SOCIAL INCLUSION: GENDER AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION SWAPS IN SOUTH ASIA

SRI LANKA CASE STUDY

Swarna Jayaweera
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unicef

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ISBN 978-99946-896-4-4

Designed and processed by: WordScape, 977-1-5520755
Printed in Kathmandu, Nepal

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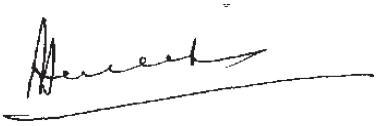
Foreword

The Sri Lanka Case Study on Social Inclusion, Gender and Equity in Education in South Asia is a part of a regional study sponsored by UNICEF. It addresses mainly the aspects of equality and social inclusion in education in Sri Lanka, with a view to sharing the experiences with other countries in the region. We welcome this study.

Sri Lanka has adopted a sector-wide approach called the Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) for the development of education on a thematic framework. It comprises four themes, namely, promoting equitable access to basic and secondary education, improving quality of education, enhancing the economic efficiency and equity in resource allocation, and strengthening education governance and service delivery. It was only last year that the ongoing medium term implementation plan commenced, translating this policy initiative into action. Therefore, the findings in this study should be perceived with due concern to this background.

Finally, I wish to thank the two researchers Prof. Swarna Jayaweera and Prof. Chandra Gunawardena for undertaking this study and UNICEF for providing all logistic and technical support.



Ariyaratne Hewage
Secretary
Ministry of Education
6 August 2007

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge with sincere thanks the assistance provided by the following.

(1) Several colleagues, particularly:
- Amanda Seel, Research Coordinator/Consultant and Barbara (Bobbi) Keller Shuey, Lead Researcher/Consultant for reviewing research instruments and several drafts of the report
- Susan Durston, UNICEF ROSA focal point/Regional Education Adviser
- Ita Sheehy, UNICEF (Sri Lanka), for facilitating coordination and making suggestions for improvement of the report

(2) Officials of the Ministry of Education for volunteering to be interviewed, and providing information, particularly:
- Mr Ariyaratne Hewage, Secretary
- Mr S. S. Wijeratne, Additional Secretary
- Mr Gammanpila, Consultant Coordinator, Donor Projects
- Ms Madhura Wehella, Deputy Director, Planning
- Ms K. D. V. Kumari Wijesekera, Deputy Director, Planning

(3) The researchers who assisted with the interviewing:
- Mr T. Thanaraj, Distance Education Partnership Programme
- Dr Kalamani, University of Jaffna
- Dr N. G. Kularatne
- Mr M. Selvarajah, Eastern University
- Mr L. R. Gonsalkorale, Open University

(4) The principals and Ministry, provincial, zonal, divisional and National Institute of Education officials as well as those from other ministries and development agencies who consented to be interviewed for the study and provided information

(5) Ms Yasmin Samsudeen (UNICEF, Sri Lanka) and Ms Pushpa Chhetri (UNICEF ROSA) for assistance with coordination; and the staff of CENWOR for assistance with the preparation of the report

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CENWOR	Centre for Women's Research
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Children
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DPs	Development Partners
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EFA	Education for All
ESDFP	Education Sector Development Framework Programme
GAD	Gender and Development
GCE (AL) (OL)	General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) (Ordinary Level)
GTZ	German Technical Co-operation
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
JICA	Japanese International Co-operation Agency
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCOEs	National Colleges of Education
NEC	National Education Commission
NEREC	National Education Research and Evaluation Centre
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIE	National Institute of Education
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (UK)
PBAs	Programme-based Approaches
PETS	Public Expenditure Tracking System
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategies and Programmes
PSI	Programme of School Improvement
SIP	Sector Investment Programme *or* School Improvement Planning
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
UNFPA	The United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WFA	The World Food Programme
WID	Women in Development

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report on Social Inclusion: Gender and Equity in Education in Sri Lanka explores how Education Programmes supported through a Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) are conceptualizing and addressing issues of social exclusion and gender inequality, and contributing to increasing equity in access to quality education and reduction in disparities.

In Sri Lanka, the right of all children to education was recognized as far back as in the 1940s, even before she regained independence. As a result of several progressive policies introduced to ensure this right to all children, such as provision of free education, change in the medium of instruction to mother tongue and incentives such as free mid-day meals, free textbooks, school uniforms and subsidized transport, Sri Lanka has achieved a net enrolment rate of 97.1% for boys and 95.6% for girls in the primary education cycle. Yet around eight per cent of the children of school-going age are estimated to be out of school. Girls have achieved near parity status in access as well as performance. Stakeholders, however, have been extremely concerned about the quality of education. The educational reforms launched from the 1990s have seriously focused on improving the quality of education, but the effectiveness of implementation of the reforms has been questioned.

The move towards SWAps, implying greater policy coherence, scope for evidence-based planning and more effective targeting of resources to where needs are greatest, is regarded as having the potential to strengthen equity and inclusion in quality education service provision.

In Sri Lanka, a SWAp was developed and introduced only in 2005 with implementation commencing in 2006. This case study is an inquiry into the potential of the SWAp and issues that have arisen in its implementation to date as insufficient time has elapsed between planning and the time at which this study was undertaken for it to be possible to identify any direct impacts.

The objectives of the study are to:

- Analyse the key dimensions of disparity and social exclusion that affect children and their implications for the education sector;
- Explore the political, policy, governance and institutional context for the SWAp, as well as 'threats' such as conflict or natural disaster;
- Assess the extent to which equity-related goals, objectives and indicators have been identified in the SWAp framework and plans;
- Identify the concepts, approaches and tools used in incorporating gender and equity considerations and the addressing of equity in different stages and processes of SWAp development and implementation;
- Identify development partner approaches, roles, influences and strategies related to addressing gender and social disparity within the SWAp;
- Assess the effectiveness of approaches taken and the influence of contextual factors; and
- Identify lessons learned from good practice and identify gaps and weaknesses for further action.

Four focus areas were identified for the research, namely:

1. Patterns, causes and educational consequences of disparity, inequity and social exclusion.
2. Analysis of the SWAp content, with regards to conceptualization and addressing of disparity and social exclusion.
3. Analysis of SWAp processes, mechanisms and development over time, with regards to the creation of a conducive context and environment for effectively understanding and addressing equity and social exclusion issues.
4. Analysis of SWAp impacts, including direct reduction of disparity and improved education outcomes for socially excluded groups; and impacts in terms of understanding, attitudes, capacity and mechanisms to analyse and address equity and inclusion issues in an ongoing way.

The methodologies used for the study were (1) analysis of secondary data and documentation and (2) qualitative research based on feedback from a range of informants, using semi-structured interviews with personnel from schools, provincial, and zonal authorities, the Ministry of Education, development partners, and other relevant public ministries and educational institutions.

As the time set apart for the study was limited, the sample of informants was also limited and no generalization is possible from its findings. There was difficulty in obtaining information as some of the identified informants were not sufficiently aware of the SWAp. As the study was conducted only one year after the introduction of SWAp no assessment of its impact can be made.

The Context in which the SWAp was Developed

The Sector-wide Approach (SWAp) in education in Sri Lanka was discussed initially in 2004 and formulated and developed as the Education Sector Development Framework Programme by the end of 2005. It was implemented island-wide from 2006 and has been in operation therefore for one year. This approach postulates the integration of programmes and expenditure on education in a holistic framework. Total government funding for 2007 has been estimated to be around US$ 607m. Assistance from development partners/donors is likely to be around US$ 36m, that is, 5.7% of the total education budget.

The national context in Sri Lanka has been conducive to the prioritization of equity issues in the SWAp in the education sector. The modern education system that took shape under the British colonial administration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had left, juxtaposed with its positive features, a legacy of socio-economic, ethnic and gender disparities in access to education. Responding to this situation, local policy makers in the transition years between direct colonial rule and independence in 1948 introduced radical changes – free state primary, secondary and tertiary education, incentives such as scholarships, subsidized transport and the establishment of rural secondary schools, and moved towards the adoption of the mother tongue as the medium of education. These policy changes were motivated by a commitment to the right to education for all children and reduction in socio-economic inequalities and promotion of upward mobility through education.

Since independence this commitment has been reinforced by the Constitution (1978), the ratification of UN Conventions on the rights of women (1981) and the rights of the child (1990) and the endorsement of the UN Jomtien Declaration on Education for All. The National Education Commission established in 1991 gave priority to issues of equity such as compulsory education

and the equitable distribution of quality schools in the education reforms introduced in 1997. The reform proposals of the NEC in 2003 and the National Plan of Action for Children (2004) prioritized equity in access to quality education. The Poverty Reduction Strategy formulated has been overtaken by the 'Mahinda Chintana' pro-poor policy of the government elected in late 2005 which reiterates the commitment to the right to free state education and to the reduction of disparities in education.

The institutional environment for education has changed from a highly centralized educational administration to devolution of some powers to the provinces under the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1987. The transition has not been smooth but there has been significant administrative and financial decentralization. However, coordination and particularly monitoring has been weak.

An island-wide network of around 10,000 schools provides relatively wide access to primary and secondary education. The state plays the leading role in the education sector and only 2% of the students are in private schools, although international schools are being established outside the purview of the Ministry of Education. The nongovernmental sector has played a minimal role in the provision of education facilities. The distribution of schools represents broadly the ethnic composition of the population. Most schools are coeducational (96.7%), and there is gender parity in enrolment in schools while retention rates tend to be higher for girls. There are, however, district-wise disparities in the distribution of schools and in the quality of education provided in schools, reflecting also socio-economic disparities. Education participation rates are over 95% in the 5–14 age group and around 65% in the 15–19 age group. Sri Lanka has nearly achieved the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education.

Constraints to achieving the goal of equal education opportunity are:

(i) the relatively high incidence of poverty – 23% of the population are estimated to be living below the national poverty line;

(ii) the impact of the ethnic conflict in the north and east that has caused extensive displacement of the population and deprivation of access to basic services over two decades, and the recent impact of the tsunami that devastated the coastal areas of the east, south and north in December 2004.

The Challenge of Equity and Social Inclusion

This section reviews studies that have been carried out during the last ten years on disparities in education. Specific Sri Lankan studies reviewed have focused on different categories of vulnerable children who are denied access to education and those who drop out early as a result of being absent from school often and/or not reaching expected standards of learning achievement. Among these groups are children who are poor, live in remote rural areas or on streets, suffer from disabilities, are forced into child labour to support families, belong to ethnic or linguistic minorities, denied care and protection from their parents or families, or are subjected to discrimination due to social and cultural reasons. *Girls* were not treated as a separate category in need of special attention, as in Sri Lanka girls have achieved near parity status, or sometimes achieved higher than boys in education. However, *gender* is considered in relation to all other variables influencing access and performance in education.

These studies clearly indicate the possible barriers and challenges that continue to hamper the efforts to ensure equity in education. On the one hand, cardinal principles on which public policy in education are founded, as well as the commitment to public investment in education – spanning initiatives to extend access through various incentives and measures, reform efforts in curriculum, teacher education and management – have striven towards promoting equity in access and quality. On the other hand, issues related to disparities in income distribution, regional development, socio-cultural factors and conflict continue to influence equity.

The major barriers to ensuring equity in access to education identified in these studies are poverty, lack of awareness of parents about gaining access to schooling, lack of interest of parents and children in participating in education due to various reasons, socio-cultural factors which make some communities accept their historical subordinate status, lure of 'easy money' in the liberalized economy rather than going through the formal education system to obtain employment, and incidence of abuse of children in the absence of proper care.

Among other barriers are conflict, lack of support from home for children's education, stigmatization of children who want re-join school, and the small schools which service poor and remote communities being perceived as being uneconomical. Disparities in quality result from inequities in provision of infrastructural resources and in deployment of an adequate number of qualified and committed teachers in different subject specializations, and absence of proper monitoring and supervision of implementation of reforms.

Equity and Social Inclusion: Concepts, Approaches and Strategies

In consonance with past policies and programmes, the Sri Lanka SWAp or ESDFP adopts a rights-based stance to a quality education for all and to the reduction of disparities. The SWAp was not preceded by a special analysis of equity or social exclusion. It drew on the intensive work following the 1997 reforms – the reviews and the report of the National Education Commission (2002–03), the studies of cognitive achievement of students by the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre and the experience of recent donor funded education projects. Quantitative data pertaining to disparities is available in the poverty mapping and other surveys of the Department of Census and Statistics and the Central Bank, and the School Census provincial and district data, and qualitative data is found in micro-studies.

Social equity is an all-encompassing concern in the SWAp-based Education Sector Programme. In addition to the social exclusion of poverty groups and the marginalized in remote villages and the plantation sector, the NEC report urged the inclusion of especially vulnerable groups such as children with disabilities, children living on streets and destitute children. Non-formal education has been perceived since the 1980s as a mechanism for offering a 'second chance' to out-of-school children and as an avenue of transition to formal education, but has been under-resourced. The ESDFP envisages revitalizing the role of the Non-Formal Education and Special Education Division in the Ministry and in the provinces in bringing out-of-school children within the ambit of the education system.

There is no explicit reference to the need for gender mainstreaming as the general perception of policy makers based on data reflecting gender parity in participation, retention and performance

is that there is no gender-based inequality. This perception has created complacency at official level that has precluded consideration of the fact that the content of education reflects gender role stereotypes that reinforce negative gendered norms that can affect adversely the personal development of girls and women and their life chances.

The ESDFP takes cognizance of the impact of two decades of armed conflict and the devastation caused by the tsunami on access to quality education and to basic services and the need to restore normalcy as early as possible. In this context the curriculum is envisaged to promote social cohesion and disaster management techniques.

The SWAp-based ESDFP is structured to implement activities under four themes – equity in access, equity in quality, equitable resource allocation, and strengthening governance and delivery of services. In each theme objectives have been stated, strategies identified for implementation, and indicators and targets specified for monitoring progress.

Theme 1, equity in access, reiterates the commitment to free education and to continuing the incentives provided over the years to promote participation in education – scholarships, free textbooks and uniform materials, subsidized transport and mid-day meals in primary schools in disadvantaged communities. It also intends to continue the policy of upgrading schools in each administrative division to ensure a more equitable distribution of educational opportunities. The Non-Formal Education units have been given the specific responsibility of reaching the excluded by activating the compulsory education committees at local level, undertaking education programmes for the disabled and for children living on the streets and expanding the Literacy Centres, Functional Literacy Centres, and Community Learning Centres to provide windows of opportunity to those outside the formal education system.

Theme 2 promotes the right of every child to a quality education. It focuses on equity in quality in the provision of education through curriculum reforms, an improved examination system and teacher development as well as equity in the quality of learning outcomes such as cognitive achievement and the development of 'higher order' education and generic skills.

Theme 3 introduces changes in resource allocation, moving away from the traditional uniform system that reinforced existing inequalities to a more flexible system that is expected to benefit disadvantaged schools. There is no gender specific budgeting as gender concerns are considered to be incorporated in equity issues. Priority is given to allocations for higher order processes (e.g. teacher development) and inputs (e,g. learning materials), and to higher order spaces and assets (facilities and equipment).

Theme 4 addresses the need to strengthen governance and the delivery of services. It is intended to support the Programme for School Improvement and its democratic and participatory processes and the development of a human resource development strategy with a focus on capacity building at all levels.

A Monitoring Results Framework has been developed to assess progress in the implementation of the four thematic areas.

Budgets are aligned with key operations under the four themes and a tracking system is planned to monitor expenditure. A significant change that is characteristic of the SWAp is that donor assistance is expected to supplement the national budget and not be project-based.

The ESDFP has some gaps that need to be addressed, such as: the inclusion of other vulnerable groups; some lacunae in quality indicators; and ensuring that data used in the Monitoring Results Framework is disaggregated not only by province, but also by zone, division and school as well as by sex to capture socio-economic, ethnic and gender disparities, and is widely available for policy and action.

SWAp Partnership Processes and Mechanisms and the Implications for Equity and Social Inclusion

The SWAp was facilitated in Sri Lanka by recognition by the Ministry of the need for a holistic education reform process advocated in NEC documents. The World Bank had been disenchanted by its experience of project-based funding and had already supported a SWAp in assistance in several countries. Accordingly in 2004, the Ministry embarked on an unprecedented massive planning exercise that combined bottom up and top down approaches and was extended to all provinces, zones and schools.

The planning process included:

(i) the work of the Steering Committee, National Technical Committee and the Consultative Committee in the Ministry which identified four major programme themes, developed planning guidelines and provided technical assistance;

(ii) participation by provincial, zonal and school planning teams following training and awareness sessions.

Plans were developed at each level for the period 2006–10, school plans consolidated as zonal plans and zonal plans consolidated as provincial plans. The sector programme finally included the plans of the Ministry, the National Institute of Education, Department of Examinations and the Education Publications Department. Activities were classified under key operations in each of the four themes, a rolling plan approach was adopted and a monitoring instrument created comprising results-based indicators. Mechanisms for the flow of funds were identified from the Treasury to (a) the Ministry of Education and its agencies in Colombo and (b) the provinces with the assistance of the Finance Commission.

The feedback from the provincial, zonal and divisional offices and the schools visited indicated that plans had been developed at each level except by the divisional offices. Lack of skills in preparing such plans had been a problem in some schools. Information regarding disparities was obtained from schools and from surveys by some Non-Formal Education units. Overall it was a creditable exercise covering around 10,000 schools. The problems that surfaced in the study were the need to simplify planning guidelines, build capacity at all levels to participate effectively in the planning, implementing and monitoring processes, increase the key personnel in the Ministry, develop time lines and accelerate the flow of funds.

As seen therefore the government took the lead in the SWAp process both at central and provincial level. As the SWAp was conceptualized as a holistic process, development partners/ donors were invited to participate in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the ESDFP. They were members of the Consultative Committee and the Donor Coordination Committee in the Ministry. Donors were requested to provide information regarding their plans/programmes to be incorporated in the total plan. It was proposed that their funds should be channelled through the Treasury and the Ministry, contrary to the earlier practice of separate project offices

disbursing donor funds. Donors could support the programmes they identified and control the use of their funds.

The leading development partner in the SWAp process, the World Bank, channelled all its funds to support the ESDFP to the government. The Education Specialist of the World Bank was actively involved in the planning process, working closely with Planning Division of the Ministry. All World Bank supported programmes were incorporated in all four themes including the change in the system of resource allocation to provide inputs to improve the quality of education in all schools. The components of the Asian Development Bank's ongoing Secondary Education Modernization Project II are congruent with themes 1, 2 and 4 but the ADB operates from its own office which disburses its funds.

Of the UN agencies, UNICEF makes a large contribution to the programmes on equity in access in theme 1 and has agreed to participate in the SWAp. UNFPA and UNESCO support limited programmes in themes 1 and 2. The World Food Programme (WFP) offers support in kind for providing a mid-day meal for students in conflict and tsunami affected areas. Two bilateral agencies, JICA and GTZ, have offices in the Ministry and support science and mathematics teaching, and promoting social cohesion, peace and disaster management, respectively, in selected districts through the state machinery. DFID funds are in a Trust Fund with the World Bank and have been used to support the planning process.

Three International NGOs offer assistance to specific programmes in identified districts. Save the Children supports community-based activities and counselling programmes, Plan International (Sri Lanka) and World Vision support infrastructural and teaching–learning development, and World Vision collaborates in the WFP programme. The few local NGOs that support programmes work through the UN or INGOs.

The situation regarding integration in the ESDFP has varied and is an ongoing process, and the process of donor coordination and harmonization has not been smooth. Some donors appear to have reservations regarding total absorption in SWAp process. Some have concerns regarding the role of the World Bank, which has provided financial and technical assistance to planning, implementing and monitoring of the ESDFP. There are fears of bureaucratic hassles and inordinate delays in the flow of funds observed already. Equity issues, however, are strongly represented in most donor programmes. The government is the coordinator of the SWAp-based ESDFP and the Donor Coordination Committee is the mechanism for promoting co-operation and harmonizing activities and relations.

Promoting Equity and Inclusion: How is the SWAp Making a Difference?

It is premature to assess the impact of the SWAp programme as it was introduced only a year ago. It is possible, however, to ascertain the extent to which key operations have been undertaken, that is, a partial assessment of inputs and processes.

Promoting equity in access

The ESDFP has re-affirmed the commitment to the policy of free education and seeks to strengthen the demand side incentives provided over a decade. Schools have encountered

problems, however, in receiving the state supplied textbooks as a result of the perennial delays in printing and delivery of textbooks to schools. A new programme of providing a mid-morning meal to students in Grades 1–3 in disadvantaged schools has been introduced.

It was observed that efforts had been made to reactivate the Compulsory Education Committees at local level. Not all Committees were active. The state Grama Niladaris (local officials) had problems in organizing meetings as some members were from different Ministries and no payment was made for meetings.

The Non-Formal and Special Education Division in the Ministry and the units in some provinces have been clearly active. An all-island survey of out-of-school children is in progress. Targets for enrolling out-of-school children in the 5–14 age group in schools have been exceeded by 284% in 2006 and all provinces are reported to have exceeded their targets. Enrolment has increased in Literacy and Functional Literacy Centres and in Community Learning Centres.

There has been less success in enrolling 'hard to reach' children. Efforts have been made to extend education opportunity to children living on the streets and for the first time the state has opened a few centres. However, there was hardly any evidence of increase in the number of children with disabilities in schools. At the senior secondary level the ADB project from 2001 has offered stipends to retain students from disadvantaged families in school; this has increased access to science and IT education.

The programme introduced in the 1990s to develop division-based schools to promote a more equitable distribution of educational facilities is being continued. In addition, schools have been identified for upgrading from the hundred most disadvantaged divisions and from 19 conflict affected districts.

Quality

The second theme – equity in quality – identified several strategies. These strategies focused on two broad areas: Equity in Quality of Provision and Equity in Learning Outcomes.

Under equity in quality of provision, issues of teacher development, teacher deployment, provision of modern school facilities, production and timely distribution of high quality textbooks and modernizing the examination and testing system are to be addressed.

Our inquiry found that the expected equitable distribution of qualified teachers has not yet been implemented and the allowance for teachers in 'difficult' areas was not being paid systematically due to budgetary constraints. Teacher development has continued at a smooth pace and planning for school-based teacher development has been completed, but it is too early to assess the impact at school level of both school-based teacher development and capacity building of teachers.

While there were fewer disparities in the provision of blackboards, electricity and workplaces, schools located in an urban low income environment, and in a rural environment, were seen to lack facilities such as adequate buildings, partitioned classrooms, sufficient desks and chairs, adequate separate toilet facilities, and equipment and chemicals. In general, the situation with regard to toilets was not satisfactory. It has clearly not been possible to enhance school

facilities during the year in which the SWAp has operated, as funds need to reach local units for rehabilitation or extension of physical facilities to take place on a large scale.

The expectation to streamline the production and distribution of school textbooks to all students on time has still not been achieved. Lack of effective coordination between the different institutions involved with the activity and the decision to get the private publishers to produce the books appears to have delayed progress.

Equity in learning outcomes focused on the aspects of provision of curriculum guides and teachers' instructional materials to schools and improvement of cognitive achievement scores.

The supply of curriculum guides and Teachers' Instructional Materials needs to be streamlined as at present they seem to be beset with problems of lack of coordination within and among the different institutions and issues of capacity in the institutions that have responsibility for the tasks. It is too early to assess learning achievement or improvement or decline in examination performance of students after the introduction of the SWAp.

Efficiency and equity in resource allocation

Major changes have been made with the objective of increasing efficiency and equity in resource allocation. The Medium Term Budgeting Framework facilitates aligning budgetary allocations with activities. The allocation of resources has been restructured also to direct more resources to inputs, programmes, facilities and equipment that will assist in improvement in the quality of education, including in disadvantaged schools.

The proposed Performance Expenditure Tracking System is in its preliminary stage and a survey is being conducted in a hundred schools representing all the provinces. However, many officials in the zones and school principals were not aware of this initiative as it is a pilot programme. The results of the shift in allocation towards promoting equity in access and quality can be seen only in the next few years. A constraint is the continuing delays in the flow of funds and related procedures at every stage. School principals claimed that funds for 2006 were received only towards the end of the year and that funds for 2007 had yet to reach them.

Strengthening education governance and service delivery

The School Improvement Programme under this theme attempts to promote democratic governance by facilitating the participation of the community at school level under the leadership of the School Development Committee.

MoE reports that one zone in each of the seven provinces selected for PSI had been completed on target in 2006. Awareness programmes had been conducted and structures (School Development Committees and School Management Teams) had been established in the target zones. The few schools visited by us said that they had not received any funds and School Development Committees had still to be appointed under this Programme.

Strengthening education governance and monitoring is an aspect which the SWAp has considered as critical. Development of Human Resources is vital for effective governance and monitoring. The influence governance and monitoring has on the success of initiatives in all other areas in the SWAp cannot be over-emphasized. While efforts are under way to strengthen education governance and service delivery, implementation has commenced, mainly at national

and provincial levels. In the context of school plans being approved very recently and funds yet to be released, it was premature to expect results at the local level in such a short period.

Broader changes

Overall there is a high level of commitment on the part of most officials involved from the Planning Division in the Ministry to schools and a greater awareness of the issue of disparities. The effect of the direction and training provided by the Ministry has yet to percolate to local level. The exclusion of the divisional office – the nearest to schools – from the SWAp appears to have been an impediment to rapid progress. At each level there was a need for capacity building of institutions and staff and for acceleration in the flow of funds.

Conclusions, Lessons Learned, Ways Forward

The broad objective of this study was to examine how social and gender equity issues are addressed in the SWAp introduced in Sri Lanka in the Education Sector Education Programme (ESDFP) developed in 2004/05 and implemented since 2006.

In the context of the country situation surfacing from studies (Chapter 3) and the extensive disparities analysis in Chapter 4, the four themes selected for the ESDFP are seen to be appropriate. Themes 1 and 2 directly confront disparities in access to educational opportunity and to quality education. Themes 3 and 4 propose modalities to ensure the objectives of the first two themes.

Towards equity

In consonance with Sri Lanka's long time commitment to the achievement of social equity through education, the ESDFP has incorporated existing incentives to families to increase education participation, such as free education, free books and uniform material, scholarships and subsidized transport, and has added mid-day meals for children in Grades 1 and 2 in disadvantaged schools. The claim that such incentives facilitate participation has been vindicated by increase in school attendance. The concern for equity is seen also in the development of schools in disadvantaged areas and in efforts to ensure an equitable geographical distribution of schools.

Further, the Non-Formal and Special Education Divisions in the Ministry of Education and officials at local levels and Compulsory Education Committees have been revitalized to a considerable extent and consequently the numbers of out-of-school children entering the formal school or non-formal centres have increased sharply. For the first time perhaps the educational needs of the most vulnerable groups of children have been recognized at official level.

Equity in access to quality education is conceptualized as access to high quality facilities, equipment, curricula, teaching–learning methods, textbooks and assessment techniques. It includes also the promotion of values, social cohesion, and, implicitly, rights, in a country bedevilled by two decades of armed conflict.

Innovations in resource allocation have been initiated to facilitate the access of disadvantaged schools to quality inputs and assets and to increase efficiency in the utilization of resources through monitoring and tracking. Mechanisms have been created and are in their initial stages of development, to promote better management, more autonomy and productive school–community relations.

Overall, the ESDFP document has given directions for achieving outcomes through its objectives, targets and strategies and its involvement of the general education sector from the centre to school level. Nevertheless gaps have surfaced, created largely by the limited capacity of some educational personnel and institutions particularly at crucial levels – the zone, division and school. These shortcomings are the results of years of weak monitoring at these levels and perhaps some lethargy in implementation. Measures are necessary to resolve the issue of disparities and the need for capacity building and monitoring mechanisms.

Overcoming Constraints – The Way Forward

(i) In such a large planning exercise involving the participation of personnel at different levels of capabilities, simplification of the planning and monitoring instruments and more intensive training at zonal, divisional and school levels are priorities in the ongoing implementation process.

(ii) The divisional office appears to have no role in the SWAp process. However, this office has the closest interaction with schools due to their proximity to around 30 schools in each zone. Divisional officers, if sensitized and strengthened adequately, are in a better position to understand the problems of the schools and their communities and to contribute effectively to resolving disparities and to monitoring progress.

(iii) In recent decades schemes to select schools to be developed as quality schools have failed as the system of selecting these schools has been on an ad hoc basis. Such schemes need to be located to serve a wide catchment area, isolated from negative social and political pressures, conform to strictly enforced selection criteria and be monitored closely.

(iv) The commitment to equity in the ESDFP has to be translated into action by implementers and the debacle of the compulsory attendance committees appointed in 1998 is a reminder of the gap between expectations and outcomes. Capacity building programmes for educational personnel, particularly at zonal and divisional levels, have therefore a critical role in accelerating progress. Such programmes, however, cannot be confined to knowledge and skills but must also incorporate a strong sensitization component that will develop empathy for the disadvantaged among education officials, principals and teachers and promote positive attitudes to social equity and gender equality. Sri Lanka has some administrators who tend to give low priority to the marginalized poor despite the political will and public pressure for eliminating disparities, and who are complacent regarding gender issues on the grounds that there is equal participation in education by girls and boys.

