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Gender as an Entry Point for Addressing Social Exclusion and Multiple Disparities in Education

Technical Paper

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Executive summary

This paper proposes that multiple disparities in education might be best addressed by working through gender. It provides an exploration of the gender disparities pointing out links to the social and educational exclusion of marginalised groups. The discussion is structured around three main themes, Identities, Power and Processes and Methodologies. Focusing on gender, the first two themes concentrate on general principles that describe how exclusions operate in social contexts. The interplay of power and identities in the social processes of institutions give rise to gender and other disparities. Because gender identities are always cross cut by economic status, ethnicity religion, disability etc., it becomes an entry point for intervention to interrupt these systems and address multiple disparities. The third theme offers critical reflections on how we gather knowledge and evidence about educational exclusion. Some of the key problematics associated with the reliance on quantitative data are discussed. Throughout the paper the significance of the social context is emphasised in configuring different forms of exclusion in different places. In the final section the discussion is drawn back to meanings of access that are our central commitment. On this basis it raises questions about how we might move through gender to construct policy, advocacy and intervention to address multiple disparities.

Introduction

Gender is high on the international policy agenda, and within education it is a key variable in promoting and monitoring access, equity and quality improvements. The Education for All (EFA) initiative launched in 1990 at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand was a landmark for the integration of gender and education within development. The international recognition of gender disparities in education was re-articulated at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 which established the Dakar Framework for Action and six EFA Goals. Associated with this, the Millennium Development Goals further echoed two of the gender-related EFA Goals. This international consensus has confirmed the link between gender, education and development that has been a cornerstone of advocacy and action for development.

In the almost two decades since Jomtien, the development focus on gender and education undoubtedly has sponsored significant positive changes across the globe. Nevertheless, it is evident that there are still too many children, and girls in particular, who are not having their human rights to quality education satisfied. The failure to access quality schooling has multiple configurations resulting in many children who, may never have been to school, attend erratically, have dropped out or are in school, not receiving quality education. At the same time it is evident that these children are both boys and girls and while a gender focus continues to be necessary, it is only one dimension of exclusion.

Educational exclusion is most pronounced among the poorest children, and especially poor girls. In this context, it is clear that we need a broader conception of social identities and the ways these cut across each other if we are to address the multiple disparities associated with educational exclusion and social inequalities. A commitment to human rights and EFA demands that we look at the ways that gendered identities combine with other identities of the educationally excluded (e.g. ethnicity, caste, social class, disability, religion). The effort in this paper is to build on what we have learned about gender and use it to inform us in addressing wider social exclusion and multiple disparities in education. In this sense gender becomes an entry point into analysing multiple structures of exclusion (e.g. ethnicity, caste, social class, disability, religion) and the ways that the (re-)construction of these identities that serve to maintain the global economic status quo.

Three key themes are explored in this paper to draw together what we know about gender disparities and use this as a bridge into ways of addressing multiple disparities and social exclusion. The first theme considers the notion of **identities** and the way that it can help us to understand gender exclusions and can open the way to understanding how gender intersects with other social

characteristics (class, ethnicity etc) in the lives of marginalised people. The second key theme looks at **power and social processes**. It illustrates, using gender examples, how identities are acted out in social context and how in turn the context shapes identities. Interactions and processes within the social institutions in any context are central to identity formation and to inclusion/exclusion. Reference is made to the gendered phenomena of violence, early marriage, conflict and HIV/AIDS to exemplify processes of marginalisation and disempowerment. This is used as the basis to consider how social and institutional processes operate to produce multiple disparities. The third theme takes a step back to consider how **knowledge** about gender and other disparities is generated. It discusses dominant approaches to knowledge production and its influence on key concepts and methodologies used in the field. In the concluding section headlines about progress in terms of gender equity are used to raise questions about multiple disparities in access to quality education and how these problems might be pinpointed through policy, intervention and advocacy.

Identities

Gender is widely described as a social construction and in addition to biological sex this signifies the importance of social life for everyone's sense of their own gender identity. Our gender identities are then more than the obvious and natural consequence of our biological sex at birth. As a social construction our gender identities are formed through our interactions within our social contexts throughout the life course. This distinction between sex and gender is highly important and in principle it is broadly understood.

