CHAPTER 2

Unravelling Multiple Dimensions of Gender in Seychelles

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Introduction

The dominant gender discourse in Seychelles is that the country does not have a serious gender problem and that both boys and girls have equal opportunities to perform well at school. This discourse is supported by impressive gross enrolment ratios (among the highest in Africa) for primary, secondary and tertiary education: the latter standing at 82.5 per cent as per the UNDP 2007/2008 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2008). The research on gender analysis of schools and classroom processes has provided the opportunity to look behind those figures and examine processes, structures and belief systems that show another reality: a reality where boys are underperforming and under-participating and where girls may be limiting their own life chances because of stereotypes and narrow definitions of femininity.

The research was carried out in four secondary schools on Mahé, the main island of Seychelles archipelago. It explored gendered notions of masculinity and femininity among adolescent boys and girls and male and female staff in school. It looked beyond attendance and examined whether boys and girls received equal treatment and support from teachers; had equal opportunities to participate in all spheres of school life; had equal access to all resources available; and performed according to their full potential.

The chapter summarises the findings from this research and concludes that (i) staff in state schools do not actively challenge the existing gender status quo, through lack of awareness, gender training and critical self-reflection, and (ii) there is insufficient leadership and commitment to gender at the school and ministry levels to question this and encourage greater gender equity.

Background

Country profile

The Republic of Seychelles is a small island state located between latitudes 3° and 7° south, and longitudes 45° and 56° east in the South-Western Indian Ocean. It is

made up of 115 islands scattered over an exclusive economic zone covering an area of 1.374 million square kilometres. The total land area is 455.3 square kilometres.

Seychelles attained independence from the British in 1976. Following a change of government in 1977, a one-party political system was adopted until 1992. In 1992, Seychelles became a multi-party democracy. The small economy (US$911 million GDP in 2007) is primarily dependent on tourism and fisheries, which provide most of the country's total foreign exchange earnings.

The comprehensive welfare state established since 1977, which was aimed at minimising income and gender disparities, and providing universal access to healthcare and education has ensured that Seychelles has social indicators comparable to many OECD countries and emerging market economies. It is ranked 50th on the United Nation's 2007/08 Human Development Index (the highest African country ranked) with an index of 0.843. Table 2.1 below shows the social indicators alongside countries of a similar per capita income.

Seychelles has met the targets for most of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In relation to MDG 2, Seychelles has achieved universal primary education. The literacy rate of youth (15–24) is 98 per cent and primary school completion rate is 100 per cent. There is 100 per cent school enrolment.

In relation to MDG 3, the proportion of seats held by women in parliament is 29.4 per cent, and the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education is 100 per cent. The ratio of young literate female to males in the age of 15–24 years is 99.4 per cent, among the highest in the developing world. Despite the tremendous improvement in the above-mentioned areas, women continue to have lower status jobs and they represent over 60 per cent of job seekers.

Seychelles' population is approximately 81,177, (2002 census) and is characterised by a slow growth rate, low births and low mortality. The total fertility rate has decreased from 2.7 in 1990 to 2.1 in 2000. The crude death rate has also decreased from 7.8 in 1990 to 6.8 in 2000. The population is of mixed origin mainly from African, Asian and European descent. There is a high degree of social cohesion among its people.

Table 2.1. Social indicators for Seychelles and comparators

	Barbados	*Seychelles*	*Mauritius*	*Cape Verde*	*Trinidad & Tobago*	*Fiji*	*Maldives*
Life expectancy	75.4	73	73	70.7	70	68.3	59
Infant mortality*	11	9.5	13	26	17	15.7	75
Under 5 mortality*	12	13	15	35	19	17.9	114
Literacy (%)	NA	96	NA	NA	98.4	NA	61
Primary completion (%)	100	100	97.5	81.4	NA	87	74

Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank (2008) (* per 1000 births)

Seychelles has three national languages: Creole, English and French. Creole, the mother tongue, is the medium of instruction in the early years of schooling. English is the language of government and business and becomes the medium of instruction in all major subjects from primary years 3 or 4 (P3 or P4). French is the third national language. It is taught as a language as from P1.