(v) While gender equality in access to education has been achieved, there is need in the interests of equity to ensure that the curriculum and teaching–learning materials also promote gender equality and that the content of education and the social climate of the school empower girls to achieve their full potential in consonance with human rights and

human dignity. Efforts should be made also to dismantle the 'glass ceiling' that impedes the upward mobility of girls and women educational professionals on terms of equality. It should be required also that sex-segregated data is available from provincial to school level so that inequalities can be tracked and complacency dispelled.

Such data should not be confined to enrolment and retention. There is also a need to explore issues such as the higher incidence of dropping out of secondary schools by boys and their relatively lower achievement levels in some contexts.

(vi) The programme seeks to involve schools and their local communities in planning, implementing and monitoring activities. The School Development Committee is the lead agency in this respect. Nevertheless, the long experience in social mobilization in Sri Lanka has shown that the priorities of 'community leaders' are not synonymous with the aspirations of the poor. Moreover, unlike community development workers, educational administrators are not necessarily skilled in social mobilization. This dichotomy was seen in the programme to close small schools on the grounds that they are 'uneconomical units'. Communities were not consulted and community-based organizations in disadvantaged areas have been successful in increasing attendance in some of these schools.

Hence it is necessary to instruct local education officers and principals to ensure that community representation reflect all socio-economic strata and to work closely with community-based organizations (CBOs), particularly those whose membership includes the most disadvantaged families in the local community. CBOs can also bring pressure to bear on Compulsory Education Committees and Non-Formal Education officers to act with greater zeal and efficiency in identifying out-of-school children and enrolling them in institutions. The role of educational personnel as 'change-agents' in the transformation of education and society has to be inbuilt into education governance and should encompass participatory leadership styles within the education system and in reaching out to communities.

(vii) The experience garnered from earlier education projects has indicated that monitoring at all levels, and particularly local levels, has been the weakest feature in project or programme administration. The impact of the monitoring results framework will be stymied unless local monitors are also 'monitored' by a specific mechanism, by more interaction between educational personnel at different levels and by dismantling the compartmentalization of participating institutions. Monitoring effectively is a requisite for many aspects of the ESDFP such as the delivery of textbooks and curriculum and teacher's guides to schools island-wide, and the extent to which disadvantaged schools can access and utilize the higher order quality inputs, facilities and assets allocated in the ESDFP budget.

(viii) The issue of delays in the flow of funds from the highest levels through the different strata to schools has emerged as the most critical current issue and needs immediate attention if equity goals are to be reached.

(ix) The implementation of the programme will be affected also by three external factors which are issues of public concern but over which educators may perhaps have less control.

(a) Poverty is the major constraint that has prevented the realization of universal primary and junior secondary education. In the long term education reduces poverty but it has less impact in the immediate environment. Functional literacy centres and community learning centres for young adults could have an interventionist role in reducing the economic constraints of the very poor, thereby obviating the need for child labour. Overall, more rapid economic growth and equitable distribution of the benefits of growth in access to employment, education, health, infrastructure and services are priorities as education per se cannot compensate fully for poverty.

(b) The armed conflict over two decades has been a major barrier to access to equity and quality in the north and east. Reconstruction programmes need to give priority to getting children back in school and providing teachers and facilities to ensure a quality education. Catch-up programmes have been a useful innovation in the curriculum. Normalcy has to be fully restored in the areas affected by disasters, particularly the areas affected by the conflict and the tsunami.

(c) The third external factor or force is the pressure from the political structure that distorts the development of progressive policies. The relative failure of the Navodaya school scheme and the continuing inequitable deployment of teachers are examples of such negative influences. It is a widely held perception that this trend has a deleterious effect on access and quality. A practical solution would be the imposition of strict criteria for selection of schools for upgrading and for appointments of educational personnel by independent bodies perhaps on the model of the Public Service Commission of yesteryear.

These observations based on the real experiences of participants in education are offered as a caveat to unrealistic expectations of outcomes and as a stimulus to identifying strategies to ensure a positive impact.

Wider lessons learned

Retrospectively it seems that:

(i) More time should have been available for such a massive and complex undertaking.

(ii) More intensive capacity building programmes are necessary as institutions and personnel have been operating at varied levels of competence.

(iii) Continuing and more intensive monitoring is necessary at zonal, divisional and school levels.

(iv) Data disaggregated at zonal, divisional and school levels and by sex need to be available widely if disparities are to be recognized and reduced.

(v) In the context of 'consolidated' plans and some degree of centralization at operational level, the needs of disadvantaged schools and communities are likely to be lost in data and overlooked in implementation unless a strong monitoring mechanism is created to function at local level.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Sri Lanka Case Study: Part of a Three-Country Study

This report presents the case study from Sri Lanka as a part of a three-country study which explores how education programmes supported through a Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) are conceptualizing and addressing issues of social exclusion and gender inequality, and with what results.

The study takes as its starting point the assertion that good quality education is *both* a right of all children *and* a development imperative. In Sri Lanka, the right of all children to education was recognized as far back as in the 1940s, even before she regained independence. As a result of several progressive policies introduced to ensure this right to all children, such as provision of free education, change in the medium of instruction to mother tongue and incentives such as free mid-day meals, free textbooks, school uniforms and subsidized transport, Sri Lanka has achieved a net enrolment rate of 97.1% for boys and 95.6% for girls in the primary education cycle. Girls have achieved near parity status in access as well as performance. Despite the implementation of positive education policies over six decades, around eight per cent of the 5–14 aged child population is estimated to be out of school. Non-school going has been found in micro-studies to be concentrated in low-income urban neighbourhoods, remote or disadvantaged rural communities, plantations and inevitably in recent decades in conflict affected areas.

In addition to the above efforts taken to enrol all children in school, educational reforms during the past decade have seriously focused on improving the quality of education. Like in many countries in South Asia, the ongoing conflict, incidence of poverty, and social exclusion in pockets of disadvantage have compounded the challenges of achieving equity in educational access and outcomes.

Thus, a central understanding of the study has been that social exclusion and gender inequality are deeply intertwined with poverty in the South Asian context. If education is to reach all children and provide them with equal opportunities, planning for education needs to be based on a sound analysis and understanding of the complex dynamics of poverty and social exclusion and its impacts on children's life situations.

The move towards SWAps, implying greater policy coherence, scope for evidence-based planning and more effective targeting of resources to where needs are greatest, has an obvious potential to strengthen equity and inclusion in quality education service provision. However, up until now, there has been only limited exploration, mainly in relation to gender issues, as to whether and how this potential is being realized in practice. Most of the published literature on education SWAps relates to the first programmes to be established, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa. This set of studies aims to add to our overall knowledge by focusing on the South Asian context and the full range of social exclusion issues that are pertinent to the region. The initiative was catalysed by UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, as a result of a Regional Education Meeting in February 2006, which had the theme of 'SWAps and Disparities', at which these gaps in our understanding were identified and discussed.

At country level, the studies have been a joint venture of the governments, education ministries and development partners. Whilst UNICEF has provided overall coordination, in each case, a key

principle of the research has been that it is seen as an activity 'within the SWAp'. The studies were discussed, agreed and approved through the normal SWAp forums and communication channels and designed to be of practical use and value to participating governments and DP groups, Indeed, in Bangladesh and Nepal, it has proved possible to fully synergize the studies with preparations for Mid-Term Reviews of the respective programmes. This synthesis seeks to compare and contrast country-level approaches and to draw more general lessons for policy and practice, for South Asia and beyond.

In Sri Lanka, a SWAp was developed and introduced only in 2005 with implementation commencing in 2006. As a result, the Sri Lankan case study is more an inquiry into the potential of the SWAp and issues that have arisen in its implementation to date. Insufficient time has elapsed between the commencement of implementation and the time at which this study was undertaken for it to be possible to identify any direct impacts.

1.2 Background to the Studies: Developments in Commitments, Understanding and Practice

1.2.1 International commitments to equitable and inclusive education

The MDGs

In 1981 Sri Lanka ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was resuscitated from virtual limbo by the formulation in 1993 of a Women's Charter modelled largely on CEDAW. In 1990 the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the endorsement of the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All renewed the commitment to equality.

The Millennium Development Goals, developed in 2000, constitute the set of international commitments that currently drive the 'development agenda', with 'poverty reduction' holding centre stage in the current dominant development discourse. In many countries, the MDGs act as the basis for poverty reduction strategies and sector-level plans. Meanwhile, many development agencies have revised their policies and priorities around the meeting of these goals. Among eight areas of MDGs three have direct bearing on education:

Goal 1. ***Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger***

Target 1. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

Target 2. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2. ***Achieve Universal Primary Education***

Target 3. Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3. ***Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women***

Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.

It can be noted that 'social exclusion' is directly addressed in the goals only with regard to gender inequality. With regard to education, there is a new emphasis on 'completion' (in contrast to earlier goals stressing enrolment). However, the gender goal refers only to numerical 'parity' of enrolment, not a wider concept of equality. While this target has been achieved in Sri Lanka, internationally it has been missed, with 40 countries off track to achieve even numerical parity by 2015.

The EFA 'Dakar' Goals

The EFA Goals were also developed in 2000, at the Dakar World Education Forum. They constitute a considerable strengthening and revision of the earlier EFA goals (developed in Jomtien, 1990).

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive **Early Childhood Care and Education** (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
2. Ensuring that **by 2015** all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete **free and compulsory primary education of good quality**.
3. Ensuring that the **learning needs of all young people and adults** are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes.
4. Achieving a **50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literary by 2015**, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
5. **Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015**, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to, and achievement in, basic education of good quality.
6. Improving all aspects of the **quality of education** and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

The EFA goals do not contradict the education-related MDGs, but do considerably expand on them. There is a stronger emphasis on the quality and relevance of education, an expanded concept of gender equality including the concept of 'equity in quality', and a more explicit mention of socially excluded groups (namely 'vulnerable and disadvantaged children', 'children in difficult circumstances' and 'those belonging to ethnic minorities').

Rights commitments

A number of international rights conventions and declarations commit signatory countries to addressing social exclusion and inequality and ensuring each and every child accesses good quality, relevant education as a right. One key example is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Education in the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*

Article 28 (Access to education)

1. State parties recognize the right of the child to education and, with a view to achieving this right *progressively* and *on the basis of equal opportunity* they shall, in particular:
   (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free for all.
   (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need.
   (c) Make higher education accessible on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means.
   (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all chi.ldren.
   (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropout rates.

2. State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity.

3. State parties shall promote and encourage international co-operation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries.

Article 29 (Educational content)

1. State parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
   (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their full potential.
   (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
   (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own.
   (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups, and persons of indigenous origin.
   (e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions. (Subject to certain principles and minimum standards regulations.)

Other Articles

Article 13 (Freedom of expression), Article 17 (The media), Article 23 (Disability), Article 24 (Health), Article 31 (Play, recreation and leisure), Article 32 (Child work) and Article 33 (Illicit drug use) also have implications for the *right to* education and the *content and purpose* of that education.

Failure to achieve the 2005 gender goal

This 2005 MDG and EFA goal for gender parity in primary and secondary education has been achieved in Sri Lanka, but not internationally. Indeed, at the current rates, this target will not be achieved by 40% of the remaining countries by 2015. The Global Governance Initiative Report 2005 highlighted this failure as one of the '*world's biggest failures and missed opportunities*'. The 'Beijing Plus Ten' Conference (2005) called for renewed efforts to achieve this goal, without which wider progress on gender becomes impossible. A mainstreaming approach to gender issues, as advocated in the Beijing Declaration, was again stressed.

1.2.2 Understanding poverty, gender inequality and social exclusion

International understanding of the interaction between poverty, gender and social exclusion has developed both through 'academic' study and practical experience.

Poverty

Earlier models of 'development' often assumed that economic growth would reduce poverty. In the education sector, concern for national development and economic growth was the initial driver for the expansion of education systems from the 1950s through to the late 1980s, with this initial drive tending to focus on physical expansion (e.g. building schools in rural areas).

Gradually, it became apparent that this approach was not 'trickling down' to large numbers of poor people. 'The poor' are not only those without money or resources, but also experience a wide range of disadvantages related to *access* to resources and services, and to associated power, status and participation. Poverty is not only 'absolute', but also 'relative', in a particular context. The approach has shifted to one of a *direct focus* on poverty reduction, including attention to access of the poor to quality basic services. This is now very explicit in the MDGs and the emphasis on national poverty reduction strategies.

In the education sector, the sharpened focus on direct poverty reduction has catalysed a stronger focus on 'universalizing' access to primary and basic education, in order to directly 'empower' the poor. Since the mid 1990s, education efforts have shifted to a wider range of 'access' strategies, such as reducing costs to poor parents, combined with policies to address the 'quality' of education, often related to provision of trained teachers and basic educational resources. These approaches have certainly reaped some rewards, the initial dramatic results of the 'UPE' policies of Uganda and Malawi being oft-quoted examples.

Gender

Gender discrimination is perhaps the most universal form of 'social exclusion'. Gender issues, and the interaction of gender discrimination and poverty, have attracted rigorous academic analysis and now benefit from a strong conceptual basis. An overall documented trend is the move from 'Women in Development (WID)' approaches, which implied special programmes for women and girls as a 'disadvantaged' group, to 'Gender and Development (GAD)' approaches, which imply analysis and addressing of the unequal power relationships between males and females. Central to a GAD approach is the concept of *gender mainstreaming*:

> *Gender mainstreaming means the consistent use of a gender perspective at all stages of the development and implementation of policies, plans, programmes and projects. In the education sector, this would include not only the activities of governments, but also those of schools, colleges, education institutions and, where appropriate, of NGOs and the private sectors as well … Rather than adding on a women's component to existing policies, plans, programmes and projects, a gender perspective informs these at all stages, and in every aspect of the decision-making process. Gender mainstreaming may thus entail a fundamental transformation of the underlying paradigms that inform education. (DAC, 1998a)*

UN agencies, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of OECD and other international bodies have developed comprehensive guidelines for mainstreaming gender, at national, sector and institutional levels, and many governments and development agencies are – at least in theory – committed to such an approach.

This is no less the case in the education sector, where it has been gradually realized that not only were girls benefiting less than boys from the expansion of educational opportunities, but also that the education of girls and women is one of the essential strategies for making progress on poverty reduction and needs to be more highly prioritized. An understanding of gender discrimination implies that, whilst cost reduction strategies remain vital to reduce the pressure on poor parents to have to choose which children to educate, it is also necessary to directly address discriminatory attitudes and demonstrate the benefits to everyone of educating girls. Meanwhile, attention needs to be paid to ensuring gender equity in the school and classroom, so that girls are not held back due to poor self esteem, discrimination, low expectations or harassment, or simply the lack of female teachers.

Social exclusion

Some countries have long recognized that other forms of social exclusion also need attention, if progress is to be made in realizing rights and achieving development goals. India, for example, has well established mechanisms and policies for targeting its 'scheduled castes' and 'scheduled tribes'. However, internationally, attention to forms of social exclusion other than on the basis of gender has been more recent and, as yet, there is a less coherent conceptual framework on which to base analysis and action. One example of a recent attempt to address this lack, which usefully summarizes the learning to date, comes from DFID's publication *Addressing Poverty by Tackling Social Exclusion* (DFID, 2005). This draws on a range of earlier work, including an earlier DFID publication on *Disability, Poverty and Development* (DFID, 2000).

The paper defines 'social exclusion' as follows:

> *'Social exclusion describes a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, caste, descent, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household, and in the community'. (DFID, 2005)*

The paper notes that in all societies some groups are socially excluded. However, the groups affected and the degree of discrimination vary from one society to another, as do the forms that social exclusion takes. Discrimination can be '*open and deliberate*', '*unofficial*', or '*subtle and unintended*'. It can be based on '*who you are*', but also on '*where you live*'. It is also explored in detail how social exclusion causes poverty and hampers poverty reduction and development efforts, as summarized in the box below.

Social Exclusion Causes Poverty

Social exclusion causes the poverty of particular people, leading to higher rates of poverty among affected groups

- It hurts them materially – making them poor in terms of income, health or education by causing them to be denied access to resources, markets and public services. It can also hurt them emotionally, by shutting them out of the life of their community.
- Socially excluded people are often denied the opportunities available to others to increase their income and escape from poverty by their own efforts. So, even though the economy may grow and general income levels may rise, excluded people are likely to be left behind, and make up an increasing proportion of those who remain in poverty.

Social exclusion reduces the productive capacity – and rate of poverty reduction – of a society as a whole

- It impedes the efficient operation of market forces and restrains economic growth. Some people with good ideas may not be able to raise the capital to start up a business. Discrimination in the labour market may make parents decide it is not worthwhile to invest in their children's education.
- Socially excluded groups often do participate but on unequal terms. Labour markets illustrate this most clearly by exploiting the powerlessness of excluded groups and at the same time reinforcing their disadvantaged position.
- Social exclusion also increases the level of economic inequality in society, which reduces the poverty reducing impact of a given growth rate.

Social exclusion makes it harder to achieve the Millennium Development Goals

- Social exclusion explains why some groups of people remain poorer than others, have less food, die younger, are less economically or politically involved, and are less likely to benefit from services. This makes it difficult to achieve the MDGs in some countries without particular strategies that directly tackle exclusion.

Social exclusion leads to conflict and insecurity

- Social exclusion is a leading cause of conflict and insecurity in many parts of the world. Excluded groups that suffer from multiple disadvantages may come together when they have unequal rights, are denied a voice in political processes and feel marginalized from the mainstream of their society.
- Peaceful mobilization may be the first step, such as marches, strikes and demonstrations. But if this has no effect, or if governments react violently to such protests, then groups are more likely to resort to violent conflict if they feel there is no alternative.

- When social groups feel unequal and suffer compared with others in society, conflict is more likely. Research over several decades has revealed that political and social forms of inequality are the most important factors in outbreaks of violence (particularly ethnic conflicts, revolutions and genocides).
- Social exclusion also causes insecurity in the form of gang violence. Young people who feel alienated from society and excluded from job opportunities and decision-making may turn to violence and crime as a way of feeling more powerful.

(DFID, 2005)

The growing focus on social exclusion is, again, reflected in the education sector. Both in Africa and South Asia, countries that have successfully expanded access to the majority of their populations are finding that the remaining minority (sometimes called the 'last 10 per cent', though it might be more or fewer), are a 'hard to reach' category, not responsive to general 'pro-poor' policies. Certainly, these children are poor, and a disproportionate number are girls. However, almost without exception, they are also affected by other forms of social exclusion, for example on the basis of caste, ethnicity, language, disability or citizenship status (e.g. being a migrant, IDP or refugee). These are the *multiply-vulnerable* children, perhaps living in isolated communities with languages and cultures that differ from the mainstream. Many do not benefit from a supportive family setting, but live in severely stressed families, in families constantly displaced or on-the-move, in refugee camps, as orphans in child-headed households, in other people's families, in institutions, or alone on the street. They are almost certainly working for survival, but many are 'hidden' from public view: e.g. caring for sick relatives or younger siblings in an isolated rural home, working as unregistered migrants in the informal economy, working as bonded labourers, abused and exploited as child sex workers or domestic servants, or even trafficked across international borders. Others are disabled children, kept hidden away at home.

The barriers such children face in even accessing education can be formidable. Furthermore, the schools that can be 'accessed' by such groups are often irrelevant to their needs and of inferior quality. They might not provide education in minority children's languages, be able to provide good quality teachers who can respond to children's specific needs, or support children with disabilities. It is also frequently the case that schools reproduce the discriminatory attitudes and practices of the wider society. Socially excluded groups are therefore at greater risk of dropout and non-completion of education, as well as learning less, and benefiting less from education.

It is therefore being learned that addressing 'equity in access' and 'equity in quality' are complex, requiring attention to the specific life situations in which girls and boys find themselves, to 'demand' as well as 'supply' factors, to attitudinal as well as economic barriers, to school–community relationships and to the ethos, teaching approaches and management of each school. Indeed, the whole education system needs to become flexible and inclusive, and a positive force for equality, inclusion and rights, if the complex dynamics of social exclusion and gender discrimination are to be addressed and reversed.

1.2.3 SWAps as modalities of 'good practice' for assistance to educational sector development

The development of the 'SWAp' concept

In tandem (but not necessarily explicitly linked) with developments in our understanding of social exclusion and how it can be addressed, have been substantive changes over the past decade in the way in which educational development is conceptualized and how international assistance to the sector is managed. From the mid-1990s a trend away from traditional project approaches began. The new concept at that time was of a 'Sector Investment Programme' (SIP). These programmes aimed to support governments in planning coherently for the whole sector within the context of an over-arching, realistic and costed policy framework, backed by concurrent attention to macro-economic stabilization and public service reform. Funding was to be provided flexibly as a part of government budgets, with governments and ministries of education able to make choices about resource allocation. Financial procedures were to be harmonized and monitoring at sector and programme level integrated, to meet diverse reporting needs. Donors would give up their control over specific project interventions, but gain participation as 'Development Partners' in education policy dialogue and broader budget framework negotiations.

The criteria proposed in the earlier formal definitions were largely a construct of development agencies (not government providers of education systems) and generally go beyond the status of practice in all but a very small number of examples. As implementation has got underway, it has been realized that 'one size does not fit all' and that national and local realities are the starting point for any sector programme. Few countries have been able to meet the 'ideal' wider context of macro-economic stability, action on corruption, civil service reform and decentralization. Similarly, differences in procedures and agendas of development agencies have proved hard to overcome and created difficulties in negotiating a coherent policy approach.

Therefore, over time, the terms 'Sector-Wide Approaches' (SWAps) and 'Programme-Based Approaches' (PBAs) have been adopted in preference to 'SIPs', to describe what is more of a direction, process and ethos than a rigid blueprint or narrowly-defined funding mechanism. There has also been a clearer linking of SWAps in the social sectors to overall poverty reduction frameworks, resulting in a shift of focus – at least in principle – from mechanism to poverty reduction outcomes. A definition put forward by ODI (2000) is one that has become widely used, as a useful working definition that picks out some key characteristics and principles whilst allowing some flexibility of interpretation.

A SWAp includes support that :

- Is sector wide in scope;
- Is based on a clear sector and strategy framework;
- Is based on long-term plans;
- Includes host country ownership and strong coordinated partnership with external agencies;
- Is developed and implemented with the involvement of, and partnership with, all local stakeholders;
- Includes the involvement of all main external agencies;
- Is based on common implementation arrangements and effective donor coordination
- Relies on local capacity; and
- Includes provision for results-based monitoring.

(ODI, 2000)

Education SWAps and social exclusion in theory

SWAps were developed as a pragmatic mechanism for more effective development assistance. Whilst they are gradually being linked more explicitly to poverty reduction, they do not of themselves necessarily imply a 'rights-based' or 'inclusive' approach. Nevertheless, as it is becoming clearer that education systems need to address poverty reduction, gender equality and social inclusion as inter-dependent factors, the question arises as to whether and how the move towards a SWAp modality can consciously assist with this process. A major DAC Study on 'Gender Mainstreaming in SWAps',[1] as well as a number of other papers and studies,[2] make suggestions as to this potential.

Potential of a SWAp in Education for Improving Addressing of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

- The potential for improving policy coherence within the education sector, and developing a costed, coherent programme framework and plan, should be conducive to the better mainstreaming of gender and other equity issues in policies, strategies and budgets. SWAps and PBAs require the costing of alternatives, prioritization and targeting (avoiding duplication, wastage and contradictory policy and approaches).
- The potential to mainstream innovative approaches piloted in projects (often targeted at 'hard-to-reach' groups) into overall sector policy.
- Improved potential to link formal and 'non-formal' approaches within a coherent, flexible system.
- New partnerships for addressing gender and social equity should provide the environment in which the energies and expertise of different government partners, civil society and development partners can be maximized by working in the same direction towards clear goals.
- The longer-term time-frame implied in the approach should be conducive to supporting attitudinal change in complex and sensitive areas.
- There is potential for enhancing linkages with the private sector and across government policies in other sectors, to reinforce the equity and inclusion dimensions of education policy.

[1] DAC/ ODI/ DFID/ CEC (Norton, Sibbons, Seel, Gibbard, Poulsen, Smawfield). Case Studies on Mainstreaming Gender in Sector-Wide Approaches in Education. (Consists of India Case Study, Ghana Case Study, Uganda Case Study, Literature Review and Synthesis Report), 2000.

[2] Including Kelly (1995), Bird and Norton (1996), Seel (1997) and various ODI papers.

Education SWAps and social inclusion in practice

Studies that have looked into practice are as cited above. The box below summarizes their findings.

Positive Achievements

- SWAps are increasing resources to primary education through cost sharing at higher levels.
- SWAps in different parts of the world are identifying gender/social inequality as a key issue to be addressed at a strategic level, setting equity related objectives and attempting to implement a range of strategies to increase all children's access to good quality basic education.
- SWAps have brought about improvements in equity in resource allocation by geographic location and improved prioritization and sequencing of strategies and resources, enabling effective implementation of policy priorities in a more systematic manner.
- Particular progress has been made in increasing girls' access to school through strategies such as cost reduction/elimination and classroom/facilities construction in rural areas, which have benefited from improved efficiency attributable to the SWAp modality.
- There is some evidence of enhanced trust between governments and poor communities thorough strengthened transparency in educational service delivery, as well as some local economic benefits in poor communities (e.g. through the decentralization of some procurement functions to school level).

Problems and Challenges

- A focus on sector-wide efficiency and national development objectives over individual rights can lead to a de-prioritizing of the 'hard to reach' groups as 'too expensive to reach'.
- The top-down, centralized and 'formal' approach of many SWAps can lead to weak involvement from civil society, a lack of recognition of informal processes and the reinforcement of existing gender and social biases.
- The focus (over some years) in some SWAps on central-level capacity building and agreeing on mechanisms has diverted attention away from the present needs of poor communities, so that children have 'slipped through the net'.
- There is variation in the quality and depth of analysis that takes place, of patterns of educational disparity, the key causal factors and of how these interact. Analyses often fail to be multidimensional and to relate one factor to another. There is still less attention to gender than to poverty, and to other forms of social exclusion than to gender.
- As a result, strategies that are identified can prove inappropriate or inadequate/insufficient. Strategies devised to address gender disparity or social exclusion tend to focus overly on physical access and enrolment. There is less attention to 'equity in quality', more nuanced approaches to address attitudinal barriers or addressing the specific life situations of multiply-vulnerable 'hard to reach' children. Many countries, despite developing 'comprehensive' education policy frameworks as a part of SWAp development, continue to lack clear policies related to minority languages in education, or modalities of provision for disabled children.

- SWAps are not necessarily founded on good consultative processes either with disadvantaged individuals and communities themselves or professionals with understanding of specific equity issues.
- There has been limited use of the DAC guidelines for gender mainstreaming in SWAps in practice, and no guidance exists pertaining to other forms of social exclusion. The degree and approach to addressing gender and social exclusion issues is highly dependent on individuals and the overall 'donor mix' in a country (including the level of agreement and coordination in support of government efforts).
- Some development partners perceive themselves to be losing the diversity and depth of experience, field-based understanding and relationships, which project interventions provided, making them less able to provide quality assistance.

Implications

It is concluded that the potential of SWAps/PBAs to accelerate progress on gender and equity is not being fully realized in practice. Furthermore, relatively little is documented (in systematic form) about the development of Education SWAps *over time*: how equity issues are conceptualized, what 'partnership' factors help to bring about attitudinal change, what are effective capacity development strategies, institutional arrangements and so on. Hence there are gaps in our current understanding, especially with regards to effective practices for South Asia (with its vastly different social-economic and cultural context and generally lower level of aid dependency). The Sri Lanka study, and the study as a whole, will seek to fill some of these gaps, to understand better what processes and practices have taken place and what has been their effect. It is hoped that this will support governments and development partners, in Sri Lanka and across South Asia, to be able to analyse and understand the complex, inter-linked forms of inequality and exclusion at work in any one context, and to take the opportunities provided by a SWAp to address these through a coherent set of effective strategies, supported by conducive structures and partnership arrangements.

1.3 Study Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

To understand in detail how gender and social disparity/exclusion are being addressed in a selection of education SWAps in Sri Lanka, in order to inform good practice within those countries and to learn lessons for other countries in the region and beyond.

Objectives

To achieve this purpose, Sri Lanka and the other country case studies had the following objectives:

- Analyse the key dimensions of disparity and social exclusion that affect children and their implications for the education sector.
- Explore the political, policy, governance and institutional context for the SWAp, as well as 'threats' such as conflict or natural disaster.
- Assess the extent to which equity-related goals, objectives and indicators have been identified in the SWAp framework and plans.

- Identify the concepts, approaches and tools used in incorporating gender and equity considerations and the addressing of equity in different stages and processes of SWAp development and implementation.
- Identify development partner approaches, roles, influences and strategies related to addressing gender and social disparity within the SWAp.
- Assess the effectiveness of approaches taken and the influence of contextual factors.
- Identify lessons learned from good practice and identify gaps and weaknesses for further action.

The subsequent synthesis study will:

- Summarize, compare and contrast the key findings of the three country case studies.
- Identify general 'good practice' lessons of relevance, for wider application.

