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# Why are Boys Under-performing in Education?

Gender Analysis of Four Asia-Pacific Countries

## Table of Contents

Acronyms .....	iii
Acknowledgments .....	iv
Part I: Executive Summary .....	1
Methods .....	2
Findings .....	2
Recommendations .....	3
Part II: Background .....	5
The Right to Education and Gender Equality .....	5
Education for All .....	5
Mid-Decade Assessment .....	6
Gender and Gender Equality .....	7
Promoting Gender Equality through Education .....	8
Part III: Methodology .....	9
Research questions .....	11
Data Collection .....	11
Limitations .....	12
Part IV: Overview of Country Reports .....	13
Malaysia .....	14
Mongolia .....	15
The Philippines .....	15
Thailand .....	16
Part V: Policy and Legal Frameworks .....	17
Education Laws .....	17
Free Education .....	18
Gender policies .....	18
Part VI: Key Trends .....	20
Trend 1: Low Enrolment Rates .....	20
Trend 2: Lower Completion Rates .....	20
Trend 3: Low Results in Educational Achievement Scores .....	20
Part VII: Factors Contributing to Boys' Underperformance .....	21
Systemic Factors: Government Investment, the Learning Environment and Parallel Education Systems .....	21
The Learning Environment .....	21
School Response to Limited Budgets .....	22
Language of Instruction and Academic Streaming .....	22
Parallel Education Systems .....	23
The Impact of Transition on Learning .....	24
Family Influences in Education .....	25
Customs in Raising Boys and Girls .....	25
Family involvement .....	26
Poverty and Household Economics .....	27
Within Classrooms .....	28
Gender Stereotypes about School .....	28
Socialization and Stereotypes of Masculinity .....	28
Learning Styles and Curriculum .....	29
Lack of Male Teachers .....	30
Violence and Corporal Punishment .....	30
Part VIII: Recommendations .....	32
Part IX: Conclusion .....	34
Bibliography .....	35

## List of Boxes

Box 1: Policy Practice: Boy's Education Policies.....	19
Box 2: Case Study: Improving School Quality by Increased Government Spending.....	22
Box 3: Policy in Practice: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education.....	23
Box 4: Male Teachers as Informal Counselors and Mentors.....	30

## List of Tables

Table 1: Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Enrolment Ratios for the EAP Region.....	6
Table 2: Country study methods.....	11
Table 3: Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Enrolment Statistics.....	13
Table 4: Main Findings of Country Studies.....	19
Table 5: Attrition Rate of Malaysian Boys and Girls from Year 1 (1999) to Form 5 (2009).....	14
Table 6: Teaching Staff Ratios.....	35

## Acronyms

CEDAW	Convention to End Discrimination against Women
EAP	East Asia and the Pacific
EFA MDA	Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment
EFA	Education for All
GPI	Gender parity index
OECD PISA	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
UNESCO AIMS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics office for Asia-Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNICEF EAPRO	UNICEF East Asia Pacific Regional Office

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## Part I: Executive Summary

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All girls and boys have an equal right to education. Meeting this right requires an education system, which welcomes all students, girls and boys. Teaching and curricula must respond to students' individual backgrounds, cultures and learning styles, allowing meaningful participation and development. Education should be of high quality, relevant and useful, ensuring that students leave not only with basic levels of education, but also with the skills required to seize further opportunities for employment and learning. In short, education should allow learners to reach their potential.

In many countries around the world, girls traditionally have been at a disadvantage. In East Asia and the Pacific, despite significant progress in reducing gender disparities in education, data disaggregated by residence, ethnicity or wealth quintiles indicate that girls and women continue to be directly or indirectly excluded from high-quality education. Further, a mid-decade review of Education for All (EFA) showed that even in countries in the EAP region where national, aggregated statistics are beginning to show universal access to education, in some settings enrolment, attendance and achievement are decreasing for boys. Boys' enrolment rates have declined. Many boys are leaving school early. Fewer are continuing on to higher levels of education. This suggests that the education system is not meeting the basic requirements of many boys.



The EFA-MDA Gender Equality in Education Progress Note (UNICEF, 2009) analysis revealed that boys' enrolment rates were significantly lower than those of girls in Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand. In 2011, the East Asia and Pacific Regional United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (EAP UNGEI) undertook a research review to investigate the issue of boys' underperformance in these four countries. The review was based on the premise that the factors that contribute to boys' underperformance should not be overlooked and deserve further investigation in order to provide the basis for policies and interventions to achieve gender equality. Given the wide variations across countries in underperformance indicators, this report takes a broad view of 'underperformance': In the country-specific reports, evidence for boys' underperformance comes from data pertaining to enrolment, retention, participation, achievement, survival to and through secondary education, and a host of other, nationally pertinent factors.

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The objectives of this study are to:

- Understand why boys have been underperforming in education over the past few years;
- Analyse factors (including economic, societal, and cultural) that are causing the trend of poor performance and low survival rates at higher levels of education; and
- Describe current policies and interventions in place to address the issue.

## Methods

National research teams in each of the four countries first explored the underlying dynamics behind boys' underperformance, while reviewing good practices and providing recommendations in the form of country case studies. A broader gender analysis was then undertaken utilizing the information provided in the case studies, government policy reviews and analyses of other relevant sources. Rather than comparing the four countries, the synthesis report aims to highlight broad trends and lessons learned from the four nations. It uses the experience of the four countries to explore how the social construction of gender and attribution of differences between males and females influence educational achievement in the region as a whole.

## Findings

A variety of factors – including educational, economic and social – impact the educational achievement of boys. This research finds that *system-wide education structures* such as the legislated years of compulsory education, whether education is provided for free and the process of academic streaming, can act as unintended push factors encouraging boys to leave school. Limited resources within education systems further compound these issues, as a lack of investment is linked to low-quality education. Students are unlikely to attend school if it is not compulsory, free or useful. Further, the underlying gender dynamics where boys are considered more independent, believed to be less interested in learning, and have the potential to earn money while working mean that boys are more likely to leave school.

At the community level, *families* play a central role in children's educational achievement. Involvement in schooling plays a critical role in achievement, as principal caregivers are crucial decision makers in whether children attend school. Thus caregivers' perceptions about boys' 'innate' educational ability, and the opportunity cost of sending boys to school often result in boys leaving school in order to work. The Philippines country study (Torres 2011a) found that poor families tend to withdraw boys from school because they seem to be unresponsive to learning and because boys have more diverse work opportunities than girls (p. 8).

Further, *the nature of the school environment* itself is not gender-neutral, and stereotypes impede boys' potential and achievements. The four country studies commissioned by UNGEI identified a common notion that school 'is for girls'. Thailand researchers Nethanomsak and Raksasataya (2010) found that the formal education system caters primarily to girls who are perceived to be academically superior. For example, participants in a group discussion stated that boys become "the group of students in the back of the room that the teachers often ignore and don't show much interest in their learning, in contrast to the more attentive girl students in the front rows who normally get greater attention from the teachers" (p. 13).

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This perception influences boys' participation in education as well as how teachers think and act about boys' academic abilities. Stereotypes are often perpetuated by inadequate positive male role models and guidance processes. In the Malaysia country report, Goolamally and Ahmad (2010) found that almost half of the 275 university students surveyed attributed the underperformance of boys to a lack of male teachers in school to act as role models (p. 16).



Existing gender stereotypes in classrooms also mean that boys can be mistreated and develop a negative relationship with school. The Mongolia country report indicates that entrenched violence and discrimination are persistent and pervasive problems. For example, the idea that boys are tough or unruly and therefore should be physically disciplined means they are more likely to be the

victims of corporal punishment by teachers (Undara and Enjkjargal, 2011). Country study authors Undara and Enjkjargal link a higher likelihood of violence for boys to an increasing likelihood of their leaving school early, especially for children from low-income and migrant families who have coexisting economic pressures (p. 17).

## Recommendations

All country reports indicate that there are systemic factors that negatively influence boys' educational achievement. Examples from the country case studies highlight clear actions that address these systemic issues, and positively improve education outcomes for boys. First, better data are required across sectors to capture the diverse education and work experiences of boys. The country studies suggest that many boys tend to switch from formal education at early secondary level into other types of education, such as non-formal or technical, or to transition into the workforce. However, the pattern of such movements cannot be understood without information on where boys are and what they are doing. *Systematic tracking* and mapping through all types of education; including public and private, formal and non-formal, will ensure that a full picture emerges. Data disaggregated by gender, region, geographic location, socio-economic background and ethnicity would identify which particular boys and girls are performing poorly in which formal education settings. Empirical examination and proper planning would allow governments to create responsive interventions for particularly disadvantaged students, whether the disadvantage is due to their sex, ethnic or socio-economic background, disability or geographic location. Second, incentives should be offered to improve attendance. Enrolment and dropout are clearly linked to poverty. A broad range of compensatory measures that are conditional upon children being in school can improve attendance. Third, boys' concerns need to be included in education gender reviews. This involves inclusion of boys in education policies, and the development of specific strategies for boys to address disadvantage. Fourth, inclusive education should be promoted to ensure

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that education responds to individual learning needs and styles. Fifth, counselling and guidance should be strengthened to firstly assist children in developing positive views of their own gender roles and secondly, to ensure that they continue their education. Lastly, the individual country reports point to the need for an inter-sectoral discussion to examine education system gaps in meeting students' needs. Such a holistic approach could also ease the transition between education levels and sectors, promoting life-long learning. If properly pursued, the above recommendations can have a positive influence in ensuring that all children, boys and girls alike, fulfil their right to education.

## Part II: Background

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### The Right to Education and Gender Equality

The right to education is an inalienable human right. It is universally acknowledged and protected by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 (United Nations). The right to education is not only a matter of access. It implies meaningful participation and development through learning. The right to education is also extensively asserted in the General Comment on Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (UN Economic and Social Council 1999), which notes that in order to meet this human right, education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. Article 14 of the same covenant articulates the substance of the right to education as universal access to free and compulsory primary education, universal access or accessibility to secondary education, in particular by the introduction of free education, and equal access to higher education on the basis of capacity.

