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Achieving gender equality in education: don't forget the boys

Achieving gender equality in and through education is central to meeting the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. While the emphasis tends to be on the effects of gender norms on girls, this paper puts the spotlight on the less recognized effects of these norms on boys' schooling, particularly at the secondary level and amongst those from the poorest families. It argues that addressing boys' disadvantage and disengagement in education is an essential part of a response to the challenge of gender inequality, in education and beyond.

Achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education enrolment and completion is an essential first step in achieving gender equality in education. Achieving gender parity can also support a more transformative role for education in tackling the unequal power relations, social norms and systems of belief that underpin gender inequality in societies.

Yet, significant gender disparities remain at the point of entry to school as well as in all subsequent transition points. Girls remain far more likely to be disadvantaged at the primary education level in the poorest countries, where they make up a much larger share of those who will never even go to school. Yet, in many countries, boys are at greater risk of failing to progress and complete their secondary education. Moreover, boys perform increasingly less well in assessments of reading skills worldwide, a fact that continues to puzzle policy-makers.

Boys' lower attainment or learning achievement are linked to disadvantage stemming from poverty leading to demands on them to search for work and to disengagement associated with disaffection with school and a sense of not belonging to the school community. But both the pull factor of the labour market and the push factor of the school community are not neutral. Rather, they can be traced back to prevailing gender norms in society, which place expectations on boys to behave in specific ways.

Gender norms are perpetuated, directly or indirectly, by education systems. A hidden curriculum leads to biases in textbook representations of gender and in teaching practices. These norms and beliefs that are traditionally associated with the exclusion of girls can also negatively affect boys. As the world has set its sights on the achievement of universal completion of secondary education by 2030, it is important to take note of boys' continuing disadvantage in several countries at this level.

This matters – and not just for meeting the Sustainable Development Goal 4 commitment to leave no one behind and ensure all boys and girls fulfil their right to complete 12 years of education of good quality. Actively addressing boys' disadvantage in education could be transformative in promoting gender equality, reducing violence and protecting youth from risk factors that could distort their futures. This paper describes the extent of the problem, examines where and why it occurs and explores possible solutions[1].

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Improving education outcomes for boys can help build a more equal society

Boys' disengagement with education and high dropout rates have broad repercussions for gender equality throughout society. Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), conducted in 2009 and 2010 in Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, Mexico and Rwanda, showed that less educated men were more likely to express discriminatory gender views (Barker et al., 2011). Moreover, men who had not completed secondary education were more likely to perpetrate physical violence against a female intimate partner in Bangladesh and Papua New Guinea, sexual violence in Indonesia, and both forms of violence in Cambodia (Fulu et al., 2013). Experiencing or witnessing violence at home increases the risk that a child will grow up to become a victim or perpetrator of violence. So, improving educational outcomes for young men, as future partners and fathers, can help mitigate violence and promote more equal gender relations within households.

Improving boys' access to quality, inclusive education can be important in addressing youth disenfranchisement and gang violence. During the civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, for example, youth who had no education were nine times as likely to join rebel or counter-rebel groups as were those with post-primary education or above (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). In Brazil, rates of violence and violent death are particularly high for young men in low income settings, where lack of education and employment opportunities can lead them into gangs and the drugs trade (Imbusch et al., 2011).

Many studies have explored the links between paternal education and positive child development outcomes. Analysis of data from the six countries with the lowest measles vaccination coverage – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan – showed that paternal education at secondary level or higher was significantly associated with measles immunization uptake, even after taking maternal education into account (Rammohan et al., 2012).

Engaging young men in parent training initiatives has been shown to increase their involvement in childcare and to improve gender relations within participating families. When children see their parents share care work more equally, they themselves tend to do the same as adults. Programmes to prepare both boys and girls to be caregivers and providers in the future can be embedded into schools, early childhood development initiatives and extra-curricular clubs (Heilman et al., 2017).

The road to gender equality passes through boys' and girls' access to equitable education of good quality. Schools, as well as non-formal education settings, can be instrumental in preventing discriminatory views and violent behaviours from taking root, and also in ensuring that young men make a smooth transition to productive employment and active participation in social life.

## Boys face education disadvantages in many parts of the world

Since 2000, the world has made rapid improvements towards achieving gender parity in education. On average, the target of gender parity has been achieved at all levels except tertiary education. However, behind this picture lie considerable disparities by education level and regions.

In sub-Saharan Africa, girls are at a relative disadvantage at four key points in education: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary completion, and participation in post-secondary education. But in upper secondary completion and participation in post-secondary education, boys are at a disadvantage in the richer regions of Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as Europe and North America, as measured by the adjusted gender parity index (**Figure 1**)[2].

In Latin America and the Caribbean, for every 100 females, 96 males completed primary, 94 completed lower secondary and 91 completed upper secondary education, while only 83 were attending some form of post-secondary education. This is not a new phenomenon (Grant and Behrman, 2010). Since 1997, for every 100 females in the region, there have been no more than 90 males enrolled in upper secondary education. Eastern Asia is the only region that has moved into disparity since 2014. Europe and North America, where males were at a slight disadvantage in the 1990s, has achieved parity on average since 2000 (**Figure 2**). Yet, as regions move towards parity on average, with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa, individual countries can move in very different directions.