Understanding gender as a social construction entails the acknowledgement that we learn about our gender identities as we meet and interact with others. Identities are relational, that is they are worked out with respect to others who we regard as similar and different to ourselves. It is not a one-off occurrence; rather we continually act out our gender identities throughout our lives in a variety of social institutions and contexts (Butler, 1990). As such our gender identities are accomplished rather than given; we are active in producing our gender identities. In this respect we need to think carefully about framing girls as docile subjects, without agency and as victims (Mohanty, 1991a, b; Kapur, 2002; Saunders, 2002; Lazreg, 2005; Dunne, Humphreys and Leach, 2006; Leach and Humphreys 2007; Dunne, 2007a). The idea of individual agency or the active personal engagement in the production of gender identities is a central in the social construction of identity. This process of gender identity formation applies equally to our ethnic, religious and other aspects of our identities. Our identities are not only cut across these different characteristics but they are cut through internally as well, for example our ethnic identities are always cut through by gender.

Individual agency and our interrelations with others however, are framed within social contexts. The way we construct our gender identities is influenced by gender norms and traditions (the gender regime) of social and institutional contexts. Most social institutions (e.g. families, schools, the workplace) have gender regimes in which males and females have particular roles and/or are expected to behave in specific ways according to their gender. The rules and structures of these social organisations interact with individual agency to shape identities (Giddens, 1991). As such expressions of our identities are shaped by our context and are variable. Gender identity performances differ across contexts, for example, a male wearing a *sulu* (skirt) would be less remarkable at a social gathering in Suva, Fiji than in Liverpool, England. The wide range of global social contexts in which individuals shape their gendered selves suggests that there are multiple ways of acting out and expressing our gender identities.

The above theorisations of social enactments of identity provide crucial distinctions between sex and gender that highlight the significance of social interactions in different contexts. Building on this, further conceptual development has considered the significance of sexuality to an understanding of gender relations. In short, in everyday contexts in which biological sex and gender are barely distinguished and sexuality is rarely spoken, gender is mapped onto heterosexuality. Butler (1990) describes this as 'the heterosexual matrix' which is based on the assumption that we are all heterosexual. This 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980) in turn structures the social organisations of the family and schools in an unspoken. The assumptions of heterosexuality

(heteronormativity) directly influences the ways we perform gender and sexual identities. As with gender the performances of our sexual identities, masculinities and femininities vary according to context and over time. It is unlikely that you perform your gender / sexual identities in the same way your fathers/mothers did.

The conceptual link from gender to sexuality, normative heterosexuality, masculinities and femininities (sexualities) has been used to deepen understandings of gender and sexual relations in a number of qualitative studies in a range of contexts (see for example, Pattman & Chege, 2003; Dunne et al., 2005; Reddy & Dunne, 2007; Bakari & Leach, 2008; Humphreys, 2008). In some cases, the studies have illuminated the ways that every day life in educational institutions and at home is organised through assumptions of heterosexuality and centrally implicated in gender and sexuality identity processes (and educational outcomes). For example, the domestic division of labour in which a girl is expected to cook and clean for her elders, parents and brothers is part of the apprenticeship for a heterosexual future as a wife when these duties are again expected of her. Similarly, boys limited engagement in cleaning at home and in school signals the expectation that it will be done for him usually by a wife. These dominant assumptions of heteronormative futures are reflected back on notions of gender to constrain any ways of acting out masculine or feminine identities other than according to this heterosexual norm and gender hierarchy.