Gender equality is a core development objective in its own right and also essentially linked to education objectives. The right to gender equality in education is reaffirmed in the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, 1960, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979, the World Declaration on Education for All, 1990, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 2000. In the first instance, gender equality in education is measured through gender gaps in educational enrolment. The World Development Report 2012 (World Bank, 2011) identified that primary education enrolment gender gaps to the disadvantage of girls and women have shrunk rapidly over the last 25 years. In secondary education, gaps have reversed in many countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and East Asia. Girls now outnumber boys in secondary schools in 45 developing countries, and there are more young women than men in tertiary education in 60 countries (p. 61).

### Education for All

A key mechanism to meet the right to education is the Education for All (EFA) framework. Launched at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, EFA is a global commitment to the right to education. Countries from around the world agreed on the vision of quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted by the World Conference on Education for All, called upon all countries to universalize adequate basic education and expressed global commitment to the right to education. The *Framework for Action: Meeting Basic Learning Needs* (UNESCO, 1990) was launched at the Conference as a strategy for implementing the goals adopted in Jomtien. Countries world-wide agreed on the vision of quality basic education for all children, youth and adults.

A decade later in 2000, representatives of the international community met again in Dakar, Senegal, and affirmed their commitment to EFA. By adopting the Dakar Framework for Action: *Meeting our Collective Commitments* (UNESCO, 2000), which incorporated six Regional Frameworks for Action, the Forum participants reaffirmed their commitment to achieve the six goals and targets of Education for All by 2015. Gender is a cross-cutting theme and relates to all six EFA goals.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Specific gender-related education goals are: Goal 2 to “ensure that by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.”

Goal 4 to “achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.”

## Mid-Decade Assessment

In order to monitor progress towards the six Education for All goals, regions globally undertook a mid-decade assessment in 2005. Data from the Asia-Pacific assessment revealed that targets were not being met, and that there was still an unacceptably high number of children and adults, primarily girls and women, who were denied their right to an education. Gender analysis of these data from the East Asia and Pacific<sup>2</sup> was undertaken by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO), in collaboration with the East Asia and Pacific Regional United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Bangkok and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics office for Asia-Pacific (AIMS Unit).

Less girls/women enrolled			Parity	Less boys/men enrolled		
Far from goal (GPI below 0.80)	Intermediate (GPI 0.80 to 0.94)	Close to the goal (GPI 0.95 to 0.96)	Goal achieved (GPI 0.97 to 1.03)	Close to the goal (GPI 1.04 to 1.05)	Intermediate (GPI 1.06 to 1.25)	Far from goal (GPI above 1.25)
<b>Primary Education</b>						
		Indonesia, Lao PDR, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Tonga	Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines, Samoa, Vanuatu			
<b>Secondary Education</b>						
Cambodia, Lao PDR, Papua New Guinea	Niue, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Vanuatu	Australia	China, Cook Islands, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Singapore, Timor Leste, Viet Nam	Brunei, Marshall Islands, Thailand	Fiji, Kiribati, Malaysia, Micronesia, Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Philippines, Samoa, Tonga	
<b>Tertiary Education</b>						
Cambodia, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Lao PDR, Vanuatu, Viet Nam	Japan		China		Australia, Fiji, Philippines, Thailand	Brunei, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, New Zealand, Tonga

Table 1: Gender Parity Index (GPI) of enrolment ratios for East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF 2008 p. 27)

Goal 5 to "eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality" (UNESCO 2011b).

<sup>2</sup> The East Asia and Pacific (EAP) region is home to almost two billion people – one third of the world's population and some 580 million children. From Mongolia in the north to Tonga in the south, and from Western China to the Cook Islands, the region covers some of the world's most diverse areas. It combines East Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania and is comprised of 33 countries. These include countries that participated in EFA reporting in 2000 – Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, DPR Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam; as well as those countries that did not prepare EFA National Reports – Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Singapore and South Korea.

Data indicated that a new gender trend was emerging in East Asia and the Pacific (UNICEF EAPRO 2009, p. 5). In addition to the disadvantages that girls and women face, in some countries gender disparities were also emerging to the disadvantage of boys. Analysis completed for the Gender Progress Note (2009) revealed that boys faced disparities at higher levels of education – secondary and tertiary. Of the countries in East Asia and the Pacific with data available in 2006 – including Fiji, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Samoa, Thailand and Tonga – nearly half had a lower proportion of boys enrolled in secondary education than girls, (p. 27). Boys’ enrolment rates were significantly lower than those of girls in Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand (p. 26). Substantial progress was made between 1999 and 2005 to address this in Mongolia, with disparities diminishing to near-parity (p. 32), but boys’ enrolment in secondary education still remains lower than that of girls (p. 42). At the tertiary level, there is a growing trend of higher rates of girls’ enrolment, which can be described as a ‘reverse’ gender gap (p. 27). Additionally, data on enrolment in primary education in some countries suggest that once girls are enrolled in school, they tend to stay in school at rates equal to, or higher than, boys (p. 29). Such disparities in the performance of girls and boys should also be studied further, especially in light of the recent emphasis on strengthening quality of education.

*A disadvantage for boys does not necessarily translate into an advantage for girls.*

The relatively recent trend of boys’ underperformance in East Asia and the Pacific attests to the need for novel avenues of research and interventions for addressing inequalities in access to, and completion of, education. Even though these analyses explicitly focus on boys, they nevertheless underscore the critical importance of underlying gender dynamics that give rise to inequities.

There is a caveat, however, while we acknowledge that we do provide comparisons of boys’ and girls’ performance, we wish to emphasize that a disadvantage for boys does not necessarily translate into an advantage for girls. When boys drop out of school or engage in the labour force, the burden of domestic chores and responsibilities significantly increases for girls and women, which in turn impacts on their access to, and the quality of, their education. In addition, we acknowledge that boys’ underperformance is frequently not an outcome of discrimination, but is more the result of an underlying set of gender norms and socially determined, unspoken expectations concerning gender roles. The same social context can provide notions of masculinity as equated with the ability to earn and be engaged in the labour force, and simultaneously tolerate violence against girls. Therefore, the underlying *gender* dynamics and factors contributing to these trends deserve further research to understand the reasons for such disparities and provide the basis for policies and interventions to achieve gender equality. That is what this report intends to do.

## **Gender and Gender Equality**

The World Development Report 2012 (World Bank, 2011) defines gender as “the social, behavioral, and cultural attributes, expectations, and norms associated with being a woman or a man. Gender equality refers to how these aspects determine how women and men relate to each other and to the resulting differences in power between them” (p. 4). UNESCO’s GENIA Toolkit for Promoting Gender Equality in Education (2009a) defines gender equality as meaning that “women and men have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their

*Gender equality is the equal valuing by society of the similarities and differences of individuals and the roles they play.*

full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development” (p. 23). Gender equality is thus based on women and men being full partners in their home, community and society.

A clear understanding of the difference between sex and gender is essential for gender analysis. UNESCO (2004) notes that ‘sex’ refers to the biological differences between males and females, while ‘gender’ refers to the set of socially and culturally constructed meanings and roles assigned to the different biological sexes.

Gender consists of the roles and responsibilities that individuals are expected to play within societies. The notion of gender encompasses the expectations held about men and women, their behaviours, characteristics and abilities. Plan’s (2011) research into gender expectations demonstrates that in many settings boys and men are encouraged to be ‘tough’, are put under pressure to be heads of households and often face institutionalized violence, much at the hands of other men through choice of profession. Social pressures to meet stereotypes of masculinity mean that men may suppress non-masculine aspects of their personality. Men may miss out on rewarding social opportunities, such as showing affection, child rearing, and caring for others (Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Plan, 2011; UNESCO, 2004).

Furthermore, while commonly understood as a binary category of ‘man and woman’, the gender spectrum is actually highly complex. Those who do not fit comfortably into culturally defined gender categories may face poorer access to education and employment, and stigma and discrimination in the classroom and beyond. The move towards gender equality encompasses all aspects of the gender spectrum. This movement is not an attempt to remove gender but the force of negative gender stereotypes, thus allowing the many aspects of an individual’s personality to be freely expressed. Gender equality is the equal valuing by society of the similarities and differences of individuals and the roles they play.

### **Promoting Gender Equality through Education**

Research has pointed to the need for understanding children’s development as an integral part of their cultural contexts. For example, Harkness and Super’s theoretical framework of a developmental niche (1986, 1992, 1996) provides a means to understand and analyse how cultural aspects impact children’s development. The ‘developmental niche’ is a construct that consists of three interacting sub-systems:

1. Physical and social settings such as the physical environment of the developing child, infrastructure, and what is provided by the physical space.
2. Customs and practices of child rearing, such as inherited and adapted ways of nurturing, educating, entertaining and protecting the child.
3. Psychology of caretakers, including caregivers’ theories and beliefs pertaining to child development and how they direct actual practices.

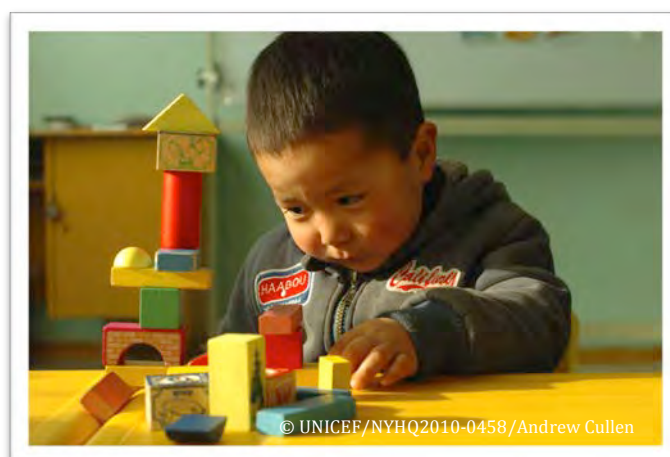
The three sub-systems – settings, customs and caretaker psychology – mediate a child’s developmental experience within the larger culture. The elaboration of themes such as gender identities, reading, caring for others, expression of emotion or the value of independence,

*The education system is a  
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gender equality.*

throughout a child’s development ensures acquisition of skills and values around those themes. As key meaning systems are elaborated in appropriate ways at different periods in development, learning occurs across behavioural domains and various points in time, demonstrating that cultural themes have a profound influence on development.