Overall, one in four countries had disparities at the expense of girls in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary enrolment in 2016, as compared to one in five countries in 2000. By contrast, in 2016, 6% of countries had a disparity at the expense of boys in primary enrolment, 17% in lower

FIGURE 1:

Boys are disadvantaged at secondary and post-secondary levels in Latin America and Europe
*Adjusted gender parity index for selected education indicators, selected regions, 2010–2016*
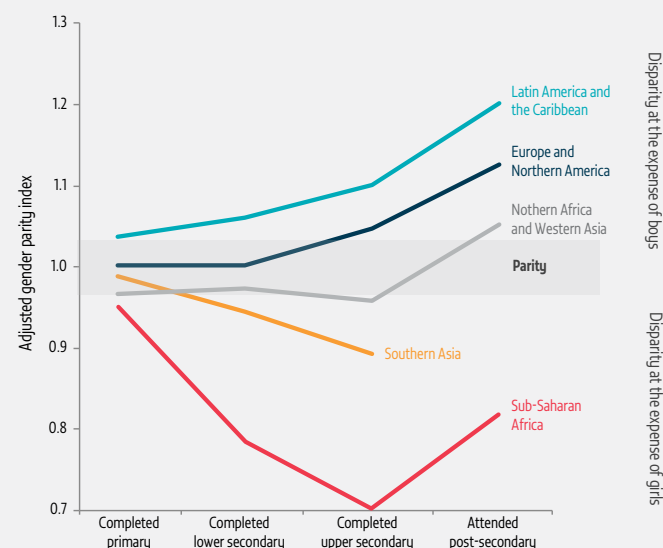
Note: Values for Northern Africa and Western Asia refer only to low and middle income countries in the region.
Source: GEM Report team analysis based on household survey data.

secondary and 45% in upper secondary. While fewer countries have such disparities than did in 2000, the pace of change for addressing boys' relative disadvantage has been slower than for girls', especially at the upper secondary education level (**Figure 3c**).

Some countries experienced unprecedented changes in the gender composition of enrolments within the 15 years from 2000 to 2016. For example, at the primary education level, in India and Senegal about 85 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys in 2000, but by 2016 the situation had been reversed (**Figure 3a**). Likewise, at the lower secondary education level, in the Gambia and Nepal about 70 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys in 2000, but by 2016 both countries exhibited gender gaps at the expense of boys (**Figure 3b**). Note that disparity at the expense of boys tends to be observed first in enrolment before it is also observed in completion.

FIGURE 2:

