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## Gender perspectives on causes and effects of school dropouts

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# Gender perspectives on causes and effects of school dropouts

# Preface

Education plays a fundamental role in human, social and economic development. Sweden has a specific objective to improve access to quality education with a focus on learning outcomes, strengthened national public education systems, equality and inclusive education. The focus lies on strengthening capacity for quality education and promoting equal rights to education and learning.

Gender equality and women's and girls' rights have a central position as a prioritized area in Swedish development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. The Swedish government states that a gender perspective shall be mainstreamed throughout the cooperation. Gender equality has since long been in focus for Sida's work, as a rights issue and thus a goal in itself as well as a means to achieve sustainable development. Women's and girl's education is a crucial areas in Sida's work with gender equality.

The intersections between gender equality and education in Sida's work are manifold. Given Sida's focus on quality education and an equal right to, in and through education, supporting sustained gender equality within the education sector is a priority.

There has been an impressive decrease in the number of out-of-school children worldwide since 2000, in particular by reducing the number of girls that are not in school. Nevertheless, major challenges in achieving gender parity remains, drop outs rate remain high and there are large varieties when it comes to the retention of all children until completion of secondary education as a key target in Agenda 2030.

There is an awareness of the need to shift focus from gender parity to gender equality to enable all, and especially girls and young women, to fully benefit from education. To address structural barriers and discriminatory social norms to, in and through education that contributes to gender inequality, there is a need to better understand and analyse the driving forces behind dropouts from a gender perspective.

Therefore Sida in 2015 initiated a process aiming at exploring the links between gender and school dropouts in the Sida partner countries where primary and secondary education is a substantial part of the portfolio. The paper at hand is the outcome of the first part of this work; a study using a gender lens to analyse the causes and effects of school drop outs. This study is part of an ongoing work which includes workshops, seminars and the development of concrete tools to address school dropouts from a gender perspective.

Due to the quality of and the unique findings in this paper, written by Dr. Gita Subrahmanyam, Sida has decided to make it accessible to a wider audience. We see it as a contribution to our mutual worldwide efforts in line with Agenda 2030 to decrease school drop outs through quality education – and as crucial for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and participation in all spheres of the society.

Stockholm December 2016

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# Gender perspectives on causes and effects of school dropouts from primary and secondary education in developing countries – an overview

Final Paper

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23 January 2016

Indevelop AB

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CCTs	Conditional cash transfers
CFS	Child Friendly Schools
EFA	Education for All
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGM/C	Female genital mutilation and cutting
FSSSP	Female Secondary School Stipend Project
GPI	Gender parity index
IMAGES	International Men and Gender Equality Survey
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRGBV	School-related gender-based violence

## Executive Summary

This paper adopts a gender lens to analyse the causes and effects of dropout from primary and secondary education in developing countries. The analysis is based on a review of existing material (statistical data, reports, etc.) and focuses on the main Sida partner countries within the education support portfolio – that is, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Liberia, Rwanda and Tanzania.

‘Dropout’ has received little attention in the global education agenda, which until recently has emphasised *access to education* through a focus on enrolments, rather than *retention in education* with an emphasis on completion. While the proportion of children admitted to the first grade of primary school at the official entry age has increased globally and in every developing region since 2000, little and uneven progress has been made in reducing the rate at which children drop out before reaching the last grade of primary school.

Gender plays a role in these trends. Across the world, females are more likely than males to be out of school, and the poorest girls/women from the most disadvantaged rural areas tend to have the lowest educational attainment levels. The reasons why females are more likely than males to be out of school relate to social power structures and socially-constructed norms that define the roles that boys/men and girls/women should play. These gender roles affect the rights, responsibilities, opportunities and capabilities of males and females, including their access to and treatment in school. Mainly because of gendered perceptions of adolescent girls’ roles and responsibilities, in most developing countries, girls’ enrolment rates fall when they reach lower secondary school age and then decline further when they reach upper secondary school age.

In today’s complex globalised environment, a secondary education is widely regarded as the minimum level required for securing and maintaining productive employment, which is the main route for escaping poverty and contributing meaningfully to the economy and society. A failure to complete secondary education can affect individuals’ long-term capabilities and earnings potential. This is especially the case for girls/women, who receive the greatest returns to their schooling investment from secondary education.

Most young people in the Sida partner countries within the education support portfolio have not completed secondary school. Moreover, in most of the countries, the majority of young people have not completed primary school, and young women have lower educational attainment levels than young men. The reasons why educational attainment levels are low differ across the countries, but two broad trends may be identified:

- In four of the countries (Afghanistan, Bolivia, Tanzania and Liberia), the main problem is low initial enrolments in primary education and ensuring that children begin school on time. Dropout is also an issue in these countries, but late entry and non-entry appear to be larger concerns.

- In three countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia and Rwanda), the main challenge is retaining students in school once they have enrolled. Bangladesh has the best retention rate of the three countries; nevertheless, only just over one-quarter of students that begin primary school in Bangladesh make it to the first grade of upper secondary school.

The main barriers that children and young people in developing countries face in accessing or remaining in education stem from issues, practices and policies at individual/household, school/community and policy/system level, including:

- *Individual/household level:* poverty; low perceived value of girls' education; income shocks; death/illness of parents; lack of parental support for education; ethnicity and social exclusion; gendered traditional practices; early marriage; early pregnancy; and lack of interest in school (which is linked to other factors).
- *School/community level:* high cost of schooling/corruption; lack of a nearby school; school-related gender-based violence; inadequate school facilities for girls/women; unequal learning environments; lack of female teachers/role models; and a non-inclusive language of instruction.
- *Policy/system level:* inadequate/weakly enforced policies on access to school for pregnant girls/young mothers; inadequate/weakly enforced legislation on school-related gender-based violence; and inadequate/weakly enforced legislation on harmful traditional practices.

In terms of impacts, studies suggest that low educational attainment levels can lead to an entrenchment of unequal power structures as well as discriminatory gender norms and attitudes at individual/household level, which may then be replicated and perpetuated at community level through unequal practices within schools. Breaking the cycle of gender inequality and its detrimental impacts requires overcoming patriarchy and unequal power structures at state level. Yet women's subordinate position in society and low educational attainment levels relative to men's block their equal representation in key decision-making fora, which in turn prevents gender-equalising reforms from being implemented.

To break this cycle and overcome the dropout problem, policies need to be put in place that improve educational access and retention while simultaneously reducing gender inequality. The final section of this paper presents several examples of evidence-based interventions implemented in developing countries to address the main causes of dropout identified for the Sida partner countries, and critically analyses these policies and programmes from a gender perspective. By doing so, it highlights some of the crucial issues/questions that need to be addressed to improve future interventions in this area.

# 1. Introduction

‘Dropout’ has received little attention in the global education agenda, which until recently has emphasised *access to education* through a focus on enrolments, rather than *retention in education* with an emphasis on completion. Hence, while the proportion of children admitted to the first grade of primary school at the official entry age has increased globally and in every developing region since 2000 (see Figure 1), little and uneven progress has been made in reducing the rate at which children drop out before reaching the last grade of primary school (see Figure 2).<sup>1</sup> On average across the developing world, 1 in 4 children who enrol in primary school withdraw before completing it, and many leave school without acquiring basic skills, such as reading, writing and simple arithmetic (UIS and UNICEF, 2015). In sub-Saharan Africa, more than 2 in 5 children who begin primary school do not complete it. This situation has resulted in negative returns on educational investment, producing costs to both governments and individuals without generating the requisite benefits in human capital development.

## 1.1 LINK BETWEEN DROPOUT AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN

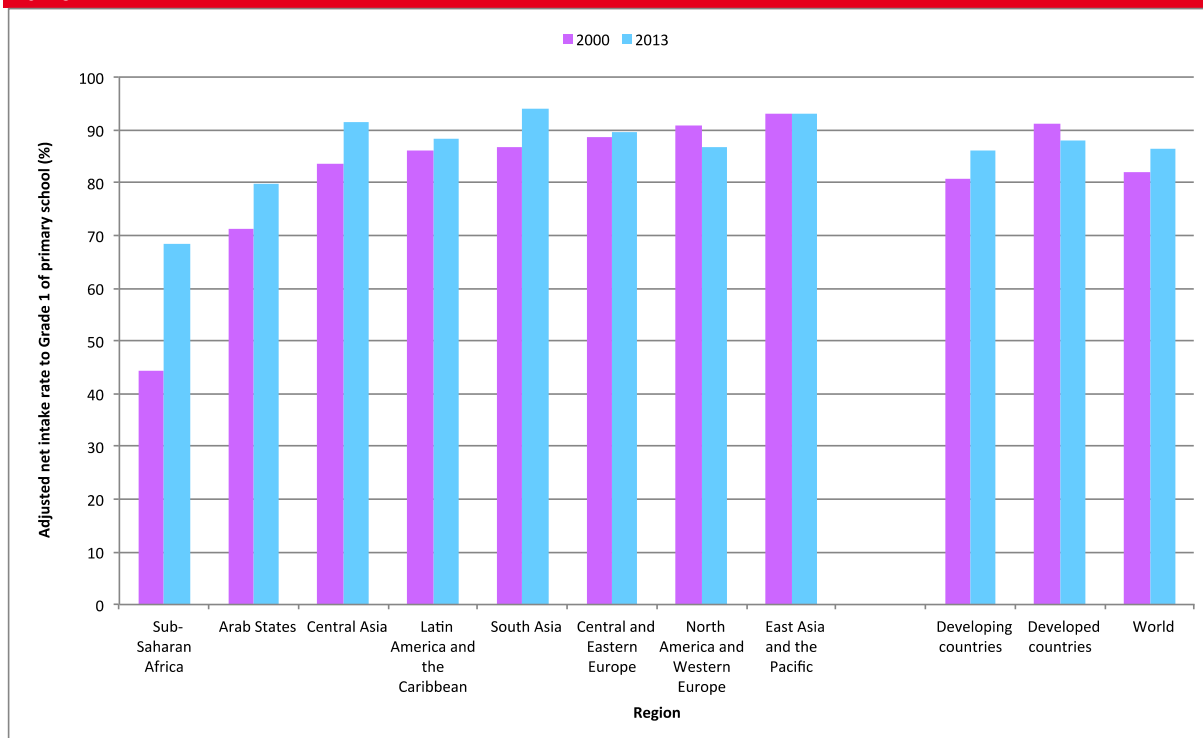
Moreover, despite global pledges to achieve Education for All by 2015, nearly 58 million children of primary school age worldwide were not enrolled in school in 2012, but less than one-quarter of these ‘out-of-school’ children<sup>2</sup> were dropouts (see Figure 3). Instead, most (77%) had not yet started school, and many of these children – especially in West and Central Africa and South Asia – were not expected to ever do so (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 23). The extent to which the ‘out-of-school’ label overlaps with the ‘dropout’ label varies by region. In East Asia and the Pacific, 59% of primary school aged children who were not enrolled in school in 2012 had dropped out (see Figure 3). In Eastern and Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the CEE/CIS region, the majority of out-of-school children will likely begin school late, and a significant proportion of these late entrants will likely drop out without completing basic education. After all, research suggests that over-age students have higher dropout rates than appropriately aged or under-aged students (EPDC, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Primary education, which is the equivalent of ISCED 1, typically lasts between 4 and 7 years, with 6 years being the most common duration (UIS, 2012: 17). The official primary school entry age differs by country, but is typically 6 years.

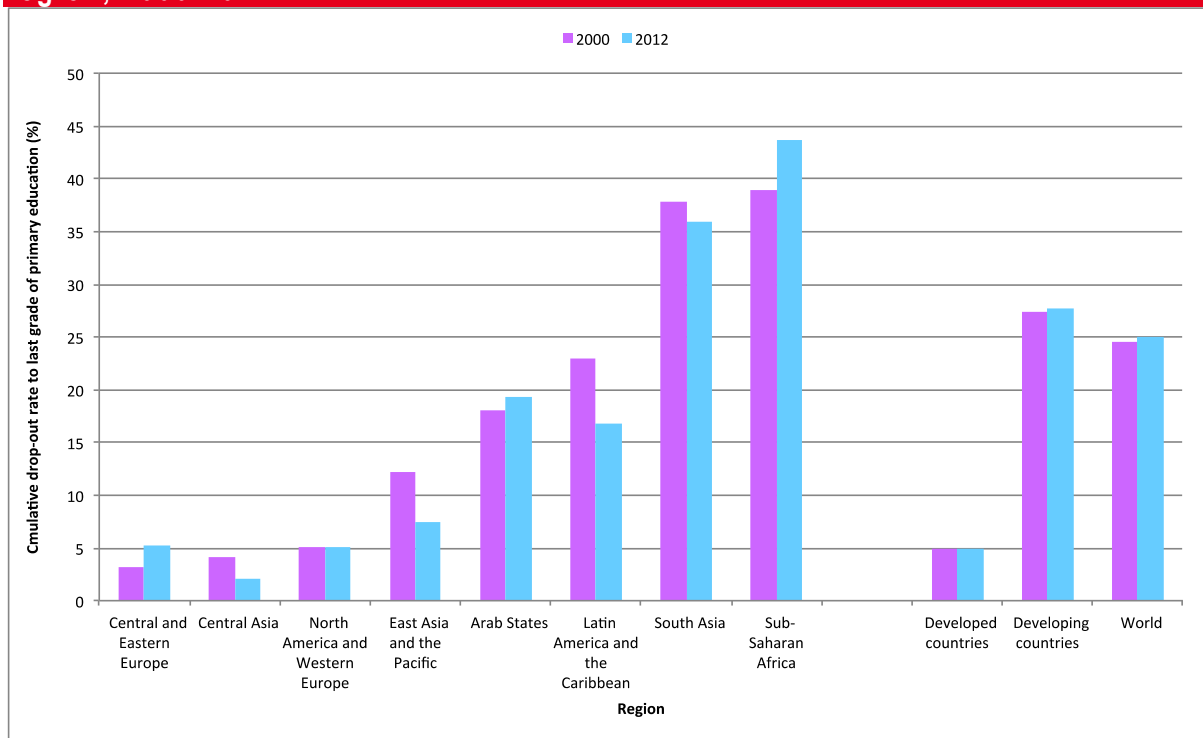
<sup>2</sup> UNESCO (2015: 409) defines ‘out-of-school children’ as children in the official primary school age range who are not enrolled in either primary or secondary school. The official primary school age range differs by country, but typically falls between 6 and 11 years of age (UIS and UNICEF, 2015).

**Figure 1 – Adjusted net intake to Grade 1 of primary school, by region, 2000-2013**



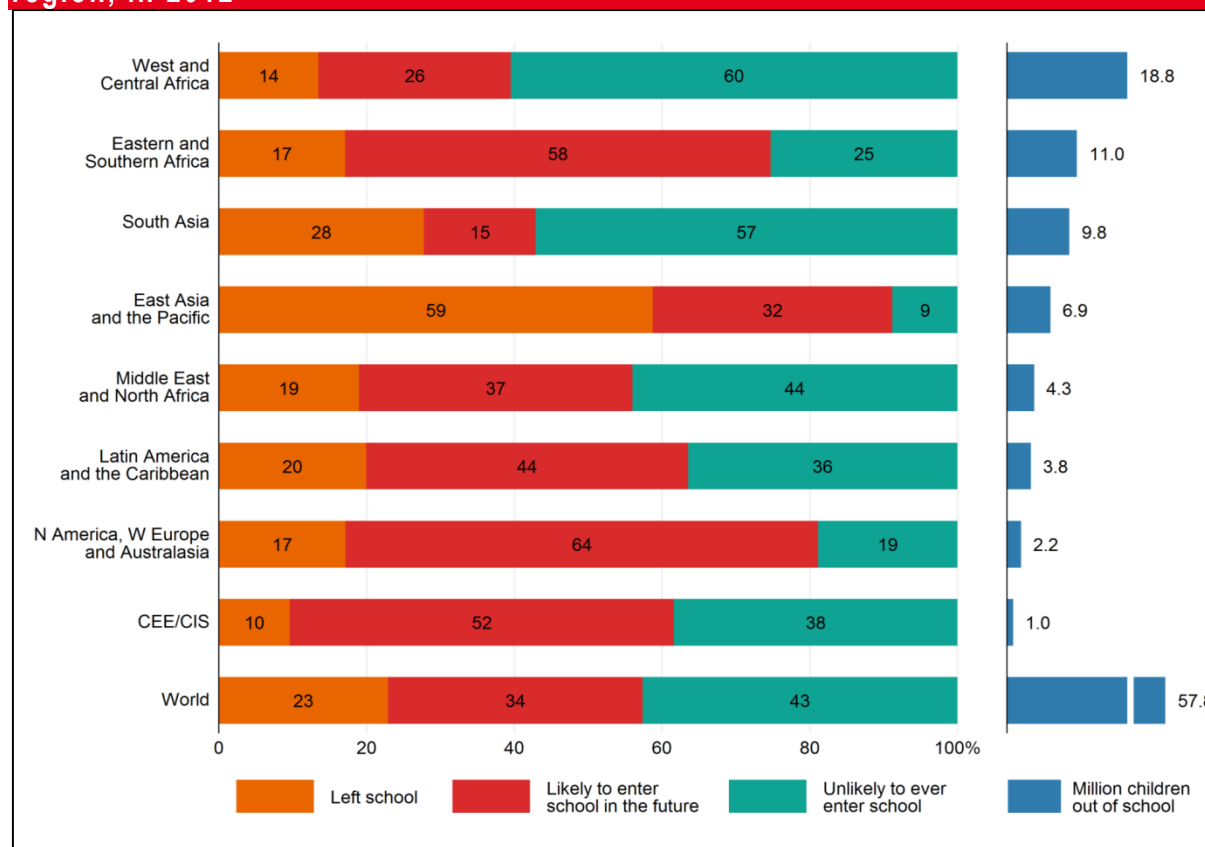
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

**Figure 2 – Cumulative dropout rate to the last grade of primary education, by region, 2000-2012**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics  
Note: Data shown for South Asia in 2012 is the 2011 rate.

**Figure 3 – School exposure of out-of-school children of primary school age, by region, in 2012**



Source: UIS and UNICEF (2015: 23)

The global primary out-of-school rate has remained at 9% since 2007, despite global efforts to achieve universal primary education (UIS and EFA GMR, 2014). There are two main reasons for this:

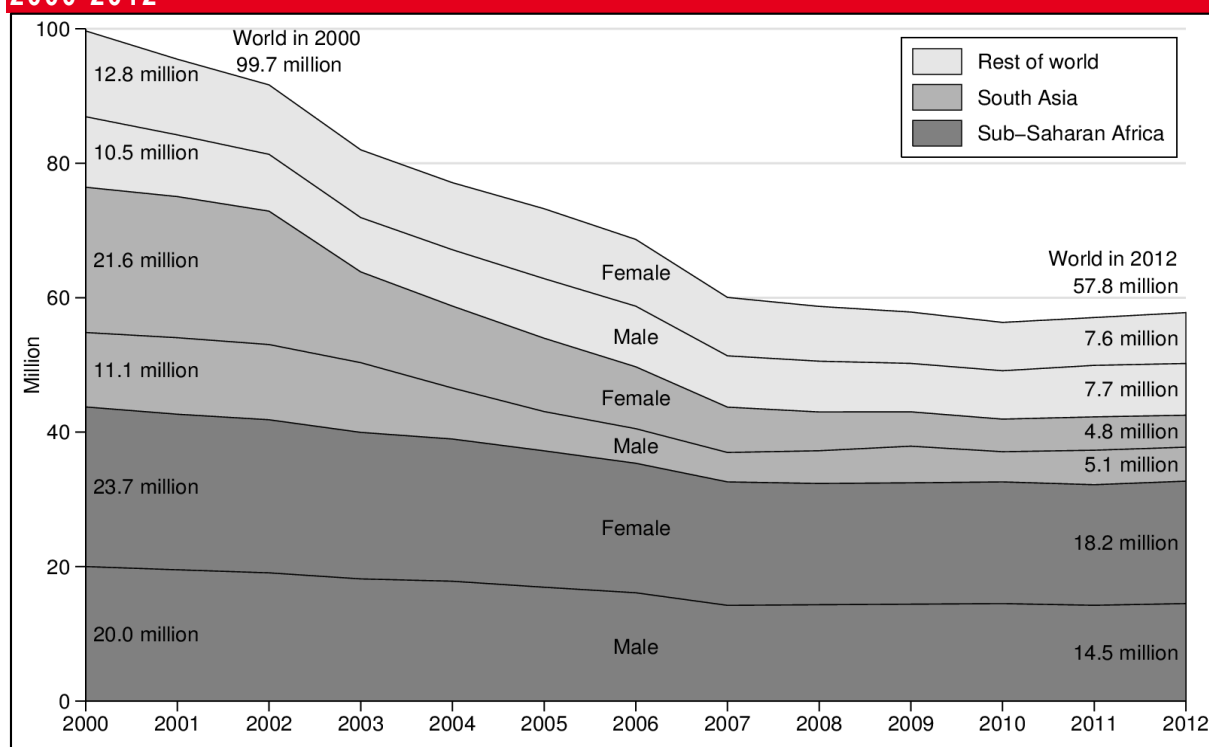
- After an initial period of high investment in education, which helped to reduce the global primary out-of-school population from nearly 100 million in 2000 to 60 million in 2007 (see Figure 4), the onset of the global financial crisis resulted in a decline in educational aid to developing countries, slowing progress in getting all children into school by 2015. According to UNESCO (2015: 261): ‘Overall aid disbursed to education did increase steadily after Dakar until 2010, but has since been in decline. Total aid disbursements to education fell by 10% between 2010 and 2012, a total of US\$1.3 billion less’.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Dakar, Senegal is the site where the Education for All pledge took place, at the World Education Forum in 2000.

- In Sub-Saharan Africa, the primary school-age population expanded by 36 million between 2000 and 2012, challenging efforts to cut the out-of-school rate (UIS and EFA GMR, 2014: 2-5). The number of out-of-school children of primary school age in the region has therefore remained at around 30 million since 2007, coinciding with the slowdown in international aid for education.

Nevertheless, there has been an impressive decrease in the number of out-of-school children worldwide since 2000, with the South Asia region accounting for over half of this decline, in particular by reducing the number of female children that are not in school.

**Figure 4 – Out-of-school children of primary school age, by region and sex, 2000-2012**



Source: UIS and UNICEF (2015: 19)

## 1.2 GENDER AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The South Asia region's success in reducing the female proportion of out-of-school children, from 66% in 2000 to 48% in 2012, could provide lessons for other regions, in particular Sub-Saharan Africa, where females now make up 56% of primary out-of-school children, up from 54% in 2000 (see Figure 4). After all, beyond the numbers, the reasons why females are more likely than males (or vice versa in some cases) to be out of school often relate to social power structures and socially-constructed norms that define the roles that boys/men and girls/women should play – for example, the sexual division of labour in the household, where women/girls are assumed to bear responsibility for raising children, cooking and cleaning, while boys/men are responsible for generating income and more 'masculine' household tasks, such as maintaining machinery or washing the car. These 'gendered' roles affect the rights, responsibilities, opportunities and capabilities of males and females, including their access to and treatment in school. Yet the South Asia case proves that gender disparities in education can be altered within a relatively short time period.

However, care must be taken not to confuse *gender parity*, which refers to equal numbers of males and females in school, with *gender equality*, which is concerned with equal conditions for both sexes and can only be achieved by eliminating all forms of discrimination based on gender, so that girls/women and boys/men enjoy equal access to, treatment in, and opportunities through education. Until recently, gender parity was used to measure gender equality, partly because gender equality is a more complex concept and therefore difficult to quantify. However, shifting the focus from school enrolments to school retention by adopting a gender lens highlights how gendered norms and practices, combined with other factors (notably household wealth, location and ethnicity), jointly determine an individual's placement within social hierarchies and often influence whether or not a child – and which child – attends or remains in school (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 56).

Discrimination based on gender occurs on a number of levels, from how families and/or communities perceive male or female children's roles and capabilities, to what is taught in school and how it is taught, to what is funded by government. It affects individuals' pathways and opportunities in all spheres of life, since education imparts the skills that are needed to engage meaningfully in economic, social and political affairs, and educational qualifications signal the level of skills that individuals possess and can usefully contribute to these areas. Across the world, females are more likely than males to be out of school (although not in all countries), and the poorest girls/women from the most disadvantaged rural areas tend to have the lowest educational attainment levels of all social groups. For example, 48% of out-of-school girls, but only 37% of out-of-school boys, of primary school age worldwide will likely never enrol in school (UNESCO, 2015: xiv). Lack of education will greatly restrict the opportunities available to both groups, but the outcomes will likely affect girls more, given the layers of inequality that cause them to be less educated than boys.



Gendered norms and practices become more pronounced as children reach puberty, and result in a widening of sex differences in access to and retention in education. Nearly 63 million adolescents of lower secondary school age worldwide were out of school in 2012 (see Figure 5), corresponding to an out-of-school rate of 17% – that is, 8 percentage points higher than the global primary out-of-school rate (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 17).<sup>4</sup> Mainly because of gendered perceptions of adolescent girls' roles and responsibilities, in most developing countries, girls' enrolment rates fall when they reach lower secondary school age and then decline further when they reach upper secondary school age.<sup>5</sup> This can be seen by observing regional enrolment rates and the gender parity index of enrolments at each level of education (see Table 1). The data in Table 1 shows that, despite progress in reducing gender disparities since 2000, girls are still less likely than boys to be enrolled in primary and lower secondary school in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab States, but enjoy relative gender parity at those levels of education in all other regions.<sup>6</sup> At upper secondary level, females are less likely to be enrolled in school than males in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Central and Eastern Europe, while males are less likely than females to attend school in Latin America and the Caribbean. The picture is further complicated by the fact that many children/young people enter primary school at an age older than the official entrance age (see Figure 3), which means that in some cases they may reach puberty before completing primary school. In such cases, push and pull factors relating to gender may affect whether or not these individuals remain in education until completion of upper secondary school.<sup>7</sup>

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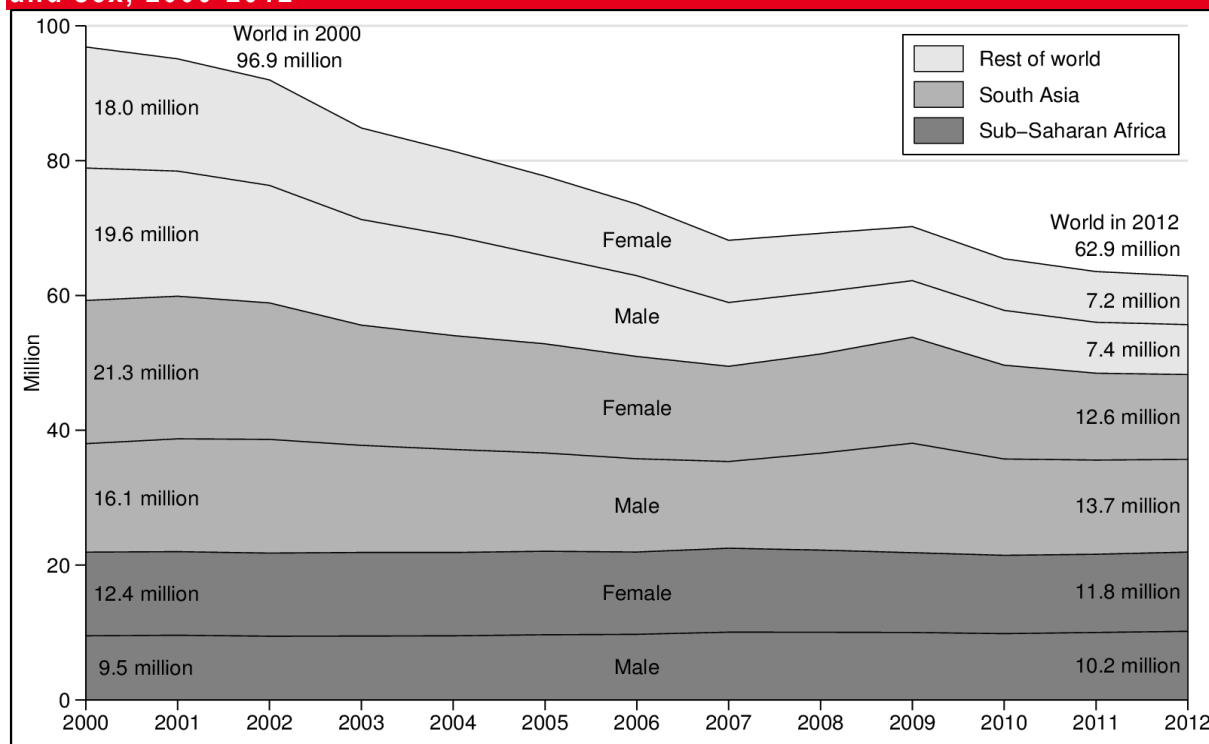
<sup>4</sup> Lower secondary education, which is the equivalent of ISCED 2, typically lasts between 2 and 5 years, with the most common duration being 3 years (UIS, 2012: 17). The lower secondary school age range differs by country, but typically falls between 12 and 15 years of age (UIS and UNICEF, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Upper secondary education – which is the equivalent of ISCED 3 – typically lasts between 2 and 5 years, with the most common duration being 3 years (UIS, 2012: 17). The upper secondary school age range differs by country, but typically falls between 16 and 19 years of age (UIS and UNICEF, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> However, it should be noted that the net adjusted enrolment rate used to calculate primary school enrolments is different than the gross enrolment rate used to calculate lower secondary enrolments. The latter includes individuals falling outside the official school age range for that education level, while the former does not.