The education system is a key setting for promoting gender equality. A gender equality approach to education argues for valuing girls and boys equally (UNESCO, 2004, p. 1). This is different from advocating for treating boys and girls in the same way, which Wilson (2003) found reinforces rather than redresses social disadvantage. Boys and girls have different biological needs, and have also been socialized in different ways. This means that children come to education with different experiences, understandings and ways of learning. For education to be gender responsive (UNESCO, 2008a), it must acknowledge these differences and accommodate all students' learning needs. The Promoting Gender Equality in Education Toolkit (UNESCO, 2009a) defines gender equity as a tool for promoting gender equality through the process of being fair to men and women. Gender equity may include compensatory measures for disadvantage that prevents women and men from operating on an even playing field.<sup>3</sup>

UNESCO (2009a) seeks gender equality in education in three elements: "that girls and boys are ensured and actually offered the same chances and treatment in access, process and outcome of an education of good quality and which is free from any stereotypes" (p. 24). Firstly, ensuring boys and girls go to school in equal numbers is a vital element. Secondly, acknowledging and responding to gender-based barriers influencing children's ability to participate while at school. Lastly, and more broadly, gender equality means fair involvement in the workforce: women and men accessing the same job prospects at equal pay, with the obligations of care-giving responsibilities considered, to ensure women do not have a double burden. Wilson argues that equality of the sexes can only be achieved by addressing all three elements (2003, p. 2).



## Part III: Methodology

### Structure of this Report

In this report, we take a broad view of 'underperformance'. In the four country reports, evidence of underperformance can come from data pertaining to enrolment, retention, participation, achievement, survival to and through secondary education, and a host of other, nationally pertinent factors. In addition, we echo Jha and Kelleher's (2006) argument that such evidence should not be perceived as pitting boys against girls in a "war of sexes" (p.xiii). In fact, boys' underperformance, as we discuss it here, is not primarily in comparison to girls, but as a relatively objective evaluation of their performance in relation to existing standards and developmental guidelines. Girls have often been disadvantaged in accessing and participating in education, particularly in less developed countries in the East Asia and Pacific region. This has naturally and rightly ensured that girls' education has dominated debates on gender equality in education. By investigating why boys are doing poorly in school, this report is part of a wave of

<sup>3</sup> For example, countries where female students outnumber their male counterparts at the tertiary education level (particularly in science and technology fields) can introduce a quota system or affirmative action. This helps to ensure that the same or increased number of female students are enrolled in this field at the university level.



research (see Collins, Kenway, & McLeod, 2000; Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Stone, 2010) that seeks to analyse cultural expectations, power and relational structures within communities and systemic barriers and bottlenecks in achieving gender equality. In focusing on boys the report does not aim to move the debate away from the disadvantage of girls in education, but seeks to also shed light on an area of inequality that has not received much attention. This report argues in favour of a move towards a more holistic gender approach, as advocated by Buchmann, DiPrete and McDaniel (2008, p. 33), focusing on improving educational attainment for boys and girls alike.

A focus on boys as underperformers differs from how boys have been represented in previous development debates on gender equality in education. Boys have been portrayed as advantaged

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power-holders, and as part of the problem in achieving gender equality. This over-simplification has resulted in the growing invisibility of both boys' issues as well as the gender and power dynamics underlying girls' education. This analysis raises the visibility of obstacles faced by boys within education systems – obstacles that are more likely to be experienced by boys simply because they are boys. Such a gender analysis uncovers how education systems reflect the social construction of gender, and the ways in which this reflection creates and perpetuates disadvantage for individuals. At the same time, it is essential to rebut the commonly held notion that girls' achievement is in some way causing boys' underachievement. Underachievement, whether of

girls or boys, is representative of the same issue. It illustrates a gap in the fulfilment of the right to education and demonstrates that education is not meeting the needs of students. It reminds nations when they are not meeting their responsibility to provide accessible, responsive and meaningful education to all.

Four countries in the East Asia region served by the EAP UNGEI<sup>4</sup> participated in a self-selected research study to investigate the issue of boys' underperformance in Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand. This research aimed to strengthen the evidence base for policies and allow more effective implementation. It was based on the premise that boys' underperformance has important implications for national development as well as for the holistic development of all young people, including girls.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Understand why boys have been doing worse in school over the past few years;
- Identify the factors (including economic, societal, and cultural) that are causing the trend of poor performance and low survival rates; and
- Highlight current policies and interventions in place to address these issues.

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<sup>4</sup> UNGEI is a flagship for girls' education. It serves as the principal movement to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education and to ensure the right to education and gender equality for all children, girls and boys alike. It aims for a world where all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming societies where gender equality becomes a reality. UNGEI was launched in April 2000 at the World Forum on EFA in Dakar by the then United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. UNGEI is a partnership that embraces the United Nations system, governments, donor countries, non-governmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, and communities and families.

## Research Questions

This report endeavours to answer two research questions. First, what are the factors, including economic, social and cultural, that are associated with the emerging trend of poor performance and low retention rates among boys? Second, what are some of the current policies and interventions in place to address these issues?

## Data Collection

National research teams in each of the four countries explored these significant regional trends, providing examples of noteworthy practices and recommendations for improvements in country case studies. The researchers were commissioned to synthesize evidence from existing literature and also, when available, collect additional first-hand data by conducting focus group discussions and interviews with schools and community members to determine the main reasons for these trends and recommendations for the way forward (Tumursukh, 2011).

The country situation analyses undertaken in Mongolia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand took different approaches, including targeting boys at various educational levels and geographical sub-regions. The Malaysian country study (Goolamally and Ahmad, 2010) focused on indicators of educational success for boys and girls in primary, secondary and upper secondary schools. National school examination results and educational data from Malaysian Educational Statistics were the main sources of input for the country report. The country study undertaken in Mongolia (Undara and Enkjargal, 2011) included a desk review using national statistics, existing reports and policy reviews. Interviews, focus groups and observations at schools were also used. The Philippines study (Torres, 2011a) used a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches. A desk review and examination of secondary data were complemented by primary data collected during interviews, focus groups and school observations for basic education. The Thailand country report (Nethanomsak and Raksasataya, 2010) conducted a meta-review of 54 studies related to aspects of gender, and three focus group discussions with university level students on factors contributing to classroom learning and internal characteristics among learners.

Country	Target Age	Sources	Methods
<b>Malaysia</b>	Primary Lower secondary Upper secondary	National school examination results Educational data from Malaysian Educational Statistics Primary data	Desk review Focus groups Surveys
<b>Mongolia</b>	Primary Lower secondary Upper secondary	National statistics reports Existing reports Policy review Primary data	Desk review Interviews Focus groups Non-participant observations at schools
<b>Philippines</b>	Pre-Primary Primary Lower secondary	APIS FLEMMS BEIS Existing studies Primary data	Desk review Interviews Focus groups School observation
<b>Thailand</b>	University students	Existing studies Primary data	Meta-analysis Interviews Focus groups

Table 2: Country Study Methods

For the purposes of this synthesis report, a broader gender analysis was then undertaken, utilising the information provided in the case studies, government policy reviews and analysis of other relevant sources. Rather than providing comparisons or rankings across countries, the synthesis report aims to highlight broad trends and lessons learned from the four countries. It seeks to organize the information to facilitate joint learning and identification of common issues

as well as unique challenges. The synthesis report uses the experience of the four countries to explore how the social construction of gender and the attribution of differences between males and females influence educational achievement.

### **Limitations**

The country case studies are grounded in the local context and are specific to that setting. Thus the report's findings cannot be generalized to cover all countries in the region. The report does, however, provide insights into some emerging regional trends that may need to be addressed by policy makers when considering the question of boys' achievement.

It is also noteworthy that the understanding of gender explored by the regional synthesis report is limited to hegemonic understandings of male and female, which were the basis for the research provided from the original country studies and available sex-disaggregated data. No data on the educational outcomes of boys perceived to be different (or possessing bisexual or homosexual sexual orientations or who are transgender) were analysed in the country reports. This limitation of the current report, especially in light of anecdotal references to discriminatory practices related to such understandings, represents a worthy area of future study.

## Part IV: Overview of Country Reports

The Overview section introduces the main findings of the country reports as identified by the country research teams. Each country report is summarised, and the country context introduced. Further information on specific country reports can be obtained upon request from the EAP UNGEI Secretariat. The policy and legal frameworks of each country are also explored, including education laws, the provision of free education and gender policies.

Different levels of participation based on gender exist, at different stages of education: In primary education, Mongolia, Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia appear to show gender parity, but disparities widen in upper secondary, with boys disadvantaged. Using the latest UNESCO education data table 3 illustrates this trend through the gross enrolment ratio (GER).<sup>5</sup> Sex disaggregation of the figures provides an overview of trends from the school year ending in 2008 at pre-primary, primary and secondary levels.<sup>6</sup>

Table 3: Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Enrolment Statistics

Country	GPI Primary	GER Pre-Primary	GPI Primary	GER Primary	GPI Secondary	GER Lower Secondary	GPI Upper Secondary
Malaysia	1.08		1.00		1.00		1.17
Mongolia	1.08		0.99		1.05		1.13
Philippines	1.02		0.98		1.07		1.20
Thailand	1.01		0.98		1.02		1.20

Source: UNESCO EFA GMR 2011 (UNESCO 2011b). Based on latest available data

These data based on the GER indicate that in Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand, boys seem to drop out in lower secondary education or during the transition to upper secondary education. Furthermore, the gender parity target is missed in these countries in upper secondary education due to the lower enrolment rates for boys. In the Philippines, boys seem to face particular barriers in their access to primary, lower and upper secondary education.