Gender and sexual norms of institutions are the context in which individuals construct their identities. There are multiple examples; mothers teaching their daughters how to sit, dress, serve and listen; the invitation for boys to take up space, speak and act publicly, rites of passage from boyhood to manhood etc. To a large extent this gender/sexual regulation is taken for granted as part of normal everyday life. For those who resist or do not conform there are explicit forms of social regulation usually enacted by others (mothers, fathers, siblings, peers) in the same social context. We are all familiar with terms of derision for a strong woman whether in sport or business as well as for a boy who does not like football but likes flowers. In many cases transgressions of the gender/sexual norms are met with social regulation ranging from verbal abuse that casts doubt on a person's heterosexuality to physical violence. These forms of social regulation impose the dominant social order and gender/sexual power hierarchies. In this sense they are exclusionary and deeply impinge on identity formation. These conditions for identity formation make normative gender roles and position appear natural. Gender mainstreaming is one strategy of disrupting the gender order which needs to be further extending across social institutions paying attention to the details of everyday life. Efforts to breakdown gender and other cultural stereotypes have been made in reviews and revisions of curriculum texts. Balancing gender representations and the inclusion of both females and males engaged in non-stereotypical activities acts to disrupt gender assumptions. Offering multiple ways to act out gender identities, masculinities and femininities breaks down the stereotypes that deterministically (though perhaps unintentionally) connect biology at birth with naturalised inequalities in education and social life.

Returning to our key question, how does this understanding of gender/sexual identities help us in addressing gender and other dimensions of educational exclusion? Importantly, this analytical understanding has to work with the dominant constructions of gender that operate on the ground. For example, in some Ghanaian schools teachers explained gender difference saying 'well, boys will be boys' or 'girls are naturally quiet' (Dunne, et al, 2005). Effectively they operated stereotypes based on a biological conception of gender that for them was the main determinant of their educational outcomes for their students. These cultural stereotypes and assumptions do not only work with respect to gender (see Dunne & Gazeley, 2008 for an example related to social class in UK). Such deterministic explanations implicitly support the status quo of social and educational inequalities and suggest the futility of intervention. On the contrary, our analytical pulling apart of sex from gender and gender from sexuality suggests the significance of social life as the locus of policy and practice intervention. It is evident, however, that such interventions need to focus not only on the groups who are marginalised but also on those in positions of relative power, like teachers.

The encouragement of more women to become teachers is part of a strategy to make schools more girl and learner friendly. This has seen some success in the Asia-Pacific region in which nearly all countries have 50% or more females in the primary school workforce (UNGEI, 2009). Interestingly difficulties in getting more females into teaching are similar to those for many marginalised groups. These include distance from the educational institution often exacerbated by difficult terrain, hills, flooded roads etc. and fears about safety. Distance or correspondence courses have been used to provide an alternative in certain contexts. This strategy has multiple positive potential not only in possible improvements in the school environment but also in engaging women in the formal labour market with the associated increase in financial resources and improved participation in school and community life. It has been noted however, that more needs to be done to ensure that women climb the career ladder and are professionally engaged in educational management (UNGEI, 2009). For school pupils these difficulties of distance have been addressed by closer consultation and involvement of local communities and in some cases in the construction of alternative forms of schooling.

The whole idea of the social construction of identities highlights institutional power and process and invites us to connect gender with other social identities in understanding the production of social and educational marginalisation.

Power and Processes

Processes of becoming gendered are critical to understandings of educational exclusion. Acknowledging gender as a process of accomplishment (a becoming) in which individual agency interacts with institutional norms, draws attention to the contextual and local in the formation of gender identities. Everyday relations, language and actions (performances) constitute identities and structure daily life of social institutions. Even though daily life goes on in a taken for granted way, these daily activities are often enacted to passively or actively exclude specific groups. Institutional processes of domination and subordination are fundamental to social hierarchies that link power, identity and disadvantage. In schools, for example, there are numerous ways in which gender power operates. Ethnographic work in Ghana and Botswana has shown the allocation of different duties to boys and girls. Boys were given the jobs of time-keeping / bell ringing and digging the compound and girls usually cleaned and collected water. At the same time, the female senior prefect was always subordinate to male senior prefect. For teachers too, a gender regime operated, in which male teachers were usually responsible for discipline and corporal punishment. At another level many teachers expressed difficulties with the notion of females in school leadership positions (Dunne, et al 2005). Although all of these incidences suggest inequitable gender hierarchies, they were taken for granted aspects of institutional life.

