



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Boys'

UNDERPERFORMANCE IN EDUCATION

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REVISITING THE ISSUE
IN THE COMMONWEALTH

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COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.



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Foreword

BY PROFESSOR ASHA KANWAR

Gender disparity in education has often been seen as disadvantaging girls. Although this continues to be the case in many places, the phenomenon of boys' underachievement — in terms of both participation and performance — has also become an issue in a number of countries. For some Commonwealth Member States in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, boys' academic underperformance and high dropout rates are a matter of concern. The Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) Strategic Plan 2015–2021 accordingly places particular emphasis on addressing this issue.

In 2006, the Commonwealth of Learning and Commonwealth Secretariat co-published *Boys' Underachievement in Education: An Exploration in Selected Commonwealth Countries*. It found that boys' underachievement, in terms of both participation and performance, was a result of a complex interplay of forces, including general societal characteristics as well as existing education systems. Some of the proposed solutions were to expand the number of school spaces and facilities, and to challenge established notions of gender roles and stereotypes.

This publication is a follow-up to that report. It aims to document the changes in the educational participation and performance of boys in Commonwealth countries since 2006 and examines the factors that continue to exacerbate the situation. This current report provides a summary of the lessons learned from various initiatives in different countries during the past ten years and notes that certain interventions resulted in positive outcomes for both girls and boys.

One of the surprising changes noted is that boys' underperformance tends to arise where there is greater gender parity in the education system. This report provides a range of recommendations for addressing this issue, including encouraging schools and teachers to adopt a pedagogical process that enables and accommodates a diversity of students as a whole, rather than attempting to “masculinise” educational initiatives; calling on governments to refocus on data collection, establishing disaggregated databases and developing specific methodologies by which these data are collected; and creating safe spaces for participation within the schooling system to help identify the problems and issues that inhibit boys in schools.

COL is committed to promoting equitable access to quality lifelong learning for all — believing, in effect, that access to learning opportunities will lead to progress in achieving sustainable development. In addition to commissioning this report, COL has been developing a model for technical and vocational skills development to reach at-risk boys in the Caribbean. The model will address boys’ academic underperformance and high dropout rates in the region, and leverages the power of open and distance learning to provide skills development for sustainable livelihoods. COL will work with Member States to institutionalise and scale up this model.

I thank the authors for their valuable contributions to this report. It is sure to serve as an important resource in our efforts to ensure inclusive and quality education for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Asha Kanwar', written in a cursive style.

Professor Asha Kanwar
President and CEO
Commonwealth of Learning

Executive Summary

Every child, regardless of gender, has the right to an education that offers not only academic learning but also training in the skills they will need to be successful in their particular environment. However, as recent statistics indicate, a significant percentage of children are still unable to access good quality education and so are denied its associated benefits. While a majority of these children are girls, concerns about boys' underperformance in schools have also been raised. This report follows up on a 2006 report that addressed the factors that are crucial to understanding boys' underperformance in Commonwealth countries (Jha & Kelleher, 2006), and aims to:

- document the changes in participation and performance of boys in Commonwealth countries since 2006,
- examine factors that continue to contribute to boys' underperformance, and
- summarise lessons learned from various interventions in different countries during the past ten years.

This current report is based exclusively on a review of data and literature from secondary sources, augmented by an analysis of data and reports received from some of the Commonwealth countries themselves. A gender-based framework was used to analyse the data and took into account the gender-differentiated factors that could influence the contextual situations and scenarios as represented within the Commonwealth countries.

One of the major changes since 2006 documented in this report is that boys' underperformance tends to arise where there is gender parity in education. As countries move towards greater gender parity in school participation, boys' underperformance is being noticed more and more, and tends to be concentrated in literacy more than in any other learning area. These gaps start to show early in primary education, so it would be more effective to intervene at that level of education to combat the problem. The same gender regimes in schools that influence girls' underparticipation in schools have been shown in multiple studies to be responsible for boys' underperformance. An examination of the various factors suggests that unmodifiable

A significant percentage of children are still unable to access good quality education and so are denied its associated benefits.

An examination of the various factors suggests that unmodifiable factors ... are linked to many of the trends in boys' underperformance.

factors — such as gender and family background — in addition to other factors — such as social capital (as indicated by parents' education and socio-economic status), gendered schooling processes, teachers' varying expectations of boys and girls, and the role of male role models — are linked to many of the trends in boys' underperformance and should be taken into account when designing interventions.

Interventions that address pedagogic practices that move away from reinforcing authoritative practices and instead engage both boys and girls and provide the space (physical, emotional, aspirational), the tools and the capabilities to address the larger anti-social behaviours that characterise sexism, communalism, homophobia and racism have led to positive outcomes for both girls and boys. Interventions that include institutional, social and familial support have also led to emancipatory and transformative changes with respect to boys' underperformance.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BELS	Building European Links towards Southeast Asia
BGCSE	Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education
BJC	Bahamas Junior Certification
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
CSEC	Caribbean Secondary Education Certification
CXC	Caribbean Examinations Council Exam
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GLAT	Grade Level Assessment Tests
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GSAT	Grade Six Achievement Examination
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
KCSE	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
PCR	Primary Completion Rate
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SLE	School Life Expectancy
SOBP	Stand Out Boys Project
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

1.

Introduction

Every child, regardless of gender, has the right to an education that offers not only academic learning but also training in the skills they will need to be successful in their particular environment. However, recent statistics indicate that in 2013, at least 124 million children were unable to access a good quality education and the associated social and economic benefits (UNESCO, 2015a).

A majority of the children not in school were girls (UNESCO, 2015a). While there are systematic barriers to girls' achievement, such as gender discrimination in the family and the education system, which contribute to generalised gender attitudes towards the education of girls in some societies, there are also concerns about boys' underperformance in schools (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Watson, Kehler & Martino, 2010; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). While it is unarguably important to address the systemic gender discrimination towards girls, a 2006 report that assessed the underparticipation and underperformance of boys in education in Commonwealth countries pointed to the necessity of addressing boys' underperformance in schools as well (Jha & Kelleher, 2006).

A 2006 report ...
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The underperformance of boys is of significant concern to many member countries, which reiterates the importance of addressing this issue in order to ensure quality education for all and to eliminate gender disparities in learning at the Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in 2015. The purpose of this current report is to:

- succinctly capture the changes in participation and performance of boys in schools in Commonwealth countries since 2006, when the first Commonwealth research on this topic was published,
- examine the factors that contribute to boys' underperformance, and
- summarise lessons learned from various interventions with communities and schools, and to develop recommendations based on these lessons.

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Therefore, this report revisits some of the key findings of Jha and Kelleher's (2006) report, and studies the current situation of boys' performance and participation in education in the Commonwealth countries. It provides recommendations for Commonwealth governments and institutions so that they may address the problem of boys' underperformance by developing, adopting and implementing appropriate strategies and interventions in their respective countries. Although primarily meant for the Commonwealth countries, the analysis is valid for other countries that are facing similar issues.

1.1 METHOD AND DATA SOURCES

This report is primarily based on a review of data and literature from secondary sources. A Web-based search was supplemented by an analysis of data and reports received from some of the Commonwealth member countries that responded to the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) request for the same. The sources can be divided into four main categories:

1. Results of a Web-based literature search for published papers and articles (journals, books, etc.).
2. Results of a Web-based search for reports from international agencies and NGOs, and other materials such as reflective pieces by teachers on self-carried-out experiments.
3. Results of a Web-based data search from UNESCO, PISA, SACMEQ and other open sources.
4. Responses from the Commonwealth countries to a request by COL to share data and other details about the strategies that they have adopted. Only nine countries responded. They have been included here as case studies. (See Appendix.)

1.2 ORGANISATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organised into five sections. After this introductory chapter, the second section presents the analyses based on available data from international sources as well as those accessed through national government sources. The third and fourth chapters form the bulk of the report. The third chapter discusses the factors that explain boys' underachievement and the fourth analyses the lessons learned from successful and less successful interventions. Although there is a clear focus

on the Commonwealth countries and on reporting the changes, if any, since the last report was published, this report can be read independently of that research, and is equally useful and relevant for non-Commonwealth countries. At the end of Chapters 2–4, new information is summarised.

This report has used a gender-responsive framework for the analysis and review of both the data and the literature. This allows for a non-discriminatory analysis that will take gender-differentiated factors into account. It does not advantage either male or female individuals but takes a more holistic view while recognising the individuality of all concerned.

The report has some obvious limitations because of its reliance on Web-based literature — any information, reports or data that are not digitised were inaccessible and therefore not included. Inconsistencies in statistics from different sources were common. Much of the literature accessed online, especially unpublished reports on interventions, has not necessarily been evaluated or analysed by external professionals, and therefore has not necessarily been vetted by peer readers. Readers and users of this report need to keep these limitations in mind.

2.

What Do the Data Show?

From the early 1980s and into the 1990s, some Commonwealth countries noticed that boys' achievement levels were relatively lower than those for girls. They therefore asked that gendered behaviour with respect to male underperformance be included in gender inequality studies alongside girls' underperformance and lack of access to education. The countries that noticed the phenomenon of male underperformance were primarily from Europe, North America (Canada), the Caribbean, and the East Asia and Pacific Region. The majority of African and South Asian member countries still reported gender disparity in favour of boys. There were some exceptions in all regions, though, as some countries — for example, Bangladesh, in South Asia, and Lesotho, in Sub-Saharan Africa — reported boys' underperformance while Papua New Guinea (PNG), in the Pacific, for example, continued to report that girls were at the receiving end of gender disparity in learning.

This section re-examines these patterns in the Commonwealth countries and revisits some of the statistics provided by Jha and Kelleher (2006). It also explores some new statistics on boys' underperformance in education. Reviewing the gender-segregated data on participation and performance revealed some interesting patterns.

School Life Expectancy ... has increased for both male and female students in every region.

2.1 PARTICIPATION

School Life Expectancy (SLE) — the expected number of years of formal schooling from primary to tertiary education — has increased for both male and female students in every region (as defined by UNESCO) between 2002 and 2013 (Table 2.1). But what is notable is that all the regions have maintained their status in terms of male-female differences. Four regions reported higher SLEs for girls as compared to boys in

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2002, and they continue to do so in 2013. In addition, SLEs for girls have risen more than those for boys in three out of four regions: East Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This means that the disparity against boys increased during this period in East Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This is significant in terms of the Commonwealth, as several member countries belong to East Asia and the Pacific and to Latin America and the Caribbean. The male-female difference in SLEs has narrowed only in North America and Western Europe on account of relatively higher growth in the SLE for boys. This is a cause for concern in other regions with the same problem, as it indicates that policy and institutional reforms that have been initiated in the past ten years, especially in the Caribbean, are yet to produce any substantial results.

The rate of increase in SLEs for girls has been higher than for boys in three out of four remaining regions — the Arab states, South and West Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa — although boys' SLEs continue to be higher overall than girls' SLEs in these regions. This means that the global and national efforts to bring in greater gender equality in education in the last two decades have led to some positive changes in these regions. This is a cause for celebration for the Commonwealth, as a number of member countries belong to South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. The fourth region, Central and Eastern Europe, reports a decline in the SLE for boys while maintaining the SLE for girls at the same level as 2002. This means that the gap between male and female students, which in this case is in favour of girls, has increased in these regions.

TABLE 2.1: SCHOOL LIFE EXPECTANCY (FROM PRIMARY TO TERTIARY) IN 2002 AND 2013

	FEMALE STUDENTS			MALE STUDENTS			TOTAL		
	2002	2013	Δ	2002	2013	Δ	2002	2013	Δ
ARAB STATES	9.6	11.4	2.0	10.7	12.1	1.5	10.2	11.9	1.7
CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE	12.8	15.7	2.8	12.8	15.4	2.5	12.8	15.5	2.7
CENTRAL ASIA	11.4	12.8	1.0	11.6	12.8	0.9	11.5	12.5	1.0
EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	11.0	13.5	2.1	11.3	13.3	1.6	11.2	13.0	1.8
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	13.3	14.6	0.8	12.8	13.8	0.5	13.1	13.7	0.6
NORTH AMERICA AND WESTERN EUROPE	17.0	17.4	0.2	15.3	16.3	0.9	16.4	16.7	0.3
SOUTH AND WEST ASIA	8.4	11.2	2.8	9.7	11.1	1.9	9.1	11.4	2.3
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	7.0	8.8	1.9	8.5	9.9	1.5	7.8	9.5	1.7

Data source: 2002 data reproduced from Jha, J., & Kelleher, F. (2006). *Boys' underachievement in education: An exploration in selected Commonwealth countries*, Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning; 2013 data from *School Life Expectancy (2013)*, available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org>.

The transition from primary to secondary education is usually identified as an important point from an educational perspective, as substantial numbers of students drop out at this time. Jha and Kelleher (2006) point out that a significant number of member countries from the Caribbean and also some from East Asia and the Pacific as well as most of the developed countries from the Commonwealth have reported underparticipation of boys in secondary education. Therefore, it is critical to review the changes, if any, in transition rates. The country-specific data on transition rates from the primary to secondary stage, in combination with the net enrolment ratios (NER) at the secondary stage, in the Commonwealth show that the high-income countries — including Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom — as well as one middle-income country — St Lucia, in the Caribbean — are the only ones that successfully narrowed the gender gaps in secondary NERs during 2002 and 2013 (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3).

The gaps have more or less remained the same in most other countries, with the exception of Malaysia, where the trend is reversed. However, the situation in Malaysia is a matter of concern, as the reversal has happened due to a slight increase in the NER for boys and a bigger decline in the NER for girls. This essentially indicates that most of the developing Commonwealth countries that faced the issue of boys' underperformance in education about a decade ago continue to face this issue, while the developed Commonwealth countries have reported some progress towards greater gender parity in this regard.

What makes this issue more important and significant is that boys' underperformance is now surfacing at the primary level as well, a trend that was not seen in most countries a decade ago. A comparison of the 2002 and 2013 figures for NERs at the primary stage for the Commonwealth countries shows that the gender gap has either disappeared or has turned in favour of girls in some countries — for example, India and Bangladesh, in South Asia, and Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, in Sub-Saharan Africa (see Table 2.4). So, even though in some countries girls' participation rates are lower than boys' even now, it does appear that social campaigns and governmental incentives have worked favourably for girls in a number of countries in the last decade. It also appears that as the economy of a country grows and income levels go up, participation rates go up faster for girls than for boys.¹

A significant number of member countries from the Caribbean and also some from East Asia and the Pacific as well as most of the developed countries from the Commonwealth have reported underparticipation of boys in secondary education.

1 In this document, N/A in tables refers to "not available."

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TABLE 2.2: EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE TO SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR 2002 AND 2013 (IN %)

REGION/COUNTRY	2002			2012		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
AFRICA						
BOTSWANA	93.90	93.60	94.30	97.47	97.38	97.56
GAMBIA	78.50	77.50	79.80	90.30	90.19	90.01
LESOTHO	66.90	67.00	66.70	74.80	74.80	74.80
MAURITIUS	62.70	57.40	68.40	72.03	66.62	77.83
NAMIBIA	83.30	81.20	85.20	82.00	81.00	84.00
SEYCHELLES	99.00	99.10	98.90	97.00	95.00	98.00
SOUTH AFRICA	91.90	90.70	93.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
SWAZILAND	78.10	76.60	79.60	90.55	90.37	90.72
UGANDA	42.20	40.70	44.10	58.34	59.72	56.92
ZAMBIA	54.50	53.50	55.60	55.90	61.40	50.80
THE CARIBBEAN						
THE BAHAMAS	79.40	81.00	77.90	98.00	99.00	98.00
DOMINICA	96.50	95.80	97.40	93.00	93.00	94.00
GUYANA	67.6 ^a	64.70	70.70	95.00	93.00	97.00
JAMAICA	95.2 ^b	100.00	90.70	82.00	79.00	85.00
ST LUCIA	65.70	56.60	74.60	90.00	89.00	92.00
ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	51.10	44.20	57.80	92.00	92.00	91.00
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	97.4 ^b	94.80	100.80	88.00	87.00	89.00
EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC						
AUSTRALIA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
FIJI	98.40	100.00	96.60	94.10	91.20	97.20
SAMOA	97.50	95.70	99.40	97.40	98.20	96.60
MALAYSIA	99.70	100.00	99.50	99.50	100.00	98.90
NEW ZEALAND	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
TONGA	78.90	80.10	77.60	N/A	N/A	N/A
EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA						
MALTA	90.70	89.60	92.00	98.64	98.70	98.58
CANADA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
CYPRUS	99.40	99.80	98.90	98.82	97.75	99.91
UNITED KINGDOM	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SOUTH ASIA						
BANGLADESH	89.30	83.00	95.70	90.00	84.00	95.00
INDIA	86.70	84.90	89.00	89.00	88.00	89.00
SRI LANKA	97.00	96.40	97.70	99.00	98.00	99.00

Notes:

Effective transition rate here refers to the number of new entrants to the first grade of the secondary level of education in the following year expressed as a percentage of the students enrolled in the last grade of the primary level of education in the given year who do not repeat that grade the following year.

Data are for the school year ending: 2011: Malaysia, Fiji, Samoa, Cyprus, Malta, Swaziland; 2010: India, Uganda, Seychelles, Bangladesh (national estimate); 2009: Bahamas, Guyana, Namibia, Trinidad and Tobago (national estimate). Data taken from UIS-UNESCO for Botswana.

Sources: 2002 data reproduced from Jha, J., & Kelleher, F. (2006). *Boys' underachievement in education: An exploration in selected Commonwealth countries*, Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning; 2012 data from *Global Education Monitoring Report, Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges*, <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/node/6>; Effective transition rate from primary to lower secondary general education, 2012 (UIS estimation), <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

TABLE 2.3: NET ENROLMENT RATIO (NER) IN SECONDARY EDUCATION (%)

REGION/COUNTRY	2002-2003			2013		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
AFRICA						
BOTSWANA	53.60	49.90	57.40	N/A	N/A	N/A
GAMBIA	27.90	32.00	23.90	N/A	N/A	N/A
LESOTHO	22.50	17.80	27.20	37.10	29.07	45.28
MAURITIUS	74.40	74.30	74.50	83.88	81.44	86.41
NAMIBIA	44.20	38.70	49.70	N/A	N/A	N/A
SEYCHELLES	99.90	100.00	99.70	78.35	76.29	80.50
SOUTH AFRICA	65.50	62.70	68.40	N/A	N/A	N/A
SWAZILAND	32.40	29.30	35.60	36.21	31.74	40.72
UGANDA	16.50	17.40	15.60	23.60	24.52	22.69
ZAMBIA	22.20	24.90	20.60	N/A	N/A	N/A
THE CARIBBEAN						
THE BAHAMAS	75.80	74.40	77.30	82.69	79.74	85.69
DOMINICA	91.80	86.00	97.80	86.32	85.50	87.15
GUYANA	76.40	75.00	77.90	82.48	82.33	82.63
JAMAICA	75.40	73.90	77.00	72.94	69.19	76.89
ST LUCIA	76.10	67.60	84.70	77.71	78.45	76.98
ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	58.40	55.90	60.80	85.19	83.89	86.52
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	72.00	69.40	74.70	N/A	N/A	N/A
EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC						
AUSTRALIA	88.00	87.00	89.10	87.57	86.40	88.82
FII	76.00	73.40	78.70	83.38	79.11	87.93
SAMOA	62.10	59.10	65.40	77.25	73.74	81.04
MALAYSIA	70.00	66.40	73.80	68.54	65.02	72.27
NEW ZEALAND	92.70	91.30	94.10	96.44	95.65	97.28
TONGA	71.10	67.50	76.70	75.43	71.48	79.77
EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA						
MALTA	86.80	85.80	87.80	80.34	84.13	76.90
CANADA	97.60	97.40	97.90	N/A	N/A	N/A
CYPRUS	92.80	91.40	94.30	94.63	94.18	95.10
UNITED KINGDOM	95.20	93.80	96.60	98.28	97.83	98.75
SOUTH ASIA						
BANGLADESH	44.50	42.10	46.90	52.24	49.34	55.27
INDIA	N/A	N/A	N/A	66.70	66.16	67.31
SRI LANKA	N/A	N/A	N/A	85.43	83.89	86.99

Notes:

For 2013 — Swaziland, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Bangladesh — 2014 data have been used; Sri Lanka, Fiji, Jamaica — 2012 data have been used; Guyana — 2011 data have been used; Uganda, Bahamas, St Vincent and the Grenadines — 2010 data have been used.

Sources: 2002, data reproduced from Jha, J., & Kelleher, F. (2006). *Boys' underachievement in education: An exploration in selected Commonwealth countries*, Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning; 2013 data from Net Enrolment Ratio, Secondary, 2015 (UIS estimation), available at <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

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As a result of the above, an important shift can be noticed in terms of the blurring of previously clear regional trends in the Commonwealth. With higher gains achieved for girls' enrolment in countries and regions that had been lagging behind, more

It seems that boys' underperformance starts surfacing when enrolment rates improve for both boys and girls.

countries are now reporting similar trends related to reduced gender gaps in learning. Although girls are still behind in some countries in Africa and Asia, the number of such countries has gone down.

While this is a cause for celebration on one hand, it is also important to be alert to the possibility of boys' underperformance in the future. In the past, while girls' underperformance rates have largely been reported from countries with low levels of enrolment for both boys and girls, boys' underperformance rates have usually been reported from countries with high enrolment rates for both girls and boys. In other words, it seems that boys' underperformance starts surfacing when enrolment rates improve for both boys and girls, and therefore, countries need to be watchful and take preventive actions.