### Main Case Study Findings

Country	Main Findings of Case Studies
<b>Malaysia</b> Goolamally and Ahmad (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Girls perform better in all national exam subjects.</li> <li>More boys enrol in primary school, sharp decline in enrolment seen in secondary.</li> <li>Boy's underperformance related to unsupportive school environments, inappropriate teaching styles, and societal, cultural and gender stereotypes.</li> </ul>
<b>Mongolia</b> Undara and Enkjargal (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boys under-represented at school, making up less than 50 per cent of students in general primary education schools.</li> <li>Boys constitute about 60 per cent of out-of-school children.</li> <li>Seriously under-represented in higher education (only 35 per cent of students male).</li> <li>Boys more likely to experience physical violence from peers and teachers and face extortion of money by peers.</li> <li>Child-friendly education policies exist but implementation is weak.</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> These most recent figures may be different to those used in the country reports.

<sup>6</sup> The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is used to show disadvantage. A GPI of less than one (GPI < 1) indicates disadvantage for girls and a GPI greater than one (GPI > 1) shows a disadvantage for boys.

## Philippines

Torres (2011a)

- Boys make up the majority of out of school children (56.9 per cent primary, 63.7 per cent secondary).
- Out-of-school boys are likely to be engaged in economic activity.
- Likelihood of attendance is connected to wealth.
- Boys' functional literacy rates are lower both in and out of school.
- Girls outscore boys in all subjects in the National Achievement Test.
- Boys' underachievement is driven by parents' and teachers' low academic expectations for boys, the economic viability of boys, passive classroom experience, gender bias, stereotyping and a lack of learning materials.

## Thailand

Nethanomsak  
and  
Raksasataya  
(2010)

- School enrolment of boys is significantly lower than girls.
- Male students receive lower PISA assessment scores.
- Boys' underachievement attributed to classroom factors include learning ability, skills, behaviour, learning background and attitudes towards learning. Internal factors include self-perception, ethical behaviour, nature, attitudes towards relationships and behaviour, and surrounding factors, expectations for further education and the social environment.

Table 4: Main findings of the four country studies

## Malaysia

Goolamally and Ahmad's (2010) analyses of data from national examination results revealed that girls performed better in all four national exam subjects: Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mathematics and Science, in both primary and lower secondary. Boys' disadvantage in achievement grows as time goes on, with the widest differences at upper-secondary level (p. 18). Using one cohort as an example, Table 3 shows that while the total population enrolled in primary school is higher for boys, there is a very high attrition rate as they enter secondary school (p. 13). Using information from focus groups and surveys, Goolamally and Ahmad propose that boys' underperformance is related to unsupportive school environments, inappropriate teaching styles, and societal, cultural and gender stereotypes which influence the behaviour of boys and girls (p. 17). Individuals in the focus group stated, "In the Asian context, parents are more lenient with boys. Due to that, girls tend to give more attention to their studies while the boys are running wild" (p. 14).

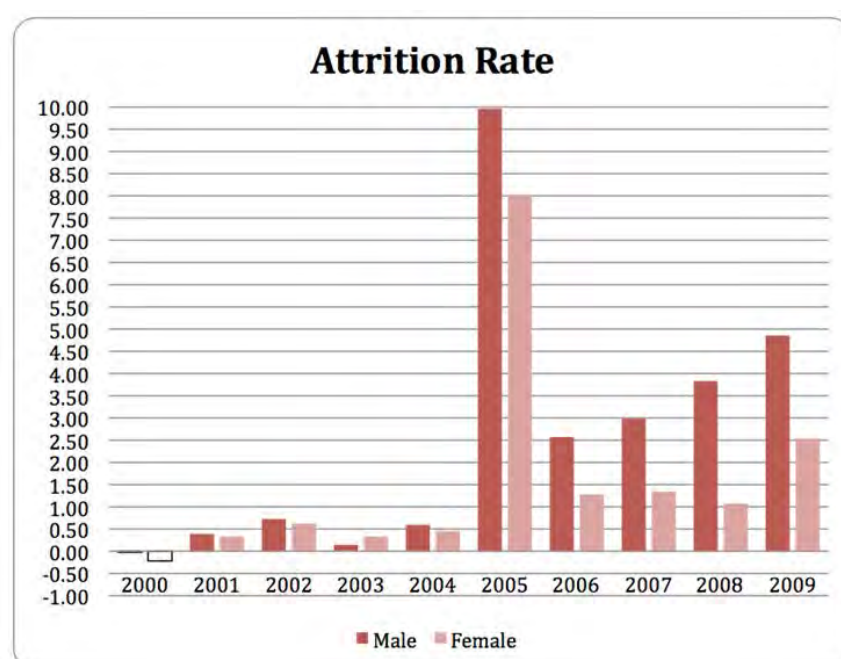


Table 5: Attrition Rate of Malaysian Boys and Girls from Year 1 (1999) to Form 5 (2009)  
Source Goolamally and Ahmad (2011, p. 13).

## Mongolia

Undara and Enkjargal's (2011) study found that although educational policy documents in Mongolia emphasize child-centred teaching and learning methods and child-friendly environments, implementation of these policies was weak, and violence and discrimination were widespread. Noting that only limited statistics are available, Undara and Enkjargal's study provides data that are indicative of entrenched issues in relation to the development of boys and men (p. 19). Although boys constitute over 50 per cent of the age 5-14 population group and of those entering first grade, they make up less than 50 per cent of students in general education schools. Males seem to hold a slight advantage in vocational education, constituting about 52 per cent of the students and possibly enjoying slightly better access to the labour market. However, they are seriously under-represented in higher education, making up only about 35 per cent of the students. Statistics indicate some improvements in enrolment in recent years, especially in first grade, vocational and higher education. Yet boys still constitute about 60 per cent of out-of-school children. Furthermore, Undara and Enkjargal assert that violence in educational environments has an impact, finding that boys were more likely to experience physical violence from peers and teachers as well as extortion of money by peers (p. 19).



## The Philippines

The desk review analysis undertaken by Torres (2011a) argues that despite the achievement of gender parity at primary school level in the Philippines, many boys are at risk of exclusion from educational opportunities. In 2008, boys made up 56.9 per cent of primary-aged out-of-school children, and 63.7 per cent of secondary-aged out-of-school children (p. 1). Attendance appears to be inexorably connected to wealth. 89.3 per cent of pre-primary aged boys from the richest wealth quintile are enrolled in school, compared with just 44 per cent from the poorest. Girls face similar disparities by wealth, but are more likely to be enrolled than boys at all wealth indexes (p. 2). This is a very important area relating to the issue of equity, and deserves more in-depth exploration and gender analyses.

The number of out-of-school boys aged 5-15 years engaged in economic activity is twice that of same-aged girls (p. 2). Torres found that the functional literacy rates of boys are lower than those of girls. Some 78.5 per cent of out-of-school boys had simple literacy, compared with 83.3 per cent of girls. For children currently in school, 65.4 per cent of girls are functionally literate compared to 58.7 per cent of boys (p. 3). Girls have also outscored boys in the last five years in all subjects in the National Achievement Test (p. 3). The Philippines country report suggests that boys' underachievement in primary education is driven by the following factors: parents' and teachers' low academic expectations for boys, the economic viability of working, passive classroom experience, gender bias and stereotyping (p. 16-17). A lack of learning materials was also identified as an issue, particularly for early childhood education programmes. Grade one and two teachers stated that if practice sheets were not supplied, children were only able to copy materials in class time. They felt that this disadvantaged boys, especially if their fine motor skills were less advanced than those of girls and they took longer to copy coursework (p. 19).



## Thailand

Nethanomsak and Raksasataya (2010) identified 12 indicators within three broad categories that affect boys' learning. These categories are: factors contributing to classroom learning, internal characteristics of the learner, and surrounding factors (p. 8). Nethanomsak and Raksasataya argue that these three factors appear to result in boys doing less well (p. 14). They cite Education for All Mid-Decade Assessment data which show that school enrolment of boys was significantly lower than girls in Thailand. They also refer to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)<sup>7</sup> results on Thai students' learning achievement in reading, mathematics, and science in 2009 which revealed that male students received an average assessment score lower than that of girls (p. 2).

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<sup>7</sup> PISA is an international exam, which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in participating countries.

## Part V: Policy and Legal Frameworks

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The State plays a vital role in fulfilling the right to education for its citizens. It is the central actor in the provision of this right the prime duty bearer and the chief implementer of international norms and standards regarding education. Governments are duty-bound to provide their citizens with education, and are also responsible for increasing rights-holders' capacity to claim their right to education.

A prime mechanism for ensuring the right to education is the formulation and implementation of education laws and policies. These guide the provision of education and set the structure of the education system. States can increase demand for education by improving school quality, making education compulsory and free as well as emphasizing the benefits of education (Fuller & Rubinson, 1992).

### Education Laws

Several countries enshrine the right to education in their Constitution. Thailand's 1997 Constitution, for example, upholds the right of children to 12 years of free education. Subsequent reforms have seen the addition of three years of free, but not compulsory, education at upper secondary level (UNESCO 2011a). The Thai Government initially defined education as a right for children who are both citizens and legal residents of Thailand, which resulted in the possibility of stateless people and migrants being excluded from education. Thai Ministry of

*Raising the awareness of  
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countries.*

Education regulations issued in 1992 extended the provision of education to children without domicile and non-Thais. It has been noted, however, that education personnel and schools often do not accept hill tribe children for admission because they are unaware of the ministerial regulation (Right to Education Project, 2008b). This lack of awareness about amendments and regulations deserves urgent attention.

Raising the awareness of regulatory amendments and guidelines, and strengthened monitoring of implementation are urgently needed in all four countries. In Malaysia, in spite of numerous international conventions as well as national laws guaranteeing all children equal access to education,

thousands of school-age children remain out of school. Some children never enrol while others leave voluntarily or are expelled from school, often because education authorities and schools do not fully realize their legal responsibility to provide quality education for all children (Right to Education Project, 2008a).

## Free Education

The Constitutions of Mongolia<sup>8</sup>, the Philippines<sup>9</sup> and Thailand<sup>10</sup> express the right to free education for all their citizens, whereas Malaysia has achieved primary education goals without making basic education free<sup>11</sup>. While a commitment to free education assists with progress towards universal access, provision of free education alone is frequently not enough due to the hidden costs of sending children to school.