Gender expectations and stereotypes inform individual gendered behaviour and interpretations of the gendered behaviour of others in ways that entrench and solidify organisational practices and associated gender myths. For girls, lower expectations¹ of their educational performance have a fundamental bearing on their access to quality education. Strategies to improve educational outcomes for girls have included broadening forms of educational assessment. These include changes in the examination questions and blending formal tests with classroom assessment. Attention to language issues and references to the experiences of girls have been part of these reform strategies (USAID, 2008). Observations in schools show boys performing their dominance over the girls by their attempts to control the physical and verbal space of the classroom. They usually sat at the back and the sides of the class surrounding the girls and they often jeered and discouraged girls from answering questions in class. On most occasions the teachers did not intervene in this 'natural' gender order. Through these informal social practices the male power in the school was reinstated and used to regulate male and female gender performances in the interests of the more powerful males. Attempts to transgress this gender order would be to risk the danger of public ridicule and humiliation.

The link between teacher expectations and educational performance has been fairly well established in research. See Dunne and Gazeley, 2008 in relation to low educational outcomes by social class in UK.

The school is a key site in which gender and sexual identities are formed and performed. The ways that female and male students and teachers interact and regulate each other is central to how identities are negotiated and place and space in the power hierarchies of institutional life is found. The encouragement of more female teachers in schools, referred to earlier, could be a productive strategy in changing the atmosphere and ethos of the school. Like families, schools operate with gender and age structures that have to be negotiated. Female teachers provide examples of women negotiating contradictory positions of 'masculine' institutional authority and subordinated femininity. The difficulties of some female teachers with the discipline of male students might also be understood as the intersection of age and gender relations in contexts where seniority and masculinity hold power. The school environment is a central dimension of educational quality and vital to the ways that institutional power and processes structure identities and difference. It also confers privilege on the dominant and excludes those who do not or cannot comply. We might consider how a teacher explains and addresses the low performance of a lower caste boy or how different it might be for a minority ethnic female teacher to discipline a dominant ethnic senior boy. While the main discussion has been on how gender and sexuality structure the disadvantage experienced by girls, the same constructs of power, process and identity can be used also to explain intersecting multiple forms of educational exclusion.

Schools are only part of the social landscape in which gender and sexual identities are formed and inequalities prevail. Dominant heterosexual masculinities observed in schools where boys try to regulate girls or play games in which they 'own' girls (see Dunne et al, 2005) are a microcosm of broader gender/sexual relations. Gender-based violence in schools including the physical and sexual abuse of females and younger or less powerful males are fundamental inequalities that find resonances in families and other social spaces with direct implications for social and educational exclusion. This is heightened in context of social insecurity as indicated by the incidence of physical violations of females in displaced communities disrupted by civil conflict which result from similar dominant and violent masculinities. When children are stolen, girls predominantly are taken as wives and become mothers and boys become soldiers engaged in aggression and violence. Inter-ethnic conflict whether on ethnic or religious grounds are deeply structured by gender and sexual identifications.

Limited horizons and heteronormative social practices are sustained also through customs like early marriage through which the social and educational disadvantage of women is sustained intergenerationally. Kinship, marriage and intimate sexual relations are all expressions of masculinity and femininity which on the whole work to regulate and subordinate females. In India this intergenerational cycle has been interrupted by particular projects e.g. Lok Jumbish, that target women in the community as key agents of change, providing empowerment through education, skills development and collective action (Subrahmanian, 2007).

Gender and sexual identities and the performances of appropriate masculinities and femininities have a significant bearing on the spread of HIV/AIDS. The double standards around male and female sexual behaviour are framed in heterosexual terms and in a gender hierarchy in which males dominate. Females often feel disempowered and unable to demand conditions around sexual intercourse or they are forced, raped and violated (Manathoko, 2008). In South Africa school girls described the tensions between safe sexual practices and forms of femininity that demanded they were virginal and appeared sexually unknowing (See Reddy and Dunne, 2007). Educational work with young men and women has been shown to have important influences on they way they engage with intimate relations in ways that avoid the risks of educational and social exclusion (Khamasi and Undie, 2008). State support to address HIV/AIDS in schools has been exemplified in Uganda in which material were developed to address personal, social and health issues and space was allocated to this subject on the curriculum. In broader terms the links between schooling and health has become an important intervention point not only in addressing (sexual) health issues on the curriculum but as the arena to provide healthcare for children as a means to keep them healthy and in school (Pridmore, 2007). In many countries health is an integral part of the contract in conditional cash transfers that have been used to target access and retention of the most marginalised children.