2. Study Approach and Methodology

2.1 Overall Approach

The overall approach of the study has been exploratory, aiming to 'tell the story' of Education SWAps in Nepal and attempting to understand how and to what extent these have made a difference in addressing issues related to gender and social inclusion.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Research focus areas

Four **focus areas** were identified for the research, namely:

1. Patterns, causes and educational consequences of disparity, inequity and social exclusion. This was in order to set the context for the studies.
2. Analysis of the SWAp content, with regard to conceptualization and addressing of disparity and social exclusion.
3. Analysis of SWAp processes, mechanisms and development over time, with regard to the creation of a conducive context and environment for effectively understanding and addressing equity and social exclusion issues.
4. Analysis of SWAp impacts, including direct reduction of disparity and improved education outcomes for socially excluded groups; and impacts in terms of understanding, attitudes, capacity and mechanisms to analyse and address equity and inclusion issues in an ongoing way.

2.2.2 Research methods and tasks

Methods

The above four focus areas were explored through two key methodologies, namely:

1. Analysis of secondary data and documentation

Secondary data and documentation was used for all areas of the study. This included:

- MoE official disaggregated statistics
- Data on disparities from other ministries or other bodies
- Analyses and research undertaken by excluded groups themselves
- Analyses and research undertaken by Development Partners (including donors, UN, NGOs)
- Analyses undertaken for preparation of the SWAp, or to feed into education policy processes
- Overarching legislative or rights frameworks that guide the education sector
- Key plans/policy frameworks/strategic frameworks that guide the SWAp
- PRSP (Mahinda Chinthana)
- SWAp 'working documents', for example review mission Aides Memoire, code of conduct, monitoring reports
- DP reports, policies, country assistance plans and so on.

2. Qualitative enquiry with a range of informants

Qualitative investigation was mainly conducted through 'semi-structured' interviews, and discussion with individuals and small groups. Question guides were developed, to ensure consistency and coverage (see Appendix for a prototype). The table below summarizes the key groups of study informants.

Government Structures ***Ministry of Education*** (1) Secretary, (2) Deputy Director/Planning,(3) Former Chief Adviser, (4) Consultant Coordinator/Donor Projects, (5) Director/Non-Formal Education, (6) Director – Special Education, (7) Commissioner (Dept. of Examinations) ***Other Ministries and Divisions*** Ministry of Finance (Director-General, National Planning)Chairman, Finance Commission	**Decentralized Levels of Administration** Provincial/Zonal/Divisional Education Officials **Education Institutions (Autonomous, government or private)** Vice-Chairman, National Education CommissionNational Institute of Education, Assistant Director-Generals: (1) (Research, Planning & Development); (2) (Science & Technology); (3) (Education Leadership Development & Teacher Education)
Schools/Communities Head teachers **SWAp Development Partners** Education Specialist (World Bank)Programme Officer (Education) (UNICEF)Consultant – Secondary Education Modernization Project (ADB)(1) Expert and (2) National Coordinator (GTZ)National Consultant (JICA)	**Civil Society Organizations, Campaigns etc.** National Coordinator (Coalition for Educational Development)

Research tasks

The exploration of the four focus areas, through the two methodologies, was broken down into six 'research tasks', namely:

A. Identification of sources, documents and study informants
B. Document-based analysis of key dimensions of educational disparity
C. Document-based analysis of SWAp content, processes and impacts
D. Qualitative research on SWAp processes and impacts
E. Analysis of findings
F. Writing up the case study.

2.3 Limitations and Constraints

Several constraints were encountered in undertaking the fieldwork. In Sri Lanka, the SWAp process had been set in motion only in 2005 and the plans were developed only in 2006. As such it was not possible to assess the impact of SWAp and therefore what could be attempted was to assess the extent to which it had been implemented.

Firstly the period set apart for field work, a mere sixteen days, was insufficient to collect information from different groups identified initially as informants. Thus even though conflict affected districts were included in the sample, the informants were drawn from relatively safe

locations within those areas, so as not to endanger the interviewers' lives. Even in rural areas, except in one, in Siyambalanduwa, more accessible locations had to be selected due to the difficulties of transport.

Some of the informants were not available, being out of the country or location. Others who occupied key positions were new to the respective positions and were not willing to participate in a discussion. On several occasions the interviewers found that having given appointments to them, officers were either not present, or unwilling to be interviewed (as they had not participated actively in the SWAp process), or even when interviewed, were not very well informed about what had taken place. Some of the stakeholders' impressions of not being informed about the SWAp was itself an important piece of information. This resulted in some cases of data inconsistency. In several cases, where actual data was requested, especially at provincial or zonal level, this was not available. The process of getting back the completed schedules after the interviews were done, especially from some locations, also took time and email had to be used in the case of the Northern Province.

The main objective of the researchers in identifying the sample of informants was to give fair representation of the locations in which disparities in education exist. However, it is noted that data gathered from one location which represents a particular constituency does not allow for generalizations to be made.

3. SWAp Development in Context

3.1 The Education Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) In Sri Lanka

The sector-wide approach in the education sector in Sri Lanka was discussed initially in 2004. The approach was crystallized in a programme framework based on national policies and priorities discussed over a decade and developed as the Education Sector Development Framework Programme (ESDFP) in 2005. Island-wide implementation of the programme commenced in 2006.

Key Features of the SWAp	■ Sector-wide scope limited to general education ■ Based on a clear sector and strategic framework ■ Based on long-term multi-year plans ■ Sri Lankan ownership and partnership with Development Partners ■ Developed and implemented with partnership of provincial, zonal authorities and schools and school development societies ■ Based on common implementation arrangements and donor coordination ■ Relies on local capacity with external inputs ■ Includes provision for results-based monitoring
Key Development Partners	**Current Funding (US$) (2007)**
Government Funds	US$ 607.34 m
Multilateral partners	
World Bank	US$ 10.91 m
Asian Development Bank	US$ 7.25 m
UNICEF	US$ 14.62 m
UNFPA	US$ 2 m
WFP	In kind
UNESCO	US$ 0.2 m
Bilateral partners	
JICA	US$ 0.11 m
GTZ	US$ 0.18 m
INGOs	
Save the Children (SL)	(Not available)
Plan (Sri Lanka)	US$ 2.7 m
World Vision	(Not available)
Indian Credit Line	US$ 1.14 m
Total Donor Funds	**US$ 36.58 m**
Total Govt. Funds	**US$ 607.34 m**
Total Govt. and Donor Funds	**US$ 643.92 m**
Percentage Donor Funds	**5.70%**

Source: Planning Division, Ministry of Education

3.2 The Context in Which the SWAp was Developed – Political, Policy and Institutional Environment

The modern system of education in Sri Lanka developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the aegis of the British colonial administration. The education system that was introduced was highly centralized, academically and examination oriented, and based on social class and language differentiation that created, juxtaposed with access to knowledge, wide socio-economic and regional disparities. These disparities have been reduced in the post-colonial decades but have not been eliminated.

Sri Lanka's commitment to achieving social equity through education was articulated strongly by national policy makers in the early 1940s during the transition years between British colonial rule and political independence in 1948. The report of the Special Committee on Education (Sessional Paper XXIV of 1943) introduced radical changes in educational policy such as free state primary, secondary and tertiary (including university) education in 1945; establishment of state secondary schools in the rural sector and Grade 5 scholarships at the end of primary education in the 1940s to facilitate the access of able children in non-affluent families to secondary education; and the adoption of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary education by the 1950s. Free education was introduced in recognition of the universal right to education and as a pre-requisite of a democratic society, with the concomitant objectives of reducing social inequalities and promoting upward socio-economic mobility for all. This initiative was taken before International Declarations, Covenants and Conventions were promulgated and nearly five decades before 'Education for All' became an international norm.

Education became a major agency for the reduction of poverty. Significantly it also became an agent of gender equality in access to general education as parents in low income families had no longer to invest their scarce resources only in the education of their sons. By the early 1960s around 75% of boys and girls in the 5–14 age group were enrolled in schools and the rapid expansion of educational opportunities in a low income country transformed Sri Lanka into an 'outlier' among economically developing countries. Most importantly, rising educational expectations and public consciousness of the value of free education became a social force that, through the vicissitudes of time, exerted pressure on policy makers to prevent deviation from or dilution of the right to free state education. Consequently, despite economic constraints from the late 1950s and slow economic growth, disparities created by uneven development and anti-poor macro-economic international and national influences, social equity is currently a policy imperative and gender equality is accepted as a *fait accompli* in the context of minimal differences in enrolment rates.

A rights-based approach to education continues to inform policy perspectives. The Constitution (1978) guarantees fundamental rights and its Policy Directive promotes the eradication of illiteracy and the assurance of equal access to education at all levels [Art. 27 (2)]. In 1981 Sri Lanka ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was resuscitated from virtual limbo by the formulation in 1993 of a Women's Charter modelled largely on CEDAW. In 1990 the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the endorsement of the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All renewed the commitment to equality. Further incentives were introduced to facilitate educational opportunity through the provision of free textbooks from 1980 and free materials for school uniforms from 1993. Intermittently, free mid-day meals have been provided to students in disadvantaged communities. Transport to school has been subsidized over decades.

Policy documents and education reforms since the 1990s have focused on equity issues. The reforms introduced by the National Education Commission (NEC) in 1997 included compulsory education regulations for the 5–14 age group and proposals for the establishment of a well-equipped quality school in each of the 324 local administrative divisions to ensure an equitable distribution of educational opportunities. The National Education Commission's (NEC) 'Proposals for a Framework for General Education' (2003) had as its priority, equity in the provision of quality education. The National Plan of Action for Children (Department of National Planning, 2004) endorsed the proposal in the NEC report to extend compulsory education to 16 years, and reflected the same priorities of universalizing primary and junior secondary education and increasing access to senior secondary education, reducing disparities, ensuring quality and providing a 'second chance' to school dropouts. Legislation prohibiting child labour under 14 years and hazardous employment from 14 to 18 years, and the establishment of the National Child Protection Authority, reinforce the rights-based approach to child development and welfare.

Although Sri Lanka developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy over several years, a volatile political environment and frequent changes of government prevented implementation. Currently the pro-poor policy document of the new government that was elected in late 2005, known as the 'Mahinda Chintana', is replete with poverty reduction and social equity oriented proposals. In the education sector the document reiterates commitment to the right to free education, the provision of free mid-day meals to children in poverty groups to increase school attendance, and the reduction of disparities by the equitable distribution, division-wise, of quality schools, improving the infrastructural facilities in rural schools and facilitating access to English and to the second official language.

From an international perspective, Sri Lanka is perceived to have near universal primary education but is committed to the MDG plus of universal junior secondary education in consonance with its compulsory education requirement.

The institutional environment for the operation of the education system was largely centralized till the 1990s but the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (1987) introduced the devolution of some of the powers and functions of the central government to the provincial governments. The transition has not been smooth in the context of lack of clarity in delineating lines of authority and preventing overlapping functions but there has been significant administrative and financial decentralization. The educational structure is relatively complex and coordination and monitoring have been weak at all levels with implications for effective implementation of policies and programmes.

An island-wide network of primary and secondary schools has been created over decades providing easy access at least to 85% of primary school age children. The state has had a near monopoly of the provision of education since the 'take over' of the majority of denominational schools in 1961, and only around 2% of the school population are in private schools, which number 85 of a total of around 10,000 schools in the country. However, in recent years some international schools have been opened in different parts of the country but are not within the purview of the Ministry of Education.

Another feature of the education system is that 96.7% of the schools are co-educational schools. The small number of single sex schools are located in urban areas, most having catered to elite and middle class families since the colonial era. Half the primary and secondary school population are girls (50.2%), the percentage of girls increasing from 49.1% in primary grades to 56.6% in the highest grades (Grades 12 and 13). The distribution of the schools also

represents broadly the ethnic composition of the population. Hence disparities in the provision of education are determined largely by socio-economic and regional disparities rather than by gender and ethnicity, except in the plantation enclaves which have been educationally disadvantaged since the colonial era.

Schools are categorized into four types:

(i) Type 1AB – those having grades to Grade 13 (GCE/Adv. Level) in Science, Arts and Commerce, 646 schools (6.6%);
(ii) Type 1C – those having grades to Grade 13 (GCE/Adv. Level) in Arts and/or Commerce only, 1810 schools (18.6%);
(iii) Type 2 – those having grades to Grade 11 (GCE/Ord. Level), 4237 schools (43.6%);
(iv) Type 3 – those having grades to Grade 5 or 8/9, 3034 schools (31.2%).

Of these schools, 324 which include the most prestigious and popular schools in the country are known as National Schools and are administered by the Central Ministry of Education. The proposal of the National Education Commission to upgrade a school in each division to be a 'centre of excellence' led to the selection of 388 schools as Navodaya schools but most of these schools have yet to achieve excellence. Under the current Mahinda Chintana policy a scheme has been initiated to upgrade one school each (Isuru schools) in the one hundred most disadvantaged divisions and in 19 conflict affected divisions identified by the Department of Census and Statistics. The geographical distribution of schools continues to be inequitable and a correlation is clearly seen between deprived family background and disadvantaged schools.

Education participation rates had increased from around 40% at the time of political independence to 97.1% for boys and 95.6% for girls in the 5–10 age group and to 93.4% for boys and 96.4% for girls in the 10–14 age group in 2002 (the compulsory age group). Retention rates in 2001 were 96.9% for boys and 98.3% for girls at the end of primary education (Grade 5), and 79.1% for boys and 86.3% for girls at the end of junior secondary education (Grade 9). Participation rates are around 65% in the 15–19 age group.

Content-wise, a uniform curriculum is in operation in Grades 1–9. Grades 10–11 have a core curriculum and options available under aesthetic and technical subjects. In Grades 12–13 students are enrolled in three streams – science, arts and commerce – and offer three subjects. They sit for a Common General Paper for university admission and are encouraged to offer General English and General Information Technology in Grade 12.

In a country in which the state has had a preponderant role in the provision and management of education, the private sector and civil society have had a minimal role in educational operations. Non-governmental organizations have focused on other sectors and have tended to leave education to the state in view of its positive record in expanding educational opportunities. A new development is the Coalition for Educational Development of 63 civil society organizations (CSOs) island-wide, formed with support from the Commonwealth Education Fund through Save the Children. The Coalition envisages the involvement of CSOs from community to national levels in the formulation and implementation of national policies to ensure quality education and equal education opportunity for all

At the same time the general public has been consistently articulate regarding perceived deficiencies in the education sector and has been pro-active in holding the state accountable for safeguarding the right to free education and reducing social inequalities.

Poverty is a major factor that creates and reinforces educational disadvantage in a country in which 23% of the population have been estimated to live below the national poverty line, with wide regional disparities ranging from 6% poverty in Colombo to 37% in Moneragala, the most disadvantaged district.

In addition, Sri Lanka has faced major challenges in recent years such as political instability, armed conflict and natural disaster. Two decades of armed conflict in the Northern and Eastern Provinces have caused not only loss of lives but also extensive displacement; and for survivors, lack of access to basic services, livelihoods and security. Access to education has become a major issue despite the efforts of the state to maintain educational institutions in areas to which it has access. Reliable data is limited but a rapid assessment survey by the National Institute of Education supported by UNICEF (2003) has estimated a dropout rate of 15% in the conflict affected areas in a country in which dropout rates from schools are estimated officially to be overall around 4%.

The unexpected tsunami that devastated the coastal areas of the South, East and North, and to lesser extent the North-West, created a crisis in the provision of services in view of the speed and magnitude of the disaster. In addition to loss of lives and displacement of families, severe damage was inflicted on housing and infrastructure. Over a hundred schools were destroyed or were damaged. The process of reconstruction is ongoing. Micro-studies have indicated that the educational aspirations of parents had led to the return of most displaced children to schools in old or new, permanent or temporary locations. However, there is evidence that groups of children in extensively damaged areas in the East and North are still deprived of educational opportunities.

4. The Challenge of Equity and Social Exclusion

4.1 Exploring the Challenge

Macro-studies over the years have indicated that Sri Lanka's problem is less an issue of overall educational disadvantage than acute educational deprivation in pockets of poverty and social exclusion. Some findings of micro-studies are indicative of the incidence, causes and consequences of non-schooling in specific circumstances and the need for committed interventions to promote universal elementary (primary and junior secondary) education. Even at the macro level, on the other hand, inequities exist in the quality of schooling. Inequitable distribution of resources and especially issues related to the deployment of qualified teachers discriminate against the improvement of quality mainly in the above pockets of poverty and social exclusion.

In our analysis of disparities we present the macro picture on the disparities in education. Then we peruse specific Sri Lankan studies that have focused on different categories of vulnerable children who are denied access to education and those who drop out early as a result of being absent from school often and/or not reaching expected standards of learning achievement. Among these groups are children who are poor, who live in remote rural areas, who belong to ethnic or linguistic minorities, or who are denied care and protection from their parents or families or are subjected to discrimination due to social and cultural reasons. Girls are not treated here as a separate category in the field of education (in access as well as achievement), as girls have achieved near parity status or sometimes achieved higher than boys. However, *gender* is considered in relation to other variables influencing access to education. It is recognized that the disadvantages children suffer from frequently occur together and that some children suffer from multiple disadvantages. Included among these vulnerable children are those placed in special circumstances such as girls in some ethnic and religious groups, estate children, institutionalized children, street children, children forced to work, and those affected by conflict and natural disasters. Some of the studies utilized have focused on specific groups of children while others have examined how specific disadvantages affect the education of children in different groups.

4.2 Children Affected by Gender Discrimination, Poverty and Social Exclusion

4.2.1 National, regional and local patterns of poverty

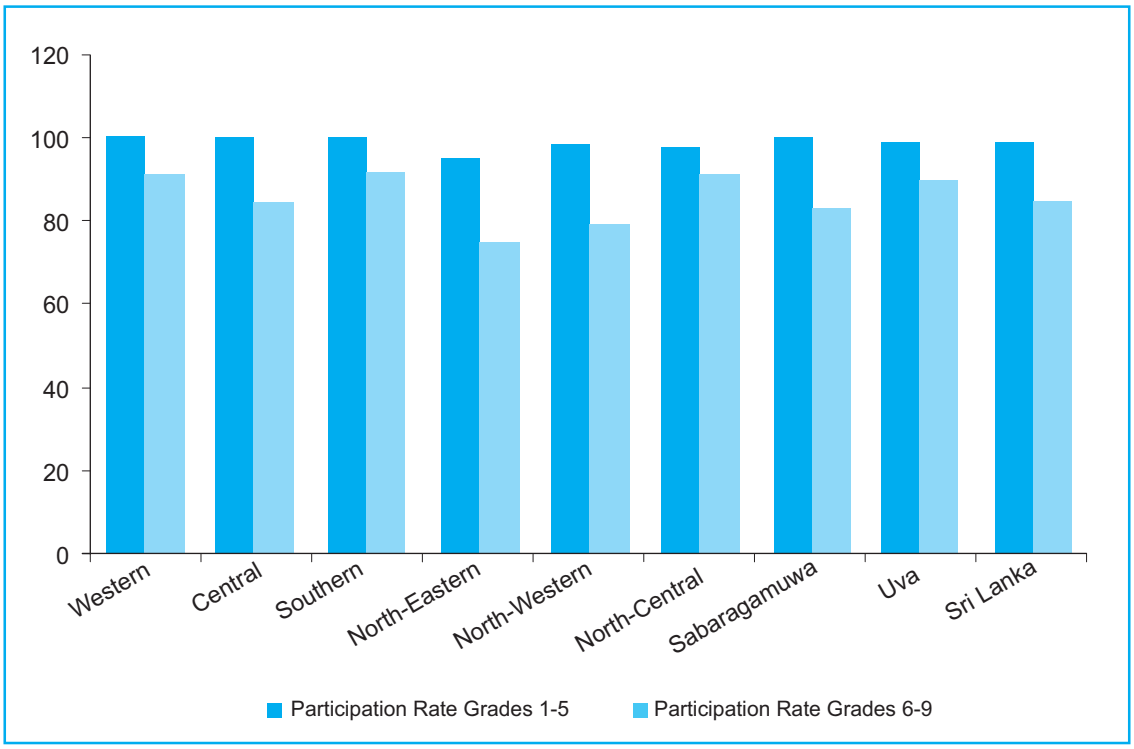
A cardinal principle of Sri Lankan public policy has been the promotion of equity and distributive justice through investment in education (National Education Commission, 2003). The results of this investment are evident. Analysis of the Household Income and Expenditure Survey of the Department of Census and Statistics of 1995/96 (the most recently available data available) by the World Bank estimated that the enrolment rates of children across economic groups indicate a high degree of equity between families from various economic levels (World Bank, 2005a). Net primary enrolment among poor households was 95% and among the richest quintile was 97%. At the junior secondary and senior secondary levels, too, the distribution of the net enrolment was fairly equitable, with enrolment rates ranging from 63% to 71% in junior secondary and 32–47% in senior secondary levels between poor and non-poor households. These values imply that

net enrolment among non-poor households is only 8% higher for junior secondary education in comparison to poor households. World Bank further points out that secondary enrolment among poor households has considerably risen since then so that the school enrolment gap between low income and high income households is likely to have narrowed further.

The Central Bank (2005) figures based on sample data collected in 2003/04 reveal that the highest participation in formal education (net enrolment) came from the Northern Province, one of the most affected parts of the country in a 20-year civil war. The Bank itself admits that these estimates may be overstated as they have been derived excluding three districts which were less urbanized and relatively more backward than the Jaffna and Vauniya districts which were included in the survey. The survey found the participation rates varying from 94.2% in the Northern to 91.6% in the Southern Province. The disparities between boys and girls in the 5–14 age group ranged from 95.2% for boys and 92.6% for girls in the Western Province to 93.4% for boys and 91.2% for girls in Eastern Province. In the 15–18 age group, more boys were in formal education than boys in all provinces other than Western.

World Bank (2005a), however, on estimates based on School Census data, indicates that school participation rates (see Figure 1) reveal a high degree of regional equality over the primary education cycle (Grades 1–5).

FIGURE 1 School participation rates by provinces



Source: World Bank (2005a)

There are also substantial intra-province variations in junior secondary participation. Vavuniya and Batticaloa districts of the North-Eastern Province attain participation rates of just 55% and 65% respectively. The Puttalam district of the North-Western Province and Nuwara Eliya district of the Central Province reach participation rates of only 69% and 73% respectively. In contrast, the Colombo district of Western Province and the Jaffna district of the North-Eastern Province achieve very high participation rates of 93% and 92% respectively.

In an attempt to enforce compulsory education for the 5–14 age group, regulations were implemented from January 1998. Two Committees (School Attendance Committee and School Attendance Monitoring Committee) were appointed at local level to monitor compulsory attendance. Perera *et al.* (2003), however, found that while 8459 School Attendance Committees and School Attendance Monitoring Committees had been appointed by 1999 they had not met regularly and had ceased to function by 2000. The reasons attributed for this situation were lack of involvement by the provincial education authorities and the reliance on the Non-Formal and Special Education Division of the Ministry to implement the proposal. This Division identified as the lead agency was under-resourced and lacked adequate human resources needed for implementation.

Census data gathered in 2001 for 119 most economically backward Divisional Secretary's Divisions out of 324 in the country, on the other hand, presents a clear picture of the situation with regard to education in these areas (Department of Census and Statistics, 2006) (Table 1). The proportion of the population below the national average poverty line in the districts from which these divisions were selected ranged from 37.3% in Badulla to 6.4% in Colombo.

TABLE 1 Incidence of poverty – selected districts

PROVINCE	DISTRICT	TOTAL NO. OF DIVISIONS	NO. OF DIVISIONS BELOW POVERTY LINE	% OF POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LINE
Western	Colombo	13	2	6.4
	Gampaha	13	2	10.7
	Kalutara	14	5	20.0
Central	Kandy	20	10	24.9
	Matale	11	4	29.6
	N. Eliya	5	2	22.6
Southern	Galle	19	4	25.8
	Matara	16	7	27.5
	Hambantota	12	12	32.2
Northern	Jaffna	15	2	NA
	Mannar	5	NA	NA
	Vavuniya	4	2	NA
	Mullativu	4	NA	NA
	Kilinochchi	3	NA	NA
Eastern	Batticaloa	14	2	NA
	Ampara	19	3	NA
	Trincomalee	10	3	NA
North-Western	Kurunegala	27	3	25.4
	Puttalam	16	6	31.3
North-Central	Anuradhapura	22	3	20.4
	Polonnaruwa	7	2	23.7
Uva	Badulla	15	12	37.3
	Moneragala	11	7	37.1
Sabaragamuwa	Ratnapura	17	15	34.4
	Kegalla	11	11	32.5
Total		**323**	**119**	

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2006)

Eight of the districts from the conflict affected Northern and Eastern Provinces were not included in the analysis, thus leaving out the worst affected regions.

The percentages of children not attending school aged 5–14, as based on the 2001 census data, exceeded 5% in 59 out of the 119 divisions and was higher than 10% in 13 divisions.

TABLE 2 Poverty and not attending school – selected divisions

DISTRICT	DIVISION	% OF THE POPULATION BELOW POVERTY LINE	% OF CHILDREN AGED 6–14 YEARS NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL
Matara	Pitabeddara	25.8	10.1
Puttalam	Mundel	40.0	10.9
Ampara	Irakkamam	NA	10.9
Galle	Thawalama	28.6	11.0
Trincomalee	Kinniya	NA	11.0
Puttalam	Kalpitiya	44.3	11.3
Badulla	Haldumulla	30.6	11.4
Puttalam	Wanathawilluwa	38.7	11.5
Trincomalee	Kuchchaveli	NA	11.5
Ampara	Navithanveli	NA	11.8
Galle	Neluwa	32.1	12.2
Kalutara	Mathugama	28.5	12.2
Ratnapura	Pelmadulla	29.7	12.4
Colombo	Colombo	10.5	14.1
Ratnapura	Kalawana	35.4	16.0

Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2006)

Table 2 vividly indicates that disadvantaged in education are found not only in the remote and difficult districts but are in pockets of disadvantage even in so-called privileged districts, for example Colombo, Kalutara and Galle districts. In addition, it is noteworthy that of the above districts, Ampara, Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Puttalam are affected by the conflict.

In spite of the public investments in education, households also invest considerable resources for the education of children. World Bank (2005a), analysing Department of Census and Statistics data for 1995/96, points out that the major proportion of household education spending was by the richest consumption quintile which accounts for about 52% of total household education expenditure. This share progressively declines with the poorest quintile (who were 25% of the population), accounting for only about 6% of the total private education expenditure. The largest component of annual private education expenditure (45%) is on tuition fees. This is followed by equipment and stationery (28%) and school fees, facility fees etc. (19%). The dominance of tuition in private household education spending is the outcome of several factors such as (i) extreme competition to enter university, (ii) the high stakes in Grade 5 scholarship examination, (iii) perceived inadequacies in teaching and examination preparation by schools, especially for major examinations, and (iv) a culture of attending tuition classes which has now become virtually institutionalized. The low teacher salaries have forced teachers to seek a second source of income through tuition. It is not possible to estimate how this expenditure is spread among different levels of education but it is assumed that more expenditure is borne at collegiate and tertiary levels.

4.2.2 The interaction of gender and poverty

School Census data (Ministry of Education, 2004) reveals disparities in gender by school type and economic sector. This data, however, is flawed by the fact that Divisional Secretary's Divisions schools (DSD schools), which have been provided with enhanced facilities to develop as centres of excellence, are mistakenly included as a separate category. It is significant to note that gender disparity in enrolment by sector (as defined above) is most evident in the municipality areas, to the advantage of girls. Thus the percentage of boys enrolled in school in these areas is 46.2% while 53.8% are girls. The lowest percentage of girls is in the Pradeshiya Sabhas with 50.2% of enrolled being boys. It is also noteworthy that the plantation schools, traditionally considered as disadvantaged, especially for girls, had 49.2% girls as enrolees.

As pointed out above, however, gender disparities occur not so much between sectors but between and within districts. Most significant is that in DSD schools, in Northern Province only 36.9% of those enrolled were girls while in Uva Province 55% of those enrolled were girls. Within Northern Province, Jaffna district DSD schools had only 37.3% of students who were girls and Vavuniya district 29.7% girls. In other sectors and other districts gender disparities were much less pronounced. The highest percentage of girls in school enrolment was from Kalutara district (52.0%) and the lowest from Nuwara Eliya (47.2%). For the whole country the boys' and girls' percentages were 50.1 and 49.9, indicating near parity. While the percentage of females in the population in 2003/04 was higher (52.6%), the trend of high enrolment of girls in education has continued for several decades.

Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2005) presents the data collected through its Consumer Finance and Socio-economic Survey of 2003/04 in 22 out of the 25 districts excluding three conflict affected districts. It found that the share of students in formal education in the age group 5–14 years had increased from 91.2% in 1996/97 to 93.2% in 2003/04. Further, the increase in the percentage share of males was greater than that of females between the two surveys with the male percentage increasing from 90.9% to 93.9% and the female percentage from 91.5% to 92.5%. When the above data was analysed by sector, age and gender, the highest attendance was in the 5–14 age group in all three sectors and the percentage of males was higher than that of females – although differences were small and within 89.8% and 94.1% among all sectors and genders.

