Towards Gender Equality in Education: Progress and challenges in Asia-Pacific Region

Technical Paper for Deliberation
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1. Introduction

Providing universal compulsory primary education has been a long-time goal pursued by all countries as a basic philosophy. This goal received a new direction through the global vision that evolved during the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien 18 years ago. The conference called for treating education as a basic need and a fundamental right of every individual. It was stated: “The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated.” It was further emphasized that education programmes for women and girls should be designed to eliminate the social and cultural barriers that have discouraged or even excluded women and girls from benefits of regular education programmes, as well as to promote equal opportunities in all aspects of their lives.

Taking stock of the situation towards the end of the decade following the Jomtien Declaration, it was observed that gender disparities have persisted. Although great strides had been made, nearly two thirds of children who were denied their right to education were female. Even though girls’ education had been extensively documented as the investment that offered the greatest overall returns for economic development, national policies did not reflect this insight. It is in view of such an assessment that the Dakar Declaration on Education for All (EFA), as well as the Millennium Declaration, called upon national governments and the international community to pursue more focused action, and to set concrete targets and a time frame for achieving the goal of gender equality in education.

The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) has been a part of the response to this call at the international level. National governments across the world have also been initiating action plans to meet the goals of universal participation of girls in primary education and for moving forward to achieve gender equality in all spheres of life and all levels of education.

What is the level of progress made in this regard in the subregions of East Asia-Pacific and South Asia? This is the subject of review in the present paper.

1.1 The context

The past decade and a half have witnessed enormous expansion of educational facilities in almost every country in the Asia-Pacific Region. This has no doubt brought schools closer to children, significantly enhancing the potential for their participation in basic education. It has also resulted in overall improvement in female enrolment rates and gender parity indices. Does the quantitative progress also meet concerns of quality and equity? Do these overall figures represent real progress towards the goal of gender equality? Are there specific pockets and clusters within the subregions that continue to lag? These are critical questions that need closer examination.
Various assessments in the two subregions during the post-Dakar period indicate substantial progress but significant unevenness across the subregions; they also point to persisting gender and social inequities and serious shortfalls in the quality of provisions and outcomes. There is increasing awareness that actions must move to a different plane – from mere counting the number of children enrolled to all children enjoying equal rights without gender, ethnic, caste or class distinctions. The present paper attempts to take stock of the progress made with respect to some of these questions in the countries of South Asia and the East Asia-Pacific subregions. Further, based on the review, the paper presents a reflective overview of lessons derived from successful strategies across the countries and the challenges that remain to be addressed.

1.2 About this paper

This paper begins with a brief discussion in Section 2 on the policy trends with respect to gender-related issues in education in the two subregions. Section 3 follows with a quantitative review of the situation with respect to participation of girls in education, as well as with respect to some indicators of gender equality. Section 4 examines different aspects of school quality, including efficiency, transition rates and learning outcomes, which are effective indicators of quantitative progress as well as the quality of education provided. The final section highlights experiences across the region in countries that have made a positive impact on girls’ participation in education; it also discusses the issues that remain to be addressed in order to achieve the goal of gender equality.

The paper essentially derives its inputs from the findings of two commissioned studies: one on South Asian countries and the other on the countries of East Asia and Pacific. In addition, it draws on several assessments of gender-related progress carried out under the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) framework during recent years. Assessments that are specific to the Asia-Pacific Region have also been made by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Observations from these reports have been used to draw a broader picture of the progress in girls’ education and gender equality in the region. Data presented in the text, mainly drawn from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) database, relate to selected countries of the subregions that are critical to register overall progress by 2015 or illustrate success achieved – thereby showing the way for other countries.

2. Tracing policy trends in the region

At macro level, all countries of the Asia-Pacific Region are committed to pursuing the goal of gender equality. All countries in the region are parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and equality between the sexes is expressly guaranteed in many constitutions and statutes. However, reflection of this commitment in actual policy and legislation is quite diverse.

This diversity should not surprise anyone, given the multiplicity of cultures, political systems, and levels of development, forms of governance and environmental contexts across the region. With respect to gender-linked policies, divergence is also due to the very different gender profiles of countries in the major subregions, specifically influenced by their historical, demographic and cultural contexts. Although this diversity should be respected, it is pertinent to ask if governments are doing enough to create a sensitive and responsive policy environment to achieve the goals of gender equality. Some broad trends in this regard can be discerned from the national EFA reports and the reviews carried out by the UNICEF and UNESCO in the two subregions.

2.1 Adopting the human rights-based perspective in education
Policy documents are explicit in their commitment to achieving gender parity in education within the stipulated time frame. This is evident from the fact that almost all countries have either achieved universal basic education or have legislated compulsory education acts to secure full participation of girls and boys. The Constitution of India, for example, was recently amended to make free and compulsory education a fundamental right on par with other human rights. The Constitution of Afghanistan states, “The State shall devise and implement effective programmes for balancing and promoting of education for women, improving of education of nomads and elimination of illiteracy in the country.” It further pledges: “The State shall pursue a policy of making the female population participate to a greater extent in the task of national development by making special provisions for their education, health and employment.” The Compulsory Education Law in China was revised in 2006, stressing the right to free education without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, wealth or regional status. Recognizing that provision of early childhood care and education facilities particularly benefit girl children, several countries in East Asia have announced pertinent policies.

These examples are only illustrative of the policy initiatives taken in different countries. Further one can safely say that many of these have drawn inspiration from the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, though none have adopted the provisions wholly in their legislation.

2.2 Bringing gender concerns to the centre stage of policymaking

Persisting gender disparities in education have prompted countries to adopt special policy measures to promote girls’ education. One of the major initiatives adopted, particularly, in South Asian countries, is to reduce the financial burden on families for schooling of girls through cash incentives. This can be observed prominently in Bangladesh and Pakistan and some of the States in India; recently, Nepal has moved to offer cash incentives to girl children. There are also measures such as residential schools, free textbooks and uniforms that could in turn impact girls’ participation and learning.

It is important to observe that most of these are linked to regularity in participation of girls in schooling. For instance, the Bangladesh School Stipend programme requires girls to both regularly attend school attendance and not to marry during the period of support. Another common policy measure is to appoint female teachers on a preferential basis through special incentives, particularly in rural areas. India has the policy of requiring at least 50 per cent of new teacher recruitments to be given to females. Cambodia offers special incentives to attract local female teachers in rural areas.

2.2.1 Development planning and gender mainstreaming: National governments during recent years have begun to look beyond school education in their pursuit of gender equality goals. This is discernible in the development strategy plans and special approach papers in many countries. Gender concerns explicitly run through the contents and proposals of the Five Year Development Plans of India and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers in many countries of South Asia. Many countries of East Asia have adopted gender mainstreaming as the primary approach to integrating gender dimensions into policies and programmes across all sectors of development. Gender mainstreaming in these countries serves as a legal platform for addressing gender in all development activities. Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic have recently articulated a gender mainstreaming policy specifically for the education sector.
Whatever approach is taken to integrate gender concerns with development, the changed policy in this regard is reflected in measures for women announced in national plans. Such measures are often accompanied by earmarked financial allocations in national budgets to promote actions that include women’s self-help groups and microcredit societies, or incentives for women entrepreneurs contributing to their economic empowerment. The coverage of such programmes, however, remains inadequate to make a significant impact. But supportive policies to allow participation by civil society groups in these areas have also contributed to moving towards the policy of gender mainstreaming.

2.2.2 Gender equality and macroeconomic policies: There is increasing concern about the continuing gaps between macroeconomic policies focused on economic growth and social policies focused on the larger goals of gender equality and social justice. In the fast-growing and transitional economies of Asia, governments tend to give precedence to maintaining economic growth patterns, often jeopardizing gender and social equality goals. It is necessary to transform processes of macroeconomic policymaking rather than focusing exclusively on the micro level.

Women’s potential to develop sustainable livelihoods could be directly undermined by financial and trade liberalization. There is indeed a necessity to act at the level of macroeconomic policy and the labour market. It is argued that a vicious cycle ensues whereby “men earn more, making the returns to male schooling higher, so boys are sent to school more often than girls. Girls then grow up lacking the education they need to compete. Cultural traditions may reflect and reinforce economics, especially in poor rural settings.”

Some countries have begun to introduce reforms in the labour laws and other aspects of employment. For instance, India adopted in 2004 a national policy on street vendors, who are mainly women. The policy includes provisions on vendors’ legal status, designation of vending zones, promotion of vendor associations, access to credit and social security benefits for vendors, and integration of street vendors in urban zoning and development. In the People’s Republic of China, the law on the protection and rights of women was recently amended to make sexual harassment unlawful. In Viet Nam, a gender equality law is being drafted that is expected to address employment issues related to women. The Mongolian Government plans to introduce new legislation on workplace discrimination. Legislation has also been established to ensure enhanced representation of women in key political institutions and processes. Several countries, including India and Pakistan, have mandated a quota for women in elected, local self-government bodies.

2.2.3 Institutional mechanisms: Mere policy formulations are not adequate, and even legislation may remain ineffective, if suitable institutional mechanisms are not created to oversee and monitor the policies. Towards this end, many countries have established special organizational arrangements. Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic have set up specific bodies tasked with monitoring gender parity in education. Indonesia has created a dedicated unit within the education ministry that is responsible for ensuring gender equity is planned for and monitored, in consultation with the Coordinating Ministry of Women’s Empowerment. It is mandated to ensure gender mainstreaming of all Government policies and strategies, including for education, to ensure equitable access to and benefits from education provision.