Established institutional structures and traditions of practice are extremely powerful in framing how we understand ourselves as people, our place in our communities, our cultures and identities. In particular, educational institutions exert influence far beyond a restricted (and contested) cognitive domain. Some strategies to address the child-unfriendly school environment have focused on the sensitisation of teachers to girls learning through in-service education (UNGEI, 2009). Insights into the processes of exclusion related to gender and sexual identities have much to offer an understanding of the educational exclusion of marginalised groups and the ways that these interact with gender. However, these processes are necessarily contextually constructed as people in different contexts do not have access to the same range of possibilities (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). This implies the importance of recognising multiple gender configurations. As Chandra Mohanty comments (1991):

To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being 'women' has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or sexuality, just with gender. But no one 'becomes a woman' (in Simone de Beauvoir's sense) purely because they are female. Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex (pp.12-13).

Identities then are never singular; we are never simply a 'man' or a 'woman'. Our gender identities are always intersected by, for example, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status etc. As multiple, fluid and dynamic (Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996) identities are performed differently and with different emphasis in different contexts and times. Unless we recognise the multiplicity and contingency of identity we will find it difficult to understand social life and its multiple disparities. It is thus important to consider how gender has been connected to other identities as without such understandings it is unlikely that EFA goals can be realised. Gender and poverty have been inter-related and discussed in terms of female disadvantages with respect to, for example, economics, literacy, education and health². Similarly, religion has been associated with specific forms of subordinated femininity although it might be argued that this is again a manifestation of male power in a specific country located gender regime.

Methodologies

A dominant source of knowledge about education and development are the quantitative data sets and indicators presented in the tables of periodic reports of many international agencies. The Human Development Report (UNDP, 2008), for example, contains statistics covering 177 countries presented in 35 different tables in 354 pages. Despite concerns raised about the reliability of the data (Tabachnick & Beoku-Betts 1998; Booth & Lucas 2004), statistical sources are important in providing a view of what is going on within and across different countries. By simply measuring, calculating indices, listing, ranking, grouping and categorising, implicit and explicit comparisons are made and invited between different contexts and over time. Specifically, these data provide the basis for multiple comparisons, in which outcome indicators are used in the construction of international hierarchies and to evaluate and inform national policy and practice.

The focus on gender has led to increases in the availability of gender disaggregated quantitative data and the construction of various gender-related indices (e.g. GPI, GDI). As with other statistical data this presents the opportunities for comparisons that focus on gender differences realised in gender ratios and the identification of gender gaps. As useful as these are, they are based on conceptions of gender as a discontinuous variable with the categories, male and female, presented as a neo-biological binary. The gender binary or 'bio-logic' (Oyèwùmí, 2002) conceptually refers back to a simple sex

² It is important to acknowledge a tendency to compartmentalise education from wider aspects of social life even though they are germane to educational and social gender equality. Deeper understanding of these connections is predicated by the increasing decentralisation of school governance. Importantly, a small but growing literature has started to explore health and education together (see for example Pollitt, 1990; Del Rosso & Marek, 1996; Pridmore, 2007).

difference³ has been sustained and remains dominant within discourses of development, despite the availability of more sophisticated theories of gender and social life. Even the 2003/4 Global Monitoring Report on gender equality (UNESCO, 2003), reproduced rather than destabilised the reductive neo-biological gender binary. Although there was explicit acknowledgment of the social construction of gender and some theoretically diverse research evidence was included, gender-disaggregated statistics dominated. Direct comparisons between these categories both produce a gender opposition (males v females) and construct an implicit gender hierarchy. This is exemplified by the gender parity index (GPI) which has values between 0 and 1 to indicate disparity in favour of boys; 1 is parity, and a GPI greater than 1 indicates a disparity in favour of girls (UNESCO, 2002, p.305). While a useful indicator for making the extent of disparities evident, it also constructs a gender hierarchy in which males are the standard against which girls are compared.⁴ This is itself an inequality.

