Challenging gender, poverty, and inequalities in schooling through collaborative, cross-national partnerships: Evidence from CARE Bangladesh and CARE Malawi

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Introduction

In the wake of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), and particularly over the past decade, there has been a growing international effort to provide access to quality primary education for every child throughout the world (Mundy 2006). Initially, out-of-school children consisted disproportionately of girls in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and international declarations concerning education for all (EFA) focused particular attention on getting girls into school in equal numbers to boys.

The majority of international declarations have continued to largely focus on achieving gender parity, while also emphasizing the importance of a quality education for all.1 For example, the Dakar framework for action (2000) states as a goal: “eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality” (p. 2/8). The MDGs (2000) included two statements related to gender and schooling:

• GOAL 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, Target 1: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015
• GOAL 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education, Target 1: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

1 As will be discussed further below, international quality measures tend to be constructed as gender-neutral but gender-positive; that is, the measures are not themselves related to gender, but if educational quality is improved, the outcomes for girls are expected to be more positive than for boys because parental tolerance for low-quality education is believed to be higher for boys.
Although international funding has remained below the levels expected and needed to achieve EFA (Mundy 2006), and global goals for universal enrollment in primary education have not been met, international efforts to get all children into primary schools have yielded significant results. For example, there was an estimated 25 percent decrease in the number of out-of-school children between 1999 and 2006; approximately 75 million children were estimated to be out of school in 2006, down from 103 million children in 1999 (UNGEI 2010). The global gender gap in out-of-school children has also decreased, though more than 50 percent of out-of-school children are still girls.

Within this broader EFA landscape, a few countries have been particularly successful at decreasing the enrollment gender gap. Bangladesh and Malawi represent two examples of this success; in Bangladesh’s case, the gender gap was closed in part by the success of non-formal primary education programs run by local non-governmental organizations and in part by government education polices targeted at girls and poor families (Al-Samarria, 2009; Schuler, 2007). In Malawi’s case, the gender gap was closed in part by the success of government and international development organizations’ girls’ education programs (Anzar et al. 2004, Macro 2008).

Below, we present a brief overview of some of the key gender and education features of Bangladesh and Malawi. These provide a comparative basis for our discussion of CARE’s multi-country Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI), an eight-country, cross-national research action project that uses educational innovations to improve the lives of marginalized girls and boys. The purpose of the research component of PCTFI is to assess the longitudinal impact of the educational innovations, implemented as a quasi-experimental design in these two countries. We discuss the salient findings related to gender and education from the PCTFI situation analyses (SA) in each country, and conclude with a discussion about the analytic themes that arose in the SAs and the program plan developed in each country to address the SA findings.

**Gender and Education In Bangladesh and Malawi**

The education histories, systems, and experiences in each country are, of course, unique and display many significant differences. Below, we briefly outline selected historical aspects of and
trends in each country’s education system and their particular responses to EFA, as well as their successes at achieving gender parity in primary schooling.

**Bangladesh**

Bangladesh has one of the largest primary education systems in the world with an estimated 18 million primary school aged children. The Government of Bangladesh has made significant progress in recent years to increase primary-school-age enrollment rates, particularly since 1990, when it established a policy of free and compulsory primary education. In 1985, BRAC started the largest NGO education program, which by 2004 had 31,000 primary schools in which 11% of the primary school-age children attended. In addition, the government implemented a number of policies to increase access to government primary schools, particularly in rural areas, in an attempt to address poverty and gender-based gaps in education (Schuler, 2007). Between 1985 and 2001, enrollment doubled, as did the number of primary schools (Wils, Carrol, and Barrow, 2005).

Recent data and reports show that a gender gap now slightly favors girls. From 2005-2007, UNICEF (2009) reports average primary net enrollment rates of 87% for boys and 91% for girls. External analyses have also found that girls in primary classes 1-5 tend to have equivalent or higher enrollment than boys (Al Sammarai, 2009, p. 203). Despite these significant increases in enrollment rates, in 2004, 3 million school-aged children (19% of the population) were still out of school. Furthermore, drop-out is an increasing problem. In 2002, the drop-out rate for primary grades was 33%, in 2005 it was 47% and in 2006, 52%. (DPE, 2009). While girls may fare better in enrollment and retention, girls are still significantly less likely to be entered for the primary completion exam or to pass it (Daily New Nation, 2006). In addition, 56% of school-age children never enroll in secondary school.

Bangladesh still faces obstacles towards the long-term success of its education system. Government expenditure is currently the lowest in South Asia, and public spending varies greatly.

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2 These numbers reflect estimates based on children aged 6 to 10 years only (UNICEF?? NEED CITE; would be better if it were children aged 6-12, which are the ages on which out-of-school child data are based).
at the level of the upazila (district level) and for types of schools, resulting in inequities in educational expenditures and, in turn, other educational indicators, across the country (Al Sammarai, 2009).