Education

Ministry of Education's mission statement

Seychelles has opted for an inclusive educational agenda, which is clearly defined in its official policy statement 'Education for a Learning Society', published in 2000.

> *'The mission of the Ministry of Education is to build a coherent and comprehensive system of quality education and training, reflecting shared universal and national values, which will promote the integrated development of the person and empower him/her to participate fully in social and economic development.'*

It is based on principles of equity, quality, accountability, education for empowerment, education for productivity, education for social cohesion and education for global participation.

The principle of equity is clearly defined as:

- Equality of access to compulsory education
- Equitable sharing of resources
- Equal opportunity/creating conditions for optimum achievement according to ability and career aspirations
- Ensuring that the context, content and medium of education are equally favourable to boys and girls
- Catering for special needs/working towards greater 'inclusion of the learning disabled'

Until 2002, the Ministry of Education had an active Gender in Education committee. It has also produced a Gender Action Plan (2002–2015) to respond to the 'Education For All' (EFA) goal 5, which aims to eliminate gender disparities and achieve gender equality in education by the year 2015.

The system: an overview

Education is a high government priority and represents 8.5 per cent of GDP. The state provides free, comprehensive co-educational schooling to all Seychellois children from the age of 3+ to 16+. Further and higher education after secondary school is available to all students who meet the criteria appropriate to the particular course of study or training for which the student applies.

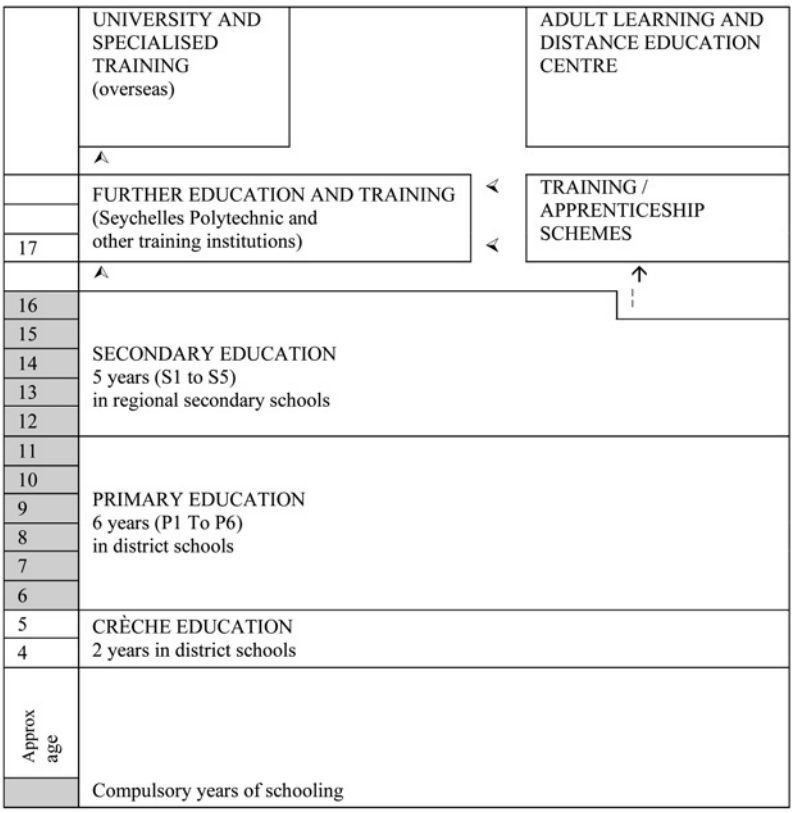


Figure 2.1. The structure of the education system

The country has a small private school system. After the restoration of a multi-party democracy in 1993, the government liberalised its policy on private schools, which started admitting Seychellois children. There are currently three private schools and approximately five per cent of the school population attend private primary/ secondary school.