Some countries have established constitutional bodies, such as the National Commission for Women in India, on the lines of National Human Rights Commission. India has also recently established a National Commission for Protection of Child Rights, which explicitly uses the Convention on the Rights of the Child framework for action. Sri Lanka has recently announced a
National Plan of Action for Women detailing several measures. And Maldives adopted a Gender Management System in 2003 to streamline gender-related concerns in educational governance.

These policy measures and mechanisms have undoubtedly brought gender concerns to centre stage in development policymaking. But actual progress at the ground level has been slow. Even as gender disparities in education are reduced, other gender differences tend to persist – in labour market opportunities, legal rights, and the ability to participate in public life and decision-making. Thus, a policy framework must often look beyond actions within the education sector.

Gender-biased norms of institutional functioning and public bodies are not often explicitly observable but are embedded in the hierarchies, work practices and organizational beliefs. Unchallenged gender biases and stereotypes within organizations seriously constrain efforts to achieve true gender equality. Although there had been progress in formulating policies, setting up the infrastructure to dismantle deeply entrenched organizational values that discriminate against women in subtle and insidious ways is not easy. Effective action in this regard requires strong commitment on the part of the top leadership to push ahead necessary reforms and legislations reforms with a gender perspective. Equally important is the role of the civil society in facilitating transformation of social attitudes and perspectives among the people at large.

3. Snapshot of progress in the Asian subregions: What do the numbers tell?

The Dakar Framework of Action for EFA called for elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005. Further, it called for achieving gender equality in education by 2015. Reviewing the situation across the world, the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 concludes, “The gender parity goal has been missed, and gender equality remains elusive.” Does this statement reflect the situation in the two subregions of Asia-Pacific? Perhaps, yes. However, a sweeping conclusion of this kind should not be allowed to undermine the efforts and progress made during recent years. In fact, figures show that almost every country in the region has come closer to reaching the goals.

Yet, despite the formal commitments and observable progress in quantitative terms, neither the goal of parity nor that of gender equality has made sufficient progress. The following section presents a brief picture of the situation in the two subregions of Asia-Pacific in a comparative frame with respect to selected indicators of gender parity and equality.

3.1 Bridging gender disparities in education

If eliminating gender disparity at the entry level of education is the concern, worldwide progress is substantial: 94 girls started Grade 1 for every 100 boys in 2005, compared to 91 girls in 1999. Within Asia, however, the group of countries in South and West Asia is behind the global average. It is nonetheless heartening to observe a significant increase in the gender parity index (GPI), from 0.83 to 0.92, for this subregion.

Although the Asian region is also making steady progress in reducing gender disparity with respect to secondary enrolment ratios, the situation is far from satisfactory. In particular, South Asia still had only 79 girls enrolled for every 100 boys in 2005. Gender parity figures at tertiary levels are quite intriguing. UIS data show that, in general, gender disparity has widened over the years in favour of women in tertiary enrolment. However, this is not so in most parts of Asia. Women continue to be at a disadvantage, with GPIs of 0.74 and 0.92 in South (and West) Asia, and East Asia-Pacific, respectively. This is possibly due to continued low transition rates for girls in different stages of school education (see figures 1 and 2 in Annex).
3.1.1 Achieving gender parity – Country prospects: The regional and subregional averages mask more than reveal the underlying problems. Educational reality in Asia, home for close to 60 per cent of the world’s children, is characterized by high levels of disparities across and within countries. While some countries have achieved near universal participation in basic education, others have continued to lag, particularly those in the South Asian peninsula.

Table 1: Country prospects for achieving parity in primary and secondary education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender parity in secondary education</th>
<th>Achieved or likely to be achieved in 2005</th>
<th>Likely to be achieved by 2015</th>
<th>Likely to be achieved by 2025</th>
<th>At risk of not being achieved in 2015 or 2025</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieved or likely to be achieved in 2005</td>
<td>Bangladesh, China, Cook Islands, Indonesia, Myanmar, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Maldives, Mongolia</td>
<td>Australia, Kiribati, Malaysia, Nauru, New Zealand, Philippines, Samoa, Vanuatu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely to be achieved by 2015</td>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Cambodia, India, Nepal, Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely to be achieved by 2025</td>
<td>Vietnam, Macao (China)</td>
<td>Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tokelau, Tonga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table 5.3, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 (based on past trends, 1991–2005, all countries with GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 are considered to have achieved parity)

The gender parity index must be considered with caution for the figures beyond the universal compulsory education period. Although one may appreciate Bangladesh’s progress in gender parity in primary schooling, for example, it is necessary to be cautious with respect to parity figures at the secondary stage. Data on participation levels and completion rates show the country has a long way to go in improving overall education participation levels, even in primary schooling. Specifically, data show that the survival rate to Grade 5 is only 65 per cent, and the primary cohort completion rate for the school year ending 2004 was only 55 per cent; in addition, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) at the secondary level is only 47 per cent.

Similarly, UNESCO data indicate that Myanmar had a 2003 GPI of nearly 0.949, but primary school enrolment was only 84 per cent. The situation of Vietnam requires greater in-depth analysis because, in general, it has been doing quite well among the Mekong Region countries. The data highlights serious problems with several South Asian countries, and also the small Pacific Island countries. Gender parity, therefore can be used as a benchmark of progress only where a country is showing universal completion of primary schooling, not just enrolment, as well as enhanced levels of participation in secondary and tertiary levels.

Some critical questions are being examined in this context. What is the proportion of children who fail to enter even primary school or drop out after enrolling without completing the full
cycle? What is the proportion of girls among the out-of-school children in countries of Asia? Are girls moving up and attending secondary school?

3.1.2 Girls among out-of-school children: All countries specify the official age for entering primary school and also the age group in which children are supposed to be in the primary cycle of schooling. Data available in this regard raise some critical issues in this regard. For instance, a substantial proportion of out-of-school children in regions that are relatively better developed in educational provision – including East Asia and the Pacific – are likely to enter school late. On the other hand, in South West Asia, along with the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of children who are not likely to enrol in school at all is highest (see Figure A3 in Annex).

What proportion of these out-of-school children are girls? Has the situation improved during recent years? Figure 1 shows there has been a distinct decline in the number of out-of-school children in almost all countries of Asia-Pacific. Between 1999 and 2005, for the 19 countries from the two subregions for which data are available, the general trend has been of substantial reduction in the number of out-of-school children. However, an assessment of the change in share of girls in the total number of out-of-school children in various countries is a cause for serious concern, as the general trend is one of increase and not reduction. Even though the sample of countries covered is small, it highlights the need to proactively focus on girls’ participation and on making schools more girl child friendly.

![Figure 1: Out-of-school children and girls’ share in selected countries](image)


3.1.4 Participation in secondary schools: The use of secondary school facilities have also increased during recent years in all the countries. Participation in secondary schools is a good indicator of the quality of primary schools and their capacity to help children complete the primary cycle successfully, facilitating their entry to secondary stage of schooling. How well are girls advancing?
It is definitely not a very encouraging picture, considering that only the gross enrolment ratios are being examined. Some countries are in a critical condition as they languish at the 20 per cent level or even less; the list includes Cambodia, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands in East Asia-Pacific, and Afghanistan and Pakistan in South Asia. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Nepal are stuck at levels around 40 per cent. Despite improvements, even India has only one out of two girls attending secondary school, while Bangladesh shows a marginally negative trend receding from the 50 per cent mark in 1999.
3.2 Progress towards gender equality

Unlike gender disparity, assessing progress towards gender equality is a complex proposition. The Dakar Framework of Action for EFA does not elaborate on the operational contours of gender equality. However, there is a consensus that gender equality needs to be viewed as a cross-cutting policy goal that applies to all sectors and institutions. In terms of content, the United Nations Millennium Project has suggested that gender equality encompasses three main dimensions: (a) capabilities, including education, health, and nutrition; (b) access to resources and opportunities, including access to economic assets, such as land and infrastructure; resources, such as income and employment; and political opportunities such as representation in political bodies; and (c) security, including reduced vulnerability to violence and conflict. These dimensions, together, contribute to women’s individual well-being and enable women and girls to make strategic choices and decisions, that is, to be empowered.15

Within this broad perspective, the road map for gender equality is considered to include, along with eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education, three indicators: literacy rates, the share of women working in non-agriculture jobs and the proportion of seats women hold in national parliaments. These indicators cast light on the existing situation where even as gender disparities in education are reduced, other gender differences tend to persist – in labour market opportunities, legal rights, and the ability to participate in public life and decision-making.16 The Global Monitoring Report 2008 proposes to consider the share of women among teachers as an additional indicator of gender equality. It is argued that apart from indicating gender equality, the presence of women teachers will have a significant impact on participation and retention of girls in schools. The next section of this report keeps these propositions in view while assessing progress achieved towards gender equality in the two subregions in Asia.
3.2.1 Female youth literacy: The literacy level among youth in the age group 15–24 is an effective indicator capturing two different dimensions. On the one hand, it is in itself a useful indicator of the progress made towards gender equality. It also reflects how effectively the school system has functioned during the past decades in terms of success in enrolling and retaining students in the school system for at least the minimum number of years. Reviews of literacy figures show that adult literacy figures have improved in all countries of the subregions. But is the pace of improvement satisfactory?

The graphs in Figure 4 indicate the possibility of reaching full female youth literacy by 2015, based on current and past levels of performance. The prospects seem to be very good in many countries. However, in the South-East Asia-Pacific group, Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Papua New Guinea are likely to fall significantly short of meeting the benchmark by 2015. The situation is also unsatisfactory in South Asia, except in case of Maldives and Sri Lanka. In particular, the situation in Afghanistan, and to a considerable extent in Pakistan, is quite alarming – unless drastic steps are taken to alter the course through more focused efforts. One positive feature is that except for Afghanistan, all countries of South Asia are likely to register a fast growth in literacy during the coming years.