TABLE 2.4: NET ENROLMENT RATIO (NER) IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN 2004 AND 2012 (IN %)

REGION/COUNTRY	2004			2012		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
AFRICA						
BOTSWANA	85.4	85.4	85.4	90.2	89.6	91.0
CAMEROON	N/A	N/A	N/A	91.4	96.9	85.7
GHANA	59.6	59.4	59.8	81.6	82.9	80.4
KENYA	73.8	73.7	73.9	84.9	83.2	86.6
LESOTHO	78.1	75.5	80.7	81.6	80.1	83.1
MALAWI	97.4	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MAURITIUS	94.4	93.7	95.1	93.8	92.9	94.8
MOZAMBIQUE	67.3	71.0	63.5	85.4	87.6	83.1
NAMIBIA	86.9	84.4	89.3	87.7	86.4	89.0
NIGERIA	66.1	70.6	61.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
RWANDA	88.5	87.6	89.3	96.1	94.8	97.4
SEYCHELLES	95.4	95.5	95.3	94.7	94.1	95.3
SIERRA LEONE	N/A	N/A	N/A	97.9	98.6	97.3
SOUTH AFRICA	85.2	81.7	89.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
SWAZILAND	75.2	74.3	76.0	78.5	78.8	78.3
UGANDA	N/A	N/A	N/A	93.7	92.2	95.1
UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA	85.0	86.5	83.5	84.2	84.0	84.4
ZAMBIA	80.2	80.2	80.2	90.1	88.8	91.5

WHAT DO THE DATA SHOW?

REGION/COUNTRY	2004			2012		
	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE
THE CARIBBEAN						
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA	N/A	N/A	N/A	85.3	86.7	83.9
THE BAHAMAS	93.8	93.2	94.3	97.5	79.7	85.7
BARBADOS	93.1	91.0	95.1	88.8	86.1	91.6
BELIZE	65.1	63.8	66.4	67.5	66.2	68.8
DOMINICA	89.1	84.5	93.9	78.9	76.5	81.5
GRENADA	80.4	77.2	83.5	80.2	79.6	80.9
GUYANA	N/A	N/A	N/A	82.5	82.3	82.6
JAMAICA	81.7	79.4	84.2	73.8	70.0	77.7
ST KITTS AND NEVIS	78.0	73.1	83.2	70.1	68.1	72.1
ST LUCIA	62.6	63.8	61.4	82.4	81.2	83.6
ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES	75.6	72.1	79.2	85.2	83.9	86.5
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO	72.6	70.2	75.2	N/A	N/A	N/A
ASIA						
BANGLADESH	91.9	89.3	94.5	90.0	88.5	91.5
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
INDIA	83.8	84.9	82.6	91.6	91.0	93.2
MALAYSIA	96.7	96.8	96.6	97.7	97.5	97.9
MALDIVES	99.1	97.8	97.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
PAKISTAN	66.6	76.5	56.1	71.3	76.1	66.1
SINGAPORE	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SRI LANKA	96.8	97.3	97.2	95.4	96.4	94.4
EUROPE						
CYPRUS	96.1	96.3	96.0	97.9	97.7	98.1
MALTA	N/A	N/A	N/A	90.0	94.9	85.3
UNITED KINGDOM	98.0	97.9	98.1	99.8	99.9	99.7
PACIFIC						
AUSTRALIA	94.9	93.6	96.3	97.5	97.3	97.8
FIJI	96.7	96.7	96.7	96.6	94.0	96.2
KIRIBATI	N/A	N/A	N/A	96.4	N/A	N/A
NAURU	N/A	N/A	N/A	76.5	75.4	77.6
NEW ZEALAND	98.1	98.4	97.7	98.3	98.0	98.6
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	N/A	N/A	N/A	86.0	89.2	82.6
SAMOA	N/A	N/A	N/A	94.8	93.9	95.8
SOLOMON ISLANDS	75.5	77.0	74.0	N/A	N/A	N/A
TONGA	95.4	N/A	N/A	95.6	92.3	94.1
TUVALU	N/A	N/A	N/A	75.2	75.6	74.8
VANUATU	96.4	96.8	96.0	N/A	N/A	N/A

Notes:

Data for the school year ending in: 2003: Rwanda, India, Malaysia, Guyana; 2005: Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka, St Vincent; 2010: Bangladesh, Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago; 2013: Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu, Rwanda, Swaziland, Uganda, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines; 2014: Kiribati, Seychelles, Barbados, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Cyprus, Nauru, Tuvalu.

Data source: UNESCO, <http://data.uis.unesco.org> (2004 and 2012/2013 data)

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2.2 BROAD REGIONAL AND NATIONAL TRENDS

This section examines the situation in nine individual countries using data provided by the national governments in response to a request by COL (see Appendix). It is important to remember that these data are not as rigorously verified as those provided by UNESCO and may differ from the UNESCO data. However, those caveats aside, the data not only help us understand some very broad regional and national trends but also point towards the need for more rigorous and disaggregated data and a more thorough examination of the contexts of boys' underperformance in most of these countries.

Before we look at specific country data, we will discuss some broad regional trends. The two regions that the nine countries represent are:

- The Caribbean (Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica and Belize), and
- Africa (Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda and Zambia).

In general, the overall trend that can be seen in the Caribbean, in terms of both NER and gross enrolment rate (GER), is that boys tend to be more disadvantaged than girls at the secondary level of education, although there are exceptions to this, and that completion rates for secondary education are also generally lower for boys in this region. It is difficult to identify any regional trend in this region, as the individual countries seem to be very different from each other. However, what emerges is that some countries in this region are consistently facing the issue of boys' underperformance at secondary level — and the number seems to be increasing. Like Mauritius and Zambia, Kenya reported this problem, although in Kenya girls perform better at the primary level before tapering off at the secondary level. The reasons for this are difficult to assess without any contextual information.

Some countries in this region are consistently facing the issue of boys' underperformance at secondary level — and the number seems to be increasing.

In some countries — such as Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Mauritius and Zambia — the NER or GER for boys tends to be on par with or better than girls' in primary education, but then dips for secondary education. Similarly, Mauritius reported a high drop in the GER for girls and boys in secondary education as compared to the GERs in primary education for both girls and boys. While Zambia reports the same pattern, it also shows that the levels of inter-regional disparities at sub-national level are greater than those of gender disparity. Therefore, other factors that are critical for examining participation and performance are often not included in the available data, which impedes a true assessment of the reasons behind some

of these trends. For example, in Antigua and Barbuda, while the data clearly suggest that the GER for primary-level education is higher for male students, the country reports that boys attending private and single-sex schools have performed just as well as girls in similar economic circumstances. The critical focus therefore has to be on boys from poor families.

The situation for all countries is obviously not the same, though. The Bahamas, for example, witnessed a decline in completion rates for both boys and girls in primary education. But when we move to secondary education, both boys' and girls' completion rates tend to improve marginally, and the differences between boys' and girls' completion rates are smaller. In Grenada, however, boys' completion rates have been quite high compared to girls' (97.7% for boys and 91.2% for girls). In some countries, such as Kenya, we see that while completion rates seem to favour girls, the country reports as well as reports by UNESCO indicate that this may not be the full picture. For example, when we examine university enrolment rates provided by the country, we see that 100,087 boys have enrolled in public universities — and only 59,665 girls.

Other factors that are critical for examining participation and performance are often not included in the available data.

2.3 PERFORMANCE

It is not easy to gauge changes in performance levels because of the near absence of comparable data over a period of time. However, a number of international agencies now periodically conduct sample learning outcome surveys at different stages. A few Commonwealth countries participate in several of these regional assessments, but their number is high only in the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) survey. Nevertheless, we examined performance data from several sources: EGRA-based (Early Grade Reading Assessment) data for early years; SACMEQ's TIMSS, which examines trends in Mathematics and Sciences, and PIRLS, which examines only reading achievement; and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics and science literacy every three years.² An examination of these data revealed an interesting array of results, summarised below:

² EGRA-based (Early Grade Reading Assessment) data for early years; SACMEQ: The survey of the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) administered in school to children in the sixth year of formal school; TIMSS monitors trends in mathematics and science achievement every four years, in the fourth and eighth years; PIRLS monitors trends in reading achievement in the fourth year; and PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics and science literacy every three years. TIMSS Numeracy and PIRLS Literacy are new additions that measure learning outcomes in the fourth year and at the end of primary cycle respectively for countries where most children are still developing fundamental mathematics and reading skills.

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- Boys' underperformance is more prominent in contexts where both boys' and girls' participation is very high, such as in Kenya (USAID, 2011).
- In terms of reading skills, girls have, on average, higher reading achievement levels than boys. Data from SACMEQ 2007 suggest that girls perform better in reading domains. With the exception of Malawi and Tanzania Mainland, girls tended to outperform boys in all the countries covered in the SACMEQ data (IIEP, 2011).
- Boys tended to outperform girls in Mathematics in some African countries, including Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi and Mozambique (Jha, Bakshi & Faria, 2012).
- The reading advantage of girls appears to be prevalent consistently from the early years to the later years. Boys' underperformance in lower grades has significant implications for performance at the higher levels. For example, in the UK, boys' underperformance in reading puts them at a great disadvantage in secondary education because of the resulting weak literacy skills.
- Subject domains such as Humanities also indicate a comparable lack of improvement in boys' performance when compared to girls', and an early disadvantage in reading contributes to greater gaps in later years in these subject areas (Jha et al., 2012).

Table 2.5 shows that of the African countries participating in SACMEQ, boys' average reading scores are much lower than girls' in Botswana, Namibia, Seychelles and South Africa. Girls outperform boys in Mathematics as well in these countries, except in Namibia where they are almost at par in Mathematics. The results for pre-PIRLS (similar to PIRLS Literacy — conducted only in three countries in 2011 for the first time) shows that Grade 4 girls had a higher average reading achievement than boys in both South Africa and Botswana.

TABLE 2.5: SACMEQ III MATHEMATICS AND READING SCORE

COUNTRY	MATHS SCORE			READING SCORE		
	BOYS	GIRLS	OVERALL	BOYS	GIRLS	OVERALL
BOTSWANA	517.50	523.60	520.50	519.70	549.40	534.60
KENYA	567.60	546.00	557.00	544.10	542.10	543.10
LESOTHO	477.10	476.80	476.90	463.50	471.50	467.90
MALAWI	452.70	441.10	447.00	438.40	428.50	433.50
MAURITIUS	616.10	630.70	623.30	558.80	588.90	573.50
MOZAMBIQUE	488.20	478.60	483.80	478.40	473.20	476.00
NAMIBIA	472.00	470.10	471.00	489.60	503.70	496.90
SEYCHELLES	535.20	566.70	550.70	544.40	607.20	575.10
SOUTH AFRICA	491.20	498.40	494.80	483.50	506.00	494.90
SWAZILAND	545.50	536.20	540.80	545.20	553.60	549.40
UGANDA	486.70	477.20	481.90	481.50	475.90	478.70
ZAMBIA	440.80	429.20	435.20	437.10	431.50	434.40
SACMEQ III	511.90	507.60	509.70	506.80	517.10	512.00

While the situation of boys' underperformance is indeed worse in some developing countries when compared to developed countries, it helps to contrast these trends to the ones in developed countries to understand what is working in those countries to counteract the trends. The literature from the UK suggests that:

the underachievement of boys in literacy begins in the first few years of their education, and eventually this leads to many boys transferring to secondary schools with weak literacy skills that are often insufficient to cope with the demands of the secondary curriculum. (Skelton, 2006)

It is also important to first understand the scenario outside the Commonwealth in order to understand and gain some insights into the larger picture. A longitudinal research study in the United States that followed students from kindergarten to eighth grade using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998–99 (ECLS-K)³ found that girls had an advantage in reading at all grades from kindergarten to eighth grade (Robinson & Lubienski, 2011). A number of studies based on the analysis of SACMEQ and PISA results and country analysis in the UK suggest that girls start showing signs of reducing the performance gaps and catching up to boys in Mathematics as they progress through school, but boys do not always show the same pattern in reading, meaning that boys' performance gaps in reading ability continue in later years (Jha et al., 2012; Younger & Warrington, 2005).

Further examination of these results, especially from Australia, New Zealand and the UK, indicates that generalisations about boys' and girls' reading achievements must be qualified. It appears that boys' underperformance is primarily a problem for a minority of the student population, rather than a general trend among the student group (see Younger & Warrington, 2005, pp. 9–10). This would suggest that attention must therefore be more closely focussed on the lowest-achieving male students rather than on boys as a single group (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). Income levels also appear to play a role, as the difference in performance rates between the richest areas and the poorest can be as high as 40 per cent in some countries, including the UK (Skidmore, Cuff & Leslie, 2007). So, boys' underperformance or girls' achievements cannot be characterised in terms of "all boys" or "all girls." Some studies have also pointed out that although girls perform better in language-based subjects, boys' attention is diverted to more prestigious subjects such as STEM subjects, which are ultimately more helpful in the job market (see, for example, Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Therefore, boys' underperformance cannot be understood as a function of gender alone.

In ethnically diverse environments, race has emerged as an important variable, albeit one whose effects are not very predictable. For

Generalisations about boys' and girls' reading achievements must be qualified ... boys' underperformance or girls' achievements cannot be characterised in terms of "all boys" or "all girls."

³ See <https://nces.ed.gov/ecls/kindergarten.asp>

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example, while some studies indicate that White working-class boys are more disadvantaged than Black Caribbean and Asian children of any class (Skidmore et al., 2007), other studies say the opposite. It is clear that in addition to examining gender influences, we must also consider the social context of communities, their

In addition to examining gender influences, we must also consider the social context of communities, their political environment and the role of social class when assessing underperformance in schools.

political environment and the role of social class when assessing underperformance in schools (Robinson, 2013). For example, Indian and Chinese boys have historically not underperformed, as there are influential socio-cultural forces that tie together social capital, social mobility and learning outcomes very strongly within these communities. Therefore, a closer examination of the underlying factors that might lead to these trends of boys' underperformance in the developing and developed Commonwealth countries is warranted.

Of course, the analysis based on these numbers alone will not tell us *why* these trends emerge. As will be elaborated in the next section, factors other than gender — for example, race and class — are often closely connected to these results. Without disaggregated data that examine race, class or ethnicity, interpreting these results and understanding the underlying dynamics is difficult. To understand the importance of the disaggregated data, we examine the evidence

in the literature that points to factors that influence the underperformance of boys in schools.

2.4 SUMMARY

Despite its limitations, the data analysis provides some critical pointers that deserve attention from policy makers.

The SLE, which is reflective of both participation and performance, has risen in all regions. However, the SLEs for girls have risen more than those for boys in East Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean, meaning that the disparity against boys has increased during 2002–2012. The male-female difference in SLEs has decreased only in North America and Western Europe and can be traced to relatively higher growth in the SLE for boys. This is a cause for concern, as it raises issues about the limitations of policy and institutional measures undertaken so far, except in the developed countries that reported a decline in the disparity.

Country-wide data on transition rates from primary to secondary education and the NERs at the secondary level among the Commonwealth countries reinforce the regional trends by showing that Australia, New Zealand and the UK — in

the high-income countries — and St Lucia — a middle-income country — have shown a reduction in the gaps in the secondary NERs between 2002 and 2013. The magnitude of the gaps has remained almost the same in most other Commonwealth countries that have reported boys' underachievement in the past, except in Malaysia, where the trend has reversed, albeit more on account of a drop in girls' participation, which is hardly a cause for celebration.

One of the most worrying trends to have emerged is that some countries have started reporting boys' underperformance at the primary level. Earlier reports had indicated that the gaps generally emerge at secondary level, but it now appears that the problem begins in the early years and carries through to the later years.

In terms of performance, the paucity of data precludes a robust analysis. However, we do know that boys' underperformance is generally only noticeable in those countries where both boys' and girls' participation in school education is high. Girls continue to perform better in reading skills from the early years through to secondary level. The more recent data show that in some countries, girls are now outperforming boys in subjects like Mathematics, where boys had traditionally outperformed girls, especially in the later years. This too deserves attention, as a reading disadvantage for boys in the early years seems to be impacting their performance in Mathematics in later years.

While it is clear that the problem of boys' underperformance in the Commonwealth countries does not seem to have improved, except in certain high- and middle-income countries, it is also clear that not all boys are affected or equally affected. Other factors that play a role in the problem are closely related to race, ethnicity, socio-economic background and location, and so interventions must be carefully designed to take all of these into consideration. However, the current lack of data is an important limitation in developing a clear understanding of the trend and the associated factors.

One of the most worrying trends to have emerged is that some countries have started reporting boys' underperformance at the primary level.

3.

Factors that Explain Boys' Underperformance

Factors that influence gender differences in educational performance have been investigated by researchers from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, biology and education. Some of the explanations for such differences have historically been based on:

- biological differences that influence capacities and interests,
- systemic gender biases that discourage boys from taking up what are perceived to be “feminine” skills and activities, for example, literature and reading, etc.
- teaching methods, curricula and the assessment of performance, and
- socio-economic characteristics, such as income, family structure and parental education (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008).

However, researchers have since moved away from focusing on biological differences to focusing instead on examining the social contexts of students — including, for example, social constructs of hegemonic masculinity, student-teacher interaction, immediate contextual environments and available support structures — to draw conclusions about the differences between the genders (Leslie, 2012).

A close examination of more recent literature — largely dating from post-2010 and covering trends in boys' underperformance in that time — shows that, in terms of understanding the factors that explain the boys' underperformance, the new experiences and analyses have reinforced the inferences drawn earlier. It is a *combination*

Researchers have ... moved away from focusing on biological differences to focusing instead on examining the social contexts of students ... to draw conclusions about the differences between the genders (Leslie, 2012).

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of socio-economic–cultural background coupled with home- and society-related factors on one side and school- and teacher-related issues on the other, in addition to the prevailing gender socialisation and gender-stereotypical notions, especially in the context of masculinity that explains the phenomenon of boys' underperformance to a large extent. The relative importance of these factors varies in different contexts, and how the factors interact with each other also varies, but this is a dominant thread in almost all contexts from where the studies have originated, and therefore, these inferences can be generalised to a large extent with, of course, some variability and allowance for the influence of local contextual factors. This section summarises these factors as follows:

- Socio-economic–cultural background.
- Gender socialisation and macho-masculine identity.
- Laddish behaviour of boys in school.
- Gender schooling processes and teachers' expectations.
- The importance of male role models.
- Measurement and practice.

3.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC–CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Socio-economic class is heavily indicative of boys' underperformance in several countries, and in almost all Commonwealth regions. In Botswana and Ghana, Dunne and Leach (2005) documented a close relationship between low-income households and boys' underperformance. Evidence from all regions suggests that socio-economic class is important in part because it is an influence on children's participation in the workforce, which adversely affects school attendance, and therefore, their performance in school (Ahmad & Ray, 2011; Jha & Kelleher, 2006; UNGEI, 2006). In this context, it is important to pay attention to expectations that men have to go out and earn and to blend these expectations into the notion that education can contribute to economic stability and growth. Especially for marginalised working-class groups, the connection between education and a good job is not always easy to make, especially if the need for a regular wage is immediate (Archer, Pratt & Phillips, 2001). Given the high cost and lengthy time requirements of secondary and higher education, the postponement of earning capabilities for the prospect of potential employment is a hard choice to make. Class emerges as a significant factor in some countries such as Antigua

Evidence from all regions suggests that socio-economic class is important in part because it is an influence on children's participation in the workforce.

(Cobbett, 2014), with more boys in private schools graduating and passing the university entrance exams than working-class boys in government-funded schools. In such countries, some studies have claimed that gender is not as important as socio-economic status, poverty and social class in school achievement, and the class-based differences are much greater than gender-based differences (Cobbett, 2014).

Working-class men are not only pressured to earn money, they are also pressured to avoid effeminate non-action-based activities such as reading books (Abraham, 2008; Archer et al., 2001). However, the studies take divergent positions in this context. For example, while some studies attest that working-class populations may see attending university and participating in academic life as involving themselves with very particular middle-class value systems, customs and mannerisms that can be threatening (Archer et al., 2001), others indicate that working-class populations have a “strong and longstanding tradition of valuing education and learning” (Abraham, 2008, p. 90). This illustrates that identifying as working-class alone cannot determine attitudes or perceptions, and that attention must be paid to the specificity of contexts in which these narratives function and influence behaviour. So, while indicative of boys' underperformance, socio-economic class is not universal in its influence on achievement. For instance, the working class in the UK is composed of native Blacks, native Whites, and migrants from South Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe. The myriad contexts in which these diverse working-class individuals are placed influence the educational outcomes of boys in different ways. Such co-construction is also linked with race and ethnicity.

While indicative of boys' underperformance, socio-economic class is not universal in its influence on achievement.

In the UK, for example, students from visible minority communities such as African-Caribbean communities may be subjected to racial stereotyping not only by their local peer groups but also by teachers (Graham, 2011). Again, this relationship with race is not a simple one, as “Asian” masculinities, as indicated above, attract very different stereotypes (and behaviours) in many societies (Connell, 2005). Additionally, some minorities have the disadvantage of being both invisible (ignored or marginalised, for example, in schools, policy and theory) and hyper-visible (in discourse, in streets, in universities) (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). The identities of race are constantly being constructed by boys from minority communities, keeping in mind the dominant and cultural discourse around their invisibility and hyper-visibility. In addition, not all racism experienced in these contexts is open hostility. Some forms of racism have become more institutionalised and covert in their structure (Graham, 2011). It is in reaction to these forms of institutionalised racism that the label of “acting white” is often evoked as a means of deflecting systemic racial discrimination.

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However, just as it is with class, racial (or ethnic) identities are not simply framed against discriminatory social constructs; they co-exist with identities that are community- and family-based. So, while boys from racial minorities might view education as a form of institutional racism, they also want to be good sons to their families and to be perceived as important and knowledgeable (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). The anti-school stance of not wanting to be White therefore does not adequately “capture the range of experiences encountered by Black students” (Robinson, 2013, p. 26).

Location, language and other forms of social marginalisation also create divisions within achievement levels of boys. For example, in many multi-language countries (e.g. Malaysia), the medium of instruction creates a distinct disadvantage for some boys (UNGEL, 2006). In other countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, boys located in rural areas are significantly more disadvantaged than boys in urban areas (Jha et al., 2012).

Other social contexts that have been shown to influence academic achievement in schools include coming from single-parent families, especially households headed by a woman, and the influence of religious institutions. However, this relationship has not been fully explicated. For example, it has been reported that fathers serve as good role models for reading skills as compared with mothers (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). The active role of fathers has also been positively correlated with better educational outcomes for children, using measures such as examination results, attendance, criminal behaviour, quality of relationships and mental health (Shelton, 2008). However, there is no corresponding information about mothers, so it is difficult to tell if it is a case of fathers being role models or having two supervisory parents that is critical for success in school.