<sup>7</sup> A similar situation can also occur in countries that have long primary school cycles (for example, lasting 7 years), a relatively high official entrance age for primary education (for example, 7 years old) and/or high primary school repetition rates, which mean that students reach puberty while still in primary school.

**Figure 5 – Out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age, by region and sex, 2000-2012**



Source: UIS and UNICEF (2015: 20)

### 1.3 IMPORTANCE OF SECONDARY COMPLETION

In today's complex globalised environment, a secondary education is widely regarded as the minimum level required for securing and maintaining productive employment, which is the main route for escaping poverty and contributing meaningfully to the economy and society. Thus, a failure to complete secondary education can affect individuals' long-term capabilities and earnings potential. This is especially the case for girls/women, who receive the greatest returns to their schooling investment from secondary education (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2004: 113): while men experience higher returns to primary education than women (20% versus 13%), women realise higher returns to secondary education than men (18% versus 14%).

Girls' and women's education is also necessary for realising key development goals, such as breaking the cycles of poverty and poor health (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 58). Adolescent girls who are enrolled in school are less likely to marry early, die during childbirth and/or contract diseases, such as HIV and AIDS; and they are more likely to send their children to school and to acquire the information and skills necessary to enable them to earn higher wages (UNESCO, 2003). The increase in women's educational attainment since 1970 has been shown to account for around one-half of the reduction in child and maternal mortality rates over the past 40 years (Gakidou et al, 2010). These positive associations explain why the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasise the retention of all children until completion of secondary education as a key target (SDG Goal 4, Target 1).

**Table 1 – Enrolment rate and gender parity index of enrolment, by level of education, 2000-2013**

Region/Indicator	Adjusted net enrolment rate, primary (%)		Gross enrolment ratio, lower secondary (%)		Gross enrolment ratio, upper secondary (%)	
	2000	2013	2000	2013	2000	2013
Sub-Saharan Africa	62	80	30	50	21	35
South Asia	80	94	60	81	34	54
Arab States	81	88	77	87	47	59
Latin America and the Caribbean	94	94	98	104	64	80
Central and Eastern Europe	94	96	93	100	83	100
Central Asia	95	94	85	96	88	104
East Asia and the Pacific	95	96	75	96	43	78
North America and Western Europe	98	96	102	106	95	104
<i>Developing countries</i>	84	90	66	82	38	60
<i>Developed countries</i>	98	96	102	105	97	106
<i>World</i>	85	91	72	85	46	66
Region/Indicator	Adjusted net enrolment rate, primary, gender parity index (GPI)		Gross enrolment ratio, lower secondary, gender parity index (GPI)		Gross enrolment ratio, upper secondary, gender parity index (GPI)	
	2000	2013	2000	2013	2000	2013
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.89	0.94	0.80	0.87	0.81	0.83
South Asia	0.84	1.00	0.79	0.99	0.71	0.88
Arab States	0.90	0.97	0.86	0.92	0.92	0.98
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.98	1.00	1.03	1.02	1.14	1.13
Central and Eastern Europe	0.98	1.00	0.97	1.00	0.94	0.95
Central Asia	0.99	0.99	1.00	0.99	0.97	0.98
East Asia and the Pacific	1.00	1.00	0.96	1.02	0.96	1.00
North America and Western Europe	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.98	1.03	1.02
<i>Developing countries</i>	0.92	0.98	0.90	0.98	0.87	0.95
<i>Developed countries</i>	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.98	1.02	1.01
<i>World</i>	0.93	0.99	0.92	0.98	0.91	0.96

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Gross enrolment rates above 100% reflect attendance by individuals outside the official school age for that education level.

A GPI equal to 1 indicates parity between females and males. A value less than 1 indicates disparity in favour of boys/men and a value greater than 1 indicates disparity in favour of girls/women.

Nevertheless, the regional trends presented in this section need to be treated with caution, because they mask crucial differences between individual countries. For example, most of the South Asia region's out-of-school population is located in two countries – Pakistan and Afghanistan – where gender norms and cultural practices, as well as other factors (notably household wealth and location), mean that girls have less access to educational opportunities than boys (UIS and UNICEF, 2015). The trends in these countries belie the overall pattern for the South Asia region, where males are more likely than females to be out of school. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of how gender affects educational access, retention and attainment, it is necessary to examine trends on a country-by-country basis.

## 1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The remainder of this paper provides a gender perspective on the causes and effects of school dropouts from primary and secondary education in developing countries, with a focus on the main Sida partner countries within the education support portfolio – that is, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia, Liberia, Rwanda and Tanzania. The paper is structured in three sections. Section 2 provides a broad overview of the school dropout situation at primary and secondary education levels in the seven Sida partner countries. It pays specific attention to how sex differences affect educational access, retention and attainment. Section 3 identifies, from a gender perspective, the main causes and effects of dropout on individuals, communities and societies in developing countries, with a focus on the Sida partner countries. Section 4 provides examples of policies that have been implemented in developing countries to remove barriers to educational access and retention while simultaneously addressing issues relating to gender, and highlights some of the crucial questions that still need to be addressed to improve future interventions in this area.

## 2. Overview of the school dropout situation in the Sida partner countries

To be able to appreciate how discrimination based on gender affects educational access and retention in the Sida partner countries, it is first necessary to establish how far sex differences explain differences in school progression patterns. This section provides an overview of the school dropout situation in the seven countries by examining sex-disaggregated data on school enrolment patterns at each stage of primary and secondary school.

However, prior to looking at the data, it is worth mentioning some of the issues that have arisen as a result of the international community's focus on access over the past 15 years. First, because the emphasis has been on increasing the numbers of children entering school, most countries in the world maintain data on enrolments at the entry point to each level of education (that is, Grade 1), but not on enrolments at each grade (apart from the last grade). Many countries also do not maintain data on completion rates at the end of an education level; for example, data on graduation rates is available for only 5 of the 7 Sida partner countries.<sup>8</sup> This issue makes charting school progression patterns a complex task, which requires piecing together strings of statistics to form an overall – and unavoidably stylised – picture. Second, the focus on universal primary education has meant that data becomes sparser the further one moves away from primary education level. As will be seen later in this section, there is much less information on upper secondary or tertiary education than on primary or lower secondary education. Third, the focus on improving educational access has sometimes come at the cost of educational quality (Birchler, and Michaelowa, 2013: 15). The fact that children enrol in school does not necessarily mean that they obtain the knowledge, skills and competencies to lead productive, fulfilled lives. Policies to increase enrolments need to be accompanied by policies to assure the quality and improve the outcomes of education, and indicators used to measure countries' performance need to emphasise both aspects. Finally, equality of access is measured by the gender parity index<sup>9</sup>, which means that the available statistics treat sex as the only variable that explains how gender affects access to education. However, other variables – notably household wealth, location and ethnicity – also play a role.

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<sup>8</sup> These are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia and Rwanda.

<sup>9</sup> The gender parity index (GPI) is the ratio of female to male values for a given statistic (UIS, 2009: 49). Its purpose is to measure progress towards gender parity in educational participation and/or learning opportunities.

Nevertheless, the available data may be usefully combined to provide a stylised picture of school progression patterns in the Sida partner countries (see Figure 6). Details on the methods and assumptions applied in compiling the data are outlined in Annex 1. However, the main points are summarised below:

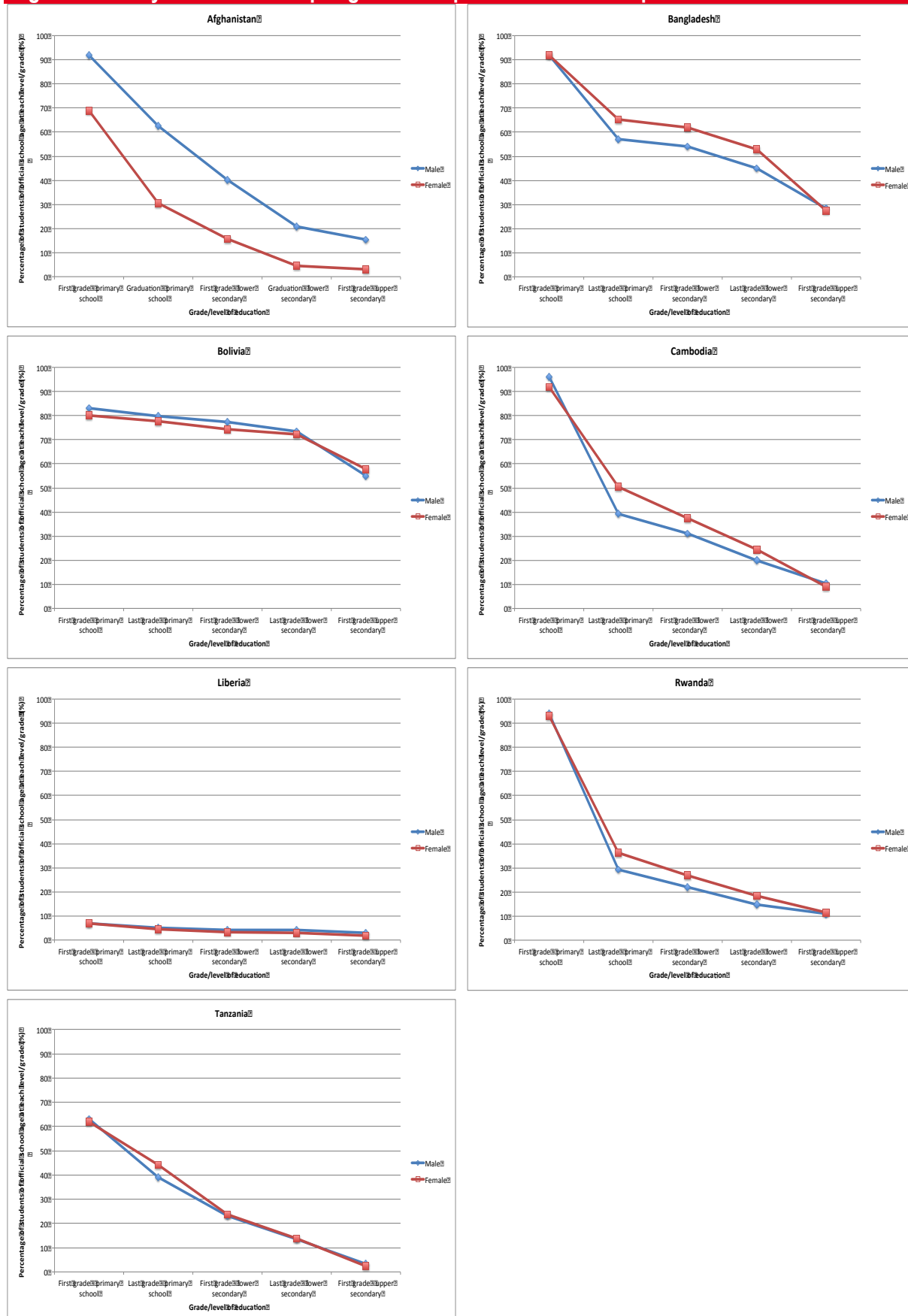
- The starting point for examining student progression patterns in each of the Sida partner countries is the ‘net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary education’, which is defined as the total number of new entrants in the first grade of primary education who are of the official primary school entrance age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age (UIS, 2009: 6). The net intake rate reflects the level of enrolments at Grade 1 and therefore acts as a baseline for tracking children’s progression through primary education. The net intake rate is labelled as ‘First grade – primary school’ in the Figure 6 graphs.
- To estimate student retention during primary school, these Grade 1 enrolment rates are multiplied by the ‘survival rate to the last grade of primary education’, which estimates the proportion of children entering grade 1 that are expected to reach the last grade of primary education (UIS, 2009: 14). The product reflects the enrolment rate at the last grade of primary school and is labelled in Figure 6 as ‘Last grade – primary school’. Since Afghanistan lacks data on survival rates, the ‘gross graduation rate in primary education’ – which is defined as the total number of graduates from the last grade of primary school, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population at the theoretical graduation age for primary education (UIS, 2009: 40) – is used instead. Hence the label on the Figure 6 graph for Afghanistan (‘Graduation – primary school’) is different than for the other countries.

- Leaving school after completing primary education is not usually considered as dropping out; however, for the purposes of this study, it is, since it means that individuals leave the education system without completing secondary school. To determine what proportion of students remain in education after primary school, the enrolment rate in the last grade of primary school is multiplied by the ‘effective transition rate from primary to secondary general education’, which is defined as the number of students admitted to the first grade of lower secondary school, expressed as a percentage of the number of students enrolled in the last grade of primary school during the previous year, minus any grade repeaters (UIS, 2009: 8).<sup>10</sup> The resulting enrolment rate is labelled in Figure 6 as ‘First grade – lower secondary’.
- To estimate student retention during lower secondary school, the enrolment rate in the first grade of lower secondary school is multiplied by the ‘survival rate to the last grade of lower secondary education’. The resulting enrolment rate is labelled in Figure as ‘Last grade – lower secondary’. Afghanistan is once again the exception due to lack of data on survival rates; therefore, the ‘gross graduation rate in lower secondary education’ is used instead, and the graph for Afghanistan reflects this difference.
- It is not known with certainty what percentage of students are retained from lower to upper secondary school, because lower to upper secondary transition rates are not published. However, a proxy transition rate may be calculated by dividing countries’ gross upper secondary enrolment rates by their gross lower secondary enrolment rates. This proxy transition rate is multiplied by the enrolment rate in the last grade of lower secondary school to calculate the proportion of young people that enrol in the first grade of upper secondary school. This new rate is labelled in Figure 6 as ‘First grade – upper secondary’.

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<sup>10</sup> A high transition rate indicates widespread access to secondary education, while a low transition rate signals that there are problems in retaining students after primary school. Data on the primary-secondary transition rates was not available for Afghanistan; hence a proxy variable was calculated by dividing the gross lower secondary enrolment rate by the gross primary enrolment rate.

**Figure 6 – Stylised school progression patterns in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics



The patterns displayed in Figure 6 may be summarised thus:

- In **Afghanistan**, fairly robust net intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, favouring males more than females, are eroded over time by high dropout rates, especially among females, and low transition rates between levels of education, affecting girls/women more than boys/men. The net effect is a widening of gender disparities across levels of education and a very large male presence in upper secondary education amid low enrolments.
- In **Bangladesh**, a high and fairly gender-balanced net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary education is eroded over the course of primary school by high dropouts, which affect male students more than female students. Students that survive to the last grade of primary school have high access to lower secondary school, where dropout rates are much lower and more evenly distributed across the sexes. However, most students – in particular, female students – do not continue on to upper secondary school. The net effect of preferential male access to upper secondary education, following on from a greater female presence in primary and lower secondary education, is relative gender parity in enrolments at upper secondary level, but a low level of enrolments across both sexes.
- In **Bolivia**, fairly robust net intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, which favours males slightly more than females, are maintained throughout primary and secondary education owing to low dropout rates and high retention through to the end of lower secondary school. However, a significant proportion of lower secondary school students do not progress to upper secondary level education, and females make up a larger proportion than males of those that do continue their studies. Hence, there is a small gender disparity in favour of females in Bolivia's upper secondary enrolment profile.
- In **Cambodia**, high enrolment rates to Grade 1 of primary education, favouring males over females, are eroded over time by high dropout rates, affecting males more than females, especially during primary school. Greater retention of female students compared to male students at primary and lower secondary school levels is reversed in the run-up to upper secondary school level, when half of all males but two-thirds of all females exit the education system. The net effect is a greater male presence in upper secondary school amid a low level of enrolments.
- In **Liberia**, a very low intake rate to Grade 1 of primary school, slightly favouring males over females, is further eroded by high dropout rates, especially among females, and low retention of girls/women in education, resulting in a widening gender disparities over time. The net effect is a greater male presence in upper secondary education amid low enrolment rates.

- In **Rwanda**, a high and gender-balanced intake rate to Grade 1 of primary school is eroded over time by high dropouts among both male and female students, especially during primary school. Because male students have greater access to secondary education than female students, especially at upper secondary level, but are more likely to drop out at primary school level, gender disparities in education in Rwanda shift over time and virtually disappear by upper secondary school level. However, upper secondary enrolment rates are low for both sexes.
- In **Tanzania**, a fairly robust net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary school favouring females over males is eroded over time by high dropouts, especially among male students during primary school, and low retention of students during transitions between levels of education, especially affecting females. The net impact of these trends is a greater male presence in upper secondary education amid low enrolment rates.

It is not known what percentage of students that begin upper secondary school reach the final grade – or, indeed, graduate – because data on gross intake rates to the last grade of upper secondary education or on gross graduation rates at upper secondary level is not available. Hence, the best indicator for assessing whether young people remain in education until the end of upper secondary school is ‘average years of schooling’. Figure 7 displays this data for youth aged 20-24 in the Sida partner countries. It shows that educational attainment across the Sida partner countries is low. In Afghanistan, Liberia and Rwanda, the average youth aged 20-24 has not completed 6 years of schooling, which is the length of primary school in all three countries. In Cambodia and Tanzania, the average youth has completed between 6 and 7 years of schooling, which equates to primary school completion in Cambodia, but not in Tanzania.<sup>11</sup> In Bangladesh, the average youth has completed between 8 and 9 years of education, which means that s/he has completed lower secondary school and begun – but not completed – upper secondary school.<sup>12</sup> Only in Bolivia has the average youth aged 20-24 completed more than 10 years of education – which means that s/he has completed primary and lower secondary school, but not upper secondary school.<sup>13</sup>

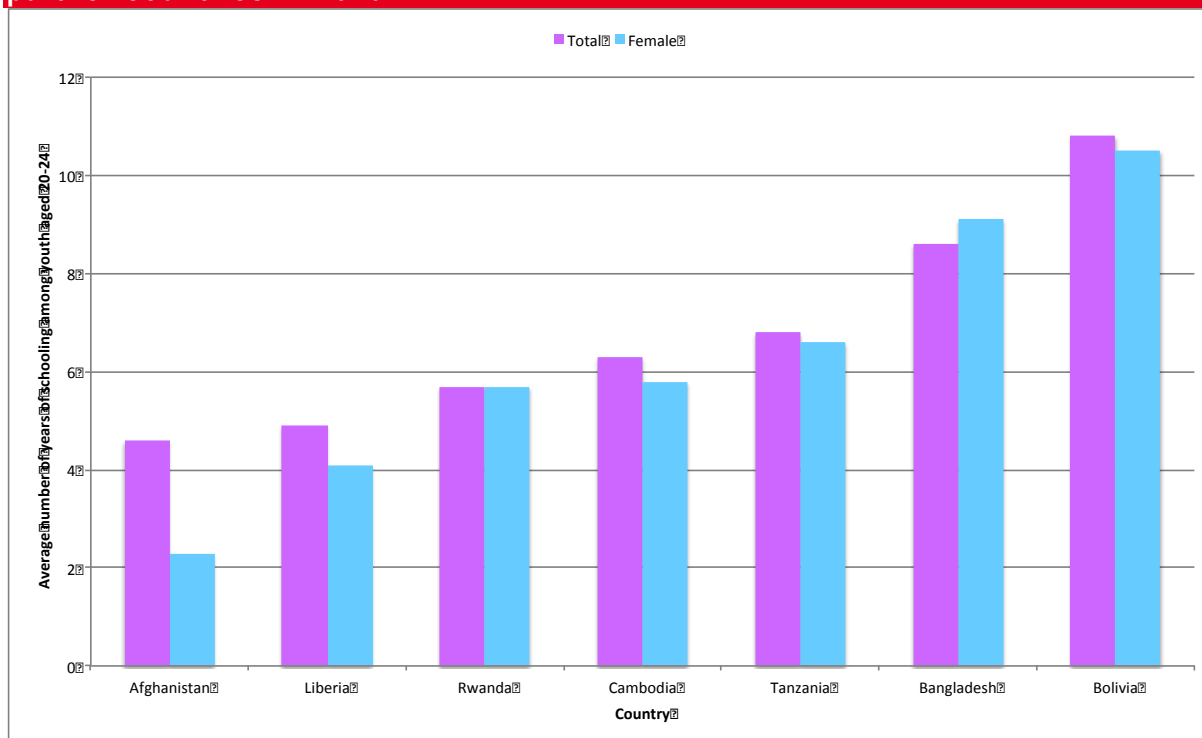
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<sup>11</sup> Primary school lasts 7 years in Tanzania, but only 6 years in Cambodia.

<sup>12</sup> In Bangladesh, primary school lasts 5 years, lower secondary school 3 years, and upper secondary school 2 years.

<sup>13</sup> In Bolivia, primary school lasts 6 years, lower secondary school 2 years, and upper secondary school 4 years.

**Figure 7 – Average years of schooling among population aged 20-24 in Sida partner countries in 2010**



Source: World Bank World DataBank, Education Statistics, Barro-Lee dataset

Observing this data from a gender perspective shows that educational attainment levels are higher among males than among females in all of the Sida partner countries, apart from Bangladesh and Rwanda. In Rwanda young males and females have equivalent educational attainment profiles, while in Bangladesh young women remain in school for a half-year longer on average than young men. More significantly, in every country apart from Bangladesh and Bolivia, the average female aged 20-24 has not completed primary school. In Bangladesh and Bolivia, she has completed lower secondary level education and has entered – but not completed – upper secondary school. Afghanistan has the widest gender gap in educational outcomes among the Sida partner countries: the average Afghan male aged 20-24 has completed two years of schooling more than the average Afghan woman aged 20-24; however, in both cases, these individuals have completed less than 5 years of education.

It should be noted that the data displayed in Figure 7 does not perfectly reflect patterns of retention in education, because the ‘average years of schooling’ indicator includes individuals who have never gone to school, as well as those who have. Obviously an individual can only drop out of school if s/he has enrolled in the first place. Out-of-school rates at primary and/or lower secondary school level are considerable in all of the Sida partner countries, apart from Bolivia (see Table 2), and more than three-quarters of all out-of-school children in every country for which there is data have never been to school (see Figure 8). While most (two-thirds or more) of these children will likely enrol in primary school in the future, 10% or more of girls in Liberia, Bangladesh and Cambodia and 11% of boys in Bangladesh will never go to school – which greatly reduces the average years of schooling statistic in those countries.

**Table 2 – Out-of-school rates at primary and lower secondary levels in Sida partner countries in 2013**

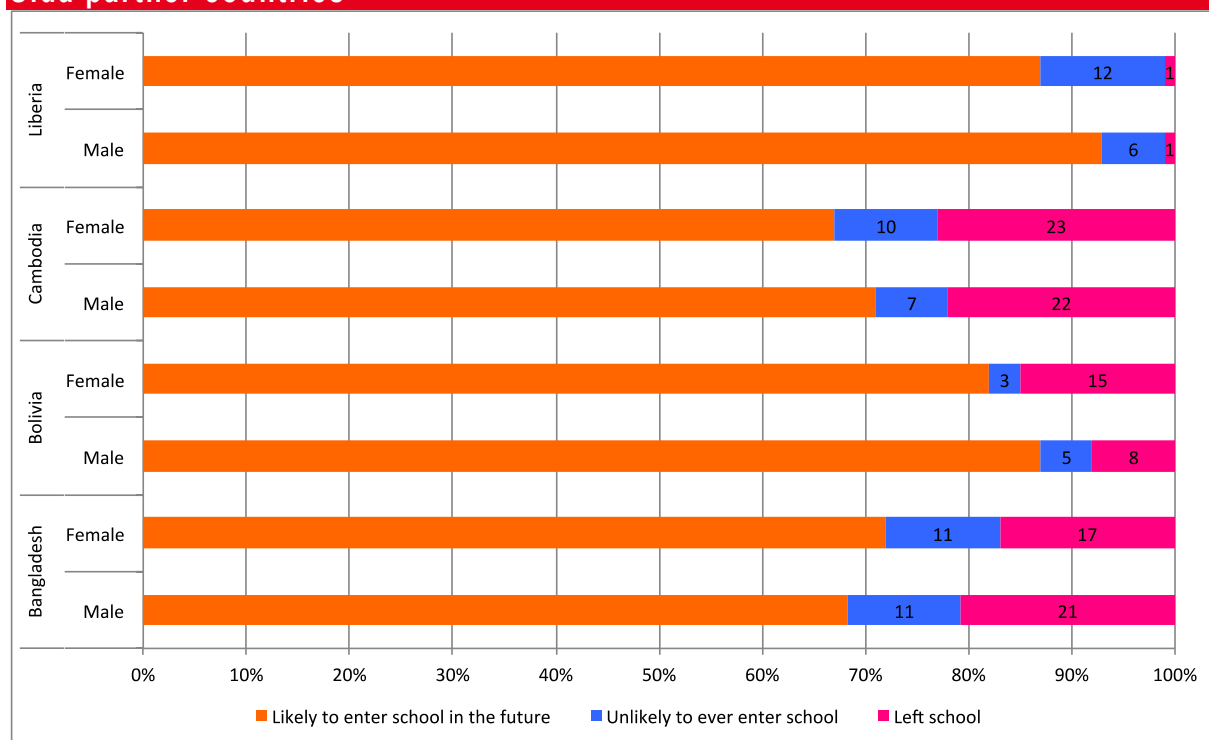
Country	Primary		Lower Secondary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Liberia*	67.0	71.0	18.9	26.8
Afghanistan*	34.6	51.9	36.2	63.4
Bolivia	3.0	3.0	8.8	9.5
Tanzania	16.9	14.0	37.8	45.9
Rwanda	7.9	5.4	18.2	17.7
Bangladesh*	11.0	11.0	29.9	14.6
Cambodia*	8.0	6.0	20.1	23.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.2	23.7	32.4	36.8
Latin America/Caribbean	6.6	6.4	7.0	6.5
Southern Asia	6.0	5.8	25.6	25.7
South-Eastern Asia	5.6	5.6	12.3	11.4
Central and Eastern Europe	4.1	3.7	3.7	3.9

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

\* Data shown is for reference year or closest available data year

Data shown in blue represents household survey data

**Figure 8 – School exposure of out-of-school children of primary school age in Sida partner countries**



Source: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/LAYOUTS/UNESCO/oosci-data-tool/index-en.html#en/cover/school-experience/>

The conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that most young people in the Sida partner countries do not achieve the minimum level of education regarded as vital for escaping poverty and becoming economically and socially engaged – that is, completion of secondary education. In some cases this is due to a high level of dropouts, and in some cases it has more to do with a low level of initial enrolments. Moreover, in most of the countries, the majority of young people aged 20-24 have not completed primary education, and educational attainment levels are lower among young women than among young men. Differences between male and female educational attainment levels are particularly pronounced in Afghanistan and Liberia.

