

SECTORAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAMME

SECTOR Notes

Gender issues in Education and training A case of unequal access

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Girls and women in most developing countries have far less access to quality education and training than do their male counterparts. This is a major economic and social development issue. It begins with basic education and continues through to higher education. A firm linkage has been demonstrated between greater access of girls to educational opportunities and improvements in health, family planning, and economic development.

Another potential challenge exists in many of the more economically developed countries of the OECD, and in the Caribbean; namely, a trend toward a growing disproportion of far higher female enrolment and graduation rates at secondary levels, and even more at higher levels. Paradoxically, in the future this could create barriers to equal access for young males in the form of higher dropout rates at secondary level and restrictions on access to higher education, even as gender segregation in secondary technical education and in higher education continues.

One contributing factor in both contexts is persistent gender disequilibrium in the teaching profession, including technical and vocational education. The minority position of women teachers in certain regions – Africa and south Asia in particular – and even more so in rural and disadvantaged areas where it may be difficult to post single female teachers, has been directly linked to the under-enrolment and high dropout rates of girls. The small number of women teachers and trainers to serve as role models and advisors capable of encouraging girls and women to pursue careers in technical trades is another – and important – barrier to equality of opportunity in these fields.

Previous research commissioned by the ILO¹ suggests that the highly feminized nature of the teaching profession in some countries may have a negative impact on improvements in salaries and other conditions of service which contribute to a higher

¹ Wylie, Cathy, *Trends in the feminization of the teaching profession in OECD countries, 1980-1995*, Sectoral Activities Working Paper 151, Geneva, ILO, 2000.

professional status, recruitment and maintenance of high quality graduates in teaching, and ultimately, quality education for both males and females. Continued prosperity and a dynamic labour market in many OECD countries continues to attract many highly qualified men and women to career choices other than teaching, leading to shortages – in both numbers and quality – which are likely to be aggravated as a “graying” teaching profession faces large-scale departures of professionals from the present generation.

Women in education

Nearly 60% of the world’s primary and secondary teachers are women, and women teachers dominate the pre-primary level in almost all countries (more than 90% in most, a minimum of 50% in the rest). Yet, vast regional differences linked to socio-economic levels exist in primary and secondary levels. Latest figures (2004)² show that over 80% of primary teachers in North America and Europe are women, but they are less than half the total in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. At secondary level women teachers represent more than 60% of the total in most developed countries but only 25-30% in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, almost without exception the percentages at both primary and secondary levels have risen inexorably over the last two decades. Furthermore, enrolment figures in teacher training programmes of OECD countries where male teachers are already a distinct minority foreshadow further declines.³

Though opportunities and percentages of women in management positions of this highly feminized profession are improving, women remain seriously under-represented in senior teaching and management posts. Moreover, despite the absence of more detailed data disaggregated by sex in most countries, in almost all regions, *de facto*, women earn less overall than men because of lower qualifications (in many developing countries), interruptions in their careers for family responsibilities, and their relative absence from positions of responsibility. Some indications of sexual harassment have been noted as impeding careers. However, the largest barrier to equality in career development remains male-biased recruitment procedures and criteria, which do not sufficiently account for the demands on women arising from family responsibilities and the persistence of “camouflaged” stereotypes concerning their suitability for leadership roles.

In a few countries, statutory discrimination in the allocation of allowances and subsidies also persists. Even in the absence of such discrimination, ILO surveys have shown that women teachers and trainers in many countries earn less than their male counterparts at the same levels, and in the same subjects, at secondary and

2 UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Teachers and Educational Quality, Monitoring Global Needs for 2015*, Montreal, 2006

3 OECD, *Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, Paris, 2005

higher education levels.⁴ One contributing factor is that women are not proportionately represented in the decision-making structures of teachers' unions and professional associations, which has minimized the attention to their concerns in collective bargaining outcomes and professional standard-setting.

There are very few women teachers in technical and vocational education and training, and they are mostly in a limited number of disciplines which are traditionally "feminine", such as secretarial and office work, and domestic science. In higher education, women professors tend to be concentrated in lower-level institutions out of all proportion to their numbers. And they are at the lower rungs of the career ladder in the high prestige universities, and in managerial positions concerned with areas such as student services rather than the most important academic posts of dean or head of department.

Progress and achievements

In order to influence increases in enrolments and completion of studies by girl students in countries where women teachers are relatively few – especially in rural areas – some educational authorities have instituted special programmes to recruit, train, and guarantee accommodation for women teachers. Other countries have established special programmes to award seniority credits for women who interrupt careers for family reasons, they have created joint (male and female) promotion panels, introduced quotas, or extended training programmes to encourage women.

What else can be done? Some policy options

- Include gender issues in education policy documents, including national plans, promote gender awareness and give problem-solving training for members of policy and planning units
- Systematically collect and use sex-disaggregated data on the numbers of women teachers/trainers, their location by rural or urban area, rank in the education or public service and position on the salary scale
- Design and implement gender training packages at teacher training institutions and in continuing training programmes
- Provide material and administrative support for gender-specific training programmes for women, to focus on developing leadership capacity
- Systematically review and eliminate any overt discrimination in remuneration scales (base salary and allowances) and teaching service regulations, as well as any practices of sexual harassment
- Within teachers' unions and professional associations, establish awareness and training programmes to help propel more women teachers into positions of responsibility in teachers' organisations and professional bodies
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⁴ ILO, *Recent Developments in the education sector*, Report for discussion at the Joint Meeting on the Impact of Structural Adjustment on Educational Personnel, Geneva, 1996.