An additional influence that is often unaddressed is the larger context of the surrounding communities. Often, when these larger cultural influences, norms and support structures are understood, a clearer and more structural approach can be taken to address the underperformance by tackling the attitudes and beliefs under-

pinning these influencing factors. Some research indicates that an alternative way to engage with underperformance in certain school districts is to engage with the larger community, family and peer networks to promote a “healthy sense of racial identity” (Robinson, 2013, p. 22). Even creating belief systems or modes of self-efficacy — that is, the mere belief that one is competent and able — provides students with the necessary social resources to reject any negative stereotypes (Robinson, 2013). Instead of creating a polarising discourse of the discriminatory schooling system and the passive victim

An additional influence that is often unaddressed is the larger context of the surrounding communities.

of discriminatory practices, research indicates that the diversity of experiences and support systems that familial and social contexts provide can, instead, play a much more positive role, and therefore should be studied further (Stahl & Dale, 2013). Research also indicates that a strong sense of community and family support (as well as the social capital of the family) enables boys to be resilient in the face of negative stereotypes and low expectations (Robinson, 2013). In some cases, it gives them the “impetus to achieve and surpass expectations” (Robinson, 2013, p. 137), especially in the transition from primary to secondary school education.

3.2 GENDER SOCIALISATION AND MACHO-MASCULINE IDENTITY

As mentioned earlier, family is one of the sites wherein implicit and explicit expectations of appropriate behaviour for both boys and girls are articulated. This starts quite early, and is influenced not only by the family, but also by the Church (or other religious institution), media, peer groups and social networks (Clarke, 2005). One of the most prominent discourses that arises from these institutional networks and structures is that of hegemonic masculinity. While the construction of a hegemonic masculine identity is often “historically and culturally situated” (Clarke, 2005, p. 2), and has multiple dimensions, versions, hegemonic structures and discourses (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008¹), it continues to influence education outcomes and experiences by creating normalcy around a particular form of masculinity that overemphasises sexuality, physicality, strength, sporting abilities and social dominance (Martino, 1996). Given that these constructions of masculinity are often idealised forms of a singular masculinity, disruptions are made by boys very tentatively.

For example, boys who love reading have to negotiate their expression of it very carefully (Scholes, 2013) and are extremely conscious of how these expressions can affect their interactions with their immediate surroundings.

These discursive elements also translate into social practices. For example, gendered articulation of hegemonic masculinity typically translates into the division of household duties, with girls relegated to household tasks and boys to the “heavy” work outside (Clarke, 2005). Being outside, boys are also more encouraged to socialise in groups, making group membership highly valued and, therefore, masculine performance more critical. Boys who remain at home are often considered to not be well

The construction of a hegemonic masculine identity ... continues to influence education outcomes and experiences.

¹ See Cuttance & Thompson (2008) for a more detailed literature review on the Australian and New Zealand findings on the factors related to boys' underperformance.

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socialised, and so any educational activities that involve being indoors, such as homework, are not socially acceptable in the peer group.

The consequence of this relationship is that there appears to be a greater relationship between girls' gender identity and academic self-efficacy than those of boys (Vantieghem, Vermeersch & Van Houtte, 2014). In other words, stereotypical expectations, from both the self and others, guide the behaviour of both boys and girls — and in the case of boys, this drives them away from academic pursuits while the opposite is true for girls.

3.3 LADDISH BEHAVIOUR OF BOYS IN SCHOOL

One of the offshoots of the discourse of hegemonic masculinity, especially with respect to learning, has been the concept of “laddishness” (Butt, Weedon & Wood, 2004), which hinges on the rhetoric of sexism, misogyny and homophobia. In essence, it is a variation of the constructed persona that allows boys to navigate the slippery masculinity that is especially important for their identity in marginalised communities. Boys who engage in laddish behaviour tend to be disruptive, engage in the “cool pose” and resist authority within the classroom and school (Jackson, 2010). These notions of laddishness not only affect boys' self-identity, but also impact teacher-student relationships and the interactions, expectations and behaviours in the classroom and the school environment in general. However, the link between

laddishness and anti-school behaviour is not always linear. Teachers have reported that while boys can be laddish in general, they do not all take this type of behaviour into the classroom and it is still not clear which students take laddishness into the classroom and which students do not (Jackson, 2010).

Nevertheless, the concentration only on boys' laddish behaviour creates blindness around the underachievement of both boys and girls who have a genuine problem with academic achievement rather than exhibiting mere “mischief” or “unruly behaviour” (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). In addition, laddish behaviour patterns also interact with class, race, family and community structures to produce context-dependent relationships to learning outcomes which colour all schooling environments, experience and performance of boys in schools.

Notions of laddishness not only affect boys' self-identity, but also impact teacher-student relationships and the interactions, expectations and behaviours in the classroom and the school environment in general.

3.4 GENDERED SCHOOLING PROCESSES AND TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS

The issue of gender socialisation cuts across the domains of home and school. As children interact with their immediate social environment as a continuum, numerous factors work together to contribute to and shape their behaviour in school. There are a number of ways in which the school reinforces and even promotes the same gendered expectations and notions of masculine identity. Research indicates that schools are sometimes instrumental in contributing to hegemonic masculinities as a “pedagogical strategy” (Abraham, 2008, p. 93). Because boys are expected to have “physical strength, humour, and hypersexuality” (Cobbett, 2014, p. 46), although this varies across cultures, schools reinforce boys’ machismo by enabling them to remain in these “cool boy” stances, and having these stances define them (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). This also has a corollary effect in that atypical students or students who do not live up to their gendered identities have a harder time with academic achievement (Vantieghem et al., 2014).

Another critical factor with clear linkages to boys’ underperformance is teacher expectations. A substantive body of literature from different Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries points to the fact that teachers’ expectations remain gendered and self-fulfilling. That is, when teachers expect boys to underperform, the boys do underperform, although the reverse is also true (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010; Hodgetts, 2010; Page & Jha, 2009; Stromquist, 2007; USAID, 2011). For example, in Jamaica there is evidence to suggest that, when boys who are interested in academics are not supported by the school systems and are influenced by the expectations of the hegemonic masculine discourse, they are less likely to succeed (USAID & Jamaica, 2011). Similarly, studies in Seychelles have indicated that teachers’ gendered expectations and attitudes adversely affect school achievement (Ministry of Education and Youth, 2002).

When teachers expect boys to underperform, the boys do underperform, although the reverse is also true.

Gendered teacher expectations around the behaviour of boys and girls also have a tremendous effect on students’ performance (Cobbett & Younger, 2012; Hartley & Sutton, 2013). Even the language used to describe performance, such as “nice,” “hard-working” and “having potential,” is loaded with cultural connotations. The cultural expectations are not just valid for boys, but also for girls, who, in particular contexts, are penalised for academic performance and excellence (Cobbett & Younger, 2012). In the USAID report that featured research from Jamaica cited earlier, girls are often closely supervised, while boys are allowed to indulge in “play” activities that take them out of the classroom (USAID & Jamaica, 2011). So, even while self-perceived femininity is

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Teacher expectations can reinforce gendered behaviour in the classroom that hinders performance levels of both boys and girls.

more closely connected with greater achievement levels, teacher expectations can reinforce gendered behaviour in the classroom that hinders performance levels of both boys and girls.

Thus, even favourable stereotypes applied to boys and girls can affect performance. For instance, findings indicate that perceptions of girls largely tend to be about being easier to teach, compliant and less likely to challenge authority, whereas boys are perceived to require a more authoritarian control in order to learn (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). These kinds of gendered expectations mean that teachers are concerned about quiet boys, but not quiet girls. Similarly, boisterous girls will be immediately corrected, while boisterous boys will be tolerated to a point, before they become a problem (Martino, 1996). Creating these gender divisions creates a certain rhetoric, even within the classroom, around acceptable behaviours for girls and boys. In fact, research has indicated that within a short time of beginning school, children have very clear gendered notions of who speaks and who listens (Godinho, 2007). Boys as young as seven and girls as young as four seem to have already internalised the lowered expectations around achievement, which seems to lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of boys not performing as well as girls (News-Medical.net, 2013).

However, this does not seem to be true for all countries. In Malaysia, boys' problematic attitudes are rewarded with no or minimal penalty (Abdullah, 2009), and as mentioned above, in Jamaica, the stereotypes result in greater restrictions for girls than for boys. For example, girls are less likely to ask questions and answer questions in class than boys (Butt et al., 2004). Other studies indicate that boys receive twice as much attention in class as girls, although it is often negative in nature (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). But in either case, whether boys are ignored or they are reprimanded much more, their academic achievement suffers. Therefore, classroom dynamics must shift to a more gender-inclusive focus that acknowledges the problems of boys' underachievement, but frames it in the larger context of girls' inclusion and legitimacy within the gendered classroom (Younger & Cobbett, 2014).

3.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF MALE ROLE MODELS

One of the early recommendations that were made to remedy boys' participation in the educational system was to hire more male teachers who could present alternative models of the benefits of education and work against the hegemonic discourses

of anti-school stances (Brownhill, 2014). Sometimes, even school administrators believe that the masculine form of teaching — strict, disciplinarian and aggressive — is the only way to deal with laddish students in the classroom, and these pedagogical values have significant social power (Jackson, 2010). However, this model has been critiqued for its “one-dimensional, essentialist way of conceiving gender” (Brownhill, 2010, p. 3). Research has indicated that modelling behaviour underplays the complexity of influences that underlie boys' underperformance in schools (Brownhill, 2014) and that the modelling of desirable characteristics and qualities that children would like to emulate is not restricted to only one gender (Brownhill, 2010). In a study conducted in seven countries — Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, Samoa, Malaysia, Pakistan, India and Nigeria — the authors concluded that a teacher's gender sensitivity and competency were much more influential than their gender in changing academic outcomes (Page & Jha, 2009).

The very idea that the inclusion and hiring of more male role models is problematic if the same hegemonic masculinity that is documented to be one of the factors that works against boys' achievement is displayed by those role models (Brownhill, 2014). Additionally, the qualities of strength and trust with which male teachers are supposed to be imbued are not exclusively masculine and can be embodied by any individual, regardless of gender (Brownhill, 2014). Therefore, models of any gender must be chosen on the basis that they are able to relate to children's lives and to either connect with them through their own experiences or cross boundaries so as to understand the social environments in which they function (Brownhill, 2010).

3.6 MEASUREMENT AND PRACTICE

Research has indicated that while the differences between boys and girls with respect to underperformance are significant, the gender gap itself is often not large and varies significantly with respect to subject matter (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). So, testing and measurement have taken on (possibly too much) significance, and researchers have argued that assessments have to be “nuanced enough to reflect the complexities involved” (Weaver-Hightower, 2003, p. 485). For instance, the disparity between dropout rates of girls and boys starts very early in the transition from primary to secondary school education (Skidmore et al., 2007). Also, the distribution of scores in many of the achievement scores are spread wider for male students than for female students (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). The real problem is therefore not necessarily with the overall performance of the boys, but with the clumping that happens at the lower ends of the wide distribution.

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Other studies also indicate that some of the low scores on language are often compensated for by boys' attention to more prestigious subjects such as STEM subjects, so that they are better able to transition into the job markets. In addition, as Hodgetts (2010) illustrates, it is possible that educational systems are so geared towards addressing boys' underperformance that good educational practices that integrate learning with inclusive methods can be neglected in favour of "active, boy-friendly methods," which might be directly linked to "teacher professionalism" (Hodgetts, 2010, p. 42). These kinds of disproportionate reactions to boys' underperformance have the potential to harm the educational and pedagogical systems as a whole, so much so that some researchers have documented that a non-emphasis on boys' underachievement has been termed as "favour[ing] girls" or being "lazy" as a teacher (Hodgetts, 2010, p. 42).

Even in situations where "laddish behaviour" is observed, it would be erroneous to think that boys are rejecting education only to protect their identity as bad boys (Stahl & Dale, 2013). Instead, the practice of teaching in traditional schooling systems and the ways in which assessment tools are designed mean that boys (and girls) who are unable to keep up with work at school grow bored with lessons that they no longer understand, fall behind in school, start to develop contentious relationships with teachers and are then unable to understand the connection between school work and achievement aspirations (Harland & McCready, 2012).

One of the factors that influence this relationship between laddish behaviour and academic performance is the relationship with their own communities. Boys who do not feel encouraged or academically supported by their communities tend to

Boys who do not feel encouraged or academically supported by their communities tend to feel disconnected from the schooling experience.

feel disconnected from the schooling experience, and peer groups emerge as a site of positive educational experience that provide boys with alternatives not found within traditional schooling environments (Stahl & Dale, 2013). The supportive environment, therefore, also has to be closely studied to understand the pull away from traditional classrooms, especially for boys. While a review of boys-focussed literature or a re-examination of the entire pedagogy of book learning is required, a more fundamental question, and one that has scarcely been asked in the literature or in practice, is: "What [do] boys actually want to achieve?" (Stahl & Dale, 2013, p. 358). For example, academic education for many boys is not just "beyond their grasp, but also beyond their desire" (Stahl & Dale, 2013, p. 360).

Therefore, attention to what is perceived as achievement and what achievement entails for young boys (especially in the societal framework in which they function) can provide better insight into boys' underperformance and the kind of compromises

they might feel compelled to make. For example, Stahl and Dale (2013) state that when boys are perceived by their peers as being “successful in an activity that requires perseverance, skill and verbal/linguistic dexterity” (p. 369), they are much more likely to be integrated into the classrooms and can negotiate discriminatory school environments. This is extremely important, as the perception of their own performance is often framed against their family, peer and school environments, and without understanding the socio-cultural context in which boys function, it is difficult to devise strategies that would work in practice. Research has also indicated that there are rarely any sharp divides among students who are in conflict with school expectations and peer expectations (Scholes, 2013). Scholes illustrates the varying degrees with which students navigate the anti-reading rhetoric around masculinity, and how many boys are able to navigate that successfully, primarily through the support of family social capital and expectations (Scholes, 2013).

Thus, the measurement of boys' underachievement cannot be understood in isolation, taking into consideration only the gender of the student as the defining context. Instead, other factors, such as schooling environments, poverty, family background, etc., should also be analysed to understand the phenomenon. It would therefore be more useful to measure the concept of underperformance of boys against the context of the social identities that they inhabit, instead of grouping them within a category that has considerable internal diversity.

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3.7 SUMMARY OF THE FACTORS

In the last ten years, researchers have moved away from examining biological difference as the basis for the underperformance of boys in school; instead, they have been examining the influence of various social and school-related factors, such as class, race, family support, and community dynamics and school policies on the performance of both boys and girls.

Socio-economic class emerges as a significant factor in influencing children's participation and performance. While working-class identity alone does not explain boys' underperformance, there are various contexts in which it becomes a factor that influences boys' (under)performance. For example, boys from immigrant communities face strong adverse stereotypes in schools that can influence their participation in schools. Household characteristics are also important. While active fathers

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have been documented as champions for better outcomes for boys, it is likely that a strong family support system (e.g. two supervisory parents instead of one) positively influences behavioural and performance outcomes.

Hegemonic masculinity, prevalent in the expectations, social constructions of roles (for both men and women) and self-identification of boys within a particular framework, has a severe impact on performance and participation in school. Coupled with the idea of laddishness, a signifier of sexism, misogyny and homophobia, these narratives affect teacher-student interactions and social behaviour in schools and create negative expectations that in turn create a vicious circle of underperformance, which is not resolved (but instead is often exacerbated) by hiring more male teachers.

A more critical question, and one that has rarely been investigated but must be answered by all Commonwealth countries, is how to define “achievement” as articulated and internalised by students (boys and girls), and the meaning they ascribe to educational accomplishments. A critical engagement with the central question of “what is achievement for boys and why?” is central to understanding the dynamics of boys’ underperformance in schools.

“What is achievement for boys and why?”

Some of the major factors that seem to influence children’s performance in the school systems are social background and family, school and community environment, and these must be closely examined to understand and subsequently combat the issue of boys’ underperformance. Lack of appropriate understanding of these factors and its reflection in school policies and teacher-preparedness programmes add to creating classroom practices, school environments and teacher-student relationships that perpetuate rather than solve the issue.

4.

Lessons from Experiments

There are various possible approaches that can be taken to mitigate the problem of boys' academic underperformance. Larger social forces such as the structure of the labour markets are outside the purview of this review, but they are acknowledged as vital forces that influence the context of schooling and learning. More central learning-based or community-based initiatives can be proposed on the basis of the reviewed literature. While barriers of class, ethnicity and gender are intimidating, scholars recommend tapping into alternative sets of attitudes within subcultures, such as the social constructions of mobility, affluence and financial security that can dovetail with the learning outcomes desired by schools and communities (Abraham, 2008; Archer et al., 2001).

Although there has been much progress in terms of viewing boys' underachievement beyond anti-women rhetoric, some literature continues to follow that line of thinking. Such reports highlight the simplistic way in which data can be examined. The Parity Report, from the UK, is one such example. In an effort to create sympathy for boys, the authors of the report advocate that achieving equality does not rely on "identifying causes of inequality" (Parity Report, 2013, p. 10). Instead, we need to address the negative stereotypes about boys, research into boys "carried out by male researchers" (Parity Report, 2013, p. 10) and efforts to make "serious and sustained attempts to increase the number of male teachers in schools" (Parity Report, 2013, p. 10). Other interventionist strategies seem to revolve around monitoring and reforming the "bad apples" of the group, mostly by ensuring a greater "discipline, structure and authority" in their lives, so that they are able to resist bad influences (Francis, 2006).

However, as others have pointed out, this broad-brush painting of boys as "a few bad apples" and taking punitive action against them should not be the focus of finding a solution to the problem of underperformance (Francis, 2006). This form of rhetoric obfuscates the complex interrelationships of race, class, gender, ethnicity

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While there has been some improvement in how girls' education is framed, the same cannot be said of boys' education.

and achievement (Titus, 2004). While there has been some improvement in how girls' education is framed, the same cannot be said of boys' education, which is still mired in essentialist conversations that “adjust educational environments and expectations to accommodate boys' [perceived] inner capacities and interests” (Williams, 2012, p. 545). So, one of the challenges is to create dialogues around masculinity that is “naturalised” (Williams, 2012).

In the last decade, we have witnessed a number of policy and institutional interventions to address the issue of boys' underperformance in the Commonwealth countries. Also, new research based on both small and large experiments has been reported from across these countries. Although largely emanating from Australia, the UK and the Caribbean, this new research includes studies that have analysed both community- and school-based initiatives. Following the last study on boys' underperformance in partnership with COL, the Commonwealth Secretariat undertook a multi-country study focussed on understanding classroom gender dynamics in two circumstances: one, where boys were underachieving, and the other, where girls were underachieving (see Page & Jha, 2009). This was then followed by small research projects in four countries, one in each region, and the documentation of the outcomes of the studies in the form of a resource book on making schools gender responsive (Atthill & Jha, 2009). The combined evidence points towards some clear lessons learned to address this issue. Therefore, there has been significant progress in terms of understanding what should work and what should not. Using the analysis from such experiments, we will try to articulate the lessons learned and the principles behind the research in order to help those who are trying to develop strategies to address this problem.

4.1 OVERARCHING MESSAGES EMANATING FROM SUCCESSFUL EXPERIMENTS

One overarching message from successful home-, community- and/or school-based interventions is that boys need support, protection and encouragement — from their peers, parents and larger community, but above all, from their teachers and school. The solution does not lie in rejection or in approval, but in creating an enabling and supportive environment where students are encouraged to believe in their own self and made to face challenges that push them towards positive engagements with learning and with academic as well as non-academic achievements.

The second overarching lesson is that whatever is good for boys is also good for girls — and that is important again in both home and school contexts. Younger and Warrington (2005) worked with more than 50 schools in the UK, and conclude that there is no specific style for boys. Atthill and Jha (2009), who worked on school-based projects in a number of countries in different Commonwealth regions and in different contexts of gender disparities, arrive at similar conclusions — that is, both boys and girls need to be freed from gender-based stereotypical expectations and treatment in order to be able to perform better and reduce disparities in different contexts. It is important to get out of this binary approach and start believing in boys' abilities and potential and providing them with an enabling, encouraging, supportive environment. And it is important for both parents and teachers to reject stereotypes and instead trust in boys who may not be “performing” very well in a particular context and period. These boys need greater and more creative, and perhaps more compassionate, engagement to be able to change the situation.

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The third overarching message is that the early years are also important. This is because many of the gaps in later years are attributed to “poor literacy and numeracy skills acquired during the primary school cycle” (World Bank, 2008). Even if the hard evidence for signs of boys' underperformance emerges only later in primary education or at the post-primary stage, it is important to have interventions in place long before that to help in containing and preventing full-blown underperformance. This is critical even for those countries where signs are visible only at later stages, and also for those where the signs may not currently be as strong. Going by past trends, as countries are moving towards higher enrolments of girls, and also towards higher economic growth rates, such trends are likely to emerge or be more pronounced. A timely response would help in stemming the problem.

The fourth, and last, overarching message for those designing interventions to address this issue is that a combination of both school- and community-based approaches is required. For example, the success of the Stand Out Boys Project (SOBP) in helping boys in their early years to improve their behaviour and reading outcomes in the UK also lends weight to the idea that both classroom- and home-based interventions are necessary to create positive engagement among parents, teachers and students (Forrest, 2014). Based on the analysis of about 100 randomised control trial-based studies in the UK and other parts of the world, Gross (2008) concluded that the simultaneous effects of home, school and community factors influence academic success. A number of other experiments also lend weight to this observation, as can be seen from the discussion in the following sections.

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Concentrating on only one aspect of a school is not useful, as schools are complex social institutions. Instead, researchers and practitioners have to engage with it at multiple sites with varying degrees of discursive and structural power (Keddie, 2003; Legewie & DiPrete, 2012; Shelton, 2008; Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

4.2 LEADS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

The outcomes of community-oriented experiments point towards three types of interventions, which also act as three principles that can be helpful in this regard:

1. Peer groups in the form of strong friendships and sibling networks can provide security and support, especially in the transition from primary to secondary school, and in standing up to hegemonic masculine pressures (Robinson, 2013). This is because a strong sense of community support allows boys to become resilient to the effects of negative stereotypes and expectations within and outside the classroom. In fact, the basic belief that one is competent and capable gives students the necessary social resources to reject negative stereotypes.