The findings point to the need for the following interventions to improve educational outcomes in the Sida partner countries:

- In **Afghanistan**, there is a need to improve female intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, and to cut dropout rates, especially among females. Transition rates between levels of education also need to be improved, especially to retain more girls/women in education.
- In **Bangladesh**, there is a need to cut dropout rates, especially among males at primary school level, and boost transitions between lower and upper secondary education, especially among females.
- In **Bolivia**, there is a need to improve intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, especially among females, and improve transitions between lower and upper secondary education levels, especially among males.
- In **Cambodia**, there is a need to reduce dropouts, especially among males at primary school level, and improve transitions, especially among males between primary and secondary school level and among females between lower and upper secondary school levels.
- In **Liberia**, there is a need to drastically improve intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, especially among females, and reduce dropout rates, especially among females in primary school. Transition rates between levels of education also need to be improved, especially to retain more girls/women in education.
- In **Rwanda**, there is a need to cut dropout rates, especially among males in primary school, and improve transition rates between levels of education, especially among females between lower and upper secondary school levels.
- In **Tanzania**, there is a need to improve intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, especially among males, and reduce dropout rates, especially among males at primary school level. There is also a need to drastically improve transitions between levels of education, especially among female students.

### 3. Gendered causes and effects of school dropouts at primary and secondary levels

Understanding that action needs to be taken to reduce dropout and/or improve retention in education does not provide an insight into what specific measures need to be implemented. For greatest impact, interventions need to be targeted to the groups most in need of assistance and address the key issues that hamper their participation and engagement in education. However, how to do this is not so clear from the existing literature. Most studies on dropout offer solutions to the problem that do not recognise the specific (and often different) issues faced by males and females as a result of gendered norms and values. In addition, most of the literature that addresses dropout from a gender standpoint tends to approach the subject in a way that equates gender with “women’s issues”. By neglecting how gender also affects males, these studies address only half of the problem.

This section examines the causes of dropout from a gender perspective, setting out how gendered norms and values that define the roles that males and females should play in society affect children’s and young people’s tendencies to enter and remain in school. It also outlines why gender issues that affect school access and retention need to be addressed.

#### 3.1 GENDERED CAUSES OF DROPOUT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Gendered norms and values affect children from the day that they are born. They are reflected in the roles, rights and benefits that male and female children are assigned within households, which are passed down through generations through cultural practices, such as succession and inheritance arrangements. These socially constructed norms and values are reinforced at community level through the roles, rights and privileges that are accorded to males and females within community structures (for example, the expectation that women and girls should cook and serve food at community meetings, while men deliberate on issues and make decisions), the positions that men and women occupy in relation to one another in religious teachings (for example, the commandment in the Christian Bible that wives should submit to their husbands), and how males and females are portrayed in the mass media (for example, occupying traditional gender roles and/or as sexual objects) (Mlama et al, 2005: 3).

Because teachers and other school personnel are often also parents and family/community members, they tend to have internalised these shared norms and values, which affect their behaviour and attitudes in the classroom, as well as the structures and processes within schools. For example, teachers often treat girls and boys differently, thereby reinforcing gender roles, or adopt texts, curricula and/or management styles that reinforce gender stereotypes (ibid).

One way of overcoming gender-reinforcing practices within schools is to invest in positive policy measures, such as educating and training school staff to recognise and overcome their internal gender biases, or implement negative measures, such as introducing legislation to deter school personnel from acting on their gendered ideas and assumptions. Governments can play a role in either or both of these areas. However, state policies and plans are all too often gender-insensitive or, where they are not, they are often not implemented or enforced. Moreover, in many countries, women are absent from or are not evenly represented in governing bodies or decision-making processes, which further reinforces unequal gender roles and restricts the rights and privileges of girls and women (ibid).

The ways in which gender norms and values contribute to children and young people being out of school are outlined below, first on a global basis across all developing countries and then by examining the main issues that affect each of the Sida partner countries. After all, while there is substantial overlap across all countries in how gender issues affect males and females, there are also culturally specific ways in which this takes place in different countries.

### **3.1.1 Global picture<sup>14</sup>**

The gendered barriers that children and young people face in accessing and/or remaining in education stem from issues, policies and practices at individual/household level, school/community level and policy/system level. Individual/household-level barriers relate to individuals'/families' demand for education and the issues that affect parents' decisions to educate their children, while school/community- and policy/system-level barriers relate to the supply of education and the political/regulatory environment in which education takes place.

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<sup>14</sup> The summary provided in this sub-section is based on information from four main sources: Hunt (2008), Sabates et al (2010), Stromquist (2014) and UIS and UNICEF (2015). As there is high overlap in the information provided by these sources, specific references are furnished only where unique data is reported.

## Individual/household-level barriers

*Poverty, gender and location* – Most studies on dropout correctly identify poverty as a factor contributing to early school withdrawal. In many developing countries, males and females from poorer households have lower educational attainment levels than those from wealthier households and are more likely to be out of school (see Table 3).<sup>15</sup> Education bears an opportunity cost for poor families, since children are studying rather than contributing to the household income. This opportunity cost grows as children get older and are able to earn higher wages, thus increasing pressures on these young people to drop out (Hunt, 2008: 13). Many children and young people from poor households have no choice but to juggle work and school or to help with domestic chores and childcare to free up their parents to work. In some cases, family commitments clash with school schedules and lead to high absenteeism, poor school performance and (usually) dropout.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 3 – Highest educational attainment, by household wealth and sex, in Sida partner countries (% of total population)**

Country	Year	Females – Poorest quintile			Males – Poorest quintile			Females – Richest quintile			Males – Richest quintile		
		No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education	No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education	No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education	No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education
Bangladesh	2011	51.3	35.1	13.6	53.6	36.9	9.5	10.8	17.2	72.0	5.5	17.6	76.9
Bangladesh	2007	56.2	31.1	12.3	53.9	35.0	11.1	13.0	21.8	65.2	10.9	18.1	71.0
Bolivia	2008	14.2	72.7	13.1	2.1	72.5	25.5	0.3	11.7	87.9	0.3	6.4	93.3
Bolivia	2003	19.7	72.6	7.7	2.2	78.4	19.4	0.7	16.7	82.6	0.0	8.8	91.2
Cambodia	2014	27.9	57.4	14.7	15.7	61.6	22.8	4.1	28.5	67.4	0.6	15.4	84.0
Cambodia	2005	37.1	58.0	4.9	22.3	63.8	13.9	7.2	41.0	51.7	2.3	24.7	73.0
Liberia	2013	59.2	32.7	8.0	25.8	42.7	31.4	10.7	19.9	69.4	3.5	14.6	82.0
Liberia	2007	65.3	29.1	5.3	31.6	43.3	25.1	15.0	27.9	56.9	5.1	20.2	74.6
Rwanda	2010	26.1	70.1	3.8	18.5	75.4	6.1	5.0	50.9	44.1	4.8	52.9	42.3
Rwanda	2005	32.3	65.7	2.0	23.6	73.2	3.2	10.4	57.6	32.0	7.9	59.6	32.5
Tanzania	2010	39.4	58.0	2.6	25.6	67.1	7.4	3.5	56.2	40.3	0.8	50.0	49.2
Tanzania	2004/05	45.6	53.8	0.6	28.0	71.1	1.0	5.8	67.2	27.0	1.3	63.7	35.0

Source: ICF International, 2012. The DHS Program STATcompiler. <http://www.statcompiler.com>. December 2015.  
Data shown in the table excludes missing values

<sup>15</sup> While Table 3 shows data for the Sida partner countries, Sabates et al (2010: 11) provide data for a range of Sub-Saharan African countries and offer the same conclusions.

<sup>16</sup> Hunt (2008: 46) identifies several precursors to dropout: grade repetition, the result of poor school performance; low achievement, which is related to a range of factors, including absenteeism, repetition, quality issues, household contexts, and demands on children's time; late enrolment; absenteeism; irregular attendance; and/or temporary withdrawal from school. A precursor is an early warning sign, rather than a cause, of dropout.



Linking poverty to sex differences, it is obvious from Table 3 that across all of the Sida partner countries, except Bangladesh, females from the poorest quintile of the population are less educated than males from the poorest quintile. In most developing countries, differences in educational attainment levels between males and females in the richest income bracket are lower than between males and females in the poorest income bracket. Moreover, females in the richest quintile of the population are in most cases more educated than males in the poorest quintile, although they tend to be less educated than males in their own wealth bracket. The most disadvantaged group tends to be poor women, and in some countries (for example, Liberia and Bangladesh), the majority of girls/women from the poorest households have not entered school or have dropped out prior to completing primary school.<sup>17</sup>

Sex differences in educational attainment stem from two main issues relating to gender. First, when money is tight, many families display a preference for educating boys. This choice may be based on a cost-benefit calculation: for example, in patrilineal societies, where sons inherit from their fathers, girls are often regarded as ‘temporary’ family members who will eventually join their husband’s family and are therefore unlikely to offer high returns on their family’s investment in their education (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 60). In some cases, families may question why a girl needs to be educated if her future role is to be a housewife and mother, or may decide that their daughters should not be too educated in case this affects their marriage potential or price. Second, when poor children juggle household responsibilities and school, the roles assigned to male and female children often differ. Boys/men tend to take up paid work or work in the family business on an unpaid basis, while girls/women tend to assist with domestic chores and sibling care, which is nearly always unpaid and unrecognised (Hunt, 2008: 11-15).

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<sup>17</sup> This is also true for the poorest males in Bangladesh (see Table 3).

Both of these practices reinforce traditional gender norms and values. By educating boys rather than girls, girls' future pathway is consigned to marriage and dependence on their husbands. By giving boys/men more economically lucrative and respected roles than those discharged by girls/women, gender norms and hierarchies are reinforced. Moreover, when children/young people combine school with work/household duties, the time spent on non-school activities is often greater for girls/women than for boys/men, resulting in girls' poorer school performance and higher absentee rates compared to boys/men and therefore their higher likelihood of dropout.<sup>18</sup> In turn, their poor performance and higher dropout rates reinforce gender stereotypes about the lower capabilities of girls/women and confirms pre-set notions that investment in girls'/women's education is not worthwhile.

Other gendered practices within households also tend to work against girls' education. Poverty is linked to food insecurity, and hungry individuals unable to concentrate on their studies often drop out of school. In many societies, girls/women are fed after male family members have eaten (UNESCAP, 2009: 56). This gendered 'food discrimination' not only results in girls' under-nourishment relative to boys but also affects their school performance and retention in school.

Poverty, gender and location often interact. In most developing countries, children from rural households are more likely to drop out than those from urban households and tend to have lower educational attainment levels (see Table 4). There are three main reasons for this (Hunt, 2008). First, households in rural areas tend to be poorer than those in urban areas. Second, poor rural children are more likely to combine school and work/household chores than poor urban children. Third, agricultural work often clashes with school schedules, leading to high absenteeism or seasonal withdrawal from school, which can affect children's/young people's school performance and motivation, and lead them to drop out.

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<sup>18</sup> The differences in dropout rates between males and females in Bangladesh may be partly explained by time use: the poorest boys in rural areas spend more hours per week earning an income for their families than the poorest girls in rural areas spend on household chores – 26 hours for males versus 20 hours for females (Hunt, 2008: 14). This partly explains sex differences in educational attainment levels evidenced in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 4 – Highest educational attainment, by place of residence and sex, in Sida partner countries (% of total population)**

Country	Year	Female—Rural			Male—Rural			Female—Urban			Male—Urban		
		No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education	No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education	No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education	No education	Primary education	Secondary or higher education
Bangladesh	2011	30.6	31.6	37.8	30.3	34.6	35.1	19.5	25.5	55.0	15.8	29.8	54.4
Bangladesh	2007	36.7	30.4	32.8	32.1	35.2	32.7	25.2	26.7	48.1	22.2	27.3	50.5
Bolivia	2008	9.4	64.2	26.4	1.1	58.3	40.6	2.1	29.2	68.6	0.3	19.1	80.6
Bolivia	2003	13.9	67.9	18.2	1.4	66.9	31.6	2.7	36.8	60.5	0.4	27.3	72.3
Cambodia	2014	14.5	51.2	34.3	7.3	46.1	46.6	5.4	29.2	65.4	1.0	20.0	78.9
Cambodia	2005	20.9	58.3	20.9	9.9	52.0	38.1	12.8	44.4	42.8	4.7	30.7	64.6
Liberia	2013	49.8	35.6	14.6	19.0	40.3	40.7	22.5	28.2	49.2	8.7	21.3	70.0
Liberia	2007	55.6	34.6	9.7	23.8	40.8	35.4	24.3	30.6	45.0	8.4	22.2	69.3
Rwanda	2010	17.1	70.5	12.4	11.2	71.4	17.5	6.7	55.8	37.5	5.6	56.1	38.3
Rwanda	2005	25.4	68.7	5.9	18.0	73.4	8.7	13.5	58.9	27.7	8.4	60.1	31.5
Tanzania	2010	23.7	66.5	9.9	11.9	72.5	15.6	7.7	60.1	32.2	2.9	54.8	42.3
Tanzania	2004/05	30.2	66.4	3.4	15.1	79.4	5.5	9.3	69.2	21.5	3.0	70.3	26.6

Source: ICF International, 2012. The DHS Program, STATcompiler. <http://www.statcompiler.com>. December 2015.  
Data shown in the table excludes missing values

*Income shocks* – Income shocks often result in parents withdrawing their children from school to conserve financial resources and/or expand the number of family members earning an income. While withdrawal from school may be regarded as a temporary measure, it can sometimes lead to more permanent dropout (Hunt, 2008: 10-11). Literature from across the world shows a relationship between families’ financial strength and girls’/women’s education, suggesting that female children tend to be the first to be pulled out of school in the event of a debilitating shock (ibid, pp. 8-10). Poor rural households tend to be more vulnerable to income shocks than other demographic groups.

*Death/illness of parents* – Children from poor households who have lost one or both parents, or whose parent(s) or sibling(s) are critically ill, are more vulnerable to educational exclusion and dropout than other children (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 62; Hunt, 2008: 19-21). A high proportion of dropout in conflict-affected environments and in countries with a high incidence of HIV/AIDS is linked to parental deaths/illnesses. Sometimes this is due to bereavement and the resulting periods of school absence; sometimes it is because pressures grow for boys/men to leave school to work and/or for girls/women to leave school to take care of younger siblings or infirm relatives. Sometimes it is because children are moved into foster care, which disrupts their schooling and increases their likelihood of dropout. A UNICEF study of 20 countries found a large (19 percentage point) difference in enrolment rates between orphans and non-orphans (Hunt, 2008: 19). Orphaned girls/women may have higher dropout rates than orphaned boys/men because of their vulnerability to sexual abuse and forced prostitution or, alternatively, early marriage (to keep them safe) – all of which are linked to dropout.

*Lack of parental support for education* – Children whose parents have received an education are more likely to attend and remain in school longer than those with uneducated parents. This is because uneducated parents are often unaware or unconvinced of the benefits of schooling (Hunt, 2008: 21). Gender plays a role in this: a mother's level of education has been found to be a determining factor in both school access and retention for girls (Sabates et al, 2010: 13). Research from Tanzania shows that mothers educated to primary school level increase the probability of girls enrolling in primary school by 9.7% and in secondary school by 17.6% (Al Samarrai and Peasgood, 1998, quoted in Hunt, 2008: 21-22). Moreover, research from Bangladesh shows that girls with mothers who have decision-making power in the household are more likely to attend and remain in school (Shahidul, 2013). Availability of access to secondary education often increases parents' support for their children attending primary school (Sabates et al, 2010: 13). Similarly, parents may decide to keep their children out of school if they do not perceive that there are adequate returns from education – for example, in terms of improving their children's employment prospects (Hunt, 2008: 23). These findings have gender implications in terms of parents' assessments of girls' education, given gendered roles and girls'/women's unequal chances of obtaining jobs and places in higher education.

*Ethnicity and gender* – Children from ethnic, religious, linguistic, racial or other minority groups are less likely to enrol in school, more likely to repeat a grade and more likely to drop out than children from majority groups (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). Their parents often keep them at home because of a resistance to change, a desire to retain a separate ethnic identity, and/or scepticism regarding what schools have to offer. Parents may also fear that their children will be discriminated against in school or judge that returns to schooling are too low, given fewer employment opportunities for minority groups. Male-female differences in school enrolment and retention are much larger within socially excluded groups than within the majority population because of traditional norms and values that view girls' place as in the home. In Guatemala, only 54% of indigenous girls are enrolled in school at age 7, compared to 71% of indigenous boys and 75% of non-indigenous children; by age 16, only 25% of indigenous girls are still in school, compared with 45% of indigenous boys and over 50% of non-indigenous children (Hallman and Peracca, 2007: 149). Similar findings apply to tribal girls in India, Hausa-speaking girls in Nigeria, and Roma girls in Eastern Europe (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). Ethnic identities often overlap with rural location and low household income, which explains why nearly three-quarters of the world's out-of-school girls come from socially excluded groups (ibid).

*Gendered traditional practices* – Traditional practices can interfere with children's school schedules and negatively impact their performance in school. These rituals and observations are usually carried out by parents or community leaders and tend to affect children most at an early age or as they approach puberty. Sometimes practices, such as rites of passage or initiation ceremonies, take place during the school calendar and disrupt children's school attendance. In some cases, absences occur on a regular basis, which increases the probability of dropout. For example, in many communities in India, girls are kept home during their periods, which causes them to be absent from school monthly (Thakre et al, 2011, quoted in UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 61). Traditional norms and practices may deny children, especially girls, entry to school or, alternatively, children may be sent to traditional/religious schools that focus on preparing them for their future gendered roles. Research in Tanzania shows that belonging to a household with traditional religious beliefs increases the likelihood of girls never attending school by 7.7% and lowers the probability of boys and girls attending secondary school by 16.9% and 18.8%, respectively (Al Samarrai and Peasgood, 1998, quoted in Hunt, 2008: 37). Some traditional practices are detrimental to the health and status of girls/women, as well as resulting in girls being pulled out of school. These harmful practices include female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C), forced and early marriage, early pregnancy, honour crimes, and dowry-related violence (UNICEF, 2006). FGM/C is prevalent in Africa and some parts of Asia.

*Child marriage* – Child marriage – that is, marriage before the age of 18 – affects both male and female children, but is a key factor in female dropout in many developing countries. Across the developing world, one in three girls is married before the age of 18 (McCleary-Sills et al, 2015: 70). Women from poorer households are two and a half times more likely to have been subject to child marriage than women from wealthier households, while girls from rural households are twice as likely to marry before the age of 18 than girls from urban households (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 60; McCleary-Sills et al, 2015: 71). During conflict and humanitarian crises, girls are especially vulnerable to early marriage (Lemmon, 2014). Evidence from Bangladesh and Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that women who marry early are over 5 percentage points less likely to be literate and over 8 percentage points less likely to have exposure to secondary education (McCleary-Sills et al, 2015: 71). Every year of early marriage significantly reduces girls' likelihood of completing secondary school; conversely, the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 or have children during her teenage years (ibid).

*Early pregnancy* – Adolescent pregnancy is a key driver of dropout among female secondary school students, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2015: 170). Girls may voluntarily leave school because pregnancy leads to missed days and lower performance; wish to avoid social stigma and ridicule from other students or teachers; and/or be forced out of school because parenthood increases financial pressures, making it more difficult for girls/women – particularly those from poor households – to meet the costs of schooling (Hunt, 2008: 27). Early fatherhood may also be a cause of dropout among male students, increasing pressures to work and earn money; however, early pregnancy tends to negatively impact girls' retention rates in school more than boys'. In some cases, girls may become pregnant as a result of being raped in school or en route to school, which makes returning to school painful.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in many countries, pregnant girls and young mothers are excluded from school, so are not given the choice of whether to continue their education.<sup>20</sup> Around 90% of all adolescent pregnancies in the developing world are to girls who are married (UNFPA, 2013). However, in Latin America, pregnancy rates among unmarried teenage girls are a growing concern (ECLAC and UNICEF, 2007).

*Lack of interest in school* – is often cited in surveys as a reason for dropping out, especially by males but also by females. Lack of interest may stem from either demand-side or supply-side factors, or a combination of the two. On the demand side, lack of interest in school may be due to students' heavy engagement in non-school activities, such as work or domestic chores, which can cause difficulties in keeping up with or concentrating at school (Hunt, 2008). Hunger may also affect focus and interest in school. In some cases, gendered notions of masculinity play a role, and school is viewed as unmanly; this explanation is especially pertinent in societies where there is a shortage of educated male role models (Barker et al, 2012). On the supply side, educational quality and/or relevance may be low – for example, overcrowded classrooms, absent or disengaged teachers (because of corruption), lack of student-centred pedagogies, and/or low emphasis on the skills required in the labour market. In addition, lack of sensitivity to students' needs may cause or exacerbate feelings of marginalisation, as can use of corporal punishment and other forms of school-related gender-based violence.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See 'School-related gender-based violence' below

<sup>20</sup> See 'Policy/system-level barriers' below

<sup>21</sup> See below for further details

### *School/community-level barriers*

*High cost of schooling/corruption* – Families with a low household income often struggle to pay the direct and indirect costs of educating their children. Even where tuition is free, the other costs of schooling – for example, uniforms, transportation and learning materials – are often too high for many poor families. Moreover, in many countries, corruption by teachers and other school personnel – including taking bribes or charging students for private tutoring, which students need to access learning materials and receive quality teaching – adds to the costs of schooling and discriminates against the poor (Jayachandran, 2014).

*School-related gender-based violence* – In many developing countries, school is not a safe and supportive environment, but instead a place that some students drop out of to avoid. Millions of children and adolescents worldwide are subject to school-related gender-based violence (or SRGBV), which is defined as ‘acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics’ (UNESCO and UNGEI, 2015). The forms of SRGBV that affect males and females may or may not be the same, and the rate at which SRGBV occurs varies between and within countries. However, there are some common features. Males are more subject to harsh corporal punishment by teachers, based on the idea that boys are tough or unruly and need to be physically disciplined (UNGEI, 2012). Boys are also more at risk of forced recruitment in school in conflict-affected countries (Hunt, 2008: 35). Girls/women are more likely to suffer sexual violence, harassment and/or exploitation by teachers and/or male classmates. They are also more likely to be prevented from going to school because of their family’s concerns for their safety, especially in countries where girls that attend school are specifically targeted, such as Afghanistan (Shayan, 2015: 282).

*Lack of a nearby school* – The distance from home to school affects whether children/young people join or remain in school, particularly when transportation facilities are inadequate (Khan and Samadder, 2010: 12-13). One problem may be the time it takes to get to school, which can undermine punctuality, attendance and school performance – all precursors to dropout (UIS and UNICEF, 2015). Girls/women face greater risks than boys/men if the distance and time it takes to get to school is long, including sexual harassment, assault and/or trafficking. Many parents keep their daughters at home because of safety concerns, which often results in late school entry until girls are judged to be old enough to make their own way to school. These problems are greater in rural areas, which tend to be underserved by schools, and at secondary education level, when the distance to school often increases (Shahidul and Karim, 2015: 29). These issues partly explain the disparities in educational attainment levels between rural men and women displayed in Table 4.

*Inadequate school facilities for girls/women* – Lack of access to separate, clean toilets and washing facilities in schools may lead to chronic absenteeism and dropout by female students, particularly when they reach puberty and begin to menstruate. Basic sanitation facilities are sometimes below the required minimum standards in schools in developing countries. For example, a 2009/2010 survey of Tanzanian schools conducted by SNV, WaterAid and UNICEF found that only 11% met government regulations of 20 students per girls' latrine and 25 students per boys' latrine; that 20% of schools had more than 100 students per latrine, while 6% of schools had no latrine at all; that 52% of girls' latrines did not have doors providing dignity and privacy; and that 92% of schools lacked functional handwashing facilities (SNV, WaterAid and UNICEF, 2009). Lack of adequate toilet facilities may also pose an issue for male students, but not to the same degree.

*Unequal learning environments* – Gendered practices inside schools may affect student retention patterns, as well as shaping children's perceptions of their capabilities, life chances, and future work/educational prospects (Hunt, 2008: 41). In many schools, the curriculum and learning resources promote specific notions of 'femaleness' and 'maleness', and teachers encourage/discourage students based on gender and/or assign students gendered tasks and roles within the classroom (Kane, 2004). One study concluded that 'classroom and school environments in Guinea appear to be significantly less conducive to learning for girls than boys, negatively affecting their chances for promotion as well as their later productivity and earnings potential' (Glick and Sahn, 2000: 80). Another study found that teachers in Jamaica tend to stereotype boys as disruptive and likely to be expelled or drop out, and that these characterisations sometimes become self-fulfilling (Figueroa, 1997). The gendering of subject areas also creates zones of exclusion, preventing boys (literature) or girls (physics and mathematics) from pursuing their preferred disciplines (Chevannes, 2006).



*Lack of female role models* – The presence of female teachers can have a favourable impact on girls' school entry – sometimes because they bring assurance of girls' safety in school and sometimes because of cultural norms that dictate girls should not be taught by a man. Women in positions of authority within schools can make the school environment more responsive to girls' needs, challenge gender norms and stereotypes, and act as positive role models for girls. Studies from across the world suggest a positive correlation between the proportion of female teachers in school and girls' academic performance. A study of rural public schools in India found that the test scores of girls in the upper grades were 10-20% higher if they had a female teacher, and that their math scores improved if they were taught by a woman (Muralidharan and Sheth, 2013). A study in Sub-Saharan Africa concluded that having a high proportion of female teachers was associated with reduced dropout rates among girls in primary school (Michaelowa, 2001). Nevertheless, in many developing countries, female teachers, headmasters and school directors are in short supply. Female teachers account for less than 40% of all teachers at primary school level in 43% of Sub-Saharan African countries for which there is data, at lower secondary level in 72% of the countries, and at upper secondary level in all of the countries (UNESCO, 2014a). A shortage of women in positions of authority both reflects the gendering of opportunities for females and contributes to its reproduction.

*Non-inclusive language of instruction* – Children from minority language groups are often the most at-risk of dropping out of school if the language of instruction in school is different than the one they speak at home. Learning in a non-mother tongue language has a negative impact on school performance and often leads to high repetition and dropout rates, as well as social exclusion (UNESCO, 2015: 210-211). In Bolivia, the first-grade repetition rate among indigenous children is 43%, compared to 13% among non-indigenous children; and only 55% of indigenous children in Bolivia complete primary school, compared with 81% of non-indigenous children (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006: 89). Girls from minority language groups often have fewer opportunities than boys to learn the official language, so are particularly disadvantaged in school, with lower educational attainment levels (UNICEF, 2011). In Bolivia, both Quechua-speaking and Aymara-speaking indigenous girls are less likely to enrol in school than Ladino (non-indigenous) girls or boys; they are also more likely to drop out before completing primary school (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006).

### *Policy/system-level barriers*

*Inadequate/weakly enforced policies on access to school for pregnant girls/young mothers* – In many developing countries, discriminatory practices prevent pregnant girls from attending or returning to school, thereby forcing them to drop out. Some countries (notably Malawi and Botswana) have laws that exclude both the baby's father and mother from school (Hunt, 2008: 27). However, in general, early pregnancy affects girls' access to school more than boys' and leads to their higher exclusion rates. UNICEF Country Office Annual Reports show that, in 2013, only 49 out of 155 countries had policies in place to allow pregnant girls and young mothers to continue their education (UNICEF, 2014). However, even in countries with favourable legal frameworks, policies to allow pregnant girls or young mothers to return to school are often not implemented, because schools are unaware of the policies, are pressured by communities to exclude girls, or are themselves biased. Young mothers are also denied entry to school by a lack of organised childcare arrangements, which most developing countries lack (World Bank, 2012: 365).

*Inadequate, weakly enforced legislation on SRGBV* – Limited progress has been made on eliminating SRGBV in developing countries. While a growing number of countries have introduced bans on corporal punishment and/or passed legislation to make it an offence for teachers/school personnel to have sex with students, enforcement has tended to be weak due to a lack of political will, poor institutional capacity, cultural barriers and/or lack of resources (Leach et al, 2014). Moreover, in many countries, it is not illegal for teachers to have sex with students who are above the age of consent. In addition, efforts by Ministries of Education to integrate ethical aspects into teacher training have been patchy, so have had a limited impact on raising teachers' awareness of expected codes of conduct (ibid).