Overall, the outlook for gender equality as reflected by female youth literacy is still not very positive. In almost all the countries, even in those relatively well performing ones, the share of females among the total number of youth illiterates will continue to remain high in 2015.
3.2.2 Women teachers: It is generally assumed that women teachers provide good role models for girls in school; they allay parents’ fears of security issues within the school, and their presence shows that the teaching profession is a suitable aspiration for girls currently in school. Viewed from this angle, the proportion of women teachers in the system is an important indicator of progress towards gender equality. Figures reveal there are fewer women teachers in countries with high gender disparities. In India, almost all single-teacher schools (about 20 per cent of all schools) are staffed by men, and more than 70 per cent of two-teacher schools have no women teachers. However, an Oxfam report argues that “a feminization of the teaching profession – as can be seen in Sri Lanka and Maldives, at least at the primary level [and even more overwhelmingly in several countries of East Asia] – may reinforce a distorted impression of women only as nurturers and carers.”

Figure 5: Women teachers in primary schools

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**Percent Female Teachers - Primary**

**East Asia-Pacific**

- Brunei Darussalam
- Cambodia
- China
- Cook Islands
- Fiji
- Japan
- Kiribati
- Lao PDR
- Macao, China
- Malaysia
- Marshall Islands
- Myanmar
- Nauru
- Niue
- Palau
- Papua New Guinea
- Philippines
- Republic of Korea
- Samoa
- Singapore
- Solomon Islands
- Thailand
- Tokelau
- Tonga
- Vanuatu
- Viet Nam

**Percent Female Teachers - Primary**

**South Asia**

- Afghanistan
- Bangladesh
- Bhutan
- India
- Maldives
- Nepal
- Pakistan
- Sri Lanka

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The proportion of women teachers at the primary stage has been steadily rising across all countries, even though there are wide variations in the current situation and the extent of change during recent years. Overall, the East Asia-Pacific group of countries presents a fairly positive picture. Of the 28 countries for which data are available, only 6 fail to meet the 50 per cent mark. In contrast, prospects in South Asia scene are very disappointing; except for Maldives and Sri Lanka, none of the countries cross the 50 per cent mark. And the situation remained static between 1999 and 2005 in most of these countries. A possible reason for the shortage of women teachers is that female participation in secondary and tertiary schooling is quite low in most South Asian countries. It is with a view to breaking this cycle that several countries have special incentives for girls to continue studies beyond primary level and also preference is accorded for women in teacher recruitment. The situation becomes even more complex with respect to share of female teachers in secondary and tertiary levels as higher levels of educational institutions require university degrees and research experience.

**3.2.3 Work participation levels:** It is well known that around the world women continue to carry the task of caring for children, staying at home or alongside agricultural activities, and participating in unaccounted and unpaid labour. It is also well established that women’s participation in labour is critical for poverty alleviation and social empowerment in general. Although much has been written about the opportunity cost of children attending school, very little empirical work looks closely at the social and economic costs of denying half the population employment opportunities.

Comparing the situation across regions of the world on the participation of women in non-agricultural wage employment, one finds that the performance of East and South-East Asia is high on the scale, recording an average of about 40 per cent in 2005, thus, surpassing the world average of 39 per cent participation. In contrast, South Asia stands at the bottom of the league, with only 18 per cent of women employed in non-agricultural wage labour in 2005.

Overall, the participation level of women in wage labour for different countries of the two regions reveals a similar story (see Figure A4 in Annex). Surprisingly, female labour participation is among the lowest in India, despite registering high economic growth during recent years. Sri Lanka scores much lower in comparison to Bangladesh and Nepal in spite of higher educational levels among women. Similarly, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea remain far behind in both
economic and educational progress but are far above most other countries in terms of female labour participation.

This unevenness highlights the complexity of efforts required for implementing an agenda of gender equality. While progress in one domain (such as education) should improve women’s chances of success in other domains (such as employment), gender biases or other factors can weaken or break these links. For example, patterns of gender segregation in labour markets can limit women’s employment prospects even if they have comparable educational backgrounds to men. Because gender inequities exist on many levels, different policy initiatives may be needed to promote gender equality in different sectors and institutions.\(^{18}\)

\[3.2.4\] Political participation: Participation of women in political processes and decision-making is seen as one of the most critical factors that can significantly boost progress towards gender equality. Regional comparison on the share of women in parliament clearly shows that participation levels are on the rise, even though the figures fall well below the 50 per cent mark, and it is difficult to directly interpret their value in pursuing the goal of gender equality.

Two points in this regard need to be noted. First, participation in parliament and other political forums of governance acts in tandem with other factors in a virtuous cycle: Achieving high levels of education for girls and women leads to an increase in their participation in government, which in turn leads to greater efforts to promote girls’ education. When more girls go to school and more women participate in government, countries tend to embrace policies that benefit children without bias.\(^{19}\) Second, parliament is not the only forum where decisions are made that significantly influence women’s lives. In fact, there is an increasing trend in several countries of Asia to strengthen participation of women in grass-roots level structures. This includes a specified quota of seats for women being reserved in elections for local self-government bodies. This again is closely linked to education of girls, as a 1999 study concludes, “Expanded educational opportunities for females goes along with a social structure that is generally more participatory and hence, more receptive to democracy.”\(^{20}\)

The move to involve more women in governance has also been greatly influenced by promotion of civil society groups, such as farmers’ cooperatives, parent associations and women’s self-help groups, working as partners with governments for social and economic improvement. This indeed is a common feature in many countries of Asia.

4. Quality and Gender: Bridging the Learning Gaps

Governments, non-governmental organizations and donor agencies have been working intensively during the last decade and a half to improve girls’ access to formal education. These initiatives have had a clear positive impact, drawing more girls into the ambit of schooling. Total numbers of girls going to school have swelled everywhere, even if in some countries many girls are still left out. But there is an increasing realization that it is necessary to go beyond merely providing access to education. It is also not enough to study gender differentials in achievement test results. The focus of the next set of actions should be on what happens to girls who manage to enrol in school despite handicaps. There is evidence that poor quality schooling influences girls’ participation levels more negatively than boys’. The effects, of course, are not straightforward. The problem is quite complex, often embedded in the design of the school. For instance, evidence from Bangladesh, Kenya and Pakistan indicates that girls’ enrolment is more sensitive than boys’ to school quality and to specific delivery attributes, such as the presence of female teachers and sex-segregated schools and facilities, and safe transport to and from school. Addressing such
considerations is critical to increasing participation of girls in a sustained fashion and contributing to enhanced levels of learning.\textsuperscript{21}

But large-scale, systematic evidence of the quality of education that girls receive and the knowledge, skills and competencies they acquire through schooling is difficult to come across in most countries of the region. Generally, studies with large samples, and even large-scale sponsored projects on improving girls’ participation in schooling, have studied only the supply-side factors that inhibit their participation. Very little attention has been paid to which contents and processes adopted in schools may act as disincentives for families to send their girls to school. In fact, field observations indicate that families view sending boys to schools as an inevitable and normal practice, irrespective of what is delivered as education; but the same families are unconvinced of the value of sending their girls to schools when no tangible outcomes are seen. Schools have fared poorly in convincing families, particularly poorer families, that girls’ education has value.

Governments in many countries are currently sponsoring programmes to improve school effectiveness and enhance learning levels. This chapter presents a brief overview of evidence from selected countries and highlights issues for reflection emerging from this evidence.

4.1 Quantity and quality are interlinked

How does school quality affect girls’ participation and learning? There are only sporadic studies of this issue. However, several studies suggest that standard aspects of school quality have a stronger impact on girls’ education than boys’\textsuperscript{22}. For instance, a study in Bangladesh found that increases in indicators of teacher quality raise girls’ enrolment or reduce their dropout probability, while having no effect on boys. It was also observed in the same study that having separate toilet facilities for boys and girls increased girls’ enrolment and improved their grades. A study in rural India reported that several measures of school quality have larger or more significant impact on girls’ primary enrolment than boys’; the most impressive difference came from providing midday meals in schools, which raised female enrolment by 15 per cent. A study in Pakistan found that merit-based grade promotion had greater impact on girls’ school continuation than boys’. It was also observed that in many countries, the school learning environment favoured boys over girls, for reasons such as a lack of female teachers, unfavourable teacher treatment of girls in class, sexual harassment by male teachers or students, and curricula and textbooks that present favourable adult role models only for boys.\textsuperscript{33} To the extent that these factors hinder girls’ ability to learn, they reduce parental incentives to invest in daughters’ education by reducing the benefits of their education relative to sons’ (in addition potentially to prompting girls’ own decisions to withdraw). Viewed from this angle, it is important to consider general quality indicators in different countries of the region as a means of improving girls’ education. The Global Monitoring Report 2008 identifies five such indicators: survival rate to Grade 5, pupil/teacher ratio, percentage of female teachers, training status of teachers and public expenditure on primary education. This subsection will discuss data for four of these indicators: survival rate, pupil/teacher ratio, percentage of female teachers and teacher training status. Comparable data on public expenditure could not be found for many countries of the region.

4.2 Improving survival rates

Are schools able to retain girls for the full cycle of primary schooling? This is the most important question to be examined with respect to school quality. Often, entrance enrolment figures go up, but children do not complete even the first cycle of education.
Survival rates are going up in all countries; only Bangladesh shows a marginal reduction. Compared to 1999 figures, on average, 10 per cent more girls survived until the end of the last grade of the cycle in 2004. However, the situation is far from satisfactory, as around 30–40 per cent of girls leave school before reaching the last grade. Interestingly, some countries, such as Bangladesh and the Philippines, which show relatively low survival rates, have high scores on overall gender parity for primary and secondary education. As noted earlier, almost every country provides special incentives to ensure that children, in particular girl children, complete at least primary education.