Even with programs that provide provisions and incentives, girls' educational parity and their empowerment is not as positive as recent reports suggest. After more than a decade of the Female Secondary Stipend Program (FSP), for example, overall gender parity in completion and performance at higher secondary school is not satisfactory. Girls enter but fewer than one in seven successfully complete the secondary cycle (Hove). Out of 14 developing countries from the Asia Pacific, Bangladesh ranks 10th in respect of gender equity and overall equity (The South Asian Pacific Bureau of Adult Education and Global Campaign for Education Report, 2005). Gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in families and society at large, preventing many girls from completing basic education and fulfilling their academic potential. Schuler (2007) shows how gender norms about education for girls and women are changing, yet these changes are precarious and cause increased physical and psychological costs to female students, raise concerns by parents and girls that they may not get married, and conflict with the lack of economic and employment opportunities for educated women.

**Malawi**

Malawi’s education system, established by missionaries in the late 1800s, remained an extremely elite system through to the early 1990s. During the colonial and postcolonial dictatorship (1964-1994) periods, educational access at every level, but particularly post-primary, was tightly controlled by the government and quotas were used to engineer the school population. For example, at the secondary level, the government instituted a quota requiring that, despite their lower test scores, the government assure that one-third of admitted secondary school students were females.

Malawi has seen a phenomenal increase in enrollment since 1994, when Free Primary Education (FPE) was introduced as a public commitment to EFA; subsequent initiatives were undertaken by the Ministry of Education, international development organizations (IDOs), and NGOs to
support FPE. Enrollment rose by more than 130% between 1990 and 2008 (Macro, 2008), with a near-doubling of the number of enrolled primary school students in the six months following the FPE declaration. Improvements in primary education access occurred almost entirely within the public sector (government-run schools), and were coupled with decreased quality as the government’s limited budget strained to cover the influx of new students. Declines in quality were measured in terms of high dropout and absenteeism rates, shortages of qualified teachers, and student:resource ratios.

Girls’ enrollment rates increased dramatically following the introduction of FPE and were bolstered by ongoing, large-scale girls’ education programs supported by organizations such as the Ministry of Education, USAID, and DANIDA. The gender enrollment gap decreased from 0.84 to 0.98 between 1990 and 2000 (Kendall, 2006), and in many schools there are now more girls than boys. In fact, there are signs that within a few short years boys will be at a disadvantage in primary school completion rates and secondary school enrollment rates.

Girls and women still face social, cultural, political, and economic constraints and inequities, however. Socio-cultural norms continue to privilege men over women in access to diverse resources and in daily social interactive patterns (Minton and Knottnerus 2005). Social inequities and gendered expectations affect every aspect of women’s lives, from education, to labor, to health, to decisions about planting crops or visiting friends. Women have higher HIV rates than men; young women between 15 and 24 have four times higher rates than young men because they are exposed to the virus by older men. Girls and women work longer hours than boys and men, but often without remuneration. (Mathiassen et al. 2007) Only 6 percent of women, compared to 22 percent of men, reported engaging in formal wage labor in a national survey (Mathiassen 2007), and although women’s share of formal secretarial labor increased between 1987 and 1998, their share decreased in service, production, transport, and labor (National Statistical Office 2000). Women also face particular disadvantages in relation to their physical integrity; one-third of women 15 to 49 reported having experienced violence (primarily perpetrated by husbands), and wife-beating is widely culturally accepted. Women have relatively little reproductive control, but face a one in seven lifetime chance of dying in childbirth, and the rates of other complications are high.
Discussion
In some critical ways, the trajectory of primary schooling and of gender and education in Bangladesh and Malawi are quite similar. Both have grown extremely rapidly over the past two decades, thanks to immense government efforts and international support for these efforts. This phenomenal growth has been accompanied by concerns about concomitant decreases in educational quality, most often measured through indicators such as teacher:pupil or textbook:pupil ratios. Both systems are struggling to address quality issues in part because increased enrollment has significantly strained government education budgets (though government spending as a percentage of GDP differs markedly). Both systems continue to experience high rates of student dropout over the course of the primary school cycle, and relatively low rates of achievement as measured on national examinations.

Both have also seen a remarkable increase in the number of girls who enter the system, in part because education programs in each country have specifically targeted girls and provided girls with additional education resources (often at the secondary school level). By many measures, these efforts have been remarkably successful. Indeed, both countries now report that more girls than boys enroll in school, and that boys are beginning to drop out of primary school at faster rates than girls. In Bangladesh, more girls than boys begin and attend secondary school, while in Malawi it is estimated that in the next five years there will be more female than male secondary school enrollees, and there are already an equal number of girls and boys attending secondary school.