*Inadequate, weakly enforced legislation on harmful traditional practices* – An increasing number of governments have ruled child marriage illegal and have passed laws criminalising FGM/C, but these laws are not strongly enforced, so the practices persist (McCleary-Sill et al, 2015: 70). Some of the reasons for weak enforcement include: laws allow for exceptions; national policies are not coordinated at local levels; communities ignore legislation and move practices underground; and measures are not in place to make women aware of their basic human rights or raise their capacity for challenging harmful practices. Moreover, in many developing countries, social norms and legal frameworks continue to support unequal power structures. For example, 128 countries around the world have laws that discriminate against women and girls, despite 187 out of 194 countries having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (World Bank, 2014: xviii).

### 3.1.2 Sida partner countries

Turning back to the Sida partner countries, it should be noted that, while either girls/women or boys/men may be more susceptible to low entry or high dropout, in every country both sexes exhibit similar tendencies (see Figure 6). Therefore, it is not enough to outline the issues that contribute to low entry and/or high dropout rates for just one sex; a well thought-out strategy for boosting educational retention and attainment must consider the specific issues faced by both sexes on the basis of gender. The main reasons for dropout in the Sida partner countries are summarised below and on a sex-disaggregated basis wherever possible.

#### **Afghanistan**

Much of the secondary literature on gender and dropouts in Afghanistan focuses on the reasons why girls are not in school, rather than also providing reasons for male dropouts (Shayan, 2015; Lexow, 2012; Chitrakar, 2009). However, some findings apply to both sexes or are more pertinent to males.

#### ***Both sexes/males***

*Poverty and high cost of schooling* – Many poor families cannot afford the cost of schooling, which although fee-free, requires parents to pay a user fee as well as the costs of uniforms, books, transportation, etc (Chitrakar, 2009: 23).

*School-related gender-based violence* – A 2008 baseline study of 23 government schools in Afghanistan by Save the Children found high levels of classroom violence – including physical punishment of children by teachers in 100% of observed classes in boys' schools as well as in 20% of observed classes in girls' schools – and sexual abuse, including the rape of boys by male teachers and sexual violence toward younger boys by older boys (Save the Children, 2011: 5). Humiliation and verbal use are also commonly used to discipline children.

#### ***Females***

*Lack of female teachers* – In many communities, girls are discouraged from having contact with unrelated men, so cannot be taught by male teachers; yet some areas of Afghanistan lack female teachers. Women constitute only 1%, 3% and 4% of teachers in Paktika, Khost and Uruzgan provinces, and only 24% of students enrolled in teacher training colleges in Afghanistan are female (Shayan, 2015: 280-282).

*School-related gender-based violence* – Although the Taliban has been removed from power, they still have influence in some parts of southern Afghanistan, where girls' schools have been targeted by extreme violence or threats of violence (Shayan, 2015: 281-2). Vulnerability to violence and sexual attacks keeps many girls out of school.

*Lack of nearby school* – Destruction of schools over decades of conflict has resulted in low educational capacity, with rural and remote areas in Afghanistan particularly underserved (Shayan, 2015: 282). Favouritism in planning means that girls' schools have lower priority than boys' schools in terms of planned construction (Lexow, 2012: 14). Girls/women therefore tend to have longer distances to travel to school than boys/men and, given their vulnerability to gender-based violence en route to school, many do not attend.

*Unequal learning environment* – The Curriculum Department in Afghanistan has undertaken a thorough screening on gender, including removing discriminatory texts and pictures from the school curriculum and textbooks. Nevertheless, critics have voiced concern that women and girls continue to be portrayed in traditional roles as mothers and housewives, with little emphasis of women in non-traditional roles (Lexow, 2012: 23).

*Low perceived value of girls' education* – Many poor families prioritise their sons' education and keep girls at home to assist with household duties (Shayan, 2015: 282). In addition, especially in rural areas, many parents do not want their daughters to go to school, fearing that education will alienate them from traditional values and compromise their ability to be good wives and mothers (Shayan, 2015: 281). In some parts of Afghanistan, girls are only allowed to attend traditional Madaris, where they learn religious subjects (ibid).

*Early marriage* – Over 50% of girls in Afghanistan are married by age 18 (Shayan, 2015: 281). According to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, over 60% of all marriages in Afghanistan are forced (UNFPA, 2012). Early marriage sometimes occurs because girls are not in school, but also decreases the retention of girls in education.

## **Bangladesh**

Three main sources have been consulted to establish the main causes of dropout in Bangladesh: (1) a survey of 9,000 children aged 6 to 15 from six districts in Bangladesh conducted between 2007 and 2009 (Sabates et al, 2010a); (2) a 2008 survey of 199 dropouts from 128 BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, a Bangladesh-based NGO) non-formal primary schools (Khan and Samadder, 2010); and (3) a 2007 survey of 745 female and 1,006 male secondary school students (Nath et al, 2008). The first source provides data on an aggregated basis; it does not offer breakdowns by sex of respondent. The second source provides disaggregated data broken down by both sex and location (male/female and urban/rural). The third source provides data on a sex-disaggregated basis. The data suggests that there are more commonalities in the drivers of dropout among urban males and females than among urban and rural males or among urban and rural females (see Table 5). According to these sources, the main reasons of dropout in Bangladesh are:

### ***Both sexes (primary school)***

*Poverty* – explains over 40% of all dropouts from primary school (Sabates et al, 2010a: 7).

*Lack of interest in school* – explains 37.5% of all dropouts from primary school (ibid).

### *Urban males and females (non-formal primary school)*

*Lack of interest in school* – is the top reason for dropout among both urban males (43%) and urban females (33%) (see Table 5). This is likely linked to an inadequate school infrastructure, especially an absence of benches for sitting during class, cited by 38% of urban males and 24% of urban females as a major school-related issue (Khan and Samadder, 2010: 12).

*Lack of nearby school* – This was the second most-cited reason for dropout by 32% of urban males and females (see Table 5).

*School-related gender-based violence* – 24% of both urban males and females indicated that they had dropped out of school because they feared the teacher (see Table 5). According to a 2009 UNICEF report, 91% of children in Bangladeshi schools experience corporal punishment, and boys aged between 9 and 13 are the most likely (98%) recipients of this type of SRGBV, while girls aged between 14 and 18 years are the least likely (81%) to receive physical punishment in school (UNICEF, 2009: 9). BRAC primary schools target children aged 8 to 15 years (Khan and Samadder, 2010: 1).

*Lack of parental support for education* – The third most common reason for dropout among urban females was poor parental education (28%), while a substantial proportion also cited lack of parental support for their education (19%) (see Table 5). These two explanations are linked and highlight the importance of education for breaking the cycle of poverty and illiteracy among females.

### *Rural males and females (non-formal primary school)*

*Lack of nearby school* – was the most-cited reason for dropout among rural females (67%) and the second most-cited reason among rural males (33%) (see Table 5). The difference between the two sexes highlights the greater danger of travelling long distances to school for rural females, who complained of verbal abuse or ‘eve teasing’ (sexual harassment) while going to school (Khan and Samadder, 2010: 17).

*Irregular attendance of teachers* – was the second most-cited reason for dropout among rural females (33%) but only the fifth most popular reason given by rural males. Absences among teachers as well as students are linked to lack of a nearby school. The difference in male-female responses may reflect the dangers that girls face when attending school in an unsupervised setting.

*Unequal learning environments* – According to the UN Girls’ Education Initiative, lack of female teachers in schools and classroom environments that are not conducive to girls are key causes of female dropouts from school in Bangladesh (IRIN, 2009).

*Non-inclusive language of instruction* – Difficulties in following the textbook was the most-cited reason for dropout among rural males (43%) and the fifth most-cited reason among rural females. The reasons for difficulties in following the textbook arose from the language of instruction in BRAC schools being different from that used at home by indigenous children attending the schools (ibid, p. 11).

*Lack of interest in school* – The third most-cited reason for dropout among rural males (32%) – lack of interest in school – is thought to be linked to difficulties in understanding textbooks, as well as teachers' inattentiveness to students who perform poorly (Khan and Samadder, 2010: 11).

*Lack of parental support for education* – The third most-cited reason for dropout among rural females was lack of parental support for their education (30%). Given the other survey responses, it seems likely that rural parents' lack of support for their daughters' education is linked to fears for their daughters' safety at school. On the other hand, in some cases parents exhibited a low regard for their daughters' education: 1 out of 10 rural girls dropped out to take care of their younger siblings (see Table 5). Yet rural girls are the least likely to cite lack of interest in school (11% versus 32% or higher for other groups).

**Table 5 – Main reasons for dropout in BRAC primary school in Bangladesh in 2008 (%)**

Reason for dropout	Males		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Not interested in studying	43	33	32	11
Distance of schools and transport problems	32	32	33	67
Difficulties following textbook	8	5	43	18
Lack of parental support for education	13	19	16	30
Poor performance of teacher	14	24	7	20
Irregular attendance of teacher	5	5	13	33
Afraid of teacher	24	24	13	0
Poor education of parents	13	28	25	7
Language barrier	14	5	7	13
Taking care of younger siblings	2	6	3	10
Involvement in work	3	3	4	4
Slum eviction	14	9	0	0
Quarrel with neighbours	9	5	0	0
Illness	0	5	4	7
Migration	4	6	2	7
Poverty	2	0	3	3
Early marriage	0	0	0	2
Source: Khan and Samadder (2010: 7-13)				
Multiple responses considered (n=199)				

### *Males (secondary school)*

*Poverty* – explains the bulk of male secondary school dropouts in Bangladesh, with 44% dropping out to earn an income and 18% dropping out because they lack money to continue their studies (see Table 6).

*Poor performance in examinations* – explains 16% of male dropout from secondary school (see Table 6). The reasons for poor performance were not given in the survey analysis, although it was noted that male students in rural schools were more than twice as likely to have dropped out due to poor performance than those in urban schools (Nath et al, 2008: 203). Therefore, language of instruction may be an issue, although not confirmed by the analysis.

*Lack of interest in school* – explains 15% of male dropouts from secondary school (see Table 6) and was found to be a more common response among urban males than among rural (Nath et al, 2008: 111). Lack of interest in school appears to be linked to male students' desire to earn an income, reflecting their internalisation of gendered norms and values.

### *Females (secondary school)*

*Early marriage* – The predominant reason for dropout from secondary school among females is marriage, accounting over half of all female dropouts at that level of education (see Table 6). Bangladesh has one of the highest incidences of child marriage in the world, with 66% of girls marrying before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2013: 27). Marriage rates were highest among females studying in urban private schools and in rural and urban madrasas – reflecting traditional practices in the latter case (madrasas) and higher marriage rates among girls from wealthier families owing to policy reforms targeting poor rural girls (Nath et al, 2008: 203).

*Poor performance in examinations* – is the second most-cited reason for dropout among female secondary school students (see Table 6). Female students in rural private schools were more likely to have dropped out owing to poor performance than women in urban private schools or government schools (Nath et al, 2008: 203). Language of instruction may therefore be an issue.

*Poverty* – and lack of money to continue schooling were the main reasons for dropout, cited by 1 in 10 females. The low rate among females for this indicator compared to males likely stems from a policy implemented in Bangladesh to boost female enrolment and retention: the Female Secondary School Stipend Project. The project requires girls to remain unmarried until they reach the age of 18 – which may explain the marriage trends summarised above. Secondary education levels have grown most rapidly among the poorest females compared to all other groups in Bangladesh (see Table 3).

**Table 6 – Main reasons for dropout at secondary school level in Bangladesh in 2007 (%)**

Reason for dropout	Males	Females
Marriage	2.0	51.4
Lack of money to continue education	18.0	9.6
Poor performance in examination	16.1	11.5
Work/income generation	44.2	8.1
Not interested in studying	14.9	9.4
Other	4.8	10.0
Total	100.0	100.0
Source: Nath et al (2008: 110)		



## **Bolivia**

A 2013 survey of 2,500 Bolivian women offers insights into why girls/women drop out of school, as do other reports examining out-of-school children (Reimão and Taş, 2015: 21; Stromquist, 2014). However, there is little available data on why males drop out of school. Ethnicity appears to be a key variable for understanding gender education gaps in Bolivia, which appear to be low when considering the population as a whole (Zapata et al, 2011). Among indigenous groups, the Quechuas have the lowest average educational attainment levels in Bolivia, but with small differences between Quechua men and women (Reimão and Taş, 2015: 21). By contrast, the Aymaras have much higher average educational attainment levels, but Aymara women are educationally disadvantaged compared to Aymara men. Combining these sources and ideas gives a sense of the gendered causes of dropout in Bolivia, which are summarised below.

### ***Both sexes/males***

*Poverty* – Low household income combined with entrenched conceptions of masculinity, wherein school is viewed as unmanly and boys/men should instead work, are a main reason why many males drop out of school in Bolivia, particularly at secondary education level but also at primary level (UIS and UNICEF, 2015: 62). Bolivia has one of the highest child labour rates in the world: 29% of Bolivian children aged 7-14 years are employed (ibid, p. 67).

*Non-inclusive language of instruction* - Indigenous children are three times more likely to drop out of primary school than non-indigenous children, because of a disconnect between the medium of instruction used in schools and the languages that they speak at home (ECLAC, 2005).

*School-related gender-based violence* – 82% of Bolivian students have been physically punished in school on some occasion for lack of discipline, unfinished homework and/or learning difficulties.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, 40% of Bolivian teachers consider use of corporal punishment to be both necessary and effective. Corporal punishment is one of the key drivers of dropout in Bolivia.

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<sup>22</sup> Source: [http://www.unicef.org/bolivia/children\\_1540.htm](http://www.unicef.org/bolivia/children_1540.htm) (accessed 14 December 2015)



## ***Females***

*Poverty* – Around 50% of dropouts among girls/women are due to lack of funds (Reimão and Taş, 2015: 21). However, indigenous females tend to be poorer than non-indigenous females, so their dropout rates tend to be higher.

*Low perceived value of girls' education* – Aymara women participating in the 2013 women's survey indicated that their families value boys' education more than girls' education (Reimão and Taş, 2015: 21). In addition, both Aymara and Quechua respondents were more likely than non-indigenous respondents to say that they had dropped out of school because their families did not allow them to continue studying.

*Lack of nearby school* – Most schools in Bolivia are located in urban areas, and rural areas are often underserved. Distance to school poses a risk to girls' safety and is a major cause of dropout among rural Bolivian girls/women (Stromquist, 2014: 7).

*School-related gender-based violence* – A desire to escape sexual harassment is a major cause of female dropout in Bolivia, where girls/women are often subject to intimidation and abuse from teachers and other pupils (Stromquist, 2014: 7). A study by Child Defense International Bolivia found that there are at least 100 cases of sexual attacks per day within Bolivian schools (Global Campaign for Education, 2012: 5).

*Early pregnancy* – 27% of adolescent girls in the Bolivian Amazon region have left school due to pregnancy (UNICEF and UIS, 2011). While Bolivia's national education policy allows pregnant girls to continue their studies, parents and community groups often oppose this policy, and schools exclude girls in response to this pressure (Global Campaign for Education, 2012: 5).

## **Cambodia**

Most data on dropouts in Cambodia covers both sexes in aggregate, although some studies examine the specific reasons why girls are not in school (Velasco, 2001; SADEV, 2010). The findings of both sets of studies are summarised below.

## ***Both sexes***

*Poverty* – Poverty and the need to contribute to family income and/or help with household chores is the main reason for dropout in Cambodia, accounting for 50% of all cases of dropout (VSO, UNESCO and NEP, 2014). The percentage of Cambodian children that engage in paid and unpaid work increases with age: 16% of children are economically active by the age of 6, more than 50% by the age of 10, and 83% by the ages of 15-17 (ILO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2006: 12). Nearly 80% of 7-14 year-olds also regularly assist with household chores. As a result of working and/or helping out at home, many students are absent from school, which affects their school performance and often leads to dropout (USAID, 2015).

*High cost of schooling/corruption in schools* – Many Cambodian children and young people drop out of school because they cannot afford the high cost of learning materials and other school-related expenses (USAID, 2015; VSO, UNESCO and NEP, 2014). The cost of schooling in Cambodia is higher than it would normally be, because low salaries lead teachers to charge students informal private fees (Barton and Rith, 2006).

*Lack of nearby school* – Long distances to school and a lack of transport have been cited as the main cause for dropping out, especially in rural areas of Cambodia (VSO, UNESCO and NEP, 2014).

### ***Females***

*Low perceived value of girls' education* – Low household income and parents' prioritisation of boys' education, especially in rural areas, means that girls' education is often cut short (Velasco, 2001). Many Cambodian families expect girls/women to help with domestic chores and/or to earn an income, rather than attending school. Pressure to take up paid work and contribute financially to the home grows as girls get older (SADEV, 2010: 15).

*Early marriage* – 18% of children in Cambodia get married before the age of 18 (Schatz, 2015). Some girls reportedly get married as early as Grade 6 or 7, resulting in a de-emphasis on school and often also early pregnancy.

*Inadequate school facilities for girls/women* – There are no toilet facilities in many schools, which deters school attendance by adolescent girls (Velasco, 2001).

*School-related gender-based violence* – Harassment or intimidation by male students is a key reason why many female students in Cambodia drop out of school (Velasco, 2001).

### **Liberia**

A 2011 Liberian household survey of out-of-school children provides information on the causes of dropout among all students, as well as among girls/women (UIS and UNICEF, 2012). However, it does not highlight the specific issues faced by boys/men.

## *Both sexes*

*High cost of schooling/corruption in schools* – The main reason for school dropout in Liberia – cited by two-thirds of respondents participating in the household survey – is ‘no money and fees’ and the ‘high cost of school materials’ (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 38).<sup>23</sup> One of the factors that makes schooling so expensive and contributes to students’ high dropout rates is a ‘longstanding practice of teachers requesting monies from students for grades’ (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 39).

*Lack of interest in school* – 40% of households participating in the household survey indicated that their children refused to go to school or were not interested in school (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 43). This is likely a reflection of the low quality of education in Liberia: 46% of parents participating in the household survey reported a shortage of learning materials, too few teachers and poor school facilities (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 39).

*Lack of parental support for education* – Many parents/guardians in Liberia are themselves uneducated, so do not recognise the importance of educating their children. In addition, in many rural communities, parents prefer that their children attend ‘bush schools’ rather than modern educational institutions and often pull their children out of school, once enrolled, or do not register their children in school in the first place (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 37).

*Poverty* – High levels of poverty combined with low parental support for education means that many children in Liberia are encouraged to drop out of school to work. 17% of respondents to the household survey indicated that their children had dropped out to earn money, with some working children reported to be as young as 8 years of age (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 49).

*Death or abandonment by parents* – Poverty and the high cost of schooling make education especially prohibitive for children/young people whose parents have died or abandoned them. One outcome of Liberia’s 14-year civil war, which ended in 2013, is that there are many orphans in the country who need to support themselves (FORWARD and IPPF, 2012: 12). 22% of respondents to the household survey indicated that they knew children who had dropped out of school owing to the death of a parent or parents (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 46).

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<sup>23</sup> This is also the key reason for non-entry to school.

*Lack of nearby school* – 15% of respondents from rural households and 8% from urban households reported dropouts due to long distances to the nearest school (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 40). 11% of households reported dropouts due to the unavailability of schools (in particular, secondary schools), lack of available places in accessible schools, and/or the absence of teachers from schools (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 39).

*School-related gender-based violence* – 6% of respondents to the household survey indicated that their children had dropped out of school due to bullying (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 39-40). Some survey participants also reported children dropping out to avoid corporal punishment by school personnel.

### ***Females***

*Low perceived value of girls' education* – The average Liberian woman has 5.2 children, and girls are often kept at home to help with childcare and domestic chores (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 37-38). Girls/women are often also pressured to leave school to earn money, which – given a shortage of employment opportunities in Liberia – means that they are often forced into prostitution (FORWARD and IPPF, 2012: 19).

*Early pregnancy* – 68% of respondents to the household survey indicated that girls in their household had dropped out of school because of pregnancy (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 40). One of the reasons for high levels of early pregnancy in Liberia is a lack of easily available and accurate information on sex matters, including pregnancy (FORWARD and IPPF, 2012: 22). In addition, pregnant girls tend to be forced out by school authorities for fear that they will 'influence' or 'infect' other girls (FORWARD and IPPF, 2012: 34). While Liberia's Ministry of Education has a policy in place that allows pregnant girls to attend 'night school', so that they do not mix with their peers in day school but still benefit from educational access, this policy is not uniformly enforced (FORWARD and IPPF, 2012: 34).

*Early marriage* – 40% of respondents to the household survey reported children in their household dropping out of school due to early marriage (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 44). In rural communities in Liberia, it is common for girls to be given in marriage at 16 years of age. Early marriage also affects boys, but to a lesser degree.

*School-related gender-based violence* – 18% of Liberian girls/women in urban areas and 15% in rural areas drop out of school for fear of sexual harassment by teachers and/or other students (UIS and UNICEF, 2012: 54). Sexual exploitation by teachers is widespread.

### **Rwanda**

The secondary literature on dropouts in Rwanda – including analyses on the link between gender and educational progression (e.g. USAID, 2014) – tends to highlight female-specific or aggregate trends but not the issues that lead to male dropouts. The aggregate and female-specific causes of dropout are summarised below.

## ***Both sexes***

*Poverty and high cost of schooling* – Rwanda offers 12-year fee-free education, but many poor families cannot afford the other costs of schooling, such as uniforms, books, transportation, etc (USAID, 2015a: 6). Therefore, many students (girls and boys) have to work to support their families and to earn enough to pay for school, which affects their performance and attendance and can lead to dropout. In addition, many girls/women are kept at home to look after their younger siblings. Pressures to work/help at home increase as children get older, which affects student retention at secondary school level (ibid, p. 6).

## ***Females***

*Lack of female role models* – Although female staff (53%) outnumber male staff (47%) at primary school level in Rwanda, male staff (73%) greatly outnumber female staff (27%) at secondary school level (USAID, 2014: 2). In addition, females are under-represented in school decision-making roles: only 30% of primary school administrative staff are female, as are only 19% of head teachers at secondary school level (ibid, p. 3). Only 5% of secondary school science and technology teachers in 2005 were women (Randall and Huggins, 2007).

*Low perceived value of girls' education* – Girls' education tends to be de-emphasised compared to boys', especially at secondary school level (USAID, 2015a: 6). A heavy load of household tasks is allocated to girls/women, including having to travel long distances to collect wood and water. Girls/women work an average of 20 hours per week more than boys/men, which affects their performance and retention in school (Strode et al, 2007: 58)

*Inadequate school facilities for girls/women* – In 2008, only 66% of schools in Rwanda had access to water, although 93% had separate toilets for girls/women (USAID, 2014: 13). Lack of water in school is a known cause of dropout among adolescent women.

*Unequal learning environment* – Most teachers in Rwanda have not been trained in responding to the different needs of male and female students, so often discriminate against girls/women (USAID, 2014: 7). Lack of sensitivity to the needs of female students often leads to marginalisation and dropout.

## **Tanzania**

Several surveys on school dropouts in Tanzania provide sex-disaggregated data on the reasons for dropout, as well as differentiating between urban and rural areas. However, the intersectionality between gender, location and dropout is unclear from the survey results.

### *Both sexes/males*

*Poverty and high cost of schooling* – is the main cause of dropout among primary school students in Tanzania (Ngodu, 2013: 36).<sup>24</sup> Many low-income households cannot afford the high costs of schooling, including uniforms, books, and other school-related expenses. Children (girls and boys) often have to work to support their families and to earn enough money to pay for school, which affects their performance and attendance, and can lead to dropout. One in ten male students in urban areas of Tanzania drops out of primary school to work, while over 10% of male and female students in urban and rural areas drop out of secondary school in order to work (see Table 7).

*Traditional practices* – Traditional cultural beliefs, especially in rural areas, means that many students enter primary school late in Tanzania (UNESCO and Pole Dakar, 2011: 221). More than half of all dropouts in Tanzania are overage (see Table 7), and most rural students are teenagers by the time they reach the end of primary school (ibid, p. 221).

*Death/illness of parents* – accounts for around 8% of all dropouts from primary school (Ngodu, 2013: 36). HIV/AIDS-affected children are often forced to drop out of school to take care of ill parents, due to bereavement or because of an inability to pay fees. In addition, many experience discrimination in access to education as soon as a family member is diagnosed with HIV/AIDS (ibid, p. 36).

*Lack of interest in school* – explains 13% of primary school dropout among boys but only 4% among girls (see Table 7). The specific reasons for lack of interest in school are unclear from the survey analyses.

*School-related gender-based violence* – Corporal punishment is a much-cited reason for primary school dropout in Tanzania, especially among male students (Ngodu, 2013: 36).

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<sup>24</sup> The results reported by Ngodu (2013) are different from that shown in Table 7. However, it seems clear that poverty is a major cause of dropout in Tanzania, so the former source has been viewed as the more reliable on this indicator.

**Table 7 – Main reasons for dropout, by sex and place of residence, in Tanzania in 2006 (%)**

	Sex		Place of residence		Total (%)
	Male	Female	Urban	Rural	
<b>Primary School level</b>					
Too old/too young/completed level	58.4	61.2	52.2	63.0	60.0
Exam failure	8.6	8.5	9.7	8.1	8.6
Cost of schooling	9.1	7.6	13.4	6.2	8.3
Lack of interest	12.7	4.2	7.1	8.4	8.0
Child is working	5.0	8.3	10.5	5.4	6.8
Marriage	0.4	4.4	1.7	3.0	2.6
Illness	2.3	2.1	1.1	2.6	2.2
Early pregnancy	0.0	1.7	1.0	0.9	0.9
Distance to school	0.9	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.4
Other reason	2.6	2.0	3.2	1.9	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<b>Secondary School level</b>					
Too old/too young/completed level	60.4	52.6	58.0	52.7	55.8
Child is working	10.1	12.3	11.0	12.1	11.4
Cost of schooling	11.3	10.6	10.4	11.6	10.9
Exam failure	8.0	5.5	7.7	4.7	6.5
Early pregnancy	0.0	10.0	3.4	9.5	5.9
Marriage	2.8	4.9	4.8	3.0	4.1
Lack of interest	2.3	0.8	1.6	1.1	1.4
Illness	2.2	0.7	1.1	1.7	1.3
Distance to school	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.2
Other reason	2.6	2.4	1.7	3.6	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Source: UNESCO and Pole Dakar (2011: 222)					

### *Females*

*Low perceived value of girls' education* – Girls' education is often de-emphasised compared to boys' education, as can be seen from the higher dropout rates due to work among girls at both primary and secondary education levels (see Table 7). In addition, girls/women are given a heavy load of domestic chores, including childcare, cooking and fetching water before school (Machimu and Minde, 2010: 13). Each trip to collect water often lasts more than one hour, affecting girls' school attendance and performance. A study showed that, when water is available within 15 minutes compared to over half an hour, girls' school attendance increases by 12%.<sup>25</sup> The truancy rate among girls at secondary education level is 44%, compared with 12.5% for boys, reflecting girls' heavier load of responsibilities outside school (Machimu and Minde, 2010: 13). However, girls' high out-of-school rates also reflect strong cultural beliefs against girls' education, especially in rural areas (UNESCO and Pole Dakar, 2011: 222).

<sup>25</sup> Source: [http://www.unicef.org/esaro/7310\\_Gender\\_and\\_education.html](http://www.unicef.org/esaro/7310_Gender_and_education.html)

*Lack of nearby school* – Long distances to school and insufficient development of roads and transportation systems in Tanzania partly explain the high proportion of out-of-school girls in rural areas (Machimu and Minde, 2010: 12-13). Distance to school affects girls much more than boys, since they face higher risks of sexual and physical abuse on their journey to and from school.

*Early pregnancy* – One in ten Tanzanian females drops out of secondary school due to early pregnancy (see Table 7). The child pregnancy rate is higher in rural than in urban areas of the country. Tanzanian government guidelines for enabling pregnant girls to continue their studies have recently been approved, but it is not known how far these measures are being implemented in schools (UNESCO and Pole Dakar, 2011: 221).

*Early marriage* – explains 4-5% of school dropouts among female students at both primary and secondary school levels (see Table 7). Tanzania's Law of Marriage Act (1971) allows girls to marry as early as 14 years of age.

*Inadequate school facilities for girls/women* – As already mentioned, toilet and handwashing facilities in Tanzanian schools are often below the standards required by adolescent girls (SNV, WaterAid and UNICEF, 2009). However, it is not known what percentage of girls/women drop out for this reason.