In Mongolia, free education up to age 17 is provided, but the plummeting economy following the transition to a free-market economy saw much of the cost of education transferred to families. Out-of-pocket expenses for schooling – including for uniforms, books and dormitories to house the children of nomadic populations – have risen. A government policy requiring families to pay 70kg of meat to house their children in school dormitories was repealed in 2000, because it was resulting in children from low socio-economic backgrounds being withdrawn from school (Mongolian Human Development Report as cited in Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011, p. 12). The policy was linked to dropout rates of up to 8.8 per cent in the 1993/1994 school year (UNESCO, 2008b). In the Philippines, families bear the cost of meals, transportation, school uniforms and supplies, and often enrolment and tuition charges (Right to Education Project 2008c).



Therefore, deeper and more meaningful analyses of costs, bottlenecks and barriers are urgently needed. Costing studies must include not just tuition fees but also the hidden, yet mandatory, burdens families bear for educating their children. There is also an opportunity cost of sending children to school instead of having them work, which is especially relevant for families with low socio-economic status. Torres (2011a) found that

boys' low participation in school is directly affected by their higher engagement in economic activity. The number of out-of-school boys aged 5-15 years in the Philippines is twice that of girls. More girls are still attending school (71 per cent) although they are (also) participating in economic activity (p. 2).

## Gender Policies

A majority of the four countries have gender equality and empowerment mechanisms, which almost exclusively focus on girls and women. Thailand has a National Commission of Women's Affairs under the Office of the Prime Minister to provide overall policy guidance and oversee inter-ministerial coordination (UNESCAP, 2010). Similarly, Malaysia's gender focal point was

<sup>8</sup> The Constitution of Mongolia, 13 January 1992, amended 2001 (UNESCO 2008b)

<sup>9</sup> Section 2 of the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines provides that the state shall establish and maintain a system of free public education at elementary and high school levels. (UNESCO 2009b p.11)

<sup>10</sup> Part 8, Section 49 of the 1997 Constitution stipulates the rights and liberties of Thai citizens to receive free quality education of not less than 12 years (UNESCO 2011a)

<sup>11</sup> Article 12 of the Constitution of Malaysia. Adopted 31 August 1957, as amended (Right to Education Project 2008a)

upgraded into a full-fledged department within the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development in the late 1990's (Osteria, 2009), which has since become the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. The Philippines has implemented many gender equality and empowerment mechanisms, including the Philippines Commission on Women. The Philippines Plan for Gender Responsive Development (1995-2025) includes several initiatives. For example, over 3,000 teachers have received gender and development training since 2004. Other initiatives include provision of gender-sensitive evaluation criteria for instructional materials, tracking gender equality in school performance through a sex-disaggregated database (Basic Education Information System of the Department of Education), use of national competency-based learning standards and development of gender and development learning examples (Torres 2011a).

Mongolia's Soviet influence saw much attention given to achieving gender equality and early successes in gender equity. The 1940 (second) Constitution (Article 80) addressed issues such as early marriage, bride price, polygamy and hindering school attendance as punishable by law (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). The Mongolian country report attributes the relatively narrow difference between men's and women's literacy rates to these policies. In 1989, 94.9 per cent of women and 98.2 per cent of men were reported as being literate (p. 10). However, these successes were challenged by the transition to a market economy and a reduction in education investment. Public perception of the value of education decreased, with a belief that common sense and practical knowledge can only be obtained through experience rather than education, and that these had more impact on earning potential (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). Mongolia does have a national programme to address issues related to gender. The Gender Equality 2002-2015 policy aims to increase the Gender-related Development Index of Mongolia from 0.653 to 0.690 by 2015 (UNESCO, 2008, pp. 7-8).

**Text Box 1: Policy Practice: Boy's Education Policies**

An unusual policy supporting boys' education was issued by the Government of Mongolia in 2004, in order to reduce the reverse gender gap. This policy is in line with The Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality argument that gender equality measures in education only have credibility if they address educational problems of both boys and girls. The meeting stated that gender equality policies must "speak, in concrete and positive ways, to their [men's] concerns, interests, hopes and problems. The political task is to do this without weakening the drive for justice for women and girls that animates current gender equality policy" (as cited in Connell 2003, p. 11). However, this good practice seems to have reversed in the most recent Action Plan (2008-2012), which mentions many aims for education without any reference to boys or other groups lagging behind.

## Part VI: Key Trends in the Four Country Reports

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This section highlights three key trends emerging from the country reports, which relate to the underperformance of boys. These trends are: sex differences in parity or the number of children enrolling, disparities in the number of out-of-school children, and variations in achievement in particular subjects.

### **Trend 1: Gender Parity: Balance Tipping from Low Enrolment Rates**

A key trend in all countries is the low enrolment level of boys. Gender parity is measured by similar enrolment rates for boys and girls. Data highlight disparities in this measure, with a general picture of fewer boys enrolling than girls. In the Philippines, boys make up 56.9 per cent of both primary school-aged out-of-school children and the majority of over-age children in primary school (Torres, 2011a).

### **Trend 2: Participation: Those Who Enrol Still Have Lower Completion Rates**

A second trend is that while boys might enrol, they often do not complete their course of study. In the Philippines, for example, although gender parity has been achieved in primary-level enrolment, boys are much less likely to reach grade six than girls. Boys are also more prone to repeat a grade in primary school as shown by the repetition rate, which is nearly twice as high for boys than for girls. Furthermore, boys are at greater risk of leaving and dropping out of primary school compared to girls (Torres 2011a p. 2). Data from the Malaysian Ministry of Education show that boys comprise a higher proportion of the total population enrolled at primary level, but that this declines as students enter the secondary level and further falls at the tertiary level (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010). A decrease in the school attendance of boys at secondary and tertiary levels is also seen in Mongolia (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011).

Other issues compound the disadvantages due to gender-specific factors, accentuating the trend of boys leaving school. In Malaysia, the *language* of instruction changes at secondary level, from bilingual to Malay. While the scope of Goolamally and Ahmad's study did not include an investigation into whether boys studying in minority languages are leaving education at higher rates than Malay-speaking students, ethnicity does seem to be systematically related to the likelihood of children not attending school. Goolamally and Ahmad (2010) note that only half of Orang Asli ethnic minority students in Malaysia who completed primary school continued on to lower secondary. The lack of data on out-of-school children means that a clear picture of the issues has not emerged. Furthermore, education ministry figures may not capture the population of students in Malaysia who are studying in private education (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010).

### **Trend 3: Even When They Do Stay, Boys Have Low Educational Achievement Scores**

A final focus in this overview is to identify how and in which areas boys do badly. Selective indicators in all four countries showed that boys are doing less well in measures of educational achievement. Goolamally and Ahmad's (2011) analysis of Malaysian examination results reveals that girls perform better in the four subjects in national exam (p. 5-14). The Torres (2011a) study indicates that grade six results from the Philippines National Achievement Test show a slight underperformance for boys in all tests (p. 3). In the Philippines, boys are 1.8 times more likely than girls to repeat a subject (p. 2). Functional literacy rates in the Philippines are eight percentage points lower for boys in school than girls in school, although rates are almost identical for out-of-school children (p. 3). Undarya and Enkhjargal (2011) suggest that youth literacy is now slightly lower for boys in Mongolia, while UNESCO figures suggest that boys aged 15 to 24 make up over 70 per cent of all youth illiterates (UNESCO 2011b p.275). In Thailand, PISA results, which measure reading, mathematics and science, show that boys receive an average lower assessment result than girls (Nethanomsak & Raksasataya, 2010).

## Part VII: Factors Contributing to Boys' Underperformance

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Clearly, there is no single reason why boys do poorly in school. A variety of factors (e.g., scholastic, economic and social) impact boys' educational achievement and performance. This research considers a number of these influences, including education and gender policies which promote or prevent children from attending school as well as educational system factors, such as learning environments, investment in education and administrative oversight of education institutions. This section highlights the role of families and the decisions they make about education. It looks at the way that gender is constructed within classrooms, and more broadly, at holistic factors, which may encourage students to leave school.

### Systemic Factors: Government Investment, the Learning Environment and Parallel Education Systems

Government investment in education plays a significant role in the enrolment, completion and achievement of students. A scarcity of public funds allocated to education has a negative impact in two major ways: by reducing both the availability and the quality of education services. If the quality of education is low, pupils will have a lower achievement and families will increasingly doubt the utility of their children going to school.

The focus on primary education through the Education for All goals may have led governments to prioritise investment in this area at the expense of other levels. Secondary education is significantly more expensive than primary education, consuming more than double the allocation of primary education in Malaysia and Mongolia, and almost two-thirds in the Philippines<sup>12</sup>. The expense of secondary education may account for higher levels of out-of-school children at secondary level. Schools in Mongolia use the argument of limited places as an opportunity to get rid of 'undesirable' students, according to Undarya and Enkhjargal (2011). Schools "admit about 70 per cent of the students into 10<sup>th</sup> grade as the ministry only provides a budget for 70 per cent and boys tend to constitute the majority of poor-performing students. Sifting of students after grade nine was done using a simple rating by grades: each school developed a rating of its grade-nine graduates, listing the best performers on the top and a red line was drawn once the quota given from the ministry was completed" (p. 20). The Mongolia case study did not have access to sex-disaggregated achievement data to conclusively identify whether boys perform more poorly in academic testing and are entering grade 10 in lower numbers. However, the case study did identify that men are seriously under-represented in higher education, making up only 35 per cent of students in 2009 (p. 19).

### The Learning Environment

A chronic shortage of education resources, such as a lack of qualified teachers, textbooks and classrooms, was identified in all countries. While these factors do not affect boys alone, they are worthy of explanation as they interact with pull factors encouraging boys to leave school, and together contribute to the decline in boys' attendance. In the Philippines, a limited overall national budget teamed with low investment in education as a percentage of GDP<sup>13</sup> results in a very small financial commitment to education. Almost all the education budget goes towards teachers' salaries, which account for 94.5 per cent of expenditure in primary education (UNESCO, 2010 p. 404-6). Limited educational investment also has a negative impact on quality, particularly on *the quality of teachers*. To indicate the scale of the problem, the Philippines

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<sup>12</sup> Total public expenditure on primary education as percentage of GNP in Malaysia is 13.7 per cent, compared with 34.4 per cent at secondary, Mongolia is similar at 13.7 per cent at primary and 35.5 per cent at secondary, the Philippines 7.6 per cent at primary and 27 per cent at secondary. (UNESCO 2010 p.404-406)

<sup>13</sup> In 2008, the Philippines government invested 2.8062 per cent of GDP on education (UNESCO 2012)



Commission on Human Rights includes teachers as a disadvantaged sector due to low pay. The Commission highlights inadequate salaries as a bottleneck for improving both the outreach and quality of education (Right to Education 2008c).