Disparities in secondary education have persisted in Latin America and the Caribbean for at least 20 years
Adjusted gender parity index of the upper secondary education gross enrolment ratio, 1992 to 2016
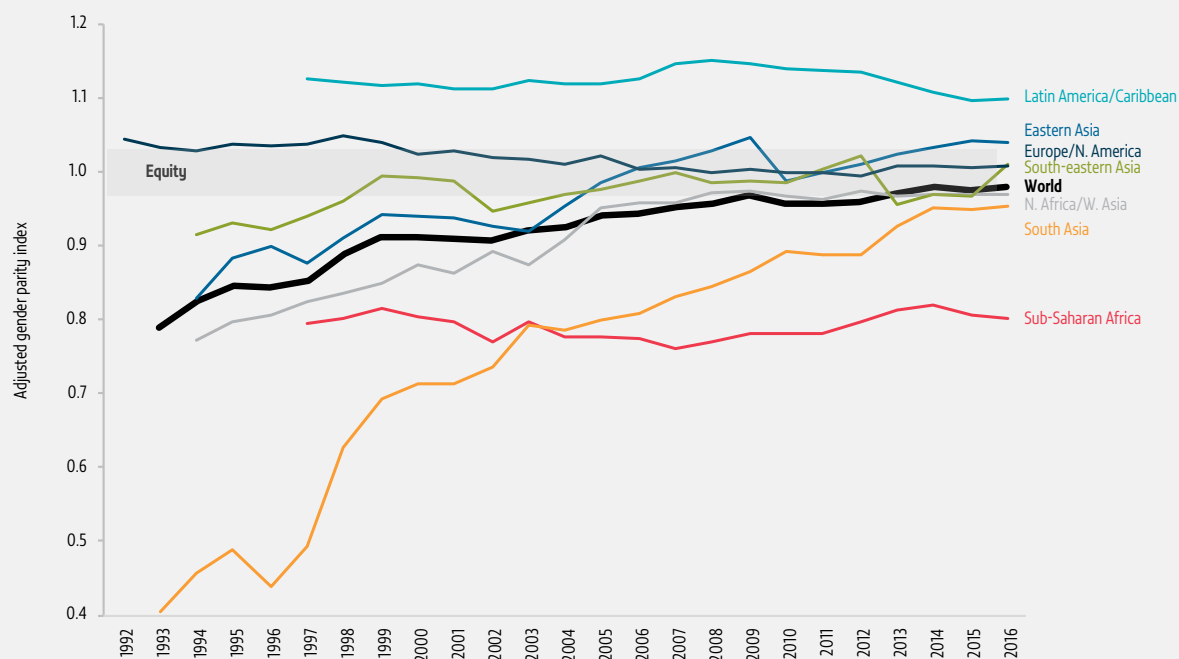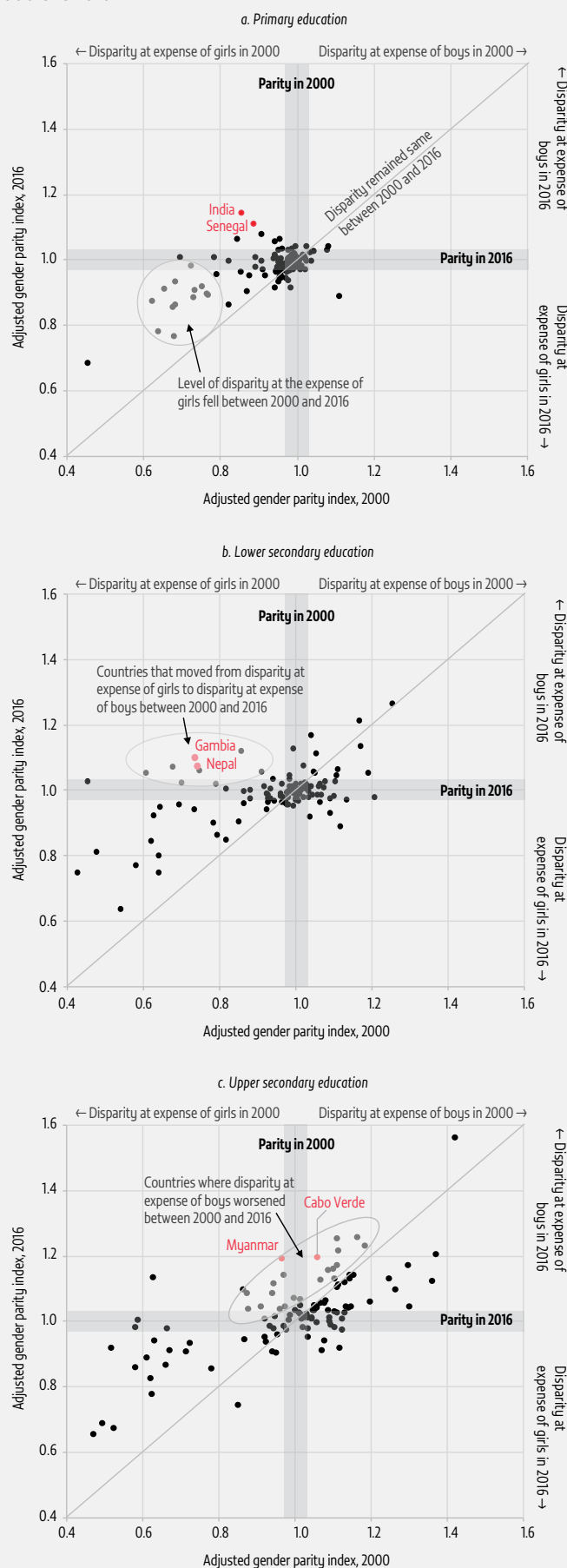

Source: UIS database.

It is important to compare parity indices for countries at roughly similar levels of the underlying indicator. Comparing countries at roughly similar levels of the lower and upper secondary completion rate close to the global average reveals a wide range of cases. For example, 75 females completed upper secondary for every 100 males in Nigeria, but 75 males completed for every 100 females in Tunisia (**Figure 4**). But even in countries with disparities at the expense of girls on average, it is possible that boys are at a disadvantage in some provinces or states. For example, in Nigeria, where some of the world's largest disparities in lower secondary completion are observed at the expense of girls, boys were at a disadvantage in Enugu State (**Figure 5**).

DISPARITIES IN READING SKILLS ARE LARGE BUT MERIT A CLOSER LOOK

A phenomenon that has attracted considerable attention is the large and persistent gap in favour of girls in cross-national assessments of reading skills in most regions with available data, including Northern Africa and Western Asia, Latin America, Europe and Northern America and the Pacific. In contrast to reading, there is increasing convergence towards gender parity in mathematics and science from an initial point of girls' disadvantage.

Gaps in reading scores tend not to be particularly pronounced in early grades. For example, among member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that took part in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2016, the performance gap between female and male grade 4 students was equivalent to about one-third of a school year (Mullis et al., 2017).. But by the end of lower secondary education, the gap becomes larger. Among OECD member states that took part in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015, the performance gap between female and male 15-year-old students was equivalent to about two-thirds of a school year, although this

FIGURE 3:

Almost half of countries have enrolment disparities at boys' expense in upper secondary education

Adjusted gender parity index of the gross enrolment ratio, by level, 2000 and 2016

a. Primary education

b. Lower secondary education

c. Upper secondary education

Source: GEM Report team analysis based on the UIS database.