Of direct concern to the issues discussed in this paper, the current emphasis on comparison between females and males as a whole, directs attention to the differences between gender groups and deflects attention away from differences within groups (Cornwall, 1997). This makes it difficult to ask 'which girls?' The singular focus limits gender analysis to two oppositional categories (female and male) effectively making invisible the intersections with diverse ethnic, religious or class identities (Mohanty 1991, Mbilinyi 1992)⁵. Differences within groups e.g. between poor and wealthy boys might be more significant to social and educational exclusion than the differences between groups e.g. wealthy girls and boys. While the focus on gender is vital, the absence of other qualifying social categories provides a very blurred lens on inequalities. For example, setting aside other intersecting hierarchical kinship relations, can lead to distorted social analysis and the production of erroneous truths about {African} societies (Oyěwùmí, 2002)¹. It is important then to provide better descriptions of the poor and the ways they are they comprised in ethnic, linguistic or religious terms. This would certainly assist with the identification of 'which girls' are excluded and provide some demographic contours to describe populations that have been too often clumped together and homogenised as the poor in low-income countries.

The significance of context to understandings of social life, identities and how exclusions work (and how they might be addressed) raises further methodological questions concerning the production of knowledge about development. The statistical emphasis on outcomes focuses on the 'what' in broad geographical locations rather than different local social circumstances. Effectively, it separates development outcomes from the local particularities and social contingencies and cultural conditions of their production (Kabeer 1994; Mohanty 2003). This is a decontextualisation that disconnects people from the social contexts in which they construct their identities. It objectifies people, simplifies the complexities and contingencies of social life and tends to universalises gender (and other) identity processes. For example, the decontextualised and frozen statistical data offer little lead in understanding why there is high dropout of females in Punjab or even, which girls are dropping out. The implication is that there is a need for more nuanced and sociologically informed research and analysis to understand how material inequalities (and multiple disparities) are produced, reproduced and resisted.

At this point it is worth noting that despite the significance of violence, sexual abuse, bullying and other social processes to educational and gender outcomes (Human Rights Watch, 2002; UNICEF, 2007; Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2006), while the educational data

³ The existence of intersex communities and research on the social processes of medical ascription of sex/gender to young babies demonstrate, the male/female dichotomy is neither natural nor clear-cut (El-Bushra, 2000; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Kessler, 2002).

⁴ Statistical comparisons across countries similarly construct international hierarchies in which nations are categorised as being of 'high', 'medium' or 'low' development, or 'likely', 'unlikely' or 'potentially' capable of achieving the MDGs.

⁵ A similar point may be made in relation to global divisions in which the 'developing nation' is the 'other' of the developed nation and this becomes the discursive axis in which there is limited space to consider the internal 'other' within nations or identity practices in social class or ethnic terms.

often emphasises enrolment, repetition, persistence, drop-out and attainment and calculations of gender gaps⁶. The gaping absence is knowledge about the social conditions and processes that are highly implicated in these measured outcomes. To remain silent on such threats to human rights, personal safety and quality of life is to prioritise these outcomes in ways that are difficult to justify and that are unlikely to reflect the concerns of those vulnerable to, or excluded through violence or abuse. Additionally, the focus on these outcomes is to treat educational institutions as black boxes and to assume them to be benign. This is contrary to the picture provided by much research into the social and political dimensions of life in school (see Dunne, Akyeampong and Humphreys, 2007 for a review of this literature).

The emphasis on context implies the need for local studies accessing local perspectives and knowledges to understand the specifics of the social production of disadvantage. The gulf between this approach and those that dominate the development field is wide, even though, through the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) attempts have been made to broaden the kinds of indicators and the data collection processes (see UNICEF, 2007). This apparent impasse between macro- and micro-perspectives was evident in the GMR on Quality (UNESCO 2004)⁷, which despite the attempt for a greater process-orientation remained substantially within the thrall of quantitative indicators. In particular, it did not manage to 'commit gender treachery' by dislodging the gender binary (Kisiang'ani, 2004). The same might be said of much research that has explored the field of gender, education and development that operates unproblematically with decontextualised quantitative data and/or universalised conceptions of gender (see Humphreys, Undie & Dunne, 2008 for a review of the literature).