### School Response to Limited Budgets

Schools respond to the limited budgets provided by governments in various ways. In Thailand, the local government and schools are expected to mobilize resources for education, often through taxes. Teachers in Mongolia are asked to collect money from students for school fees, impacting on the perceived professionalism of teachers (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011, p. 21). Many schools have large class sizes, an average of 37 students per class in Thailand and 40 in Mongolia. Schools in the Philippines responded to government priorities to reduce class size to a maximum of one teacher for 47 students by increasing the number of school shifts. Department of Education records show that a significant number of schools in the Philippines observe multiple shifts in 2007: 11 schools observed four shifts a day, 133 offered three shifts and about 900 provided two shifts a day to accommodate the ever-increasing student enrolment numbers (UNESCO 2009b p. 15). Multiple shifts are also common in schools in urban Mongolia (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). This trend has the potential to negatively impact quality, by decreasing time spent in the classroom and depriving students of the time or space for extra-curricular activities. Multiple shifts can also be exhausting for teachers if they are required to work more than one shift during the day. Education quality can suffer due to educator burnout.

#### **Text Box 2: Case Study: Improving School Quality by Increased Government Spending**

Mongolia and Thailand have both addressed challenges in the learning environment through increased investment in education. Improvements require commitment both legislatively and through action. The Mongolian Government's efforts to redress deterioration in the education sector led it to increase the education budget to around 20 per cent of total government expenditure, as per the Education Law. This resulted in more investment in education resources, including better dormitories and school buildings, and the provision of computers and equipment (UNESCO 2008 ,p.16-7). In Thailand, massive investments in education since 1990 have seen a doubling in secondary school enrolment (UNICEF, 2012). However, low-quality education remains an issue, particularly for the 12,000 small schools – mostly located in rural and remotes areas – that constitute one-third of all schools in Thailand. Common problems found in smaller schools include inadequate per-student budgets, limited learning materials and a shortage of teachers in some subjects, according to UNESCO (2011a).

### Language of Instruction and Academic Streaming

While language challenges do not affect boys alone, system-wide issues around language run the risk of compounding other disadvantages already faced by some boys. The language of instruction plays a role in achievement, as it can act both as a means of exclusion or inclusion. Non-dominant language speakers are excluded from learning if instruction is in a language other than their own. In a scenario in which a risk of boys underachievement is already present, this may be further compounded by the lack of instruction in a familiar language. Non-comprehension of the dominant language may add to the numerous existing bottlenecks within an ethno-linguistic community. In Thailand for example, the language of instruction is central

*The language of instruction plays  
a role in achievement, as it can  
act both as a means of exclusion  
or inclusion.*

Thai. Access is an issue for children who do not speak Thai as a first language, who currently represent 15 per cent of the out-of-school population (UNESCO, 2011a, p.9). SIL International suggests that non-dominant language students do best if instructed in their own language throughout their course of study, in addition to the study of the dominant language. “Primary education programs that begin in the mother tongue help students gain literacy and numeracy skills more quickly. When taught in their local language, students readily transfer literacy skills to official education languages, acquiring essential tools for life-long learning. The results are the growth of self-esteem and a community that is better equipped to become literate in languages of wider communication” (2011).

### **Text Box 3: Policy in Practice: Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education**

Mother tongue-based multilingual education was formalized in the Philippines in 2009. Students are instructed in their mother tongue language from pre-school through to grade three. Subjects are then taught in Tagalog or English at upper grade levels. Mother tongue-based instruction in these contexts has been linked to improvements in class participation and achievement results in Math, Science, Filipino and English (Torres, 2011a).

Government language policies also directly influence enrolment. Country case studies found that these policies can inadvertently discourage non-dominant language speakers from progressing to higher levels. In Malaysia, Goolamally and Ahmad (2010) found that Tamil, Chinese and Malay schools instruct in those respective languages. All children transition to Malay and English instruction in secondary school. Instruction in a new language at secondary level presents several challenges, and may cause dropout and underachievement in Chinese and Tamil language students (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010). Similarly, Mongolia’s attempts to introduce Uigjarjin Mongol script as the main language of instruction in the early 1990’s failed. This disadvantaged a group of learners, initially taught in Uigjarjin, and then expected to master more complex subjects in Cyrillic in secondary school (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). In these cases, exploration into transitional teaching methods from native tongue to mainstream languages, bridging gradually to dominant languages, or what is preferable, supporting the continuation of learning in the mother tongue, may significantly enhance the quality of learning.

## **Parallel Education Systems**

A related issue is the diversification of education systems. Some types of education are provided in schools outside of the government’s direct control, which may result in different levels of quality being delivered by different education settings. Basic education in the Philippines is offered at both private and public schools. Almost 40 per cent of secondary schools were private in the 2007-2008 school year, compared with 15 per cent of primary schools (UNESCO, 2009b, p.11). Similarly, Mongolia’s Ministry of Education, Culture and Science has no quality oversight of religious schools (UNESCO, 2008b).

An understanding of the impact of parallel learning systems is hindered by the profound lack of data across education sectors and levels. For example, many countries lack data on out-of-school children. Malaysia’s national tracking data do not include students studying in private schools at secondary level. Data on movement from national schools to private schools are frequently not available at the Ministry of Education (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010). The Mongolian country report also identified limitations to national statistical data and information on non-formal education. “[A]dults or youth over the age of 15 years old who enrol in a short-term, non-formal education programme are considered literate. Similarly,

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with disabilities are often not  
counted at all in education  
statistics*

school-aged children who enrol in non-formal education are subtracted from the number of dropouts or never-enrolled children and youth. As a result, the figures for literacy tend to be over-reported, while those for dropouts and never-enrolled children and youth are under-reported” (Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelmaa, 2008). Across the board, children with disabilities are often not counted at all in education statistics (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). The Philippines also has a very strong non-formal education sector and Alternative Learning System (ALS). The ALS covers primary and secondary-age students who can later take an equivalency test and join or re-join formal education. While the Department of Education collates data, these are not included in the Basic Education Information System (Torres, 2011a). The Philippines country study did not have access to sex-disaggregated data from non-formal education and participants in the ALS, so it is not possible to track whether more boys are enrolled in non-formal and ALS programmes.

Tracking these diverse learning experiences is vitally important, as the case studies point towards diversification in enrolment in different types of education. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) generally has much higher rates of boys’ enrolment. Enrolment of girls in vocational and technical education in Malaysia was less than 50 per cent, with little change from 2000 to 2005 (Goolamally and Ahmad 2010). On the other hand, Mongolia’s vocational education system declined in the 1990s, resulting in a lack of options for men, who traditionally enrolled in such education. The TVET system collapsed due to its low social status, a mismatch between skills supply and labour market demand, and the poor provision of market-oriented skills and training to students (UNESCO, 2008). Analysis by Tumursukh suggests that education services in Mongolia do not respond well to the practical and strategic needs of students, their families and the labour market, reducing the value of education and leading to assumptions that formal education is not directly correlated with economic success. This is reinforced for boys, often from poor families, who are mainly exposed to adult male role models engaged in manual labour (Tumursukh , 2011).

### **The Impact of Transition on Learning**

Another key area is the transition and funding between education levels. Often, there is a lack of consistency in learning at different education levels and transitions between education levels are not adequately supported. Recent research and a set of articles published by the Lancet

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(Engle et al 2011) confirmed findings that young children benefit greatly from participation in quality early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes (Engle, et al., 2007; 2010). Early childhood education improves a child’s readiness for primary education, which is likely to ensure their ability to complete and transition to secondary education.

The Philippines is working to address this issue through the introduction of kindergarten and other programmes to improve school readiness for young children (Torres, 2011a). Such programmes should be expanded to focus on transitions between other education levels, such as primary and secondary school. Investment in ECCE can provide advantages

to families at multiple levels. There is ample evidence to indicate that transition to primary school, survival to higher grade levels in education and learning outcomes are better for both boys and girls who receive ECCE (UNESCO-UNICEF, 2012).

The problem of boys' underachievement is frequently related to the increased burden that falls on girls in the form of greater demands to perform household chores and take care of younger siblings. Provision of quality ECCE can provide opportunities for possible maternal participation in the labour force, increasing family income and easing financial burdens on the family (which impact boys' underperformance) as well as releasing young girls from the burden of sibling care at the cost of their education. "An extensive evaluation by USAID in eight countries concluded that boys have consistently benefited from programmes and policies to



improve girls' education. Not only did boys as well as girls benefit from initiatives to improve school quality, but boys' enrolment also increased together with that of girls.

Boys face many of the same problems as girls: restricted access, poor quality, lack of nearby schools and the absence of parental support for education. When these are addressed in order to get more girls into school, boys – especially those from vulnerable or marginalized groups – also reap the reward" (UNICEF, 2004, p. 60). Thus, progressive policies aimed at providing

services for the whole family, such as integrated early childhood development, and targeted at girls' education, can greatly benefit boys as well.

### Family Influences in Education

Children develop differently in different cultures, as illustrated by Super and Harkness (1986, 1992, 1996) in their conceptualization of the developmental niche. The three sub-systems of the developmental niche – settings, customs and caretaker psychology – mediate a child's development experience within the larger culture. Physical spaces provided for girls and boys may be different, with girls relegated to the house and boys offered learning opportunities further afield. Child-rearing practices are different for boys and girls, with boys raised to be more physically active and resilient. Lastly, the psychology of parents and teachers elaborate themes such as normative gender identities, the differences between boys and girls, and the value of action for boys.