Distribution of schools

All schools are located on four main granitic islands. Mahé, the main island, has about 88 per cent of the entire school population. Praslin has two primary schools and one secondary school. La Digue has one combined primary and secondary school. A small multi-grade school on Silhouette has 25 students in crèche and primary. Students have to come to Mahé for further education.

Student population

In 2006, the total number of students in full-time education stood at 21,483. The student:teacher ratio is **15:1** at crèche level, **13:1** at primary and secondary levels and **12:1** at post-secondary level.

Curriculum structure in state secondary schools

From secondary 1 to secondary 3, students follow a broad-based curriculum and are introduced to certain vocational subjects such as agriculture/fishing, construction/technology, social economics, art and design, and computer education. At upper secondary, S3 to S5, students follow a core programme of compulsory subjects such as English, French, maths, personal and social education (PSE), religion and physical education. In addition, students are offered a choice of subject groups in relation to their academic ability, career needs and interests.

Teacher population and training

Demand for teachers is high. Eighty-five per cent of teachers at crèche, primary and secondary levels are trained. Fifty-five per cent of teachers at secondary level hold a

Table 2.2. Count of schools, teachers and students (2006) including private schools

Type of School	*No. of Schools*	*No. of Teachers*	*No. of Students*
Crèche	32	186	2,823
Primary	25	692	8,910
Special Education	1	25	63
Secondary	13	590	7,756
Post secondary	9	194	1,931
TOTAL	**80**	**1,687**	**21,483**

Source: Ministry of Education: Education Statistics (2006)

Table 2.3. Number of teachers by gender and origin 2006

	Local			*Expatriate*			*F*	M	*Both Sexes*
	F	M	*Total*	*F*	M	*Total*			
Crèche	169		169		0		169	0	169
Primary	552	97	649		0		552	97	649
Secondary	242	169	411	54	80	134	296	249	545
Post sec.	66	77	143	20	31	51	86	108	194
TOTAL	1,029	343	1,372	74	111	185	1,103	454	1,557

Source: Ministry of Education: Education Statistics (2006)

university degree. Eighty per cent hold a Diploma 2 in Education and above, which is the minimum qualification required to teach at secondary. In spite of the heavy investment in teacher training, there are shortages of Seychellois teachers at secondary and post-secondary levels because of global competition and emigration of teachers. At secondary level, expatriate teachers account for almost 23 per cent of staff.

There are no male teachers at pre-primary (crèche) level. Women account for the majority of teachers at primary and secondary levels, although there are more male teachers at the post-secondary level. There are three male and seven female head teachers in secondary schools. All 10 secondary head teachers have been trained up to master's level in educational leadership.

Gender

Issues affecting women

The Seychelles Constitution ensures equal opportunity and protection for both men and women, and several policies and pieces of legislation are in place to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Seychelles ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992.

In spite of facilitative laws, many disparities exist. In education some of the main issues affecting women are stereotyping of subject and career choices at the secondary level and under-representation in the technical and vocational areas, in spite of girls' good academic performance.

Stereotyping also exists among teachers' subject responsibilities. The majority of language, religion and personal and social education teachers are female. Men dominate in maths, science and physical education. In the technical field, all social economics teachers are female and all construction and technology teachers are male.

Table 2.4. Count of male and female teachers at secondary level by subject

Subject	*M*	*F*
English	13	49
French	11	49
Maths	42	21
Science	44	23
Social science	31	29
PSE/Religion	5	48
Technical	57	51
IT	11	7
PE	23	8
Total	237	285

Source: Schools Division Statistics

Women's empowerment and participation in decision-making

Women appear to be highly visible in public life because of the small size of the country, but the full participation of women in decision-making processes at the political and administrative levels has not been achieved.

In 2006, women made up 30 per cent of cabinet of ministers, 41 per cent of all principal secretaries and 30 per cent of parliament. There was only one female magistrate. Women, however, were well represented at local government level, constituting 56 per cent of all district administrators. Although Seychelles is doing well compared to other countries in the region, the full participation of women in the decision-making process has not been achieved and power remains in the hands of the men.