Both countries’ remarkable success in achieving parity at the primary school level has not, however, translated into broader shifts in women’s social status, financial independence, or cultural roles. As Oxfam notes, “Bangladesh still has a long way to go to achieve gender equity…and equal roles for women and girls in society” (Girls’ Education in South Asia Education and Gender Equality Series 9, OXFAM). Almost 50% of Bangladeshi girls are estimated to be married, divorced, or widowed before the age of 19 (the highest in South Asia); protection of women’s physical integrity is extremely low; and women cannot inherit land. Similarly, in Malawi, institutions and practices as diverse as customary law, family codes, ownership rights, civil liberties, and social norms concerning physical violence continue to disproportionately favor men (OECD 2009).
Table 1: Comparative Education Data, Bangladesh and Malawi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th></th>
<th>Malawi</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total primary school age population,</td>
<td>5319000</td>
<td>5580000</td>
<td>1220000</td>
<td>1241000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006^</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school enrollment ratio, 1986-1993^^</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school enrollment, gross 2003-2008*</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school enrollment, net 2003-2008*</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school attendance, net 2003-2008*</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school completion, 2004/2005**</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>55.5</td>
<td>56.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school enrollment, gross 2003-2008*</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school attendance, 2003-2008*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in which Free Primary Education was</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1990</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>introduced</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated teacher:pupil ratio, 2008***</td>
<td>1:44</td>
<td></td>
<td>1:93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated percentage of female teachers,</td>
<td>34.2**</td>
<td></td>
<td>38****</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Est. public expenditure per primary pupil as</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of GDP/capita, 2003**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total public expenditure as % of GDP, 2003**</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total public expenditure as % of total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government expenditure, 1999**</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^^ Data from UNICEF’s *State of the World’s Children*, 1996.
* Data from UNICEF national statistics, 2010.
**** Data from the Commonwealth Organization, www.thecommmonwealth.org/.../7B021F7F40-6529-4A90-A007-DF2B121C89BF%7D_Regional%20Percentage%20female.pdf

In short, in both countries there have been such great strides towards educational parity that boys will soon be underrepresented at the primary and secondary levels. The relative ease with which both countries were able to convince parents and girls to send girls to primary school does not appear to reflect a deeper and sustained transformation in gender relations or norms for adult women and men.
CARE’s PCTFI: A New Conceptual Framework for Understanding Gender and other Social Inequalities and Education

The CARE Patsy Collins Trust Fund Initiative (PCTFI) was designed to develop educational innovations to improve the lives of marginalized girls and boys, and specifically to empower girls. The PCTFI will assess the long-term (5-10 year) impact of the innovations on achieving empowerment and equality for girls and women, and in communities.

In an attempt to move beyond indicators of parity in enrollment, completion and achievement (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2003), CARE’s PCTF Initiative developed a common framework for assessing gender and schooling in relation to four broad education and gender indicators: attainment, quality, equality and empowerment. These four dimensions form the conceptual underpinning of a Common Indicators Framework (CIF) used by CARE’s PCTFI country offices to assess gender and education issues in communities and to determine the long-term impacts of their programming. The CIF comprises a set of 12 indicators (three indicators for each of the four constructs), including qualitative indicators that were introduced to measure change across contexts. These definitions served as guides for operationalizing these concepts in each specific context, rather than definitive criteria for measurement. The operationalization of these constructs did not always align with the definition stated here, and as such, revision of the definition of these constructs is ongoing (see Miske, et al., 2010).

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3 While CARE uses the term indicators, each of these four constructs is defined by three dimensions that further require operationalization in quantitative and qualitative ways. These dimensions do not reflect one specific measurement as an indicator is commonly regarded.
Table 2: CARE’s Common Indicators Framework (CIF)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTAINMENT</th>
<th>EQUALITY</th>
<th>QUALITY</th>
<th>EMPOWERMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Completion</strong></td>
<td>Communities' Educational Opportunity Perception</td>
<td>Suitable Educational Environment</td>
<td>Supportive Strategic Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is defined as the degree to which enrollees that start a PCTFI supported educational program finish based on a set of pre-determined requirements for the program.</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which community members believe girls and boys have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from education in the program area.</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which schools and classrooms in PCTFI target areas demonstrate social and physical learning environments that are gender-sensitive, healthy, safe, protective, and include adequate facilities. (adapted from UNICEF)</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which formal and informal decision makers exercise their ability to make decisions in favor of girls’ right to development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persistence/retention</strong></td>
<td>Teachers’ Gender Sensitivity</td>
<td>Relevant Educational Content</td>
<td>Girls’ Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is defined as the degree to which beneficiaries that are enrolled in an educational program that continue to subsequent years, periods and/or levels.</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which teachers are observed to be facilitating equal conditions for girls' and boys' learning using a standardized instrument.</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which PCTFI innovations are able to promote regular use of curriculum and learning materials that cover basic skills with pertinent, gender-sensitive and contextually appropriate subject matter. (adapted from UNICEF)</td>
<td>is expressed in the frequency with which girls exercise their rights and/or their rights are recognized in the law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
<td>Children's Perception of Educational Equity and Equality</td>
<td>Girl/Child Centered Processes</td>
<td>Structural Environment for Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is defined as the degree to which direct beneficiaries demonstrate attainment and practical application of new skills as a result of PCTFI supported program.</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which children in the impact area believe girls and boys have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from education in the program area.</td>
<td>is defined as the degree to which girl/child centered pedagogies and methodologies are evidenced in practice in the educational environment.</td>
<td>is expressed in whether girls have equitable access to basic human services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The CIF drew from current measures and frameworks for educational attainment and quality (UNICEF, 2001; Pigozzi, 2006) and from CARE staff experiences with gender and education in PCTFI’s eight countries. The CIF’s attainment indicator measures include two of the indicators typically cited for gender parity (completion and retention), as well as a measure of achievement, defined as an outcome of learning, the application of skills and knowledge in students’ lives.