Differences among sectors and between genders were wider in the 15–18 age group, and only the urban sector had reported a higher percentage of males in formal education than of females. The estate sector had the lowest percentages of both males and females from both age groups participating in formal education when compared with other sectors. The percentage of females participating in education in the 15–18 age group was marginally higher than that of males.

The Central Bank survey (2005) also provides data on 'school avoidance'. School avoidance rate was defined as the number of out-of-school children as a percentage of the population of schooling age. The average non-schooling rate had declined from 3.3% in 1996/97 to 2.1% in 2003/04. The school avoidance gap among sectors and between males and females within all three sectors had also narrowed during this period. Male avoidance rate in 2003/04 was 3.0%, 1.7% and 4.8% for urban, rural and estate sectors while the female rates were 2.9%, 1.9% and 4.5% respectively for the three sectors.

A main reason indicated for non-schooling was the inability to provide basic requirements. There was a negative relationship between income level and non-schooling rates. School avoidance

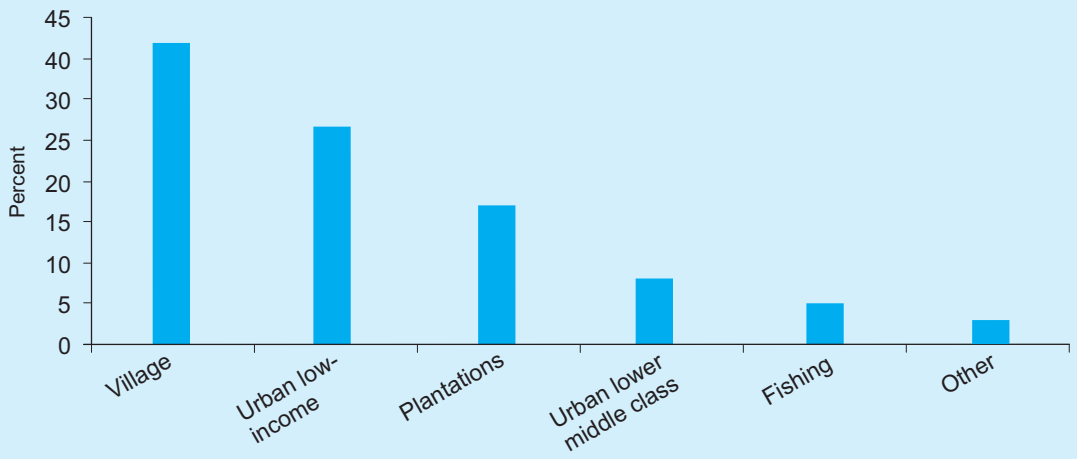
declined as income rose. Thus the percentage in all sectors in the 1st income quintile was 2.8% with this percentage varying from 5.8% in the estate sector to 2.6% in the rural sector. At the other end of the spectrum (5th quintile) the percentages were 1.3% for all sectors, 3.2% for estate and 0.6% for the urban sector. Across provinces, school avoidance rate varied from 4.1% in the Eastern Province (a conflict affected province) to 1.3% in the North-Central Province.

The national level data analysed in the above studies shows that poverty, especially as related to other disadvantages such as lack of infrastructure facilities, leads to non-schooling and/or early dropout in certain sectors and in pockets of deprivation in districts. Gender differences on the whole appear as minimal while boys are also prone to leave school in some sectors, probably due to the ease of finding employment during adolescence.

Case Study 1: Out-of-school Children and Irregular Attendance

Sample

A total of 1014 children and 944 parents/caregivers from 22 districts in the country and six community types.



There were more children in school (39.2%) than out of school with little gender difference (39.5% boys and 38.6% girls). The 60.4% out-of-school children comprised those who had never been to school (15.7%) and those who had dropped out early (44.7%). More girls (18.3%) than boys (14.1%) had never been to school and more boys (46.3%) than girls (42.3%) were school dropouts. There were more out-of-school children in the 10–14 age group (61.7%). The percentage of out-of-school children was relatively higher among the Sri Lankan Tamil children and the plantation Tamil children. Fifty-three per cent of the village-based children were out of school.

Most of the dropouts (96.4%) had left school before completing junior secondary education and 35.7% before completing primary education. The percentages ranged from 50% in low income urban communities to 40.3% in plantations, 38.3% in villages and 36.8% in fishing communities, thus rejecting the belief that plantations are the most disadvantaged of communities. Economic reasons loom large in the case of village, slum and plantation children, while personal reasons were important in urban lower middle class, fishing and village

communities. School figured as one of the least important factors with only 7.5% of children citing it.

Poverty and resultant economic constraints of families, indifference of parents and unstable family environments were found to be the major factors of non-schooling, dropout and high absenteeism leading to engagement in paid employment in occupations such as domestic service and manual labour

School related factors such as refusal to admit poor children, or those without birth certificates, lack of facilities for children with disabilities, harsh punishments and lack of transport facilities had also been barriers. Personal problems such as chronic ill-health, disability, peer pressure and learning difficulties had contributed to non-schooling and dropout.

Gunawardena and Jayaweera (2004)

4.3 Disabled Children

As in any country, a proportion of the people of Sri Lanka have a disability. Disabilities can be broadly classified into physical disabilities (e.g. having limited mobility), sensory disabilities (e.g. visual, hearing) or intellectual/learning disabilities. These disabilities affect children's education either due to lack of facilities to enable these children to gain access to education and benefit or due to the non-availability of qualified teachers to guide them. Some disabilities are linked to poverty. It is also perceived that disabled children suffer from discrimination and social exclusion due to societal attitudes. Thus disabled children from poor and socially-excluded groups suffer from multiple disadvantages.

Saddhananda (2001) found that the majority of totally blind people have never gone to school. Similarly, nearly half of those with hearing/speaking disabilities, 74.8% of dumb persons, 57.9% and 50.8% of persons who are both dumb and deaf and persons with speaking difficulties respectively, 87.1% persons who cannot work with both hands, and 64.3% of people with other disabilities in both hands have never gone to school. Forty-three per cent of persons who cannot use both legs, 34.2% of persons with disabilities in both legs, 30.7% of those with other physical disabilities, and 65% of mentally retarded persons also have not received any schooling.

It is not easy for those with disabilities to enter the common school system and there are no facilities for them to obtain an education. There is a scarcity of schools for the blind in the country, and an inadequacy of teachers with competency in sign language. In spite of the acceptance of Inclusive Education as a policy, lack of proper alternative facilities in educational institutions, provision of Braille equipment and audio tapes etc., and insufficiency of teachers trained in inclusive education, hamper the translation of this policy into practice.

Department of Census and Statistics (2003) reveals that a large number of disabled population (87,105 or 31.7%) had never attended school. More disabled females than males had never attended school (46,340 as against 40,765).

Ahuja and Mendis (2002) found that teachers very rarely identified children who have disability as being within the Special Educational Needs Group. They were focusing on children with

psychological, social and economic problems as those whose parents were migrant workers or were poor, those who had alcoholic fathers and others in difficult circumstances. Many of the teachers interviewed were of the opinion that children who have disability should be placed in 'Special Education Units' and had no place in the normal classroom.

Mendis (2004) quoting figures from the Ministry of Human Resources, Education and Cultural Affairs (2002) points out that the numbers of female school-going children who have disability are far less than male school-going children. Similarly, even though there are more girls in the secondary education cycle than boys, the proportion of students who have disability registered in schools in 2000 was 59.5% boys and 40.5% girls. She argues that these figures indicate that many female children with disability are not being sent to schools even though the incidence of a number of disabilities is higher in females.

4.4 Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances

Poverty and livelihood factors exert a powerful influence on the assurance of access to education, sometimes with a gender dimension. Poverty also increases parents' migration, family breakdown, child abuse and exploitation, all of which tend to aggravate the adverse situations in which children are placed. Such children are especially vulnerable to dropout, to engage in income-earning activities whilst attending school, to become absent more frequently and to perform poorly in the learning achievement. We have identified estate children, child workers, street children, institutionalized children (Children Placed in State Receiving Homes and Children Placed in Remand Homes, Detention Centres and Certified Schools), children affected by conflict and children subjected to sexual exploitation as 'multiply vulnerable children'. How these factors affect the education of girls and boys can vary in different contexts and these differences will be analysed as probed through the literature.

4.4.1 Estate children

'Plantation children' or children of resident plantation labour families in their enclaves created by colonial policy were by-passed by the positive education policies implemented since the 1940s. They have been integrated in the national system of education during the last two decades and have benefited from special donor assisted programmes implemented to extend education opportunity and to improve their quality of education (Jayaweera, 1998). Even by 2001 (Korale, 2004), 68.5% of the plantation schools were Type 3 schools and had only primary grades. Out of a total of 775 schools, there was only one 1AB Type school and 38 Type 1C schools of which 17 were in Nuwara Eliya district and another 12 in Badulla district.

Little's (2003) study based on interviews with relevant stakeholders found that a certain amount of educational progress had occurred during the last 50 years in the estate sector. She reported that parents, teachers and estate superintendents had alluded to a number of reasons for this change. These were (1) an increased interest on the part of the parents in education, (2) the integration of the schools into a national system of education, (3) the role of the government and foreign agencies, (4) declining employment opportunities within the estates and the growth of alternatives outside, and (5) improvements in the internal functioning of schools and the school system.

At the same time her interviews identified several constraints in change. Teachers, principals and educational officials highlighted (1) the lack of interest on the part of parents which led to poor attendance, (2) lack of housing for teachers, (3) cramped working conditions for students and teachers, and (4) insufficient supervision by educational officials. Little points out that between 1977 and 1995 the growth in enrolment in the plantation schools has been great but the composition of growth has been different from that observed in the mainstream:

(1) There has been a substantial growth of enrolment in the primary grades, reflecting marked improved retention between years 1–5.
(2) The growth in the post-primary school grades has been more marked than in the rest of the school system; 100% increase was observed between 1987 and 1992.
(3) The growth observed has been greater for girls than for boys at both primary and, especially, at post-primary level.

4.4.2 Children affected by conflict

De Silva (2003) reports interviews with nineteen children who were recruited as child soldiers by a rebel group in Sri Lanka. They gave multiple reasons for joining the group. Nine of them had joined for the virtue of being a freedom fighter and martyr. Seven had joined for fear of being abducted by the enemy and five said they joined seeking revenge for the death of a family member. Only three had joined for economic reasons. Subsequent studies revealed that single parenthood, domestic violence, and extreme poverty leading to migration of mothers to the Middle East were predisposing factors for conscription. Several of the recruits who had run away from home had been in orphanages maintained by rebels and had undergone training for some time before formal recruitment.

Somasunderam (1998) presents case studies of child soldiers who were not only deprived of the right to education and development but also underwent psychological trauma. Children reported how they were abducted and were not given to their mother when she came to take them home, how they underwent extensive training, participated in village massacres, tortured informants, were forced to kill their own friends and bury them, and had been ordered to commit suicide. Some of them had tried to ‘escape’ from unbearable circumstances in the family but later faced traumatic consequences several times more horrendous.

A survey conducted by the National Institute of Education and UNICEF (2003) covered government schools in seven districts in conflict affected provinces and four districts bordering these districts. The methodology employed was a triangulation process using a documentary survey, focus group discussions of zonal level personnel and visits to selected schools in the districts for observation. Data was collected in relation to school buildings, common amenities, students, teachers, school facilities including supplies and equipment, and non-formal education. The study specifically comments on the problems and difficulties which existed in the educational infrastructure in these areas, particularly inconsistencies, gaps in information and lack of clarity.

The study estimated the dropout rate for children in the North-East Provinces (before the provinces were de-merged) as 15.8% as compared with the national rate of 3.9%. This rate ranged from 7.8% in Puttalam district to 31.8% in Mannar. Qualitative information revealed that dropout rates were high in general, the highest numbers being from the displaced children. Irregular attendance and absenteeism were very common and poor nutrition and health status

influenced attendance. A large number of students were seen to be affected by psychosocial problems.

Wimaladharma *et al.* (2005) conducted a study of 303 households in three districts of Eastern Province using interviews with organizations working in the area, households and children. The province indicated that widespread poverty and the conflict had led to further loss of property (91%) and loss of income. For 50% of the respondents, conflict had resulted in permanent displacement. They had also lost livelihood equipment such as canoes, machinery, livestock and cultivable land. Thirty-eight per cent said disruption of education had occurred.

The percentages of school-aged children aged 10–14 and 15–17 enrolled in school were 89% and 49% respectively. The gender differences were minimal. In the younger age group there was no difference by ethnicity but, in the older group, almost as many children from the Tamil and Muslim communities were out of school as in school.

Educational attainment of the 19–25 age group indicates the impact of conflict on education. Only about 6% of this age group had less than 5 years of education and 36% have had 9 years or less of schooling. However, close to 70% overall have dropped out of school before completing 10 years of education. Among those who had less than five years of education there were twice as many girls as boys, but this trend was reversed at higher grades and there were more females going into Advanced Level classes. Overall, among the Sinhalese, more than 86% had completed between 10 and 13 years of education and in contrast only about half of those belonging to Tamil and Muslim communities had completed between 10 and 13 years of education. About 10% of Muslims had less than 5 years of education and most of these were females.

These differences in ethnicity could be linked to the relative proximity of the Tamils and Muslims to the violent conflict areas. Children drop out of school when the main income earner has been killed or disabled in order to find ways of supplementing the household income. During conflict periods, even while children remain formally enrolled in schools, their attendance is poor and many school days are lost because of insecurity caused by violent incidents. In some instances, schools are taken over to house refugees or armed personnel. Many schools do not have adequate facilities and are often not adequately maintained or resourced. The total quality of education received is thus likely to be poor.

4.4.3 Children in urban low income neighbourhoods

Urban low-income communities are among the most economically deprived. The community selected by Ariyapala (2002) was a low-income community in a suburb of Colombo with an approximate population of 1030 in 110 families. The majority of the families (60 out of 110) had a monthly income between Rs 1500 and Rs 2500 (US$ 15–25). A random sample of 58 children had been selected for the study. The study does not give an analysis of data by gender.

Children in this community suffered from multiple disadvantages. A majority of children lived with another family and 34% were from families that experienced constant conflict and friction. The children were often isolated by incidents of alcoholism, extra-marital affairs, divorce and family squabbles. Abandonment by the mother/father or both was also a feature. Four children were jeered at and bullied by the community because of a physical or mental disability or ridiculed as

a result of a parent's misconduct. The parents cared for the disabled children but they lacked any education. The family considered it a shame to have such children and no effort was made to ensure his/her future well-being. Instances of children being frequently beaten by a drunken father or mother and being spoken to in obscene language were evident.

The majority of the parents were aware and eager to provide health and medical care for the children but did not have the financial ability or the facilities to do so. Sixty-two per cent of the children were malnourished and did not have proper meals. However, there was close affinity within the community and when the family could not afford meals for a child, the community would help.

A major factor affecting education was poverty. Other factors conducive to the children's education were also absent in many families. The bent towards education in the community was weak. Living amidst unstable economic conditions and family problems, the child's strategy was money-centred. A pass in the GCE (OL) and getting a job was the primary aim of the few parents who aspired for education for their children. 'Money' was more important than 'education'. Fifty per cent of the children were engaged in work, which they did not object to but was harmful to their health, education and development. Seventeen per cent were from economically stable but broken families. Another 26% belonged to families that were economically very weak. These children did not get any protection from elders, the community or the state and as the child's freedom was not restricted he/she was likely to be sexually exploited and abused.

Pinto-Jayawardena (2006), in a random sample of 1200 households, studied mothers who had migrated overseas for employment and had been absent for over six months. The study was carried out in two districts – Colombo and Kurunegala – and looked at the effect of migration on children and husbands of the women who migrate. The study included a sample survey of 400 children from the two districts and control groups of families from the same socio-economic background. The study used structured questionnaires, focus group discussions and observations. Data from children under five years was obtained through informal discussions and child-friendly activities. A significant feature of the study was that children's participation had been directly ensured by having a team of 10 child researchers (aged 10–16) trained on child rights and child-friendly methodologies who worked alongside the research assistants.

A comparative analysis was conducted of school attendance and performance of 50 children each from three groups comprising children of migrant mothers, children with mothers working in Sri Lanka and children of non-working mothers. Educational performance of children left behind by migrant mothers was clearly lower than that of the two control groups. The highest proportion of children obtaining the lowest scores in all three subjects was children of migrant mothers. The highest percentage of attendance at schools was by children of working mothers and the lowest by children of migrant mothers. It was clear that the absence of the mother had a decidedly negative impact on children's performance and somewhat of an impact on school attendance.

4.4.4 Child workers

Child labour has become a subject of concern largely due to the activities of international organizations such as ILO to eliminate or at least reduce its incidence. Education has been effective as a major agent in reducing child labour as it is apparent that non-schooling predisposes child labour. Children in low income families tend to be absorbed into the informal sector activities in their environment, such as vending or petty trade in urban locations, assisting

cultivation in the rural sector and domestic service and manual wage labour everywhere. These low income, low skill, unstable activities merely perpetuate the cycle of poverty in their families and deprive them of educational opportunities that would improve their life chances.

The most recent large study was the Child Activity Survey by the Department of Census and Statistics (1999). The survey found that non-school going was not an extensive feature in the macro data but that there was evidence of child labour, part time economic activities often as family labour, and household labour by out-of-school children as well as by children in school. It estimated that out of a total of 926,037 children (5–17 years of age), 68,715 were combining schooling with economic activity, 7.5% only. Of these, 5% were urban children and 95% were residing in rural areas. Of those engaged in unpaid family work, 91.7% were in the 5–14 age group. There was a likelihood of more children engaging in economic activity and household work as they get older. Almost 12% of the children aged 5–9 and 46% of those aged 10–14 were engaged in both economic activity and schooling; the corresponding figures for those engaged in economic activity, household work and schooling were 13.2% and 52.6%, while 30.0% and 49.2% respectively were engaged in schooling and household work.

More boys were engaged in economic activity and schooling in both the above age groups but more girls were engaged in schooling and housekeeping only and economic activity, household work and schooling in both the age groups. Information on school attendance showed that 97.5% of the 5–9 age group and 96.8% of the 10–14 age group were attending school. A slightly lower percentage of girls were attending schools than boys (90.4% as against 89.7%). It had not been possible in a survey of that nature to explore intensively the reasons for non-attendance and the household dynamics that influenced the attitudes of parents and children to participate in education.

The ILO-supported CENWOR study of the incidence of non-schooling and child labour among 5–14 year olds was undertaken in a sample of a hundred households each in a low income urban neighbourhood in Kalutara town (Western Province), a remote village in Syambalanduwa division in Moneragala district (Uva Province) and a plantation in Ratnapura district (Sabaragamuwa Province) as an action research exercise (Jayaweera *et al.*, 2001). It was found that enrolment figures were not consonant with regular attendance in schools, reflecting the realities of the educational participation of children in these households. Enrolment data indicated that 87.7% boys and 90.8% girls in the urban low-income households and 89% boys and 86.6% girls in the remote rural locations were in school. In reality in the weeks preceding the survey 62.5% boys and 65.8% girls in the urban households (that is, 73.7% of the boys and 72.5% of the girls enrolled) were irregular in attendance. In the rural environment 34% boys and 51.2% of the girls (that is 43.1% of the boys and 59.3% of the girls enrolled) were irregular in attendance.

Around one third of the boys and one fourth of the girls in the urban households who were irregular in attendance were engaged in child labour in economic activities in the informal sector, while the rural children were assisting in cultivation. Irregular attendance could therefore reflect the conflict between education and employment during the years of compulsory schooling. They could also portend a higher incidence of dropping out from school. Current male and female dropout rates were 5.5% and 5.3% in the urban households and 8.7% and 2.0% in the rural households. Among the urban households only 2.8% boys had never been to school but 12.1% boys and 9.0% girls had never been to school in the rural environment and were totally deprived of education as a right and as an avenue of advancement. Nevertheless, children are perceived to be economic assets in families in poverty and as seen in studies (Jayaweera *et al.*, 2001). Child labour is a part of life in such families.

The 2003 ILO study (Gunawardena *et al.*, 2006) was drawn from a sample of schools located in six communities, city working class (73), village working class (142), urban slum (540), plantation (71), beach (70) and other communities (29), representing the three sectors (urban, rural and estate), occupations and activities from six districts (Anuradhapura, Colombo, Galle, Hambantota, Kandy and Moneragala). One limitation of the study was that the expected numbers of students could not be drawn from some of the communities as envisaged, especially the estate and beach sectors. The study found that even though only about one third of the parents had affirmed that they expect their children to contribute to household income, this latter proportion assumes significance when we consider the background characteristics of children at work. The background characteristics clearly indicated that they were mainly drawn from slum and beach communities, had parents with a lower income, larger families, and lived in houses some of which lack basic amenities like water and electricity. That what propels children to engage in economic activities is economic need is substantiated by the parents' responses that they want children to work to increase family income and to repay loans.

This study confirms the findings of previous studies that the majority of working children are engaged in agriculture. Similarly the majority was working all the year round. Children engaged in economic activities for seven or less hours of work per week have reported that they never get late to school. However, as the number of working hours increased, numbers reporting that they get late (rarely, sometimes or often), gradually increased with the highest number of children, working for more than 28 hours per week, reporting that they get late often.

Kannagara *et al.*'s (2003) study on children in domestic labour collected information from 4076 families from seven 'sending' communities that contribute to sending children to and engaging them in domestic labour, a school survey using an indirect approach through 7574 school children in five major districts inquiring about 'Who lives at my house', and interviews with 247 children currently employed as domestic workers and 81 former domestic workers. The study found that 1010 children were engaged in some form of work but that domestic work was not the most prevalent form of child employment. The majority of child workers had 4–7 members in the nuclear family and the fathers were mostly engaged in estate-based or agriculture-based work.

Children's lack of interest in studying was given as the sole or one of the main reasons for allowing children to work. At least 3% mentioned 'social pressure' in the form of 'inability to refuse the job offer' for the child. The school survey found that 1.94% households have at least one domestic worker under 18 years of age. The girls were more often employed than boys and approximately 59% of the child domestic workers were from the Tamil speaking background. The interviews with those who are or were child domestic workers show that many come from single parent families with either the mother or the father dead or not residing at home. Most of them (40%) were attending school at the time and claimed to have basic literacy and mathematical skills. Fifty-one per cent said they want to attend school again if possible. Only nine per cent of them were sent to school (while working) and 37% said they could read books and another 28% that they were taught to read at home. Another 24% were taught a vocation.

Jayasena's study (2005) of domestic labour had a sample of 185 domestic workers and 120 employers. The survey, carried out in three major towns of Central Province, showed that over two thirds were less than 18 years of age with more than half less than 14 years. Parents were the major suppliers, followed by friends. Some had sought employment on their own.

Poverty was identified as the main reason which compelled the parents to send their children as domestic labourers. Most of these families were identified as living below the poverty line. Lack of education and skills to obtain employment had also been factors for seeking work in the domestic sector. Other reasons that compelled workers to come to unknown households to work as domestic servants were identified as the separation of parents, overseas employment of the mother and the lack of a proper guardian due to the death of parents. Consequently work had been accepted by about a third of the sample under compulsion.

The boy domestic workers were used for both household work and business. They were also used for marketing, gardening, sweeping and generally for work outside the house which the women or girls are not expected to do. The women and girls are used for cooking, washing and for taking care of children. The majority of live-in workers reported excessive hours of work and a third of the girls said that they worked beyond their capacity. But a little less than half said that their working conditions were satisfactory. The majority of employers were guilty of employing children who are less than 14 years of age and not providing child workers access to formal or non-formal education. However, they paid their wages, provided food and clothing and did not treat their domestic workers in an inhuman manner.

The study by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (2005) looked at the demand for children in the fireworks industry in Sri Lanka and the various means by which children are trafficked into the factories. It investigated the factors that give rise to the demand for trafficked children to be employed in the fireworks industry. The children were found to be all boys less than 17 years of age with the majority between the ages of 14 and 17 years – above the minimum age for employment. However, there were some who were less than 14 years of age. An overwhelming majority (26) were school dropouts. The parents of the child workers had a low level of education as did the children and this was a factor that contributed to the trafficking of the children. The children had been trafficked from several parts of the country.

Trafficked children are in demand because they can be controlled easily. They can be exploited by paying them the minimum possible wage, delaying payment, extracting long hours of labour without additional pay, and not giving them additional benefits that have to be given to adult workers. The children are deemed to be more efficient, and they do not complain about the monotonous or the hazardous nature of the work. Trafficked children are also preferred since they do not steal raw material, as do workers who come from the same locality.

Children who experience parental poverty and the need to provide financial support to families are easily prone to dropping out. As most products of the fireworks industry appeal to children and are popular among them, it is easy to attract children into the industry.

The studies reviewed above vividly bring out the influence of poverty in a range of geographical locations and varying livelihood patterns (remote rural locations, urban slum areas, agricultural and fishing communities and estate sector) which push children out of school into child labour, either to support family income-generating activities or to supplement meagre family earnings. The vicious cycle of poverty, low level of education and low aspiration levels of parents also contribute to irregular attendance, high absenteeism and difficulties of coping with school work, and these lead to dropout. At the same time, lack of interest in implementation of compulsory education regulations and parental lack of knowledge regarding school admission procedures have resulted in a low percentage of children who still do not enrol in schools.

4.4.5 Street children

Street children are often deprived of the opportunity to participate in education. Manchanayake's study (2000) examined the assurance of child rights to street children in one selected area in the city of Colombo in which 250 families from all ethnic groups live. They lack permanent shelters and some even a temporary abode. The majority do not have birth certificates, are unable to obtain national Identity Cards, and are unable to vote or to enter school (the necessity for a birth certificate to enter school has been removed only recently). Among them are those who have migrated from slums or distant places, have been freed from prisons or are criminals evading the law.

Twenty-nine children from this community were studied. Almost half of the children lacked birth certificates, two thirds were left to themselves when the parents went out to beg or engage in work, and almost sixty per cent worked in hotels, shops, etc., and were subjected to physical abuse. One third of the children were from broken homes and had no notion of a family unit, while 10% lived independently. The predominant majority (86%) were malnourished. The researcher concluded that none of the parents were interested in obtaining knowledge about children's nutrition or health. Two thirds of the children had experienced sexual abuse due to availability of freedom and lack of parental care and protection.

Seventy-nine per cent of the children had either not enrolled in school, or if they had attended school through an intervention of some agency had dropped out early. Factors affecting the children's education were poor economic circumstances, parental ignorance, absence of social and cultural values and difficulties faced socially. The majority of the parents had no understanding of the economic and social benefits of education and wished the children to engage in an income-generating activity feeling that they cannot compete in society by receiving an education. This qualitative study had a small sample of children and the data was not disaggregated by sex.

De Silva and de Silva (2001) attempted to assess the extent of the problem of street children. They identified 258 children, of whom 219 were boys. There were unusual combinations of religion and ethnicity due to intermarriage. Twenty-four per cent of the children were not attending school while 67% had either been to school or were currently in school. The majority claimed they could read in the mother tongue and 78% said they were able to understand and handle money transactions. The majority of the under-age children were found around churches and mosques for alms, and areas of congestion near bus and railway stations, ideal for begging. Only seven children said their job was begging. Some of the children's parents were also begging.

Gunawardena *et al.*'s study (2005) looked at the demand side of trafficking for children for begging. The sample consisted of 210 child beggars and 32 accompanying adults from two locations in Western Province. There were more girls and fewer boys. The majority were Sinhala in ethnicity and Buddhists by religion. They were all under 14 years and some under nine years of age. Most had been engaged in begging for up to six years.

Two thirds of the children had never attended school and about half were illiterate. Forty-five per cent could only sign or had attended only primary school. Parental disinterest coupled with poverty had been the primary reasons for non-schooling and school dropout. Forty per cent of both boys and girls stated they were subjected to forced begging. Victims of forced begging

were mainly the physically and mentally handicapped. Forty-two per cent of children indicated that they had gone into begging to help their families financially. Their parents had been mainly instrumental in putting them into begging.

4.4.6 Institutionalized children

Children placed in State Receiving Homes

Orphans, abandoned and destitute children are among those vulnerable to non-schooling, particularly as the few State Receiving Homes, the children's homes organized by voluntary organizations and the SOS villages are limited in number. De Silva (2000) observed that children in these homes are sent to the nearest school and that even those whose education has been disrupted by family breakdown have been able to re-enter the school system. Education at least may help to compensate for the sense of isolation from family life experienced by these children and offer them a window of opportunity. The problem at issue is the inadequacy of such provision and the need for vigilance to protect children in some of these homes from economic or sexual exploitation. The study sample consisted of twenty-one children who were placed in a children's home on escaping from domestic service (three), due to domestic conflict (eight), due to death and destitution (eight) and due to armed conflict (two).