4.3 Pupil/Teacher Ratio and Percentage of Women Teachers

Two questions are pertinent. First, are there enough teachers? This is indicated at the aggregate level by the pupil/teacher ratio. Second, are they professionally equipped to teach effectively?
Data in Figure 8 (title should read pupil/teacher ratio) show that some countries, such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Cambodia, have serious problems with teacher supply. The national averages in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, India, Nepal and Pakistan are also marginally worse than the overall average. In fact, national averages do not give the real picture. There are large variations between schools in all these countries, which indicates that inefficient management of teacher resources is the problem, rather than availability. Further, as noted earlier, most countries are making efforts to recruit more female teachers, which poses additional complications. Interestingly, on average, countries with better teacher supply also seem to have higher proportions of female teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students (%)</th>
<th>Teachers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lao Loum</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao Theung</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao Soung</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Ethnic Mismatch in Lao PDR Primary Schools – 2005 (Source: EFA MDA Report – Lao PDR, 2008)

But in South Asia, a lack of trained teachers is a serious problem, particularly in Afghanistan (only 36 per cent of teachers have professional training), Bangladesh (48 per cent), the Maldives (64 per cent) and Nepal (31 per cent). Even in countries where more than 70 per cent of teachers have professional training, one finds wide variation across different regions. For instance, in India, the North Eastern States have a very low proportion of trained teachers. In most countries, hilly areas and areas inhabited by ethnic and linguistic minority groups suffer from a lack of trained teachers. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic case illustrated in Table 2 highlights this imbalance. Similar situations exist in several countries for religious and linguistic minority groups.

4.4 Are children acquiring basic learning competencies in schools?

Learning should be the central objective of education. Yet, there is no systematic evidence about the performance of school systems on this indicator. Sample studies conducted in some countries indicate that the situation is far from satisfactory. For example, in a survey conducted in 2006 in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, only one per cent of children completing fifth grade were found to have reached a level of competency in mathematics that would allow them to continue their studies further; the corresponding figure for language was 17 per cent. A study conducted in Pakistan found that when tested at the end of third grade, a bare majority had mastered the first grade mathematics curriculum, and only 31 per cent could correctly form a sentence with the word ‘school’ in the vernacular (Urdu). One of the key findings of a survey conducted in 28 states in India was that 47 per cent of children in class five could not even read a class two text fluently. Specifically, in class one, 38.2 per cent could not read alphabets and 53.7 per cent could not identify numbers; in class two, 76.7 per cent could not read a class one text and 75.0 per cent could not do subtraction; and in class five, 47.0 per cent of children could not read a class two text and 54.6 per cent could not do division. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2006, published by Pratham, indicated that half of all children in the country began lagging behind in class one and continued to lag in the achievement of expected competencies in classes three and five. It is not adequately recognized that many children, especially those from economically disadvantaged families and communities, are first generation learners. The adults in their households are often uneducated. There is not enough support, space, opportunity, time, interest or input at home to support and strengthen children’s learning so that they can succeed in
the formal school system.\textsuperscript{27} This observation on first generation learners, particularly those from marginalized groups, needs special attention, as it is a common feature applicable to many countries under review.

Neither the East Asia/Pacific region nor the South Asia region has conducted any multi-country comparative surveys to throw light on this issue at the regional level. However, several countries have begun conducting national surveys to assess the status of learning achievement among schoolchildren. (See Table A2 in the Annex.) Again there are no means of ascertaining whether and how the authorities have been using the results of such surveys to improve teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes in schools. It is difficult to conclude from these assessments if there is any significant gender difference in learning outcomes. International assessments indicate that girls consistently perform better than boys in language test scores. Girls outperform boys even in countries with significant gender disparities in enrolment. Although boys have long outperformed girls in mathematics, in most surveys at all grades, differences in favour of girls are appearing.\textsuperscript{28} These are positive indications that given adequate opportunity, girls may not be at a disadvantage in learning outcomes. Yet, these results come largely from the developed world, where learning support systems are quite good. In contrast, the 2005 results for the Secondary School Certificate in Bangladesh showed that girls were less likely than boys to be entered for the final examination and less likely to pass, and that these imbalances combined to make a 12 per cent gender gap in pass rates. There were similar disparities in terms of subject and school choice, and even bigger gaps at the tertiary level. A casual look at closing the gender gap in enrolment in Bangladesh can lead to misleading assumptions that boys are now at a disadvantage. Overall, this is most definitely not the case.\textsuperscript{29}

It is clear that merely attending school does not guarantee that girls benefit from it. Poor learning achievement in primary school affects the education prospects of girls more than boys. With poor learning outcomes, many girls suffer silent exclusion even while attending school. While most families view sending boys to schools as an inevitable and normal practice regardless of what and how much they learn, the same families question the value of sending girls to school. The general rhetoric of macro correlations between female education and development cannot convince poor families, who need to see perceptible changes in their lives and environment. Unfortunately, the quality of education provided in many schools is insufficient to meet these expectations.

What are governments doing to improve the quality of education delivered in schools and meet these legitimate expectations? The \textit{Global Monitoring Report 2008} identifies three sets of critical provisions that are essential to improving the quality of learning in school, both in general and for girl children in particular. The first set relates to improving the curriculum and textbooks adopted. The second set relates to making the school environment girl-friendly. The third set focuses on enhancing the quality of teachers and the teaching-learning process.

\subsection*{4.5 Reforming curriculum and textbooks from a gender perspective}

Revision of curriculum and textbooks has been on the agenda of almost every country of the region in the post-Dakar period. Two major principles that have guided recent efforts are: (a) increased focus on competencies/outcomes; this was an explicit goal of reform efforts in Cambodia and Indonesia and has received further impetus from national testing programmes in most of the countries of the region; and (b) recasting the curriculum and textbooks to become more learner-centred; the National Curriculum Framework developed recently in India advocates for child-centred cooperative learning. Textbooks have been recast to emphasize this approach in the teaching-learning process. Flexibility to accommodate local and cultural diversity has also guided reform efforts in several countries in East Asia. While introduction of bilingual or mother
tongue education programmes has underscored efforts in Cambodia, Indonesia and Viet Nam, madrasa education reform has been an important feature of efforts in Pakistan and the Philippines.

It is widely recognized that curricula and textbooks are powerful instruments in influencing the perceptions of the new generation and transforming prevalent norms of social behaviour into those characterized by gender equality. While all countries have made an effort in this direction, the ‘gender mainstreaming’ strategy has most shaped actions in the countries of East Asia. Some countries have initiated ‘gender audits’ of textbooks to remove stereotyped depictions of sex roles. It is difficult to know how comprehensive these efforts have been. Often, these efforts are part of donor-supported curriculum reform projects confined to the early grades of schooling. Further, they may not encompass all subjects effectively. As the Beijing Platform for Action pointed out, “Science curricula in particular are gender-biased. Science textbooks do not relate to women’s and girls’ daily experience and fail to give recognition to women scientists. Girls are often deprived of basic education in mathematics and science and technical training, which provide knowledge they could apply to improve their daily lives and enhance their employment opportunities. Advanced study in science and technology prepares women to take an active role in the technological and industrial development of their countries, thus necessitating a diverse approach to vocational and technical training. Technology is rapidly changing the world and has also affected the developing countries. It is essential that women not only benefit from technology, but also participate in the process from the design to the application, monitoring and evaluation stages.”

There is now greater awareness among curriculum makers and textbook writers of the value of designing educational inputs that are more gender sensitive. Taking these efforts beyond funded projects and making them a standard feature of national policies and programmes will possibly remain a long-term goal.

4.6 Making school environments girl friendly

It is difficult to state with any clarity what constitutes a girl-friendly learning environment. Certain infrastructural components can be identified, such as separate sanitary facilities for boys and girls, or having women teachers in every school. But this is not all. The school environment is greatly influenced by styles of interaction both inside and outside the classroom. The complex set of factors that influence girls’ participation and learning in school is captured in the following quote: “Parents withdraw girls from school if they perceive that their daughters are not learning anything; or worse, that they are vulnerable to abuse, attack and humiliation on school grounds. Yet many schools in poor, rural areas (and urban slums) lack even the basics needed to function. They frequently have far fewer resources, offer fewer hours of instruction, and attain far worse results, than schools in more affluent areas…. Construction of safe and private toilet facilities for girls should be mandatory. Strong sanctions against the sexual abuse and harassment of girl pupils must be enacted and enforced.”

Examining the status of girls’ education, the State of the World’s Mothers reiterates: “Girls are also deprived of education when the school environment is hostile to them (when they fear violence and intimidation in the classroom by male teachers and pupils, for example); when schools are located at a distance parents believe is too far for girls to travel safely; or when school facilities are designed in ways that girls find unacceptable (for instance, when they lack separate toilets for boys and girls).”

All countries are making serious efforts to provide proper physical facilities in schools. Yet, the task is far from complete. Many schools function with less than minimal physical infrastructure. Yet, while assessing the availability of infrastructure is relatively easy, monitoring whether infrastructure is effective and functional is very difficult. Several countries in the region, such as Cambodia, India, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Nepal, are struggling to meet
infrastructural standards that can be considered fully gender sensitive and girl friendly. As noted earlier, making the school safe for children, free from physical and mental abuse, is a major issue confronting all countries. Small-scale surveys carried out in many countries show that abusive behaviour is widespread. Recruiting more women teachers would alleviate the problem to some extent, but may not solve it completely. Many countries have launched gender sensitization workshops for teachers and administrators to counter this problem. Increased community involvement in school management is also seen as effective in making schools safer places for children in general and girls in particular.