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Since peer influence plays an important role when it comes to developing particular masculine identities and laddish behaviour, there is a risk that such peer groups can become counter-productive. Therefore, it is critical that peer groups be mentored well and monitored carefully to ensure that the same hegemonic pressures do not work on them. Peer support groups may not be a standalone strategy but could be a part of the larger intervention either with the community or in schools. Since peer pressure is one of the main reasons for laddish behaviour, it also has the potential to be very effective in countering that behaviour. If a critical number of boys come together and start questioning symbols of hegemonic masculinities, it is easier to counter the pressure faced.

2. Promoting supportive parenting by working closely with parents and improving their understanding and knowledge of the need for supportive parenting has proved helpful in diverse contexts. Social capital generated by parents also has strong effects on school achievement. In Seychelles, for example, parents' views on equality and educational attainment had high correlations with boys' achievement (Geisler & Pardiwala, 2010). Geisler and Pardiwala's study highlighted the need for equal treatment and high parental expectations from boys in raising their academic performance in schools. In a research study,

Scholes (2013) illustrates the varying degrees with which students successfully navigate the anti-reading rhetoric around masculinity, primarily through the support of family social capital and expectations.

Although it is not a new realisation that parental expectations and support help, the challenge lies in enabling such support among parents who are themselves stressed for various reasons or who do not have the required knowledge and skills to offer such help to their children. Community-based interventions as well as school-based parental support systems have played an important role in such cases. Parents also need to be trained in positive disciplining skills, especially with regard to setting clear and consistent boundaries. Adjunct training in problem solving, communication and self-control that is designed to help parents cope more successfully with negative life stresses and marital conflict are also needed in some contexts for successful outcomes. Mutual support groups where parents can exchange experiences and act as easily accessible “buddies” have also proved helpful (Gardner, 2008).

3. Interventions have to start early for maximum effectiveness, especially for families from disadvantaged backgrounds. Therefore, models such as those tried by the Birmingham City Council that use parent support programmes, workshops with youth and community groups, and training are reported to have helped with parental support for young boys and in turn their academic achievement in schools (Birmingham City Council, 2008). The Birmingham City Council also reports positive results from working with youth in enhancing their self-esteem and enabling a more positive direction to their schooling and other life choices. Similarly, a few youth support programmes for adolescent boys have also been reported from the Caribbean, which helped in shifts towards positive behaviour and also impacting academic outcomes for boys (Jha et al., 2012; UNICEF, 2004).

Interventions have to start early for maximum effectiveness, especially for families from disadvantaged backgrounds.

4.3 LEADS FOR SCHOOL- OR/AND TEACHER-BASED INTERVENTIONS

School-based initiatives fall into four basic categories: (1) pedagogical, (2) individual, (3) whole-school and (4) socio-cultural (Younger & Warrington, 2005). Younger and Warrington (2005) recommend a holistic approach that combines all of these approaches and involves both boys and girls. For example, they argue that

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what is good for boys will also be good for girls: active, engaging classroom activities focusing on diverse skills and involving performing and creating art, poetry, drama and other such modes of pedagogy. This, coupled with specific interventions, can help to create spaces for expression and success and can lead to positive results. Other research that has focussed on different pedagogical tools such as small group work, paired group work, storytelling, use of artistic expression and role playing also claims that these have helped to create a positive impact on boys (Harland & McCready, 2012).

Younger and Warrington (2005) drew major conclusions about the four approaches, which can be useful for designing other interventions to address the issue of boys' underperformance. In the context of a pedagogic approach where they focussed mainly on literacy and writing skills, the experiences emphasised the need

for a wide range of texts and for activities allowing for varied settings, including paired reading sessions, for changing boys into “successful and satisfied” readers (Younger & Warrington, 2005, p. 38). These experiments did not support the idea that boys have a different reading style from girls. Younger and Warrington's analysis of individual approaches using mentoring as the main tool showed that it can be successful in an institutional setup only when the mutual understanding between the mentor and mentee exists; the mentor needs to be credible to individuals, collaborative and supportive on the one hand, offering strategies, advice and encouragement, but, crucially, assertive and demanding

on the other. When these pre-conditions are in place, boys can develop a sense of self-belief and come to realise that they can reconcile academic work with the self-image that they wish to promote (Younger & Warrington, 2005).

Jha and Kelleher (2006) share an example of an initiative in Jamaica called Change from Within that brought together teachers from different inner-city schools who formed a group called Circle of Friends to work with adolescent boys. In this initiative, mentoring was an important tool to help teachers to connect with boys and win their confidence, and then allow them to work closely with the boys on several issues that adversely affect performance. However, they did not use mentoring exclusively. It was one of several interventions, which also included working closely with school leaders, engaging with the community, creating a support circle for teachers and using new pedagogies that encourage collaborative learning. The focus on a number of enabling activities with the schools and for community outreach reflected what Younger and Warrington (2005) call a “socio-cultural approach.” Socio-cultural strategies include team-building activities, supportive school councils, citizenship initiatives within schools and help in integrating laddish boys, and

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even girls, “more fully into school life.” The change in children’s aspirations and achievement were more visible in schools where school leadership and teachers were united in their commitment and approach (Younger & Warrington, 2005). Social activities within the schooling environment, such as the one introduced by the Commonwealth Secretariat’s pilot project in Seychelles, also helped improve the participation and performance of boys (Geisler & Pardiwalla, 2010).

Research into successful interventions also suggests that school leadership plays a very important role in changing schooling processes, culture and ethos (Atthill & Jha, 2009; Jha & Kelleher, 2006). Teacher education and professional development of teachers are important in influencing the school culture and also notions about gender roles and stereotypes. Teachers’ understanding of issues around equity and diversity is generally weak, probably because typical teacher development programmes do not emphasise these issues adequately and this cannot change through short-term training programmes on gender, race, ethnicity, poverty and hegemonic masculinity. The training approach needs to focus on a process-based long-term engagement to orient teachers and school leaders towards how these inequalities shape children’s identities and self-expectations. School leadership is also important to gain a shared understanding around goals and objectives related to the issue of boys’ underperformance.

In 2003, the Department of Children, School and Families in the UK brought out a Primary National Strategy (Department of Children, School and Families, 2007), which argues that teachers of young children must have a better understanding of home situations so that they can use this familiarity to start the learning process in schools. This also supports the idea that teachers should respect diverse cultures that exist in different families rather than expect the same culture to exist in every household. It recommends involving the families of the children in discussions to share their thoughts and experience in order to strengthen boys’ engagement in academic activities. It describes valuing boys’ participation and contributions in the classroom, encouraging every child to try new activities and discouraging stereotypes about the roles of boys and girls as key features of an effective approach. It also emphasises the need for extra-curricular activities to create a healthy learning environment in schools (Department of Children, School and Families, 2007).

Understanding the basic nature of the problem of boys’ underperformance has also helped the development of different strategies for different problems. For example, in the Building European Links towards Southeast Asia (BELS) project in

Teacher education and professional development of teachers are important in influencing the school culture and also notions about gender roles and stereotypes.

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Australia, they encountered two separate groups of boys: struggling and disengaged. Strategies for the former included highly structured processes that were specifically directed towards reading and writing skills, while the strategies for the latter were more activity- and supervision-based (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). This project also used the concept of integrated projects where reading and writing skills were part of the larger task that also included hands-on work and collaboration with adults. Boys were reported to have learned language skills faster and performed better as a result of this strategy (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). Open discussions and critical analyses of masculine and feminine identities using different kinds of texts also helped boys in challenging their own ideas of masculinity, and in turn contributed to increasing their engagement with academic activities (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008).

Another way to modify the classroom environment is through assessment tools for teachers. Proper assessment tools can create better learning outcomes, increase motivation and lead to greater autonomy in classrooms. When expectations of learning and “fail” points are made clear, students are able to analyse and assess their own

“intelligences” so that they can formulate and communicate their own learning patterns (Butt et al., 2004). In general, these experiences of learning with proper assessment tools suggest that the use of supportive assessment, where regular feedback is provided along with solutions to the problems that emerge from the feedback, means boys tend to respond better.

Proper assessment tools can create better learning outcomes, increase motivation and lead to greater autonomy in classrooms.

One of the key recommendations from these interventions is to abandon the practice of streaming, whereby low-performing boys are generally grouped together in low-ability streams, which further isolates and demotivates them. Mixed-ability grouping rather than ability-based streaming is considered more suitable for all children (Atthill & Jha, 2009). Classroom dynamics should focus more on an inclusive grouping that will allow for a more diverse set of students, including girls. So, focusing on a de-streamed, inclusive class will not only help with boys' underperformance, but will also provide space for girls' inclusion and legitimacy within the gendered classroom (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). This also allows room for creating classroom and schooling practices that are gender responsive and resist stereotypes, and thus lead to better achievement levels for both boys and girls (Atthill & Jha, 2009).

The issue of boys' underperformance has often raised questions about co-education or mixed-sex schools being more suitable for boys. A number of research studies from different parts of the world show that single-sex schooling is not an answer.

Nevertheless, the research also clearly suggests that single-sex settings can be advantageous for both boys and girls in some circumstances where comfort levels may be an issue. For example, they may feel less embarrassed in a single-sex environment about asking questions, especially around sexuality and identity. Single-sex spaces within co-educational systems have been reported to be helpful in a number of settings. Nevertheless, the risk of normalising or legitimising stereotypical masculine or feminine behaviour is high in the case of single-sex girls' or boys' schools (Afamasaga, 2009; Akhtar, 2009; Davis, 2002; Lloyd, 2011; Younger & Warrington, 2005).

4.4 SUMMARY OF THE INTERVENTIONS

Most of the studies and interventions reviewed examine in depth the ways in which social constructions created by class, social mobility, migration, status, race and ethnicity create systemic barriers to boys' performance in schools. While some interventions focus on entrenching notions of masculinity within the classroom (e.g. recommending a "stricter" approach, or the presence of more male teachers), most continue to focus on creating educational environments that can harness and cater to the diverse capabilities and interests of male students.

One of the primary lessons learned from reviewing the interventions is that interventions that look to enhancing the outcomes of both boys and girls seem to be the most successful in combating the problem of boys' underperformance. Another lesson is that supportive and enabling environments in the early years, well before the differences between the genders start showing, can potentially prevent such underperformance from emerging in later years. The third primary lesson from the interventions is that there is a need to recognise the importance of outside-school actors, such as parents, communities and peer groups, in influencing the outcomes within schools. Community-engaged interventions can have a massive impact on school performance.

Within the school environment itself, there seem to be four approaches that characterise various interventions: pedagogical, individual, whole-school and socio-cultural. Strategies that cater to the diverse needs of students (both among boys and between boys and girls) seem to increase school participation and performance. The use of diverse tools such as group work, storytelling and various

Interventions that look to enhancing the outcomes of both boys and girls seem to be the most successful in combating the problem of boys' underperformance.

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forms of artistic expression also helps with catering to children who do not learn through traditional pedagogical methods. In fact, mixed-group dynamics enable greater learning outcomes than streaming students, as students are geared towards self-identification with lower-performing groups and this can have a detrimental impact on their performance.

Teachers' engagement and sensitivity to gender-related issues also seem to have an impact. So, delinking pedagogical activities and practices from gendered stereotypes (what a girl is good at, or what a boy must do, for example) has helped improve the pedagogical environment within the classrooms. In sum, it is clear that a supportive, engaging, enabling and accepting environment within and outside schools seems to improve boys' (and girls') performance within schools.

5.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Hard evidence for boys' underperformance in education at national levels is still missing because of the uneven availability of reliable statistics in general and gender-segregated data on academic performance in particular. While the data on enrolment, transition and completion rates are available from international organisations, they are often incomplete and at times at variance with the data provided by the countries themselves — making it impossible to draw conclusions about trends in individual countries and establish clear conclusions about trends from hard data. However, considering the evidence that is available and accessible, it can be said with some degree of confidence that boys' underperformance is a real and critical problem, at least in a number of Commonwealth countries, and particularly among the developing Commonwealth countries.

It can be said with some degree of confidence that boys' underperformance is a real and critical problem.

Some researchers argue that the phenomenon has been oversimplified to imply that girls' history of outperforming boys has led to structural opportunities being systematically denied to boys (Titus, 2004). The simplistic assumptions are often the following: boys are failing in large numbers, boys who fail become violent and youth delinquency is expanding because of a “feminist” backlash (Titus, 2004). Considering the evidence, it can also be concluded safely that the issue does not deserve a panicked response in any part of the world. This is because the problem has not reached a stage where it is a universal phenomenon for any country; it is more common for certain socio-economic groups, and the literature now makes it possible to understand and analyse the problem better. The experiences of the last decade in terms of interventions tried out in some countries provide us with information on a possible range of solutions that are in the realm of public policy.

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Rather than panicking, the countries concerned need to strengthen their data systems and processes, embark on specific research projects that are contextual and provide knowledge about the local nature of the problem, and then take actions that are linked with the findings. This would also help in raising the general quality and levels of both boys' and girls' learning, which most analyses of interventions tend to suggest is the ideal approach.

While boys do tend to perform worse than girls in some parts of the world, the opposite is true in other parts of the world. Although school life expectancy is less for boys than girls in some regions — such as East Asia and the Pacific, and the Caribbean — certain other regions have shown progress in reducing this gap. It is also important to realise, especially when it comes to policy formulation, that these trends need to be further unpacked for various sub-groups such as socio-economic, race, ethnicity, family-type and other parameters. Gender is not the only factor underlying this trend, and the specific contexts in which boys underperform require close attention. It is important to note, however, that while there is an over-representation of boys from lower socio-economic strata, ethnic minorities and single-parent households who are underachieving, not all boys from these particular social groups underperform.

5.1 MAJOR CONCLUSIONS: UNDERSTANDING PERFORMANCE PATTERNS AND UNDERLYING CAUSES

With all these caveats in place, and using both the literature review that discusses the drivers of such phenomena and the review of the interventions, a set of conclusions can be drawn. As mentioned earlier, some of the interventions and the results thereof are self-reported and not necessarily externally evaluated or independently analysed. However, that does not really undermine their relevance, as in many cases these are first-hand accounts from those who implemented the strategies. Nevertheless, these are broad conclusions, but they help in understanding the nature of the issue on one hand and the possible solutions on the other. It goes without saying that these conclusions need to be contextualised to region- or country-specific situations. A summary of major conclusions pertaining to performance, the factors that are likely to determine the performance and the solutions that have worked are presented here.

Performance patterns

Some generalised patterns can be discerned from the data on academic performance from various sources. A number of these inferences are based on analyses of learning outcome scores in countries/regions outside the Commonwealth, but they are included here because they provide important pointers for the Commonwealth as well. While some of these inferences are the same as those reported earlier by Jha and Kelleher (2006), others offer new insights. One important insight is that boys' underperformance generally surfaces in situations where participation rates are high for both boys and girls. Boys do not begin to underperform until they outnumber girls in participation. This does not mean that they start underperforming as soon as girls start participating in equal numbers but that signs of boys' underperformance generally exist in situations where there is gender parity in participation. This means that countries moving towards gender parity in enrolment and completion rates need to be aware of this likelihood and take steps to prevent such occurrences in future.

Boys do not begin to underperform until they outnumber girls in participation.

An important point to note in this context is that donors are moving away from basic education and are starting to move towards secondary and post-secondary educational sectors (UNESCO, 2015), with an assumption that all relevant goals have been or are about to be achieved at primary level. It is important to be aware of the gendered nature of performance that may emerge at secondary level and initiate preventive actions. A strong correlation also exists between SLE scores and per capita income of a nation; essentially, "school-life expectancy tends to increase as national wealth rises" (UNESCO, 2012, p. 13). While measures such as improving access to education — by waiving tuition fees, for example — and providing the physical infrastructure — more classrooms or more textbooks, for example — are important, they are not the only factors that can get children to school and provide a good quality education (UNESCO, 2015b).

Boys' underperformance is much more common in literacy than in any other subject or learning area. While in some countries the gender gap in literacy opens up at the post-primary stage, data from other countries indicate that the gender gap in literacy and reading starts earlier than that. In many cases, gender gaps narrow in later years, especially where the appropriate interventions are offered. The exception to this is those who are in the lowest percentile of scores. This group tends to continue to perform consistently badly, and so it appears that they need particular help and attention.

Boys' academic achievement is perhaps only one of the many problems plaguing the educational systems of the Commonwealth countries, and even though boys

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receive negative attention, both boys and girls suffer from the unequal gender regimes prevalent in schools (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). In Kenya, for example, some studies show that while more girls than boys attend classes, boys still perform better academically (Kangethe, Lyria & Nyamanga, 2010).

Girls continue to underperform in many countries and in many subject areas, such as Mathematics and Science. However, the evidence from developed countries suggests that these gaps also narrow as students progress through their schooling, except for those who are in the lowest quintile scores. In low-income developing coun-

tries, where boys outnumber girls in school participation, girls tend to outperform boys academically. This means that those girls who continue in school perform better. It is important to look carefully at these trends to gain insights into how gender and other variables play out in terms of learning scores. Other measurements indicate the need to ensure that stable unmodifiable factors such as gender, family background and social capital, as indicated by parents' education and socio-economic status, must also be used, so that underachievement is measured by assessing achievement that is "falling below what would be forecast from our most informed and accurate prediction, based on a team of predictor variables" (Smith, 2003, p. 12, quoting Thorndike, 1963).

In low-income developing countries, where boys outnumber girls in school participation, girls tend to outperform boys academically.

Understanding underlying causes: Getting out of the binary

Chapter 3 summarised the factors that explain boys' underperformance under the following six heads:

- Socio-economic-cultural background.
- Gender socialisation and macho-masculine identity.
- Laddish behaviour of boys in school.
- Gender schooling processes and teachers' expectations.
- The importance of male role models.
- Measurement and practice.

Here, the focus is on understanding these factors in the context of looking for the right approach and appropriate mix of solutions. Anti-school behaviour is often intimately entwined with the larger discourse of anti-social behaviour such as sexism, homophobia and racism (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). Disciplinary strategies, therefore, need to move away from reinforcing hegemonic practices that establish certain behaviour as "authoritative" and interpret it as masculine. Such conversations are framed within the larger narrative of "moral panic" around boys'

underachievement, and these forms of harmful discourses around masculinity have to be dismantled (Archer & Yamashita, 2003).

Hegemonic masculinity is often blamed for the lack of achievement of boys, but masculinities are not uni-dimensional. Instead, they are culturally entangled, not only with the surrounding contexts, but also with respect to the larger discourse that frames boys' participation and manner of participation. So, the discourses that boys are engaging with are globalised and localised, often at the same time (Archer & Yamashita, 2003). It must be acknowledged that the hegemonic masculinities that are shaped by the peer group in creating anti-school stances also serve as a "safety net for anxiety and fear" (Stahl & Dale, 2013, p. 358). Thus, it is important to break the binaries of masculine and feminine behaviour and provide both boys and girls with the space, tools and capabilities to interrogate and examine the construction of their own subject-positions.

Masculinities are not uni-dimensional.

Given masculinities not only exist in structured spaces, but also are a huge part of the discursive spaces that surround boys, and so creating a dent in these discursive spaces will influence the more institutional spaces. For example, increasing the incentives for Black men to participate in the educational system requires the creation of a different model of education and a different means of creating an alternative form of masculinity. This does not automatically imply that there must be more male role models in the classroom, or that women must adopt "masculine" forms of teaching in order to deal with laddishness. These forms of interventions fail to recognise the diversity of the classroom and reinforce only a specific form of performing masculinity (a model for both girls and boys). They also create problems for teachers who cannot and do not want to be laddish and authoritarian in the classroom (Jackson, 2010). In fact, it is important that male role models are not entombed by the masculine structures and that they are able to present "socially constructed feminine characteristics" (Brownhill, 2014, p. 256) and to engage with a larger set of emotions than that prescribed by hegemonic masculinity.

Some researchers contend that the conversation around boys' underachievement has been treated as "the educational issues, perhaps at the expense of others involving class and ethnicity" (Cobbett & Younger, 2012, p. 612). This approach to examining only male underachievement, they say, has sidelined the issues of social justice in education (Jackson, 2010) and overlooks the importance of the confluence of race, class and gender in understanding academic underachievement. In fact, several studies indicate that boys as a social group have more positive experiences associated with school than girls and have a higher perception of their abilities when compared to girls as a social group (Francis, 2006). For example, when we examine

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the gender regimes and stereotypes in education, we find that while boys certainly suffer from negative stereotypes, so do girls (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). In some studies from the Caribbean region, girls also reported feeling unsafe and threatened, which impacts their educational prospects and their long-term participation in education. In general, it is important to ensure that alternative masculinities are developed for the benefit of both girls and boys. In order to do this properly, there must be institutional, structural, social and familial support systems in place for creating and sustaining these alternative forms of masculinities.

Some researchers contest that the neoliberal state is just as responsible as the school systems for failing boys. Engagement levels in the belief that education is a universal right and one of the only means for creating real change in a society must also be examined (Francis, 2006). The state often points towards “truant” parents who are supposedly not encouraging their children in school, and so underperformance is often blamed on the “poor” or the individual rather than on the systemic racist cultures and structures that are currently prevalent in the education system and neoliberal state (Francis, 2006). Therefore, it is important to step back and examine the larger discursive factors contributing to the underachievement of children in schools.

It is important that young people are invested in looking towards the future and that they start to engage with their potential as future citizens. This in turn is important for shaping and changing their own lives and the communities that they live in (Harland & McCready, 2012). So, it is important to better understand the ways in which labour force participation is affected when boys are socialised away from the classroom and girls are socialised towards it. Such socialisation approaches do not always translate very well into better outcomes for women (Cobbett & Younger, 2012; Jha & Kelleher, 2006). For example, despite women’s educational achievement, unemployment rates among women are much higher than among men, and they are often over-represented in low-prestige and low-paying occupations. This disconnect between achievement and employment is not always visible, because women who are unemployed often remain at home. Unemployed men and the boys who are dropping out of schools often occupy public spaces and are therefore a much more visible problem (Cobbett & Younger, 2012).