The quality indicator and measurements were developed in dialogue with international debates about whether equality can be achieved without quality (UNESCO, 2004). In an extensive summary of research on quality, UNICEF (2001) developed the *Quality of Education* framework, which suggests five interrelated dimensions of quality: aspects related to learners, the environment, content, teaching and learning processes, and outcomes. This framework does not directly link quality with gender relations and norms in schools. In contrast, the CIF assumes that quality and equality are intricately related. PCTFI’s quality indicators, adapted from the UNICEF framework to address this relationship, include the physical and social environment and content and pedagogy as they relate to girls, boys and gendered practices.

The CIF further attempts to integrate gendered relations and practices through the gender equality and empowerment constructs. Gender equality refers to parents’, other community members’, teachers’ and children’s attitudes and practices about gendered norms in the communities. Gendered norms may be discriminatory against girls, such as the findings by Schliecher (2007) of more positive attitudes held by boys toward learning math, but comparatively small differences between girls’ and boys’ actual math performance. Other research has found that parental attitudes and encouragement to learn math is related to opportunity structures for future learning and work, stratified by sex (e.g., Baker & Jones, 1993) as well as attitudes and influences of teachers and schools (Wiseman et al., 2009). These studies suggest that in much of the world, parents, teachers and girls and boys themselves hold different attitudes about girls’ and boys’ learning ability and opportunities to use that learning, which may in turn affect their participation in and outcomes from schooling.
Gendered norms affect both girls and boys negatively by shaping inequitable expectations and creating stereotypes that harm individuals. For example, norms that boys are “too cool” for school, or that boys are too violent may harm working class and black boys’ academic performance around the world (e.g. Connell 1989, Neal et al. 2003, Parry 2000); similarly, widespread norms about girls’ intelligence and future social roles may bias teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of their success and their educational experiences. As Wiseman et al. (2009) argue, “gender is an extremely salient social characteristic, and hence is a very complicated social variable with clear implications for social behavior at a number of levels of the social system” (p. 417).

Following this research and USAID’s (2008) Education from a Gender Equality Framework, the CIF includes measures of gendered norms in teaching and learning, including teachers’ gender sensitive practices and attitudes and practices held by parents, community members and girls and boys themselves about learning.

Finally, the CIF includes a common set of constructs by which to assess empowerment, a framework that undergirds CARE’s work across the organization (CARE, 2006). The CIF’s empowerment indicator draws heavily from the work of Deepa Narayan (2001) and Naila Kabeer (1999). Kabeer asserted that empowerment includes women's agency, resources (both structural/material and relational), and outcomes. In the CIF’s empowerment indicators, three interrelated dimensions are assessed—agency, structures and strategic relations. CARE maintains that all three dimensions must be addressed to sustain transformative outcomes (CARE USA, 2006). Structures are defined as “accepted rules, norms and institutions that condition women’s choices and chances. Structures can be both tangible and intangible; behaviors and ideologies.” These structures may include: “economic markets, religion, caste and other social hierarchies, educational systems, political culture, forms of organization” (CARE, 2006, p. 6). Drawing on Kabeer’s conceptualization, structures are not only material goods and institutions, but also discourses and norms. These structures may be categorically different for girls, or they may have nuanced meanings at different ages. They could include transportation and access to schools or children’s workload and access to work after schooling.
The relations dimension of empowerment is defined as “the vehicle through which women negotiate their needs and rights. Empowerment, in part, relies on individual women building relationships, joint efforts, coalitions, and mutual support, in order to claim and expand agency, alter inequitable structures, and so realize rights and livelihood security” (CARE, 2006, p. 6). Finally, the third dimension, agency, “reflects the aspirations, resources, actions and achievements of women themselves” (CARE, 2006, p. 6). With regard to education, agency can be understood as the aspirations girls and boys have for their education, their knowledge of rights, and their ability to act on their rights, and to enact with others their choices for well-being through education. While agency is often the most visible and addressed agenda in international organizations’ discourse, agency is affected by and affects the structures and relations that shape choices (Maslak 2008).

The CIF required new ways of measuring and understanding gender and education outcomes. Scholars and international organizations have long argued a need for qualitative indicators that move beyond gender parity to capture social processes and gender-related social changes and begin to explain why inequities exist and how they can be addressed (UNDP, 2004; Rao and Kelleher, 2005; Subrahmanian, 2007). Subrahmanian argues that “[i]ndicators provide a window into the vision underlying policy and implementation, and in education today they reveal a lack of interest in analysing the meaning and purpose of education for diverse groups.” (p.xiii). What Subrahmanian is suggesting is that our understandings of gender and other inequalities need to be contextually sensitive, as well as informed by feminist perspectives on inequality. Beetham and Demetriades (2007) suggest several characteristics of feminist and gendered methodologies, whether quantitative or qualitative. They should:

- consider power relations in the everyday lives of males and females and in the research process; integrate multiple disadvantages, such as poverty, ethnicity, as related to gender;
- use qualitative methods and adapt quantitative methods to take into consideration empowerment and sensitive issues, such as gender-based violence (p. 200).