Although it might be a start, the methodological point is not simply about the inclusion of more qualitative data on social and educational processes with which to qualify the quantitative accounts. It is a broader point about the construction of knowledge about low-income country contexts. Specifically, a reliance on quantitative data and analysis provides limited capacity, interest and value in reading the small stories about social processes and human agency. It is important to be conscious and reflexive about how methodologies and discourses construct the field. Oyěwùmí (2002) also reminds us, in reference to Africa, that dominant understandings of social phenomena have been historically produced through specific racialised and gendered discourses of colonialism⁸. The suggestion is that while over the last decade or so there has been a notable increase in the use of qualitative and mixed methods research, the domination of macro-perspectives and quantitative methods and analysis has militated against localised research, understandings of particular social meanings, and ultimately better targeted intervention. There are examples, however, from the Philippines of local community involvement in data gathering and tracking children, especially from marginalised groups. These data and analysis that include health and education have been used to inform locally appropriate interventions (UNGEI, 2009).

Planning policy, advocacy and intervention to ensure access to quality education at primary and secondary levels

Progress so far

The above discussions have highlighted the importance of identities, power and process and knowledge generation to understandings of exclusion from school. Gender disparities were explored in depth to show how they arise from pervasive unequal power relations. At the same time as gender

⁶ There have been some important efforts to develop additional indicators that are also context related as means to more socially nuanced analysis, see for example www.childinfo.org

⁷ There were important breakthroughs made in this report that highlighted the significance of in-school factors and processes in the production of educational and social inequalities. It does represent a move beyond a sole concern with the numbers and has stimulated general advocacy for learner-centred pedagogies, continuous assessment, mother-tongue teaching, consultative disciplinary practices, as well as more specific advocacy that brings quality and gender together (see for example FAWE, 2005, and Oxfam, 2007).

⁸ For more on aspects of the methodological debate see Amadiume, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Oyěwùmí, 2002, Bakaré-Yusuf, 2004; Lewis, 2004; Chilisa, 2005; Lazreg, 2005, Odora - Hoppers, 2008

identities are always cross cut by economic status, ethnicity religion, disability etc., it was linked to multiple disparities experienced by marginalised groups. As such gender becomes an entry point into the analysis of the ways that exclusions are produced in the every day enactments of identity and power in social institutions. These processes are often normalised in ways that sustain the social, political and economic power dynamics of the status quo. For this reason, it is important to look at how power and identity processes are used to deny people their rights to education so that we may design programmes and policies that interrupt these systems.

Lets us first consider the progress made in terms of gender, to remind ourselves of the positive gains and to stimulate thinking about how we might use this to address multiple disparities. The 2003/4 GMR focused on EFA and gender (UNESCO, 2004) noted an 8.7% increase in school enrolments from 596 million in 1990 to 648 million in 2000. This massive increase was tempered by the estimation of 104 million children still out of school in 2000. The gender dimensions were highlighted to show discrimination against girls in the education sphere. For example, girls comprised 57% of the out of school children and in 11 countries the enrolment of girls was less than 80% of that for boys. Regions of the globe were compared showing significant differences that qualified the global trends. Contrary to the headline trends above, between 1990 and 2000, population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa led to a 17% increase in out of school children of which 23 million were girls. The relationship between low enrolments and wider gender disparities was also affirmed.

According to the most recent GMR on Governance (UNESCO, 2008) in 2006 there were 28 million fewer out of school children than in 2000 and the proportion that were girls had reduced to 54%. Nevertheless 75 million remain out of school including 12% of primary age children in developing countries. Sub Saharan Africa has 47% of the world's out of school children with one third of primary age children not in school. Projections suggest that globally 29 million will still be out of school by 2015 and thus, the failure to meet a second MDG on time was anticipated. Other comparisons since the millennium showed that 40 million more children were in school with 135 million gaining access to the classroom for first time in 2006, an increase of 5 million since 1999. While gender parity in education had been reached by 59 out of 176 countries in 2006, an increase of 20 countries of the time period, girls were more likely never to have enrolled in school than boys but once they had gained access they were less likely to repeat and more likely to complete school.