Other ways in which the labour force participation outcomes differ for men and women is through the reaffirmation of positive roles around masculinity that present men as breadwinners and providers for their families. For example, what is often considered a disadvantage in terms of educational outcomes, entry into the informal labour economy, is a source of power and authority for men in the Caribbean, a move that is not as favourable for women in the same context (Cobbett & Younger,

2012). So, while the identity of being a provider does trap men in fixed positions of social power, it also provides economic power through which alternative forms of social power can be obtained — an option not always available for women (Cobbett & Younger, 2012).

Therefore, researchers examining male marginalisation in education have to be careful not to be overly simplistic in terms of educational and employment data, and must recognise that other social factors — such as class, social context and workforce participation — and the power dynamics located within them should also be considered when trying to understand this phenomenon. It is important to keep in mind that power dynamics are rarely a zero-sum game, where one social group's gain comes at the cost of another social group's (Cobbett & Younger, 2012). Usually, the loss of one also indicates the loss of the other, and so the long-term implications must be taken into consideration while considering the social forces surrounding male marginalisation in education.

Power dynamics are rarely a zero-sum game, where one social group's gain comes at the cost of another social group's.

One of the ways in which to examine the factors underlying underachievement is through the experience-centric narrative methodology. This examines individuals' construction of their social realities (rather than their “truth”) and examines their lives at the “intersection of history, biography, and society” (Robinson, 2013, p. 39). This type of research allows students to create and analyse their own sense of realities and lived experience, and can therefore be emancipatory and transformative in nature (Robinson, 2013).

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION: TOWARDS A GENDER-RESPONSIVE SCHOOL, SUPPORTIVE PARENTING AND EMPOWERING FRIENDSHIPS

Chapter 4 discussed the lessons emerging from various strategies and interventions tried in different parts of the world. These recommendations draw from those lessons as well as from research that has tried to analyse what works. It is also important to note that a substantial number of these lessons emerged from only a few countries, and some countries and regions remain under-studied. For example, the literature from East Asia and the Pacific is heavily concentrated around studies from Australia and New Zealand. Similarly, the literature covering successful interventions largely comes from the UK. However, the feedback from research projects

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in other parts of the Commonwealth lends weight to the inference that the larger principles and results remain the same. Nevertheless, despite the possibilities of high potential for application, it is important to contextualise the knowledge first. In other words, while the issue of boys' underperformance is a problem for some regions, the contexts vary widely and it is essential to fully understand a specific situation before recommending a solution.

While most recommendations are for addressing the issue of boys' underperformance, they are important for both boys and girls, depending upon the context. The recommendations have been divided into four groups:

1. School and teachers
2. Home and community
3. Policy
4. Technology-aided solutions and the possible role of open and distance learning (ODL)

School and teachers

School leadership and teachers are instrumental in transforming school processes, culture and ethos. Engaging critically with gender stereotypes, gendered socialisation and gendered expectations, for example, can help in combating hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Specific approaches that allow learning to orient towards issues of gender, race, ethnicity, poverty and hegemonic masculinity and femininity can provide student-centric interventions that can bring school-level changes in policies and practices among teachers and administrators. It will allow schools and students to create tools to fight the adverse effects of stereotypes that arise from these social narratives.

While the issue of boys' underperformance is a problem for some regions, the contexts vary widely and it is essential to fully understand a specific situation before recommending a solution.

Teachers can contribute immensely as role models by embracing the complexity of social lives, roles and expectations. For example, authenticity of self is a cherished trait of role models, as children often reject role models who do not recognise the realities of the situation around them and are not responding in a genuine manner (Brownhill, 2014). There must be a focus on ensuring that teachers (who are often the role models) are able to comprehend the complexity of factors facing boys and to inhabit an authentic self (Brownhill, 2014). Finding male teachers or Black teachers, simply on the basis of their gender or race, is not sufficient. Identity is not the only thing that matters. Teachers have to be sensitised and sensitive to the power dynamics within

the classroom and must try to disrupt them on a daily basis (Brownhill, 2010; Graham, 2011; Hodgetts, 2010; Jackson, 2010; Majzub & Rais, 2010; Martino, 1996; Reed 1999; Watson et al., 2010).

Pedagogical measures, academic content and reforms that can situate the present realities of boys who are also facing racial and class discrimination can help to ensure that boys are able to relate to the issues in schools and in turn find it more relatable to the issues that dominate their lives, and to also critique the current frameworks of masculinities (Graham, 2011; Harland & McCready, 2012; Martino, 1996; Reed, 1999; Stahl & Dale, 2013; Watson et al., 2010; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). The strategies that have been useful are: creating a diverse set of activities for students; offering positive reinforcement; and providing personal attention to check in with progress and to set specific targets, and self-reflective teacher-student interaction (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008). In other words, reinforcement, corrective feedback, differentiated homework, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, professional development for teachers coupled with parental involvement and individual tutoring have been identified as highly effective practices, while computer-assisted instruction, same homework for everyone, programmed instruction, ability grouping, team-teaching and watching television have been shown to not be helpful.

Creating different and varied pedagogical tools and methodologies such as using art, music and drama in small groups or co-learning models can cater to the diverse needs of boys and girls within the schooling environment. The co-learning models, for instance, are devised to ensure that teachers and students engage with each other and challenge the traditional roles set within classroom environments (e.g. who can learn, who can teach), so that both teachers and students are able to create a more participatory and evolving pedagogical practice in the classroom (Brantmeier, 2005). Skill learning is an effective alternative for hegemonic masculinity, especially in the Caribbean and Latin American countries, and allows adolescents to be mentored and to develop a sense of self-worth.

Creating different and varied pedagogical tools and methodologies ... can cater to the diverse needs of boys and girls within the schooling environment.

Schools should offer extra support and information and empowerment strategies during key transitional stages for both boys and girls (Harland & McCready, 2012). A focus on changing teacher-pupil relationships to create an ethos of equality and positive attitudes and approaches to learning (Harland & McCready, 2012) has been helpful. Participative teaching methodologies and even design of school buildings, teaching plans and pedagogical practices can be jointly agreed upon by the schooling systems and the teachers to engage students and ensure their investment in the running of the school (Harland & McCready, 2012; Kangethe, Lyria

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& Nyamanda, 2014). Measures to tackle school-based violence, including bullying, homophobia, sexual harassment and corporal punishment, have to be incorporated into pedagogical practices in schools (Harland & McCready, 2012).

The primary recommendation as regards schooling and teachers is therefore not to create a more “masculine” or “feminine” pedagogical space, or to make education more appealing to male students by creating positive constructions of masculinity around reading, for instance. Instead, the idea is to focus on catering to diversity and to expand our focus on underperformance to include factors apart from gender to explain the patterns that we are seeing. Therefore, adopting a pedagogical process that enables and accommodates a diversity of students (including diversity in race, culture, class, ethnicity or religion) as a whole is a vastly better (and perhaps more efficient) strategy than merely examining these results through the prism of masculine or feminine endeavours and attempting to “masculinise” educational initiatives.

Home and community

Parental support in the form of parent-school forums, contact programmes and workshops can be instituted so as to engage parents and encourage them to examine their own beliefs, attitudes and expectations so that they can change their own outlook and commitment to academic achievement. Schools could have parental development programmes in which parents are oriented towards supportive parenting. Parents also contribute to the formation of hegemonic masculine identities, and so it is important that they change their expectations and behaviour towards boys. Parents tend to advantage boys by expecting less from them in terms of housework and domestic responsibilities, but this translates into the boys being unable to meet the demands of school. Parental orientation needs to address these issues. School initiatives and skill programmes are also generally much more effective when community and parental engagement are part of developing and implementing the programme.

Empowering friendships are as important as supportive parenting, if not more. The power of peer pressure is immense, as is obvious from the role of peer groups in strengthening notions of hegemonic masculinities and influencing laddish behaviour, and it can be harnessed for positive results. Community-oriented programmes can use peer pressure effectively by directing strategies aimed at creating alternative notions of masculinities in which groups of boys see value in engaging with creative and substantive activities, and in turn influence each other in a positive manner. Schools can also create such opportunities for boys.

Policy

Governments, especially departments of Education, should refocus on data collection, establishing disaggregated databases and developing specific methodologies by which these data are collected. Funding and incentives for independent researchers and universities to study the specific trends that are related to socio-economic, race, religious and age groups can be used to point out specific factors within each country that influence male underperformance there. For example, when data on the school performance of children are collected, it is important to also collect structural information such as race, socio-economic status, geographical location, private or public schooling, rural or urban status, and other socio-demographic factors that could help researchers engage with the different dynamics that might influence performance. In addition, if possible, data on performance must also be studied and understood in conjunction with the immediate social contexts in which the child is assessed — occupation status of the child, educational status of the parents, educational facilities in the schools, etc. These indicators in conjunction with the data collected on participation and performance can shed light on the patterns visible in the quantitative results.

If possible, data on performance must also be studied.

More importantly, it is incumbent upon each country to commission a qualitative assessment of the nature of education that does not focus solely on boys' underperformance, but rather captures the surrounding dynamics of schools in the country. For example, it is difficult to examine boys' underperformance without information about the role and influence of labour force participation. In addition, it is important to examine this larger context in order to feed this understanding back into designing school structures and curriculums better so that the education clearly enables, rather than hinders, labour force participation once the education cycle is complete.

So, country-wide mapping of the socio-cultural–economic and institutional structures that influence academic performance (for both boys and girls) can be done so that relationships between labour markets, educational systems, class, race and gender relations, and other societal structures can be identified for each country. Factors such as labour market trends and practices have to be kept in mind when assessing dropout rates for both male and female students. National governments and international agencies could fund such research to better understand country-specific interrelationships.

As discussed earlier, experiences from civil society and research indicate that interventions that involve both parents and teachers simultaneously have proven to be the most effective option. The results are much more visible if these interactions are

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Interventions that involve both parents and teachers simultaneously have proven to be the most effective option.

initiated early. Creating family and community support for boys and programmes that create relationships between schools, communities and parents might help to strengthen the ways in which hegemonic masculinities can be questioned and addressed (Graham, 2011; Harland & McCready, 2012; Robinson, 2013; Stahl & Dale, 2013). Any support from governments or inter-governmental organisations can take these leads into account while initiating or funding any intervention. This has implications for both school- and community-based interventions; the interventions should start at the primary schooling stage. However, to address the issue of adolescents, it would also be important to intervene at the secondary stage, either in communities or in schools.

Subcultures have to be better understood so that common attitudes and beliefs among members of subcultures are not misinterpreted and are better understood by those outside of the subculture (Graham, 2011; Stahl & Dale, 2013). It is important that teacher education and training programmes pay greater attention to creating an understanding of these subcultures among teachers. Recognition by teachers and institutions of the existence of institutional racism, classism and sexism and of the ways in which these can be examined and reflected in their own treatment of race, class and gender in the classroom is critical (Cuttance & Thompson, 2008; Graham, 2011; Keddie, 2003; Rampersad, 2010; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). This will not happen in most countries unless the teacher education and training systems, school curricula and teaching materials, and pedagogic processes are reformed.

While single-sex settings are advantageous for some interactions, single-sex schools are not recommended because of the inherent risk of their normalising and legitimising stereotypical masculine and feminine behaviour (Akhtar, 2009; Davis, 2002; Lloyd, 2011; Younger & Warrington, 2005). It would be more helpful to create single-sex spaces within a co-educational school for specific purposes as and when required.

Technology-aided solutions and the possible role of open and distance learning (ODL)

One policy intervention that is often proposed in response to the underperformance of boys is to investigate whether technology as an enabling or intervening factor could be introduced. We did not come across specific technological interventions during the literature review or analysis of the interventions for this current study. The analysis of the data, factors and interventions suggests that technological interventions may play a limited role in adding to multiple pedagogical approaches

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

and methods that have already emerged as important tools to enable boys' engagement in the classroom. Technology may not have much to offer beyond this for many reasons.

One major factor that has been identified with respect to underperformance is related to the perpetuation of ideologies of hegemonic masculinity. While technology has enabled communities to create and participate in social groups outside of their traditional boundaries, it has also facilitated the spread of hegemonic cultures that are often detrimental to both boys and girls. Therefore, it is better to be cautious and not be over-dependent on technology. A deeper engagement facilitated through relationship-building rather than a wider engagement is necessary to combat the problem of underperformance of boys. It is likely that while technology is able to provide access to educational opportunities, the rates of participation and performance of boys and girls are linked to gaps that technology alone may not be able to fill.

However, one of the ways in which information and communication technologies (ICTs) can help is by breaking the silence and isolation around boys' underperformance. It might be useful to engage with boys by creating safe spaces online for participation within the schooling system in order to identify the problems and issues that inhibit boys in schools. In some ways, the space for engagement already in the school can be expanded through technology, allowing more diverse student populations to participate in, shape and engage with the schooling systems. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the purpose of using technology is not to substitute for the existing infrastructure, but to expand the range of current operations into hitherto unexplored arenas.

The literature rarely points towards the use of ODL modes as a solution to the issue of boys' underperformance. Jha and Kelleher (2006) referred to a country case from Lesotho, where ODL had been used to provide access to education to boys who lived in far-flung, inaccessible and isolated regions and were engaged in activities such as grazing. While ODL can reach physically isolated groups, its potential to address the issue of boys' disengagement from schooling is not clear. Its use in non-threatening enabling spaces, however, has potential; it can widen and add to other school- and community-based efforts without necessarily displacing them and becoming a substitute for them.

If ICTs are not considered to be only mechanisms but rather forums for influencing and subverting hegemonic masculinities, or even as a dispensing tool, they are likely to be more useful. One of the more powerful ways in which ICTs have been

Technological interventions may play a limited role in adding to multiple pedagogical approaches and methods that have already emerged as important tools to enable boys' engagement in the classroom.

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shaping human behaviour is not only by informing social relations and structures (by allowing students to reimagine alternative forms of social relationships and structures) but also by opening up spaces to recreate them. It is this potential that

can be harnessed through the use of technology. A mere extension of existing services will not only recreate the existing pedagogical structure but also reinforce them. Thus, it is important to remember that the issue of boys' underachievement must be framed within the larger discourse of equality and rights, and not merely in terms of educational performance. Comprehensive responses are possible only when the trends and inter-linkages are understood well and policies are directed at creating greater space for enabling every child's full potential.

It is important to remember that the issue of boys' underachievement must be framed within the larger discourse of equality and rights, and not merely in terms of educational performance.

Short-term challenges and long-term goals

It is also important that countries distinguish between short-term challenges and long-term goals. For example, identifying those boys who are at risk of dropping out of school for reasons of underperformance and responding to issues that could immediately help them regain confidence and continue schooling can be a short-term goal, while making all schools gender responsive and enabling all boys and girls to perform better in a way that does not push any student to be at risk can be a long-term goal. The literature suggests that boys from certain socio-economic and family backgrounds are more vulnerable to underperformance and eventually at risk of leaving school too soon. While it is important, then, to build capacities and have in place measures that help identify those who are consistently underperforming, it is also important that such students are not labelled and so further marginalised. The real need now is to work towards long-term goals with provisions for identification of and action on short-term challenges within that framework. A disproportionate focus on the at-risk aspect alone can prevent a country from adopting long-term strategies.

Appendix: Case Studies of Nine Commonwealth Countries

INTRODUCTION

As part of the preparation for this report, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) invited the member countries to send in any information pertaining to the problem of boys' underperformance in their respective countries. A total of nine countries responded with data, studies or reports: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Rwanda and Zambia. We have used this information, along with ancillary data and information from the public domain, such as the education statistics available from the World Bank and UNESCO, in this report.

While each country supplied different information, it is all incorporated into an overall analysis comprising a brief history of the country, a limited demographic profile and an educational profile. The educational profile of the country, if not augmented by the data provided by each country, will include statistics such as the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in primary and secondary levels of education, Gender Parity Index (GPI) ranking and completion rates for primary and secondary educational levels of education. It must be noted that some of the case studies engage with the question of male underperformance more than others, and this is primarily due to the availability (or lack thereof) of data and reports specific to these countries. The nine case studies are presented in alphabetical order.

DEFINITIONS

The NER at the primary and secondary levels of education is calculated by assessing the percentage of students in the theoretical age group enrolled in the primary and secondary levels against the total population belonging to that age group. The theoretical maximum value for the NER is 100 per cent.

The GPI is calculated as the ratio of the female Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for both primary- and secondary-level education to the male GER for both primary- and secondary-level education. A GPI value of 1 indicates that there are no

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disparities between girls and boys with regards to primary and secondary enrolment rates. A value of less than 1 implies a disparity that favours boys and a value of more than 1 implies a disparity that favours girls.

The Primary Completion Rate (PCR) is calculated as a percentage of the total number of students enrolled in the last grade of the primary education levels against the total male population belonging to that theoretical age group. Essentially, it is the number of new entrants in the last grade of the primary education divided by the projected population eligible at the entrance age for the last grade of primary education. The ratio can be more than 100 because of over-aged or under-aged students entering the primary school.

The transition rate from primary to lower secondary general education is the number of students who are admitted to the first grade of lower secondary education as calculated against the number of students who were enrolled in the last grade of primary education. High transition rates indicate a high level of access from one level of education to the next, and lower levels imply problems in the bridging between continuous cycles of education.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Brief history

The country of Antigua and Barbuda, nestled between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, comprises two main islands. While they are also composed of smaller islands (such as Great Bird, Guinea and York Islands), the two islands hold most of the country's population. The capital of the twin islands is St. Johns, in Antigua. The Siboney are considered to be the first peoples to inhabit these islands, but when Columbus arrived on these islands in 1493, the inhabitants were primarily Arawak Indians. Disease, malnutrition and slavery eliminated most of the native population in successive colonising ventures by the Spanish, French and English. The English colonised Antigua in 1632 and Barbuda in 1684, and primarily used the native populations to work in sugar plantations. While there were constant skirmishes with the French, the British ruled the country until 1981, when it became independent. It also became a member of the Commonwealth in 1981.

Demographic profile

According to estimates in 2011, the population of the islands is about 87% Black, 5% mixed and the rest either White or Hispanic. While the official language is

English, the inhabitants also use Antiguan creole and other native languages. The population, as per 2015 estimates, is about 92,000 (CIA, 2016).

Education profile

Educational institutions in Antigua and Barbuda are divided into pre-primary, primary and secondary divisions, in both the public and private sectors. The system of education is primarily based on the British education system and is compulsory and free for children between the ages of five and 16. As with the British system, the preschool children receive some care and early developmental education in the kindergarten facilities. Primary education lasts for six years, and goes from Grades 1 to 6, when students then sit the common entrance test to mark their transition from primary to secondary school.¹ Secondary education lasts for five years — three years of lower secondary, followed by two years of upper secondary education. At the end of these five years, students sit the Caribbean Examinations Council Exams (CXC), which are similar in structure to the English O-level examinations. Students are then eligible to go to university or any other form of technical or tertiary education.

There are several universities, such as the American University of Antigua, the University of West Indies Open Campus and the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Technology. While administrative facilities such as school buildings are available in all the islands for education, there are concerns about overcrowding. Natural events such as hurricanes also pose a threat to student attendance and institutional structures.

Educational indicators

In terms of overall GER, Antigua and Barbuda has seen decreasing levels of enrolment rates. In 2007, the GER was around 102.9% for female students and 105.7% for male students, but dipped to 93.3% and 100.9% in 2014, according to data obtained from the World Bank. Additionally, the GER for secondary-level education also appears to have fallen for male students (105% to 101.8%) and risen slightly for female students (100.5% to 102.8%) between 2007 and 2014.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) (%)

INDICATOR	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2014
GER, PRIMARY, BOTH SEXES	104.3	104.7	102.8	103.4	100.7	97.9	97.1
GER, PRIMARY, FEMALE	102.9	102.5	100.6	98.8	96.5	94.5	93.3
GER, PRIMARY, MALE	105.7	107.0	104.9	107.9	104.9	101.3	100.9
GER, SECONDARY, BOTH SEXES	102.7	110.9	108.5	106.2	106.1	105.4	102.3
GER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	100.5	107.3	108.1	106.7	105.7	112.9	102.8
GER, SECONDARY, MALE	105.0	114.7	109.0	105.7	106.6	97.9	101.8

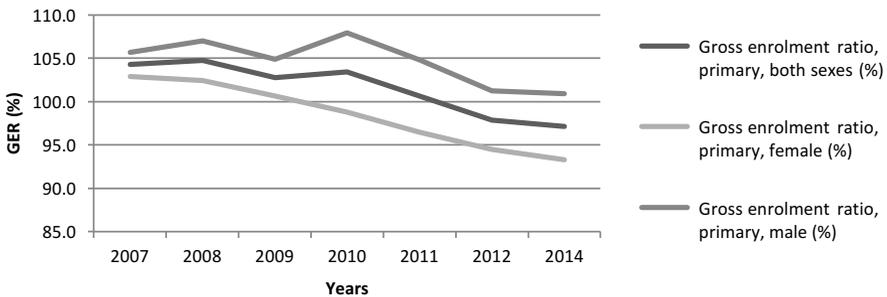
Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/antigua-and-barbuda>

1 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Antigua_and_Barbuda

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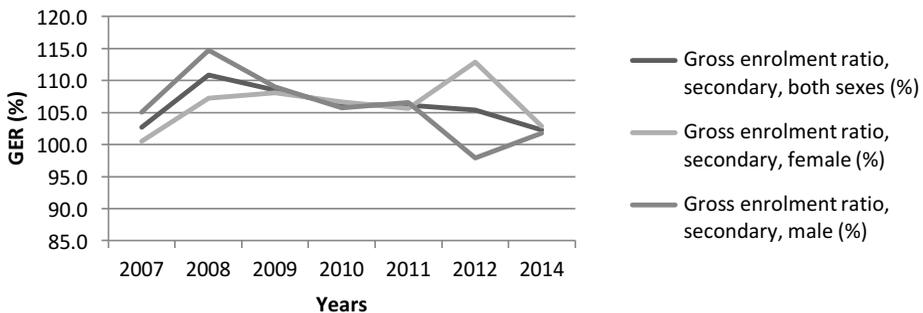
The reasons for these dips are not clear, especially given the steady increase in the GER in the preceding years. When we examine the secondary GER, we see that the secondary GER for the period was at its highest for girls (112.9%) and its lowest for boys (97.9%) in 2012, but these trends tend to converge in 2014, with 102.8% for girls and 101.8% for boys. A more in-depth investigation into the contextual factors responsible for these trends would provide further insight into these phenomena.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: TRENDS IN PRIMARY GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/antigua-and-barbuda>

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: TRENDS IN SECONDARY GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/antigua-and-barbuda>

Furthermore, the number of children who are out of school was almost double in 2014 what it was in 2007, especially for girls. The number of boys dropping out, for example, increased from 435 to 684 boys in only seven years.