Every step in the construction of each country’s PCTFI program, including the Situation Analyses conducted by each PCTFI country office, reflect these new ways of measuring and understanding gender, and an emphasis on cross-national learning.
The PCTFI Situation Analyses

Each PCTFI country office began their work by conducting a situation analysis (SA) designed to carefully map and analyze the particular gender and education issues that existed in the schools and communities in which the PCTFI project would be implemented. The findings from the SAs drove planning for each country’s intervention, as well as the identification of cross-country issues and desired outcomes related to gender and education. The SA research methodology and methods were guided by the CIF, which shaped both shared and individual country-level cross-site data collection and analysis in an effort to identify and understand common and divergent conditions affecting girls and boys in communities and schools. The CIF thus allows for a comparative analysis in which the issues that come to the fore in each country vary, but are also informed by the south-south partnerships that foster knowledge- and experience-sharing across PCTFI offices.

The CIF and the PCTFI position school-age girls and boys as central participants and voices in understanding issues of education and gender inequalities in their schools and communities. In addition, each SA aimed to understand the perspective of multiple community members, using qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques, including participatory learning and action methods (PLA).

In 2007 and 2008, PCTFI piloted the CIF in four countries (Cambodia, Honduras, Mali and Tanzania). Efforts were made to develop contextually specific quantitative and qualitative measurements, while also sharing methods and questions across sites. In 2008 and 2009, CARE’s programs in four additional countries (Bangladesh, Malawi, India and Ghana) built upon these experiences. In each country, PCTFI staff used some common data collection methods and items and developed their own questions, guided by the CIF. In both Malawi and Bangladesh, data were collected from a wide range of stakeholders to examine the CIF’s four constructs. For example, data were collected about girls’ and boys’ agency, rights, workload, self-esteem, and perceptions of school quality and girls’ educational capacities. Parents were

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4 See Miske, Meagher and DeJaeghere, 2010 for more about this process and lessons learned.
asked about their gender attitudes, perceptions of educational quality, and girls’ and boys’ educational capacity, and perceptions of community responsibilities and rights vis a vis the school.

Table 3 refers to the methods used to collect SA data in each country. Both quantitative (closed-answer, quantifiable responses) and qualitative (open-ended questions) were used.

Table 3: Situation Analysis participants and data collection activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting/Group</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>Malawi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary age in-school girls/boys</td>
<td>Questionnaires, Focus group discussions</td>
<td>53 Grade 3-5 girls and boys 8 girls/boys groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary age out-of-school girls/boy</td>
<td>Questionnaires, FGD</td>
<td>25 girls and boys 8 girls/boys groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community members and Parents (M/F)</td>
<td>Community Power Analysis, In-depth Questionnaires</td>
<td>44 mothers and fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and Head Teachers</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>9, Grades 3 - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collected from schools</td>
<td>Student attendance, completion and achievement data</td>
<td>Grades 1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Management Committees, community leaders</td>
<td>FGD and participatory data</td>
<td>11 community groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender and education officials (district and national)</td>
<td>Key informant interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Situation Analysis Findings

As indicated above, the PCTFI Bangladesh and Malawi teams focused their SAs on slightly different populations (though still focus on school-aged youth), and collected different kinds of data from the same actors. These differences largely reflected each team’s initial ideas about the type of project they thought would most effectively address gender and education issues in the areas where they planned to work. Despite these different starting points and methodologies, many of the SA findings were quite similar. Below, we present some of the data generated by each SA and then discuss some of the key similarities that emerged across the studies.

**Bangladesh**

**Discrimination in the School**

The SA conducted in Bangladesh revealed that the quality of teaching and learning and teachers’ relations with students differentially affected girls and boys. These issues can be understood by analyzing whether and why children remained enrolled in school. Dropping out, especially after grade 3, is a key concern in the communities in which PCTFI will work. Annual floods, a lack of secondary schools near many of these isolated villages, and migration for work all pose challenges to girls and boys completing their primary education. The SA found that Muslim girls were most likely to drop out of school. Nearly 60% of girls and boys stated they could never, or only some of the time, exercise their right to education, but 13% of the girls and only 1% of boys said they could never exercise their right to education. The most salient reasons for girls and boys not being able to participate in school was related to safety in the school and teachers’ treatment of girls and boys. While nearly 65% of the girls felt somewhat safe in school, about 12% said they never felt safe in school for reasons ranging from beating or harsh punishment by the teachers, teasing from boys on the way or in school, and floods that hinder their way to school. In addition, nearly 25% of male and female community members felt that teachers treated the boys better than the girls.

In addition to the teachers’ relations and lack of gender sensitivity toward girls and boys, the quality of education in terms of its relevance for girls and boys is poor. Nearly 30% of the girls
and boys in this study felt that their learning in schools was not useful at all. Parents echoed these concerns with nearly 40% of parents stating that what children learned was not useful for their futures. Parent also felt that teachers were not often at school teaching and were not knowledgeable. One concern among parents and students is that teachers do not teach in the mother tongue, which is particularly relevant for the non-Bangla speaking girls and boys in these communities. The quality of teaching and learning is apparent in the achievement scores of students. Nearly 50% of boys and girls received marks of less than 20% for all three terms in all grades examined. There were no significant differences in marks between girls and boy. However, in one of the communities with the lowest average marks, girls were considerably lower than boys.