Another factor is that many countries in the region are frequently ravaged by natural disasters leading to displacement of large numbers of families. It is well known that quality education is the first casualty of natural disasters and that women and children are the worst affected in such circumstances. It is important to explore ways to ensure provision of quality education despite such eventualities, which have become too frequent across the region to be taken as exceptions.  

4.7 Focus on improving teachers and the teaching-learning process

4.7.1 Protecting the Professional Status of Teachers: Teachers are the central figures in improving learning in schools. It is widely acknowledged that availability of well-trained and qualified teachers in adequate numbers is the key to improving learning in schools. Therefore, most countries spend huge amounts on teachers’ salaries and on continuing their training while in service. In fact, teacher training is the most prominent item, apart from provision of textbooks and learning materials, in the education development projects being implemented in most countries. Yet, as noted earlier, many poorer countries face serious shortages of qualified teachers. Several of these countries, including India, have resorted to recruiting contract teachers, most of whom are less qualified and receive lower compensation than regular teachers. While such measures may be expedient to meet expanding enrolments, their long-term impact has to be carefully examined. The Global Campaign for Education argues that “a first priority should be improving the status, pay and support of teachers, especially those teachers posted to rural or ‘difficult’ areas.” Longstanding quotas for gender parity among rural teachers should be backed up with efforts to extend and improve teacher training facilities in both rural and urban areas and additional incentives and career development opportunities for female teachers willing to work in rural areas.

4.7.2 Decentralized Teacher Support: Providing on-site support to teachers is another important strategy adopted in several countries of the region. This is being accomplished mainly by creating local teacher resource centres to help the teachers at a small number of schools in the same neighbourhood. While these centres are a positive step, quality of teaching has not yet been greatly improved. One reason for this could be lack of coherence in the various parts of the system. For instance, while teachers are trained in certain methods (e.g., multigrade teaching), this training may not be reinforced at resource centres or be a part of direct assistance from visiting resource persons and supervisors. Thus, teachers often do not master or internalize new techniques (as evidenced by observations of classroom performance). More coherence among all its parts could improve the system's impact on classroom teaching and student learning. It should be noted that gender concerns are invariably built into the content and delivery of all these in-service programmes. Pre-service teacher training has also been reviewed and revised in many countries in recent years, but only to a limited extent.

4.7.3 Focus on the teaching-learning process: Are teaching-learning processes changing and becoming more effective? Are teachers more sensitive to gender concerns in their classrooms? There are no large-scale, systematic assessments of either the effectiveness or the gender
sensitivity of classroom processes. Even when classroom observations are carried out, quantitative indicators don’t shed light on gender-specific treatment of students at the school level. Difficulty in making teachers appreciate that ‘less vocal girls are as likely as boys to answer a question’ is just one example of gender-sensitive thinking that must be inculcated at the classroom level Changing often unintended, though culturally rooted, behaviour is challenging. While there have been many improvements in school quality, gender inequality in teaching and learning processes remains a serious problem. This may be because strategies for adding gender awareness to the daily behaviour of teachers, learners and parents are not deep enough to change the real dynamic of gender perceptions and relationships in society. This criticism has been made of the overall approach for analysing gender in EFA, which pays little attention to gendered processes of learning, the conditions in which women teachers work, the way their work is regarded by their societies, or the meanings that children make and take from the images they see in textbooks. Changing behaviour in classrooms and transforming teacher attitudes and perspectives cannot be a short-term agenda, since change will come slowly.

To conclude on the issue of quality and gender, there is an urgent need to look beyond cognitive outcomes in defining school quality. Quantitative assessment of enrolment and retention levels and measurement of learning outcomes help assess the practices being adopted to bring more girls into school and acquire basic competencies. But they do not help understand the causes if progress is unsatisfactory. It is necessary to recognize that gender inequalities cannot be addressed apart from racial, ethnic and caste affiliations. While some acknowledgement is made of differences between rural and urban girls, there is little engagement with complex social differences. It is necessary to encompass school quality and equity in a common framework, not pursue these as two distinct agendas with unconnected means and strategies. A definition of school quality that overemphasizes input provisions or scholastic learning outcomes measured through large-scale testing is not likely to help improve gender equality or create a favourable learning environment.

5. Lessons, Challenges and the Way Ahead

Every country in Asia, with very few exceptions, has improved enormously in recent years in bringing more girls into school and reducing gender disparities at primary and secondary levels. Yet, there is no scope for complacency. Many countries have inefficient and poor quality schools which hamper progress, even in improving participation. This section describes some strategies that have worked effectively in many countries of the region and points out challenges that remain inadequately addressed.

5.1 Reconfiguring policies and programmes at the macro level

Sustained advocacy at national and international levels has resulted in heightened concern among planners and policy makers in all countries. This has taken the shape of ‘gender mainstreaming’ in many East Asian countries. Gender audit, gender budgeting and such other instruments have also come in vogue to inject gender concerns into policy making and programme formulation. But these are still the early days. In most countries, these processes are carried out just in project mode or informally through civil society organizations and other stakeholders. The challenge is to make the process systemic. This would require intensified action on several fronts. Three areas of policy making need special consideration.

5.1.1 Rights framework for pursuing gender goals: Many countries have established laws and mechanisms to provide free education for all, reinforcing equality among gender, class, caste, ethnic, linguistic and regional affiliations. Yet, as the Dakar Declaration and several other
international conventions such as CEDAW emphasize, it is necessary to create a comprehensive rights framework for providing education on a non-discriminatory basis, with gender equality as an integral requirement in all policies and programmes. To be effective, this framework has to be supported adequately by legislative measures.

5.1.2 Strengthening institutional mechanisms: Taking forward an agenda of gender equality demands creating and strengthening institutional mechanisms like human rights bodies that have the power to oversee and guarantee implementation of gender-equality principles as basic human rights. While this has to be a cross-cutting measure concerning all sectors, programmes in the education sector must be more proactive; they have to rectify existing imbalances through positive discrimination measures favouring girls and women in admissions, recruitment processes or financial support and incentives. Such measures can be found in the education sectors of many countries of the region. However, they still have limited reach in most countries, as they are often included as projects within donor-supported initiatives, not made standard government policies. This is an important distinction, as projects have relatively short life cycles and only selected components get institutionalized beyond the life of a project.

5.1.3 Focus on hard-to-reach and marginalized children: There is no doubt that school systems throughout the region have expanded rapidly in recent years. But, will generalized expansion of schools address the particular problems faced by girls? Proactive policies and actions are needed to level the playing field, so that girls – especially those who are poor, live at lower rungs of class and caste hierarchies, are urban displaced and street children, live in rehabilitation camps and reside in remote rural pockets – can benefit from educational expansion equally or in greater measure than boys. As enrolments continue to expand, more effort will be needed to meet the schooling needs of these hard-to-reach girls, at the entry level but even more at higher levels, to ensure that they continue and complete schooling. The problem is that national programmes find the number of such children in the total school population quite small, and therefore fail to pay them adequate attention. They may be few, but their right to an education is as precious as anyone else’s.

5.2 Enhancing participation

Intensive efforts made in the last decade and a half to bring more girls to school and establish gender parity seem to be showing positive results throughout the Asia/Pacific region. Overall progress can be observed as growth in female enrolment outpaces that of boys. In fact, some countries of East Asia, such as Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand, have begun to face the problem of ‘reverse disparity’, with more girls than boys in school. While enrolling all girls in school is the first step, the more difficult next step is to retain them in school and ensure that they progress to secondary school. To this end, educational planners have been engaged in designing and implementing innovative strategies for expanding and improving the school system. Some specific strategies seem to have worked well and could be emulated by others, with appropriate adaptations.

5.2.1 Schools at safe walking distance: Building more schools and hiring additional teachers has been the core agenda pursued in recent years. Population size has traditionally been one of the main criteria for locating new schools. The new concern which has been added, keeping particularly the girl child in view, is, “Is the location safe enough for the girl to walk?” This effort to bring schools closer to habitations has been a critical element in increasing enrolment and eliminating non-participation of girls at the first stage of schooling. Apart from making it easier for the young child to walk to school, a safe location has also helped in countering cultural resistance in several countries where parents hesitate to allow their girls to go alone outside the
5.2.2 Bridge programmes to mainstream out-of-school children: In spite of all efforts, many girls continue to drop out of school before completing even primary schooling. Should they be abandoned? In order to ensure that they do not miss out on education altogether, ‘bridge’ programmes have been designed to rechannel relatively older out-of-school girls into the mainstream of schooling. Bridge schemes, which require attending intensive residential and non-residential camps for a few months to a year, have been quite successful, particularly in South Asia. Through these programmes, children are not only equipped with cognitive competencies to reenter mainstream schools at appropriate grades, but they also receive training in life skills.

5.2.3 Placing the community at the centre of action: Another successful strategy has been to change the paradigm of planning – moving from a supply-oriented strategy to a demand-based one. Recognizing that merely creating school facilities based on externally determined criteria has not ensured the full participation of girls, in several community settings, the process of has been reversed to guarantee opening of schools or adding facilities in response to demands by community members. Approaches adopted under BRAC in Bangladesh and Lok Jumbish in India, as well as the participatory planning exercises done in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and other countries, demonstrate this principle. By placing the community at the centre of planning and action, a sense of ownership and accountability is created among parents, who utilize the facilities fully and effectively.