This is also corroborated by the primary completion rates for girls, which declined from 101.5% in 2008 to 92.7% in 2014. However, boys' primary completion rates increased from 103.5% to 111.8% in the same period.

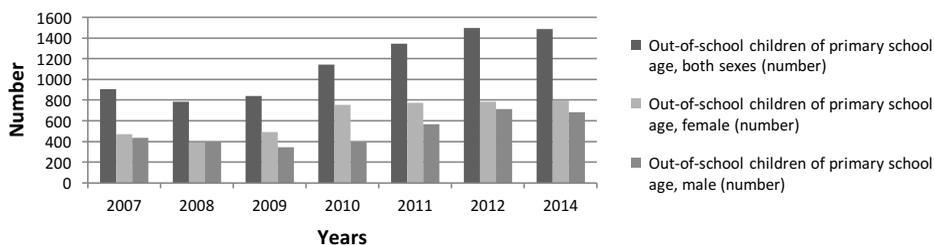
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE (NUMBER)

INDICATOR	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2014
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE, BOTH SEXES	907	786	838	1145	1343	1498	1484
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE, FEMALE	472	392	494	754	773	786	800
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE, MALE	435	394	344	391	570	712	684

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/antigua-and-barbuda>

While Antigua and Barbuda have used institutional mechanisms such as a free and compulsory system for children aged five to 16 and devote about 2.6% of the GDP to education, children are still dropping out (CIA, 2016). The completion rates for the entire country dropped to 67.3% in secondary school, 24.2% at pre-university level and 9% at university level. Anecdotal evidence suggests that facilities and programmes that encourage students to continue through to university will also enable students to participate in schooling. So, there are some failures early in schooling that are creating these downward trends.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/antigua-and-barbuda>

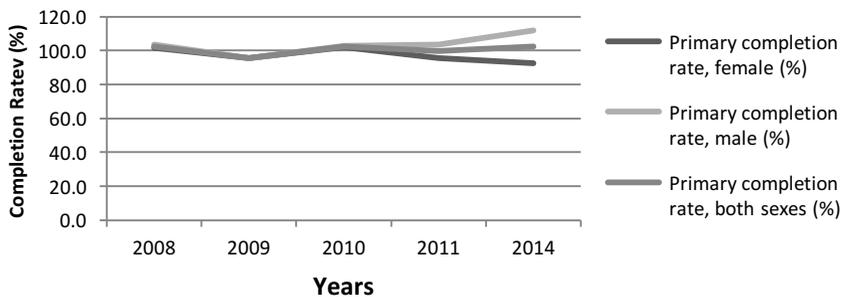
ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2008	2009	2010	2011	2014
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	101.5	95.6	101.9	95.8	92.7
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	103.5	95.5	102.9	103.6	111.8
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	102.5	95.5	102.4	99.7	102.3

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/antigua-and-barbuda>

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ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE (%)



A significant contributor to the problem appears to be poverty. For example, according to the country's poverty reports, the areas with the worst-performing schools (in terms of the number of dropouts) are also the areas where there is a concentration of the poorest households (Hillhouse, 2010). This is true whether students are going to private or public schools. However, in the absence of data that take into consideration the backgrounds and demographics of these dropouts, it is not easy to understand the reason for these trends. The same study also suggests that social expectations and pressures are one of the reasons for the downward trends in education and for the gaps in male and female performance (Hillhouse, 2010). While girls were often asked to stay in the house to complete their school work, boys were allowed to go out to play and not monitored with respect to their school work. This appears to have resulted in the thinning-out of the male population in the transition between the primary and secondary years. So, the demographic profile of the classroom changes dramatically at the junior secondary and secondary levels. The former is dominated by boys, and the latter by girls. In addition, girls' results tend to be higher and boys tend to repeat school years more frequently than girls.

Even in the information provided by Antigua and Barbuda, it was acknowledged that enrolment rates for girls in junior secondary schools are fairly low (31.8% compared to 68.2% for boys in 2011). According to the assessments made by Antigua and Barbuda, girls also had higher dropout rates than boys. The argument is that while female students far exceed male students in enrolment in tertiary-level education, social barriers such as teenage pregnancy bar women from fully participating in education. The information provided by the country also acknowledges that poverty plays a major role in boys' underperforming.

The problem of boys' underperformance has been widely recognised within the government, and even non-government institutions such as the St. John's Seventh Day Adventist Church are creating independent programmes to encourage male participation in schools. One of these programmes, Black Boys Can – Empowerment of

Black Boys in the Community, was inaugurated by Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer to encourage boys to move back into schools and to try to combat the low expectations that often mark boys' underperformance (High Commission Report, 2011). At the same time, the country acknowledges that while girls fare better in educational attainment at the tertiary level, graduating from university or any other form of higher education has not improved conditions in general for women, and there has been no shift in women's access to work, income or leadership positions alongside the increase in educational attainment.

THE BAHAMAS

Brief history

The Bahamas is an archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean, consisting of 700 islands and 2,400 cays. The original inhabitants were Arawak Indians, specifically Lucayan Indians. After Columbus arrived in 1492, the native populations were either systematically wiped out or shipped to slavery by the Spanish to such a degree that when the British inhabited these islands in 1648, the islands were sparsely populated. It became an official British colony after the British routed piracy from the islands and established important ports in the islands. Their proximity to the United States also brought prosperity to the islands, as they hosted important ports for supply lines to and from the United States. Cotton plantations were also established, which resulted in the population dramatically shifting towards African slaves and Seminoles. Independence from Britain was obtained in 1973, and The Bahamas joined the Commonwealth and the United Nations in the same year. It is considered to be one of the richest countries in the Americas, primarily because of its tourism and finance industries.

Demographic profile

The capital of The Bahamas is Nassau, on the island of New Providence. Its population of approximately 300,000 is distributed mostly across the three main islands of New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco. The population is primarily Black (90%), with White (4%) and a variety of other ethnic groups accounting for the rest of the population. Because it was largely a British colony, the official language is English. Most of the population practise Christianity, with 70% being of the Protestant faith and about 12% Roman Catholic.

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Educational profile

Education in The Bahamas comes under the purview of the Ministry of Education. Education is free for all residents between the ages of five and 16, since the passing of the amended Education Act in 1996. The education system follows the 6-3-3 format. The first six years, primary education, cater to students from the age of five to 11. The next six years, secondary education, are divided between junior high (11 to 14) and senior high (14 to 17). While the enrolment rates for secondary education have not been high, they have been improving.

About 75% of primary and secondary students are in the public education system; the other 25% attend private schools. Government funding, based on various criteria, is also provided for many students in both private and public schools. At the preschool level, most of the educational institutions are dominated by private and/or religious organisations. In addition, several foreign-based institutions have established satellite campuses that cater to a number of adults (Fielding & Gibson, 2005). Vocational training and technical education is provided by the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), and the College of the Bahamas also provides university-level education.

Testing in the Bahamas takes the form of Grade Level Assessment Tests (GLAT) in Grades 3 and 5, the Bahamas Junior Certification (BJC) in Grade 9 and the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) in Grade 12, at which point students typically move onto university or technical and vocational training. Students who enter the schooling system at age five are expected and encouraged to spend at least 12 years in school.

Educational indicators

The GER for primary education for girls improved dramatically within a decade — from 94.3% in 2002 to 108% in 2010. Similarly, the GER for primary education for boys improved from 94.6% in 2002 to 106.9% in 2010. The secondary education GER for girls increased to 95.1% in 2010 from 93.4% in 2002, and increased very minimally for boys to 90.2% in 2010 from 89.8% in 2002.

THE BAHAMAS: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) (2002–2010) (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
GER, PRIMARY, FEMALE	94.3	103.1	108.4	107.4	110.7	111.0	108.8	108.9
GER, PRIMARY, MALE	94.6	104.4	109.9	108.3	111.7	111.5	105.9	106.9
GER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	93.4	85.9	89.1	91.7	96.4	95.2	94.0	95.1
GER, SECONDARY, MALE	89.8	86.8	89.5	91.5	93.8	93.7	92.0	90.2

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/bahamas>

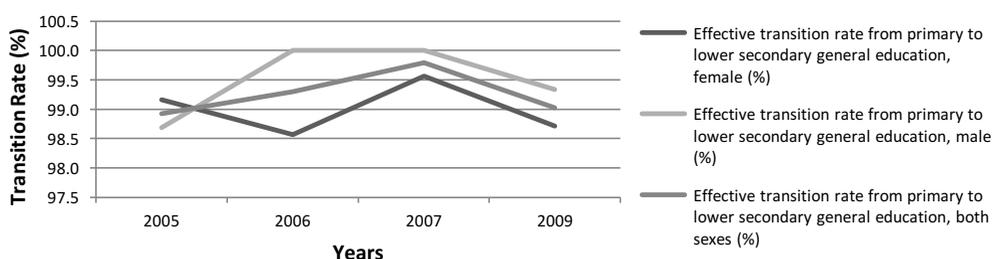
Thus, while the primary GER for boys is very similar to that for girls in 2002, a disadvantage for boys is noticeable at the secondary level. This difference is also evident in 2010.

THE BAHAMAS: TRENDS IN EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2005	2006	2007	2009
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, FEMALE	99.2	98.6	99.6	98.7
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, MALE	98.7	100.0	100.0	99.3
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, BOTH	98.9	99.3	99.8	99.0

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/bahamas>

THE BAHAMAS: TRENDS IN EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/bahamas>

However, the difference is not necessarily reflected in the transition rates from primary to lower secondary education, where there is only a marginal difference between girls (98.7%) and boys (99.3%). What is troubling in this context is that we see a downward trend in transition rates from 2005 to 2009, which indicates that more than gender is influencing them.

THE BAHAMAS: COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	1999	2005	2010
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	84.3	107.5	94.8
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	80.3	105.9	91.5
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	82.3	106.7	93.1
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	80.6	92.2	97.1
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	81.5	93.2	96.2
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	81.1	92.7	96.7

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/bahamas>

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When we examine the completion rates across the country, we find that this downward trend continues. For example, primary education completion rates between 2005 and 2010 declined from 107.5% to 94.8% for female students and from 105.9% to 91.5% for male students. However, for lower secondary education, the rates increased in this period from 93.2% to 96.2% for boys and from 92.2% to 97.1% for girls. Without understanding the contextual information that can explain these trends, it is difficult to analyse whether boys' underperformance is a significant problem in The Bahamas, and only research studies that examine the structural nature of the problem can explain these educational trends in the country.

BELIZE

Brief history

Belize is located on the eastern coast of Central America, and is bordered on the north by Mexico and on the south and west by Guatemala. It was one of the sites of the Mayan Empire, but started to decline when the Spanish invaded in the 16th century. While the Spanish explored and claimed the land, they did not settle it because of a lack of readily available resources (such as gold). It was, for a long time, used as a base for pirates. The British tried to settle the country in the early 19th century after many encounters with the Spanish, and established it as a colony that they called British Honduras in 1862. They primarily used slave labour in the forest, mainly for timber and other forest products.

Britain gave British Honduras the right to self-govern in 1964, and in 1973, the name was changed to Belize. The road to independence was not easy, as Guatemala claimed Belize was part of its territory. Even after winning independence from Britain in 1981, Belize struggled to establish its sovereignty because of the territorial disputes with Guatemala, and border disputes continue to mar the relationship between these two nations.

Demographic profile

Belize is the only country in Central America where English is recognised as the official language. The other languages spoken are Spanish, Belizean Creole, Maya, German and Garifuna. The population of about 350,000 is 53% Mestizo, 26% Creole and 11% Maya, with the rest of the population being Garifuna, East Indian, White and Asian. A majority of the population is Christian, with 40% Roman Catholic and 31% Protestant of various denominations. About 10% of the population, in total, are Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon, Muslim or Rastafarian. The country's roughly 15% immigrant population comes from neighbouring countries

APPENDIX: CASE STUDIES OF NINE COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES

such as Guatemala, Salvador and Honduras. Out-migration affects the population composition significantly, with most Belizeans going to Canada, Mexico and other English-speaking Caribbean countries.

Educational profile

According to the CIA World Factbook (2016), Belize spent about 6.6% of its GDP on education in 2010. The average school leaving age is 13 for boys and 14 for girls (in 2013). Part of the reason for this is that around 40% of the children in Belize are in the labour force (as per 2001 estimates).

The education system is divided into three categories: pre-primary, primary and secondary. Pre-primary is mainly preschool community ventures for children aged between three and five. Primary education is an eight-year programme that is compulsory for all children between the ages of five and 14 (UNESCO-IBE, 2006c). At the age of 14, students typically sit a national examination that determines their entry into the secondary school. Secondary education comprises two cycles, one of four years and the other two. At the end of the first four years, the students can take the GCE O-levels of the English system, or the Caribbean Examinations Council Certificate. At the end of the following two years, they take the GCE Advanced Council Certificate “A” examinations, after which they can continue their education in the University College of Belize or the American University of the Caribbean (UNESCO-IBE, 2006c).

According to national estimates made in 2014, Belize has about 89,000 students in the educational system (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014). More than half of these are enrolled in primary education (60%). About 2% of the youth in this country have had no formal education and 11% have not completed primary education (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014).

Educational indicators

BELIZE: NET ENROLMENT RATE (NER) (2001-2014) (%)

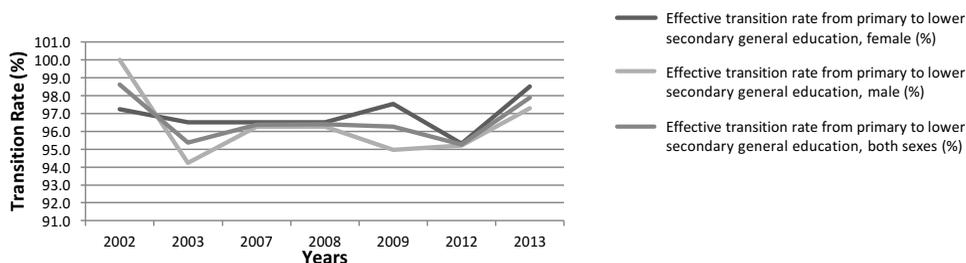
INDICATOR	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
NER, PRIMARY, BOTH SEXES	92.0	92.1	93.3	93.0	93.7	93.4	93.8	94.9	95.4	95.2	96.7	95.8	96.5
NER, PRIMARY, FEMALE	91.6	92.4	93.5	92.6	93.7	93.7	93.2	94.5	95.1	94.0	96.4	95.0	95.5
NER, PRIMARY, MALE	92.4	91.9	93.1	93.4	93.6	93.1	94.4	95.3	95.7	96.3	97.0	96.6	97.6
NER, SECONDARY, BOTH SEXES	60.2	68.1	N/A	65.1	64.8	64.2	63.4	63.7	63.7	65.4	67.5	69.2	N/A
NER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	61.9	69.3	N/A	66.4	67.0	66.5	66.1	66.3	66.3	67.6	68.8	71.1	N/A
NER, SECONDARY, MALE	58.4	66.8	N/A	63.8	62.6	62.0	60.8	61.2	61.1	63.2	66.2	67.3	N/A

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/belize>

Boys' UNDERPERFORMANCE

The NERs have been improving consistently for both boys and girls in primary and secondary education. The NER for primary education increased from 92% in 2001 to 96.5% in 2014, and the NER for secondary education improved from 60% in 2001 to 69.2% in 2013.

BELIZE: TRENDS IN TRANSITION RATES FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/belize>

BELIZE: TRANSITION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2003	2007	2008	2009	2012	2013
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, FEMALE	97.3	96.5	96.5	96.5	97.6	95.3	98.5
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, MALE	100.0	94.2	96.3	96.3	95.0	95.2	97.3
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, BOTH SEXES	98.6	95.4	96.4	96.4	96.3	95.3	97.9

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/belize>

Despite these improvements, there is still much work to be done, especially with respect to boys' enrolment. In 2013, the enrolment rate was 71.1% for girls and 67.3% for boys. While the primary gross enrolment ratio was favourable for boys (114% to 109%) in 2014, the secondary gross enrolment rate in 2013 was not (78.5% to 81.8%).

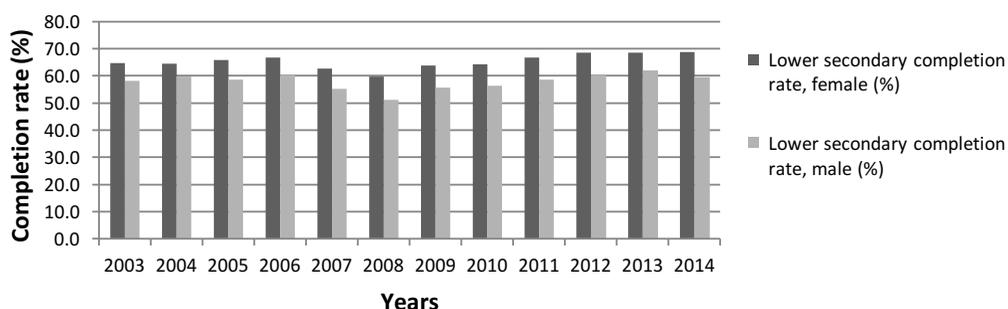
BELIZE: COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	64.7	64.5	65.8	66.8	62.7	59.7	63.8	64.3	66.8	68.5	68.5	68.7
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	58.1	59.7	58.6	60.1	55.2	51.1	55.7	56.3	58.6	60.1	62.1	59.6

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/belize>

The transition rates have been fairly consistent for both boys and girls, albeit with slight variations. According to the World Bank, the lower secondary completion rate was lower for boys than for girls (59.6% vs 68.7%) in 2014, but it has been consistently lower according to figures dating back to 2003 (58.1% vs 64.7%).

BELIZE: LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE (2003-2014)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/belize>

Even according to the most recent statistics shared by Belize, the NER for primary education in the period 2014–15 was higher for boys (87.8%) than for girls (84.8%), but is reversed at the secondary level (48.5% for boys and 55.7% for girls). There appears to be a systematic drop in the enrolment levels for both boys and girls, which merits further investigation.

GRENADA

Brief history

Grenada is an island country that consists of the island of Grenada and six smaller islands in the Caribbean Sea. Most of the population lives on the main island of Grenada, which hosts the majority of the large towns, including the capital, St. George's. Grenada was originally inhabited by Arawak Indians, and then by the Carib Indians. Columbus encountered these islands in his third voyage, although neither he nor the Spanish made any attempts to colonise it. The French colonised it (with some resistance from the Carib Indians) in the early 1600s and called it La Grenade. They established sugarcane and indigo farms, and imported large numbers of African slaves to cultivate these cash crops.

The British took over in 1762, and skirmishes with the French over governing of the country continued for several years. After a pro-French movement in the

Boys' UNDERPERFORMANCE

colonies took hold, the country was granted full autonomy in 1967 and was granted independence in 1974. The islands were subsequently taken over by a military council and the United States invaded in 1983, ostensibly to restore democracy. Since then, parliamentary democracy has been functioning in the islands.

Demographic profile

The population of Grenada is approximately 110,000, according to July 2015 estimates (CIA, 2016). Most of the population identifies as Black (89.4%), with some mixed race (8.2%) and East Indian (1.6%) populations also being present, according to the 2001 census. As in other Commonwealth countries, English is the official language, with French patois as a secondary language. The main religion is Christianity, with 44.6% being Roman Catholic and 43.5% Protestant.

Educational profile

The educational system in Grenada is built along similar lines to those of the British educational system and is primarily divided into preschool, primary and secondary education. The state provides free and compulsory education for all students aged five to 16. Preschool education is aimed at children who are yet to enter the formal educational system and are typically aged three to five. From age five onwards, primary schooling begins (Grades 1 to 6). At the end of Grade 6, the students sit a state-wide entrance examination that will place them in secondary-level education. Secondary education is split into two cycles, Grades 7–9 and Grades 10–11. At the end of Grade 11, students sit the Caribbean Secondary Education Certification, which they need to be eligible for university. Those who do not pass the examination are awarded a School Leaving Certificate instead.

Most of the schools use English for teaching, although high school students also learn French and Spanish. There are a number of technical and vocational training centres and tertiary institutions.

Educational indicators

The primary GER in Grenada in 2013 was 103% (not shown here). Twenty years before, the GER for the pre-primary education was about 48.2%, which rose to 81% in ten years by 2004 (World Bank, 2013). According to UIS-UNESCO,² the primary GER and NER for Grenada were 80% and 74% respectively in 2007. The transition rate from primary to lower secondary education in Grenada was 84.0% for boys and 87.7% for girls in 2008, indicating a slight advantage for the girls.

² See <http://uis.unesco.org/country/GD>

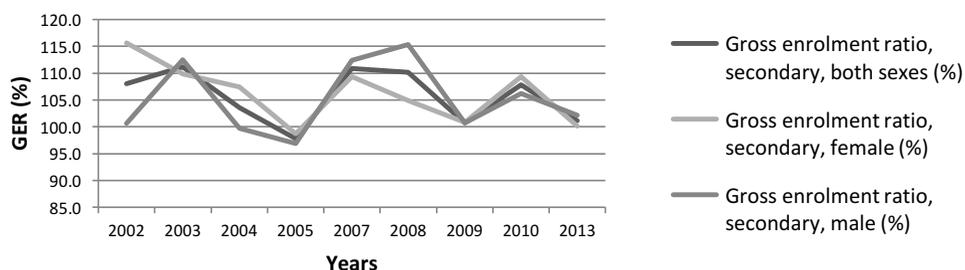
GRENADA: SECONDARY GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013
GER, SECONDARY, BOTH SEXES	108.1	111.2	103.5	97.8	110.9	110.1	100.8	107.8	101.1
GER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	115.6	109.9	107.4	98.7	109.3	104.8	100.8	109.4	100.1
GER, SECONDARY, MALE	100.7	112.5	99.8	96.9	112.4	115.4	100.7	106.2	102.1

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/grenada>

The GER patterns for secondary education show very varied trends that cannot be easily explained without contextual information about the socio-economic and cultural changes happening in Grenada at the time. For example, the GER for boys decreased to 96.9% in 2005, increased to 115.4% in 2008 and then decreased to 102.1% in 2013. The patterns for girls were found to be similar.