Data on the schools were limited by the lack of classroom and teacher observations conducted. Classroom data would be useful to understand how these safety issues in the school manifest for boys, girls and teachers.

Discrimination at Home and in the Community

While children recognized their inability to enact their right to an education, male and female community members and parents held views about the lack of rights for girls and boys as well. More female than male community members felt that boys could exercise their right to an education all the time, whereas more male than female community members (40% and 22%, respectively) felt that girls could not exercise their right to an education all the time. Men and women thus hold differing perspectives about boys’ and girls’ ability to exercise their right to an education. More respondents (40%) felt that sons could participate in the decision to go to school, whereas only 25% felt daughters could participate in this decision.

Men and women also held differing views about parental and community support for girls’ and boys’ education. 80% of all female community members supported their boys to go to school, in contrast to 44% of female members who supported their girls. The percentage of male community members who supported girls and boys was equal (70%). However, this difference may be understood in that most respondents were assuming that the question referred to
monetary support, such as providing stationary or tutoring, and men tended to make financial decisions about their children’s schooling. In contrast to parental support, female (60%) and male community members (30%) stated that the community does not support girls to go to school.

Community members echoed gendered perspectives about safety for women, men, girls, and boys in the community. Nearly 30% of women reported they did not feel they had a right to be free from abuse and violence, whereas 100% of men in the communities felt they had a right to be free from abuse and violence. Not only did women feel they did not have the right, but 50% of the female community members felt they could never exercise or only seldom exercise their right to be free from abuse and violence. With regard to girls’ and boys’ right to be free from abuse and violence, 40% of the female and 20% of the male community members stated that girls do not have a right to be protected from abuse and violence, whereas a higher percentage of both males and females felt boys had a right to be protected. Twenty percent of all respondents also felt that girls are never or rarely safe in school, in contrast to 5% feeling the same about boys. Finally, in addition to feeling they have rights and can enact them, community members also responded to whether the community protects girls, boys, women, and men from violence and provides resources. Twenty percent of women felt they and their girls were not protected by others in the community.

Community members’ statements about their perceptions of women, men, girls, and boys in the community suggest that gendered discrimination persists in attitudes that may, in turn, illuminate violent behaviors that are often secret. Not only do more women and girls feel they do not have rights to protection, but more women felt so than men, suggesting they may be more aware of the problems with abuse and violence. Violence was understood differently among men and women in the communities. While violence as it intersects with gender and poverty needs to be better understood in these communities, women are particularly concerned with the power that both men and wealthier people exert over their lives, and their ability to live free of abuse and violence.
The data from these communities in Bangladesh suggest that safety in relation to violence and abuse in the school and community is a key concern related to girls’ participation in school. In addition, male and female community members’ attitudes about girls’ and boys’ right to schooling, as well as support for their schooling, suggest persistent gender discrimination continues despite the national achievement of gender parity in primary enrollment.

Malawi

Discrimination in the school

In Malawi, the SA revealed deeply held biases against girls and their intelligence and capabilities within and outside of the school. At the school, many teachers thought that girls were less intelligent than boys. This widely held view was usually age-specific: teachers said that girls are smarter than boys at young ages, but not when they are older. This collaborated with what teachers at one of the schools said: “in the infant level both boys and girls perform well because they are still young and have equal opportunities and they do not have gender attitudes as they learn a lot together”.

It was observed that teachers’ issues with girls developed after puberty; before then, girls were even sometimes viewed more favorably than boys. This bias was evident in some male teachers’ behavior towards older girls. Several FGDs with parents and students, for example, reported that teachers make comments to older girls such as “you are very dull, why can’t you just get married?” “Look at her body, like a mother. Do you think you are beautiful? I have a more beautiful wife than you” and called them degrading names like “grandmother”, “mother”, and “postpartum woman”.

These perceptions of girls’ lowering intelligence and boys’ increasing intelligence over time appeared to be directly related to girls entering puberty. As they became capable of becoming wives and mothers, their schooling experiences and opportunities declined. From being called names for being “too old”, to being mocked if they tried to return to school after dropping out for marriage or pregnancy, to increasing demands on their time by family household chores, girls are given the message that once they are physically mature, they are no longer “good” students.
This mix of sexualizing female pupils and holding low views about older girls’ abilities transforms the safety, security, and utility of schooling for girls and boys. For example, it was reported that boys were given more physically challenging punishments than girls by teachers. Girls and boys agreed that boys received more punishments and were often treated more harshly than girls because teachers did not want anything (sexual) from the boys. In FGDs, boys and girls reported that girls received more positive messages from teachers, especially male teachers, because they wanted to enhance their relationships with the girls so that when they propose love to them they should not refuse. Thus, pupils widely believed that teachers treated boys and girls unfairly, and in cases where girls were treated favorably by teachers, it was for sexual purposes. Likewise, when girls were diminished by teachers, parents and pupils reported that it was usually done in a sexual manner, while for boys it was not.