Although this report was found to have an insufficient gender perspective (UNGEI, 2008), it does mention the persistence of gender disparities and an acknowledgement of way that gender intersects with other variables including economic status, belonging to an indigenous group, linguistic or ethnic minority or low caste, and living in a rural or isolated community. This observation supports the possibilities that we are taking up, of using gender as an entry point for addressing multiple disparities.

Mapping the field for intervention

Given the focus on the achievement of EFA we now need to turn to consider access and quality more fully. Admission and attendance are obvious first steps but as noted in the Governance GMR (UNESCO, 2008) these do not guarantee that pupils would meet basic literacy and numeracy standards (UNESCO, 2008). It is clear that a limited version of access and admission to school has to give way to a more comprehensive view. What should this include? The list could be very extensive: admission, attendance, retention, progression, curriculum access, language, school, teacher and pedagogical quality, school processes, achievement in literacy, numeracy and formal examinations, and post-school destinations.

As individual aspects of access and quality these represent rather specific dimensions appropriate, perhaps, as indicators and for monitoring, but are too compartmentalised to capture the broader complexities of social and educational inequalities. A more holistic view has produced groups of concern as a means to policy, advocacy and intervention. For example, school organisation / teacher management; curriculum, assessment and learning; the learning environment; school and community relations (Dunne, et al, 2007). The Governance GMR (UNESCO, 2008) has proposed three key areas

for targeted intervention: reforming curriculum and textbooks; enhancing the quality of teachers and female teachers and more child friendly teaching and learning.

In the same Governance GMR (UNESCO, 2008), however, we are reminded of the widespread decentralisation of educational services and school management. This offers challenges and opportunities for achieving the EFA goals. Community involvement in promoting the importance of education in Lao and in the provision of schools in remote areas of Bhutan, are examples of positive opportunities offered through decentralisation (UNGEI, 2009). Nevertheless, it also suggests a need for strong central policies around equity and inclusion as responsibilities are devolved gender must be a central dimension of accountability. Decentralisation also indicates a much wider field for intervention and implicates more organisations and people in the quest for educational inclusion. It has been suggested that efforts for gender equity and inclusion for well being and empowerment should have three broad dimensions: capabilities in education, health and nutrition; access to resources in the economic terms, the labour market and political realm; security from violence and conflict (UNGEI, 2009). This broad view is important to the vision for planning and intervention and with this in mind Subrahmanian (2007) has mapped what might support the achievement of the educational goals. This includes policy, advocacy and intervention through the state, communities, labour market and schools. The questions for us to consider now are how and what kinds of advocacy and interventions can we target at these different bodies and importantly how would these address the inequities that we currently experience. The challenge is to develop linked strategies for empowerment that target the powerful and disempowered in educational and associated institutions. Each strategy needs to be defined by a range of specific outcomes and monitoring systems. In addition, the key advocacy messages need to be formulated and strong central policies need to be articulated and disseminated. All of this needs to be guided by experience and evidence from a broader knowledge base.

The following questions should provide an initial frame for a renewed effort to address multiple disparities for broader social and educational inclusion.

How might we articulate and formulate strong central policies to produce educational and social equity and inclusion applicable to a range of different contexts?

What are the key advocacy messages and strategies to empower those people who are excluded?

How will these be contextually informed?

What is the evidence? What more evidence is needed?

Who are the targets of the strategy?

How would you use this to empower the marginalised?

How would you address those with political, social and professional power?

What are the cross-sectoral links? Is this comprehensive enough?

What are the priorities?

How would the policies, advocacy and strategies work together to better address gender and multiple disparities?

What is the influence on access and quality?

What outcomes need to be stipulated?

How will progress be monitored?

What are the feedback and on-going formative mechanisms?

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