Although many more women are taking up employment, the gendered pattern of male and female labour remains constant. Women continue to have lower status jobs, and are clustered in unskilled and lower-paid occupations. The great majority of women are found in secretarial/typing, domestic service, cleaning, nursing, waitressing, teaching and tourism. Women comprise about 60 per cent of job seekers and 30 per cent of employers (2002 census).

Pockets of poverty, where they exist, affect women more than men because of the large number of households headed by women (47 per cent) with limited marketable skills. Women constitute 80 per cent of recipients on government welfare schemes.

In spite of a broad range of reproductive health services, teenage pregnancies remain a problem. In 2004, 15 per cent of all children born were born to mothers under the age of 20, and 27 per cent were born out of wedlock. Unplanned and unwanted pregnancies among teenage girls also result in illegal, unsafe abortions.

Another concern is the spread of HIV. The prevalence rate among youth (15–19) is 0.15 compared to 0.19 in the general population and the number of women diagnosed for HIV/AIDS is on the increase.

Issues affecting men

Gender concerns regarding men are rarely studied, probably because of the political and economic power yielded by certain categories of men, and the influence of a strong patriarchal ideology that continues to portray men as the 'stronger sex'. The traditional reluctance of men to air their problems in public for fear of appearing weak and the lack of men's organisations as opposed to women's organisations (which were very active in the early 1990s prior to the Beijing World Conference on Women) have meant that issues affecting men have not received as much public attention or media coverage.

Some of the main issues affecting men are the underachievement/under participation of boys in schools and a lower life expectancy rate for men (67 as opposed to 76

for women), linked to unhealthier life styles, drug and alcohol abuse. Other issues are a rising trend in domestic violence.

Gender-sensitive data is essential to challenge existing myths about men or women's superiority in Seychelles society. This is not always available. There is also a lack of qualitative research on stereotyped attitudes and perceptions that are impeding progress in spite of facilitative legal frameworks and measures put in place by government.

The Research and Sample

To date there has been very little research on gender in Seychelles schools, apart from two studies that have looked at the differential achievement of boys and girls in primary and secondary schools based on examination results.

Any new gender analysis in Seychelles must (i) encompass a broad, outcomes-based view of equality (not focussing only on access, as in much current reporting); (ii) recognise the value of micro-analysis at school level (and not rely only on country wide ministry statistics based on conventional indicators of equality); not generalise when talking about boys or girls, but ask 'which boys?' and 'which girls?'; and (iv) avoid falling into the boys versus girls trap, wherein girls/women are blamed for boys' relative under performance.

It would have been useful to examine how class intersects with gender to marginalise students. Unfortunately no data on the socio-economic background of students is available at school or national level and issues of class are largely ignored in educational research.

In line with other studies in this series, a qualitative research using case study methodology was undertaken to build understanding of each of the four schools.

Choice of schools

The research was carried out in four secondary schools on Mahé, the main island: three state schools and one private school. The three state schools chosen were average medium-sized secondary schools with an intake of between 600–800 students. Two of the schools are situated in the vicinity of the town, while the third one is situated on the west coast of the island. Regional secondary schools (except for a small combined primary/secondary school on one of the islands) are largely homogenous. The government's policy of equal opportunities has ensured that all schools are equitably staffed and resourced within available resources and all schools follow the same national curriculum. There is in principle very little variation among schools across the country with regards to staffing, facilities and resources. The three schools chosen drew their student intake from primary feeder schools from different regions of Mahé, North, Central and West.

As state schools are largely homogenous, a private school was included. The fourth school was a small co-educational private school also situated in the vicinity of the town. It is a combined primary and secondary school with a total enrolment of around 500 students, and a secondary school enrolment of 239 students. Students come to the school from all parts of the island. Since it is a fee-paying school, it attracts students from more affluent families and those seeking an alternative education to that offered in state schools. Both state and private schools prepare students for the Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) examinations at the end of the five-year cycle. The private school has a male head teacher and a female deputy head teacher responsible for the secondary section.