Negative comments and bullying did not only come from teachers. Pupils and teachers reported that older girls were regularly harassed by their peers, and a number of particular examples were given where older girls began to regularly absent themselves from school or dropped out entirely due to negative comments from teachers and peers. In most cases, these girls were either old in age, were physically developed, or had given birth. There was no parallel harassment of older boys in school, who were welcomed by teachers and peers alike whether they had left school to work, had children themselves, or had simply dropped out at some point.

These findings confirmed earlier studies conducted in Malawi. A 2000 study observed that teachers’ impressions of girls were less favorable than of boys. Chimombo, et al. (2000:12) cite teachers in Kainja and Mkandawire as saying, “Boys are perceived to be intelligent, hardworking, motivated and co-operative whilst girls are perceived to be easy to control, passive, calm, and submissive”. Girls were described by interviewees as being less “serious” and “capable” in Davison and Kanyuka’s study (1992:454). Kadzamira and Chibwana (2000: 40) reported that teachers see girls’ participation in class as a poor use of time, and Davison and Kanyuka (1992) noted that Malawian teachers hold different levels of expectations for girls and boys.
Although the data revealed that every stakeholder group involved in the SA held these low views about older girls’ intelligence and capabilities, girls enrolled in primary school at higher rates than boys and performed at the same rate as boys. In fact, data from examination results and head teacher and teachers’ FGDs indicated that in the previous two years, girls had surpassed boys in examination pass rates in most surveyed schools.

**Discrimination at home and in the community**

The SA also revealed socio-cultural practices, norms, and values at the household and community levels that deprived girls of their right to education and the socio-cultural practices and values that would support girls’ and women’s rights.

About 64% of men and 56% of women said boys were more intelligent than girls, while only 12% of men and 16% of women said that girls were more intelligent than boys. Some of the mechanisms that disadvantage girls in schooling were also clear: about three-quarters of all parents reported that boys had more time after school for schoolwork, while 95% of parents agreed that girls’ schooling was more disrupted with household chores.

It was noted that in some communities, parents did not encourage their children’s education, but this was particularly true for girls because parents viewed marriage as the better option for girls from a young age. In these cases, children, particularly girls, were mostly taught about reproductive roles and encouraged to marry early. There were a lot of comments about mothers’ lack of interest or inability to successfully encourage girls to get to and achieve in schools. For instance, men in one FGD said “*Women are the ones who hinder girl’s education because they assign too much household chores to them and mothers are responsible for advising girls and encouraging them to go to school*”. Thus, the perception was that parents generally do not provide too much encouragement, but women in particular were blamed for girls’ lack of interest or attendance because they are supposed to advise girls and because they give girls chores. The shift of responsibility onto women reflects another set of biases; men tend to control the
resources needed to support girls’ schooling and they did not generally offer to take on a share of women’s chores in support of their daughters’ education.

Girls faced a number of constraints on how long they stayed in school that boys did not. Girls had to do more household chores. They also faced cultural expectations that boys did not. For example, all parent FGDs agreed that girls should get married earlier than boys, usually with a large gap (e.g. 18 versus 25 years). Many said that girls were dull and too focused on sexual relationships. Some parents also said they were afraid of girls getting pregnant out of wedlock. Parents also had gendered expectations for the future: Boys were described as leaders in society and as such needed to be educated. Girls were expected to marry and have children, roles that were viewed as not requiring education. Boys were expected to be heads of households supporting their family; on the other hand, “educating a girl child is a waste of resources because she will be spending her income on her husband and not on her parents.”

There was evidence from the SA that schools were playing a more progressive role concerning gender norms than the communities. Teachers were more supportive of gender equality than were parents, and many of the gender lessons “taught” in school would generally be considered more progressive. For example, the schools encouraged children to sit anywhere and to work in gender-mixed groups, but in the communities and churches, women and men cannot sit with each other. Community norms thus contradicted the participatory methods that were sometimes used at school. Likewise, sexual abuse of girls by family members appeared to be much more widespread than abuse by male teachers.

Discussion
The SAs revealed similar patterns of widely-held community beliefs concerning the relative intelligence, goodness, and future academic capacity of girls versus boys in Bangladesh and Malawi. With the exception of the potential effects of cattle-herding on boys, these views and the activities that girls and boys were expected to complete for their families heavily favored boys and disfavored girls. Although the exact content of these gender inequitable beliefs differed, they were widely held by community and school actors alike, including by children themselves.
In Malawi, gender inequitable beliefs related to schooling were strongly linked to beliefs about girls’ most important roles being those of mother and wife; because these roles were expected to begin soon after puberty, negative attitudes toward girls’ schooling became stronger as girls approached puberty. There were also rigid expectations that girls would fulfill age-appropriate roles within and outside of the home; as girls grew older, they were given less time to study and more household chores, and they were also more likely to be approached by boys and men with sexual intent. Previous research (e.g. GABLE 1997) has also shown that parental expectations for girls to provide resources to their natal household also grow as girls mature, potentially putting pressure on girls to begin sexual relationships in order to access resources. Schools and school officials that participated in the SA appeared to be slightly more gender equitable in their actions and beliefs than community members. Though the school still served to reproduce many of the inequities girls faced in the communities, there was much stronger support for gender equal rights among teachers than among other surveyed stakeholders, and some school practices actively encouraged gender equity.