5.2.4 Expanding outreach through alternate modes of schooling: Yet another strategy that has helped improve participation is the adoption of a flexible policy on modes and mechanisms of delivery. A variety of structures, such as alternate schools, informal centres, community schools, satellite schools and so on, has emerged in recent years, and this pluralist perspective has significantly enhanced the participation of girls in many countries. One could consider the ongoing effort in some countries to give modern education through madrassahs as part of such efforts. The donor community has also actively supported moves to create alternate channels in many countries. In fact, some governments are also viewing this as a viable option for expanding schooling to hitherto unreached groups. Appointing teachers, invariably women, from the local community to such schools has helped overcome the resistance of traditional parents, for whom girls’ participation in schooling is culturally alien.

5.2.5 Some reflections on the expansion strategies: The effectiveness of the above strategies in bringing girls to school, particularly those who would have otherwise been excluded, cannot be contested. However, they do pose certain critical questions that need reflection. Are these non-traditional schools fair to the children who are enrolled in them? A large proportion of such schools being established in remote rural locations are small, single-teacher institutions with very little academic infrastructure. Often they employ locally available instructors who may be under-qualified and even underpaid. Because, except for some NGO-managed systems, these are very small schools, they remain unviable both academically and economically. Possibilities for upgrading their infrastructure and quality are few. An insightful analysis in India found that a virtual hierarchy of access is emerging, with the nature of the school provided corresponding to the marginalized status of the children. Poor children by definition are handicapped by poor levels of endowment in their homes. Fair provision demands that they have access to schools at least as well endowed as those
provided for the not-so-poor, and that they are, perhaps, given even better schools to compensate for the poor endowments at home.

An additional cause for concern is that such efforts are being glamourized by many projects and studies as cost-effective alternatives. Following these suggestions, governments, many of which are already cash-strapped, have begun to adopt nontraditional schools as the standard practice, seriously damaging prospects of putting in place a stable and academically viable system. This is particularly true for teacher recruitment, as many countries, despite receiving development assistance for long periods, have not progressed adequately towards building a well-developed cadre of professional teachers, even while the number of ad hoc contract teachers keeps rising. Will this not lead to the gradual de-professionalization of teaching? What is the long term impact of these measures?

These questions do not necessarily deny the positive contribution of the diversification strategy. But without adequate attention to fairness of provision, they may deepen social and gender inequality. This process may lead to an informal and implicit legitimization of offering small/non-formal education to girls and formal, full primary schools to boys; or private, fee-paying schools for boys and government free schools for girls. Further, recognizing that these are only short-term solutions, nontraditional schools need to develop clear pathways and linkages with the formal system so that they do not become ‘ghettos’ for girls and poor students. At the time of enrolment in primary school, schools for continuing education at higher grades, including secondary schools, should be identified and specified for each child. This implies that formal, full-fledged schools also have to show flexibility, so that eventual transfer is facilitated and encouraged.

Finally, it is important that investments made in such projects and programmes cumulatively reflect substantial improvement in the education available to the poor and marginalized, instead of condemning them permanently to the backwaters of the system. This focus is critical, as financial constraints are likely to continue in most developing countries. Governments and international donors should not treat fiscal constraints as temporary crises and adopt short-term, ad hoc solutions that increase the eventual cost of adjustment and, more importantly, undermine educational outcomes and fairness of provision. Policy makers must evolve a more focused, long-term vision to meet requirements of both quality and equality.

5.2.6 Reducing the cost burden: International reviews show that school fees contribute to the continuing exclusion of poor, rural girls. When parents can only afford to keep one child in school, daughters usually lose out. Most countries in Asia have, indeed, abolished tuition fees and/or provide fee exemptions for poor students; some countries provide this exemption specifically for girls throughout their school career. But tuition fees are not the only financial burden that poor families have to bear. They have to pay for textbooks, notebooks, transportation, school uniforms and so on. These are apart from the ‘opportunity costs’ involved, which is more than simply the income lost from paid child labour. In particular, the issue of girls as sibling caregivers, its impact on family income and its negative impact on the girl’s school participation, requires serious consideration. Because of these inequalities, several countries have in recent years adopted programmes of ‘direct cash transfer’ to families. In most cases, these are conditional transfers depending on the regularity of the girl’s participation in school. Studies show a positive impact of such measures on girls’ school attendance. In fact, several countries have also introduced non-monetary support to girls in the form of free uniforms and textbooks. Some countries also offer nutritional food supplements in schools to offset the disadvantages of dietary imbalances and malnutrition, which are serious handicaps for girls’ development and learning abilities. The programmes represent proactive steps to secure school participation by the poor in general and by girls in particular.
These programmes must be managed efficiently and evaluated by several measures. First, do girls really get the full benefit of these incentive schemes? Corruption and mismanagement often accompany incentives. Second, these measures have been introduced at different times and their effects are measured and monitored as single-factor solutions. Do they mutually reinforce in improving the school life of girls? Third, evaluations are done only at the macro level using attendance figures supplied by schools as the main criteria. This is hardly adequate, as the core issue is if these efforts are transforming family dynamics in favour of continuing the girl’s education beyond primary level to secondary and tertiary levels. Finally, if incentives are being introduced through external assistance projects, as is the case in many countries, critiques are apprehensive of the ability of governments to sustain them long enough to make a lasting impact on the life of the girl children. On the whole, it is essential to view incentives as part of a larger package of social protection specifically targeting girls and poor households, rather than hurriedly seeing their impact on school attendance as the criterion of success or failure.

5.2.7 Expanding opportunities for secondary schooling: As the participation level in primary school improves, which is happening fairly fast, it is essential that plans are made to rapidly expand secondary schools. With this in view, some countries have extended free education to secondary level. So there is an opportunity to ensure gender equality as a central part of policy development in this area also. Further, as the agenda for expanding secondary schooling with gender equality moves forward, it will be necessary to better understand both the demand side barriers (for example, lack of labour market opportunities for girls, indirect costs of secondary education particular to girls – transport, accommodation) and supply side factors (such as adequate numbers of school places and appropriately trained teachers).

As with primary school, several governments have initiated incentive schemes to get more girls enrolled in secondary school. Offering girls stipends to enrol has been particularly effective, as they not only increase enrolment but also offer an incentive to complete primary school. There are several concomitant advantages. For instance, in Bangladesh, districts where secondary school bursaries were offered experienced a sharp decrease in child marriages. A similar scheme in India indirectly encourages families to redress the alarming population imbalance caused by son-preference by giving stipends only to families with a single girl child. As the UN Millennium Project has argued persuasively, secondary and higher levels of education provide the highest returns for women’s empowerment in terms of employment opportunities and impact on age of marriage, fertility and health, as well as the health and education of children (especially girls). Irrespective of the underlying motivation, secondary school stipends will probably have a positive indirect effect on primary enrolment for girls, which would increase the pressure to expand secondary schools.

5.2.8 Creating girl-friendly school environments: It is common to refer to girls who leave school without completing the full cycle as drop-outs. This term blames the girls for not finishing school, or at best implicates the parents. But aren’t they in reality ‘push-outs’? Studies show that a large number of boys and girls leave school in the middle because of the uncongenial conditions that characterize many schools. A national survey in India indicated that this category could be as large as 25 per cent. So, more attention is being paid to making the school environment girl-friendly. Several factors have been identified, though it is almost impossible to draw a standard set of benchmarks to measure how friendly a school is.

In order to improve the situation, countries are making conscious attempts to appoint female teachers. Yet, some countries still lag behind in overall parity, while others have an overwhelming preponderance of women in the teaching profession. The challenge is not one of
achieving parity, but of ensuring that no school goes without at least one female teacher. In remote rural areas, qualified women may not be available. Attracting female teachers to work in schools is not easy where the infrastructure is unsuitable and there are no facilities for women teachers to live in the neighbourhood. A first priority should be improving the status, pay and support of teachers, especially those posted to rural or ‘difficult’ areas. This should be followed by efforts to expand and improve teacher training facilities, and additional incentives and career development opportunities for female teachers willing to take up posts in rural areas. An additional barrier in South Asian countries is the cultural prohibition against a woman leaving the home to work. It is particularly strong in parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Consequently, there is a close correlation between the availability of teachers and the proportion of female teachers in schools.

This situation can be addressed by flexibility in recruitment procedures or identifying local women volunteers to be officially associated with the school. Unfortunately, the rules that govern school systems are quite rigid, and such local adjustments fail to materialize. Closely linked to the issue of women teachers is that of school safety. A safe environment for girls includes close attention to the design of the school. Even more important, schools have to be made free from physical punishment and abuse. Policies are no doubt in place for achieving this goal, but more consistency and a stronger and coherent voice are required.

5.3 Improving school quality with a gender perspective

Learning is at the centre of all educational processes. Parents send their children to school because they expect them to master reading and writing and acquire knowledge. It is difficult to condone the poor performance of schools on this count. As noted earlier, poor learning levels act doubly against the interest of girls. However, it is misleading to consider school quality as synonymous with pass percentages in public examinations or placement in national league tables based on national testing. If elimination of gender-based exclusion and discrimination is a concern, the definition of school quality cannot be based solely on marks and grades, which often hide underlying inequalities. Two broad sets of factors that cause inequity in quality have to be recognized and dealt with: inequality in providing quality schools, and inequitable practices and discrimination within schools.

Inequality in provision, as discussed earlier, creates further handicaps for girl children. Inequitable practices within schools, which are more difficult to deal with, include different levels of teacher attention, expectations and valuing; different treatment within the classroom (e.g., seating arrangements, delegation of chores); and unequal access to school spaces, resources and facilities. There might be deliberate discrimination, but very often there is unconsciously differing treatment of different groups of children based on societal norms that have become internalized. A rigid curriculum and, narrow adherence to rote-learning approaches or to a single language of instruction can also result in education being more accessible and meaningful to some children than to others. Are programmes and strategies in place to counter the negative effect of such factors that cause inequity in quality?