FIGURE 4:
The degree of gender disparity varies even among countries with similar completion rates
Adjusted gender parity index of the completion rate, by education level, selected countries close to the average completion rate, 2010–2016
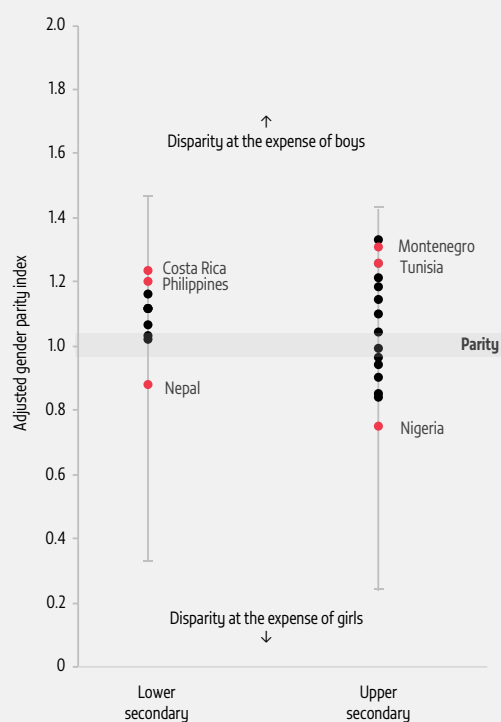
Note: Countries compared are within 10 percentage points of the global average for lower and upper secondary completion. The highest and lowest values on each vertical line indicated by a grey dash show the maximum and minimum value of the parity index for all countries.

Source: UIS and GEM Report team calculations using household surveys.

was lower than in 2009, when the gap was equivalent to a full year of schooling (OECD, 2016). Long time-series of reading skills measurement in the United States have also documented a tendency towards a decline in the gap in recent years (Loveless, 2015).

Some recent evidence has raised questions about the meaning of this gap. Comparing cohorts that participated in a PISA survey at age 15 and in a Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey 12 years later show unexpected changes in disparities (Borgonovi et al., 2017). While 15-year-old girls in every OECD country outperformed boys in reading, the gender gap had almost completely closed by age 27, with gains concentrated among low-performing males.

One possible explanation is a difference in how males engage with the PISA and PIAAC assessments. PIAAC's shorter duration, use of technology and use of a trained interviewer in the home may elicit greater male engagement than the PISA assessment, which is administered in schools, where peer effects may induce boys to lower their effort level – a supposition supported by the already very low gender disparity in literacy found among the youngest participants in PIAAC at age 16.

However, this potential interpretation cannot be verified in the case of other, non-OECD countries, which are characterized by even larger and persistent gender gaps in school surveys of learning achievement but do not have assessments of adult skills. For example, among countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia that took part in the 2016 PIRLS, the gender gap at the expense of boys was by grade 4 already almost a year in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. By age 15, the gap exceeded the equivalent of a full year of schooling.

Several factors influence the disadvantage of boys in education

Two broad sets of factors combine to influence rates of participation, progression and learning in cases where boys fall behind. First, poverty and the desire or need to work can prevent boys from continuing their education or lead to irregular attendance and eventual dropout. Relatively easy entry into the labour market may also result in complacency towards boys' education in some contexts (Jha and Kelleher, 2006). Second, gender norms and expectations can be reproduced in schools and classrooms, acting as a major barrier. Disaffected young men may find themselves locked into trajectories from which it is hard to break away.

POVERTY IS A KEY DRIVER OF BOYS' DISADVANTAGE IN EDUCATION

In many contexts, poverty exacerbates existing gender disparities in access to education. Average indicators can mask the fact that disparities may most affect those marginalized by poverty, which intersects with related factors such as social class, ethnicity or location. Young men in poverty may be more likely to seek employment rather than complete schooling, and even where this is not the case, living in poverty can entail difficult neighbourhood dynamics and inadequate healthcare, which may have an influence on the ability to attend school.

FIGURE 5:
There is large variation in gender disparity within countries
Adjusted gender parity index of the lower secondary completion rate, by region, selected countries at parity or disparity at the expense of girls at the national level, 2011–2012
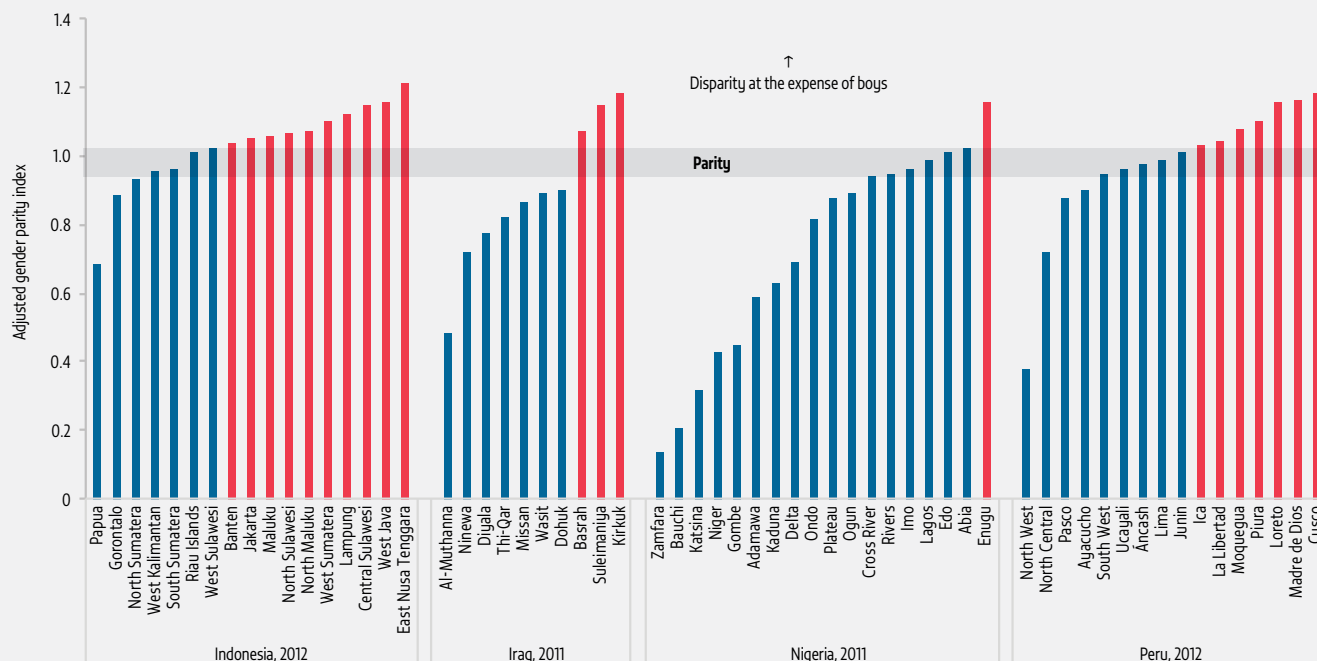
Source: GEM Report team calculations using household surveys.