*School-related gender-based violence* – A 2009 UNICEF survey showed that nearly one-third of women aged 13-24 in Tanzania have experienced at least one incident of sexual violence before the age of 18; of these women, nearly one-quarter said the incident had occurred while travelling to or from school, while 15% said it took place at school or on school grounds (UNICEF, 2011a).

## **Summary**

As the country profiles provided in this section indicate, there is significant overlap in the causes of dropout across Sida partner countries, although each country has specific aspects that make it unique. In all cases, poverty and the high cost of schooling are major issues that explain both male and female dropouts at all levels of education. Similarly, the perceived low value of girls'/women's education and harmful traditional practices, such as early marriage, rob many girls/women of their right to education, especially at higher levels.

One of the issues that becomes immediately apparent when undertaking an analysis of dropout from a gender perspective is how little data is available regarding the specific reasons why boys/men drop out. The tendency to overlook males in the production and analysis of data regarding dropouts occurs even in countries, such as Bolivia, where males have higher dropout rates than females, at least in aggregate terms, and in studies that approach the topic of dropout from a gender perspective. By ignoring the dimensions of gender inequality that affect boys/men, the studies perpetuate gender inequalities even as they seek to reduce them.



In addition, there is little data on the intersectionality between gender and other variables in terms of their combined effect on dropout. This level of complexity matters: as the more complex information available for Bangladesh shows, the dropout profile of urban females is more in line with that of urban males or even rural males, while the challenges faced by rural females are somewhat unique. This issue has implications beyond the numbers themselves. After all, groups mobilise to agitate for changes to policies on the basis of common ground. If rural girls/women have less in common with urban girls/women as well as all boys/men, then any movement for change to secure their interests will likely be small, with chances of reform more limited than would otherwise be the case. Their problems can easily be pushed to one side, with the status quo of unequal access to education maintained.

### 3.2 GENDERED EFFECTS OF DROPOUT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Gender matters when analysing educational retention and attainment patterns, because gender is the basis of all unequal power relationships in society – cutting across rich-poor gaps, urban-rural divides and majority-minority group differences – while education underpins all efforts to overcome social inequalities in a long-lasting way. The fact that girls'/women's unequal position in the household, including the roles that they have been arbitrarily assigned, contributes to their disadvantage in terms of access to, performance in and retention in education means that girls/women remain permanently subordinate to boys/men. Moreover, their unequal position is perpetuated by education systems and processes, the actions of male teachers and students within schools, and other males, some of whom prey on girls/women as they travel to school and some of whom use religion and tradition to deny girls/women their basic human right to education.

The global focus on educational access, rather than attainment or outcomes, is arguably a further means of masking the inherent inequalities between males and females. After all, females may now be more present *in numerical terms* in primary and secondary education, but they are by no means equal in terms of treatment in school or opportunities after school. Moreover, in many developing countries and some Sida partner countries, most girls/women are married early – and often forcibly – before they can form their own opinions about what they would like from their lives and whether their future pathway should be wife and mother. Hence both their voice and agency are compromised.

However, the negative impacts of dropout and low educational attainment extend beyond the individual pathways of girls/women, affecting the health, wealth and wellbeing of households, communities and societies. Boys/men are also subject to dropout and low educational attainment, which in turn has implications for social outcomes at all levels of aggregation. The main impacts of dropout/low educational attainment at individual/household, school/community and society levels in developing countries are summarised below.

### 3.2.1 Individual/household-level impacts

Studies suggest that low educational attainment levels can lead to an entrenchment of unequal power structures as well as discriminatory gender norms and attitudes within the home, while high education levels tend to produce a narrowing of gender inequalities. Evidence for this can be seen by examining the relationship between education levels and the propensity for or acceptance of domestic violence, which is the most extreme expression of gender inequality at individual/household level. Research shows that higher education levels among women tend to alter social attitudes towards violence against women, lowering its acceptability (World Bank, 2012: 367). In addition, education can increase women's access to economic opportunities, enabling them to accumulate assets, which in turn reduces the incidence of domestic violence by increasing women's bargaining power in the household (World Bank, 2012: 311-312). Higher education levels among men also lower the incidence of domestic violence. The findings of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), conducted in five developing countries (including Rwanda) between 2009 and 2011, suggest that men with higher education levels (completed primary school and at least some secondary education) display more gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours, while men with lower education levels are more likely to use violence against their female partner and have rigid gender attitudes (Barker et al, 2011).

Domestic violence is a major problem worldwide, especially in developing regions, and has strong negative impacts on women's and children's health and wellbeing. A 2013 study on domestic violence showed that 30% of women worldwide have been physically or sexually abused by their partners, with the rate of intimate partner violence even higher in South-East Asia (37.7%), the Eastern Mediterranean (37%) and Africa (36.6%) (WHO, 2013). Women who have experienced domestic violence are more likely to suffer several long-term health problems, including: a 16% higher likelihood of having a low birth-weight child; double the probability of having an abortion or experiencing depression; and, in some regions, a 1.5 times higher likelihood of acquiring HIV/AIDS (WHO, 2013). Women who have been physically or sexually abused by their partners are also more likely to have problems with walking, carrying out daily activities, pain, memory loss and dizziness (WHO, 2005: 15). Domestic violence has severe and lasting effects on the health and wellbeing of the children of abused women, who are likely to become the victims of abuse themselves or suffer the same emotional and behavioural problems as children who have been physically abused (UNICEF, 2006a).

The practice of child marriage places girls in a subordinate position before they have matured and developed confidence, and increases their likelihood of experiencing domestic violence. Moreover, because most girls married before the age of 18 are forced to end their education early, their ability to protect themselves from domestic violence or to get help when they have been harmed is low. Young age and lack of education, combined with low status and weak decision-making power within the household, means that girls married before the age of 18 are highly vulnerable to violence and abuse (ICRW, 2007). A study on child marriage shows that girls married before the age of 18 have a 20% higher probability than older married women of experiencing intimate partner violence, including marital rape and sexual coercion (McCleary-Sills et al, 2015: 71-72). Furthermore, their low education levels restrict their capabilities for upholding their rights or getting help when they have been harmed. Research spanning ten countries shows that women who experience intimate partner violence rarely report the abuse to relevant authorities or seek help from health services (WHO, 2005: 18-20).

Lack of confidence combined with entrenched gender norms and attitudes cause many victims of domestic violence to blame themselves for its occurrence or to accept it as normal, which leads to its intergenerational reproduction. One woman from Bangladesh interviewed as part of the World Health Organisation's Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women commented:

'My husband slaps me, has sex with me against my will and I have to conform. Before being interviewed I didn't really think about this. I thought this is only natural. This is the way a husband behaves.' (WHO, 2005: 10)

The IMAGES survey found that males who experience domestic violence as children are also more likely to regard it as normal and often become perpetrators themselves later in life:

'IMAGES results confirmed a strong association in all countries between witnessing violence within the household of origin during childhood and IPV [intimate partner violence] during adulthood, which also is consistent with previous research. This is the only variable that presents a statistically significant association in all countries, both during lifetime and in the last 12 months.' (Barker et al, 2011).

### **3.2.2 School/community-level impacts**

Domestic violence, which is based on unequal power relationships in the home, gets replicated and perpetuated at community level through the practice of corporal punishment in schools. Corporal punishment is both a cause of school dropout, especially among males, and a means of increasing the acceptability of gender-based violence. As the Society for Adolescent Medicine states:

‘The use of corporal punishment in schools promotes a very precarious message: that violence is an acceptable phenomenon in our society. It sanctions the notion that it is meritorious to be violent toward children, thereby devaluing them in society’s eyes. It encourages children to resort to violence because they see their authority figures or substitute parents using it... The result is that we are harming our children by teaching them that violence is acceptable, especially against the weak, the defenseless, and the subordinate, a message that can be reasonably assumed will negatively affect generations yet unborn.’ (Greydanus et al, 2003)

Low education levels combined with entrenched gender norms and discrimination against women in the workplace restrict women’s access to economic opportunities and resources, which women need to protect themselves against domestic violence, live independently and/or escape poverty. Women’s internalisation of gender norms often dictates the kinds of jobs that they pursue, resulting in many women working in low-paying occupations, while discriminatory attitudes towards women often mean they get paid less than men, even while doing the same job. The resulting gender pay gap varies in size across regions, from as low as 10% in East Asia to as high as 48% in South Asia (Nopo et al, 2011).

Discrimination and/or low education levels, especially among girls/women in rural areas who have dropped out of school as a result of traditional practices, such as child marriage, mean that women are more likely than men to be unemployed or engaged in vulnerable work – for example, part-time or temporary positions or work on an unpaid or self-employed basis (Verick, 2014). This has implications not only for the women’s income levels, but also for their local economies, which could fall further behind more progressive areas of the country.

### **3.2.3 Society-wide impacts**

Low (or no) wages and limited opportunities in the sphere of employment cause many women to become discouraged and exit (or not enter) the labour market, which has knock-on effects for economic growth and poverty reduction in many developing countries. Women’s labour market participation rates have decreased worldwide – from 52.2% in 1992 to 51.4% in 2012 – despite improvements in girls’/women’s access to education over the past two decades (Verick, 2014). In several developing regions, a low proportion of women are economically active – just over 20% in the Middle East and North Africa and under 40% in South Asia – and men’s participation rates exceed women’s by over 50 percentage points (ibid). The fact that nearly one-half of the world’s women do not contribute to their countries’ national production means that economic growth in many developing countries is much slower than it could be, as is the level of tax revenues that could be gained from women’s paid employment. Research shows that rapid economic growth is necessary for substantially reducing poverty (Ianchovichina and Lundstrom, 2009), so there are social as well as economic costs to gender discrimination.

Low educational attainment among females, combined with women's low engagement in the labour market, negatively impacts countries' efforts to achieve universal primary education. After all, household income is likely reduced if women do not work, and a dual income could pull some households out of poverty, making the difference between children attending or remaining out of school. However, women's level of income is linked to their education level, since women with higher education levels are more likely to obtain the information and skills necessary to earn higher wages and to be able to negotiate acceptable working conditions (UNESCO, 2003). Conversely, women with lower education levels are less likely to be able to access credit or social protection, such as welfare and unemployment benefits, which would reduce their vulnerability to income shocks and prevent their needing to withdraw their children from school during shocks. Finally, women who are more educated are more likely to show support for their children's education, in particular the education of their daughters, which is a key factor for improving educational participation rates.

Breaking the cycle of poverty, inequality and low country performance is possible through changes in legislation that improve conditions and opportunities for girls/women. However, women's low education levels, entrenched gender norms, and patriarchal power structures at state level tend to prevent women from gaining access to key decision-making fora to make gender-equalising reforms. The worldwide share of parliamentary seats held by women has increased from 14% in 2000 to 22% in 2014, but remains low (UN, 2014: 23). The percentage of women in ministerial positions was only 17% in 2014, while the proportion of women serving as heads of state, heads of government or speakers of parliament was even lower (ibid). Given women's low representation in key decision-making bodies, it is not surprising that legislation relating to women tends to be weak and that gender inequality persists.

Low educational attainment levels among boys/men also have negative society-wide impacts. However, it should be noted that the developing country literature on the effects of male dropout is thin, to the point where studies focused on the reasons for boys'/men's educational underperformance often devote just one to two paragraphs to the impacts. Hence, findings from studies on male dropouts from a developed country perspective (the USA) have been incorporated here. The developing region with the most information regarding the social implications of male dropouts is Latin America and the Caribbean, where links between male dropout and crime have been noted, although the relationship is not straightforward. Writing about Jamaica, one study concludes: 'Although it is difficult to establish direct and definite linkages, engagement in youth violence, easy access to guns and drug related job opportunities appear to be both a cause and impact of boys' disadvantage in education.' (Jha et al, 2012: 6). The gender dimension to this linkage is clear: given gender norms of males as providers, dropout often limits boys'/men's earning potential, leading to feelings of failed masculinity and social marginalisation. Boys/men may become attracted to criminal gangs for the sense of belonging to a group that they provide, as well as to gain income and status not available to dropouts in the legal labour market (Starling and Hope, 2013).

Failure to remain in education until the end of secondary school has other negative social implications. First, it generates a net economic loss to society, since dropouts tend to have lower individual output and productivity levels than secondary school completers, so earn lower wages and contribute less in taxes, but often require public assistance (Tyler and Lofstrom, 2005). Second, feelings of failed masculinity affect male dropouts' self-esteem, which means that they have a higher propensity to take health risks (Starling and Hope, 2013). This can affect wider health outcomes through boys/men engaging in unsafe sexual practices.

## 4. Framework for mainstreaming gender perspective to address school dropout

### 4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS/CONCLUSIONS

Developing countries' efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals by increasing educational enrolments and improving the male-female ratio of enrolments at primary and secondary education levels have been a success. Since 2000, every developing region in the world has increased enrolment rates and improved the gender parity of enrolments at each level of education. Although some regions (notably Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) still lag behind the rest of the world, they have made significant progress in boosting enrolments from a low starting point and despite high population growth.

However, developing countries have had less success in achieving universal primary education, for two reasons:

- Retention of children/young people in school, once enrolled, has been weak: 1 in 4 children who enrol in primary school withdraw before completing it, and dropout rates are even higher in South Asia (1 in 3) and Sub-Saharan Africa (2 in 5).
- Large numbers of children who should be in school are not enrolled – some because they have dropped out, but most because they have not yet entered school. Moreover, nearly one-half of the world's out-of-school children are forecast to never enter school.

Gender plays a role in these trends. Across the world, females are more likely than males to be out of school (although not in all countries), and the poorest girls/women from the most disadvantaged rural areas tend to have the lowest educational attainment levels. The reasons why females are more likely than males (or vice versa in some cases) to be out of school relate to social power structures and socially-constructed norms that define the roles that boys/men and girls/women should play. These gender roles affect the rights, responsibilities, opportunities and capabilities of males and females, including their access to and treatment in school. Mainly because of gendered perceptions of adolescent girls' roles and responsibilities, in most developing countries, girls' enrolment rates fall when they reach lower secondary school age and then decline further when they reach upper secondary school age.

In today's complex globalised environment, a secondary education is widely regarded as the minimum level required for securing and maintaining productive employment, which is the main route for escaping poverty and contributing meaningfully to the economy and society. A failure to complete secondary education can affect individuals' long-term capabilities and earnings potential. This is especially the case for girls/women, who receive the greatest returns to their schooling investment from secondary education.



Most young people in the Sida partner countries within the education support portfolio have not completed secondary school. Moreover, in most of the countries, the majority of young people have not completed primary school, and young women have lower educational attainment levels than young men.

The reasons why educational attainment levels are low differ across the countries, but two broad trends may be identified:

- In four of the countries (Afghanistan, Bolivia, Tanzania and Liberia), the main problem is low initial enrolments in primary education and ensuring that children begin school on time. Dropout is also an issue in these countries, but late entry and non-entry appear to be larger concerns.
- In three countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia and Rwanda), the main challenge is retaining students in school once they have enrolled. Bangladesh has the best retention rate of the three countries; nevertheless, only just over one-quarter of students that begin primary school in Bangladesh make it to the first grade of upper secondary school.

The main barriers that children and young people in developing countries face in accessing or remaining in education stem from issues, practices and policies at individual/household, school/community and policy/system level, including:

- *Individual/household level:* poverty; low perceived value of girls' education; income shocks; death/illness of parents; lack of parental support for education; ethnicity and social exclusion; gendered traditional practices; early marriage; early pregnancy; and lack of interest in school (which is linked to other factors).
- *School/community level:* high cost of schooling/corruption; lack of a nearby school; school-related gender-based violence; inadequate school facilities for girls/women; unequal learning environments; lack of female teachers/role models; and a non-inclusive language of instruction.
- *Policy/system level:* inadequate/weakly enforced policies on access to school for pregnant girls/young mothers; inadequate/weakly enforced legislation on school-related gender-based violence; and inadequate/weakly enforced legislation on harmful traditional practices.

The specific issues that affect children's/young people's access to or retention in education differ across countries. For example, the main reasons for dropout in the Sida partner countries are:

- *Afghanistan:* poverty; high cost of schooling; SRGBV; lack of a nearby school (esp rural females); early marriage (esp young females); and low perceived value of girls' education (esp rural females).

- *Bangladesh*: poverty; lack of interest in school (esp males); lack of a nearby school (esp rural females); non-inclusive language of instruction (esp rural males); SRGBV (esp urban children); and early marriage (esp young females).
- *Bolivia*: poverty; non-inclusive language of instruction; SRGBV; and low perceived value of girls' education (esp indigenous groups).
- *Cambodia*: poverty; high cost of schooling/corruption; lack of a nearby school; and low perceived value of girls' education.
- *Liberia*: poverty; high cost of schooling/corruption; lack of interest in school; lack of parental support for education; early pregnancy/marriage (esp young females); and SRGBV (esp females).
- *Rwanda*: poverty; low perceived value of girls' education; unequal learning environments; and inadequate school facilities for girls/women.
- *Tanzania*: traditional practices resulting in late school entry (esp rural areas); poverty; lack of interest in school; low perceived value of girls' education; early pregnancy/marriage (esp young females); and SRGBV.

In terms of impacts, studies suggest that low educational attainment levels can lead to an entrenchment of unequal power structures as well as discriminatory gender norms and attitudes at individual/household level, which may then be replicated and perpetuated at community level through unequal practices within schools. Breaking the cycle of gender inequality and its detrimental impacts requires overcoming patriarchy and unequal power structures at state level. Yet women's subordinate position in society and low educational attainment levels relative to men's block their equal representation in key decision-making fora, which in turn prevents gender-equalising reforms from being implemented. To overcome these issues, policies need to be implemented that simultaneously improve educational access and retention while reducing gender inequality.

## 4.2 KEY INTERVENTIONS AND ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

To have a lasting impact on gender norms and attitudes, interventions aimed at removing the barriers to educational access and retention need to focus on reducing gender inequality and engendering a more even balance of power between the sexes at each level of aggregation. Moreover, to target the specific issues faced by girls/women and boys/men, they need to be based on complex evidence that reflects the intersectionality of identities that all individuals possess.

The remainder of this section considers recommended actions for removing the barriers to educational access and retention from a gender perspective. Examples are provided of evidence-based interventions implemented in developing countries to address the main causes of dropout identified for the Sida partner countries. The discussion below also highlights several crucial issues/questions that need to be addressed to improve future interventions in this area.

#### **4.2.1 Removing individual/household-level barriers**

The main gendered barriers to educational access and retention stemming from issues, attitudes and/or practices at individual/household level in the Sida partner countries are poverty, early marriage and pregnancy, and low perceived value of girls' education. These four factors are interrelated, less or more so depending on country context. For example, in many developing countries, parents place a low priority on their daughter's education on the basis that she will get married and have children, so does not require much schooling. Similarly, in many developing countries, early pregnancy is related to early marriage, and early marriage is linked to poverty and regarded as a means of managing poverty. Therefore, interventions may target these issues separately or in combination.

Some countries have implemented policies to address single causes of dropout. For example, the Young Men as Equal Partners project, implemented in several African countries, focuses on tackling early pregnancy as a means of reducing dropout and improving gender equality (see Box 1). The intervention provides sexuality education and access to contraception, and seeks to make men and women equal partners in planned pregnancies. By doing so, it addresses several of the factors identified by the WHO (2011) as contributing to early pregnancies in developing countries – that is, lack of education and knowledge and lack of access to contraception. However, the intervention does not address early pregnancies caused by coerced sex or linked to early marriage. Around 90% of early pregnancies in the developing world occur within the context of marriage, and 30% of girls get married before the age of 18 (ECLAC and UNICEF, 2007; WHO, 2011). Many girls who are married early are unable to negotiate safe sex with their partners, and more than one-third of girls in some countries report having been coerced into sex (WHO, 2011). In those contexts, this policy would have limited relevance, although it may be very relevant in other contexts.

#### **Box 1 – Preventing early pregnancy through targeted interventions in Africa**

The Young Men as Equal Partners project, which was implemented between 2005 and 2009 in Kenya, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, worked with teachers, community leaders, health service providers and peer educators to encourage young men and women aged 10 to 24 to engage in responsible sexual behaviour. It also sought to strengthen gender equality in decision-making regarding sexual and reproductive health. Project activities included sexuality education, gender awareness training, provision of youth-friendly health services, counselling and condom distribution. The programme appears to have had success: pregnancy rates in the areas targeted by the project fell during the project period. In Kenya, it was reported that pregnancies in targeted schools dropped from 1 in 29 girls in 2006 to 1 in 97 girls in 2009.

*Source:* UNESCO (2015: 170); RFSU (2009); RFSU (2011).

In some countries, interventions have sought to address overlapping causes of dropout from a gender perspective. One such programme is the widely-praised Female Secondary School Stipend Project in Bangladesh (see Box 2). The project targets poverty (via conditional cash transfer), early marriage and early pregnancy. However, its impacts on improving secondary school retention may be doubted by the evidence that in 2011 over 50% of the poorest girls/women in Bangladesh continued to have less than primary education and only 14% had secondary or higher education (see Table 3). From a gender perspective, by targeting only girls/women, the programme may have discriminated against males in the poorest wealth bracket, whose educational profile is now worse than that of females in the same income category. There are gender implications to this situation, including a potential increase in misogyny and violence against women. According to one study, ‘[t]he rate of reported violent acts against women [in Bangladesh] has risen consistently and at an alarming rate, especially since the early 1990s’ (Farouk, 2005: 4).

#### **Box 2 – Preventing early marriage and retaining young women in school in Bangladesh**

The Female Secondary School Stipend Project (FSSSP) in Bangladesh was established in 1982 with the specific aim of reducing fertility by delaying the age at which young women get married, as well as to increase the enrolment of young women in secondary schools. Married women were excluded from the stipend, providing parents with a clear incentive to delay their daughters’ marriage. The Government of Bangladesh was able to scale up the programme through partnerships with international agencies, such as USAID, the Asia Foundation, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and the World Bank.

Causality is difficult to establish, but data suggest that the programme contributed to an increase in female secondary school enrolment. A 2002 World Bank study suggests that the programme also had an immediate and significant impact on delaying marriage, although this finding is disputed by later studies. While the programme appears to have had a positive impact, low quality of schooling in Bangladesh and other issues preventing young women from attending school, including a shortage of female teachers and the dangers of traveling to school in rural areas, have persisted.

*Source:* Schurmann (2009); Chitrakar (2009)

While scholarships, stipends, cash transfers and even access to credit (see Box 3) may address educational access and retention issues related to income deficiencies, they may not be enough to convince parents to abandon traditional practices. The secondary literature suggests that involving respected community members, religious leaders and other civil society representatives in designing and/or advocating policies and programmes aimed at overturning gender norms and harmful traditional practices may have a more positive effect. For example, UNICEF states that if communities themselves decide to abandon FGM/C, the practice can be eliminated rapidly (UNICEF, 2013). The question is how easy this is to do in practice and whether this can be done in every case.

### Box 3 – Access to credit as a means of retaining children in school during income shocks

Access to credit during income shocks appears to limit their impact on withdrawals from school. Research on conditional cash transfer programmes (CCTs), where school attendance is a requirement, demonstrates that CCTs can protect enrolments during income shocks and act as a kind of safety net to schooling. A 2006 study examining household survey data in 506 rural areas of Mexico showed that access to credit in times of income shock allowed families to retain children in schools; however, children's workloads were increased to cope with the additional financial pressure. Similarly, research on family coping strategies in rural Nepal and Zimbabwe showed that access to a commercial bank had a positive effect on child schooling decisions and a negative impact on child labour.

*Source:* Hunt (2008: 10-11); de Janvry et al (2006); Ersado (2005)

A further issue concerns child labour laws, which are used in some countries as a means of ensuring that children go to school instead of being put to work. Viewed from a gender perspective, these laws may have a negative impact on girls' education by putting greater responsibility on girls/women to facilitate both parents working to make up for the loss in income from boys' paid work. After all, labour laws do not usually cover household work. Hence, child labour laws could arguably result in a widening of the gender gap in educational access, performance and/or attainment unless parallel measures are put in place to address girls'/women's education.

One of the main interventions suggested in the secondary literature for improving girls' access to schooling is through information campaigns highlighting the importance of girls' education. It is possible that these campaigns would need to be linked to stipends or other monetary incentives for poor families to be persuaded by them. Emphasising the higher returns to secondary education enjoyed by girls/women compared to boys/men could be one avenue for persuading families that it makes sense to educate female children. However, in parallel, girls' access to secondary education would need to be improved, since this seems to affect parents' cost-benefit analysis of whether to send children to school, even at primary level.

#### 4.2.2 Removing school/community-level barriers

The main gendered causes of dropout that stem from issues, attitudes and/or practices at school or community level in the Sida partner countries are SRGBV, lack of a nearby school, the high cost of schooling (often linked to corruption), and unequal learning environments (including lack of female teachers/role models).

One successful intervention in combatting SRGBV is Save the Children's Violence Free Schools project in Afghanistan, which builds knowledge and capacity among students and teachers about children's rights and gender-based violence and trains teachers to use positive, non-violent discipline in the classroom (Box 4). By involving parents and community leaders in monitoring conduct within schools and providing a voice to children suffering violence and abuse, the intervention could have positive spillover effects on power relationships and gender norms and attitudes in households and in the surrounding community, as well as in schools. How such an impact would be measured should be considered.

#### **Box 4 – Save the Children’s Violence Free Schools in Afghanistan**

In a baseline study, Save the Children found that in the 20 schools in Mazer-e-Sharif, the main categories of violence were: a) physical violence and humiliating treatment of children by teachers (often considered as an acceptable form of punishment); b) high levels of sexual abuse, particularly against boys by male teachers; and c) violence by children against children. Save the Children therefore used a holistic approach involving key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, leaders within the community, parents, teachers and girls and boys, to raise awareness of child rights, challenge beliefs and attitudes, influence behaviour and practices, and provide alternatives to violence. As a result of the programme, a significant decrease in physical punishment, bullying, harassment and violence in the targeted schools has been reported. Another result is that the overall school enrolment rate has increased by 17%.

*Source:* Sida (2015: 2)

An intervention in Pakistan jointly addresses two issues that prevent many girls/women, especially in rural areas, from attending school: distance to school and lack of female teachers/role models in schools (see Box 5). The main issues that need to be considered regarding such a programme are the quality of training, rather than just educational access, and educational outcomes – for example, whether students have pathways to further education and/or employment upon completion.

#### **Box 5 – Reducing the distance to school and increasing female teacher numbers in Pakistan**

In one of the most isolated and traditional areas of Pakistan, where the female literacy rate is no more than 4%, 300 new village schools have enrolled 14,000 girls. The success of the Baluchistan project, which is funded by several international organisations, is partly based on the concept of the mobile female teacher training unit, which allows women with 8 to 10 years of education to train as teachers without leaving their villages. Thus far, more than 400 teachers have received government accreditation under the scheme. The schools are run by village education committees, which are elected by a minimum of 75% of parents of school-age children.

*Source:* <http://www.unicef.org/pon96/edgirls.htm>

In terms of how to create more equal learning environments, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), a pan-African non-government organisation, has published a handbook on gender responsive pedagogy, which includes an extensive monitoring and evaluation checklist (Mluma et al, 2005). Areas covered in the handbook and checklist include: aspects of teaching and learning; promoting the participation of girls in science, mathematics and technology subjects; gender equality in the governance and operations of schools, including the school infrastructure; tracking student and staff performance and welfare; empowering girls and boys; and promoting gender equality. The FAWE model is the product of a series of consultations, discussions, research and workshops on gender. FAWE Centres of Excellence boast impressive results, including reduced SRGBV and dropout rates (see Box 6).

#### **Box 6 – Examples of gender responsiveness in FAWE Centres of Excellence**

- Girls are empowered to express themselves freely and confidently within and outside school.
- The school community has a good level of gender awareness.
- The teachers apply gender equality principles in the academic processes.
- The school environment encourages girls to bring out their full academic potential in all subjects, particularly the sciences.
- The school addresses the issue of needy girls through provision of bursaries.
- Cases of sexual harassment and pregnancies have been drastically reduced.
- Dropout rates are lower.
- The community is actively involved in the school and in supporting girls to enrol and remain in school.
- Gender responsive physical facilities are available – accommodation and boarding facilities, separate toilets, water and sanitation.
- Guidance and counselling services are available.
- Teachers have been trained in skills necessary for gender responsive teaching.
- School management is gender responsive.