Cultural themes are linked to the gender norms within societies. The ideas that a culture has about the differences between boys and girls are elaborated throughout a child's development through the three sub-systems of the developmental niche. This ensures the acquisition of skills and values around those themes. As key meaning systems are elaborated in appropriate ways at different stages of development, learning occurs across behavioural domains and time scales, ensuring that cultural thematicity has a profound influence on development. The next section considers how cultural themes are elaborated throughout development in the four countries.

### Customs and Practices in the Socialization of Boys and Girls

Country studies identified the impact of caretaker psychology (Super and Harkness 1992) – and the ways in which sons and daughters are raised – on school participation. Thai families are perceived to be stricter with daughters than sons (Nethanomsak & Raksasataya, 2010). Participants in focus groups held in Thailand linked this with the notion that girls seem to have more patience in strict school environments (Nethanomsak & Raksasataya, 2010). Country



studies show that social constructions of gender lead to a normative gender identity for males, which results in a certain level of disadvantage for them within the formal education setting. Boys in Mongolia (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011) are considered to have greater personal freedom and possibly a higher status in the family than girls. They are also noted to respond more rebelliously to authoritarian methods at school, are less afraid than girls to disobey and are, in fact, encouraged by peers and society to stand up to authority. As a result, boys are more likely to be severely punished. The absence of appropriate mechanisms and teacher capacity to respond to such situations can lead to a vicious cycle, increasing the likelihood that boys leave school early (Tumursukh, 2011).

### Family Involvement

Family expectations, participation and availability all influence school achievement. A study in the Philippines (Battistella & Conaco, 1998) found that if a parent was away from home, the children were more likely to go to school. Parents who migrated overseas would send remittances home, providing the needed funds to support education. However, while *attendance* may improve, the study found that school *performance* suffered from parental absence. Children with one or both parents absent had lower school grades and ranking than children with both parents present. The study found that when the “mother is at home there is emphasis on religious duties and praying regularly; when the father is at home the stress is on being friendly and helping around the house; and when both parents are away the emphasis is on studying diligently” (p. 10).

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Many boys grow up without positive role models, which can lead to negative stereotypes of masculine behaviour. Tumursukh (2011) argues that a lack of role models exposes boys in Mongolia to negative influences, such as violence, sexism and materialism. The socialization of boys into dominant stereotyped masculinity leads to an increased need for cash, leading some to skip classes or quit school entirely for monetary gains, and rebel against authority figures, including female teachers, to gain status among peers. In designing responses to the issue of boys’ underachievement, it is critical to develop abilities to assess the influence of negative masculinity norms, combat gender stereotyping and promote positive gender attributes and behaviour (Tumursukh, 2011).

Family and cultural beliefs can also affect school attendance and achievement. Mongolia has a traditional preference for educating girls. The country study attributes boys’ underperformance to giving the best possible preparation for girls, who eventually marry and leave home, as opposed to boys who traditionally stay near the parents. As girls are not cared for by their parents in the long term, the cultural response has been to ensure that they are more highly educated as a safety net (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011).

## Poverty and Household Economics

Globally, girls make up the majority of out-of-school children<sup>14</sup>, but in specific countries in the East Asia region, including the Philippines (Torres, 2011a), boys account for the majority. A study by Grootaert and Patrinos (as cited in Buchmann and Hannum, 2001) connected child household labour and declining school participation in the Philippines. Another study, on the school-to-work transitions in the Philippines, suggests that a combination of social norms and poverty compels boys to leave school without high-end skills and enter the labour force at an early stage. This is linked to non-secure work such as low-wage work, self-employment or family-based economic activities (Torres, 2011b, p.6). UNESCO (2009a) identified child labour, either with or without parental permission, as the main reason for secondary-age children not attending school (p. 14).

Parental decisions about withdrawing children from school may be influenced by gender. Parents may consider boys more useful outside of school, due to their potentially higher wages. Traditional gender notions mean that boys are considered stronger and more independent. These attributes are considered useful in manual roles and in agrarian societies, the roles being typically filled by boys. Anecdotal evidence suggests that because of this, boys are more likely than girls to be taken out of school and put to work, although the case studies do not conclusively support this theory. Teachers from rural schools cited in the Torres (2011a) study suggest that boys tend to drop out especially when they get to an age where they can help out their parents on the farm (p. 18). Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to be engaged in unpaid work at home. This work may have more flexibility, meaning that girls are often able to study in the morning and work in the evenings (p. 19).

In Malaysia (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010), the perception is that parents trust boys' capacity to secure a job without having a high level of education, whereas a girl needs more education to improve her chances of getting a job. Thus girls are kept in school longer. Labour force participation rates<sup>15</sup> demonstrate this. In 2009, 79 per cent of men aged 15 and over participated in the labour force, compared to only 44 per cent of women (World Bank, 2012). The different status of men and women in employment may also represent a broader gender inequity in favour of men. A study from Australia (Hodgson, 2006, p. 124) shows that higher academic achievement does not result in more favourable labour market positions, as male early school leavers are more likely to be employed than women. The results of Hodgson's study indicate that gender has a role to play in a student's success along with individual aptitude and achievement, and suggests that women must obtain higher qualifications to remain competitive. This, in turn, implies that men need lower levels of education to be competitive in the job market, which may act as a pull factor encouraging boys to leave school. Women, on the other hand, may require a higher investment in education to obtain reasonable wages, resulting in longer enrolment periods.

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<sup>14</sup> Global gender gaps in the out-of-school population are narrowing, but in 2008 girls still made up 53 per cent of the out-of-school population. (UNESCO 2011b p.43)

<sup>15</sup> Labour participation rate as a percentage of the population aged 15 or more



## Within the Classroom

The country reports indicate that gender differences are emphasized and reinforced within the school system in all four countries. The three sub-systems of the developmental niche (Super and Harkness 1992) – settings, customs and caretaker psychology – can interact within classrooms to mediate a child's developmental experience within the larger culture and gender norms. Teachers' expectations of students' abilities, the non-active structure of classroom activities and persistent gender stereotypes combine to negatively impact boys' choices and their engagement in learning.

## Gender Stereotypes about School

Students' understanding of gender roles and how these relate to school also influence their school achievement. Some boys may consider school itself to be for girls. Participants in the survey conducted as part of the Malaysian study felt that a main reason for the low achievement of boys was that they don't like school (Goolamally and Ahmad, 2010, p. 16). According to the survey participants, being studious and hardworking appear to be considered feminine attributes (ibid).

Furthermore, stereotypes are reinforced at school. A study by the Philippines Government found that "schools continue to play pivotal roles in reinforcing and perpetuating sex-role stereotyping and sexist concepts still found in the curricula, textbooks and instructional materials" (Guiso, et al., 2008). There is a clear link between the role of biased texts and curriculum in underlining gender stereotypes and transmitting discrimination. Gender-biased texts limit an individual's potential because they support the notion that men and women are unequal and should work in particular professions. For example, a Thailand government review found that:

*"Overall in the textbooks male characters appeared twice as [frequently as] female characters and the message presented by these texts was that men and women have different and unequal roles, and that men's status is superior to women's" (as cited in Wilson, 2003, p. 13).*

## Socialization and Stereotypes of Masculinity

The way that boys are socialized defines the type of men they become. But stereotypes about masculinity are often rigid, resulting in socialization that is aggressive and harmful. Stromquist's overview of the gender enculturation process in schools (2007) noted that in gender-biased school environments, socialization of young men might encourage hyper-competitiveness or violence (p. 9). Boys are pressurized to be tough and 'manly' and these pressures engender delinquent behaviours in the classroom. Lingard notes that "school is non-innocent with regard to gender construction, in that it provides an arena for different sorts of behaviors which are overwritten with gender norms" (as cited in Gill & Starr, 2000, p. 331).

In many settings, boys face great pressure to fit into prescribed norms in terms of gender identity and sexual orientation. Young people who do not fit neatly into defined gender norms face bullying and ridicule. Studies (Kosciw, Diaz & Bartiewicz 2010, and Berlan, Corliss, Field,

*In the process of analyzing gender environments, it is critical to include boys themselves as partners and allies in efforts to reconceptualize harmful gender stereotypes and negative attributions.*

Goodman and Austin, 2009) have shown that homophobic bullying negatively affects the educational opportunities of school-age children in America. Such research points to the need for context-sensitive analysis of gender environments in each country, with the inclusion of measures for gender-based violence in educational contexts. Further, boys may see certain disciplines and types of educational activities as being 'not masculine enough'. Reading, for example, is perceived by boys as "girls' territory," or as "unmanly" (UNICEF, 2004, p. 60). In the process of analyzing gender environments, it is critical to include boys themselves as partners and allies in efforts to reconceptualize harmful gender stereotypes and negative attributions. The Girls' Education Movement (GEM) in Uganda, the "Conscientizing Male Adolescent programme", and efforts in Pakistan where girls brought in boys to support education programming (UNICEF, 2004) all provide solid examples of integrating male students' ideas and participation in advancing efforts towards peace-building and gender equality in education.

## Learning Styles and Curriculum

The general perception of participants surveyed in the Malaysian country study was that the underperformance of boys was as a result of differing learning styles between boys and girls, and the supposition that boys would prefer a more hands-on approach (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010). This is echoed in the Thailand country study, which suggests that schools organize learning activities that do not interest male students (Nethanomsak & Raksasataya, 2010).

Related to these ideas is the assumption that girls have a particular learning style, usually designated as passive and academic, and boys have a more active learning style and respond well to physical activity. However, while this broad perception exists, wider research highlights the significant diversity, and indeed a continuum, of learning styles among boys and girls (Coffield et al 2004). Research does not support the notion that boys and girls have different learning styles *per se*, but instead that age, gender, socio-economic status, academic achievement, race, religion, culture and nationality are important variables in learning preference. Furthermore, multiple learning patterns exist between and within diverse groups of students. This "means that the evidence does not support a clear or simple 'learning styles prescription' which differentiates between these groups" (Coffield et al., p. 27).