A total of 319 children from children's homes comprised the sample for a study by the Centre for the Study of Human Rights (2004). They found that 282 children were attending school, while 30 said they did not attend. Another 7 had not responded. One of the homes, which had only mentally challenged children, ran a special school for the children in the premises of the home itself. The majority of the children who were not attending (23.3%) said that they did not attend as they did not have a birth certificate. They complained that the authorities in the home did not make an effort to get their birth certificates. All these children had been employed as domestic servants prior to coming to the homes. Children who were awaiting court cases too were prevented from going to school until the cases were complete. The disabled children were also included in the non-attending group.

Children's rights in institutional care were the subject of study by Jayatilleke and Amarasuriya (2005). The study was carried out with a sample of 2961 children in 86 institutions from four provinces. The study found that the majority of children in institutions were from families with relationship or socio-economic problems and were not necessarily children without parents. In the North-East Province in particular, the conflict has resulted in displacement leading to homelessness and loss of income generation opportunities. This has led to an increase in the number of children being institutionalized. Contrary to the finding by the Centre for the Study of Human Rights, this study found that except for children in the remand home, in all other state homes children attended school. However, there was no proper environment for children to learn. Children complained of a lack of a proper mental environment to study. Children stayed away as they felt shy to be with younger children due to frequent disruptions of schooling, and as they were badly treated by other children. Children in voluntary homes attended school but were subjected to discriminatory practices, deprived of enrolment to reputed schools and had problems such as not having birth certificates. In many institutions children were given extra coaching in their studies. Even though they valued education, they did not perform well in studies. Principals and teachers complained of a lack of interest by the caregivers in children's school activities. There was very little interaction between the institution and the school. In institutions for children with disabilities, formal education was a part of rehabilitation. Yet the institutions lacked properly trained teachers, necessary equipment and aid to ensure quality education.

Children placed in Remand Homes, Detention Centres and Certified Schools

A different and negative scenario is seen in studies of Remand Homes, Detention Centres and Certified Schools to which children guilty of often petty offences are sent by court order, ostensibly for rehabilitation. Children who are guilty of both minor theft and more serious vices and crimes are placed together in a common environment. Not only are these institutions under-resourced, congested and impoverished in the quality of the services provided, the need for security measures to prevent the children from escaping from them has deprived them of access to schools in the neighbourhood while no facilities are provided for classes within the institutions (Dias, 2001).

De Zoysa's study (2005) focused on the educational achievement of 180 children in State Voluntary Homes who were attending schools together with other children living with their families. The family backgrounds and traumatic incidents experienced by the children had affected them negatively and influenced their low achievement level. There was a significant difference in the achievement of the two groups, Institutionalized Children and Home-based Children. The Home-based children were those who attended the same schools together with Institutionalized children. The Homes lacked an atmosphere conducive to the educational achievement, and carers in most voluntary homes did not appear to possess professional qualifications and training.

Schools providing education for institutionalized children possess physical resources of varying levels. Some schools were replete with excellent physical facilities while others had very meagre resources. With just one exception, all principals held a negative attitude towards these children. Institutionalized children living in limited monotonous environments at their voluntary homes get exposed to wider society in the school. This provides an opportunity for them to enrich their lives through the contact with broader society. Students who have been able to build proper relations and establish communication with home-based children show better progress in education.

4.4.7 Children subjected to sexual exploitation

A field study in six locations was carried out by the Marga Institute in 2001 (Marga, 2004). Eighty-five case studies were conducted to examine in depth the varied circumstances in which children's rights were being violated or eroded. It included 65 children whose rights had been violated and 25 placed in similar circumstances but whose rights had not been violated as a control group. The study encompassed four areas: child labour, child abuse, sexual exploitation and education. The narratives of six boys and two girls revealed that the economic benefits of children engaging in sex activities with tourists were dramatic and extremely visible. Many spent the earnings on trendy clothes, perfumes, recreation and sometimes drugs. Monetary payments were supplemented with lavish gifts such as wristwatches. Some families were virtually adopted by foreigners with outright gifts to build houses and some children were even taken abroad and long term relationships have developed. The most visible consequence of children engaging in sex activities was at first irregular and later non-attendance in school after Grades 4 or 5. They were thus effectively moved from any positive influences such as of the peer groups, teachers, school activities and sports and were limited to the company of other child sex workers and adult dealers.

In the second case study, the inhabitants were migrants who had arrived from different locations squatting on state land around the ancient village tank. The families had no social cohesion or accepted social values. The small wattle and daub houses offered no protection to young children who were left unattended when the adults went out to the field. The young girls walked

long distances to fetch firewood and water and to the school. These circumstances rendered young girls extremely vulnerable to sexual assault and sex offences.

All the seven girls whose stories were reported to the police had been raped by family members. The youngest was 7 and the oldest 14. In three other unreported cases, one girl was being treated for mental illness, the second was blinded by the rapist and the third resulted in head injuries to the girl's brother who tried to shield her. The cases revealed that the school was no safe place either when a teacher made advances to a female pupil resulting in her dropping out of school. Another victim had to get a transfer to another school.

The cases revealed that education is one of the major areas that suffer in such circumstances. The offenders not only abuse the victims but threaten them with dire consequences if they are reported to police. Victims are kept away from school and often sent away to relatives in fear of further abuse and/or because of the stigma attached to having been subjected to rape.

Case Study 2: Commercial Sex Workers

Sample

19 boys from the tourist areas in Galle and Kalutara
23 girls from three locations of Galle, Kalutara and Anuradhapura and Colombo

Method

Focus group discussions

68.4% of the boys and 73.9% of the girls said that they were 18 years old, while 31.6% of the boys and 26.1% of the girls said that they were 16 or 17 years of age. Their ostensible mean age was 17.63 years (boys) and 17.74 years (girls).

Almost all the boys were 'beach boys', engaging in their activities on the beach, in swimming classes and in group boa ting expeditions, or acting as tour guides – all activities associated with the tourist industry. The majority of the girls in the Colombo sample were in brothels, almost all the girls in Galle and Kalutara were in massage parlours and three fourths of the girls in Anuradhapura were engaged in their activities at home. All the boys and 87% of the girls were literate and all the boys and 95.7% of the girls had attended schools. All the boys, however, were secondary school dropouts; 30.4% of the girls were primary school dropouts, 65.2% were secondary school dropouts and one girl had never been to school. No one had completed even the General Certificate in Education – Ordinary Level (GCE OL) examination and had, therefore, minimal chances of stable employment.

The majority of the boys had provided sexual services for older foreign women. The girls had sought to escape from the poverty and abuse in their homes and had been persuaded by friends to migrate to the city for employment. The reality was that they were inveigled into lodges or brothels and were trapped in that life as a consequence of quick financial benefits, lack of other options and inability to return home with the stigma of sex activities. Predisposing factors for involvement in sex activities were poverty, dysfunctional families, lack of other options of earning a livelihood without education and skills.

Jayaweera (2005)

The above studies clearly indicate that the poor and vulnerable girls and boys are more likely to be subjected to sexual exploitation, even though their actual situations differ requiring different educational responses. In order to enable them to access educational opportunities, a minimum requirement seems to be social acceptance rather than stigmatization.

4.5 Systemic Barriers to 'Equity in Quality'

4.5.1 Patterns of educational achievement

Even when children from the contexts which we have described here gain access to formal education, it is often the case that the schools in which they enrol are inferior in quality of facilities available, the availability of teachers, especially qualified teachers, and for certain subject areas, and the support received through the teaching–learning processes to develop their learning performance. This section of the chapter will analyse the studies that have focused on these aspects of quality. This section of the chapter will explore patterns of educational achievement that analyse the studies that have focused on the 'equity-related' aspects of quality.

The study conducted by the National Institute of Education (2001) attempted to find out whether student performance levels in literacy and numeracy in Grade 3 have improved after the introduction of new reforms. It focused especially on the disparities in performance levels of urban and rural schools. The study found that for both literacy and numeracy, the mean percentages who have reached mastery levels were higher for the year 2001 sample than for 1997. It showed that achievement in literacy and numeracy of Tamil medium students was at the same level as of the Sinhala medium students.

The study revealed that student performance in literacy in urban schools had increased to 84.2% from 75.8% in 1997. In rural schools, the percentage had increased from 66.1% in 1997 to 73.7% in 2000. In numeracy, the percentages increased from 63.1% in 1997 to 77.0% in 2000 in urban schools and from 56.8% in 1997 to 57.0% in 2000 in rural schools. No comparison of male and female achievement levels had been done.

Gunawardena *et al.* (2002) carried out a study to investigate the effectiveness of implementation of reforms at Key Stage I of the primary cycle in Sri Lanka implemented from 1998 in the school system. Data was collected from a sample of 181 schools in 20 out of the 23 districts in the country, using multiple methods of inquiry. One aspect looked at was the achievement of 15 Essential Learning Competencies in Literacy and Numeracy that the reforms had focused on. The study found that the expected improvement of attainment of competencies had not been realized and that the only variable that emerged as significantly related to the mastery of competencies was school type. It indicated that students in schools with better facilities and qualified teachers (1AB and 1C schools) have a greater chance for developing their competencies as compared with students in Type 2 (schools with classes up to GCE (OL) or Type 3 (primary schools).

A subsequent study (NEREC, 2003) has indicated high regional variations in average learning achievement in the primary education cycle. In the total sample of 16,383 pupils, 8265 (50.4%) were boys and 8118 (49.6%) were girls. The proportion of Grade 4 students attaining mastery of their first language, Sinhala or Tamil, varies from 54.5% in the Northern Province to 72.8% in the Western Province. Similarly, mastery of primary mathematics ranges from 50.3% in the Northern

Province to 71.1% in the Western province, and mastery of English language competencies varies from 35.6% in the Northern and Eastern Provinces to 54.3% in the Western Province. The study found that 48.6% of 1834 students whose first language was Sinhala achieved mastery level, but only 25.6% of 897 students whose first language was Tamil did so.

The urban–rural differences in mean values in all three subjects were significant at the level of 95%. Of those that could not reach mastery level in first language, 49.7% were in urban schools and 66.8% in rural schools. In mathematics the respective figures were 48.7% for urban schools and 65.2% in rural schools. In English Language, the figures for those who could not achieve mastery was 78.4% in urban schools and 93.3% in rural schools.

In four districts, the percentage of students reaching the level of mastery in the upper group of districts – Colombo, Gampaha, Matara and Kalutara (three of which are in Western Province) – is high. Trincomalee, Nuwara Eliya, Batticaloa, Mullativu and Kilinochchi are at the lowest level in average scores and percentages reaching mastery.

In all three subjects, the maximum differences – 19.2%, 20.3%, and 20.1% in First Language, Mathematics and English Language respectively – are between 1AB and Type 2 schools. When mastery levels were considered, in all three subjects girls had performed better.

A follow-up study by Arunatilake *et al.* (2007) examined the nature of the relationships between learning achievement and the health and nutritional status, as well as personal characteristics of children and their environment at home with regard to learning and socio-economic status in 143 of the schools in the NEREC sample.. The multivariate analysis conducted to examine the reasons for these differences identified by the NEREC study confirmed some of the findings previously reported in *Health for Education* (National Education Commission, 2005): poverty, low levels of parental education, lack of parental help at home, and poor school attendance all affect learning outcomes adversely. Among the teacher characteristics, average time spent teaching classes after school, the amount of training received by teachers, and the time spent by teachers in travelling to work, were found to affect learning outcomes positively. Among school characteristics, the medium of instruction was found to be a strong predictor of outcome: success rates were higher in the Sinhala schools for both First Language and mathematics. Two other school level variables were significant predictors: a higher student:teacher ratio worsened learning outcome, while availability of adequate furniture for teachers improved outcome.

A National Institute of Education study on performance of Grade 5 students (Suranimala and Fernando, 2003) was carried out in 394 schools throughout the country and compared the findings with those of a study carried out in 1994. They conclude (i) that the mean percentages of student performance for Sinhala medium (no Tamil medium sample was included in 1994) in literacy (from 61.8% to 66.7% in 2003) and numeracy (from 45.1% in 1994 to 54.6% in 2003) as well as percentages of students who have reached mastery level have been improved. Mean scores in literacy progressively decline with school type with 1AB schools having the highest score (82.0%) and type 3 a score of 59.3%. There was a slight difference in performance between urban and rural sectors with urban 1AB schools having a score of 82.0% and rural 1AB schools having a score of 69.9% only. Rural type 3 schools had a score higher than that of urban type 3 schools (59.3% as against 66.2%). In the Tamil medium also the urban score in literacy was 62.2% and the rural score 57.8%. The percentage achieving mastery level in literacy varied from 64.5% in the North-western to 29.0% in Uva Province. The North-Eastern Province (in which some of the worst districts had not been included in the sample), a conflict affected region, had

a figure of 31.1%. In numeracy, the percentages ranged from 15.9% in the North-Western Province to 6.8% in Uva. Among districts, Kurunegala (in North-Western Province) had the highest mean score in literacy and Monaragala in Uva Province, the lowest mean score of 52.1%. In numeracy, the highest scorer was Ratnapura (58.2%) and the lowest was Mannar (in North-East Province) with 40.7%.

Studies on educational achievement of students who experienced the fruits of a reformed curriculum and the benefits of quality inputs to schools and teacher training are quite disappointing. These studies have essentially compared the achievement levels of students across sectors, districts and different types of schools and have revealed urban and rural disparities, disparities between schools with senior secondary classes and schools with either junior secondary or primary classes, and disparities between disadvantaged districts and provinces and districts and provinces with better resources. Thus geographical location, disruption of education by conflict, sector in which the school is located and the level of the school as typified appear as barriers to equity in quality in education.

4.5.2 Quality of facilities in schools

The Ministry of Education (2006) presents data on the availability of facilities in the national school system by province. Out of a total of 9727 schools, electricity was provided to 64.8%, telephone facilities were available in 15.9%, well water in 40.9% and tap water in 20.4% of schools. Western Province had the best provision in electricity (94.0%), telephone (40.9%) and tap water (41.8%). The least provision was in Northern and Sabaragamuwa Provinces in electricity (37.5% and 42.4%), North-Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces in telephones (8.6% and 8.8% respectively). The number of schools that totally lacked water ranged from 63.1% in Central Province to 59.8% in Sabaragamuwa and 54.1% in Uva Provinces. Thus the rural provinces of Uva and Sabaragamuwa fared as badly as the conflict affected Northern Province.

The study by Kularatne (2002) found that the main objective of the DSD Project, to develop a 'centre of excellence' in each division, was far from realization. Considerable investment had been made in construction and in rehabilitation of physical facilities since 1995 but many schools still lacked adequate classroom space, electricity, water supply, laboratories, principals' quarters, basic furniture, teaching aids and equipment, computers and playgrounds and the physical facilities provided were often reported to be of poor quality. The qualitative development of the schools had been hampered by shortage of qualified principals, science and English teachers, computer instructors and librarians. Student performance in first language and mathematics in Grade 10 had improved in some schools and declined in others and attainment levels were still low. There was little involvement by the provincial authorities so that priority was not given to these schools in the allocation of teachers. The situation in these schools did not give credence to a claim to be centres of excellence in the division. On the contrary, many DSD schools appeared to be 'residual' schools that lack the capacity to compete with well-equipped schools outside the division (National Education Commission, 2003).

The poor quality of the large number of small schools in economically disadvantaged locations in Sri Lanka has been an issue of concern over the years and the inequitable distribution of teachers and paucity of resources have exacerbated the situation (Jayaweera, 2004). One of the main reasons for schools to remain small is the decline in the size of the population cohorts reaching the age of admission for schooling. In addition, shortage of teachers, poor infrastructure and facilities and inadequacy of teaching materials also kept these schools small (Korale, 2004).

The National Education Commission's study on the Rationalization of Schools (Jayaweera, 2004) found that in 145 schools out of a total of 221 small schools surveyed, no children had dropped out of school. In the others, the number of dropouts ranged from 5 to 30 from individual schools which point to some degree of deprivation of educational opportunity. The figures ranged from 21% in Uva Province to 53.5% in the North-Central Province but gender disaggregated data was not available to ascertain whether more girls or boys had dropped out. The study found that that low enrolment, which was the major yardstick used for the closure of schools, was the cumulative result of a multiplicity of factors that had not been examined adequately in identifying the schools that had to be closed or those that could be developed or reorganized to meet the needs of the community. The parents and the community leaders stated unequivocally that the closure of schools was a 'wrong decision' and that at least some of the schools should be re-opened. Currently there is an increase of activism by community-based organizations to 'protect their schools'.

The focus group discussions in the study by Gunawardena and Jayaweera (2004) indicated school-related factors leading to early dropout as lack of teachers for some subjects, transfer of teachers with replacements, retirement of teachers, absence of schools close by for post-primary education, unpleasant and unattractive classrooms, insufficient practical work in school and inactivity of attendance monitoring committees appointed to ensure compulsory education. Factors that led to high absenteeism of children which were related to the school were identified as 'harsh punishment given in school (i.e. marginalization)', 'forcing to bring money', 'making children kneel in the hot sun', 'lack of friends at school', 'distance to school', 'apathy of teachers', 'inability to do homework/classroom work', 'inability to contribute money for school activities (i.e. facilities fees, colour washing of walls, purchasing furniture, inter-house sports meets, cleaning toilets, religious activities)', 'lack of good relations between parents and teachers', 'lack of sufficient classrooms', 'uninteresting teaching', 'poor teaching', 'lack of playing facilities' and 'teachers not allowing children to play'. It is noteworthy that these factors were identified mostly in relation to schools in deprived communities which were the focus of the study.

One aspect investigated by the National Education Commission-initiated studies in 2003 was the availability of infrastructure facilities needed for curriculum implementation.

Gunawardena *et al.*'s study (2002) looked at the match between required infrastructure facilities and available facilities. Separate classrooms were available in 83% of the schools in the mail survey sample (593 schools), required classroom space varying from 95% in type 2 to 70% in type 3 schools, drinking water in 66% of schools and electricity in 50%. More than 70% of the schools had toilet facilities. On the whole, the picture presented a satisfactory situation though not when considered with the emphasis placed on quality inputs by the government.

Perera *et al.* (2003) and Wijetunga and Rupasinghe (2003) found that the majority of schools at secondary school level, in a sample of 430 schools through a mail survey and in 113 schools in which a questionnaire was administered, had not been provided with the resources needed for the implementation of subjects which were of a practical nature (Practical and Technical Studies, Agriculture, Fine Arts and Home Science). Other subjects such as horticulture, animal husbandry, commerce and typing and visual and graphic arts had minimal resources such as tools, equipment and workshops and what the evaluators termed as 'exotic' subjects such as marine and inland fisheries were offered by an infinitesimal number of schools.

The NIE–UNICEF study (2003) of conflict affected areas found that 162 schools out of a total of 1372 were non-functioning; some had school buildings which were totally or partially damaged; and 321 schools were functioning in temporary sheds. Six hundred schools needed science laboratories or activity rooms. Shortages of latrines and urinals were estimated to be 63% and of drinking water to be 50%. A large number of schools with GCE (AL) classes lacked libraries and some lacked teachers' quarters. A lack of school supplies and equipment was identified. These included student desks and chairs (36%), teachers' tables and chairs (52%), blackboards, teaching–learning materials, and science equipment and chemicals.

4.5.3 Teacher deployment and performance

Among the challenges faced by the education service delivery network are weak teacher deployment and high teacher absenteeism (World Bank, 2005a). Teachers prefer to reside in cities, towns and prosperous rural areas, avoiding disadvantaged rural areas. As a result, schools in congenial locations tend to be overstaffed and schools in uncongenial settings understaffed. Widespread political intervention to countermand transfer orders obstructs teacher appointments to deficit schools. Thus the highest rates of teacher understaffing occur in economically disadvantaged rural communities which typically have less voice and power.

While calculations indicate a low student-teacher ratio, such calculations do not take into consideration the inequitable distribution among schools. The Ministry of Education (2005) indicates the distribution of teachers by different types of schools. Thus 15.1% of the teachers are deployed in the national schools with 18.3% of students, and 9.2% of teachers in the Navodhya schools with 10.6% of students. Projections of teacher requirements based on rigid adherence to a uniform 'ready reckoner' computation, it is pointed out, have perpetuated the inequitable distribution of teachers. More than the total number of teachers appointed to a school, what has raised concern is that teacher deficits in subjects such as English, mathematics, science, aesthetic studies and information technology lead to the marginalization of the small schools with 200 or less students which are around 47.7% of all schools in the country.

In addition, high teacher absenteeism poses a major problem, especially in schools located in difficult areas. The average leave taken per teacher in an academic year ranges from 33 days in the North-Western Province to 42 days and 43 days in the Uva and North-Central Provinces respectively. As a proportion of the school year, the incidence of teacher absenteeism varies from 15% in the North-Western Province to 20% in the North-Central and Uva Provinces. This amounts across the 192,000 teaching force to around 18% of the academic year for the country as a whole.

Further, low teacher salaries and poor teacher motivation also lead to poor quality in education. National Education Commission (2003) argues that teachers have been victims of irrational recruitment, deployment and promotion policies. Till very recent years there were no minimum qualifications for teaching appointments, and subsequently there have been deviations from the policy of recruiting teachers with GCE (AL) attainment and professional qualifications. Teacher status, motivation and work attitudes have been deteriorating over the years and the importance of re-motivating and improving the attitudes of teachers has been stressed. Teacher salaries have

been declining in real terms over the past 25 years (World Bank, 2005a) which supports the notion that teacher status has been falling. On the positive side, low teacher salaries have enabled the Sri Lankan education system to deliver the basic education services at a fairly low cost to the government budget. On the negative side, however, low teacher salaries are likely to have hurt teacher morale and performance and weakened the quality of new entrants into the teaching service.

Perera *et al.* (2003) found that, for Grades 6–9, severe shortages of teachers were experienced by all school types in three subjects: Health, Aesthetic Studies, and Technical Studies. The disadvantage of teacher shortage was more pronounced in type 2 (junior secondary) and 1C (senior secondary up to GCE (AL) in Arts only) schools. At junior secondary school level, the teachers were adequately qualified and had been made aware of the educational reforms even though the principals commented on lack of in-depth subject matter knowledge and teachers' negative attitudes.

The NIE–UNICEF study (2003) of conflict affected areas reported that there was a shortage of teachers, especially Tamil medium teachers (18%) and English teachers (51%). Volunteer teachers had been recruited to bridge the gap but many lacked training and were not paid adequately. There was a deficit of 33.3% of principals.

4.5.4 Curriculum and teaching–learning approaches

The Primary Education Reforms took forward the child-centred activity-based curriculum introduced in 1972. There was consensus that the reforms were well-designed and implemented systematically and that all stakeholders – students, teachers, officers and parents – had responded positively. The curriculum materials and books were evaluated as relevant and of high quality. Gunawardena *et al.*'s study (2002) however, pointed to the fact that these materials tended to be uniform as a result of centralization of the reform process and 'too much teacher-directed', thereby stifling the creativity and initiative of the teachers and students.

The above study revealed that the instructional processes used in the classroom for the most part did not conform to the proposed procedures. Students mainly spent time at their desks, in the classroom, and saw mainly what was related to academic work. The materials that make learning enjoyable were used sparingly. They mainly heard teachers' voices, and attractive activities were given low priority. The possible reasons for this situation were that the required resources were not available, the number of children in the class was large, not all teachers had been given training and they lacked time for preparation.

Despite efforts made during the last decade to improve the quality of classroom teaching to stimulate interest in studies in children, to make education enjoyable and the learning environment conducive to learning, examination domination persists to negate these efforts. In the process, children value rote learning, become ill-equipped to face demands of life and the world of work and are deprived of the opportunity to develop creativity. Moreover, children with special needs and placed in special circumstances and the academically less able could easily lose interest in continuing in education in this context.

4.6 Summary: Challenges for the Education System

The national level and micro-level studies that we have discussed above clearly indicate the possible barriers and challenges that continue to hamper the efforts to ensure equity in education. On the one hand, cardinal principles on which public policy in education are founded, as well as the commitment to public investment in education spanning initiatives to extend access through various incentives and measures, and reform efforts in curriculum, teacher education and management, have striven towards promoting equity in access and quality. On the other hand, issues related to disparities in income distribution, regional development, socio-cultural factors and conflict continue to be reflected as disparities in the sphere of education. The tables below pull together and summarize the factors discussed above, giving an indication of the key 'equity challenges' for the education sector as it moves into the new SWAp modality.

What are the Key Causal Factors of Educational Disparity in Sri Lanka?

IN THE SOCIETY	WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
Poverty. Children from very poor families and communities cannot equally access, and benefit from, education. Despite the transfer of the costs of education mainly to the state, poverty remains a major barrier. It is associated with lack of access to proper medical care, ill health and poor nutrition, parental lack of education, the need for adults to migrate to work and the demand for children's labour, within or outside of the domestic/subsistence spheres. ***Gender discrimination in a context of poverty.*** Gender discrimination comes into play in the poorest households, especially where decisions about income earning prospects for boys exist. In some communities, especially the estate sector, girls still tend to be given for domestic labour or kept back to look after siblings. ***Social exclusion on the basis of 'class' and 'status'.*** Some communities have a historical subordinate status. More estate children are given out for domestic labour, because parents feel less able to refuse the job offer when it is made. Even when children who have dropped out of school are given education through non-formal centres, they are still shy to re-enter the formal school at an older age due to existing social stigmas. ***Three decades of conflict.*** Displacement, economic deprivation, closure of schools for indefinite periods of time or intermittently, the numbers of children who become refugees or	***Distance*** of secondary schools from homes in remote rural areas. ***Under-resourcing of schools in poor areas*** (where parents cannot make up the difference). ***Deficiencies in school infrastructure*** result in teachers using traditional teacher-centred modes of teaching which also makes teaching uninteresting and less attractive to less motivated students, some of whom would be more interested in practical and aesthetic subjects rather than academic subjects. Especially significant is the lack of required resources and equipment for children with special needs, the visually and hearing impaired, and physically disabled in spite of a declared policy of inclusive education. ***Underfunding and closure of small 'Type 3' schools.*** The perception that small schools resulting from a decline in enrolment are uneconomical resulted in the closure of about 500 such schools. Small schools, which lack sufficient teachers or resources, fail to attract children. The majority of small schools and estate schools are only primary schools which do not promote positive attitudes towards education in the long run for parents in deprived communities. These schools lack housing for teachers, congenial working conditions for teachers and students and are insufficiently supervised by education officials. ***Limited and uneven provision of non-formal education opportunities.*** Non-formal educa-

IN THE SOCIETY	WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
orphaned, conscripted or voluntarily become child soldiers, and access to health and nutrition for children. Armed groups engaged in the conflict also pose a barrier to ensuring equity in access to education. Children in such areas are either lured to join these groups through persuasion or coercion or forced to flee from their captors or attackers. The education of children from all three ethnic groups, Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese, is affected and especially affects educational achievement of children studying in the Tamil medium in these areas. ***Breakdown of families and communities, as a result of all of the above factors.*** Incidence of abuse of children in the absence of proper care, family instability due to mother's migration, and parents' death combine to pose perhaps the most significant barriers to equity in access. Lack of support from home and even basic necessities of food and health care induce children to look for employment, with parents themselves taking the initiative to secure employment for children as in the case of child beggars. This is especially true of estate schools, where boys tend to leave earlier for employment than girls, and of conflict affected areas where children are conscripted or voluntarily join as child soldiers. ***Commercial exploitation of children.*** Emergence of market-oriented liberal economic policies and emphasis on tourism as a foreign exchange earner have had a visible impact on increased numbers of children who are subjected to sexual exploitation and thereby lose interest or opportunity to engage in formal education. Traffickers who engage in child trafficking for domestic labour, fireworks industry, and begging and commercial sex target poor communities such as estate and urban slums and prevent participation of children in education. ***Natural disaster, especially the tsunami.*** The tsunami wrecked communities, families and the education of children on an unprecedented scale. A large number of communities were displaced, children lost their parents and family members, and schools were destroyed. Even after two years of	tion reaches only a small percentage of those who need it. ***Very limited provision for institutionalized children.*** Children in Remand Homes, Detention Centres and Certified Schools are denied enrolment in schools because of security reasons and no education is provided within the homes also. ***Inadequate provision for disabled children.*** Scarcity of schools for the blind in the country, an inadequacy of teachers with competency in sign language, lack of proper alternative facilities in educational institutions to facilitate physical access, insufficiency of Braille equipment and audio tapes etc., insufficiency of teachers trained in inclusive education and discriminatory attitudes of teachers tend to shut disabled children out of education. ***Teacher recruitment, deployment, absenteeism, low salaries and resultant low commitment.*** Recruitment procedures often contravene accepted procedures, teacher deployment is affected by political intervention, in general teacher salaries are low, and sufficient incentives are not available for teachers to serve in deprived communities. These cumulate to a lack of teacher motivation and commitment leading to high absenteeism. These factors are more prevalent for deprived low income, rural, estate and conflict affected schools. A scarcity of teachers in subjects that are in demand, such as English, science and mathematics, is visible in schools in poorer, rural, estate and conflict affected areas. Studies confirm that the teaching–learning process has not undergone a radical change especially in Type 2 and 3 (junior secondary and primary) schools. In such circumstances, children with specific learning or emotional needs are mostly at risk. ***Implementation problems with curriculum reform.*** While the curricular reforms are generally hailed as targeting quality and relevance, studies on effectiveness indicate that goals are not being fully achieved. The improvement in learning achievement varied across districts, urban and rural areas and school types indicating persistence of

IN THE SOCIETY	WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
reconstruction and rehabilitation, even though schools are functioning it is unlikely that the children are in a position to continue their education as before the tsunami.	disparities. These disparities result from inequities in provision of infrastructural resources, deployment of an adequate number of qualified and committed teachers in different subject specializations and proper monitoring and supervision of implementation of reforms. Lack of progress in improving the DSD schools conceived as 'centres of excellence' is an example of lack of follow-up action. ***Lack of a welcoming and 'child friendly' ethos.*** A few studies pinpoint the school ethos which is not child-friendly, where teachers give harsh punishments to children, lack of good relations between parents and teachers, lack of friends at school as contributing to high absenteeism and eventually dropout. Especially institutionalized children and disabled children are not welcomed in schools, leading to their lower achievement. Sexual abuse or exploitation by male teachers can also occur.

