In Asia, higher rates of unemployment prevail for women at all educational levels.**

31. Bailey (2003). Empirical evidence for this is however ambiguous (Kamalich and Polachek, 1982; Sloane, 1985).

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women on average earned 22% less than men in the late 1990s. In East Asia, where more reliable datasets are available, there is some evidence that the gender wage gaps narrowed in a number of countries during the 1980s and 1990s, but even so they remained large by international standards (Seguino, 1997, cited in Razavi, 2003). Except in the case of service and farm occupations, men's wages are between 20% and 100% higher than those of women and the male wage advantage occurs across all levels of education (Lee, 2002).

## Beyond equal numbers

This chapter shows that education generates opportunity for women and men and that it, in turn, is shaped by the existing norms and values which create gendered educational choices and outcomes.

Much has changed in the world to impact on girls' education. While poverty continues to be a major factor in the countries that have the highest levels of gender disparity, evidence shows that where the gaps are closing, have closed, or are reversing slightly in favour of girls, they are doing so in ways that remain tightly scripted by notions of gender differences between men and women. We have seen that, when given opportunities for education, girls take advantage of them, work hard and perform well. However, it is ironic that boys' declining levels of educational performance may partly reflect wider inequalities in the labour market, which continue to favour men, whereas opportunities for women often remain determined by the notion that women's primary role is within the family as unpaid carers. Further, boys' relatively worse performance in some contexts indicates how masculine identity can have a negative impact on boys' ability to perform as well as girls. The role of education as a key institution for socializing young people is paramount in this respect.

Urgent action is therefore required to close gaps between boys and girls in countries where the gender gap in education is still large. Addressing poverty and economic constraints, as well as practices that continue to legitimize unequal investment in boys and girls, require urgent

### Box 3.19. Education, gender and employment in Maghreb countries

The Maghreb region demonstrates the difficulty of making linear assumptions about the links between education and employment for women. It shows that while education can influence women's opportunities to find formal employment in non-traditional sectors, economic policies, legislation and the social environment also matter.

Both Tunisia and Algeria have attained gender parity in education but Tunisian women have wide access to the labour market, whereas in Algeria it is much more restricted. Tunisia introduced curriculum reform to improve the image of women. The education system has expanded. Social reforms have been implemented, giving women the right to vote and improved divorce and marriage rights. Nearly 70% of Tunisian women are employed in the formal sector, and there is a growing number of female engineers. However, in Algeria, declining rates of female participation in the formal sector are largely associated with the decline of the public sector, which was the largest employer. Women are thus increasingly dependent on the informal sector. In contrast, Morocco is far from achieving gender parity in school enrolments and is falling further behind. However, Morocco performs much better than the two others in terms of female participation in the labour market. Poverty is one factor propelling women into the labour market, as witnessed by high rates of rural–urban migration for women. Thus, although most women are economically active, they are clustered in low-paid, low-skilled jobs.

*Source*: EFA Global Monitoring Report Team.

attention. Making schools safe environments and ensuring equity in the distribution of educational resources are crucial measures for promoting gender parity. However, the provision of infrastructure is not sufficient in itself. Attention paid to the content of classroom textbooks, process and practice is an important precondition of ensuring the enrolment and completion of girls and boys. Discriminatory content and bias in textbooks serves to reaffirm the wider social inequalities that prevent girls from taking advantage of educational opportunities in the first place.

The challenges of achieving parity do not end with the achievement of equal numbers of boys and girls in school, although that does represent a significant step towards the achievement of gender equality in education. As this chapter shows, gender equality is not a purely quantitative goal – it relates to the wider issues of equal opportunity, treatment and outcomes in education and in society more generally. ■

**The Maghreb region shows the difficulty of making assumptions about links between education and employment for women.**