GRENADA: SECONDARY GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/grenada>

The completion rates also reflect these peaks and troughs. The secondary completion rate for male students increased from 94.8% in 2002, peaked at 129% in 2009 and then dropped back to 97.7% in 2013. Similarly, for girls, the completion rates for secondary school increased from 87.9% to 113% and then became 91.2% in 2013. Clearly, there were some anomalies between 2002 and 2009 that could explain the peak in completion rates, but unfortunately, without any demographic or social information surrounding this event, and with the lack of publicly accessible reports on the country, it is difficult to assess the nature or the reasons for these trends.

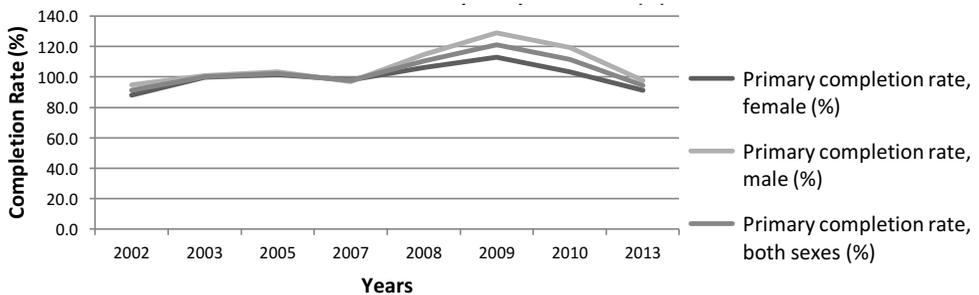
GRENADA: PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2003	2005	2007	2008	2009	2010	2013
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	87.9	99.8	101.5	98.0	106.0	113.0	103.2	91.2
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	94.8	100.8	103.3	97.1	114.8	129.0	119.4	97.7
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	91.4	100.3	102.4	97.6	110.5	121.1	111.5	94.5

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/grenada>

Boys' UNDERPERFORMANCE

GRENADA: PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/grenada>

JAMAICA

Brief history

Jamaica is an island country located in the Caribbean Sea. It was originally inhabited by the Arawak and Taino Indians, but these populations were systematically decimated following the arrival of Columbus in 1494. The English took over the island in 1655, and created a sugar-based industry, which also meant a heavy import of African slaves and indentured labour from China and India, changing the demographic profile of the island drastically. Emancipation for slaves happened in 1838, and a century later, the country was joined with the other British Caribbean colonies to form the Federation of the West Indies. Jamaica withdrew from this Federation after it gained independence in 1962, but joined the Commonwealth that year.

Demographic profile

The capital of Jamaica is Kingston, one of the largest cities in Jamaica, with a population of about 900,000 people. Jamaica, as a whole, has about 2,950,000 individuals distributed throughout its cities and towns. English is the official language. While the primary population is composed of people from African descent, Jamaica has significant White, Chinese, East Indian and mixed-race minority populations. The main religion appears to be Christianity, with about 64.8% of the population claiming to be of Protestant denomination. Only a minority of individuals are Roman Catholic (2.2%), Jehovah's Witness (1.9%) or Rastafarian (1.1%).

Educational profile

Formal education in Jamaica is primarily undertaken by the government, although some churches and private trusts also provide education in collaboration with the government. The education system is divided into four levels: early childhood education, primary education, secondary education and tertiary or higher education.

Early childhood education, for children aged between three and five, is not compulsory. Government-funded infant schools or schools with infant departments are usually responsible for this level of education.

Primary education is offered by both private and government institutions, although the sector is dominated by government schools. It serves children from the age of six to 11, and consists of Grades 1 to 6. At the end of this, students sit the Grade Six Achievement Examination (GSAT), administered by the Ministry of Education, to ensure that the students can be placed in secondary school. Secondary schooling is for students aged 12 to 16 or 18 years, and goes from Grades 7 to 11 in most schools, and is divided into two cycles. The first cycle is from Grades 7 to 9 and the second cycle is from Grades 10 to 11. At the end of secondary schooling, students typically sit the Caribbean Secondary Education Certification (CSEC), which is administered by the Caribbean Examination Councils and examines knowledge of different subjects. Some schools offer a continuing education programme comprising a career advancement or pre-university programme (Grades 12 and 13), after which they can enter either a tertiary or higher education institution after sitting the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination.

Advanced education in the form of postsecondary and tertiary-level education is offered by various training colleges, community college, the Vocational Training Development Institute, the University of the West Indies and the University of Technology, all of which are authorised to confer diplomas and associate degrees.

Jamaican expenditure on education is about 6% of the GDP as per 2014 estimates (CIA, 2016). Approximately 88% of the population is literate, with literacy rates higher among women (93.1%) than men (84%), as per 2015 estimates (CIA, 2016).

Educational indicators

In Jamaica, 1% of children of primary school age are not in school. About 4% of the girls drop out of secondary schooling, as compared to 6% of boys (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014). While the NER for Jamaica is not reflected in the World Bank data, it is provided on the Ministry of Education's website. According to this information, the NERs for both girls and boys show slight fluctuations over the

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years from 2004 to 2013, but overall remain steady. In 2013, the NER for boys was 94% and for girls was 93.3%. The secondary NERs dropped for both girls (81.7% in 2004 to 73.5% in 2014) and boys (79.4% in 2004 to 69.7% in 2014) after 2004 (World Bank, 2015).

JAMAICA: NET ENROLMENT RATE (NER) (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2011	2013	2014
NER, PRIMARY, BOTH SEXES	91.9	90.6	92.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
NER, PRIMARY, FEMALE	92.2	91.1	92.9	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
NER, PRIMARY, MALE	91.5	90.1	92.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
NER, SECONDARY, BOTH SEXES	76.7	76.7	81.7	81.4	77.7	73.8	73.5
NER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	78.2	78.9	84.2	84.6	80.7	77.7	77.5
NER, SECONDARY, MALE	75.2	74.6	79.4	78.5	74.8	70.0	69.7

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/jamaica>

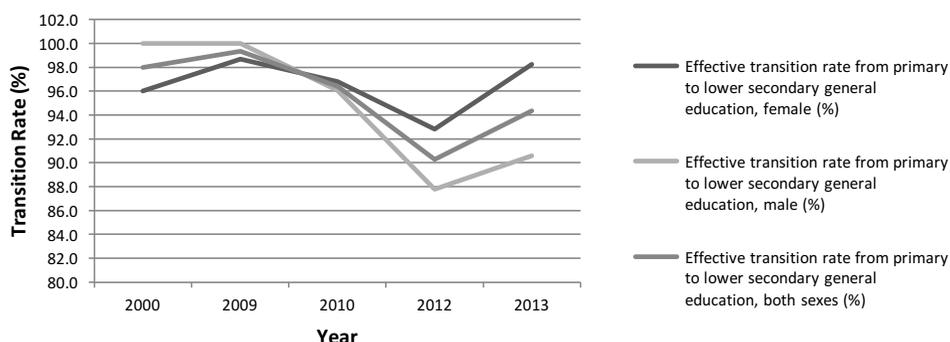
The drop in NER for both girls and boys, and the slightly higher drop for boys, is typical of other nations in this region. When we examine the transition rates for boys, we find that they dropped from 100% to 87.8% from 2000 to 2013, but picked up again, to 90.6%, in 2013. The same patterns are reflected for girls, moving from 96% in 2000 to 92.8% in 2012, and increasing to 98.3% in 2013.

JAMAICA: EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2000	2009	2010	2012	2013
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, FEMALE	96.0	98.7	96.8	92.8	98.3
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, MALE	100.0	100.0	96.0	87.8	90.6
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, BOTH SEXES	98.0	99.3	96.4	90.3	94.4

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/jamaica>

JAMAICA: TRANSITION RATES FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/jamaica>

The completion rates also reflected these patterns. They increased for both boys (91.4% to 101.1%) and girls (95.4% to 100.2%) from 2002 to 2010, but then dipped back to 83.8% (for boys) and 89.0% (for girls) in 2014.

JAMAICA: COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2010	2014
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	95.4	100.2	89.0
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	91.4	101.1	83.8
LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	93.4	100.7	86.3

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/jamaica>

Other research reports that have focussed on Jamaica have indicated that girls were outperforming boys in the national examinations, including literacy and numeracy tests (Campbell, 2013). The predominant notions of masculinity have been identified as one of the reasons for these persistent patterns. In what is considered a homophobic and transphobic socio-cultural environment, boys often view education as feminine, and often stay away from it. This seems to be reflected in the continual dismal performance of boys in the English language exams (Campbell, 2013). Other factors indicate that gender identity also plays an important role (USAID, 2011). Studies done in Jamaica (as cited by USAID, 2011) indicate that there has been a systematic gendering of educational activities that creates a masculine gender identity that is often antithetical to academic achievement within the school system. As is emphasised in the USAID report, it must be stated that not all boys perform consistently worse than girls, so the question of “which boys” is still relevant in the case of Jamaica (USAID, 2011).

KENYA

Brief history

Kenya, otherwise referred to as the Republic of Kenya, borders five other African nations: Tanzania, Uganda, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. The country has been occupied at various times by both Germany and Britain, in the form of protectorates and the British East Africa Company. In 1890, Germany ceded the protectorate to Britain and the British built the Kenya-Uganda railway, despite considerable resistance from native Africans. The railway brought with it indentured labour from India, and their descendants have contributed to the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural contemporary landscape in Kenya. In 1920, the British formally recognised the area as a colony and called it Kenya after its highest mountain. The country was settled into creating industries for Britain with coffee and tea plantations in the early

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20th century. By the 1930s, Kenya was seeing an increase in White settlers, who started gaining prominence in Kenyan society. Kenya gained independence from the British Empire as well as the Sultan of Zanzibar in 1963, and both the Colony of Kenya and the Protectorate of Kenya came together to form a republic in 1964.

Demographic profile

The population of Kenya has been estimated at about 45 million and is distributed along very diverse ethnic groups, including the Kikuyu (22%), Luhya (14%), Luo (13%), Kalenjin (12%), Kamba (11%) and Kisii (6%). Of the remainder, non-African populations — including groups of Asian, Arab and European descent — account for about 1%. Kenya recognises two official languages — English and Kiswahili — although many tribal and indigenous languages are spoken in different parts of the country. A majority of the population is Christian (83%), out of which 47.7% are Protestant and 23.4% are Roman Catholic. Muslims make up about 11.2% of the population, while the rest belong to diverse native and other religions.

Educational profile

Kenya spends about 6.6% of its GDP on education. The education system consists of primary, secondary and higher education. Students begin their primary schooling around age six and stay there for eight years. The primary curriculum usually comprises Science, Mathematics, History, Crafts, Religious Studies, Geography and History. At the end of their primary schooling, the students sit the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), after which they move to secondary education. Primary school is free through public schools, but private schools tend to be more popular.

Secondary education lasts for four years and focuses on preparing students for either the job market or higher education. At the end of the four years, students sit exams for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), administered by the National Examination Council, after which they can choose to move to the technical education system (such as getting a Craft Certificate) or to higher education for a degree programme. Higher education is expensive, however, and given the limited government sponsorship of students (until recently), few can afford to go to university.

In 2003, the government instituted a directive for free primary education for all government schools, and in 2008, extended this to secondary education as well. This had a positive effect on enrolment in both primary and secondary schools, and the number of schools increased by 7,000 (Clark, 2015). Enrolment at the university also doubled between 2012 and 2014, although reasons for this have not been clearly established (Clark, 2015).

There are still issues with school dropout and non-attendance rates. For example, in 2010, about 1 million children were still out of school, and illiteracy rates among students who have undergone six years of primary schooling have increased. In 2014, one in ten eligible children were still not attending primary school and about one quarter of the eligible student population was not going on to secondary education (Clark, 2015).

The quality of the education system has affected the transition rates between primary and secondary education. For example, even after six years of school, 6% of male students were found to be illiterate and 26% were semi-literate, with these rates being much worse for female students (9% and 30%, respectively) (UNESCO, 2012). So, while primary education has spread to the entire country, provision of quality education and the continuing costs attached to education (such as books and school uniforms) prevent the proper implementation of the programme (Glennister et al., 2011).

The literacy rates for the country hover around 78% as per 2015 estimates (CIA, 2016), with men having about 81.1% and women about 74.9% literacy in the country. The school life expectancy is quite low, with 11 years being average for both men and women. This might also be due to the high numbers of children employed in the country. According to estimates made in 2000, about 26% of children in Kenya were engaged in some form of child labour (CIA, 2016).

Educational indicators

When we examine the primary NER for the last 15 years, we see small but steady improvements in the enrolment rates, moving from 62% in 2000 to about 84.9% in 2012. For girls, it increased from 62.2% in 2002 to 86.6% in 2012. For boys, the increase was slightly less, from 61.8% to 83.2%. So, while there have been slight fluctuations in the middle years, the steady increase is a positive sign for the future.

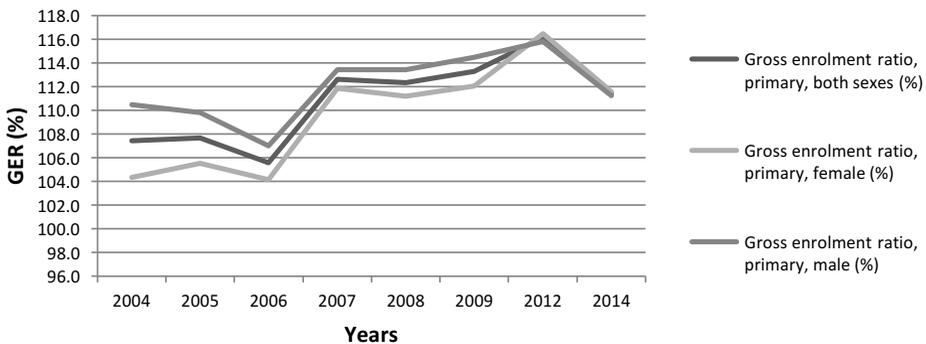
KENYA: NET ENROLMENT RATE (NER) (%)

INDICATOR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2012
NER, PRIMARY, BOTH SEXES	62.0	74.5	73.8	75.4	75.3	86.3	82.1	82.8	84.9
NER, PRIMARY, FEMALE	62.2	74.5	73.9	75.7	75.9	86.4	82.7	83.3	86.6
NER, PRIMARY, MALE	61.8	74.5	73.7	75.1	74.6	86.3	81.5	82.3	83.2
NER, SECONDARY, BOTH SEXES	34.7	36.3	39.2	41.0	42.3	44.4	49.7	50.2	56.5
NER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	34.5	35.8	39.3	41.3	41.5	42.2	48.6	48.7	55.6
NER, SECONDARY, MALE	34.8	36.9	39.0	40.8	43.0	46.7	50.8	51.8	57.4

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kenya>

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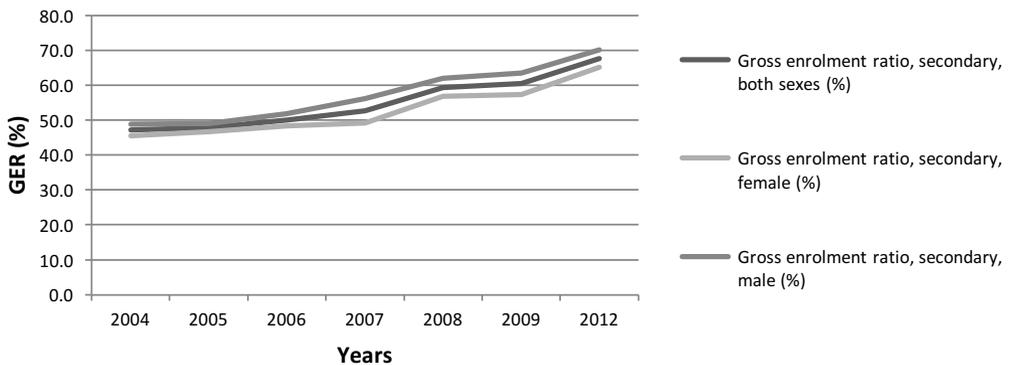
KENYA: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO, PRIMARY (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kenya>

The patterns are similar at the secondary level. The rates move from 34.5% in 2002 to 55.6% in 2012 for girls, and from 34.8% to 57.4% in 2012 for boys. These trends have been progressively improving over the years, which indicates a positive trend for the future. While there is some concern that the GERs for primary education dropped between 2012 and 2014, it appears that they are rising steadily for both male and female students in secondary education.

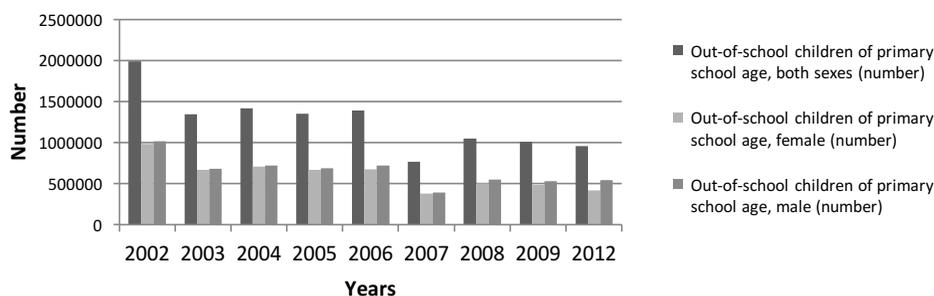
KENYA: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO, SECONDARY (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kenya>

The Gender Parity Index ranking (not shown here) has also been improving to the point where it has been approaching parity in recent years. The data for the primary completion rates (not shown here) are incomplete and unavailable for the years between 2002 and 2012. However, when we examine these two years, we see an increase in the completion rates for both male and female students. They started at 88% for girls and 90% for boys and, in 2012, they are 103% for boys and 104% for girls. The number of children out of school dropped by 50% between 2002 and 2012.

KENYA: NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/kenya>

Data provided by the government of Kenya indicate that the number of public and private primary schools increased from 6,058 in 1963 to 27,489 in 2010, and the number of secondary schools increased from 151 to 7,308 over the same period. The legislation that introduced the Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education programmes was the catalyst for the increase in these schools, the public universities and the school enrolment of students. For example, enrolment in public universities increased from 3,443 students in 1970 to 159,752 in 2010.

While enrolment rates were still quite high, the transition rates between secondary and university education have been reported as very low. Admissions have also been skewed in that female students tend to dominate the social sciences and language courses in the university, while male students dominate the engineering and computer sciences. While boys are generally not found to be particularly disadvantaged in educational achievement, there are certain areas — such as Pokot and Maasai land — where boys often do not attend schools on certain tribal occasions such as initiation ceremonies. In Asai communities, boys do not attend school because their traditional livelihoods of tending and herding cattle (seen as a significant form of wealth) tend to take priority over school attendance.

While the government of Kenya has emphasised girl-child education, there is a perception that this is coming at the expense of the boys. However, limited funding, improper guidance and inadequate infrastructure affect boys and girls equally, and boys' underperformance, as mentioned above, is also traditionally tied to livelihood options that impose different restrictions from those experienced by girls. High levels of poverty also act as a barrier, especially in unstable areas such as North Eastern Kenya. The government of Kenya acknowledges that the extent of the problem of boys' underachievement is also due to the lack of clear policies dealing specifically with the boys' educational achievements, and the lack of reliable data or statistics to guide such policies.

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Independent research indicates that while the statistics show lower enrolment rates for boys in secondary education, teachers tend to have low expectations of female students and pay more attention to boys in the classroom (Mungai, 2002, as cited in UNESCO, 2007). Additionally, girls tend to put in more work in the classroom, especially in the rural areas (Ritchie, 2004, as cited in UNESCO, 2007). Gender seems to affect reading choices and creates gender hierarchies in the classroom that tend to favour girls (Peterson, 2002, as cited in UNESCO, 2007). Social class and the acceptability of activities also make a difference with respect to boys' underperformance, as reading in general is not considered a masculine pursuit (UNESCO, 2007). So, while boys' underperformance exists as defined by the NER and GER of the nation, the school environments are not very encouraging of girls either (UNESCO, 2007). For example, teachers tend to provide more advice to girls, and girls' experiences of harassment and unequal treatment are often neglected or ignored by schools (UNESCO, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to get a sense of the contextual factors that underpin the statistical indicators.

MAURITIUS

Brief history

Mauritius is an island country located in the Indian Ocean, about 2,000 kilometres of the southeast coast of Africa, and encompasses some smaller islands such as Rodrigues and Reunion (currently a French overseas department). The capital, also the largest city, is Port Louis on the main island. The island was largely used by Arab and Malay sailors in the 10th century until it was explored by the Portuguese in the 16th century and then settled by the Dutch in 1638. In 1715, the colony changed hands to the French, who used it primarily as a strategic location in the Indian Ocean, in addition to creating a plantation economy with sugar cane and other cash crops. It was one of the focal points of the battle between the French and the British because of its important location in the trade routes between Europe and the East. The British won the fight with the French in 1810, and Mauritius subsequently became a British colony. During the Second World War, it served as an important base for convoy and intelligence operations. After a long struggle, it became an independent nation in 1968, and after some initial political turmoil, became a republic and a member of the Commonwealth in 1992. It is considered to have one of Africa's highest per capita incomes.

Demographic profile

The population of the country is approximately 1,340,000. Because of the colonising forces and the history of plantation crops, slavery and indentured labour, Indians and Africans are part of the multi-ethnic and multicultural milieu in Mauritius. The composition of the population is approximately 68% Indo-Mauritian, 27% Creole, 3% Sino-Mauritian and 2% Franco-Mauritian. While 86% speak Creole, there is still a vast variety of languages used in Mauritius, including Bhojpuri (a Hindi dialect), French and other indigenous languages. About 48% of the population identify as Hindu, 25% as Roman Catholic and 17% as Muslim.