Who are the 'unreached' and 'excluded' children in Sri Lanka?

- Children of the rural poor (especially girls in some cases), concentrated in specific districts, and communities within districts.
- Children of the urban poor, in all major cities.
- Children in conflict affected areas of the North and East.
- Children of the Plantation Estates (especially girls in some cases).
- Disabled children in every community, but particularly those in poor communities.
- Child labourers and street children (with girls and boys facing different risks).
- Children in institutions.
- Displaced, migrant and refugee children.

These children might be:

- Never enrolled (especially disabled children, children in institutions, the extreme poor and those exploited in 'hidden' forms of child labour and exploitation).
- Previously enrolled but dropped out.
- Still in school (or an NFE class) but not set to enjoy a full cycle of good quality education in an environment of protection and non discrimination – therefore at risk of dropout or non-learning.

5. Equity and Social Inclusion: Concepts, Approaches and Strategies

5.1 Overall Approach

5.1.1 A 'rights' basis for education

In consonance with past policies and policy perspectives, the Sri Lanka SWAp implicitly and explicitly adopts a rights-based approach to a quality education for all and to the reduction of disparities that have bedevilled the achievement of EFA, MDGs and quality education goals that encompass excellence and holistic human development. At the same time the shift from an ad hoc and compartmentalized project-based approach to a sector-wide approach to general education reflects also commitment to overall national development targets contingent on the effective use of education as an instrument of expanding opportunities, extending the frontiers of knowledge and promoting values, positive attitudes and relevant skills.

5.1.2 Analytical basis for understanding and addressing equity issues

The SWAp document was not preceded by a special analysis of equity and social exclusion issues but has drawn heavily from the findings of policy and research documents prepared in 2002–04. The official document (2006) states clearly that several status studies and reviews carried out by the National Education Commission (NEC) 2002–04, the National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) 2002–04 and development partners have informed the decision to address education issues in a sector wise way. The Project Appraisal Document of the World Bank (2005b) states that the dialogue on education issues and its outcome, the NEC's Proposals for a National Policy Framework on General Education in Sri Lanka (2003), the World Bank's Education Sector Report 'Treasures of the Education System in Sri Lanka' (2005a), the NEREC studies on cognitive achievements of students (2003) and the lessons it learnt from its three earlier education projects contributed to the design of the ESDFP. The World Bank Sector Study also used some of the findings and proposals of the NEC document (2003).

The NEC, World Bank and NEREC studies identified the disparities in the education sector rooted in socio-economic disparities as a major issue. The NEC Proposals (2003) – also entitled 'Envisioning Education for Human Development' – were themselves based on 19 reviews of different aspects of the education sector, four research studies, a review of the successes and shortcomings of the education reforms proposed by the National Education Commission and implemented by the Ministry of Education from 1997 to 2003, and a process of public consultation as well as intensive discussions by subcommittees of specialists.

The Proposals were four-pronged:
(i) Educational opportunity – Equity and Excellence
(ii) Curriculum Renewal, Quality and Relevance
(iii) Professional Development of Teachers and Principals
(iv) Education Governance/Management and Allocating Resources for Education.

While all four themes discussed disparities in the quality of education, deployment of teachers and inequitable resource allocation, the first theme confronted directly the problems of disparities in access to education. These encompassed:

(i) urban–rural and district wise disparities in educational participation – the educationally disadvantaged children in urban low income neighbourhoods, remote rural areas, plantations and conflict affected areas; the vulnerable groups who are victims of social exclusion and are deprived of educational opportunities – children with disabilities, working children, children living on the streets, orphans, abandoned and destitute children;
(ii) the inequitable distribution of schools between and within districts, and the issue of small marginalized schools of the poor and their indiscriminate closure;
(iii) district wise disparities in learning outcomes in cognitive development in first language, mathematics and English;
(iv) the status quo of incentives such as the Grade 5 scholarships and ancillary services;
(v) the potential role of non-formal education in meeting the educational needs of out-of-school children.

The proposals identified were intended to resolve these problems, reduce disparities and universalize primary and junior secondary education. It is observed that the four themes in the NEC framework are similar to the four themes in the Education Sector Development Framework Programme.

The World Bank, which funded the NEC studies and report, analysed the disparities identified in terms of economic and social benefits of investment in education. It focused in particular on the regional dimensions of equity, dimensions of education quality, equity of public expenditure and relations between education and earnings, occupational attainment, female labour force participation, nutritional and health status and poverty. The strategies proposed were developed from the NEC proposals and the World Bank study findings. NEREC assessments of cognitive achievement in Grade 4 and the social and gender disparities in districts that surfaced in them fed into the ESDFP themes on equity and quality.

Analyses of disparities are also found in the identification of the poorest administrative divisions by the Department of Census and Statistics (2006) and in micro-studies by individual researchers. Poverty levels mapped by districts and school census data presented by province and districts have been useful. Intra-district differences have yet to be identified, and in the context of educational needs, divisional and school level data are necessary for remedial action.

5.1.3 Gender concepts and approaches

There is no explicit reference to gender mainstreaming as the general perception among policy makers is that the education policy followed so far is ‘enlightened and non-discriminatory’ from a gender perspective. There is relative complacency at official level regarding the access of girls to education as statistics do not reveal significant disparities, especially as compared with socio-economic disparities as discussed earlier. The gender gap created by the different historical educational experience of girls and boys in rural Muslim communities and in the plantations has been virtually bridged. Slight gender differences are still seen in plantation districts such as Nuwara Eliya, but it has been recognized that socio-economic factors rather than gender have been barriers to the enrolment and retention of girls in schools. In this context there is hardly any reference to gender disparities in the ESDFP document.

Gender discrimination embedded in the gender role stereotypes in educational materials and in the gendered process of socialization in the ‘hidden’ curriculum that reinforces the impact of negative social norms in the home and in society have not received much attention in

educational plans except in the National Plan of Action for Children (2004). There is minimal awareness at any level of the role of education in reinforcing or countering the impact of gendered norms. Textbooks are less explicitly gender insensitive but progress is slow as few curriculum developers are sensitive regarding these issues. The content of education, however, is a critical component of the quality of instruction and there is palpably no awareness of the need to mainstream the concepts of gender equality and the empowerment of girls through the curriculum and teaching–learning process and the social climate of the school. A few women's organizations have stressed the need to eliminate gender role stereotypes in education materials, change gendered behavioural expectations, introduce curriculum interventions and promote attitudinal changes on the part of principals, teachers and officials to ensure gender equality and to facilitate the empowerment of girls and women through education.

5.1.4 Social exclusion concepts and approaches

The social exclusion of children through education is perceived largely in terms of poverty and marginalization in remote and isolated geographical locations. There are, however, other groups of 'excluded' children, as discussed in Chapter 4, about whom very little quantitative data is available. Disabilities as a barrier to participation have received little attention till the 1980s although a few special schools for children with disabilities have functioned for decades. The NEC proposal framework (2003) followed by the World Bank study discussed measures to bring them into the mainstream. International pressure and the development of a National Policy on Disability have resulted in workshops and in a Plan of Action. No comprehensive survey has assessed the magnitude of the problems and only around 17,000 children are enrolled in regular or special schools. It is a positive development therefore that the ESDFP has prioritized the issue of non-schooling of children with disabilities in its proposals for 'inclusive' education in regular schools or in special units. Two approaches to education for those with disabilities are being pursued in accordance with international practice – (i) inclusive education in classrooms in formal schools for those with disabilities that do not inhibit school attendance, and (ii) special schools for those with severe disabilities.

There is hardly any national level data regarding other children in 'especially difficult circumstances' who are outside the ambit of the education system – the working children whose numbers have declined with the restriction imposed on child labour by ratification of ILO Conventions, and children who live on the streets for whom sporadic programmes have been organized in the past by non-governmental organizations. Children's homes have taken abandoned, orphaned and destitute children and provided them educational opportunities but unmet needs have not been assessed. The educational needs of children in Remand Homes, Houses of Correction and Rehabilitation Centres are given very low priority. The NEC proposals (2003) drew attention to the plight of these vulnerable groups and the ESDFP has initiated non-formal education programmes for 'street children' in view of the wide publicity given by the media to the plight of these children. The lacunae in information and in educational programmes for such groups continue to be an issue of disparity that has prevented the achievement of universal primary education even after six decades of free education.

5.1.5 The role and status of NFE

Sri Lanka's success in enrolling around 95% of its children in the formal school system has resulted in the widely held perception that non-formal education for the school age population is a 'second chance' in educational opportunity, a mechanism for the transition of young children to

formal schools, and an overall strategy to expedite universalization of primary and secondary education. Unlike in neighbouring countries, most NGOs have not given priority to non-formal education for the school-going population as they do not perceive access to education as a critical issue as compared, for instance, with unemployment or gender-based violence in society.

In the 1980s, however, concerns regarding dropping out of school as a consequence of poverty constraints and the reduction of social sector expenditure under structural adjustment programmes led to the establishment of literacy centres to provide a 'second chance' to out-of-school children. These centres have been under-resourced and have been ad hoc initiatives and have barely survived over two decades. Both the 1997 reforms proposed by NEC and the NEC Report of 2003 have attempted to bring non-formal education within the mainstream by assigning to the NFE Division in the Ministry of Education the task of enforcing the compulsory education regulations of 1997 and meeting the educational needs of the out-of-school population. Regrettably these hopes have not been fulfilled and non-formal education was overcome by inertia largely through lack of resources and personnel. Hence the key role given to non-formal education in meeting the needs of the out-of-school population is a positive feature of the ESDFP.

National data is not available in school censuses with regard to the situation in areas affected by conflict and natural disasters, and the national Census in 2001 could be conducted only in one district in the East and none in the North. These provinces clearly continue to be disadvantaged in access to education. All documents, the NEC, World Bank and the ESDFP, have identified this situation as a critical issue and measures have been proposed for return to normalcy.

5.1.6 Attention to social cohesion

Of the three new areas of concern that have received attention in the curriculum revision process, the national imperative of social harmony has been highlighted in the ESDFP in the inclusion of programmes to promote social cohesion in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society through the content of education and the teaching–learning process

5.1.7 Emergency preparedness

Disaster management techniques in the aftermath of the tsunami and HIV/AIDS awareness (although Sri Lanka has been categorized as a low prevalence country) have not been mentioned explicitly. They need to be recognized as strategies to ensure a socially relevant education.

5.1.8 Equity-related programme objectives

The Education Sector Development Framework Programme document (Oct 2006) which can be seen as the ' core' SWAp document, presents 'policy themes, conceptual frameworks, wide-ranging key development operations and strategies for the general education sector for the next five years' (2006–10) and a results framework to monitor the outcome of the Programme.

The document focuses on four major policy priorities or themes.

(1) Promoting equity by enabling all children in the country to access and complete basic and secondary education

The objectives are to ensure that all children complete compulsory basic education (primary and junior secondary education – Grades 1–9) and that all have access to senior secondary education (Grades 10–13), and to increase current participation rates to universal enrolment

and completion of primary and junior secondary education. The overall commitment to reduce disparities in the ESDFP stems from the incentives to promote equity offered over six decades since the 1940s – free education, scholarship schemes, free textbooks and uniform material, mid-day meal for the needy, subsidized transport and upgrading of selected secondary schools. The ESDFP reiterates the commitment of the government to continue these policies.

(2) Improving the quality of basic and secondary education

Policy objectives are to promote learning outcomes by the development of 'higher order' education and generic skills and introducing new initiatives with respect to the school curriculum, teacher development and the examination and testing system to ensure quality, economic impact and social relevance. While these objectives do not overtly give priority to equity there is explicit acceptance of the right of every child to a good quality education. The discussion on disparities in learning outcomes as measured by mastery levels in first language, mathematics and English proficiency highlights urban–rural, school type, gender (in favour of girls) and other disparities.

(3) Enhancing economic efficiency and equity of resource allocation

The objective is to move completely from the historical budgeting system under uniform budget heads which resulted in continuing inequities in the allocation of resources, through a medium term budgetary framework for education that will strengthen the internal efficiency of the education system and promote equity. The policy statement on resource allocation discusses in detail the reinforcement of inequity through the traditional system of budgeting as under-resourced institutions continue to be disadvantaged. The restructuring of the resource allocation process to be flexible in addressing emerging key issues is expected to favour the hitherto neglected schools of the poor.

(4) Strengthening education governance and service delivery

The objective is to improve the quality and distribution of services, devolve authority and responsibility to the school level, move away from bureaucratic control to a new model of balanced control involving schools and the local community and intensively monitor and evaluate programme inputs, processes and outcomes. The objective of strengthening governance and service delivery and monitoring and evaluation focuses more strongly on efficiency. Nevertheless, the objective of empowering the school and the local community to participate in management and the capacity building of educational personnel is expected to assist in reducing disparities.

These policy objectives are, in fact, interrelated. The Education Sector Development Framework Programme reiterates the 'minimum standards of entitlements' to all children through incentives to participation, norms for school facilities prescribed through many decades and the more recent introduction of norms of mastery levels in learning outcomes. The document also reflects the perception that both access and quality are equity issues. For instance, expanding the provision of well equipped secondary schools is to provide 'geographically equitable' access to good quality secondary education. 'Model' schools have been envisioned as in the past to promote access and quality.

Financing initiatives also meet equity and efficiency concerns. The proposed 40% allowances for teachers in difficult areas is an incentive to ensure a more equitable distribution of teachers and the resource allocation formula is intended to facilitate redistribution of resources in favour of the hitherto marginalized schools of the poor. The mechanisms for targeting funds will be considered

in a subsequent section of this paper. Overall, new initiatives have been proposed to reach the most disadvantaged in entry to school, participation, quality of instruction and financial support. However, in themes two and four, the social equity aspect could perhaps be clearer if spelled out overtly and with greater clarity than in the present document.

5.2 Strategies to Address Social Exclusion and Gender Disparity (and to Achieve Inclusion, Equity and Equality)

5.2.1 Equity in access

As referred to earlier in this paper, strategies for overcoming 'demand' barriers have been implemented over six decades through the provision of a range of incentives from free education to meals that have reduced the financial burden on low income families. These strategies are reaffirmed in the Education Sector Development Framework Programme. Nevertheless the most critical 'demand' barrier in Sri Lanka is poverty, and positive education policies have not compensated fully for this factor. For instance, the opportunity costs of education appear to outweigh the right to education of the very poor.

Supply side barriers are to be overcome by continuing commitment to free education, thereby ensuring accessibility and affordability. The schemes of establishing well equipped schools in operation since the 1990s are to be strengthened, and schools in the most disadvantaged districts identified by the Department of Census and Statistics are to be developed (Isuru schools). A critical gap is the absence of specific criteria to select schools for upgrading.

The Education Sector Development Framework Programme has attempted to resuscitate this programme and has proposed strengthening non-formal education as a complementary mechanism to implement the compulsory education regulations and to develop and undertake programmes to extend educational opportunities to out-of-school children. Consequently measures have been proposed to reactivate the Non-Formal Education and Special Education Division in the Ministry of Education to support the objectives of achieving social equity through education. The two moribund Attendance Committees at village and divisional level, around 8500 in number, are to be revitalized to monitor the implementation of the compulsory education regulations. The Unit has been assigned the specific tasks of reducing disparities by:

(i) Organizing Literacy Centres, Functional Literacy Centres and Community Literacy Centres for out-of-school children and youth. These have been proposed to enable also older children who have been deprived of education opportunities to acquire basic literacy skills and vocational skills so that windows of opportunity in upward occupational mobility are opened to them.
(ii) Providing special education facilities for children with disabilities.
(iii) Establishing centres to meet the educational and other needs of 'street children'.

The proposal of the National Institute of Education for an 'Open School' is also a step in this direction.

While these initiatives are not all new, a miasma of inactivity had characterized the Non-Formal Education Units at district level. In this context it is desirable that more support should be given to the capacity building of non-formal education structures and personnel and to extend their

functions to identifying and meeting the needs of the other vulnerable groups of children such as victims of child labour and child abuse and children participating in armed conflict in the North and the East. Unconscionable provincial disparities need more visibility and remedial action.

Indicators/targets have been identified for monitoring programmes to increase access and reduce disparities:

(i) Net enrolment rates in primary and secondary education
(ii) Net completion rates in primary and secondary education
(iii) Decrease in the number of out-of-school children
(iv) Number receiving free textbooks and uniform materials on time
(v) Children receiving mid-day meals
(vi) Number of active Attendance Committees
(vii) Number of quality Model Primary schools
(viii) Number of quality ISURU schools and Navodaya
(ix) Number of schools with GCE AL science streams and science laboratories
(x) Number of students with disabilities enrolled in regular schools
(xi) Number of Special Education Units established
(xii) Number of centres organized for 'street children'
(xiii) Number of literacy centres and enrolment
(xiv) Number of Functional Literacy Centres and enrolment
(xv) Number of community literacy centres and enrolment.

Some of these are process indicators and others are output indicators. All such data need to be disaggregated by province, district, zone, division and as well as by sex and to be made available in order to bring to the surface inequalities that tend to be invisible in national level data.

5.2.2 Equity in quality

Strategies to achieve equity in quality have focused on:

(i) Curriculum reforms and examination reforms to raise cognitive achievement level and the acquisition of generic skills, values and social cohesion in order to improve learning outcomes of all students.
(ii) Provision of quality inputs to all schools – such as libraries, laboratories, computer centres, teaching–learning resource materials, equipment, tools – to eliminate disparities and to ensure equity in the quality of education available to students in all socio-economic criteria.
(iii) Allocation of an allowance of 40% of the salary to those teaching in difficult or remote areas for a more equitable deployment of teachers.
(iv) Production and timely distribution of high quality textbooks.
(v) Establishing a teacher development framework that includes school-based on-site teacher development and the professional development of teachers.

Gaps appear to be guidelines and programmes of awareness of the learning competencies identified for each grade and also awareness of the strategies for the proposed quality improvement in primary and secondary education. A major gap is the absence of human rights and specifically child rights and women's rights, social equity and gender equality as cross-cutting issues in the curriculum

The indicators selected for monitoring equity in quality of provision are:
(i) Percentage of professionally qualified teachers
(ii) Percentage of professionally qualified teachers in 'difficult' schools
(iii) Percentage of schools with all modern facilities for teaching and learning
(iv) Number of schools with teaching plan based on learning competencies
(v) Percentage of high quality textbooks
(vi) Percentage of examination item banks completed.

Indicators used for monitoring equity in learning outcomes are:
(i) Learning competencies specified in primary grades and disseminated to schools.
(ii) Learning competencies specified in junior secondary grades and disseminated to schools
(iii) Learning competencies specified in senior secondary grades and disseminated to schools
(iv) Cognitive achievement scores on first language and mathematics in Grades 4, 8 and 10 by type of school, division, urban and rural schools, and sex

These indicators too should be complemented by disaggregation by division and sex.

Gaps noted are in relation to monitoring progress in certain areas of resources provision (e.g. libraries, IT facilities, science laboratories), coverage of human rights (including child rights), national harmony, social equity, gender equality, human values, civic consciousness in the curriculum and measures of actual implementation of activity-based learning.

5.2.3 Budgeting and resource allocation for progress on equity

As stated earlier, the ESDFP was planned to accelerate the recent shift from traditional budgeting under uniform needs that ignored changing context, reinforced inequality in distribution of resources by continuing surplus resources to schools with resources and deprived disadvantaged schools of needed resources. To help to resolve the issue of equity a Norm-based Unit Cost Resource Allocation Mechanism (NBUCRAM) was introduced in 2000 under the World Bank supported General Education Project 2 to distribute funds amounting to 2% of recurrent budget for quality inputs on a basis of equity.

An important feature of the SWAp approach was to grant funds to supplement budgets at national level (Ministry of Education) and at provincial level unlike the earlier system of project-based funding. These grant funds were expected to be incorporated in public sector funds. The main donor in the Education Sector Development Framework Programme, the World Bank, followed this practice from the inception of the programme and it was hoped that other donors would adopt this modality in funding assistance.

The Education Sector Development Framework Programme incorporated both equity and efficiency concerns in developing the Medium Term Budgeting Framework for education, underscoring the need for a 'client oriented resource distribution'. The NBUCRAM was extended by providing budgetary allocation for:
(i) Support for higher order processes such as teacher development and capacity building of principals and educational officials, and higher order inputs such as consumable teaching–learning materials – 2% of the recurrent education budget in 2006 increasing to 3% in 2010.
(ii) Support for the development of (a) higher order spaces, such as activity rooms, computer centres, libraries, science laboratories, workshops, and (b) higher order assets such as

equipment, technology, books and reading material, and machinery and tools – 30% of the capital education budget in 2006 increasing to 40% in 2010.

(iii) Resources allocated for maintenance, repair and replacement of the education capital stock – 10% of the capital budget in 2006 increasing to 15% in 2010.

The allocations in the 2006–10 Education Sector Development Framework Programme indicated that priority among the four themes was given to equity in access issues, 49.37% in 2006 and 55.27% in 2010; and to equity in quality issues, 46.46% in 2006 and 40.79% in 2010. While the allocations for 2010 for themes 2–4 increased by around 40–50%, the increase in the allocation for activities under theme 1, equity in access, was 77.81%. The increase in the total budget was 57.95%.

Budgetary allocations were aligned with key operations under the four themes. Budget items followed the plan of proposed activities.

Under Theme One for instance:

(i) Ensure free education policy
(ii) Ensure subsidized transport facilities
(iii) Ensure free mid-day meals to students in disadvantaged schools
(iv) Ensure support to 'street children'
(v) Ensure support for free textbook policy
(vi) Ensure support to increase participation rate in primary education age group from 95% to 97%
(vii) Expand networks of secondary schools to reduce constraints to geographical equitable access to good quality secondary education provision – ISURU schools, Navodaya schools, Plantation schools, National schools, Model Primary schools, Schools Development in the North and East (conflict affected areas)
(viii) Support for activities pertaining to special education for children with disabilities
(ix) Provision for Non Formal Education Programmes – literacy, functional literacy and Community Literacy Centres and building capacity of NFE personnel.

Under Theme Two – Quality Improvement – budgetary allocation was made for each activity. Allocations were made on equity considerations such as for solar cells where no electricity supply was available.

Efficiency in the use of funds is to be ensured by the introduction of performance-based funding of provincial expenditure. An innovation is the introduction of a Public Expenditure Tracking System (PETS):

- to study the flow of public funds and other resources to various levels of the government administration and to monitor whether these resources reach these levels;
- to assess the level and volume of resources allocated to the various levels of the education system in relation to adequacy, efficiency and equity and to assess how well systems and incentives within the education sector promote efficiency and equity in the allocation and use of resources.

Expenditure, inputs and performance indicators for support as well as the routes from the central ministry to the schools and back are included. It is indicated that a universal part will be tracked for every school and zone and the rest will be tracked using a sample survey of perhaps 200 schools a year selected on the basis of a stratified random sample.

There is no specific mechanism to reflect gender concerns in budgeting as gender is perceived to be incorporated in equity concerns. Gender tracking could be ensured by disaggregating outcome data by sex.

5.2.4 Human and institutional capacity for addressing development issues

Theme Four – Strengthening Educational Governance and Service Delivery – focuses on the Programme of School Improvement (PSI) that is intended to promote democratic governance by facilitating the participation of the community at school level under the leadership of the School Development Committee. In contrast to the excessive centralization that characterized the system for decades, it is intended that teachers and past pupils participate in 'running' the school, thereby creating a sense of ownership, utilizing government and community resources effectively and developing institutional level planning and monitoring of implementation.

It appears to be expected that such a process of decentralization will ensure a participatory process that will help to safeguard equity despite risks of distorting the process through external pressures. There is no reference to assistance to disadvantaged communities to articulate their concerns and interests in the context of the marginalization of the very poor. There is no analysis also of the societal norms that could restrict gender mainstreaming in policies other than those for which universal provision is made. The PSI was to be implemented as a pilot project in selected zones in each province and the experience will determine progress.

The second component of educational governance is capacity building of educational personnel involved in the planning and implementation process and the formulation of a human resources development strategy. Some of these programmes, however, appear to be limited to the cadre in National schools which are not representative of the school structure even in a pilot project. In view of the 'glass ceiling' that operates as a barrier to the upward occupational mobility of women educational professionals to the highest decision making level, some specific interventions are necessary in capacity building programmes to address this issue.

5.2.5 Monitoring and evaluation

The Education Sector Development Framework Programme document gives ample space to a monitoring and evaluation process:

(i) Resources are to be allocated specifically for monitoring and evaluation and related research.
(ii) Both a) process and b) performance indicators have been identified –
  a) inputs, process and
  b) outputs, results, outcomes.
(iii) Monitoring will be by government agencies engaged in implementation activities and evaluation will be by independent external individuals/groups.
(iv) While regular assessments are proposed, some aspects will be assessed each year and others will be evaluated through sample surveys of a stratified random sample of schools.
(v) An innovation is the proposed use of participatory methods such as citizen report cards and community score cards.

A 'Results Framework' has been developed for monitoring and evaluation of objective and key development operations under the four themes against annual targets. For instance, indicators to assess the objectives of increasing equitable access to basic (primary and junior secondary education) and secondary education will be net enrolment rates of the compulsory age group, survival rate at Grade 9, and number and percentage completing the Grade 1–9 cycle. Improvement in the quality of primary, junior secondary and secondary education will be assessed by cognitive achievement scores in first language and mathematics, whether the specifications of learning competencies were sent to schools, and qualifications of staff. Indicators for resource allocation are the percentages of the recurrent and capital budget allocated to different components – capacity building of personnel, 'high order' facilities (for instance equipment, technology and books) and maintenance, repair and replacement. Under Theme 4 there are assessments of the Programme of School Improvement, and review of capacity building and human resource development.

A limitation of this Framework is that only provincial statistics and data are included in the framework that is disseminated at national level. In the context of the urban–rural and district wise disparities in Sri Lanka, provincial programmes are likely to conceal such disparities thereby defeating the objectives of promoting social equity. Within provinces there are wide district wise disparities – for instance, between Kandy and Nuwara Eliya in the Central Province, Galle and Hambantota in the Southern Province, and Kurunegala and Puttalam in the North-Western Province. Within districts there are considerable disparities between administrative divisions as seen in the identification by the Department of Census and Statistics of the one hundred poorest administrative divisions. There is no indication in the framework, too, that sex disaggregated data is to be included in the massive exercise proposed in the document. It would be unfortunate if the results framework is to overlook these real disparities in the assessment of whether the programme achieves equitable access, quality, resource allocation and effective management

5.3 Summary

In summary, it appears that the SWAp approach adopted in the Education Sector Development Framework Programme in Sri Lanka has a strong focus on equity, reinforcing the national perspective on education for all and extending this concern to equity in access to quality education, recognizing that equity and excellence are not mutually exclusive. Positive features include clear targets for improving equity in access and quality combined with a number of explicit strategies, a funding allocation mechanism to channel funds more equitably, decentralization of decision making and resource use to allow districts and schools to be more responsive to local realities and a detailed monitoring framework.

This concern is welcome as the quality of education has suffered in Sri Lanka in the context of scarce resources and weaknesses in management of resources. The third and fourth themes, efficiency and equity in resource allocation and effective governance and service delivery, spell out mechanisms to support progress towards the targets envisaged for the programmes to promote equity in access and in equality. Clearly, the success of these policies will depend on their implementations at all levels.

Nevertheless, an exploration of the core SWAp documents reveals some gaps or areas that that will probably need revisiting or strengthening in time. These include the assumptions about gender parity and consequent lack of priority to sex disaggregated monitoring, as well as insufficient indicators for assessing progress in addressing disparities at divisional and local levels. There are lacunae in the curriculum in 'equity in quality' issues such as a rights-based, socially inclusive and gender sensitive content and adequate attention to school ethos. It is not clear what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the poorest and most socially excluded will be able to participate fully in school and local level decision making.