Source: Mlama et al (2005: 6)

One issue that should be raised regards the focus of the secondary literature on the need for more female teachers to ensure that girls/women have positive role models, including examples of women in positions of authority through education. While it is of course necessary to ensure that women are equally represented at all levels of education, and not simply primary, evidence from Latin America suggests that one of the reasons for boys/men becoming disengaged from education and viewing school as unmanly is a lack of male teachers and role models within schools (Barker et al, 2012). Therefore, there is a need for gender balance to ensure that the teaching profession and schools themselves are not subject to gender bias and stereotyping.

In some cases, the unequal learning environment within schools arises from a non-inclusive language of instruction. In such cases, the recommended approach is to introduce bilingual instruction, where children are taught in their mother tongue for several years before phasing in the national or official language (see Box 7). However, several issues need to be considered in implementing such programmes. First, textbooks and other learning materials may not be readily available in some languages, and teaching without these materials could lower the quality of learning. Second, the languages chosen for bilingual programmes may not be the mother tongue of many students (as in Tanzania), which could mean that non-inclusiveness and gender discrimination continue, albeit reduced.

#### **Box 7 – Child Friendly Schools in Tanzania**

Beginning in 2000, the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) initiative was implemented in 11 districts of Tanzania. CFS focuses on making classrooms more child-centred, and in Tanzania the main focus has been on language. Kiswahili, which is spoken as a first or second language by the great majority of Tanzanians, was adopted as an official language in addition to English and became the language of instruction in the first few grades of primary school. To ensure a smooth transition in incorporating the new language in schools, a policy was passed whereby only experienced teachers (rather than non-qualified teachers) could teach Standards 1-3.

Source: Sabates et al (2010: 16); Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir (2004)

In terms of combatting school-based corruption, which often raises the cost of schooling, the recommended approach often focuses on issuing and enforcing codes of conduct. However, the secondary literature also suggests that low teacher salaries encourage corruption and that, in some cases, donor activities may have contributed to this situation. For example, education sector loans to some poor countries have included conditions such as ceilings on teachers' salaries (UNESCO, 2015: 29). In future, rather than lowering teachers' salaries, a more useful policy may be to introduce incentive systems linked to outcomes, such as performance-related pay. A range of other measures may also be considered for strengthening governance and accountability in schools (Subrahmanyam et al, 2014).

#### **4.2.3 Removing policy/system-level barriers**

The main barriers to educational access and retention at policy/system level in the Sida partner countries are inadequate/weakly enforced policies on access to school for pregnant girls/young mothers; inadequate/weakly enforced legislation on school-related gender-based violence; and inadequate/weakly enforced legislation on harmful traditional practices.

Some of the issues stem from inertia or inefficiencies within governments – for example, lack of political will, failure to coordinate policies across sectors or levels of government, etc. Innovative solutions need to be implemented to address these issues, and in some cases the solution may simply be training and capacity building of relevant stakeholders. In some cases, governments may lack the power to enforce such laws – for example, governments seeking to outlaw harmful traditional practices may simply drive those practices underground and make situations more dangerous for the victims of such practices. Hence, the main recommendation for addressing such issues is to mobilise respected community members, religious leaders and other civil society representatives in collectively abandoning harmful practices and to include them in consultations regarding legislation, including the enforcement of legislation. Publicity and advocacy campaigns highlighting the harmful consequences of such practices, as well as measures to increase the voice and agency of those affected, are other ways of increasing public support and the movement for change.



### 4.3 RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR IMPROVING FUTURE INTERVENTIONS

Actions that should be taken to improve the effectiveness of policies and programmes focused on reducing dropout/increasing access to education from a gender perspective include:

#### **Improve the evidence base**

- *Need for more complex data reflecting the intersectionality of identities:* At present, there is little data on the intersectionality between gender and other variables in terms of their combined effect on dropout. This level of complexity matters: as the data for Bangladesh shows, the dropout profile of urban females is more in line with that of urban males or even rural males, while the challenges faced by rural females are somewhat unique. This issue has implications beyond the numbers themselves. If rural girls/women have less in common with urban girls/women as well as all boys/men, then any movement for change to secure their interests will likely be small, with chances of reform more limited than would otherwise be the case. This can result in their concerns being ignored by governments and other stakeholders in education.
- *Need for greater focus and information on gender issues affecting males:* There appears to be a near-absence of information regarding the causes or consequences of male dropout from a gender perspective. The tendency to overlook males in the production and analysis of data occurs even in countries, such as Bolivia, where males have higher dropout rates than females and in studies that approach the topic of dropout from a gender perspective. By equating gender with “women’s issues” and ignoring the dimensions of gender inequality that affect boys/men, these studies address only half of the problem.
- *Need for further information on why (especially male) students are losing interest in school:* According to the secondary literature, lack of interest in school may stem from a heavy non-school workload; hunger; gendered notions of masculinity; low educational quality or relevance; schools’ insensitivity to students’ needs; and/or a high incidence of SRGBV. Without specific details on which of these (or other) explanations apply, policies aimed at reducing school dropouts are unlikely to be successful.
- *Need for better data on school enrolments and completion at secondary education level:* The focus on universal primary education has meant that data becomes sparser the further one moves away from primary education level. The need to ensure that children remain in school to completion of secondary education means that datasets need to be expanded and extended beyond primary school.

## **Focus on the end goal**

- *Need to focus on educational quality and effectiveness, including pathways after school:* The performance indicators used during the Millennium Development Goal era determined the focus of policies, as well as the data collected. In many cases, quality was sacrificed in the pursuit of higher quantities of enrolments. However, a greater focus on educational quality and the outcomes of education is now needed to ensure that children/young people have usable skills and pathways to further education and/or employment after school. After all, parents consider return on investment when deciding whether or not to enrol or retain their children in school.
- *Need to ensure greater equality within classrooms and schools:* The importance of engaging all students in class and of making school environments and processes more inclusive cannot be emphasised enough; it is a key component of retaining students in school, improving their performance and ensuring their active participation in education and lifelong learning. Teachers need to be trained in gender-responsive pedagogies to ensure the equal and effective participation of girls and boys, as well as of any subgroup of girls/boys requiring special attention within a given country context. Teacher training must be given greater focus in the post-2015 policy agenda to ensure greater quality and equality in teaching and learning processes.

## **Involve all relevant stakeholders**

- *Need for coordinated policy responses across government sectors, agencies and levels:* Overcoming the gendered barriers to educational access and retention will require a comprehensive set of policies, including interventions in the areas of social welfare and health (to address income and food security issues), employment (to remove supply- and demand-side barriers to hiring young people), and security (to ensure students' safety en route to, around and inside schools), in addition to interventions in the area of education to improve the quality and equality of teaching and learning. To achieve greatest impact for the lowest investment, these policies will need to be carefully coordinated across sectors and departments, as well as across levels of government to ensure that policies made centrally are evenly implemented across countries, with a particular focus on rural areas and/or urban slums.
- *Need to gain support of community and religious leaders, as well as other civil society representatives, to prevent harmful traditional practices and change gender norms.* It is unlikely that traditional practices or gender norms can be overturned in a sustainable manner without altering popular perceptions and attitudes. Studies show that involving respected community members, religious leaders and other civil society representatives in designing and/or advocating policies and programmes can have a positive effect and can produce rapid shifts in attitudes and behaviours. However, just how to locate and involve these actors in policies and programmes will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

This paper has provided an introduction to the intersection between gender and educational access and retention. In addition to the ideas presented in this paper, there are a number of areas that still need to be further explored and developed. One area regards health – for example, the intersection between gender, disability and educational access and progression. Information and data regarding the educational access and retention of disabled males and females, including gendered perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, capabilities and opportunities, is underdeveloped in the secondary literature and requires further strengthening. While it is likely that the educational needs of disabled males and females would be addressed through providing more equal learning environments, the issues that concern these groups will be better understood once more data becomes available.

Another area that requires further investigation and elaboration is the relationship between gender, sexuality and education. To give an example, policy decisions to provide separate and well-stocked toilets for adolescent girls and young women may need to include clauses that consider the ramifications for specific groups, such as transsexuals, transgender, etc. These issues are not so complex as to result in the abandonment of the policy, but rather will require that mechanisms be put in place to ensure equality of access and equal treatment of all groups.

Finally, it should be noted that gender norms and attitudes do not exist in a vacuum but are influenced by external events, which can in turn have an impact on educational opportunities and outcomes. For example, external crises arising from man-made or natural causes can affect household resilience and therefore educational access or retention. Similarly, political events or broad social movements could lead to more fragile environments, raising security and other concerns that can affect educational access, retention, quality and/or outcomes. Conversely, external events could produce more hospitable environments, making it easier to overcome gender norms and biases and improve access to and retention in education.

In either case, mainstreaming gender in government institutions, policies and practices makes it more difficult to reverse gains towards greater equality, once realised, and ensures that gender issues are considered and addressed in future policies and programmes. In the current global environment, where extreme political movements threaten girls'/women's rights and freedoms in many developing countries, institutional safeguards that protect basic human rights are increasingly a necessity.

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## **Annex 1. Patterns of school access and retention in the Sida partner countries**

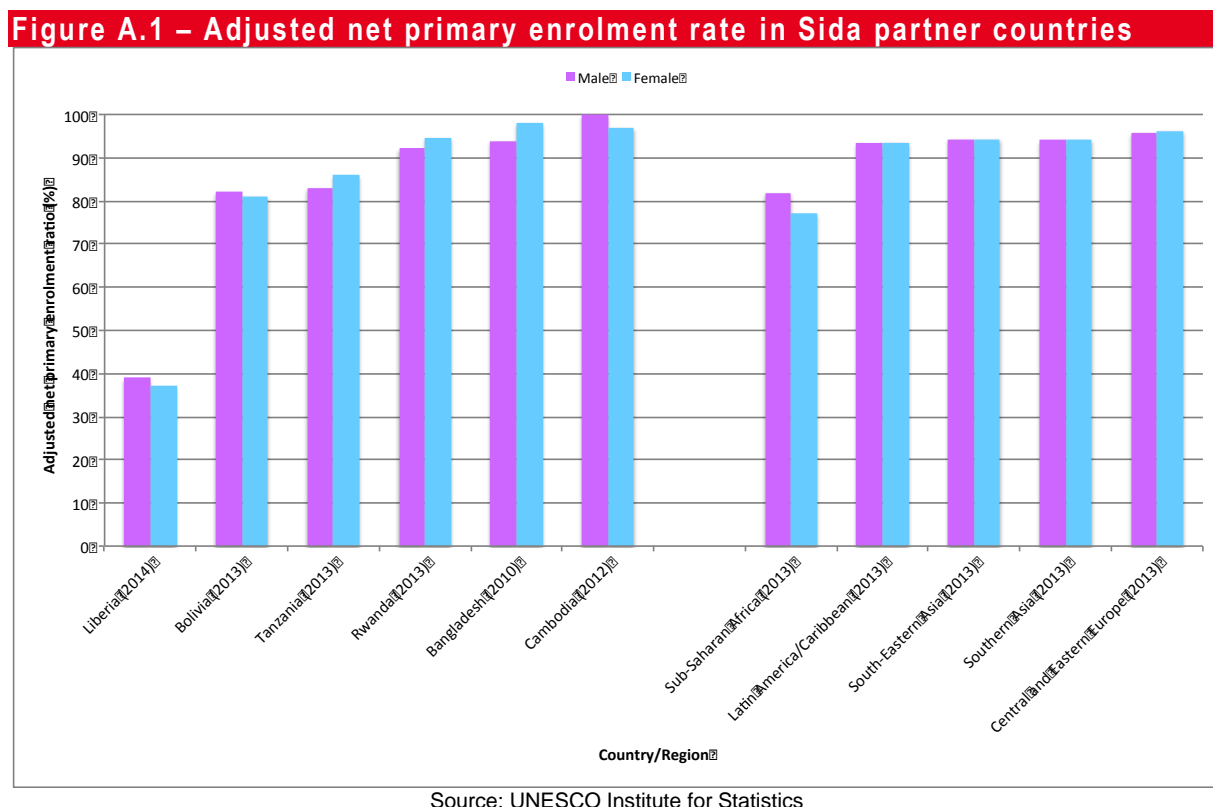
### **PATTERNS OF ACCESS AND RETENTION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Primary education is the first level of education that an individual must complete in order to progress to higher levels of education. This would explain why primary education is accorded high priority in global educational commitments, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Education for All (EFA) Goals and, more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These global performance targets have increased opportunities for education and learning to children across the world, including in many developing countries. However, developing countries are at different stages in terms of their progress in achieving universal and equal access to primary education. This can be appreciated by examining data relating to educational access and retention in Sida partner countries.

#### **Access to primary education**

The ‘net primary enrolment rate’ is the measure most commonly applied to assess countries’ progress in achieving universal primary education. It is defined as the number of children of official primary school age that are enrolled in primary school, expressed as a percentage of the total population of children of the official primary school age (UIS, 2009: 10). A high net primary enrolment rate means that a large proportion of children of primary school age are enrolled in primary education. The statistic therefore provides an indication of access at an early stage of education. However, some children may have already completed primary school and entered secondary school before they reach the official upper age limit for primary education. Therefore, calculation of the net primary enrolment rate is often adjusted to include children of official primary school age enrolled in either primary or secondary education. The ‘adjusted net primary enrolment rate’ thereby provides a more accurate picture of access to primary education than the unadjusted net primary enrolment rate.

Figure A.1 shows the latest available data on adjusted net primary enrolment rates for six of the seven Sida partner countries, as well as for the regions to which the countries belong.<sup>26</sup> It indicates that Sida partner countries fall into three broad categories in terms of progress in extending access to primary education. Three countries have virtually achieved universal primary education: more than 90% of primary school aged children in Cambodia, Bangladesh and Rwanda are or have been enrolled in primary school. Two countries have made good progress in extending educational access: more than 80% of primary school aged children in Tanzania and Bolivia are or have been enrolled in primary school. However, one country has made slow progress in extending access to primary education. Less than 40% of children of the official primary school age in Liberia are or have been enrolled in primary school – a much lower rate than the average for the Sub-Saharan Africa region, which itself lags behind all other developing regions on this indicator. However, it should be noted that, apart from Liberia and Bolivia, all other Sida partner countries have net primary enrolment rates above the average rate for their region.



<sup>26</sup> Data on this indicator for Afghanistan is not available.

Adopting a gender lens to examine whether sex differences explain differences in access to primary education shows that gender disparities in net primary enrolment rates exist in the Sida partner countries (see Figure A.1). However, the disparities are not great: in no country does the gender parity index (GPI) of adjusted net primary enrolment deviate from perfect parity by more than 5% (see Table A.1).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, countries differ in terms of which sex enjoys preferential access to primary education. Boys have slightly greater access to primary school than girls in Cambodia, Liberia and Bolivia, while girls enjoy preferential access to primary education in Bangladesh, Rwanda and Tanzania. Gender disparities appear to be more marked at country level than at regional level: every region, apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, has achieved gender parity in adjusted net primary enrolments. Nevertheless, both the Sub-Saharan Africa region and most of the Sida partner countries have made progress since 2000 in closing the gender gap in primary education (see Table A.1).

**Table A.1 – Gender parity index of enrolment by level of education in Sida partner countries, 2000-2013**

<u>Country/Region</u>	<i>Primary (net adjusted)</i>			<i>Lower secondary (gross)</i>			<i>Upper secondary (gross)</i>		
	<u>2000</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2000</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2013</u>
Afghanistan	...	...	...	...	0.39	0.57	...	0.26	0.53
Bangladesh*	...	1.07	1.05	1.14	1.13	1.25	0.89	0.96	1.01
Bolivia	1.00	1.01	0.99	1.00	0.96	0.96	0.93	0.96	1.03
Cambodia*	0.89	0.98	0.97	0.56	0.84	1.02	0.52	0.66	0.73
Liberia*	0.78	1.00	0.95	0.64	0.78	0.81	0.85	0.81	0.74
Rwanda	0.99	1.03	1.03	0.99	0.86	1.14	0.78	0.86	0.97
Tanzania*	1.03	0.99	1.03	...	0.81	0.95	...	0.75	0.68
Central and Eastern Europe	0.98	1.00	1.00	0.97	0.97	1.00	0.94	0.94	0.95
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.98	0.99	1.00	1.03	1.04	1.02	1.14	1.14	1.13
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.89	0.93	0.94	0.80	0.79	0.87	0.81	0.78	0.83
South-Eastern Asia	0.98	0.99	1.00	0.97	1.01	1.02	1.00	0.99	0.94
Southern Asia	0.84	0.94	1.00	0.79	0.89	0.99	0.71	0.81	0.88

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

\* Data shown is for reference year or closest available data year

A GPI equal to 1 indicates parity between females and males. A value less than 1 indicates disparity in favour of boys/men and a value greater than 1 indicates disparity in favour of girls/women.

<sup>27</sup> GPI data relating to adjusted net primary enrolments in Afghanistan is not available; hence the discussion here relates to the other six Sida partner countries only.

Net primary enrolment rates provide a general picture of participation in primary education across all grades, but they do not give a sense of student progression and retention over the course of primary school. For example, a country where a large proportion of children enter the first grade of primary school but then drop out before completing primary education could have the same adjusted net primary enrolment rate as a country where a low proportion of children enrol in Grade 1 but then remain in school until completion of primary education.

### **Retention in primary school**

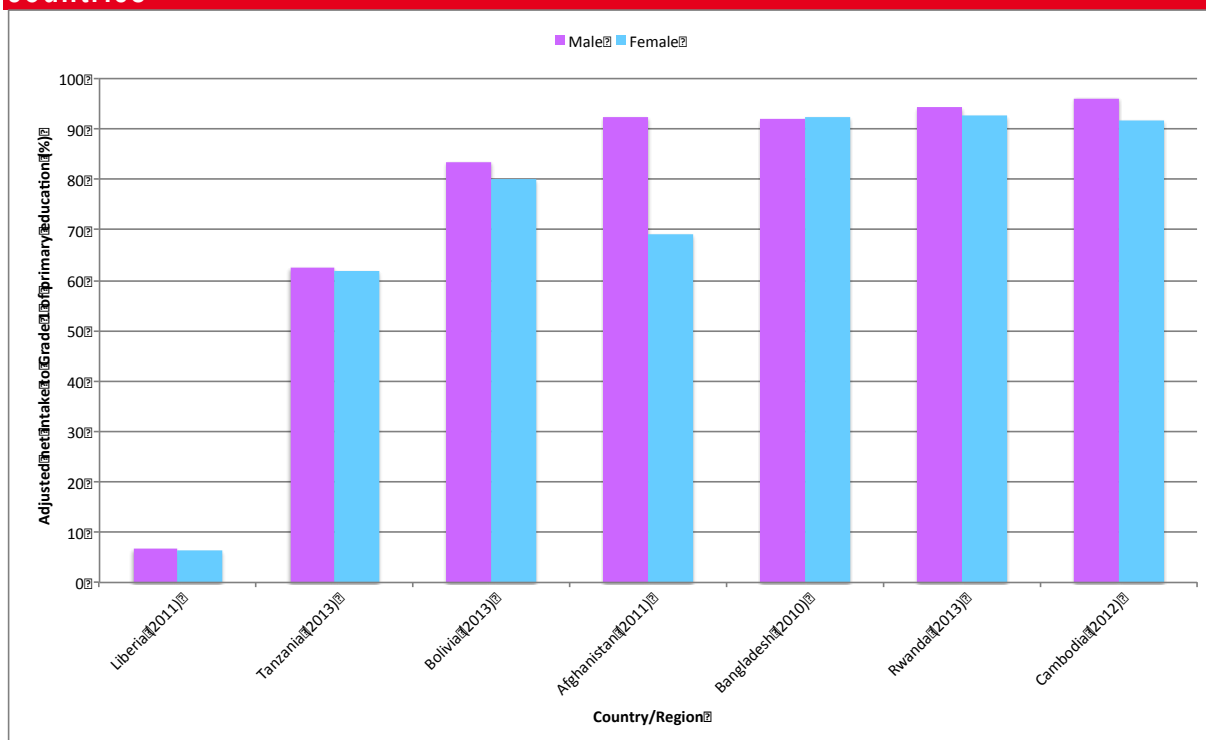
To track individuals' retention in primary education from the time they begin primary school to the time they leave, it is useful to compare enrolments in Grade 1 to enrolments in the last grade of primary school. The 'net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary education' is defined as the total number of new entrants in the first grade of primary education who are of the official primary school entrance age, expressed as a percentage of the total population of the same age (UIS, 2009: 6). It reflects the level of enrolments at Grade 1 by children of primary school entrance age and therefore acts as a baseline for tracking children's progress through primary education. To get a sense of student retention through primary school, the net intake rate to Grade 1 should be considered alongside the 'survival rate to the last grade of primary education', which estimates the proportion of children entering grade 1 that are expected to reach the last grade of primary education (UIS, 2009: 14).<sup>28</sup> Survival rates close to 100% indicate a high degree of retention and a low incidence of dropout over the course of primary education.

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<sup>28</sup> Data on enrolments for each grade of primary education are not available. Therefore, the survival rate to the last grade of primary education is the best indicator of student retention or, conversely, dropout.

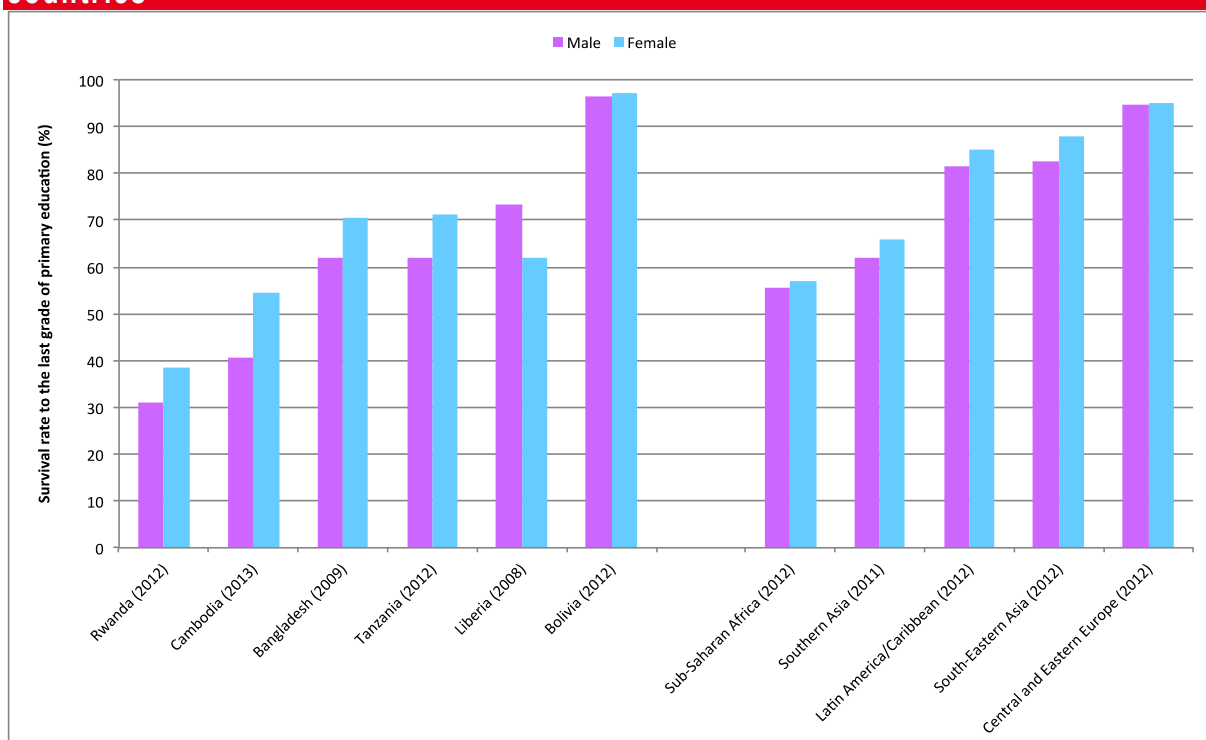
Figures A.2 and A.3 display the net intake rates to Grade 1 and the survival rates to the last grade of primary school, respectively, for Sida partner countries and their corresponding regions. The countries fall into four main categories. First, Rwanda and Cambodia have very high adjusted net intake rates to Grade 1 – over 90% of children of the official primary school entrance age in these countries enrol in Grade 1 – but very low survival rates during primary school. Less than 40% of students of the official age enrolled in first grade in Rwanda reach the final grade of primary school, while only around half of Grade 1 students in Cambodia reach the last grade of primary school. Second, Liberia has the lowest net intake rates to Grade 1 among the Sida partner countries - less than 10% of primary school entrance aged children in Liberia enrol in the first grade – but one of the highest primary school survival rates – around two-thirds of children that begin primary school progress to the final grade. Third, Bangladesh and Tanzania have fairly high survival rates (around 65%) during primary education but very different net intake rates: over 90% of children of the official primary school entrance age in Bangladesh are enrolled in Grade 1, but only 63% in Tanzania are. Fourth, Bolivia has the highest primary school retention rate among Sida partner countries: a substantial proportion (over 80%) of children join Grade 1 at the appropriate age and a large percentage (over 95%) remain enrolled through to the last grade of primary school. Accurate and complete information on dropout rates are not available for Afghanistan. However, two observations may be made based on the available data regarding primary school access and retention in that country: (1) a high percentage (92%) of boys but a much lower proportion (69%) of girls join Grade 1 of primary school at the appropriate age; and (2) only 44% of girls, compared to 68% of boys, graduate from primary school (UIS data).

**Figure A.2 – Net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary education in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

**Figure A.3 – Survival rate to the last grade of primary education in Sida partner countries**

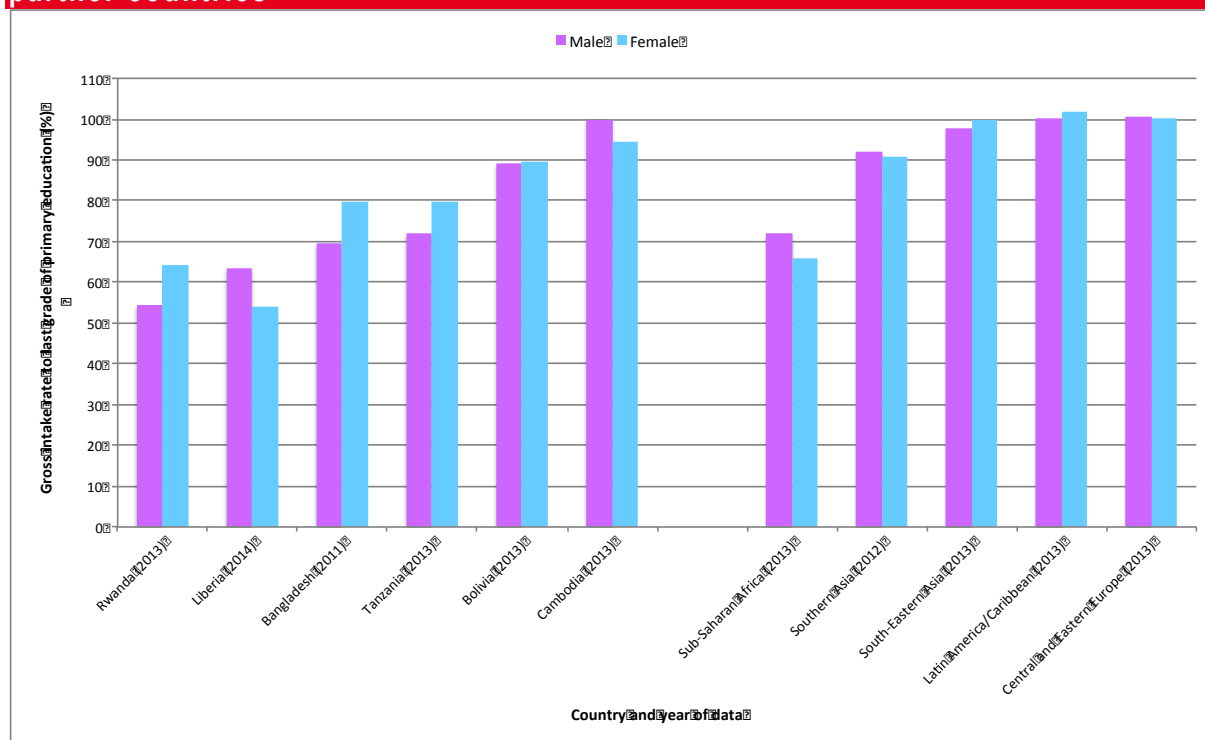


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics



As a result of high dropouts, Rwanda's gross intake rate to the last grade of primary education – defined as the number of new entrants in the last grade of primary education, regardless of age, divided by the population at the theoretical entrance age to the last grade of primary school (UIS, 2009: 38) – is around the same (roughly 59%) as that of Liberia, which has one of the world's lowest primary school enrolment rates (see Figures A.1, A.2 and A.4).<sup>29</sup> Bolivia, with the second lowest net primary enrolment rate among the Sida partner countries, has the second highest gross intake rate to the last grade of primary education as a result of its low dropout rates. These trends illustrate the importance of minimising dropouts as a means of improving educational retention and attainment.