Educational profile

The education system in Mauritius has four main stages: pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary. There is also vocational education to train students for education other than academia. Pre-primary education is for students below the age of three, and primary education caters to students from the age of five to 11. Primary school is completed in two cycles, the first from Grades 1 to 3 and the second from Grades 4 to 6. The students then sit the Certificate of Primary Education examination, which follows a grading system, for admission to secondary education. Secondary education lasts for seven years, including a two-year preparation period for the Higher School Certificate examinations. The subjects include English, French, Mathematics, Social Sciences and the Natural Sciences. The O-level and A-level examinations are usually administered by the University of Cambridge through their International Examinations programme, which prepares and corrects the examinations.

Students can then go into tertiary or higher studies. Some of the degrees are made available through distance education models. Due to the lack of higher education facilities, many students go overseas or use an open learning mode to pursue their higher education (UNESCO-IBE, 2006c).³ Mauritius spends about 3.7% of its GDP on education, as per 2013 estimates (CIA, 2016). The population appears to be highly literate (about 90.6%), although men tend to be more literate (92.9%) than women (88.5%). The school life expectancy is also very high (16 years), with men having a lower school life expectancy (15 years) than women (16 years). Mauritius has a total of about 240,000 students enrolled in educational institutions, 47% of whom are in primary education. About 2% of the children of primary school age seem to be out of schools (Education Policy and Data Center, 2014).

³ See also www.18ccem.orange.mu/education.htm and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Mauritius

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Educational indicators

The primary GER for boys and girls was 101.7% and 103.7% respectively in 2014. Given the 2004 enrolment rates of 102.1% (for boys) and 101.9% (for girls), it is safe to say that educational outcomes, at least with respect to primary school education, have been growing and continue to be very strong. When we examine the GER for secondary schooling, we see that, while in 2004 it was 85.1% for girls and 86.7% for boys, it improved dramatically to 99% for girls and 96.9% for boys. The NERs are high, but have not reached 100% for the last 14 years (not shown here). The overall NER rate, however, moved from 93% in 2000 to 96% in 2014 (not shown here).

MAURITIUS: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) (%)

INDICATOR	2004	2005	2008	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014
GER, PRIMARY, FEMALE	101.9	103.1	103.6	103.0	103.5	103.6	103.1	103.7
GER, PRIMARY, MALE	102.1	103.3	104.1	102.7	102.6	102.8	101.4	101.7
GER, SECONDARY, FEMALE	85.1	87.6	89.7	90.8	92.5	94.1	95.8	99.0
GER, SECONDARY, MALE	86.7	89.7	86.6	87.0	88.3	89.6	92.9	96.9

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritius>

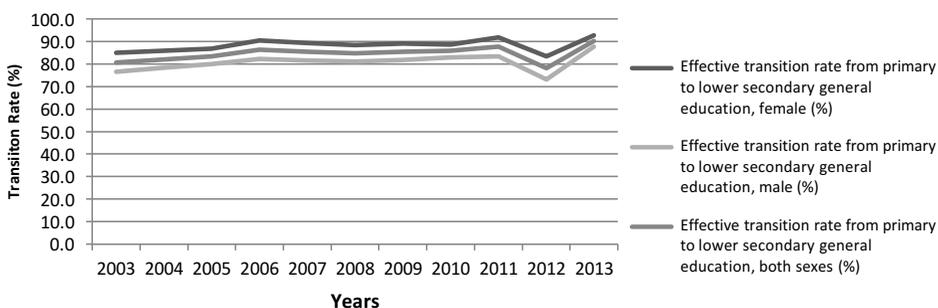
The Gender Parity Index indicates that Mauritius had almost stable parity from 2000 to 2014, moving to slightly below parity in the intervening years between 2002 and 2006 (not shown here). The country, therefore, has primarily seen almost equal participation in the enrolment ratio at the primary levels. The transition rates have steadily increased, with girls having slightly higher transition rates than boys from 2003 to 2013. For example, the transition rate for girls went from 84.9% to 92.9%, and for boys, from 76.5% to 87.7%. While there was a minor dip in 2011-2012, the trend seems to be moving back up.

MAURITIUS: EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, FEMALE	84.9	85.9	86.9	90.4	89.3	88.5	89.1	88.7	92.0	83.3	92.9
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, MALE	76.5	78.4	80.0	82.2	81.7	81.1	81.9	83.0	83.5	73.1	87.7
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, BOTH SEXES	80.7	82.1	83.5	86.3	85.5	84.7	85.5	85.8	87.7	78.1	90.2

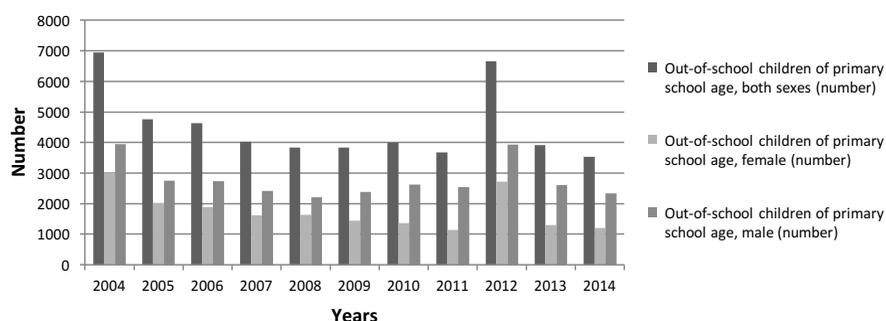
Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritius>

MAURITIUS: EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritius>

MAURITIUS: NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritius>

When we examine the number of out-of-school children in primary schooling, we see that it decreased almost by half, from 6,952 in 2004 to 3,677 in 2011 (not shown here). In 2014, it decreased to 3,539. The numbers for boys decreased at a slightly lower rate (from 3,952 in 2004 to 2,338 in 2014), as compared to girls (3,000 in 2004 to 1,201 in 2014). The completion rates are high for both boys and girls, although girls have a slight edge over boys (98.6% vs 96.4%) in 2014.

MAURITIUS: PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2004	2007	2008	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	97.6	99.0	97.4	99.5	98.8	97.2	100.0	98.6
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, MALE	94.5	96.1	96.9	99.0	97.5	93.9	95.4	96.4
PRIMARY COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	96.0	97.5	97.2	99.3	98.2	95.5	97.6	97.5

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritius>

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In addition, a national report indicates that there are persistent gender gaps in performance that favour girls (Dookun-Luchoomun, 2015). Although there are some gender gaps in favour of boys in the fields of science and technology, it appears that there is a systematic underperformance of boys in secondary education, which is not reflected in the NERs of the country. Additionally, it is not clear whether the challenges are rooted in school- or home-based issues.

RWANDA

Brief history

Rwanda is a republic located in Central and East Africa and is one of the smallest (in terms of landmass) on the African mainland. Its neighbouring countries are Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Rwanda was primarily a hunter-gatherer community, settled by Bantu peoples. From the 18th century, it was a kingdom, with primarily Tutsi kings ruling over the country. Germany started to colonise the area in 1884, while expanding its hold in German East Africa. The social structure of the country did not change dramatically under German rule, but became a more traditional colony when it became a Belgian colony during the First World War. The Belgians created cash-crop-heavy agricultural systems, public works and education systems. They also created clear divides between communities, labelling individuals by their tribal identity (Hutu, Tutsi or Naturalised) and thus creating fissures and tensions around access to power structures.

Rwanda was given independence in 1962, but ongoing violence between Hutus and Tutsis marred its future. The 1994 genocide that saw the death of an estimated 1 million Tutsis and Hutus led to international interventions for peace. Post-genocide elections were held in 1999 and legislative elections were held in 2003. Efforts to address the Hutu extremist insurgency are ongoing, and diplomatic relationships with neighbouring countries are being systematically built. Rwanda is a member of the United Nations (1962), the African Union (1963), the Francophonie (1970) and the Commonwealth (2009).

Demographic profile

Rwanda has a population of about 12 million. Kigali, the capital, is one of the largest cities and hosts more than 1 million people. The ethnicity of the population is primarily Hutu (84%), with Tutsi (15%) and Twa (1%) comprising the remainder.

Almost everyone speaks the official universal language, Kinyarwanda (93%), while others speak French, English, Swahili and other regional languages. The main religions practised are Christianity, with 49.5% being of Roman Catholic faith and 39.4% being Protestant. There is also a 1.8% Muslim population in the country.

Educational profile

Rwanda spends about 5.1% of its GDP on education. The literacy rates are about 70.5%: 73.2% for men and 68% for women, according to 2015 estimates (CIA, 2016). Primary and lower secondary education combine to form the basic education system, which lasts about nine years. Primary education is six years and lower secondary education is about three years. After primary education, students sit a national examination for the Primary Leaving Certificate, which provides access to lower secondary education. After three years, at the end of their lower secondary education, they sit national examinations — “O” levels — for admission into senior secondary education. In 2011, the Rwanda Education Board took over the governing of the examinations from the Rwanda National Examination Council.

Senior secondary education is also a three-year programme, and it consists of a choice between general education, technical education and teacher training courses. Students choosing either of the first two options have to sit another national examination at the end of their third year in order to go to university. Most institutions, whether private or governmental, function under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

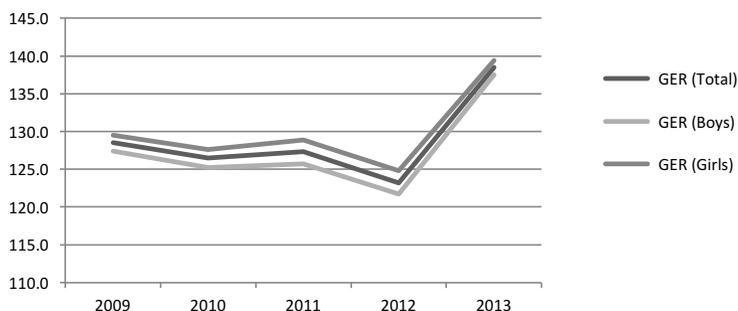
Educational indicators

Rwanda has one of the highest primary school enrolment rates in Africa. The Ministry of 2012 Education Statistics Yearbook released in 2013 indicates that there has been systematic progress in educational outcomes, with primary NER rates increasing to 96.6% in 2012. Girls have higher primary NER rates (98%) than boys (95%). The completion rate was 73% in 2012, which is a significant improvement from 53% in 2008. Girls’ completion rates are even higher, with 78% of girls finishing primary school in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2013).

However, the 2013 Educational Statistics Yearbook indicates that while the primary NER increased from 96.5% to 96.6% from 2012 to 2013, the NER for girls decreased from 98% to 97.5% in those same years. So, in one year, there seems to have been a loss of momentum. The GER of the region is more positive, moving from 129.5% to 139.4% for girls and 127.4% to 137.5% for boys.

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RWANDA: TRENDS IN GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO IN PRIMARY EDUCATION (2009-13) (%)



Data source: 2013 Education Statistics Yearbook, Ministry of Education, Kigali, Rwanda — see http://mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/2013_Rwanda_Education_Statistics.pdf

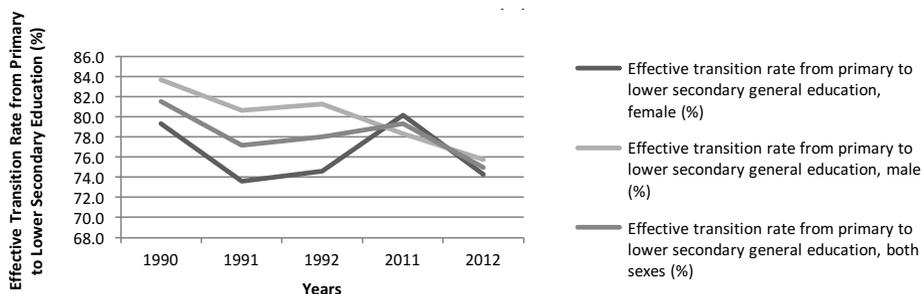
RWANDA: GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER) (2009-2013) (%)

INDICATOR	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
GER, TOTAL	128.5	126.5	127.3	123.2	138.5
GER, BOYS	127.4	125.2	125.7	121.7	137.5
GER, GIRLS	129.5	127.6	128.9	124.8	139.4

Data source: 2013 Education Statistics Yearbook, Ministry of Education, Kigali, Rwanda — see http://mineduc.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/2013_Rwanda_Education_Statistics.pdf

In contrast to the positive indications of the NER and GER, the data show that transition rates have been declining for both boys and girls.

RWANDA: TRENDS IN EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION (%)



Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>

For example, boys' transition rates went from 83.7% in 1990 to 75.7% in 2012, and girls' went from 81.5% in 1990 to 74.9% in 2012. Given that we do not have access

to reliable data for the NER and GER rates at the secondary level, we cannot draw any clear conclusions about the reasons for these contradictory patterns.

RWANDA: EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	1990	1991	1992	2011	2012
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, FEMALE	79.3	73.6	74.6	80.2	74.3
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, MALE	83.7	80.7	81.2	78.3	75.7
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION RATE FROM PRIMARY TO LOWER SECONDARY GENERAL EDUCATION, BOTH SEXES	81.5	77.1	78.0	79.3	74.9

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>

When we examine the completion rates for primary education, we see that while they have improved for both boys and girls, they are still quite far from being satisfactory. For boys, the completion rates increased from 20.9% in 2003 to 72.1% in 2013, and for girls, from 24.2% to 60.9%.

RWANDA: PRIMARY EDUCATION COMPLETION RATE (%)

INDICATOR	2000	2001	2002	2004	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013
PRIMARY EDUCATION COMPLETION RATE, FEMALE	20.9	22.7	29.3	40.2	53.5	71.8	74.0	73.1	72.1
PRIMARY EDUCATION COMPLETION RATE, MALE	24.2	25.0	30.4	41.7	50.0	65.0	65.1	64.1	60.9
PRIMARY EDUCATION COMPLETION RATE, BOTH SEXES	22.6	23.9	29.8	40.9	51.8	68.4	69.5	68.6	66.6

Data source: World Bank — see <http://data.worldbank.org/country/rwanda>

According to the data provided by Rwanda, the participation rates for boys is about 49.5% in primary education, 47.20% in secondary education and 56.6% in higher education. Girls are at par with boys in primary education (50.5%), exceed them in secondary education (52.8%) and are at a disadvantage in higher education (43.4%). This implies that while the completion rates for girls might be higher in primary education (65.5% compared to 55.3% for boys), these trends do not always translate to greater access to education for girls. In fact, when we examine the data provided by Rwanda, for example, on performance in national examinations, we find that girls are at a disadvantage at primary level (83.4% vs 85.8%), lower secondary (83% vs 90.6%) and upper secondary (85.4% vs 92.2%) (all figures refer to pass rates of national examinations). Reports from Rwanda indicate that there is no policy for reducing male underperformance, as the indicators of performance do not posit such concerns. It is, therefore, extremely important to move beyond enrolment numbers to examine the larger issues related to boys' underperformance.

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ZAMBIA

Brief history

Zambia is a country in Southern Africa, neighbouring the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Angola. The capital city is Lusaka. The region was inhabited by the Khoisan peoples, before the Bantu expansion into the region. In 1888, the British South Africa Company, through Cecil Rhodes, obtained permission to mine for minerals from the area and found copper deposits in the country. In 1911, Zambia became part of the British protectorate and was incorporated into the larger colony of Northern Rhodesia. In 1923, the BSA Company ceded the governing of the country to the British government, which started its colonising process. Independence was obtained in 1963, and Zambia became a republic in 1964. It also became part of the Commonwealth. A one-party political system ended in 1991, and since then, despite a few setbacks, the country has held free and fair elections at the local and parliamentary levels.

Demographic profile

The population of the country is approximately 15 million and is composed of a multi-ethnic and multi-tribal population. Zambia has about 21% Bemba, 13.6% Tonga, 7.4% Chewa, 5.7% Lozi and 5.3% Nsenga, with other ethnic groups such as Tumbuka, Ngoni, Lala, Kaonde, Namwanga, Lunda, Mambwe, Luvale, Lamba, Ushi, Leni, Bisa and Mbunda comprising the balance. Similarly, the languages are also varied, with about 33.4% of the population speaking Bembe, 14.7% Nyanja and 11.4% Tonga, and other languages such as Lozi, Chewa, Nsenga, Tumbuka and Lala comprising the balance. English remains the official language of the governing bodies. With respect to religions, most of the population is Christian, with about 75.3% being Protestant and 20.2% Roman Catholic. Another 2.7% of the population are Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Baha'i.

Educational profile

Zambia's educational structure has a 7-5-4 system, wherein primary education is for seven years, secondary five years and tertiary four years. Primary education is divided into four years of junior primary and three years of upper primary education. Similarly, secondary education is divided into two years of junior secondary and three years of senior secondary. Examinations are held in Grades 7, 9 and 12 to

transition from one education level to another. These systems were set up in 2002 when the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training, and Early Education set up a Free Primary Education system, whereby primary education was made compulsory and free for all eligible students. Previously, from the 1980s to the 1990s, inadequate educational infrastructure, lack of investment in education and a shortage of teaching and education materials resulted in dismal levels of learning and literacy levels. Additionally, the primary and secondary education systems were situated in separate institutions. After some structural changes that allowed for parallel and related pathways to education, there has been some improvement.

Educational indicators

When we examine the available statistics in Zambia, we find that the country has shown considerable improvement with respect to primary GER and NER.

ZAMBIA: PERFORMANCE ON FREE AND COMPULSORY PRIMARY EDUCATION 2005-2014 (%)

INDICATOR	2004	2014
NET INTAKE RATIO (NIR), PRIMARY	42.1	56.9
GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO (GER), PRIMARY (GRADES 1–7)	105.3	127.1
NET ENROLMENT RATIO (NER), PRIMARY (GRADES 1–7)	85.1	100
REPETITION RATE (RR) BY GRADE, PRIMARY (GRADES 1–7)	66	7.5
DROPOUT RATE (DR) BY GRADE, PRIMARY (GRADES 1–7)	28	2.9
PRIMARY COHORT COMPLETION RATE	72	99.04
TRANSITION RATE (TR) FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY EDUCATION	53.5	89.36

Data source: UNESCO — see <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002315/231573e.pdf>

The primary NER reached 100% in 2014, compared to only 85.10% in 2004. The transition rates from primary to secondary also improved — from 53.5% in 2004 to 89.36% in 2014. Since the new structural changes were made, the NER has risen from 71% (1999) to 97% (2013) (Ministry of Education, 2015). The literacy rate for the adult population also rose, from 67.2% in 2000 to 83% in 2010.

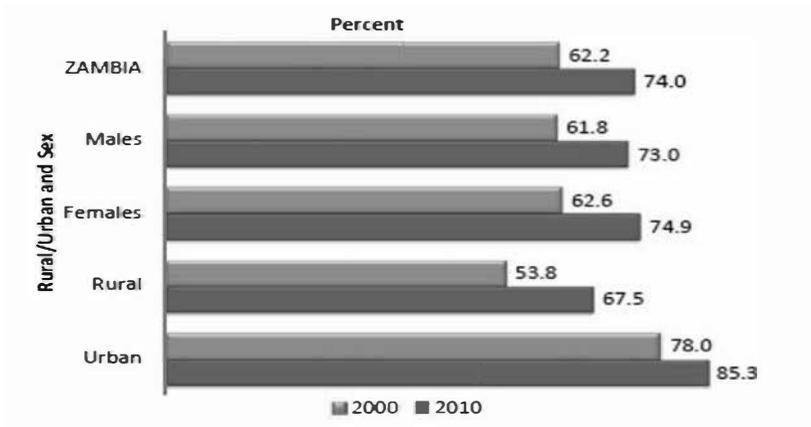
According to the information provided by Zambia, the increase in the number of schools has also contributed to these positive changes. For example, the number of community schools has gone from only 38 in 1996 to 3,000 in 2013. In fact, community schools have been a crucial part of ensuring access and reach for various communities in the country, and the government is starting to evolve a deliberate strategy to improve standards in community schools.

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Zambia also reports that one of the reasons for the lower pass ratios for boys could be that the system of a cut-off point as a selection method for advancement is much higher for boys than girls. So, boys are unable to make the high cut-off to qualify for Grades 8 and 10. This affects the intake process rates for these grades, which had been reported as 54.7% for girls and 52.2% for boys. These rates have dropped, and in 2012, the Net Intake Rate for boys was 56.8% and 60.5% for girls.

Therefore, there does seem to be a general downward trend for these rates. The government speculates that this might be because preschools have been introduced in some primary schools and so the younger children who used to previously enter Grade 1 at much younger ages are now entering the preschool system instead. One of the more interesting trends in the data provided by Zambia is the breakdown of the proportion of the primary school-age population attending school.

COMPARISON OF PROPORTION OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION (7 TO 13 YEARS) ATTENDING SCHOOL IN 2000 AND 2010.



Data source: Ministry of Education, Zambia (June 2015)

When we examine the data, we can clearly see that gender alone does not explain the discrepancies in access to and performance in schooling. For example, there is a greater regional disparity (67.5% in rural to 85.3% in urban) in the proportion of the population entering the primary school than gender disparity (74.9% for girls and 73% for boys). It is therefore critical that the data collected on examining underperformance be collected and analysed with respect to the structural and social contexts so that a clearer picture of underperformance in education can emerge.

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Every child, regardless of gender, has the right to an education that offers not only academic learning but also training in the skills they will need to be successful in their particular environment. However, as recent statistics indicate, a significant percentage of children are still unable to access education and so are denied its associated benefits. While a majority of these children are girls, concerns about boys' underperformance in schools have also been raised.

This report follows up on a 2006 report that addressed the factors that are crucial to understanding boys' underperformance in Commonwealth countries (Jha & Kelleher, 2006), and aims to document the changes in participation and performance of boys in Commonwealth countries since 2006; examine factors that continue to contribute to boys' underperformance; and summarise lessons learned from various interventions in different countries during the past ten years.

Boys' Underperformance in Education: Revisiting the issue in the Commonwealth will be of interest to policy makers, analysts and gender specialists in the education sector.



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