6. SWAp Partnership Processes and Mechanisms and the Implications for Equity and Social Inclusion

6.1 Planning and Monitoring Processes

Disenchantment on the part of the World Bank regarding the project approach in donor assistance, learning from other countries that have adopted a SWAp modality, and the awareness of the key policy makers in the Ministry of Education of the holistic perspective of the NEC and World Bank sector review and proposals, facilitated the acceptance of the sector-wide approach as a promising approach to educational development. The earliest discussions between the government and the World Bank on this issue were on future assistance at the World Bank wrap-up mission in May 2004. The World Bank had already supported this approach in its assistance programme in other countries.

The NEC and World Bank documents had proposed a more participatory process in formulating plans, including school-based planning. While these documents provided a useful base to start the planning process, credit must be given to the Ministry of Education for embarking in September 2004 on an unprecedented massive planning exercise that combined bottom-up and top-down approaches and was extended to provinces, zones and schools. The planning process continued through 2005 and to the production of the ESDFP document in 2006. Revisions are ongoing but the basic structure is embodied in the document produced in March 2006.

The participatory planning process in which officials of the central and provincial education authorities and institutions, the zonal offices and principals and teachers of all schools were actively involved followed a clearly defined schedule of activities as indicated in the ESDFP document and in the World Bank Project Appraisal (2005b).

(i) A Steering Committee, a National Technical Committee and a Consultative Committee were set up in the Ministry of Education. The National Technical Committee in consultation with the Steering and Consultative Committees provided technical assistance, developing planning guidelines for schools, zones and provinces in a collaborative process, and sought to strengthen planning capacities at provincial and zonal levels. Four themes and their key operations were identified as the components of the Programme – Equity, Quality, Resource Allocation and Education Governance.

(ii) A School Planning Committee comprising the principal and teachers was to be established in each school; a Zonal Planning Team of five members from the office to be organized in every zone; and a Provincial Planning Team to be organized in every Provincial Director of Education's office.

(iii) Capacity building of the planning teams was to be ensured by providing for two national consultants and eight provincial consultants to work with the planning teams for seven to ten months from December 2004. In as much as the National Technical Committee would assist the provincial and zonal planning teams, the zonal planning teams were to be equipped to provide guidance to the school planning teams.

(iv) Awareness sessions were to be conducted at national, provincial and zonal levels for heads of departments, institutes, divisions and branches.

(v) Plans were to be prepared in every school, zone and province according to the planning guidelines sent by the national team, to meet specific needs at all three levels.

(vi) Zonal plans had two components:
  (a) The School Consolidated Plan developed from the school plans in the zone
  (b) The Zonal Institutional Plan.
(vii) Provincial plans had three components:
  (a) School Consolidated Plan
  (b) Zonal Institutional Consolidated Plan developed from the zonal plans in each province
  (c) The Provincial Institutional Plan.
(viii) The Sector Plan therefore comprised the Plans of the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education (NIE) (responsible for curriculum development and the professional development of educational personnel), the Department of Examinations (the National Evaluation and Testing Service [NETS]), the Educational Publications Department – all of the Central Ministry of Education, and the consolidated Provincial plans.
(ix) The planning activities of each agency were classified under the key operations in each of the four themes and were aligned to the budget ceilings in the plan-based budget developed for each year within the medium term budget 2006–10. Line managers were identified at national level for each of the key development operations.
(x) A monitoring mechanism was created comprising results-based monitoring indicators developed for output oriented planned activities, strategies and programmes, and the expected outputs and outcomes of the results framework.
(xi) A rolling plan approach is to be applied to revise the medium term plan annually and to prepare annual implementation plans.
(xii) Development partners (donors) were invited to support the government to implement these multifaceted activities from centre to school level within the ESDFP.

The SWAp design was thus planned to mobilize the participation of stakeholders and consultations were planned and conducted to improve both the conceptual framework and the key development operations.

The planning process has been in operation since 2005. The technical team has developed formats for the four themes to indicate targets, output, activities to achieve objectives, responsible agency, time frame and costs, and relevant circulars have been issued. A detailed Monitoring and Results Framework also has been developed. The ESDFP has been accepted by the Department of National Planning as a model for other line Ministries. Funds flow mechanisms have been identified from the Central Bank to the Treasury to:

(i) The Ministry of Education and its agencies in Colombo
(ii) The provinces with the assistance of the Finance Commission.

Our field work in eight of the nine provinces, encompassing also a zonal and divisional office in each province and eleven schools, helped us to ascertain how the planning has operated at provincial, zonal and school levels. But the sample was limited by the constraints of the deadlines of the project so that it is not possible to generalize from the information we received. This information, however, is summarized to enable an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the process.

With regard to the School Plan, the principals affirmed that they had developed School Plans, for 2006–10 in 2005 and for 2007 in 2006. We were unable to obtain reliable data from the zonal offices, and it would not be surprising if the small schools experienced difficulties in preparing the plans. The composition of the Planning Committee had varied in different schools. In one

school the principal and one teacher had drawn up the plan; in another, the principal, the vice principal and a teacher; and a few schools had involved some teachers or all teachers and a few members of the School Development Society. The highest level of participation had been in a school which involved some parents also in developing the plan.

The responses of the divisional officers made it clear that they had not played an active role in the development of the plans at any level. They stated that while the school plans were developed by the schools under the guidance of the Zonal Planning Committee members, the divisions had not developed any plans, they had only provided the data. Yet except for the divisional officers from two provinces, others had participated at the meetings. The zonal officers interviewed also confirmed the earlier information given by the principals and the divisional officers.

At the zonal level, it was generally indicated that the Planning Committee had been drawn from among key officers such as the Zonal Director, Deputy Director/Assistant Director (Planning), Assistant Director (Non-Formal Education and Special Education), Deputy Director (Management), Deputy Director/Asst. Director (Educational Development), Subject Directors and In-Service Advisers. The Committee membership varied from one zone to the other. In two zones the planning under Theme 1 (Access) had been under the Non-Formal officer; Theme 2 (Quality) under the Deputy Director, Planning or Development; Theme 3 (Resource Allocation) Mathematics Subject Director; and Theme 4 (Governance) Deputy Director, Administration.

The provincial officers who were interviewed explained how the provincial plans had been drawn up. For example, in one province, the four themes were put in charge of four responsible officers. Under the leadership of the Deputy Director (Planning), Theme 1 was placed under the Non-Formal Education Officer, Theme 2 under the Assistant Director (Educational Development), Theme 3 under the Deputy Director (Planning) and Theme 4 under the Assistant Director (School Administration). In another, the planning was monitored and coordinated by the Provincial Director, Additional Provincial Director, directors responsible for the four Themes, Director (Planning) and three Planning Officers. It was clear that at the provincial level much effort had gone into the organization of the planning process.

The principals had received guidance in drawing up the plans. The guidance, according to the principals, had been given through one–two day seminars, sometimes at principals' meetings, sometimes by a wide-ranging committee including Provincial Ministry officials and the Zonal Planning Committee and in other areas by the Zonal Planning Teams. The number of consultations varied from two to seven. Much credence cannot be placed on this information, however, as the principals were referring to events that took place almost two years earlier and especially because the response of the principals in the schools in the same division varied.

The Zonal Committees also explained how they had been guided by the Provincial Committees to prepare the zonal plans incorporating the school plans under the four themes that had been identified. The number of training sessions attended by them over the two years ranged from three to nine. Most of these sessions had focused on the four themes.

The provincial officers said that regular consultations had been held in their provinces with officers at different levels. All the provincial officers stated that they had adequate guidance from the Technical Committee and the Consultants.

The intensive activities undertaken in Colombo support this view. The distribution of guidelines and formats by the Planning Division was a part of the planning process. Awareness programmes have been conducted for schools and parents in some areas. In most plans budgetary estimates were aligned with activities. One school claimed that their staff lacked the skills to prepare such estimates and officials in one zone said that school estimates were often unreliable.

As stated earlier, existing documents were used for the preparation of the Education Sector Development Framework Programme rather than special surveys. The only specific surveys carried out for the plans were by some schools in consultation with the Grama Sevaka and Samurdhi officers. At the zonal level, the Non-Formal officers were expected to carry out surveys of out-of-school children but there is no record as to whether all officials did so. In one zone, an in-service education adviser had carried out a survey of children with disabilities.

All the units of the Ministry of Education developed their own plans for 2006–10 – the Department of Examination, the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the Education Publications Department. The NIE already had its own plan in which the themes were not identical but were aligned with the ESDFP for the National Plan.

The planning exercise was new and unprecedented in magnitude and annual implementation plans have been developed as yet only for 2006 and 2007. Hence it would be unfair to be too critical of the process. The feedback overall has been that:

(i) Planning guidelines were rather complicated for even the provincial education authorities and much more for zonal officials and school personnel. Some simplification has been suggested.
(ii) There is an urgent need for building planning capacity at all levels – provincial, zonal and school levels. In a system of 10,000 schools with varying levels of competence among school personnel, this is a daunting challenge, which has to be confronted if the planning process is to be participatory and to reflect the educational needs of all communities.
(iii) Delays in preparation of plans were due to lack of capacity and slow flow of funds. Some clear time lines need to be developed and monitored.
(iv) The number of personnel responsible at the Ministry needs to be increased. The Ministry has not accepted the proposal in the World Bank Aide Memoire to establish a Secretariat to accelerate the implementation of the ESDFP as it portends a return to the concept of a Project Office. The Secretary has appointed a Co-ordinator responsible to him to facilitate feedback from all the units in the Ministry of Education.

Little information has been provided to the public in view of the currently tentative nature of the Programme until its finalization. As some implementation steps have been initiated, an awareness programme for the general public, civil society and political parties will be required to ensure wide understanding and co-operation.

6.2 Government Leadership and Coordination

It is clear that the government takes the leading role in introducing the SWAp to the country through the Education Sector Development Framework Programme Framework 2006–10 and subsequent rolling plans. The key government agencies are as follows.

(1) The Ministry of Finance and Planning

(i) The Department of National Planning approves the plan prepared by the sectoral Ministry of Education, and the resources allocated. It monitors the implementation of the plan/ programme and the smooth flow of funds. The Department ensures that the Education Sector Development Framework Programme (ESDFP) is consistent with the Ten Year National Plan, 2006–15.

(ii) The Treasury receives the funds from the Special Dollar Accounts of the Central Bank and channels funds to the Ministry of Education and to the provincial authorities.

(iii) The Finance Commission, established in 1987 under the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (the devolution to the provinces), as the mediator of the devolution of finances, a) assesses provincial needs, b) in consultation with the provinces, negotiates with the Budget Department of the Ministry of Finance and Planning and recommends the provincial budget to government, and c) monitors the use of these funds. There appears to be some confusion created at the provincial level by the guidelines for programme implementation sent by the Education Consultants in the Finance Commission and those sent by the Planning Division of the Ministry.

(2) The Ministry of Education

MoE is the central agency that developed the SWAp oriented ESDFP and implements and monitors the plan. The Ministry has also three other units directly involved with the ESDFP – the National Institute of Education (NIE), the Department of Examinations (National Education and Testing Services) and the Education Publications Department.

(3) The nine Provincial Education Authorities

These receive funds from the Treasury under the supervision of the Finance Commission of the Ministry of Finance and Planning. They develop coordinated plans based on zonal and school plans and take the lead role in the provinces in implementing them and monitoring their progress.

While it is important that the government leads the SWAp process, it is necessary also that effective mechanisms are established for:

- Collaboration between the central, provincial, zonal and divisional authorities as the local offices supervise the implementation of programmes in most schools; and
- collaboration between the government and development partners such as donors and the non-governmental organizations.

Constraints to implementation have arisen from the lack, as yet, of effective mechanisms and the slow pace, till very recently, of donor coordination at national level.

6.3 The Development Partners

The Development Partners include the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UN agencies, Bilateral agencies, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), National Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and other civil society organizations.

With the exception of UNICEF, donor support became visible on the education scene only from the 1980s. In terms of financial contribution, the major donors are the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UNICEF.

As the adoption of the SWAp and the development of the Education Sector Development Framework Programme based on it was conceptualized as a holistic process, donors were invited to participate in the planning process and to incorporate their programmes in the framework based on the four themes. The World Bank as the donor agency that 'tops up' the government budget was a member of the Steering Committee chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Education. All donors were members of the Consultative Committee chaired by the Additional Secretary, Education. The Donor Co-ordination Committee chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Education consists of representatives of the Ministry of Education and donor agencies and relevant national authorities such as the External Resources Department, the Finance Commission and the Provincial Education Authorities.

In July 2006 donor agencies were requested to provide their annual programme plans in the education sector to the Additional Secretary, Planning and the Consultant Coordinator of the Donor Programmes in the Ministry of Education, to be included in the overall national education work plan for 2007. It was proposed that their funds should be channelled, like the World Bank funds, through the Treasury and the Ministry of Education, contrary to the earlier practice of separate project offices disbursing donor funds. The expected outcome was a sector-wide approach in terms of both programmes and funds. Donors could identify the programmes they wished to support from the ESDFP and control the use of their funds. A common format was developed by the Planning Division and other officials for all development partners. This has helped to integrate programmes supported by development partners within the ESDFP planning document. However, the Ministry reports that a few development partners had sent their plans only in April–May 2007. One development partner complained that there were delays in approving work plans and initiating activities, primarily due to lack of harmonization of planning procedures between the Ministry and different agencies.

6.3.1 The role of the World Bank

The World Bank had in the recent past funded three large education projects – General Education 1 and 2 and Teacher Education and Teacher Deployment Projects. As the main support of the SWAp, the World Bank has now channelled all its funds, US$60 million grant over five years, 2006–10, to the government (Treasury) to support the implementation of the Education Sector Development Framework Programme in the proportion of 75% to the Provincial Education Ministries with the assistance of the Finance Commission and 25% directly to the Ministry of Education, Department of Examinations and Department of Education Publications, and through the Ministry to the National Institute of Education, the Ministry of Finance and Planning (Department of National Planning and the National Budget Department), the Faculties and Departments of Education of the Universities and the National Education Commission. In the first two years funds were to be allocated for the implementation of policies, inputs and processes. From 2008, funding will be performance-based – on outputs, results and outcomes.

The World Bank Education Specialist was actively involved in the planning process and worked closely with the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education, dispensing with a project office.

All the programmes supported are incorporated in the overall plan under the four themes – Equity, Quality, Resource Allocation and Governance and Delivery of Services. They encompass:

(i) Support for upgrading secondary schools, measures to enforce compulsory education, non-formal education and education for children with disabilities
(ii) Curriculum and examination reforms, textbook production, promoting social cohesion and values and teacher development
(iii) Developing a medium term budgetary framework and tracking system to ensure equity in resource allocation and transparency; and
(iv) Supporting the Programme for School Improvement and developing a human resource development strategy.

The bi-annual World Bank missions monitor progress and the utilization of expenditure. Delays in implementation due to lack of adequate personnel in the Ministry has led the World Bank Mission to propose the establishment of a Secretariat for the ESDFP under the Secretary which could, however, as discussed earlier, create new problems.

The significant change was that the World Bank was now granting funds to support the national and provincial budgets, which are incorporated in public sector funds and not as project funds. Following its scheme of providing quality inputs to schools since 2000, the World Bank now proposed allocating, in 2006, 2% of the recurrent expenditure for higher order processes and inputs (programmes) and 30% of the capital budget for higher order assets, spaces, equipment and facilities such as computer centres, laboratories, libraries, and 10% of the capital budget for repairs, maintenance and replacements. Its strong focus was on monitoring the results and actions of the ESDFP, economic and social benefits and financial performance. DFID funds allocated in 2005 are placed in a Trust Fund and are incorporated in World Bank funds channelled through the government.

6.3.2 Other Development Partners

(i) Multilateral agencies

Asian Development Bank

The Asian Development Bank's major project in the general education sector, the Secondary Education Modernization Project 2001–05, provided a loan of US$ 55 million focusing chiefly on senior secondary education (Grades 10–13) and was planned to:

(i) Improve the quality of secondary education through curriculum development, the provision of multimedia units, computer learning centres, on-site environmental centres, and school-based assessment
(ii) Increase the access of economically disadvantaged students to quality secondary education by providing stipends in Grades 10–13, upgrading 100 secondary schools with GCE (AL) school laboratories and promoting career guidance; and
(iii) Increase efficiency in the management, supervision and delivery of services through supporting quality assurance, programmes in school improvement or school-based management and strengthening initiatives at central, provincial and zonal levels.

The Secondary Education Modernization Project II 2005–10 continues the objectives and activities of the earlier project. It is therefore consonant with the themes 1, 2 and 4. The ADB has its own project office located in the Ministry of Education, which implements projects and disburses its funds (US$ 55 million in 2005–09).

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
UNICEF has a long tradition of country programmes especially in supporting basic education, education for all, child rights and Child Friendly schools. It continues to support equity of access to quality basic education through a holistic approach, improvement through the provision of school facilities and teaching–learning supplies as well as opportunities for out-of-school children to complete the compulsory education cycle. The 2007 programme includes a strong focus on capacity development in planning, monitoring and evaluation, particularly of zonal level educational personnel, linked to strengthening school level planning. UNICEF supports emergency education focusing on strengthening capacity and systems to ensure that children affected by conflict in the North and East Provinces continued to participate in quality education. A Catch-up education programme assists children to rejoin the formal education system. UNICEF is also supporting an extensive programme of post-tsunami school reconstruction. UNICEF's current programmes are within the framework of ESDFP. UNICEF has its own office and project staff. Funds amounting to US$ 20 million for 2007 are channelled through the National Treasury for earmarked programmes within the SWAp process led by the government.

United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA)
UNFPA has supported school programmes on reproductive health for several years. Its current grant of US$ 10 million over five years is channelled largely to the National Institute of Education which has its own project unit to implement this programme. It also supports an NGO programme to engender teacher education as a preliminary step to promoting a more gender sensitive curriculum.

World Food Programme (WFP)
WFP operates through the government of Sri Lanka, offering support in kind for a mid-morning meal for students in Grades 1–9 in conflict and tsunami affected food insecure areas. Commodities are supplied for preparation of the meals to the central government to district warehouses and then to the targeted schools through zonal offices and cooperatives or private transport. The School Development Society supervises the preparation of the meals. In five education divisions commodities are also channelled through an NGO, World Vision, as a pilot programme. With assistance from private NGO and foreign donors, WFP provides permanent kitchen and storage facilities in around 400 schools. Cooking equipment, utensils and bowls are distributed in all schools covered under the school feeding programme.

United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
UNESCO is a technical agency and channels funds from other donors for programmes within its mandate. In the education sector UNESCO supports the preparation of the Mid Decade Review of the 'Education for All' programmes and for the preparation of plans in this area, as well as the training of teachers in Information and Communication Technology and Inclusive Education.

(ii) Bilateral agencies

Department for International Development UK (DFID)
DFID placed its funds (US$ 90 million) in a trust fund in 2005. These are incorporated in World Bank funds channelled through the government. Some of these funds were used to support the preparatory planning process of the ESDFP in 2006.

Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA)
JICA's current project follows its earlier programme for the development of science and mathematics education with a budget of US$ 2.25 million (2005–08). Japanese and national consultants work with selected schools in ten zones to improve the quality of mathematics and science teaching and to develop effective school management practices under the Programme of School Improvement. JICA has its own office in the Ministry of Education and its funds are sent to the provinces according to the government funding mechanism for provincial funding.

German Technical Co-operation (GTZ)
The GTZ programmes, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, are integrated in the ESDFP. The programmes focus on promoting social cohesion, ethics, values, the teaching and learning of the second national languages, remedial education, disaster risk management, and psycho-social care for children affected by tsunami, conflict and other difficult circumstances in schools. The programme provides advisory services to the National Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education, and is working closely with the 17 National Colleges of Education and Education Departments country-wide. The programme has officers in the Ministry of Education, in the NIE and in the Provincial Education Department in Trincomalee. The focus is on junior secondary education level. Its funds, amounting to US$ 9 million (2005–09), are partly channelled through the SWAp process. Support is also provided for the capacity development of staff of the Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Education to handle the focal areas.

(iii) International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)
Three INGOs provide financial support to programmes identified by them in the general education sector. These programmes are included in the ESDFP framework, but the organizations have their own project offices and efforts are being made currently to integrate their funds in the main ESDFP budget.

Save the Children, Sri Lanka organizes educational programmes in schools and with parents and communities. It supports a local NGO, SERVE, to conduct a School Social Work programme extending also to the parents and the communities to promote a child friendly school, home and community environment. It has organized recently, through the Commonwealth Education Fund, a Coalition for Development of 63 civil society organizations in advocacy for planning, implementing and mainstreaming policies and programmes to ensure equity and quality in education.

Plan International in Sri Lanka supports the creation of a quality environment in schools by providing facilities such as separate classrooms, playgrounds, libraries, school sanitation, health and nutrition programmes and co-operative shops in selected primary schools in four districts. It assists also in the capacity building of local NGOs. Its budget allocation is US$ 2.4 million in 2007.

World Vision supports and assists in the World Food Programme school mid-day meal programme but also has its own programmes providing schools infrastructure such as buildings, teachers' quarters, playgrounds, and equipment and teaching aids in primary schools in 13 districts.

(iv) Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Few local NGOs are engaged in organizing education programmes. Even these few work through an international organization or an INGO. For instance, as referred to earlier, SERVE conducts its School Social Work Programme through Save the Children and the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) undertakes its Engendering Teacher Education programme through UNFPA.

The programme areas in the ESDFP supported by donor funds have been incorporated in the document prepared by the Consultant Coordinator of donor programmes in pursuance of the government's holistic perspective of the ESDFP and its sector-wide approach. The programmes of development partners have been fitted into the four-theme framework. Equity issues are strongly represented in the ESDFP and the involvement in equity-based programmes by large donors such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in addition to development partners such as UNICEF, which has always given priority to equity, is a welcome and promising feature in the new approach and in the overall Education Sector Development Framework Programme.

6.3.3 Donor coordination and harmonization

It is apparent that a full SWAp is not yet in operation. Rather, there is the gradual bringing-in of programmes under the common framework, with improved coordination between them and better reflection in the budget. With the exception of DFID, donors have their own project offices, within or outside the Ministry. Recently, UNICEF has agreed to channel funds to the Treasury as requested by the government and it appears that more such changes are imminent.

There are differences in the approaches adopted by donors in channelling funds to the ESDFP. The World Bank funds are intended to be used to support programmes in Grades 1 – 13 in schools in all districts and allocation is according to the needs determined by the Planning Division of the Ministry. UNFPA supports reproductive health programmes on the basis of a plan developed by the National Institute of Education. The ADB channels funds through their project office to selected senior secondary schools island-wide. UNICEF, WFP, JICA and GTZ allocate funds for specific districts/zones/identified areas according to their priorities.

Development Partners are, at least in theory, supportive of government leadership that is clearly manifested, and of the holistic approach offered by the SWAp modality. Nevertheless, old traditions die hard as some development partners appeared to be cautious regarding a total absorption in a common programme notwithstanding the space provided to support their priority areas of concern and to retain project offices. Some donors have expressed concern about the capacity of the government to manage effectively the resources made available by them. Development partners are critical of shortcomings in implementation so far. But these weaknesses could be the result of the complexity of the massive exercise in island-wide multi-layer planning.

A further concern for some donors appears to be the 'leading role' of the World Bank, though less clear is what are the particular policy issues around which differences have emerged. Since the World Bank initiated the SWAp, participated actively and provided technical and financial support in the planning and monitoring process and have channelled all their substantial funds through the Treasury from the inception and not from a project office, their initial leadership in the massive SWAp exercise was perhaps inevitable. However, it was hoped all along that all donors would similarly integrate their programmes and funds in pursuance of an approach which has a national holistic perspective. The appointment of a senior public officer as consultant coordinator

indicates that the government is the coordinator of the SWAp process. The donor coordinating committee is a mechanism for promoting cooperation and harmonizing relations. In this context the case for a 'rotating' chairperson or a 'dominant donor' has no salience. The Donor Coordination Committee met only twice in 2006 and it is desirable that these meetings are held on a regular basis to ensure meaningful and effective coordination.

Delay has been chiefly in the area of integrating budgets. Traditionally donors have funded activities through their country programmes or individual projects, channelling funds in both instances directly to institutions. Inevitably there are fears of bureaucratic hassles and the inordinate delays in the flow of funds observed in our feedback from many of the local implementing units. Ensuring the smooth flow of funds from the Ministry of Finance and Planning via the Ministry of Education and the Finance Commission to all levels of the implementation structure has surfaced in this study as a critical issue that needs to be addressed without delay.

7. Promoting Equity and Inclusion: How is the SWAp Making a Difference?

7.1 Direct Impacts

In the Sri Lankan context, the SWAp-based Education Sector Programme (ESDFP) was planned in 2005 and implemented in 2006. It is premature therefore to assess the impact of a programme that has been introduced one year ago. It is possible, however, to ascertain the extent to which key operations have been undertaken, and the constraints that delay implementation activities, that is, a partial assessment of inputs and processes. The information presented here is limited to the progress reports of the Ministry of Education in 2006, the Aide Memoire of the World Bank Mission of February 7th 2007, the progress report of one province and the data from field work in a zone in each province and discussion with provincial, zonal and divisional officials, and principals/senior teachers in 11 schools.

Theme 1: Promoting equitable access to primary and secondary education

Programmes identified and introduced under theme 1 of the ESDFP, to promote equitable access to primary and secondary education, encompass the following areas.

(i) Priority was given to activating the Compulsory Attendance Committees that had been established in 1998 but had been dormant since 2000, thereby limiting the effectiveness of the compulsory education regulations for the 5–14 age group introduced in 1998. The ESDFP was expected to activate these committees to perform their stipulated functions and a circular was sent by the Ministry of Education to re-activate 8450 Committees and to conduct awareness programmes.

The feedback from our visits to provinces, zones, divisions and schools was that not all committees were active. In the Western Province in which Colombo is located, for instance, 1200 of 2496 (48.1%) were active, some of them meeting at zonal level also. Some committees were active in two other zones and a few committees functioned even in the conflict affected North and East. The most disadvantaged division was relatively lethargic, claiming that funds were not available for meetings. There is evidence that Grama Niladaris in several areas were reluctant to participate in meetings as there was no payment for such activities. The local education authorities were faced with another constraint in summoning meetings as some members such as Grama Niladaris and Samurdi Officers (responsible for poverty alleviation programmes) functioned under other ministries, even though a circular had been addressed to district administrators. Clearly, creating awareness of child rights and the importance of education had not yet overcome the miasma of indifference that prevailed among some officials.

The need to extend educational opportunity to children outside the formal school system and to bring into schools particularly children of vulnerable groups such as child workers, children with disabilities and 'street children' was underscored in the ESDFP document. The Non-Formal Education and Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education which had been allocated the responsibility of bringing all children within the ambit of the formal or non-formal education system in 1997, had also been relatively inactive as a consequence of lack of adequate resources and personnel. The ESDFP gives an important role to the

division and it appears that the challenge has been met by both the office in the Ministry and some of the Non-Formal officers in the provinces and zones.

An island-wide survey of out-of-school children was organized by the Division in the Ministry and some data has been collected. There are some discrepancies between this data and the School Census data and the survey is continuing in 2007. There is evidence, however, that the target of enrolling 3000 out-of-school children in schools in 2006 has been exceeded, as by the end of 2006, 12,127 children in the 5–14 age group had been brought into the education system, indicating a significant decline in the out-of-school population, while the target has been exceeded by 304%. Of this number, 3534 had been enrolled in formal schools and 8593 in non-formal literacy centres.

On our visits to local education offices and schools we were informed that at least some out-of-school children had entered or re-entered schools. These children had not enrolled in schools earlier or had dropped out as a result of child labour necessitated by poverty, or had been marginalized as they had no schools within a convenient distance and no transport facilities, or were from dysfunctional families. As non-schooling in Sri Lanka is not pervasive but is concentrated in pockets of economic and social deprivation and in areas affected by armed conflict and/or natural disaster, there has been visible progress in promoting greater equity in access to education.

Outside the formal schools, enrolment in Literary Centres (3610), Functional Literacy Centres (5138) and Community Learning Centres (7495) has increased. Sex disaggregated data is not available regarding re-entry to schools but over 50% of those in Basic Literacy and Functional Literacy Programmes and 75% of those in Community Learning Centres were girls. Some of those in Community Learning Centres have found employment, the majority of them (79%) being young women. The Open School planned by the National Institute of Education for out-of-school adolescents is also an initiative that is expected to increase access to the socially excluded.

The ESDFP includes indicators to assess the numbers enrolled in school from two vulnerable and hitherto neglected groups of children – children with disabilities and children living on streets. There has been less success in enrolling these 'hard to reach' children. During our field visits we found that the numbers of children with disabilities who were now receiving an inclusive education were very few, despite recent efforts to ensure their right to education and other services through legislation and policy. Nor have sustained efforts been made to adapt teaching–learning modalities to their needs. Six centres have been opened for 'street children' for whom the state has assumed responsibility for the first time.

The Asian Development Bank's project begun in 2001 to offer stipends to retain students in senior secondary grades and to increase their access to science and IT education is in consonance with the objective of increasing equitable access to secondary education. It is too early, however, to assess achievement through indicators such as net enrolment or completion rates.