5.3.1 Increased focus on improving school quality: Experience, as well as research findings, indicate that pan-national reform processes can improve school quality only to a limited extent.
The focus must shift to individual schools and local-level action. Many countries of the region have taken this proposition as a major strategy. Both in East Asia and South Asia several governments are adopting planning for school improvement as a core strategy for building local capacities for institutional development planning, as we well as to inject a sense of ownership and accountability into school functions. Provision of direct school grants is becoming a common feature. Another strategy adopted with considerable success across countries is the establishment of resource centres at the cluster level. It is envisaged that such resource centres located close to the action setting would succeed in transforming schools to perform more efficiently and effectively.

5.3.2 Overcoming systemic biases: It is well recognized that many kinds of social perceptions and biases that cause gender inequality are systemic and are perpetuated intergenerationally through the school system. How can teaching-learning processes and interactions, both within the school and outside, be transformed so the school becomes the springboard of eliminating systematic gender biases and prejudices? This, indeed, is a challenge. As children move to secondary and tertiary levels, for example, biases begin to operate in different ways, taking the form of differential provision of optional courses of study and special classes for boys and girls. In schools where only girls study, for example, it is not uncommon to find optional courses of study involving science and mathematics altogether unavailable. This, of course, results in unequal participation of women in a variety of occupations. More attention is needed to provide girls with facilities and conditions to learn what will be meaningful and empowering, and to prepare them for further education and employment on equal footing with their male counterparts, as well as enabling them to stay in school.

5.3.3 Using the agency of the teacher effectively: Despite the recognition of the centrality of the teacher, in the traditional management framework the education authorities, community members and teacher themselves tend to view teachers only as passive recipient individuals whose role is to implement the decisions made for the larger system. Using the agency of the teacher to transform classroom processes with a gendered perspective requires a fundamental shift in school governance. But how would this change be accomplished? This becomes a major challenge because it requires new skill sets and attitudes among all the stakeholders. Are the traditional programmes of teacher education and in-service programmes for headmasters and administrators geared to meet this challenge? This is an important question that needs to be answered. One area that needs special attention is the reform of pre-service or initial teacher training to make a gender perspective an integral component of training programmes at all levels.

5.4 Action beyond the school and the education sector

Considering that a large number of children drop out without completing even the primary cycle of schooling, it is time that much greater attention is paid to programmes for out-of-school youth and adults. This is an important strategy, because low levels of literacy and life skills are a major factor contributing to the perpetuation of girls’ exclusion from schooling in an intergenerational framework. The effectiveness of adult education programmes, however, has been uneven, and their potential impact on gender dynamics at the household level has not been fully exploited.

East Asian countries have benefited considerably from non-formal education programmes for women. Particularly, programmes with direct links to the economic life of the people have been successful in leading to the creation of durable economic assets for women. As demonstrated by Grameen Bank programmes in Bangladesh, credit is a fundamental instrument for escape from poverty for working women. Many of the successful initiatives have focused on making the credit market work for the poor. This also indicates that mere basic education through schooling may
Draft for Discussion

not fully meet the requirements of the poor. It is necessary to reclaim more active space for adult education, which appears to have become a low priority in many countries during recent years.

A common feature of successful initiatives is their emphasis on creating local neighbourhood networks. The value of such neighbourhood networks of women, commonly referred to as community-based organizations, go beyond the economic advantages that accrue. To provide a concrete example, women, female-headed households and minorities in general tend to face low levels of well-being in today’s predominantly patriarchal societies with intense racial and ethnic conflicts not because they lack incomes but because they lack capability and, even more importantly, because they tend to be socially excluded. Therefore the issue must be resolved through a larger platform of social integration and empowerment, as well as within the education sector. Women’s empowerment programmes such as Mahila Samakhya in India are an outstanding example of such a programme.

5.5 Confronting child labour

For many of the poorest families, their life cycle begins and ends, one generation after another, in a small world of debt and servitude. Deprived of basic education and steeped in intergenerational debt traps, there is no escape route available from the miseries of life. Placed in such conditions people may be forced into harmful practices. Child labour, which severely curtails girls’ educational opportunities, is one such manifestation among people living beyond the margins of economic development. Yet, education may be the only means they look to for liberating themselves from the misery.

Even the poorest families, perhaps with the exception of very abusive or callous parents, would prefer to withdraw their children from work if they can afford it. The main approach, therefore, should be to create such conditions that enable parents to send their children to school. There are many ways of implementing this. One example is to improve the wages and productivity of adult workers so their children are not compelled to contribute to the family income. Similarly, in the case of girls caring for younger siblings, an obvious solution would be to establish an adequate number of day-care centres.

In the midst of this ongoing discussion, many successful efforts have been launched, particularly through non-governmental organizations. Back-to-school campaigns are one such initiative. The programme is based on the strong conviction that full-time schooling is the only means of eliminating child labour. An important lesson to note is that mere advocacy of banning child labour is not enough. It is essential to design and implement concrete programmes of alternative education that effectively relieve children from inappropriate and harmful work.

5.6 Primary school may be too late for many girls

There is increasing empirical evidence to suggest that by the time children reach school age, it might already be difficult to stop certain types of exclusion. A large body of literature in neuroscience, psychology and cognition makes the case for early childhood interventions. In particular, it is clearly established that nutrition and cognitive stimulation early in life are crucial for long-term skill development. Undernourished children, for example, have higher rates of mortality, lower cognitive and school performance, and are more likely to drop out of school. Thus, learning starts well before the formal entry of the child to the primary school. And there is widespread conviction among educators that the benefits of pre-primary education are carried over to primary school. In particular, it is observed that teachers identify lack of academic skills as one of the most common obstacles children face when they enter school. Also, they perceive
preschool education as facilitating the process of socialization and self-control necessary to make the most of classroom learning. Unfortunately, the record of many countries in South Asia and even some in the East Asia region is quite unsatisfactory. At least one in three children in South Asia, for example, grows up malnourished, and the total number of such children in the region is staggering.

It is within this context that institutional support for children before they reach school age has gained considerable attention during recent years, particularly with respect to health and nutrition programmes. School readiness programmes and attaching preschool classes to primary schools have been used as means to increase opportunities for girls’ education by freeing them from looking after younger siblings in Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, as well as in many other countries. India has a massive programme under the banner of its Integrated Child Development Scheme to provide developmental support to children in the age group 0-6 years coupled with prenatal and post-natal care facilities for mothers. But progress remains quite slow, and commitment of resources is inadequate.

### 5.7 Creating a gender-disaggregated database

Disaggregation of data on gender lines is critical not only to assess progress but to devise strategies within a specific context. Merely gathering information at the national level, even with gender disaggregation, is not adequate because intra-country variations constitute a major challenge in most countries. Gender disaggregation must also to be accomplished with respect to social groups, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and remote and historically underdeveloped geographical areas. This is important because gender disadvantage appears to become more entrenched as the marginalized status of the social group to which girls belong increases. And is a critical requirement because analysis of field data shows a close nexus between poverty, social discrimination, geographical disadvantage and gender inequality.

### 5.8 Demarcating countries for priority action

Progress towards meeting the EFA and MDG goals on primary education and gender equality is mixed in Asian countries. Although some countries have reached or are on the threshold of reaching the goals, others are far behind and demand more innovative strategies, as well as more intensified engagement. This following section of this report identifies groups of countries that must be placed on watch. At least three such groups can be identified through analysis of various data sets.

#### 5.8.1 South Asia: This large group consists of six countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Capacity to mobilize finances from domestic sources is uneven with countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, which continue to be heavily dependent on external funding. A second significant negative factor in the region is the population size and the relatively high growth rate that will continue to place increased demand for school facilities during the years to come. A third problem is that of high intra-country disparity. For instance, while some states and subregions in India are far ahead and are very likely to reach the EFA goals before 2015, others will most likely miss the goals unless dramatic efforts are made on all fronts – including capacity, planning, policymaking and internal resource mobilization. One emerging positive factor is the increased importance being given expanded community involvement through democratic electoral processes and civil society participation. But gender disparity appears to be entrenched in all of these countries, despite overall progress. Bangladesh has perhaps made the greatest progress in bridging gender differentials. But disparities increase in all countries at higher levels of education. In India, for example, the female adult literacy rate as
well as school enrolment among girls during the past few years have shown substantial improvement, but gender differences have not been significantly reduced. The way forward may lie in strengthening civil society organizations.

5.8.2 The Mekong Region: This small group consists of Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Viet Nam. (Thailand is not included in this group because it has achieved the basic benchmark of universal participation in primary schooling and is now moving towards making 12 years of schooling universal.) These four countries have suffered prolonged conflict and political instability. The prospects of mobilizing internal resources are not bright, except in Viet Nam, because government programmes continue to depend heavily on external financial support. Cambodia and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic have attempted to establish comprehensive national plans of action, but without adequate coordination, the involvement of multiple donor agencies may be hampering the emergence of well orchestrated strategies.

On the capacity front, the countries are highly dependent on outside human resources. Neglect of the secondary and tertiary education sectors has further jeopardized the prospect of internally developing inter-educational capabilities. The brighter side is that the magnitude involved in terms of actual numbers is quite small. Therefore, a better coordinated plan for capacity building and investment in the education sector could help achieve the EFA goals before 2015 provided governance reforms receive adequate attention.

What about civil society? With the long and continued legacy of well entrenched, centralized systems of political governance, civil society organs both in the form of organized non-governmental entities and mass-based community involvement are very weak. Therefore, it is not likely that a vibrant civil society movement or even a platform of private providers will emerge in the near future.