State schools face the enormous challenge of providing a co-educational comprehensive education to students of a wide range of ability, from different social backgrounds, all under one roof. Although students attending the private school also have different abilities, the school does not have to cope with the diversity of challenges posed by students from diverse social backgrounds. The focus of the study was, however, not to compare the academic results, but to understand the gender dynamics operating within the different schools.

School profiles

School A

School A is a medium-sized co-educational secondary government-owned school, situated on the west coast of Mahé. It could be classified as rural, situated some 30 kilometres from the capital. The grounds are more spacious compared to the others, situated around town. Security guards control the entrance to the school. It is a five to six streamed school, with a total student population of 771. Secondary schooling in Seychelles is of five years duration and students are organised into five year-levels (S1–S5). Table 2.5 shows the distribution of students at each level.

Table 2.5. School A, students per year level

Level	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
Secondary 1	63	94	157
Secondary 2	79	79	158
Secondary 3	88	81	169
Secondary 4	75	77	152
Secondary 5	78	57	135
Total	383	388	771

Classes are streamed by ability as from secondary 2, with girls outnumbering boys in the top sets.

The school has a total of 60 staff (29 males and 31 females). Language teachers are largely women, while men dominate in maths and sciences. Most non-teaching staff are women, as is the head teacher and the two deputies.

The buildings are old and in need of renovation, but kept relatively clean. Some temporary prefabricated classrooms, built in the early 1980s to accommodate increased student numbers because of rapid expansion in secondary education, are still in use. The school has 27 classrooms, four laboratories, four specialist rooms, two workshops and two staffrooms. There is running water and electricity. The head teacher spoke of frequent water shortages because pipes were old and had burst. Students complained of the desalinated water supply, which they found unpalatable. There were adequate toilets for girls, but two of the boys' toilet blocks were unusable and in need of repair.

School B

School B is a medium-sized co-educational state secondary school, with a total student population of 693 students in 2007. It is situated on the outskirts of Victoria and draws its student population from town and surrounding areas. It occupies the site of one of the first secondary boys' schools established in Seychelles, by the Marist Brothers around 1884. Some of the original buildings are still standing and used as workshops. The school is close to the main road. It is completely fenced in by stone walls. There are security guards posted at the entrance of the school.

Blocks of classrooms had been built over the last 17 years. There are 26 classrooms, five laboratories, eight specialist rooms, two workshops and one staffroom. There are spacious offices for the head teacher and members of the management team. Some parts of the school, including a block of classrooms and toilets, are in poor condition and need repair. There are no wooden frames or glass in the windows and it appears extremely dangerous. Staircases are dark and dingy. The school has running water and electricity.

The school is exceedingly cramped for space. There is only one concrete court in the middle of the school compound, which is used for physical education (PE) lessons and for volleyball and basketball during break times. When PE lessons are on, all neighbouring classes are disturbed. The school does not have a multi-purpose room or auditorium. School assemblies were held on the court and the head teacher had to shout to be heard. There is a very high level of noise in the school at all times.

As in the other case study schools, there is a very large female presence in the school: management and staff are predominantly female. There are 17 women class tutors as opposed to nine men. All five year-tutors are women.

Table 2.6. School B, students per year level

Level	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
Secondary 1	75	58	133
Secondary 2	74	71	145
Secondary 3	68	64	132
Secondary 4	70	83	153
Secondary 5	71	59	130
Total	358	335	693

The school ran a number of clubs: wildlife, Creole festival, care club, ecology ('eco') club and art club. There were many more girls than boys active in the clubs: 71 girls and 18 boys in the first four clubs, but 11 boys and only one girl in the art club.

School C

School C is a medium-sized co-educational state secondary school, with a total student population of 764 students in 2007. The school was originally built in 1977 as a primary school and is situated just outside Victoria, the capital of Mahé, the main island. During the years 1991–1998, a number of new classroom blocks and specialist rooms were built, and the school was gradually converted into a fully comprehensive secondary school in 1999. It is one of the eight regional secondary schools on Mahé and receives its students from three feeder primary schools in the north of the island.