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Thus, the common perception emerging from the country studies, that girls are readers and boys are active, is not only problematic but also not supported by the literature. A combination of biological, developmental and social growth influences the learning styles of boys and girls, meaning that gender identities develop in different ways. But generalizations based on stereotypes about differences should be avoided, as they can result in determinism or causal attributions based on what are perceived to be innate, pre-existing, unmodifiable, biological differences that society has no control over. Rather than biological differences, gender is a relational construct, played out in interaction between the sexes (World Bank, 2011). It is therefore imperative that advocacy for gender equality is strongly linked to examination of gender stereotypes in educational settings, curricula and teacher training.

However, any debate about learning style is clearly useful in that it acknowledges that individual students, regardless of sex, learn differently. This recognition suggests that teachers should use a broad range of styles, approaches and mediums, rather than teaching in a 'one size fits all' style. Boys may be more engaged through movement, the use of new technologies and active participation. Some girls, too, will be helped by these

approaches because not all girls learn in the same way. Sound and inclusive teaching practices for boys are therefore consistent with good teaching practices in general. Inclusive education should be promoted, with all education systems being reviewed for inclusiveness.

### Lack of Male Teachers

Another influence on the achievement of boys may be the lack of male teachers. The majority of primary school teachers in the Asia-Pacific region are women. This was perceived as a factor contributing to boys' underachievement in the report from Malaysia (Goolamally & Ahmad, 2010), where the majority of teachers are female and are seen to favour girls. The link between female teachers and girls' educational achievement has been clearly charted (UNESCO, 2006). It is widely recognized that the fewer the female teachers, the wider the enrolment, retention and promotion gaps are between female and male students (UNICEF EAPRO, 2009, p. 47). Studies by Dee (2005, 2006) found that the sex of the teacher has a large influence on a student's test performance and engagement with academic material, as well as the teacher's perception of students. "Simply put, girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men" (Dee, 2006).

### Teaching Staff in Pre-Primary, Primary and Secondary Education

	Pre-Primary		Primary		Secondary	
	Total (000)	% female	Total (000)	% female	Total (000)	% female
<b>Malaysia</b>	27	93	206	68	167	65
<b>Mongolia</b>	4	99	8	95	18	74
<b>Philippines</b>	28	97	390	87	181	76
<b>Thailand</b>	104	78	348	60	223	55

Table 6: Teaching Staff Ratios (UNESCO, 2011b, p. 326-333)

It is clear that the preponderance of female teachers at lower education levels has left few male role models for boys in their early years in school (UNICEF, 2009, p. 47). It is noteworthy that at secondary and tertiary levels, where the 'dropout rate' for boys seems to be at its highest, the majority of teachers are male.

#### **Text Box : Male Teachers as Informal Counselors**

One area in which male teachers may play a particularly significant role is as informal counsellors and mentors for male students. They may encourage boys to stay at school or guide them to alternative learning pathways. However, such informal mentoring systems should be supplemented with formal guidance and counselling systems within schools, including good training for the informal mentoring process. Such systems can advocate for meaningful, personal career choices for boys, and serve to bridge the gap between the academic curriculum in post-primary education and labour market needs. School career guidance can help students to prepare for market-oriented employment. Counselling and guidance services that are gender-responsive redress gender inequalities by promoting attitudinal and behavioural changes (Raghavan, 2009, p.4). While school guidance and counselling are relatively new concepts in Asia and the Pacific, development of counselling could be a key tool to reduce the number of out-of-school male students.

### Violence and Corporal Punishment

There is a common perception in Mongolia that boys are likely to be more severely punished by teachers than girls. "Boys reported they prefer dealing with female teachers and are in fact afraid of male teachers as they beat them painfully" (Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). Boys may also face other forms of violence in school, such as physical fighting with their peers. A 2009

study in Mongolia found that boys and older children were more likely to be discriminated against than girls and younger children, and to experience physical violence at the hands of peers and teachers (Save the Children, 2009, p.10 as cited in Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011). Child protection is an issue at schools in Mongolia, where the need for non-violent teaching spaces has been identified (UNESCO, 2008b, p.15). A 2007 study found that 75 per cent of secondary school students experienced some form of violence at school, whether from peers or teachers. In a 2009 study, 93 per cent of teachers admitted to using physical or emotional punishment against children (as cited in Undarya & Enkhjargal, 2011).

## Part VIII: Recommendations

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### **Strengthen data collection across sectors and address inequities through the collection and analyses of data disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background and geographic location.**

A major issue noted in all four country reports is a lack of comprehensive data that track the progress of young boys and girls through different levels of education. A clear picture of boys' movements within and through the school sector cannot be created without information on where boys are. Good tracking systems assist governments to identify key stress points and areas of mass-movement. Currently, there is inadequate tracking within the broader school system. It is unclear whether students transferring to a different type of education, say from formal to non-formal, or from public to private, are in fact included in current education data collected by education ministries. Boys may be counted as out-of-school children when they have transferred to another type of schooling. These issues can be addressed by systematic tracking and mapping of children through all types of education, to ensure that a full picture emerges.

Clearly, not all boys do badly. Some examples indicate that poor and rural boys may be the least advantaged, but there is a lack of systematic analysis. Data disaggregated by socio-economic background, ethnicity and geographic location would identify which particular boys are doing badly. Empirical examination and proper planning would allow governments to create responsive interventions for particularly disadvantaged groups of students.

### **Provide strong incentives to improve attendance**

Enrolment and dropout are clearly linked to poverty, a link supported by significant research in the Philippines. A broad range of compensatory measures conditional upon children being in school can improve school attendance. The success in increasing girls' attendance in the region provides a variety of models and incentives to choose from, including scholarships, provisional cash transfers, transport and school-feeding programmes. However, it is important to carefully analyse target populations, settings and specific measures, since what works for one setting or for girls may not necessarily work for boys or children in another setting.

### **Ensure gender-in-education discussions include boys**

Boys need to be included in the debate about gender equality in education. Social change should be promoted to strengthen the understanding among families of the value of education for both girls and boys. In some instances, families may place a high value on education, but have only a limited understanding of the policies and benefits that may already be in place in their country. Advocacy with and through boys should also focus on increasing the awareness of already-existing policies and benefits.

In addition, proper attention should be given to gender issues throughout the education lifespan, including from birth through early childhood education approaches. Education policies should examine and redress gender imbalances in the education system and actively promote gender equality. Equity policies can address the separate needs of boys and girls, while still promoting gender equality. Strategies to address the particular needs of boys may be required, alongside

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strategies for girls. These might include the exploration and careful examination of the pros and cons of single-sex schools, the promotion of active learning styles and the review of curricula for gender stereotypes. In these contexts, it is also particularly useful to plan and implement interventions with a 'gender lens' where planning and analyses focus on the specific needs of young boys and girls.

### **Promote inclusive education in learner-friendly environments**

Inclusive education should be promoted, with all education systems being reviewed for inclusiveness. Curricula should be reviewed and all teachers trained to respond to individual learning styles. It is important to note that 'inclusion' is a very broad term. While it does (and rightly should) encompass young boys and girls with disabilities, inclusive education focusing on un-reached children and youth should be promoted. These include children from ethno-linguistic communities; from mountainous, rural or remote communities; in situations of disaster and emergency; with diverse sexual orientations, and young affected populations and youth in conflict situations (to name a few relevant contexts in the Asia-Pacific region). Finally, supportive learning environments should be ensured by addressing safety and gender-based violence, gender issues in curricula, gendered expectations of teachers and learning styles.

### **Strengthen counselling and guidance**

Counselling and mentoring can help boys to develop during their adolescent years and mature into men who are non-judgemental and are themselves advocates for gender equality. Role models can provide positive examples of masculinity, and promote an environment that questions stereotypes. Guidance within schools is also vital to ensure that students undertake appropriate learning, and remain within the education system. Boys whose educational needs are not being met should be transitioned into more suitable contexts, such as those that promote mother tongue-based education, and vocational or technical schools. Schools need formal career guidance mechanisms to complement informal mentoring. Boys can also be recruited as partners and allies in the process, and can be effective mentors and advocates for gender equality in education.

### **Empower and facilitate an inter-sectoral approach**

In East Asia and the Pacific, there is an urgent need to initiate a holistic discussion encompassing all sectors, to ensure that the system is meeting the needs of all students and easing transition between different educational levels, including informal and formal, and into vocational education. Comprehensive inter-sectoral approaches can help navigate the change between school and the world of work. To address the issue of boys' underperformance, it is important to bring into the discussion other relevant players, such as ministries that oversee vocational and non-formal education, labour, welfare and finance and budgeting, in addition to civil society organizations and NGO partners.



## Part IX: Conclusion

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The reports from Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand paint an overall picture of boys performing less well than girls in key education indicators in these countries. These reports were used to investigate the key factors influencing how well boys are performing in an educational context. The factors highlighted include the way in which boys and girls are perceived and treated differently, and given different opportunities. This synthesis report found that school and home environments, where treatment and roles based on gender can be different, have a profound effect on a child's development and their performance in the educational system and beyond. Gender inequalities in education, where boys have access to fewer opportunities than their female counterparts, have not been fully understood, by families, school administrators and society as a whole.

This report argues that boys' underperformance is not universal across all settings but rather highly dependent upon core factors, such as socio-economic background, ethnicity, and geographic location. Gender disparities tend to narrow as socio-economic circumstances improve. Gender gaps in school attendance are smaller at the wealthier end of the spectrum. Children from households that are poor, rural or from an ethnic minority are typically left far behind (UNESCO, 2011b, p. 8).



Underachievement appears to be linked with other elements of disadvantage, such as socio-economic status or a lack of mother tongue-based instruction. This is in keeping with a wide body of research arguing that gender differences amplify other kinds of inequalities, such as racial, ethnic or class differences (Buchmann, et al., 2008, p. 319).

Clear recommendations were made to address boys' disadvantage, including strengthening data collection across sectors and addressing inequities through better collection and analysis of disaggregated data. Recommendations also include the provision of strong incentives to improve attendance and ensuring that discussions on gender in education include boys. Other calls for action include the promotion of inclusive education in learner-friendly environments, strengthening counselling and guidance, and facilitating an inter-sectoral approach to gender equality in education. If properly pursued, these activities will have a positive influence on ensuring that all children, boys and girls alike, can fulfill their right to education.

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