5.8.3 The Pacific Islands: These countries consist of more than half a dozen small- to medium-size island states located in a large area and constitute the other group that must be carefully observed. The actual numbers are not very large, but the status of education development in the Pacific Island countries is disturbing. For example, the indicators for Papua New Guinea, which is one of the larger island states in the group, are no better than those found in the countries of South Asia. The problem is linked to governance, policymaking, planning, technical and managerial issues, as well as geographically disadvantageous conditions.

Gender-related indices in this context may not accurately reveal the situation. Vanuatu, for example, has an enrolment ratio of 1.03 at the secondary level, but the net enrolment rates for girls and boys are only 28 per cent and 27 per cent, respectively. Thus, about two thirds of both girls and boys are not in secondary school. Multiple language and ethnic affiliations within relatively small population groups create other major difficulties in several countries. Papua New Guinea, for example, has several hundred language groups – and the language policy for instruction in its schools continues to be an issue that has a spiralling effect on production of teaching-learning material, teacher preparation and other educational necessities. Again, because the size of the population is quite small, what is required is better planning and strategic interventions.

5.8.4 The case of the ‘E-9’ countries: Although China and Indonesia do not belong to any of these previously mentioned groups, as part of the nine most populous countries in the world, they receive closer scrutiny, along with the three large-population countries in South Asia. China has impressive school enrolment figures that indicate it has almost reached the MDG goal of
universal participation; its progress is also quite impressive regarding the gender goals. But it should be noted that there are high levels of intra-country disparities, and even with small percentages, the numbers represent several million children.

6. Conclusion

Analysis made in the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008 and MDG evaluations present a mixed picture of progress towards achieving gender-related goals by 2015 in the East Asia-Pacific and South Asia subregions. But one cannot ignore that enrolment rates for girls are rising in all countries, and gender disparity is falling in almost every country of the region. These gains are evident in some of the poorest countries. A few decades ago, girls constituted only one third of the total enrolment in primary schools. Today the gender gap has considerably narrowed, with nearly equal number of boys and girls in school, and some countries of East Asia show a reverse gender gap, with more girls than boys enrolled.

These achievements deserve celebration. But the task of achieving gender equality is far from complete, and the remaining challenges may be more difficult to overcome. The most significant challenge is that a large number of girls remain excluded from schooling. Most of these excluded belong to highly marginalized groups and generally live in hard-to-reach locations. Ensuring that such girls complete primary schooling and move up as much as boys do in the education ladder through secondary and tertiary levels is not going to be easy. It demands a better understanding of the complex situation, and the design and implementation of more innovative strategies.

When a child is never enrolled in school, leaves school without completing the elementary cycle, is withdrawn from school in midstream, or decides not to attend upper primary school or secondary school – for statistical purposes these are just events, and these children get counted and categorized as unenrolled, dropouts and so forth. But exclusion from schooling is not just an event or a statistic, and it does not represent a momentary decision. Education is denied by a complex process shaped by numerous factors in the personal life of the child and the family.

When a girl drops out of school, many events precede and contour her course of action – some located in the family, some located in the community and the peer group, and many located in the school. Understanding exclusion demands exploring these turns and twists in the personal life history of the child. Such an exploration cannot be done just by asking questions of the parents and teachers, or even of children themselves. It requires following children individually and in groups as they join school, move up through the grades or leave school altogether. This information would be critical for building a description of the complex processes involved in exclusion and delineating the underlying causes. Programmes to address this process will have to be linked to local dynamics that surround children at home, in the community and the school. Support to the girl child, in particular, will have to follow the flow of her life, over a sustained period of time and through the transforming events that surround her.

It should be recognized that bringing all girl children to school is not merely an educational action. It aims to transform the attitudes and behavioural dynamics of society, so that gender equality is seen as a value in itself worth pursuing. This cannot be achieved by traditional short-term projects. Rather, it demands sustained and long-term engagement by the State, as well as civil society.

ANNEX
Figure A1: Progress towards gender parity in access to primary schooling

Source: UIS data; illustration from Global Monitoring Report 2008, UNESCO.

Figure A2: Change in GPI for secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios
Source: UIS data; illustration from Global Monitoring Report 2008, UNESCO.
Table A1: Women’s share of the total number of researchers (head count), 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women’s share</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Women’s share</th>
</tr>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<td>Brunei Darussalam</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea, Republic of</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td><strong>Selected regional averages</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Macao (China)</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>World total</td>
<td>27%</td>
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*Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, May 2006*
Figure A4: Female labour force participation


Female labour participation rate in East Asia - Pacific 2003
age 15 and above (%)

Female Labour Force Participation rate in South Asia 2003
age 15 and above (%)
Figure A5: Women in parliament

Share of women in single or lower houses of parliament, 1990 and 2007 (Percentage)

- Oceania: 5
- Western Asia: 8
- Northern Africa: 3
- CIS*: 8
- Southern Asia: 12
- Sub-Saharan Africa: 13
- South-Eastern Asia: 17

Figure A6: Proportion of Female Teachers (%)
Table A2: National Learning Assessments – East Asia-Pacific and South Asia
(reproduced from *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Name or description of assessment study</th>
<th>Organization(s) responsible for assessment</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Curricular subject(s) assessed</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
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<td>Australia</td>
<td>National Basic Skills Test</td>
<td>New South Wales Department of Education and Training</td>
<td>Grades 3, 5</td>
<td>Literacy, numeracy</td>
<td>Pre- and post-Downing period</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(New South Wales only)</td>
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<td>State-specific subjects</td>
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<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Assessment of the Achievement of Pupils Completing Grade 6</td>
<td>MoE, National Curriculum and Textbook Board</td>
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<td>Bangla, English, math, sci, soc, sci</td>
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<td>National Assessment</td>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Grades 3, 5</td>
<td>Bangla, math, sci, soc, sci, em, sci</td>
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<td>Intensive District Approach to Education for All (IDEUAI)</td>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Grades 1, 5</td>
<td>Bangla, English, math, sci, soc, sci</td>
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<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>Learning Assessment System</td>
<td>MoE, World Bank</td>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Khmer, math</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>Planned for 2007</td>
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<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
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<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>Standardized National Diagnostic Testing</td>
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<td>Grades 4, 6</td>
<td>English,urls Mean and math</td>
<td>Yearly from 2000 to 2006</td>
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<td>Mid-term Assessment Survey</td>
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<td>Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>MoE, National Research Institute for Educational Science</td>
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<td>Primary School Achievement Test</td>
<td>MUE, Malaysian Examination Syndicate</td>
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<td>Malay, English, math, sci, Chinese, Tamil</td>
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<td>Sample testing</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Name or description of assessment study</th>
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<td>Urdu, math, English</td>
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<td>Grade 3</td>
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</table>
Notes and References

1 Huxley, Sarah, ‘An Analysis of Trends in Girls’ Education in South Asia’, Prepared for UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA), Kathmandu, December 2007 (hereafter referred to as ‘ROSA UNGEI Paper’); and Lazo, Lucy, ‘Gender Equality in Education: East Asia and the Pacific Region’ (Draft Progress Note), UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), Bangkok, 2008 (hereafter referred to as ‘EAPRO UNGEI Paper’).


4 See ‘ROSA UNGEI Paper’ for additional references. These are only illustrative of the legislation adopted in different countries. Bhutan Constitution, Article 9: 18, states, “The State shall endeavor to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation.”; and the Pakistan Constitution, Article # TK, states, “… make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work, ensuring that children and women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex.”


6 ‘EAPRO UNGEI Paper’, (p.# TK).


8 Gender mainstreaming was established as a major strategy for the promotion of gender equality during the ‘Fourth World Conference of Women’ in 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action called for gender mainstreaming in all critical areas of concern established at the Fourth World Conference, including poverty, education, health, political decision-making, economy, human rights, violence against women, armed conflict, institutional mechanisms, environment, media and the girl child. This is viewed as the effective means by which critical policies, strategies, plans and activities in all other areas of development – political, economic, social, cultural and environmental – can be influenced to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women.


9 United Nations, Putting Gender Mainstreaming into Practice, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, October 2006, (p.# TK).

10 Herz et al (1991) quoted in ROSA UNGEI paper (primary source TK)


12 For details of the experience in India, see: Bisht, Medha, and Ratna M. Sudarshan, ‘Women In Leadership Positions’, Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi, 2005, (p.# TK).


It is worthwhile to examine the specifications of the SPHERE Project in this regard and ensure that they are well adhered to.

36 R. Govinda, ‘Enhancing Learning in Indian Schools: Experiences and Challenges’, National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, 2008.
37 UNGEI EAPRO paper
39 Ibid.
40 For more details on the nature of actions in specific countries, see UNGEI EPARO paper; UNGEI ROSA paper.
46 The practice of engaging ‘mother-teachers’ from the local community evolved by the Bodh Shiksha Samiti in India is an interesting example of this kind. See for details: ‘Mother Teachers’, a monograph published by Aga Khan Foundation, New Delhi 2005.
48 See for more detailed discussion of this framework, Amanda Seel, ‘Social Inclusion: Gender and Equity In Education Swaps In South Asia–Synthesis Report’, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Katmandu.
50 Bardhan, Pranab, (Full citation TK)
53 ‘UNGEI EAPRO Paper’
55 For additional details, see: R. Govinda and Madhumita Bandyopadhyay, *Access to Elementary Education in India: Country analytical review*, Centre for International Education (CREATE), University of Sussex, Brighton, 2007 and National University of Educational Planning and Administration, New Delhi, August 2007, (p.#TK)