While poor girls face stronger education exclusion in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, poor boys tend to bear the brunt of education marginalization in many Latin American and Caribbean and South-east Asian countries. For example, among six Latin American and Caribbean countries with average disparities at the expense of boys at four key points in the education trajectory, poor boys were at greater disadvantage in four countries (**Figure 6a**).

In many countries across the region, structural inequalities result in strong links between gender and children's work: males tend to enter the workforce earlier and to hold a paying job more frequently than females (Cunningham et al., 2008). If poor boys and young men can readily access unskilled jobs, which are not very different to those they could access if they completed secondary school, they may have less motivation to stay in school. They are less likely to value education as a means towards obtaining future employment in skilled occupations.
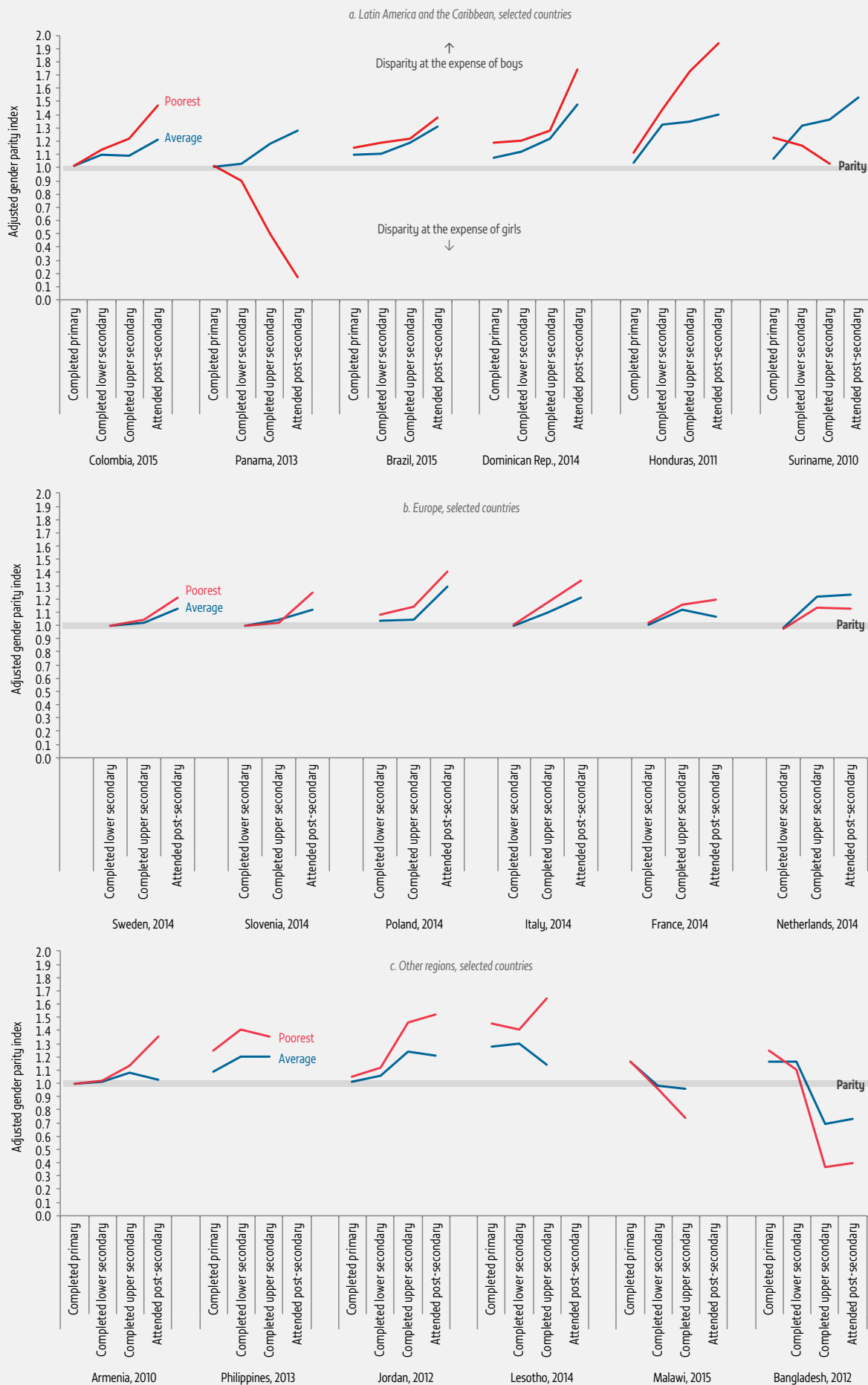
In Honduras, while only 65 males completed upper secondary school for every 100 females in 2011, just 27 poor males did so for every 100 poor females. Indeed,