(ii) Another feature of the plans under this theme is the reaffirmation of the free education policy by continuing and strengthening the demand side incentives provided over decades. Free state primary and secondary education and ancillary support services are prioritized. Free

textbooks for Grades 1–11 have been provided since 1980 but delays in the printing and timely delivery of books to schools appears to be a perennial barrier to education opportunity. Most schools and zones complained that books for 2006 were received late in the year and that some books for 2007 have yet to reach schools. On the other hand, the distribution of school uniform materials was widely accepted as a successful programme except in the currently unstable Eastern Province. The UN World Food Programme has been supporting a school meal programme in recent years, and the state too has moved in under the ESDFP to provide a mid-morning meal prepared by schools to children in Grades 1 and 2 in disadvantaged schools. These programmes are reported to have resulted in an increase in attendance in the schools benefiting from the programme.

(iii) The third programme is to ensure an equitable distribution of quality schools in the country – a programme that was initiated in the 1990s. A school has been selected for upgrading in each of the one hundred most disadvantaged divisions in the country and in 19 conflict affected districts identified by the Department of Census and Statistics, and a few Model Primary schools have been selected for development to reduce the pressure for entry to 'good' schools. In addition, selected National schools, and Navodaya schools in rural areas, plantation schools and schools in the conflict affected North and East have been identified for programmes.

A constraint to assessing the impact of programmes to provide equitable access to primary and secondary education is the limitation of quantitative disaggregated data below provincial level. A systematic data base of enrolment disaggregated by district, zone and division as well as by sex, that is, at least electronically available, is necessary for meaningful analysis of social equity and gender equality.

Theme 2: Equity in quality

The second theme, equity in quality, identified several strategies as well as indicators for monitoring equity as spelled out in Chapter 5. Strategies focused on two broad areas: Equity in Quality of Provision and Equity in Learning Outcomes.

Under equity in quality of provision, issues of teacher development, teacher deployment, provision of modern school facilities, production and timely distribution of high quality textbooks and modernizing the examination and testing system were to be addressed.

The need to encourage provinces to build on teacher deployment policies and select their own priorities and targets for meeting the needs of schools for appropriately qualified teachers was recognized in this regard. It was also considered desirable to encourage each province to set its own targets for reducing the number of schools that have an inadequate number of appropriately qualified teachers. Inevitably such programmes had still to be initiated in the provinces.

One mechanism to achieve more equitable deployment of teachers was the allocation of an allowance of 40% of the salary to those teaching in difficult or remote areas. A circular pertaining to allowances had been issued much earlier and the ESDFP reiterated that such a scheme had been introduced. It appears that there has been little progress in implementing it, clearly as a result of budgetary constraints at national and provincial levels. Principals pointed out that lack of teachers is felt mostly in IT, science, mathematics, and technical subjects. The divisional officers and zonal officers reiterated the views of the principals.

Establishing a teacher development framework that includes school-based on-site teacher development and the professional development of teachers was a major strategy to ensure equity in quality, especially to raise cognitive achievement levels of students. The Ministry identified (i) drawing up a plan for graduate teachers' professional development, (ii) improving the quality of NIE distance education centres and increasing intake, and (iii) specialized teacher retraining, as actions to be taken in this regard. In addition, (iv) the need to reorient the pilot on-site teacher development programme more firmly towards teachers and schools selecting their own priorities was identified.

According to the Ministry of Education, the school-based teacher development was piloted in 2005 in 15 schools in three zones and extended in 2006 to 50 schools in 10 zones covering all provinces. The pilot programme had developed Service Provider Directories at provincial level which the zonal offices were encouraged to use as a database for identifying resource persons for schools. It was also reported that guidelines on the rationale and strategies for school-based teacher development have been prepared and will be shortly distributed. Study groups (14 persons from zonal and provincial education teams, Teacher Centres and National Colleges of Education) had been established in all provinces during the pilot phase. During our field work we were informed that the programme was on going in 33 schools and that it will be implemented in 2007 in two other zones.

Capacity building programmes had been conducted in some of the schools that were visited. Some teachers had participated in programmes on the new curriculum and on subject disciplines. A frequent complaint was that these programmes are mostly conducted at the end of the year when the teachers are busy with their year-end examination work.

In-Service Advisers (ISAs) represent the main source of support to schools to develop teachers. They are the resource persons for in-service training and workshops organized in schools and at Teachers' Centres. The National Institute of Education stated that a total of 2477 ISAs and 401 subject directors had been trained in the new curriculum for Grades 1, 2, 6 and 10. It appeared that some of the ISAs had been de-motivated as they had not received appointments and were still in the Teachers' Service. Subsequently an ISA Service has been established.

Teacher development has continued at a smooth pace and planning for school-based teacher development has been completed, but it is too early to assess the impact at school level of both school-based teacher development and capacity building of teachers.

Provision of quality inputs and services to all schools – such as libraries, laboratories, computer centres, teaching–learning resource materials, equipment and tools was one of the strategies to ensure equity in quality under the ESDFP.

Interviews showed that the availability of facilities in schools depended on the location of the division. Thus the number of schools with Advanced Level Science laboratories varied from 15 in Colombo, to 13 in Galle, and none in Eravur Patthu and Kuruwita divisions. All the divisions had two or more computer centres but the fact that the divisions in Colombo and Galle district had 16 and 15 centres each indicated that existing disparities need to be eliminated or reduced. In addition to the ADB supported centres, under the ESDFP too, a programme of establishing IT units in schools has begun and the units established under the earlier World Bank Programme are being strengthened.

Facilities such as buildings, safe water, separate toilets for girls and boys and electricity represent the essential requirements for a conducive environment for learning. Disparities in the provision of blackboards, electricity and workplaces were minimal but schools visited in an urban low income environment, and in a rural environment, were seen to lack facilities such as adequate buildings, partitioned classrooms, sufficient desks and chairs, adequate separate toilet facilities and equipment and chemicals. In general, the situation with regard to toilets was not satisfactory either because separate facilities were not available or maintenance was poor. It is unreasonable, however, to expect a transformation in physical facilities since the ESDFP has been in operation for only one year and funds have to be channelled to over 9000 schools.

The production and timely distribution of high quality textbooks is an important strategy under the ESDFP. In this respect, the need to adopt measures to assess quality by language, content, ethnicity and gender parameters was recognized and expert panels selected from national advertisements/tests and panels to ensure similarity between Sinhala and Tamil textbooks were to be appointed.

The officials interviewed expressed their concern regarding the timely delivery of textbooks as most of the books needed for Grades 6 and 10, and especially for mathematics, history, civic education, health and second language for Grade 10 had not been received. The response of one divisional officer was revealing. He said, 'Mathematics Book I has not been received but Mathematics 2 has been sent. Last year, Grade 5 Mathematics, Science and Sinhala books were not sent at all. Children have opted to do some Technical subjects (Agriculture & Food Technology) but they do not have books yet. There are problems of transporting books as principals have to incur additional costs to transport books on several occasions.' The supply of textbooks had been delayed in 2006 and not received fully even in 2007.

The Ministry had identified the need for better sequencing and coordination to obtain the approved syllabi from NIE (with Tamil and English translations) in time to enable Education Publications Department (EPD) to facilitate the process to have texts written, developed, printed and distributed. The need to take stronger remedial action with regard to the publishers who do not keep to the agreed timelines to print books was also recognized. It was considered necessary to carry out a study to explore the best way of developing effective monitoring and remedial action mechanisms at the divisional office and school levels to ensure the timely receipt of books by all students. What the interviews revealed was not so much a failure of distribution of books after the books were received at the provinces but delayed delivery of books to the provinces. It was clear that the expectation to streamline the production and distribution of school textbooks to all students on time has still not been realized as a result of the lack of effective coordination between the different institutions that were involved.

Equity in learning outcomes focused on the aspects of provision of curriculum guides and teachers' instructional materials to schools and the improvement of cognitive achievement scores.

The Ministry of Education has reported that by September 2006, syllabuses for Grades 3, 4, 7 and 11 had been completed and that twelve electronic versions were available for Grades 3 and 4.

The NIE stated that the revised syllabuses (Grades 6 and 10) had been handed over to the Educational Publications Department by August 2006. Competencies had been identified subject-wise for all subjects in Grades 6 and 10 and tools had been developed for continuous

evaluation in all 15 subjects. Teachers' Instructional Materials were developed in 2006 for Grades 6 and 10. Some of these materials were distributed from December 2006.

A majority of principals said they had not received the new curriculum guides and teacher guides for 2007 or had received only some of the materials. As these are essential for teaching, some of the guides were obtained from the In-Service Advisers by the principals or copied. These responses were confirmed by the divisional officers who pointed out that this was an extremely unsatisfactory situation.

It was found that specific problems had resulted in these delays. The time for curriculum revision was not adequate. The new circular asking NIE to develop curricula at two entry points – Grades 6, 10, and 7 and 11 in 2007, and Grades 8 and 12 in 2008, was issued on March 07, 2006. NIE had earlier started preparing the curriculum guides, but had stopped in 2004 as the task was given over to others. They were again asked to develop the curriculum in 2006 using the new competency approach. There were delays in release of resources and materials to the NIE and within the NIE. It was reported that one donor had agreed to provide funds for curriculum development in Grades 1 and 2 but funds had not been given. As a result NIE had at first to get a loan of Rs 3 million from the Ministry and had received this grant later.

Similarly, NIE explained that Teachers' Instructional Manuals had been developed by April 2006 but the printing could not be completed due to 'internal problems and poor management'. There were also problems of distribution.

On the whole, the supply of curriculum guides and Teachers' Instructional Materials, both of which are essential for effective teaching–learning, needs to be streamlined as at present it seems to be beset with problems of lack of coordination within and among the different institutions as well as issues of capacity in the institutions that have responsibility for the task.

In the context of an examination-dominated system, attempts are being made to transform teaching–learning processes introducing more student-friendly, activity-oriented and participatory approaches. Another strategy towards this has been the introduction of school-based evaluation.

A senior NIE official explained that the NIE had taken steps to change the teaching–learning process to improve higher order cognitive skills of students. Activity-based explorations were to be used and ISAs were given 3 months' training. By August 2006, 15 books had been produced for mathematics, science & health, IT, technical education and commerce.

The example of GTZ supported Project-Based Learning for Grade 6, based on Disaster Risk Management, was cited here as a good practice. Within 3 months' duration, children are expected to produce a Group Project through active participation. JICA had supported mathematics books in the Programme of School Improvement. These books were given to 10 zones. The JICA representative admitted, however, that these materials do not get into the mainstream.

All principals said that SBA was being implemented in their schools. All of them affirmed that it is a successful initiative. The reasons given were that (i) students are given equal opportunity in learning by SBA, (ii) students showed remarkable improvements and (iii) teachers who understand SBA are cooperative. There was a perception, however, that constraints of time and

the negative attitudes of some teachers could affect the programme adversely. There were different opinions regarding whether it was more successful in primary schools or in secondary grades.

It is premature to make any assessment of learning achievement or improvement or decline in examination performance of students as the ESDFP has been implemented only for one year. Funds to support changes in quality processes had not been received also in many schools from the zonal office according to the interviewees.

The feedback from the study brings to the surface the constraints encountered in implementing changes on a massive scale encompassing nearly 10,000 schools.

Theme 3: Enhancing efficiency and equity in resource allocation

Major changes have been initiated in the distribution of resources to educational units and schools to reduce disparities.

The Education Sector Development Framework Programme per se and its rolling multi-year plans were structured to achieve this purpose as reflected in the holistic perspective it promoted. All financial inputs including donor funds were envisaged to be channelled through the Treasury to the Ministry and provincial authorities. The situation regarding donor funds has been spelled out in Chapter 6.

The Medium Term Budgeting Framework facilitates aligning budgetary allocations with specific activities under the four themes. Under Theme 1, for instance, items included were ensuring free education, free textbooks, uniform materials, and a new initiative, mid-day meals to students in Grades 1–3 in the most disadvantaged schools. The allocation of resources has been reorganized to ensure that adequate resources are provided for inputs, programmes, facilities and equipment that will assist improvements in quality

The proposed Public Expenditure Tracking System (PETS) is in its initial phase. The World Bank Mission in February 2007 noted that the instruments and the survey schedule for PETS have been prepared by the Planning Division and that the main survey is being conducted in one hundred schools representing all the provinces. Further activities will depend on the results of the survey. Inevitably officials and principals we met in the zones were not aware of these developments as the programme was in a pilot stage.

The results of the shift in resource allocations towards promoting equity in access and in quality can be seen only in the next few years. A constraint however is the continuing delays in the flow of funds at every stage – from the Treasury to the Ministry and to the provinces despite the mediation of the Finance Commission, and from the Ministry and provinces to the zones and divisions and through the zones to schools. Funds for 2006 were claimed by several schools to have been received towards the end of the year and funds for 2007 were still to be received by schools. Streamlining of the mechanism for the flow of funds is a critical issue that needs to be resolved if the ESDFP is to achieve its goals and outcomes.

Theme 4: Strengthening education governance and service delivery

The Programme for School Improvement under this theme attempts to promote democratic governance by facilitating the participation of the community at school level under the leadership

of the School Development Committee. In contrast to the excessive centralization that characterized the system for decades, teachers and past pupils were to participate in 'running' the school, thereby creating a sense of ownership, utilizing government and community resources effectively and developing institutional level planning and monitoring of implementation. The PSI is implemented as a pilot project in selected zones in each province and the experience was to determine progress.

It appears to be expected that such a process of decentralization will ensure a participatory process that will help to safeguard equity despite risks of distorting the process through external pressures. It is necessary, however, to assist disadvantaged communities to articulate their concerns and interests in a context of marginalization of the very poor. There is need also for analysis of the societal norms that could restrict gender mainstreaming in policies other than those for which universal provision is made.

According to the Ministry, the pilot programme in one zone in each of the seven provinces selected for PSI had been completed on target by 2006. Awareness programmes had been conducted and structures (School Development Committees and School Management Teams) had been established in the target zones. It was envisaged to extend the PSI to ten zones in the nine provinces with an extra one for the Northern Province.

A few schools visited by us had been included in the pilot Programme of School Improvement but principals complained that funds were not available. It was envisaged that School Development Committees would be appointed in schools under this Programme but not all schools among the PSI schools in our sample had established this Committee so far. However, the Committee was reported to be effective in one school. Some principals confused these Committees with the School Development Societies that had been in operation for a long time. Some principals commented that their school communities were too poor to expect them to contribute resources for the development of the school. The most the parents could do was to donate labour for school activities. The divisional officers also reported that the circular issued in respect of the establishment of these two types of Committees was to be replaced by a new one which had not been issued at the time of the study.

The target for 2006 was to draw up a five-year Human Resource Development (HRD) master plan for the national Ministry of Education and to commence HRD actions, with the assistance of a technical expert to be appointed to develop HR policy, strategies and a long-term plan. It was reported that the expert had been recruited and the plan to restructure the Ministry is under way. Work on the HRD plan has also commenced. From among the actions to be taken, the training of new Sri Lanka Educational Administrative Service (SLEAS) recruits, capacity building of relevant MoE and provincial officers in planning and budgeting and overseas training of procurement officials had been completed. In addition, equipment for efficient implementation of work to key technical staff at MoE and key provincial education officials working on the ESDFP has been provided. Only one divisional officer, however, said that a human resource needs assessment (of 345 teachers) had been carried out.

The Results Monitoring Framework in Practice

It was reported that the national monitoring schedule containing the key results to be achieved is being utilized by the MoE to monitor national level performance and, similarly, the province-specific monitoring schedule by the provincial ministries of education to monitor performance in their respective provinces. One NIE official said that NIE uses the progress reporting form as

given in their own Annual Plan while another official commented that while the Results Framework might be useful, it seems somewhat complicated.

A majority of the provincial officers interviewed by us responded that they use the Results Monitoring Framework but one officer pointed out that even though the Framework is used, 'frequent change of these models is a difficulty'. Another said that his officers found it difficult to collect data relating to it and that the reliability of the data is therefore questionable.

Strengthening education governance and monitoring is an aspect which the SWAp has considered as critical. Development of Human Resources is vital for effective governance and monitoring. The influence governance and monitoring has on the success of initiatives in all other areas in the SWAp does not need to be emphasized. While efforts are under way to strengthen education governance and service delivery, implementation has commenced mainly at national and provincial levels. In the context of school plans being approved very recently and funds yet to be released, it is premature to expect results at the local level in such a short period.

7.2 Affective Factors

A high level of commitment to the development of the ESDFP is demonstrated by the officers of the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education who have gained an understanding of the rationale underlying the ESDFP. They have provided guidance to officers in provincial Ministries of Education, including those from the Northern and Eastern Provinces. A similar degree of enthusiasm could be discerned among those officers directly involved in ESDFP development at the provincial levels, especially the Provincial Planning Directors.

At the level of delivery, at school level, too, the ESDFP has stimulated the school community (even though this had not been extended to all stakeholders) to identify their needs and to set about developing school plans with a sense of ownership. Especially the principals appeared to be hopeful that the ESDFP would relieve them of the indignity of going behind politicians for everything.

Despite spearheading a large number of initiatives directed towards achieving equity and quality in the education system, it is, understandably, a massive exercise of daunting magnitude to completely re-mould the planning of the national system. The fact that the ESDFP had to be developed with the participation of all institutions and organizations, from within and outside the system and with a limited number of persons possessing expertise in completing necessary templates and training, would have compounded the task of commencing implementation.

It is seen therefore that implementation activities have commenced in some of the key operations of the programme and some progress has been reported in reduction in the number of out-of-school children, in plans to develop schools in the most disadvantaged areas, in the plantation sector and in the conflicted affected North and East. Textbook distribution appears to be still fraught with problems, eroding equitable access to quality education. Progress in activities under the third and fourth themes is not indicative as yet of promoting equity as impact can be seen only over time.

The flow of the effects of training and directions from the national Ministry to the school level does not appear to have taken place smoothly. Especially in view of the little or no participation of Divisional Education Officers, who should logically be the link between the zonal and school levels, it is worthwhile inquiring as to whether these officers could have facilitated and expedited the process.

At each level, absence of staff with the necessary competence and commitment seemed to have been a constraint affecting effective implementation. In some cases, schools had had to depend on one or a few teachers to develop the school plan. A major factor affecting implementation was the delay in releasing funds to the educational authorities. This could have negatively affected the interest of all those who were involved in the development of plans, which was clearly indicated by some interviewees who were sceptical of achieving the expected results in such a scenario.

7.3 Broader Changes in Understanding Practices

The overall impact after the first year of activity has been a greater awareness on the part of some education officials, principals and teachers of the issue of disparities and their negative outcomes. The extension of the non-formal education programme has motivated some teachers to visit the homes of their students and to obtain a better understanding of their problems. Some principals, however, said that the social distance between teachers in urban deprived schools and their students was so wide that there was little attitudinal change. Specific programmes conducted by GTZ and UNICEF have created more awareness of coping strategies in conflict affected and disaster affected areas.

The tasks imposed by the planning and implementation of ESDFP have increased institutional and human resources capacity to some extent. The targeting of budgetary allocations to specific plan operations over five years has made educational personnel aware of mechanisms of optimal utilization of resources to promote both equity and quality. Complaints abound regarding the continuing lack of essential facilities in disadvantaged districts. Constraints are the limited capacity of some educational personnel and delays in the flow of funds and, therefore, in programme implementation.

8. Conclusions, Lessons Learned, Ways Forward

The broad objective of this study was to examine how social and gender equity issues are addressed in the SWAp introduced in Sri Lanka in the Education Sector Education Framework Programme (ESDFP) developed in 2004/05 and implemented since 2006.

In the context of the country situation surfacing from studies (Chapter 3) and the extensive disparities analysis in Chapter 4, the four themes selected for the ESDFP are seen to be appropriate. Themes 1 and 2 directly confront disparities in access to educational opportunity and to quality education. Themes 3 and 4 propose modalities to ensure the objectives of the first two themes.

8.1 Towards Equity

In consonance with Sri Lanka's long time commitment to the achievement of social equity through education, the ESDFP has incorporated existing incentives to families to increase education participation, such as free education, free books and uniform material, scholarships and subsidized transport, and has added mid-day meals for children in Grades 1–3 in disadvantaged schools. The claim that such incentives facilitate participation has been vindicated by an increase in school attendance. The concern for equity is seen also in the development of schools in disadvantaged areas and in efforts to ensure an equitable geographical distribution of schools.

Further, the Non-Formal Education and Special Education Division in the Ministry of Education and officials at local levels and Compulsory Education Committees have been revitalized to a considerable extent, and consequently the numbers of out-of-school children entering the formal school or non-formal centres have increased sharply. For the first time, perhaps, the educational needs of the most vulnerable groups of children have been recognized at official level.

Equity in access to quality education is conceptualized as access to high quality facilities, equipment, curricula, teaching–learning methods, textbooks and assessment techniques. It includes also the promotion of values, social cohesion, and, implicitly, rights, in a country bedevilled by two decades of armed conflict.

Innovations in resource allocation have been initiated to facilitate the access of disadvantaged schools to quality inputs and assets and to increase efficiency in the utilization of resources through monitoring and tracking. Mechanisms have been created, and are in their initial stages of development, to promote better management, more autonomy and productive school–community relations.

Overall, the ESDFP document has given directions for achieving outcomes through its objectives, targets and strategies and its involvement of the general education sector from the centre to school level. Nevertheless, gaps have surfaced, created largely by the limited capacity of some educational personnel and institutions particularly at crucial levels – the zone, division and school. These shortcomings are the results of years of weak monitoring at these levels and perhaps some lethargy in implementation. Measures are necessary to resolve the issue of disparities and the need for capacity building and monitoring mechanisms.

8.2 Overcoming Constraints – The Way Forward

1. In such a large planning exercise involving the participation of personnel at different levels of capabilities, simplification of the planning and monitoring instruments and more intensive training at zonal, divisional and school levels are priorities in the ongoing implementation process.

2. The Divisional Office appears to have no role in the SWAp process. However, this office has the closest interaction with schools due to their proximity to around 30 schools in each zone. Divisional officers, if sensitized and strengthened adequately, are in a better position to understand the problems of the schools and their communities and to contribute effectively to resolving disparity issues and monitoring progress.

3. In recent decades, schemes to select schools to be developed as quality schools have failed as the system of selecting these schools has been on an ad hoc basis. Such schemes need to be located to serve a wide catchment area, isolated from negative social and political pressures, conform to strictly enforced selection criteria and be monitored closely

4. The commitment to equity in the ESDFP has to be translated into action by implementers and the debacle of the compulsory attendance committees appointed in 1998 is a reminder of the gap between expectations and outcomes. Capacity building programmes for educational personnel, particularly at zonal and divisional levels, have therefore a critical role in accelerating progress. Such programmes, however, cannot be confined to knowledge and skills but must also incorporate a strong sensitization component that will develop empathy for the disadvantaged among education officials, principals and teachers and promote positive attitudes to social equity and gender equality. Sri Lanka has some administrators who tend to give low priority to the marginalized poor despite the political will and public pressure for eliminating disparities, and who are complacent regarding gender issues on the grounds that there is equal participation in education by girls and boys.

5. While gender equality in access to education has been achieved, there is need in the interests of equity to ensure that the curriculum and teaching–learning materials also promote gender equality and that the content of education and the social climate of the school empower girls to achieve their full potential in consonance with human rights and human dignity. Efforts should be made also to dismantle the 'glass ceiling' that impedes the upward mobility of girls and women educational professionals on terms of equality. It should be required also that sex-disaggregated data is available from provincial to school level so that inequalities can be tracked and complacency dispelled. Such data should not be confined to enrolment and retention. There is also need to explore issues such as the higher incidence of dropping out of secondary schools by boys and their relatively lower achievement levels in some contexts.

6. The programme seeks to involve schools and their local communities in planning, implementing and monitoring activities. The School Development Committee is the lead agency in this respect. Nevertheless, the long experience in social mobilization in Sri Lanka has shown that the priorities of community leaders are not synonymous with the aspirations of the poor. Moreover, unlike community development workers, educational administrators

are not necessarily skilled in social mobilization. This dichotomy was seen in the programme to close small schools on the grounds that they are 'uneconomical units'. Communities were not consulted and community-based organizations in disadvantaged areas have been successful in increasing attendance in some of these schools. Hence it is necessary to instruct local education officers and principals to ensure that community representation reflects all socio-economic strata and to work closely with community-based organizations, particularly those whose membership includes the most disadvantaged families in the local community. CBOs can also bring pressure to bear on Compulsory Education Committees and Non-Formal Education officers to act with greater zeal and efficiency in identifying out-of-school children and enrolling them in institutions. The role of educational personnel as 'change-agents' in the transformation of education and society has to be inbuilt into education governance and should encompass participatory leadership styles within the education system and in reaching out to communities.

7. The experience garnered from earlier education projects has indicated that monitoring at all levels, and particularly local levels, has been the weakest feature in project or programme administration. The impact of the monitoring results framework will be stymied unless local monitors are also 'monitored' by a specific mechanism, by more interaction between educational personnel at different levels and by dismantling the compartmentalization of participating institutions. Monitoring effectively is a requisite for many aspects of the ESDFP such as the delivery of textbooks and curriculum and teachers' guides to schools island-wide, and the extent to which disadvantaged schools can access and utilize the higher order quality inputs, facilities and assets allocated in the ESDFP budget.

8. The issue of delays in the flow of funds from the highest levels through the different strata to schools has emerged as the most critical current issue and needs immediate attention if equity goals are to be reached

9. The implementation of the Programme will be affected also by three external factors whichare issues of public concern but over which educators may perhaps have less control.

   (a) Poverty is the major constraint that has prevented the realization of universal primary and junior secondary education. In the long term, education reduces poverty but it has less salience in the immediate environment. Functional Literacy Centres and Community Learning Centres for young adults could have an interventionist role in reducing the economic constraints of the very poor thereby obviating the need for child labour. Overall, more rapid economic growth and equitable distribution of the benefits of growth in access to employment, education, health, infrastructure and services are priorities as education per se cannot compensate fully for poverty.

   (b) The armed conflict over two decades has been a major barrier to access to equity and quality in the North and East. Reconstruction programmes need to give priority to getting children back in school and providing teachers and facilities to ensure a quality education. Catch-up programmes have been a useful innovation in the curriculum. Normalcy has to be fully restored in the areas affected by disasters, particularly the areas affected by the conflict and the tsunami.

(c) The third external factor or force is the pressure from the political structure that distorts the development of progressive policies. The relative failure of the Navodaya school scheme and the continuing inequitable deployment of teachers are examples of such negative influences. It is a widely held perception that this trend has a deleterious effect on access and quality. A practical solution would be the imposition of strict criteria for selection of schools for upgrading and for appointments of educational personnel by independent bodies, perhaps on the model of the Public Service Commission of yesteryear.

These observations based on the real experiences of participants in education are offered as a caveat to unrealistic expectations of outcomes and as a stimulus to identifying strategies to ensure a positive impact.

8.3 Wider Lessons Learned

Retrospectively it seems that:

(i) More time should have been available for such a massive and complex undertaking.
(ii) More intensive capacity building programmes are necessary as institutions and personnel have been operating at varied levels of competence.
(iii) Continuing and more intensive monitoring is necessary at zonal, divisional and school levels.
(iv) Data disaggregated at zonal, divisional and school levels and by sex needs to be available widely if disparities are to be reduced and equity promoted.
(v) In the context of 'consolidated' plans and some degree of centralization at operational level, the needs of disadvantaged schools and communities are likely to be lost in data and overlooked in implementation unless a strong monitoring mechanism is created to function at local level.

The commitment to the reduction of socio-economic inequalities in a sector-wide approach over six decades has facilitated the incorporation of social equity concerns in the current SWAp.

The concomitant gender mainstreaming in policies pertaining to access to general education has ensured gender equality in participation. Nevertheless, the task of empowering girls and women through the education process, as envisaged by CEDAW (the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), the third Millennium Development Goal and the National Plan of Action for Children and the Women's Charter of Sri Lanka, has not received adequate attention over the years or in the contemporary scenario.

Space, however, has been provided in the ongoing SWAp process, through the ESDFP, to bring hitherto marginalized vulnerable groups within the ambit of the education system, and to use the curriculum and teaching--learning process to accelerate social change and to ensure human rights and social equity for both sexes and for all socio-economic strata and communities in the country.

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Annex
Sample Questionnaire for Principals

1. Why was the SERVE School Social Work Programme introduced in your school?

2. What components of the programme were conducted in the school?

3. Have there been any problems in conducting these activities?

4. What is the attitude to the programme of:
   - teachers
   - students
   - education officials
   - parents
   - the community?

5. Is the programme relevant to the needs of students and the school? Explain.

6. What do you think of the quality of the work of the social workers?
   - the materials they use
   - their activities
   - their attitudes to students
   - any other aspects

7. Have there been positive results of the School Social Work Programme?
   - reduction in non-attendance
   - improvement in performance
   - awareness of child rights
   - awareness of child abuse
   - more cooperative behaviour of the students
   - reduction in behavioural problems
   - reduction in violence in the school
   - better links with parents
   - better ethnic relations
   - any other results

8. If the support of UK Save the Children and SERVE were withdrawn, could you continue these programmes?

9. What are your suggestions for promoting social work in the school?

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