In contrast, in Bangladesh, the bias against girls starts much younger, as is reflected in the 2.1 million “missing girls” that exist in Bangladesh because of sex-specific abortion and neglect of babies. As girls approach school-age, biases against girls surface in attitudes about the need and relevance of their education, and in the treatment of girls as less capable in school subjects. In the community, these gender biases are reflected in abuse and violence against girls, or what the girls and community members referred to as “eve teasing”, particularly as they approach adolescence. This harassment serves to perpetuate norms that girls belong in the home and should be married, rather than being educated and participating in public life. Patrilineal marriage and living systems may strengthen parents’ concerns about “losing their investment” in girls, as may legal inequities concerning women’s rights to own land and receive inheritances. Despite shifting practices, such as increased enrollment, and gender norms related to education

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5 Because the region in which the SA was conducted is largely matrilineal, there was less concern from parents about controlling girls’ sexuality or about “losing their investment” in girls’ schooling than there is in other parts of the country.
of girls, discrimination persists against girls’ education, because they are to be married and do not provide substantial economic resources for the family after marriage. These concerns were echoed in Schuler’s (2007) study.

In both cases, the SAs indicated that the rapid increase in girls’ enrollment in primary school experienced in each country should be celebrated, but did not signal an end to gender inequities or, necessarily, an increase in girls’ and women’s empowerment. Indeed, they raised important questions about current frameworks for understanding and promulgating gender equity by raising questions about how gender roles and norms interact across institutional settings, and pointing to the complex ways in which age, class, gender, and schooling interact to shape community and school norms and practical possibilities for the future. They also raised important questions about current conceptions of constructs such as equality, educational quality, and girls’ empowerment. For example, in Bangladesh and Malawi, it was evident that girls were expected to work at home and go to school while boys only went to school, beginning an early and inequitable “double-shift” pattern that marks gendered labor patterns around the world. In Malawian schools in which teachers were implementing child-centered pedagogical approaches, it was evident that such pedagogies were not necessarily gender sensitive, and in some cases reproduced expectations that boys would be classroom leaders and active learners, while girls would be passive followers. Likewise, many current conceptions of how schooling empowers women did not seem to be playing out among the rapidly increasing number of young women who have completed primary or secondary school, do not have formal wage labor opportunities, and are continuing to face the same options that their mothers faced in how to survive and thrive socially. The PCTFI programs developed by each country, based on the SA findings and the CIF, aim to address aspects of these gender inequities; they are described briefly below.

**PCTFI Project Plans**

**Bangladesh**

In the target communities, initiatives need to address both school-based and community-based attitudes and practices related to girls and boys. To develop and ensure a child friendly and
gender sensitive school environment, the CARE PCTFI innovation will provide training to teachers and SMC members on child rights and gender issues that are particularly salient in these communities. Drawing on previous programs in training and supporting SMCs and teachers, this innovation supports SMCs and teachers to address gender issues in the community and school. The PCTFI team will work closely with the community and SMCs to share the key issues in the SA, and to identify training and processes for the SMC and the community that will address issues of safety and gendered perceptions of schooling. The CARE innovation aims to collaborate with and build solidarity among SMC, school and other community initiatives, such as women’s and adolescent groups to address issues of violence, abuse and exploitation. In addition, teachers are a critical component to the quality of education and equality in and through education. As such, the innovation will aim to support collaboration between the SMC and teachers to improve teachers’ attendance, practices in school, and relations with parents and the community. The long-term impacts will be measured by changes in community members, parents, and teachers’ attitudes about girls’ and boys’ educational rights and participation, a change in teachers’ gender sensitive child-centered pedagogy, as well as changes in girls’ and boys’ self-esteem, agency, completion and achievement.

**Malawi**

Enrolling girls and boys in school is an important step, but they need to stay in, achieve, and complete school in an environment that supports more gender equitable roles, including in children’s dreams for their futures. Teaching and learning processes play a major role in ensuring that both girls and boys are participating and achieving in school. This calls for making the school environment friendlier for girls and boys. Teachers are the centre of teaching and learning processes at the school, and they can also support changes at the household and community levels by working and mobilizing girls, boys, parents, school committee and leaders on issues of gender equality (such as household chore distribution). Based on data from the SA and best practices, curricular materials, and lessons learned from previous teacher training and girls’ education projects collected by CARE Malawi, an innovative, school-based, PCTFI program was developed. The program will strengthen teachers’ gender-sensitive child centered pedagogical skills and mobilize the school community around a school culture supportive of egalitarian
gender relations between and among school leaders, teachers, students, and school committee members. The program will be implemented in 26 schools in one district in the Central Region of Malawi and will involve teacher training over each school holiday break; CARE staff support to each of the teachers with at least one visit per term; exchange visits between schools, one time per term (either hosting or visiting); and school-based Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The long-term impact of the program will be measured by its effects on teacher classroom practices; changes in stakeholders’ perceptions of girls’ educational capacity; and improvements in girls’ and boys’ attendance and achievement in grades 4 through 6.
References