complementary evidence shows that about 40% of 15- to 17-year old boys in the country were involved in child labour in 2014, compared with 9% of girls. Moreover, the school attendance rate of 15- to 17-year olds was 61% if they were not involved in hazardous work but only 17.5% if they were involved in hazardous work, the worst form of child labour (UCW, 2017). In addition to unskilled labour, boys are also more likely to migrate or be involved in gang violence.

In Brazil and Jamaica, boys are most likely to find jobs in manual labour or construction, which do not require completion of secondary education (Barker et al., 2012). In India, many boys who are child workers belong to seasonally migrating households from poor, landless and marginalized communities. Their work opportunities are not available to girls for reasons related to entrenched gender norms. Many work sites are distant from schools, and when migrant children return to their homes after migration season, they have fallen far behind in classes. Schools close to temporary work sites may be reluctant to enrol children for short periods of time (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

FIGURE 6:

Boys from the poorest households are more likely to fall behind in schooling

Adjusted gender parity index for selected education indicators, average and poorest 20%

a. Latin America and the Caribbean, selected countries

↑
Disparity at the expense of boys

Disparity at the expense of girls
↓

Parity

Adjusted gender parity index

Colombia, 2015   Panama, 2013   Brazil, 2015   Dominican Rep., 2014   Honduras, 2011   Suriname, 2010

Poorest
Average

b. Europe, selected countries

Parity

Adjusted gender parity index

Sweden, 2014   Slovenia, 2014   Poland, 2014   Italy, 2014   France, 2014   Netherlands, 2014

Poorest
Average

c. Other regions, selected countries

Parity

Adjusted gender parity index

Armenia, 2010   Philippines, 2013   Jordan, 2012   Lesotho, 2014   Malawi, 2015   Bangladesh, 2012

Poorest
Average

Source: GEM Report team analysis based on household survey data.

When a poor household's income suddenly drops, the family may respond by withdrawing a boy from secondary school so that he can earn money. In Brazil, adolescent boys are more likely to drop out of school because of the need to join the labour market. A sudden fall in family income has a 46% larger effect on the probability of boys in poor households dropping out of school as compared to boys in non-poor households (Côrtes Neri et al., 2005; Duryea et al., 2007). Similarly, after Hurricane Mitch devastated rural Honduras in 1998, children from poor families were more likely to miss out on school – and since boys were more likely than girls to get a job, they were more frequently affected (Gitter and Barham, 2007).

Poverty also leads to lower attainment in Europe and North America. In Italy, 83 poor males completed upper secondary school, and only 66 poor males attended post-secondary education, for every 100 poor females (**Figure 6b**).

Household attitudes towards education depend on the type of employment opportunities available – and the gender expectations related to these opportunities. Traditional, gendered labour roles can also have an impact on boys' participation in formal education. In southern African countries, including Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia, boys are taken out of school early to herd cattle. In Lesotho, boys are less likely than girls to complete secondary school and poor boys are even less likely to do so than poor girls (Jha and Kelleher, 2006) (**Figure 6c**).

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS MAY LEAD TO BOYS' DISENGAGEMENT

The school environment itself can be a factor that loosens boys' ties with the education system and ultimately pushes them out of it. Boys' relative disadvantage results from multiple, overlapping factors embedded in both the socialization and learning processes. These include social and gender norms, which influence the way children interact with teachers, parents, peers and the wider community, which in turn shapes their identity, behaviour and choices. A lack of motivation among boys to do well in school is not just a matter of individual choice. Boys may be under pressure to disengage from school and to place less value on academic achievement and sustained effort.

A violent environment and inappropriate disciplinary methods reduce attachment to school
Explicit or implicit condoning of violent behaviour places boys at greater risk of becoming both perpetrators and victims of physical violence and bullying, both inside and outside school (RTI International, 2013). A vicious cycle of disengagement from education and involvement in risky behaviour has been observed for poorer boys in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, where school gangs have emerged (UNDP, 2012).

Entrenched violence in schools coupled with gender stereotyping compound the problem. Boys are often perceived as tough and undisciplined and consequently are more likely to experience corporal punishment than girls. The higher likelihood of corporal punishment against boys in schools in Mongolia contributes to them dropping out, especially for boys from disadvantaged, rural communities (Hepworth, 2013). In India, corporal punishment is used to enforce gender norms and cultural expectations that boys should 'toughen up' (Parkes, 2014). In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana states, two-thirds of boys reported experiencing physical violence from teachers, compared with just over half of girls (Morrow & Singh, 2016). Children from the poorest families and the traditionally excluded dalit or adivasi groups tend to suffer the highest rates of corporal punishment, with the result that they attend school only sporadically and often eventually leave permanently (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Authoritarian schools that reflect rigid social norms and gendered practices can have a negative impact on students and their relations with teachers and with each other. Students are motivated to attend school if they see a connection between schoolwork and future livelihoods, feel safe and are treated fairly. Disciplinary practices that exclude students from learning – through banning class entry, suspension or expulsion – have a negative impact on their motivation to attend and complete their schooling. For example, in southern parts of the United States, where females have a 10% greater chance of graduating than males, expulsion is one of the factors most strongly associated with school dropout, alongside involvement with the juvenile justice system and poverty (Robison et al., 2017).