**Figure A.4 – Gross intake rate to the last grade of primary education in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that the data displayed in Figure 4 is calculated on a 'gross' basis – in other words, the measure includes all new entrants to the last grade of primary education, regardless of their age and can therefore exceed 100%, due to early or late entrants to primary school or grade repetition. Grade repetition, like late entry, is positively associated with dropout (Brophy, 2006: 4).

Viewing primary school access and retention patterns from a gender perspective highlights the following trends. First, in most Sida partner countries and regions, gender disparities are not so pronounced at the entry point to primary education (as represented by the adjusted net intake rate to Grade 1) as they are after students have begun primary education (as expressed by the adjusted net primary enrolment rate). However, countries differ in terms of which sex has greater access to educational opportunities at primary school level. Boys are more likely than girls to enter Grade 1 at the appropriate age in Afghanistan, Bolivia, Cambodia and Liberia, whereas girls are more likely to enter Grade 1 at the appropriate age in Tanzania and Bangladesh. In Rwanda, girls and boys have equal – and high (97%) – access to primary education at the official entrance age. Second, more males than females drop out over the course of primary education (that is, do not survive until the last grade) in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Tanzania, whereas more females than males drop out during primary school in Liberia and Afghanistan. Bolivia has not only the highest survival rates from Grade 1 to the last grade of primary school, but also the most gender-balanced retention rates at that level of education. Third, the net effect of these processes is that, by the last grade of primary education, there are proportionately more female than male students in Tanzania, Bangladesh and Rwanda, but proportionately more male than female students in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Liberia.<sup>30</sup> Only in Bolivia is there a virtual gender balance, as well as a high gross intake rate, of male and female students in the last grade of primary school.

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<sup>30</sup> The disparity between dropouts and the resulting intake rate in Cambodia may be explained by data discrepancies and/or by the characteristics of over-aged or under-aged students in the system.

## When dropout occurs during primary school

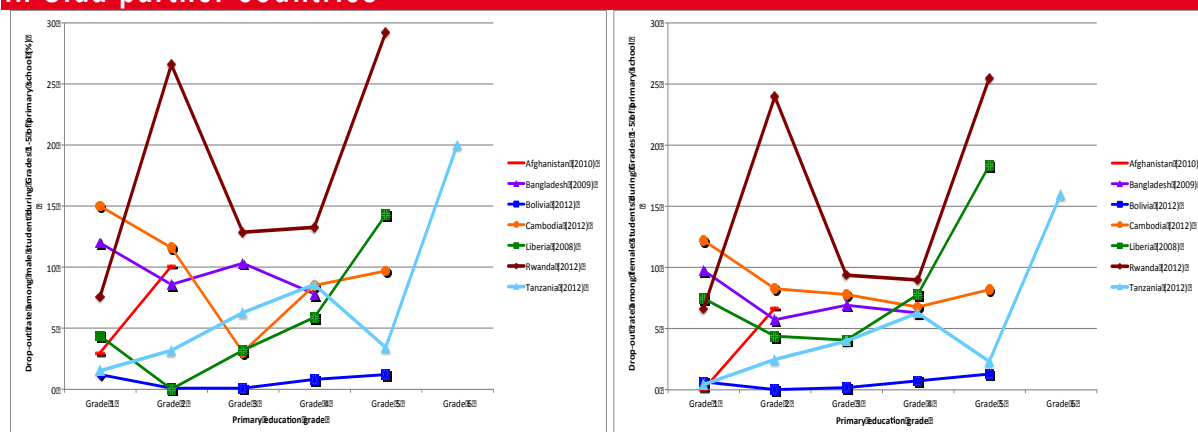
Thus far the discussion has focused on dropout (or, conversely, survival) rates across primary education, rather than pinpointing when students tend to drop out during primary school. Figure A.5 displays dropout rates, disaggregated by grade, in primary education among male (left graph) and female (right graph) students in the Sida partner countries.<sup>31</sup> It shows that there is no discernible pattern of dropout across all of the countries, but that some countries share similar traits. In Cambodia and Bangladesh, most students drop out of primary school in Grade 1. In Rwanda and Liberia, most drop out in Grade 5. In Tanzania, students exhibit a higher propensity for dropout in each succeeding year after Grade 1.<sup>32</sup> In Bolivia, a very small proportion of students drop out at all, and mainly in Grades 1, 4 and 5. In Afghanistan, data on dropouts is only available for Grades 1 and 2; however, dropouts are much higher in Grade 2 than in Grade 1. The trends for the Sida partner countries roughly follow patterns observed in other developing countries: across the developing world, dropouts tend to occur in Grade 1, owing to a high proportion of overage students (due to late entry) and/or students who are repeating that grade; they then fall during the middle years of primary school and rise again towards the end of primary school, especially in countries with high-stakes examinations that take place in the last grade (Sabates et al, 2010: 2-5).

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<sup>31</sup> Two issues should be noted regarding the data shown in Figure A.5. First, the length of the primary school cycle differs across the countries: primary school in Bangladesh lasts 5 years, in Tanzania 7 years, and in all of the other Sida partner countries (including Afghanistan) 6 years. Second, the data needs to be treated with caution, since it represents single-year values and is not available for every year for every country. For example, Liberia has produced this data only once over the past 20 years. Nevertheless, the data provides relevant insights into patterns of retention across the countries.

<sup>32</sup> The decrease in the dropout rate in Grade 5 appears to be an outlier to the overall trend.

**Figure A.5 – Dropout rate in Grades 1-6 of primary education (male and female) in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Observing the patterns of dropouts from a gender perspective highlights the following trends (see Figure A.5):

- In Rwanda, male and female dropout rates are not so different from one another in Grade 1 of primary school, but from Grade 2 onwards male dropout rates exceed female dropout rates by 3-4 percentage points.
- In Liberia, dropout rates among female students are higher than among male students across all five grades of primary education.
- In Cambodia, more boys than girls drop out of Grades 1 and 2, and then patterns change, so that each sex is nearly as likely as the other to drop out in Grades 4 and 5.
- In Bangladesh, boys have a higher propensity than girls to drop out during every grade in primary education.
- In Tanzania, boys have higher dropout rates than girls throughout primary school.
- In Bolivia, boys and girls have an equal – and low – tendency for dropout.
- In Afghanistan, boys are more likely than girls to drop out of Grades 1 and 2. However, comparing Afghanistan's gross graduation rate from primary school against its net intake rate to Grade 1 (see Figure A.2), it is clear that a higher proportion of females than males drop out prior to completion of primary education.

As will be seen in the next subsection, patterns of retention at primary education level affect retention rates at secondary education level.

## PATTERNS OF ACCESS AND RETENTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Access to secondary education is premised on completion of primary education. However, not all students who complete primary school enrol in secondary school programmes – sometimes because they choose not to, and sometimes because external factors prevent them from doing so. Exiting the education system after completing primary school is not usually considered as dropping out. However, in a sense it is the same thing, since individuals leave the education system before completing secondary school. In today's complex globalised environment, a secondary education is widely regarded as the minimum level required for securing and maintaining productive employment, which is the main route for escaping poverty and contributing meaningfully to the economy and society. Therefore, retention through to completion of secondary education is increasingly vital.

### **Access to lower secondary school**

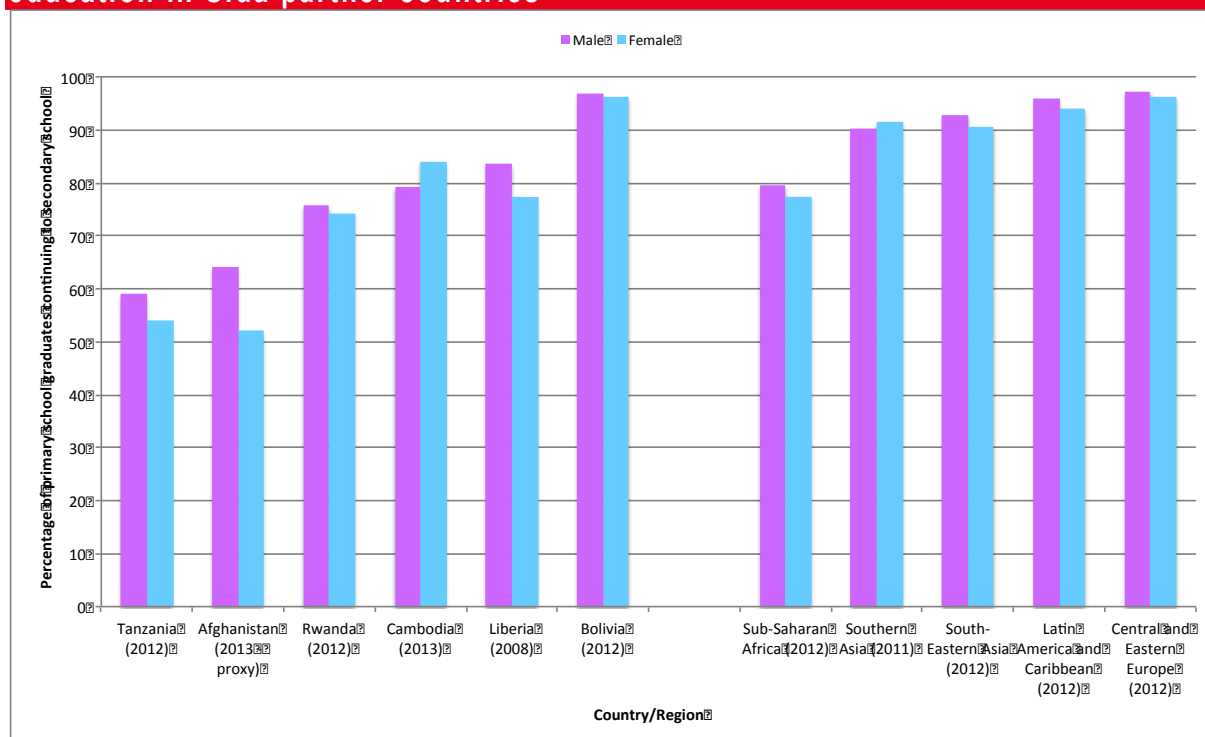
To determine what proportion of students remain in education after primary school, it is useful to examine the 'effective transition rate from primary to secondary general education', which is defined as the number of students admitted to the first grade of lower secondary school, expressed as a percentage of the number of students enrolled in the final grade of primary school during the previous year, minus any grade repeaters (UIS, 2009: 8). This indicator provides a gauge of access and retention through to secondary education. A high transition rate indicates widespread access to secondary education, while a low transition rate signals that there are problems in retaining students after primary school, due to inadequate capacity at secondary education level, restrictive entry requirements to secondary education or other factors.

Figure A.6 displays the primary to secondary transition rate for the Sida partner countries and their corresponding regions.<sup>33</sup> It indicates that the countries fall into three categories in terms of student retention to secondary education level. In the first category of countries, most primary school completers progress to secondary school. In Bolivia and Bangladesh (which is not shown in Figure 6, because sex-disaggregated data on primary to secondary transition rates is not available for that country), 95% or more of students enrolled in the last grade of primary school continue on to secondary education. In the second category, a large majority of students progress from primary to secondary education, but a significant proportion do not. In Liberia, Cambodia and Rwanda, more than three-quarters of final-year primary school students remain in education to secondary school level. Tanzania and Afghanistan fall into the third category, characterised by low primary to secondary transition rates. Only just over half of all students who reach the final grade of primary school in Tanzania and Afghanistan enrol in secondary education. The primary to secondary transition rate in both countries is much lower than the average rate for the sub-Saharan Africa region, which in turn is lower than that for other regions. Rwanda and Cambodia also exhibit lower-than-average retention rates for their region.

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<sup>33</sup> Data on this indicator is not available for Afghanistan. However, a proxy transition rate has been calculated for the country by dividing the country's gross lower secondary enrolment rate in 2013 by its gross primary enrolment rate for the same year. This proxy transition rate is displayed in Figure A.6.

**Figure A.6 – Effective transition rate from primary to secondary general education in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Patterns of retention to secondary education level appear to be linked to patterns of dropout at primary school level. The two countries with the highest dropout rates towards the end of primary school – Rwanda and Tanzania – have the lowest primary to secondary transition rates. The countries with the greatest success in containing dropouts after Grade 1 – that is, Bolivia and Bangladesh – have the highest retention rates. Cambodia and Liberia are situated between these two sets of countries, since dropout rates in both countries fall after Grade 1 but then rise towards the end of primary education.

Applying a gender lens to examine which sex has greater access to secondary education, it appears that proportionately more male than female primary school students progress to secondary education in Afghanistan, Tanzania, Liberia, and Rwanda, while proportionately more female students than male students remain in education until secondary education level in Cambodia (see Figure 6). In Bolivia, male and female students have nearly equal access to secondary education, although there is a slight gender disparity in favour of males. In other words, although males are more likely than females to drop out *during* primary education (in 4 of the 7 Sida partner countries), females are more likely than males to leave the education system *after* primary school, or at least towards the end of primary school (in 5 of the 7 Sida partner countries). Only in Cambodia and Bangladesh are females more likely than males to transition to secondary education.

The impact of these trends on student enrolments at lower secondary level can be seen by observing the ‘gross intake rate to Grade 1 of lower secondary general education’, defined as the number of new entrants in the first grade of lower secondary school, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the theoretical entrance age for that grade of education (UIS, 2009). Figure A.7 displays data for this indicator for the Sida partner countries.<sup>34</sup> It shows that, because Bolivia and Bangladesh are able to retain a large proportion of final-year primary school students in secondary education, their gross intake rates to Grade 1 of lower secondary school are quite high, nearing 100% for Bolivia.<sup>35</sup> Cambodia’s gross intake rate to Grade 1 of lower secondary school is also fairly high, owing mainly to high student enrolments during primary education, rather than to high transition rates per se. At the other end of the spectrum, Tanzania’s failure to retain many primary school students in education means that it has a very low intake rate (less than 50%) to Grade 1 of lower secondary school. Liberia and Rwanda also have low intake rates to Grade 1 of lower secondary education – Liberia because of its low initial starting point for primary school enrolments (see Figure A.1) and Rwanda because of high student dropouts, both during primary education and in the transition to secondary education. Despite the higher propensities of female students to exit the education system before reaching lower secondary school, in every Sida partner country except Liberia (and, to a lesser extent, Bolivia), females have higher lower secondary enrolment rates than males.<sup>36</sup>

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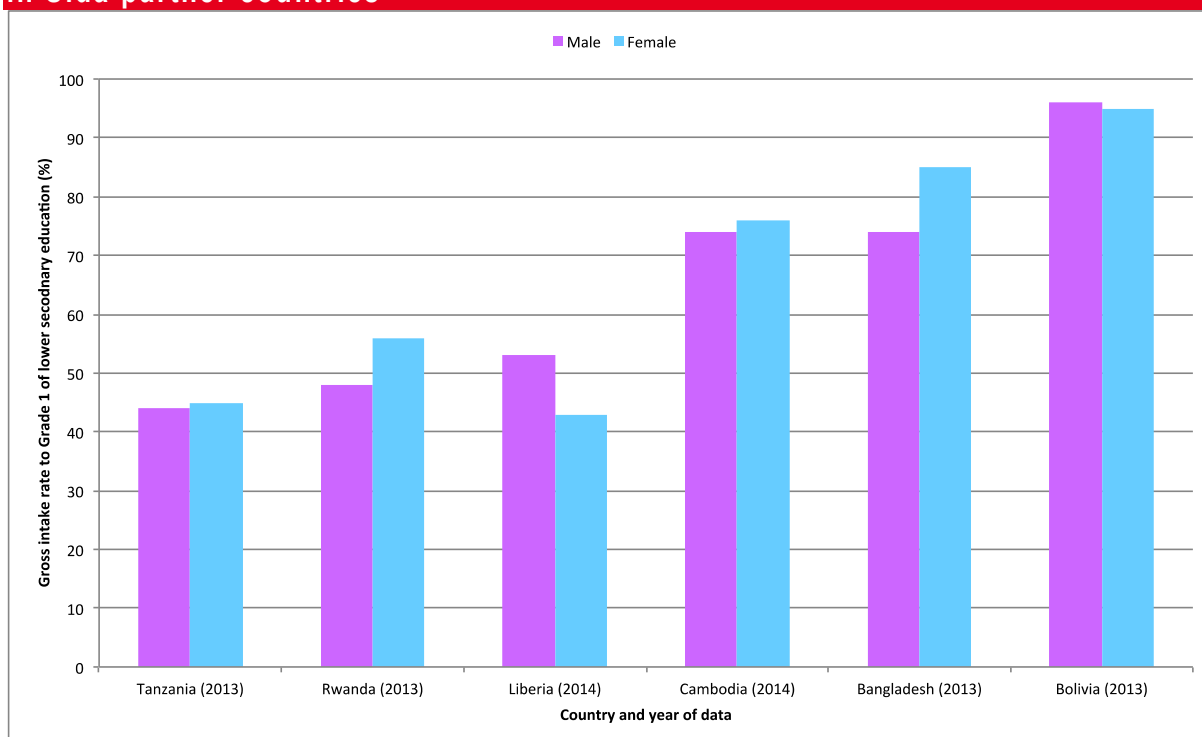
<sup>34</sup> Data on this indicator is not available for Afghanistan.

<sup>35</sup> Again, it should be noted that the data is calculated on a ‘gross’ basis and can therefore exceed 100%.

<sup>36</sup> High male dropouts during primary education and prior to the start of secondary education explain why gender disparities in favour of male students in Cambodia disappear by lower secondary education level.



**Figure A.7 – Gross intake rate to Grade 1 of lower secondary general education in Sida partner countries**

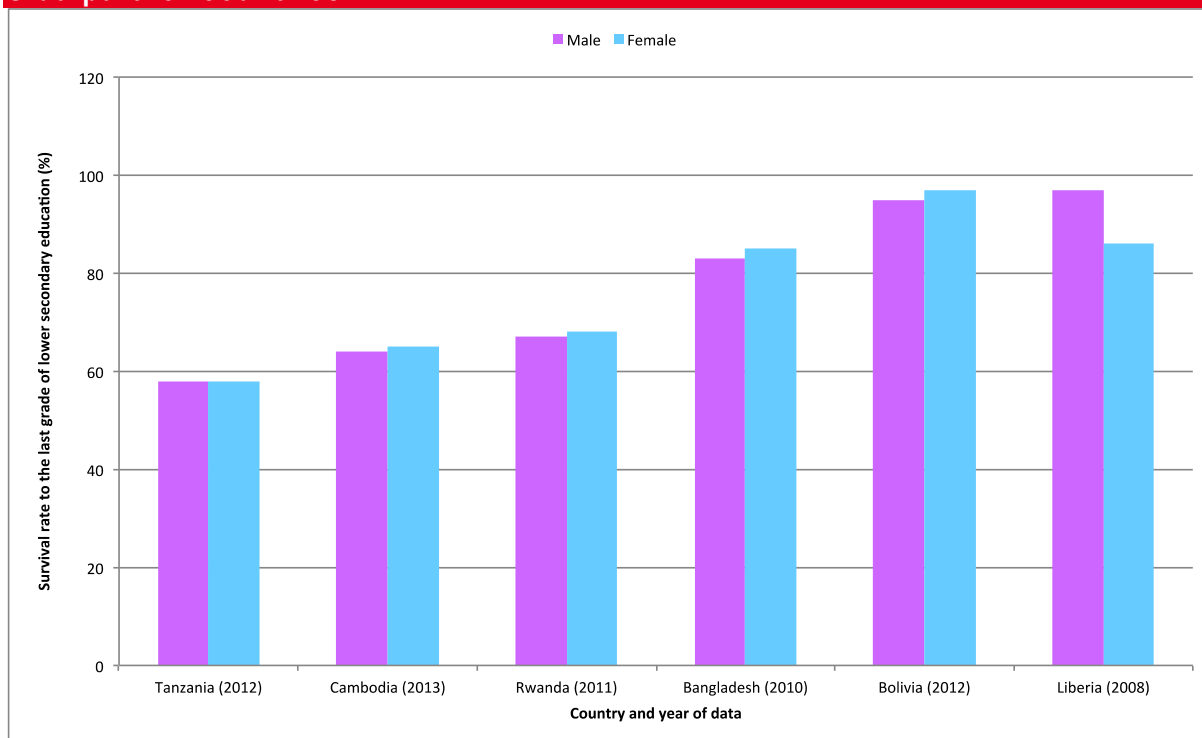


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

### Retention in lower secondary school

The dropout rate between Grade 1 and the last grade of lower secondary school varies across the Sida partner countries (see Figure A.8). Bolivia and Liberia have fairly low dropout rates: more than 90% of students in both countries remain in lower secondary school until their final year. Bangladesh also has a fairly low dropout rate: more than 80% of students who begin lower secondary school reach the last grade. By contrast, Tanzania, Cambodia and Rwanda have high dropout rates: one-third or more of students leave lower secondary school before completion. Because data regarding dropouts during lower secondary school are not available on a grade-disaggregated basis, it is not known at which point in the cycle students in these countries tend to drop out. Data on dropouts at lower secondary level are also not available for Afghanistan, so retention rates in that country are inferred by examining the gross graduation rate. In 2014, 52% of males but only 30% of females graduated from lower secondary school in Afghanistan, suggesting low and uneven retention rates (UIS data).

**Figure A.8 – Survival rate to the last grade of lower secondary education in Sida partner countries**

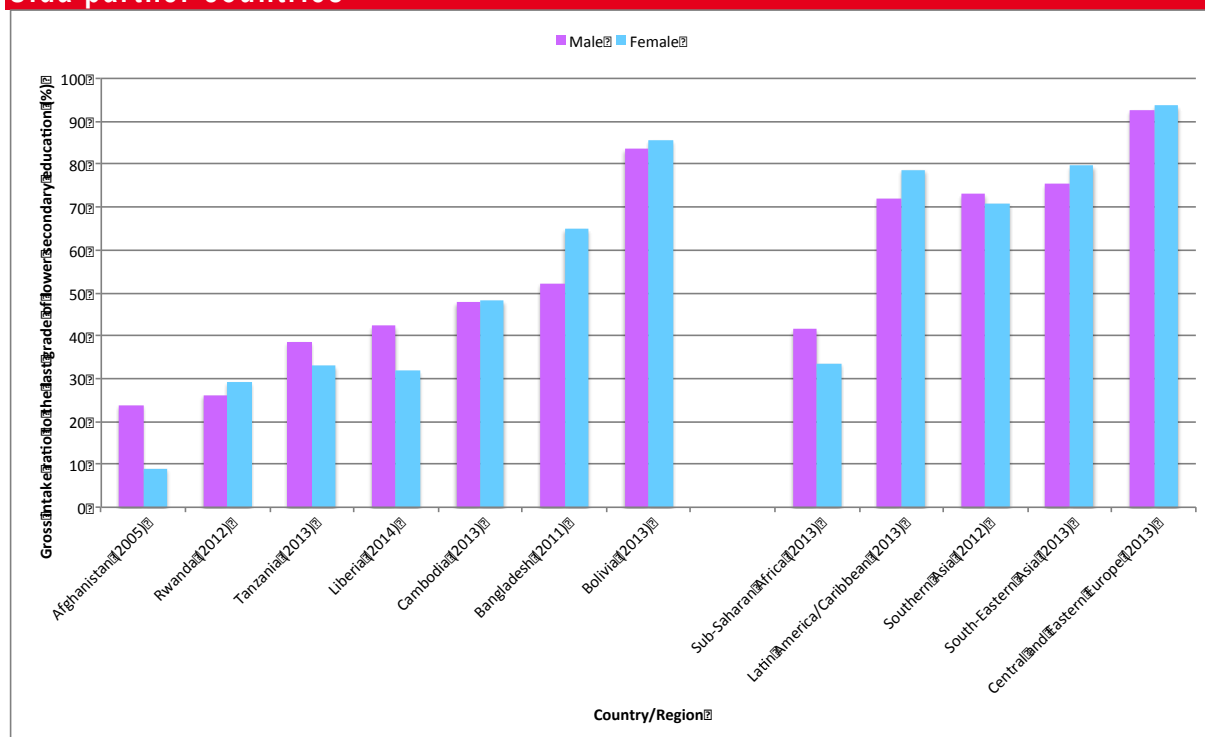


Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Apart from Liberia and Afghanistan, male and female students exhibit roughly the same propensities for dropout during lower secondary education. However, male students have a marginally greater inclination to drop out than female students in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Cambodia and Rwanda. In Liberia and Afghanistan, sex differences in the dropout rate during lower secondary school are large. In Liberia, female students are 11 percentage points more likely to drop out than male students. In Afghanistan, male students are 22 percentage points more likely to graduate than female students.

As a result of high dropouts, less than one-third of young people that begin lower secondary school in Rwanda and Tanzania, and only around one-half in Cambodia and Bangladesh, reach the last grade of lower secondary school (see Figure A.9). Intake rates to the last grade of lower secondary school are very low in Afghanistan: just 25% for males and less than 10% for females. Liberia also has a low gross intake rate to the last grade of lower secondary education, which is explained by its low initial enrolment rates, rather than by high dropouts during lower secondary education. By contrast, in Bolivia, a significant proportion (over 80%) of young people that begin lower secondary school progress to the last grade.