The school has two blocks of classrooms, four science labs, two social economics rooms, one agriculture room, two construction/technology workshops, two art rooms and one computer room. It has six sets of toilets, three sets of three each for boys and girls. Classrooms are bare and unattractive. Fans and electrical sockets are hanging from many classrooms. The toilets have running water. They have recently been renovated and are in good condition. The school has a staffroom that is slightly cramped for the large number of staff, and adequate offices for its management staff.

The school is close to the main road and it is completely fenced in. Close circuit television was installed as additional security measure in 2006. The crèche (preschool section) is in the same school compound. Break times do not coincide and the noise from the crèche can be very disturbing for the block of classrooms facing the crèche.

There are five classes from S1 to S5 and four classes at S5 (24 classes). On entering school in S1, students are streamed by ability based on their performance in the primary 6 national exams. The trend over the last five years has been for girls to outperform boys in all subjects: girls outnumber the boys in the top streams and boys are over represented in the lower streams.

Table 2.7. School C, students per year level

Level	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
Secondary 1	70	79	149
Secondary 2	82	93	175
Secondary 3	72	80	152
Secondary 4	80	85	165
Secondary 5	71	52	123
Total	375	389	764

Although the gender balance in overall school population is fairly equal, there are slightly more boys (between five and eleven) in the S1 to S4 year groups. In S5, there are 19 fewer boys than girls. Compulsory schooling ends at S4. According to the head teacher, there is a tendency for more boys to leave at the end of S4 to find employment. Girls stay on at school longer until the end of the secondary cycle. This may explain the difference in attendance at S5.

On three consecutive mornings, school buses dropped students off at least 15 minutes after the bell had rung. Students strolled into school in small groups; some even diverted via neighbouring shops. This gave a very unsettled beginning to the day.

The teaching staff is made up of 18 men and 35 women. The management team is made up of one head teacher (female) two deputy head teachers (one male and one female) and nine heads of department (three males and six females). There is a very large female presence in the school.

Girls were more 'visible' and participated more actively in clubs and competitions. The school had three sports clubs, one environment club and a care club. While the three sports clubs (including football) attracted both boys and girls, the wildlife club and the care clubs were dominated by girls. During 2006, the national public speaking and quiz competitions were won by exclusively girls' teams. Boys excelled in the national athletics competition by winning 15 medals as opposed to five for the girls.

School D

School D is a medium-sized, fee-paying private school established in 1993, when government liberalised its policy on private schooling and allowed Seychellois children to attend non state-run schools. The school comprises three sections: kindergarten, primary and secondary. A board of directors appointed by the shareholders, a board of governors and a school management team ensure the proper functioning of the school.

There are 240 students in the secondary section, distributed as illustrated in Table 2.8.

Table 2.8. School D, students per year level

Level	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*
Secondary 1	26	25	51
Secondary 2	26	22	48
Secondary 3	20	28	48
Secondary 4	20	27	47
Secondary 5	20	26	46
Total	112	128	240

The school buildings are new and the surroundings are clean and well maintained. The classrooms are well ventilated and airy. The laboratories and computer room are well equipped. Lockers and drinking water fountains are provided for students on the ground floor.

There is a shortage of space for sports and play and only one hard court on the central parking space. Students, mainly boys, were observed playing volleyball during break time. Girls were watching from the sidelines.

There are an equal number of male and female teachers (nine males and nine females). Responsibilities are fairly equally shared.

Boys and girls are equally well represented on the student committee: the chair and vice-chair are female. Drama and dancing clubs are dominated by girls, whereas sports clubs are more popular with the boys.

The school has maintained excellent academic standards with 100 per cent pass rates for the IGCSE exams. Boys and girls perform equally well and no significant gender imbalances in performance are recorded. Very few boys opt to do English literature and the number of girls entered for physics is fewer than that of boys. The choice of subject options may be helping to reinforce traditional divisions. Staff had high expectations for both genders.