Teachers should be fair and supportive
Policies to build a more gender-balanced, ethnically diverse teaching workforce are justified in terms of the wider goals of social justice and gender equality. Gender balance in the education system can help to change gender norms, including more male teachers in pre-primary and primary education and more female teachers teaching mathematics and science at the secondary level or holding leadership positions.

Global Education Monitoring Report

But calls for more male teachers as 'role models' to improve boys' engagement and learning are not enough (Francis et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2014). Of more importance is whether teachers are perceived as consistent, fair and supportive, regardless of gender. Teacher expectations about the capacities of male and female students can influence performance. A study in Jamaica found that boys were told they were lazy, leading to low self-esteem, streaming into remedial classes, and poor academic achievement and test results (MSI, 2005). Teachers have been found to have low academic expectations of boys in Malaysia, Samoa, Seychelles and Trinidad and Tobago (Page and Jha, 2009).

Positive attachment to a teacher is related to positive extrinsic motivation (Biggs and Tang, 2011) and better academic achievement (Ramsdal et al., 2013). Attachment to an adult mentor who can also provide emotional support may be particularly important for students who have weak social networks or feel socially excluded.

Early tracking and streaming of students can perpetuate boys' poor achievement

Research from middle and high income countries suggests that streaming students by ability can disadvantage boys. The main argument against streaming is that students who are placed in classrooms with other students of lower academic ability may suffer further from negative peer effects, stereotyping and loss of self-esteem and motivation, which may place them on a permanently lower trajectory of learning. In Seychelles, where results from a regional learning assessment showed a wide gap between boys' and girls' reading skills, boys were more likely to be placed in lower classes than were girls on the premise that they were more disruptive (Leste et al., 2005).

Boys should not be neglected if gender equality is to be achieved in and through education

The challenges that lead to boys' disadvantage in and disengagement from education have been met with a variety of policy and programme responses, ranging from alleviating poor families' financial constraints to establishing school- and community-based programmes. The key message is that education disparities at the expense of boys are not inevitable. Governments, schools and civil society organizations can help to improve boys' participation, attainment and learning outcomes by working towards changing gender norms that affect boys and girls.

LOWER THE COST OF SCHOOLING FOR POOR HOUSEHOLDS

Conditional cash transfers are welfare safety nets that offer a regular cash payment to individuals or families as long as a child is enrolled in school and attending regularly (Krishnaratne et al., 2013). Cash transfers can offset not only direct school costs, such as fees, uniforms and books, but also opportunity costs for poor households, and by so doing can improve attainment and learning. Over 100 such programmes worldwide have an education focus (García-Jaramillo and Maranti, 2015; García and Saavedra, 2017).

In Nicaragua, where fewer than 75 boys completed lower secondary school in 2009, receiving the Red de Protección Social school attendance transfer for three years resulted in boys achieving a half grade increase in schooling and substantial gains in both maths and language test scores, effects that were sustained ten years after participation in the programme (Barham et al., 2013).

In Jamaica, boys living in urban areas who received cash transfers under the Programme of Advancement through Health and Education (PATH) performed better by 4% in the Grade Six Achievement Test compared with non-beneficiaries. Improved school performance led to boys receiving places in higher quality secondary schools. The programme did not have significant impact on girls' school performance, which may be due to the fact that girls already achieved higher scores and thus had less margin to improve. PATH is also one of the few programmes that vary support by grade and gender, with boys in higher primary grades receiving larger stipends (Stampini et al., 2016).

While targeted transfers can have a positive impact on beneficiary groups, they may inadvertently lead to other forms of gender inequity. In Bangladesh, boys from poor households who were receiving a stipend in primary education were ineligible to receive a stipend to attend secondary school because that programme was targeted at girls (Baulch, 2011). As a result, 84 boys completed lower secondary school for every 100 girls in 2012.

DEVELOP BOYS' READING SKILLS AND DEPLOY EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

Few education systems with marked gender gaps in reading skills have developed programmes to address the issue. There is concern that boys' gender identity influences their self-concept as readers. This is especially the case among marginalized boys who rarely have male role models that can support them to form an identity as a reader.

In England, Reading Stars is an intervention that used positive role models from the football world to engage pupils in literacy activities. By 2012, the programme had reached over 34,000 children aged 7 to 13 years, of whom three-quarters were boys. The programme typically ran over 10 weeks. During this time 56% of participating pupils made half a year's progress in reading skills and 17% made a year's progress (National Literacy Trust, 2012).