**Figure A.9 – Gross intake rate to the last grade of lower secondary education in Sida partner countries**



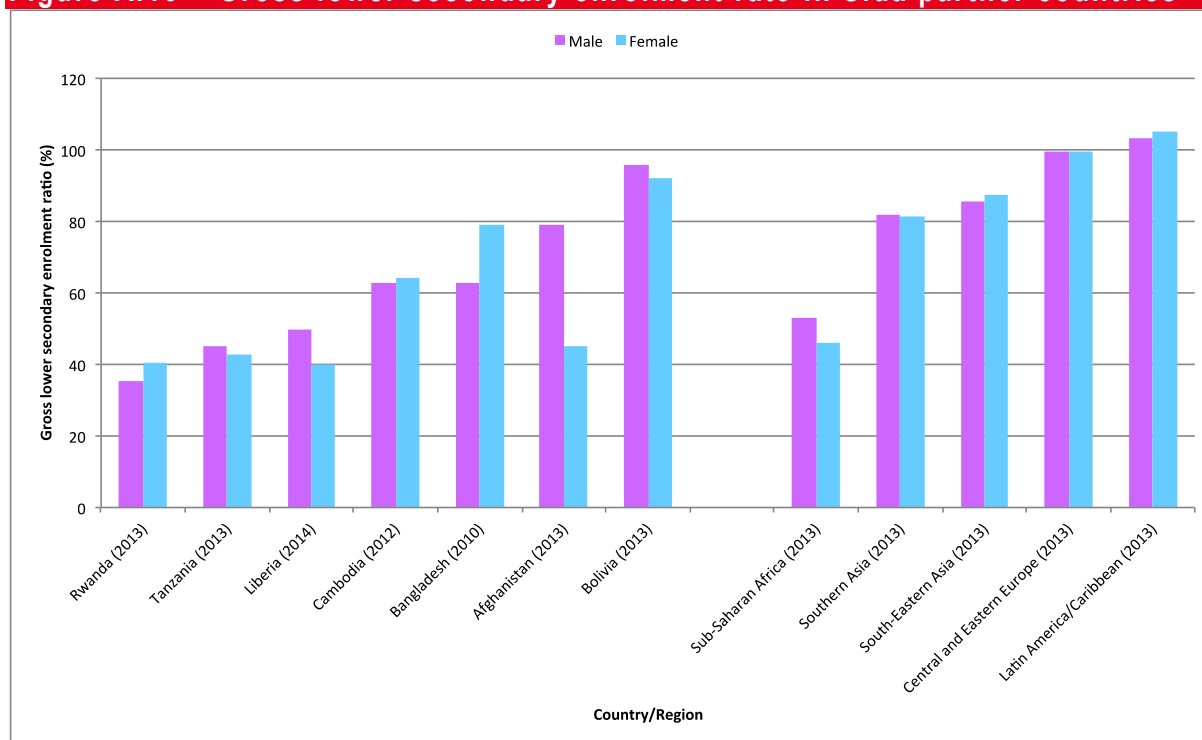
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Given that dropouts during lower secondary school occur in a fairly gender-balanced way in most Sida partner countries, the distribution of enrolments across the sexes is roughly the same in the last grade of lower secondary school as in the first grade, with a gender disparity in favour of females. The main exceptions here are Liberia and Afghanistan, where young women are more likely than young men to drop out.<sup>37</sup> In Liberia, gender disparities at the start of lower secondary school increase during the lower secondary cycle as a result of higher dropouts among female students than among male students, producing a 10 percentage point difference between male and female intake rates to the last grade of lower secondary school. In Afghanistan, the gap between males and females is even wider, and there are roughly three males to every female by the last grade of lower secondary school. In Bangladesh and Rwanda, gender disparities in lower secondary enrolments, which are evident in Figures A.9 and A.10 as well as in Table A.1, represent the cumulative effects of uneven dropout patterns prior to, rather than during, lower secondary school. In both countries, gender disparities in gross lower secondary enrolments have become more extreme over time, rather than narrowing as in other Sida partner countries and regions (see Table A.1).

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<sup>37</sup> The gender disparity in favour of males that is apparent for Tanzania in Figure 9 is likely explained by data discrepancies and/or the demographic characteristics of over-aged or under-aged students enrolled at that level of education. After all, the gender parity index of gross lower secondary enrolments for Tanzania is close to 1 (see Table 1 and Figure 10).

**Figure A.10 – Gross lower secondary enrolment rate in Sida partner countries**



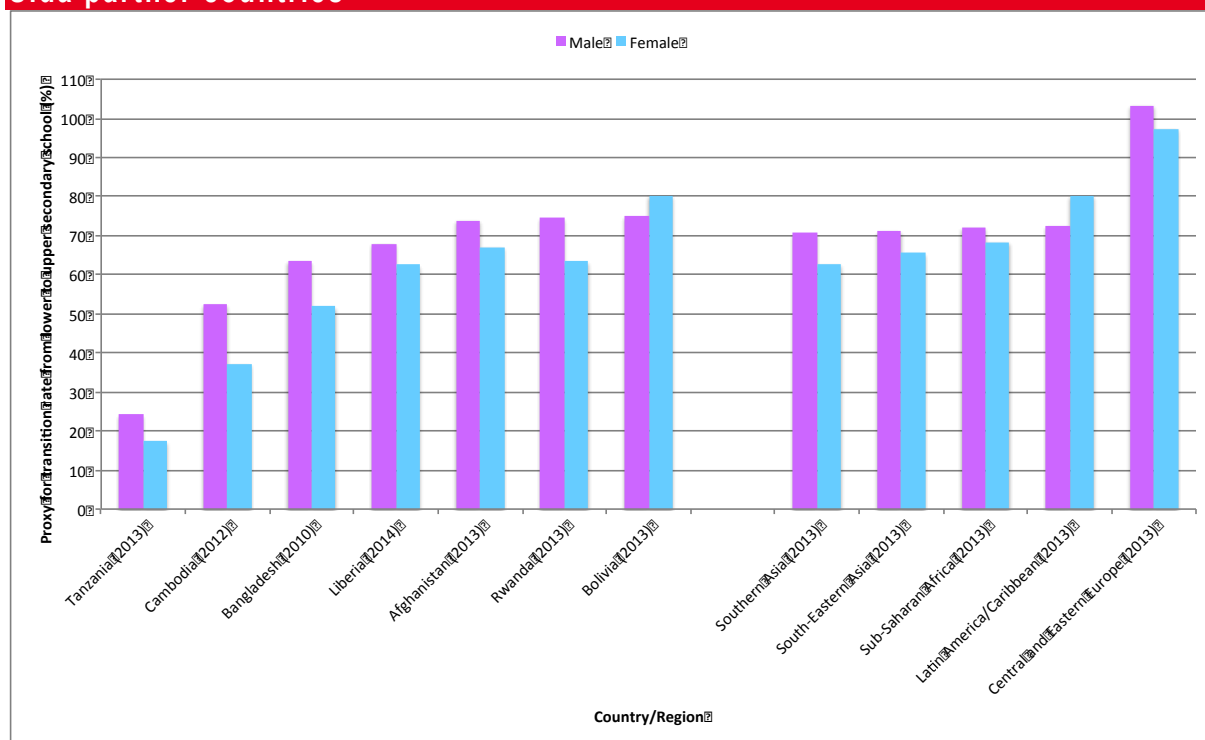
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

### Access to upper secondary school

It is not known with certainty what percentage of students is retained from lower to upper secondary education in the Sida partner countries, because data on lower to upper secondary transition rates are not published. However, a proxy transition rate may be calculated by dividing countries' gross upper secondary enrolment rates by their gross lower secondary enrolment rates. This proxy transition rate is displayed in Figure A.11 for the seven Sida partner countries, as well as for the regions to which they belong.

The data shown in Figure A.11 suggests that the Sida partner countries fall into three broad categories in terms of their retention of students to upper secondary education level. In four countries – Bolivia, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Liberia – a large majority (two-thirds or more) of students that reach the last grade of lower secondary school continue their studies at upper secondary level. In one country (Bangladesh), a small majority (just over half) of final-year lower secondary school students progress to upper secondary education. In two countries (Cambodia and Tanzania), only a minority of students enrolled in lower secondary school continue on to upper secondary education. The lower to upper secondary transition rate in Tanzania is very low, only around 20%.

**Figure A.11 – Proxy transition rate from lower to upper secondary education in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

Male students tend to have greater access to upper secondary education than female students. In every Sida partner country, apart from Bolivia, young men are at least 7 percentage points more likely than young women to progress from lower to upper secondary education (see Figure A.11). The gender disparities in favour of women in Bolivia are not so pronounced as those for men in the other Sida partner countries. Young Bolivian women are 5 percentage points more likely than young Bolivian men to progress from lower to upper secondary school – a much narrower gap than in the countries where males have preferential access to upper secondary education.

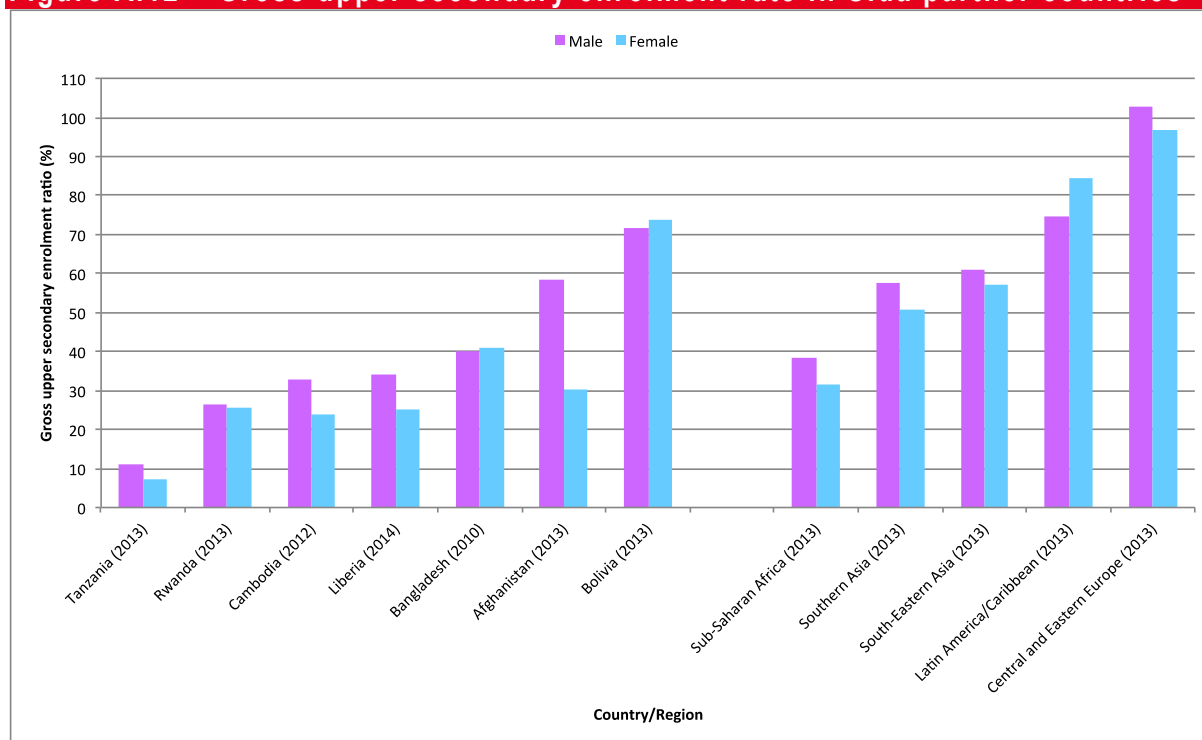
The impact of these transition patterns on student enrolments in upper secondary school is evident from examining Figure A.12, which displays the gross upper secondary enrolment rates for Sida partner countries and their corresponding regions.<sup>38</sup> The data highlights two trends. First, the level of enrolments in upper secondary education is low in every Sida partner country. Gross upper secondary enrolment rates in all of the countries, including Bolivia, fall below the average rate for their region, and four countries – Tanzania, Rwanda, Cambodia and Liberia – have rates below the average for the Sub-Saharan Africa region, the worst-performing region on this indicator. Only in Bolivia do gross upper secondary enrolment rates exceed 50%.

Second, only three Sida partner countries (Bolivia, Bangladesh and Rwanda) have achieved relative gender parity in gross upper secondary enrolments. In the other countries (Tanzania, Cambodia, Liberia and Afghanistan), males are more likely than females to be enrolled in upper secondary school programmes. Whether this disparity in access to upper secondary education is a consequence of unequal entry into upper secondary school, as represented by the proxy transition rates shown in Figure A.11, or of disproportionately higher dropouts among female students during upper secondary school, or both, is not known, since data on survival rates to the last grade of upper secondary education is not available. However, an examination of trends in the gender parity index of gross upper secondary enrolments from 2000 to 2013 (see Table A.1) suggests that gender disparities in access to upper secondary education have narrowed in Afghanistan, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Rwanda and Cambodia, while they have widened over time in Liberia and Tanzania, increasing the gap between males and females in terms of opportunities to study at upper secondary level. Despite improvements, a gap of 9 percentage points still exists between male and female gross upper secondary enrolments in Cambodia, and the gap is even wider (28 percentage points) in Afghanistan (see Figure A.12).

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<sup>38</sup> Data on gross intake rates to the first year of upper secondary education are not available; hence, the gross enrolment rate is the most useful measure for assessing enrolment patterns at upper secondary level.

**Figure A.12 – Gross upper secondary enrolment rate in Sida partner countries**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

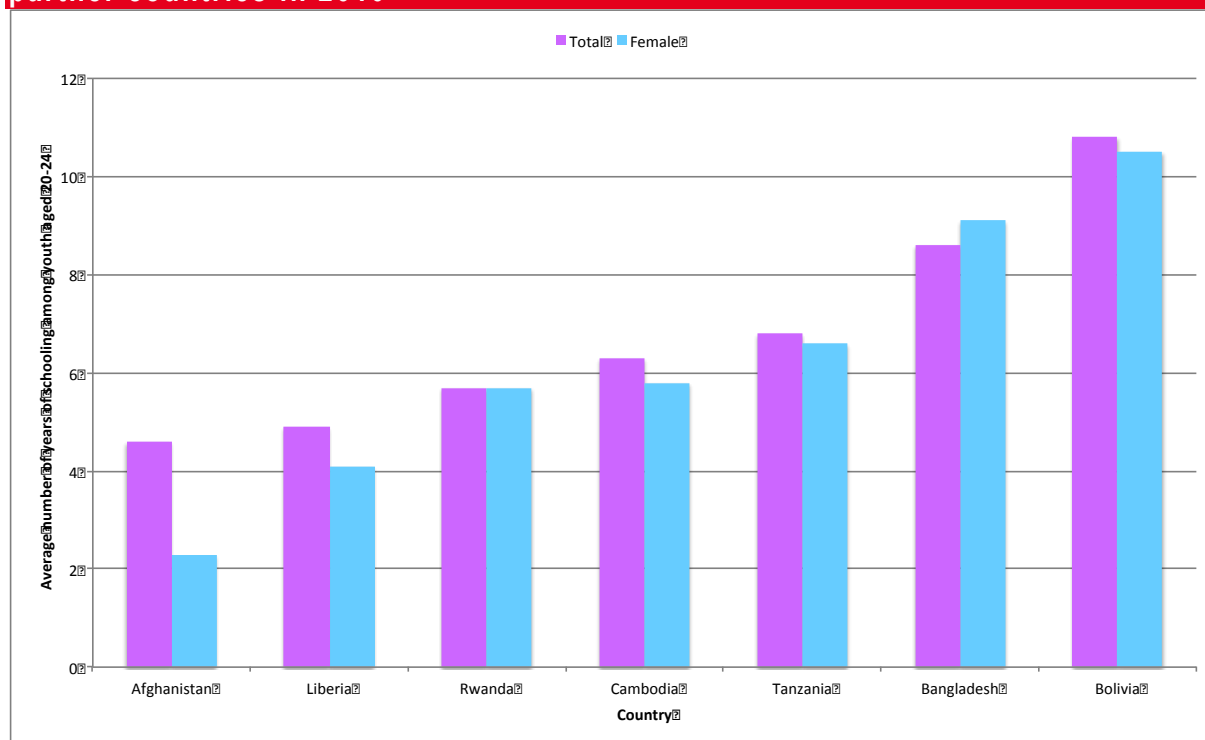
### Retention in upper secondary school

It is not known what percentage of students that begin upper secondary school reach the final grade (or, indeed, graduate), because data on gross intake rates to the last grade of upper secondary education or on gross graduation rates at upper secondary level are not available. Hence, the best way to assess whether young people routinely remain in education until the end of upper secondary school is to observe data on average years of schooling. The World Bank publishes this data for specific population ranges, pertaining to individuals aged 15-19, 20-24, 25+ and 15+. For the purposes of this analysis, the population aged 20-24 constitutes the most relevant age range, since by that time most young people would have completed secondary education, so long as they remain in education without dropping out or taking a break in their studies. Using the younger age range would not make sense, since most individuals at the lower end of the range (15 years of age) would not yet have completed upper secondary education. Using one of the age ranges covering older populations would also not make sense, since the data would reflect historical, rather than current, educational trends.



Figure A.13 displays the average years of schooling among youth aged 20-24 in the Sida partner countries. The data does not perfectly reflect patterns of retention in education, because the ‘average years of schooling’ indicator includes individuals who have never gone to school, as well as those who have enrolled in education at primary and/or other levels. Out-of-school rates at primary and/or secondary education level are considerable in all of the Sida partner countries, but especially so in Afghanistan at both levels of education, in Liberia at primary level and in Tanzania at lower secondary level (see Table A.2). The bulk of out-of-school children in the Sida partner countries for which there is data have never been to school (see Figure A.14). While most (two-thirds or more) of these children will likely enrol in primary school in the future, the fact that 10% or more of girls in Liberia, Bangladesh and Cambodia and 11% of boys in Bangladesh will never go to school has a strong depressive effect on the average years of schooling in those countries. Similar issues likely affect trends in Afghanistan and Tanzania.

**Figure A.13 – Average years of schooling among population aged 20-24 in Sida partner countries in 2010**



Source: World Bank World DataBank, Education Statistics, Barro-Lee dataset

**Table A.2 – Out-of-school rates at primary and lower secondary levels in Sida partner countries in 2013**

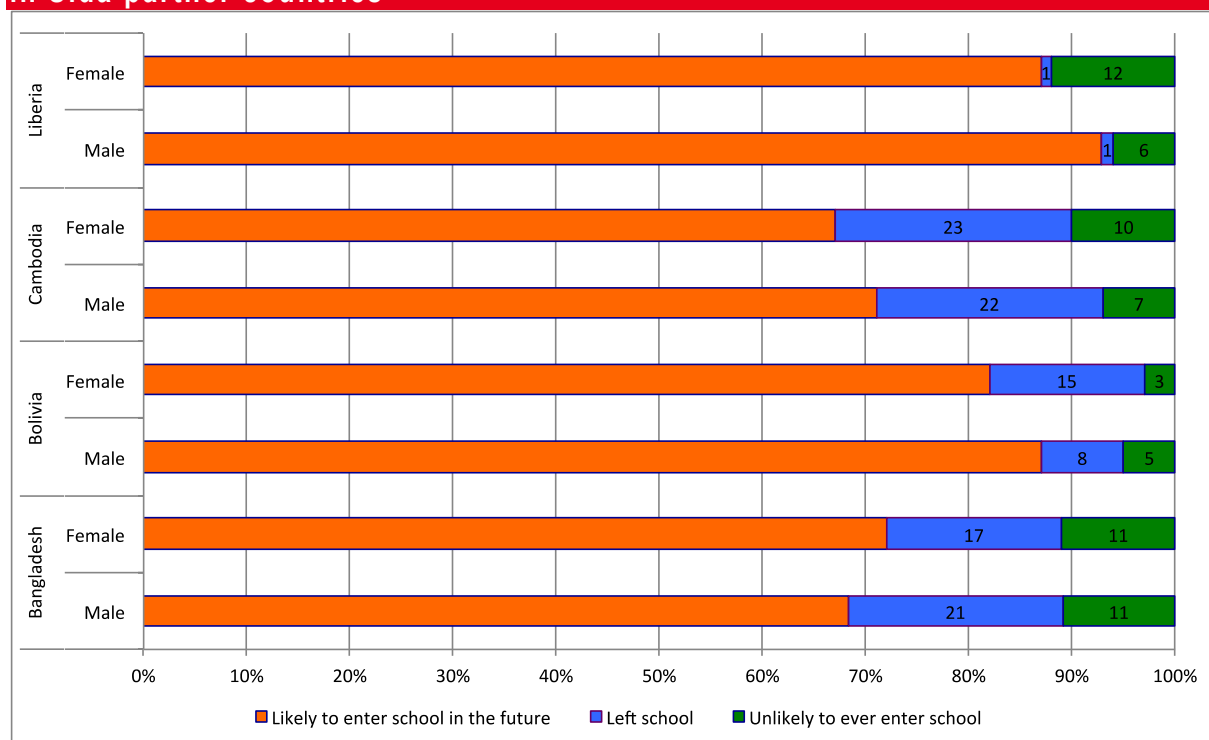
Country	Primary		Lower Secondary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Liberia*	67.0	71.0	18.9	26.8
Afghanistan*	34.6	51.9	36.2	63.4
Bolivia	3.0	3.0	8.8	9.5
Tanzania	16.9	14.0	37.8	45.9
Rwanda	7.9	5.4	18.2	17.7
Bangladesh*	11.0	11.0	29.9	14.6
Cambodia*	8.0	6.0	20.1	23.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	19.2	23.7	32.4	36.8
Latin America/Caribbean	6.6	6.4	7.0	6.5
Southern Asia	6.0	5.8	25.6	25.7
South-Eastern Asia	5.6	5.6	12.3	11.4
Central and Eastern Europe	4.1	3.7	3.7	3.9

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

\* Data shown is for reference year or closest available data year

Data shown in blue represents household survey data

**Figure A.14 – School exposure of out-of-school children of primary school age in Sida partner countries**



These issues partly explain why educational attainment across the Sida partner countries is low (see Figure A.13). In Afghanistan, Liberia and Rwanda, the average youth aged 20-24 does not complete 6 years of schooling, which is the length of primary school in the three countries. In Cambodia and Tanzania, the average youth completes between 6 and 7 years of schooling, which equates to primary school completion in Cambodia, but not in Tanzania.<sup>39</sup> However, in both countries the average woman aged 20-24 does not complete primary school. In Bangladesh, the average youth completes just below 9 years of education – which means that s/he completes lower secondary school and begins, but does not complete, upper secondary school.<sup>40</sup> Only in Bolivia does the average youth aged 20-24 complete more than 10 years of education – which means that s/he completes primary and lower secondary school, but not upper secondary school.<sup>41</sup>

Observing this data from a gender perspective shows that educational attainment levels are higher among males than among females in all of the Sida partner countries, apart from Bangladesh and Rwanda. In Rwanda young males and females have equivalent educational attainment profiles, while in Bangladesh young women remain in school for a half-year longer on average than young men. Afghanistan has the widest gender gap in educational outcomes among the Sida partner countries: the average Afghan male aged 20-24 has completed two years of schooling more than the average Afghan woman aged 20-24; however, in both cases, these individuals have completed less than 5 years of education.

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<sup>39</sup> Primary school lasts 7 years in Tanzania, but only 6 years in Cambodia.

<sup>40</sup> In Bangladesh, primary school lasts 5 years, lower secondary school 3 years, and upper secondary school 2 years.

<sup>41</sup> In Bolivia, primary school lasts 6 years, lower secondary school 2 years, and upper secondary school 4 years.

## SUMMARY

The conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that most young people in the Sida partner countries do not achieve the minimum level of education regarded as vital for escaping poverty and becoming economically and socially engaged – that is, completion of secondary education. In some cases this is due to a high level of dropouts, and in some cases it has more to do with a low level of initial enrolments. Table A.3 summarises the patterns of access and retention across the three stages of schooling (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary) covered in this section, to allow for an overall assessment of how far each of the Sida partner countries is affected by dropout and at what point in the educational cycle dropout occurs. These trends are also graphically illustrated in Figure 6 in the main text; however, the patterns for some countries (notably Liberia) are obscured in Figure 6 by low enrolment rates.

**Table A.3 – Patterns of educational access and retention in Sida partner countries**

<b>PRIMARY LEVEL</b>		<b>Net intake rate to Grade 1</b>		<b>Survival rate to last grade</b>		<b>Gross intake rate to last grade</b>		<b>Primary to secondary transition rate</b>	
Country/Region		Intake level (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured	Survival rate (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured	Intake level (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured	Level of access (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured
Bangladesh		High	Females (slight)	Medium	Females	Medium	Females	High	Females
Bolivia		Medium	Males	High	Gender parity	High	Gender parity	High	Males
Cambodia		High	Males	Low	Females	High	Males	Medium	Females
Liberia		Low	Males (slight)	Medium	Males	Low	Males	Medium	Males
Rwanda		High	Gender parity	Low	Females	Low	Females	Medium	Males
Tanzania		Medium	Females	Medium	Females	Medium	Females	Low	Males
<b>LOWER SECONDARY</b>		<b>Gross intake rate to Grade 7</b>		<b>Survival rate to last grade</b>		<b>Gross intake rate to last grade</b>		<b>Lower to upper secondary transition</b>	
Country/Region		Intake level (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured	Dropout level (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured	Intake level (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured	Level of access (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured
Bangladesh		Medium	Females	Medium	Females (slight)	Medium	Females	Medium	Males
Bolivia		High	Males (slight)	High	Females (slight)	High	Females	High	Females
Cambodia		Medium	Females	Low	Females (slight)	Medium	Gender parity	Low	Males
Liberia		Low	Males	High	Males	Low	Males	Medium	Males
Rwanda		Low	Females	Low	Females (slight)	Low	Females	Medium	Males
Tanzania		Low	Females	Low	Gender parity	Low	Males	Low	Males
<b>UPPER SECONDARY</b>		<b>Gross enrolment rate</b>							
Country/Region		Enrolment rate (high/med/low)	Gender disparity, group favoured						
Bangladesh		Low	Females (slight)						
Bolivia		Medium	Females (slight)						
Cambodia		Low	Males						
Liberia		Low	Males						
Rwanda		Low	Males (slight)						
Tanzania		Low	Males						

The patterns displayed in Table 3 and in Figure 6 in the main text may be summarised thus:

- In **Afghanistan**, fairly robust net intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, favouring males more than females, are eroded over time by high dropout rates, especially among females, and low retention rates, affecting girls/women more than boys/men. The net effect is a widening of gender disparities across levels of education and a very large male presence in upper secondary education amid low enrolments.

- In **Bangladesh**, a high and fairly gender-balanced net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary education is eroded over the course of primary school by high dropouts, which affect male students more than female students. Students that survive to the last grade of primary school have high access to lower secondary school, where dropout rates are much lower and more evenly distributed across the sexes. However, most students – in particular, female students – do not continue on to upper secondary school. The net effect of preferential male access to upper secondary education, following on from a greater female presence in primary and lower secondary education, is relative gender parity in enrolments at upper secondary level, but a low level of enrolments across both sexes.
- In **Bolivia**, fairly robust net intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, which favours males slightly more than females, are maintained throughout primary and secondary education owing to low dropout rates and high retention through to the end of lower secondary school. However, a significant proportion of lower secondary school students do not progress to upper secondary level education, and females make up a larger proportion than males of those that do continue their studies. Hence, there is a small gender disparity in favour of females in Bolivia's upper secondary enrolment profile.
- In **Cambodia**, high enrolment rates to Grade 1 of primary education, favouring males over females, are eroded over time by high dropout rates, affecting males more than females, especially during primary school. Greater retention of female students compared to male students at primary and lower secondary school levels is reversed in the run-up to upper secondary school level, when half of all males but two-thirds of all females exit the education system. The net effect is a greater male presence in upper secondary school amid a low level of enrolments.
- In **Liberia**, a very low intake rate to Grade 1 of primary school, slightly favouring males over females, is further eroded by high dropout rates, especially among females, and low retention of girls/women in education, resulting in a widening gender disparities over time. The net effect is a greater male presence in upper secondary education amid low enrolment rates.
- In **Rwanda**, a high and gender-balanced intake rate to Grade 1 of primary school is eroded over time by high dropouts among both male and female students, especially during primary school. Because male students have greater access to secondary education than female students, especially at upper secondary level, but are more likely to drop out at primary school level, gender disparities in education in Rwanda shift over time and virtually disappear by upper secondary school level. However, upper secondary enrolment rates are low for both sexes.

- In **Tanzania**, a fairly robust net intake rate to Grade 1 of primary school favouring females over males is eroded over time by high dropouts, especially among male students during primary school, and low retention of students during transitions between levels of education, especially affecting females. The net impact of these trends is a greater male presence in upper secondary education amid low enrolment rates.

These trends point to the need for the following interventions to improve educational outcomes in the Sida partner countries:

- In **Afghanistan**, there is a need to improve female intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, and to cut dropout rates, especially among females. Transition rates between levels of education also need to be improved, especially to retain more girls/women in education.
- In **Bangladesh**, there is a need to cut dropout rates, especially among males at primary school level, and boost transitions between lower and upper secondary education, especially among females.
- In **Bolivia**, there is a need to improve intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, especially among females, and improve transitions between lower and upper secondary education levels, especially among males.
- In **Cambodia**, there is a need to reduce dropouts, especially among males at primary school level, and improve transitions, especially among males between primary and secondary school level and among females between lower and upper secondary school levels.
- In **Liberia**, there is a need to drastically improve intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, especially among females, and reduce dropout rates, especially among females in primary school. Transition rates between levels of education also need to be improved, especially to retain more girls/women in education.
- In **Rwanda**, there is a need to cut dropout rates, especially among males in primary school, and improve transition rates between levels of education, especially among females between lower and upper secondary school levels.
- In **Tanzania**, there is a need to improve intake rates to Grade 1 of primary school, especially among males, and reduce dropout rates, especially among males at primary school level. There is also a need to drastically improve transitions between levels of education, especially among female students.



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