However, efforts to make a programme appealing to boys do not always work. In South Africa, where the gender gap in reading skills among grade 4 students in 2016 was equivalent to more than a year of school, the FunDza Literacy Trust, established in 2011, used an information technology platform to disseminate high-interest, locally generated content that was accessible via mobile devices. By 2013, FunDza's readership had grown to over 50,000 monthly readers. The programme was able to reach young people aged 13 to 25 from households with few reading resources: almost 40% had fewer than 10 books at home. However, an evaluation found that 75% of readers were female, in spite of an assumption that the use of technology would attract male youth (The FunDza Literacy Trust, 2014; Wiebesiek, 2015).

Teaching and learning strategies that focus on transferable skills, foster active learning or promote individual mentoring and target setting have positive effects on both boys' and girls' educational outcomes. They can be particularly effective if implemented within a school environment that promotes respect and cooperation (Jha et al., 2012).

ADDRESS GENDER STEREOTYPES IN SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Directly focusing on improving skills may not be effective if the reason that boys disengage from school is entrenched gender attitudes. Gender socialization of boys and girls begins early (Marston and King, 2006). A systematic review of studies on gender attitudes expressed by adolescents aged 10 to 14 years found them to be largely stereotypical or inequitable (Kågesten et al., 2016). Unfortunately, schools can too often be spaces in which boys are exposed to violent norms and girls to various forms of violence and discrimination (Barker et al., 2012).

Even so, girls and, to a lesser extent, boys do challenge stereotypical norms and express unease with prevailing gender inequalities (Baric, 2013) As such, it is important to initiate change processes at a young age to shape

attitudes and transform behaviours. A range of approaches can help raise boys' engagement and achievement by promoting a school ethos of cooperation, respect for students and action against gender stereotypes. Approaches have included core and add-on curricula, resources, teacher training and access to youth-friendly advice. Successful programmes have encouraged young people to self-reflect and critically examine social norms and gender inequalities, including violence (Wright, 2014).

A well-established school intervention is Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS) in India, which has been adapted in other parts of Southern Asia and Viet Nam. GEMS is a school-based intervention that promotes gender equality by encouraging equal relationships between girls and boys, examining the social norms that define men's and women's roles and questioning the use of violence. Evaluations have shown that inviting students to self-reflect can make a positive difference in attitudes and behaviours (Acyhut, 2011).

The Choices curriculum devised by Save the Children consists of eight developmentally appropriate activities, supporting 10- to 14-year-olds in achieving better sexual and reproductive health outcomes for them and their communities. The implementation of the curriculum in Nepal helped change gender attitudes and behaviours on discrimination, social image, control and dominance, violence, attitudes to girls' education and acceptance of traditional gender norms (Lundgren et al., 2013).

INCLUDE THE WIDER SCHOOL COMMUNITY IN ADDRESSING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Whole school approaches that address the wider school environment and its community can also help to promote sustainable change. Face-to-face educational programmes with boys and young men have spread beyond schools across a range of settings, from clubs and sports teams to workplaces and other institutions.

In Brazil, the government initiative Escola Alberta sees schools offering workshops for young people at weekends to counter high levels of violence in urban communities. Cultural, artistic and sport activities are combined with workshops on diversity, rights and citizenship (Parkes, 2014). Evaluations of the programme indicated several positive outcomes, including a reduction in some forms of violence and theft in schools (Waiselfisz and Maciel, 2003; Aniceto França et al., 2013).

Global Education Monitoring Report

Another set of initiatives in Brazil was established by Instituto Promundo, a civil society organization. Program H included group education sessions, youth-led campaigns and activism to transform gender stereotypes among young men. Program M helped young women to challenge deeply held stereotypes. Now adopted in over 20 countries, it has been praised as best practice in promoting gender equality. Evaluations of Instituto Promundo educational workshops with young men to prevent gender-based violence and promote gender equality in Brazil, Chile, India and Rwanda found they led to significant changes in gender-equitable attitudes and significant decreases in self-reported violence against female partners (Instituto Promundo, 2012).

The Young Men Initiative (YMI) targeted vocational secondary schools in several Balkan countries. It used educational workshops, residential retreats and a social marketing campaign. Findings from interviews and focus group discussions with boys, youth facilitators and teachers suggest that personal reflection, experience-based learning, connections with youth facilitators, new peer groups and aspirational messaging resonated strongly with participants (Namy et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Policy-makers must ensure all girls and boys complete secondary school. Yet, entrenched gender norms negatively affect the education outcomes not only of girls but also of boys in many parts of the world, notably in Europe and Latin America. Gender expectations pull poor boys out of school and into unskilled jobs that do not require secondary school completion. Likewise, gender norms influence boys' interactions with their teachers, parents, peers and the wider community pushing them to disengage from school.

Policy-makers have a wide range of options at their disposal to address both the causes and the symptoms of underlying gender stereotypes and social norms. Focusing on education quality and inclusiveness is a robust strategy that can improve attainment and learning for all children and contribute to achieving the gender equality aspirations of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

ENDNOTE

1. This policy paper draws on Jere (2018).
2. Adjusted gender parity index is a gender parity index (GPI) that is symmetrical around 1 and limited to a range between 0 and 2. If the female value of an indicator is less than or equal to the male value, the unadjusted and adjusted GPI are identical and calculated by dividing the female value of an indicator by the male value of the same indicator. If the female value is greater than the male value: adjusted GPI = 2 - 1 / (female value / male value).

References for this paper can be found online at the following link: https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/Boys_References.pdf