Analysis

Education system processes and practices

Gender imbalance within the Schools Division

The Schools Division within the Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall management of primary and secondary schools in Seychelles. Its stated mission is to 'provide educational services to state schools to enable students from pre-primary to secondary levels to achieve high standards of learning, (according to ability) and develop into knowledgeable, responsible and productive citizens'.

It has a total staff of 48, of whom nine are men, with only one man on the senior management team. Interviews were held with the director general of the Schools Division, the director for secondary schools and two education co-ordinators who provide support to schools, all of which were women.

One of the main gender issues identified by the education managers was the largely female staff in the Schools Division. Education managers felt that because of the heavy staffing imbalances in the division, the sharing of views on education and schools was done with women only. This could result in a biased point of view and biased proposals. As there was only one man on the senior management team, the 'male' perspective had far less opportunity to be voiced.

The main problems affecting boys was that they underperformed, had more discipline problems and were associated with fights, acts of vandalism and drugs. The main problems affecting girls were teenage pregnancies and a rising problem of associated truancy, although girls were now given a second chance to reintegrate into schools. The lack of male role models in early childhood/primary classes and the emerging problem of sexual harassment were also cited as two gender-related challenges in schools.

Performance of male and female head teachers

There are three male head teachers out of a total of 10 in all secondary schools. Managers did not perceive any difference in performance, although one co-ordinator said that the men were 'smooth talkers' and found the female head teachers to be more authoritative and action-oriented.

Managers described a gender-friendly school as one to which all felt they belonged and were part of. It was a school where staff and management treated everyone according to needs/desires and took care of students. It was a school where everybody felt happy and to which they wanted to come. There were mixed feelings about whether secondary schools were gender-friendly or not. All managers agreed that there was currently much more awareness of gender in the schools. Many schools were analysing exam results by gender. The situation, however, varied from school to school. Not many secondary schools were consciously doing anything to address gender issues. It did not appear on secondary schools' action plans. It was not brought up in the list of major challenges faced by schools in reports and end-of-year presentations.

Education managers appeared very aware of some of the gender issues, including the stigmatising and labelling of boys, the gender-imbalanced classes and the stereotyped attitudes of some teachers. They were aware that boys and male teachers faced many disadvantages, being in a largely female environment, but admitted that there had been no serious reflection on the part of schools and the ministry. One co-ordinator remarked that while it was considered perfectly acceptable for female staff to be surrounded by boys, some schools and staff would be immediately suspicious if male

staff were surrounded by girls. This put added pressure on male staff; it was said that some young male teachers felt discouraged and wanted to give up teaching.

Gender training teachers

The ministry did not organise any training centrally for teachers, but helped in running sessions organised by schools, where it was part of their action plans (mostly in primary schools). Managers felt that there was an urgent need to start raising gender awareness at secondary level, but more research was needed to convince secondary teachers. It was considered that attitudes were hard to change. They believed that the National Institute of Education had a key role to play in training teachers and the PSE programmes may need to be reviewed to reflect changing conditions.

The general feeling was that gender needed to be given more attention by placing it on the agenda of all meetings at ministry and school levels. Gender as a social construct was not fully understood by everyone; frequent references were made to the biological make-up of men and women to explain behaviours.

Quality Assurance service

The Quality Assurance (QA) service was set up in 2001 to i) reinforce self-evaluation in schools in the context of the improvement programme and ii) provide input into policy/decision-making through the collection of reliable data on the performance of the school system in Seychelles.

According to staff, gender was taken into account in the analysis of school-based exam results and performance in national and international exams. Performance indicators under attainment require that a gender analysis is carried out and this was done for all schools evaluated.

QA staff also said that gender-friendliness and relevance were considered when judging the quality of test items and examination papers. Issues such as equal treatment of boys and girls, equitable sharing of resources and equal distribution of questions were noted when conducting classroom observations, being reported under quality of teaching where appropriate. Students own perceptions of fair treatment were also captured through students' interviews. Performance indicators under 'ethos' examine relationships between boys and girls and how they treat each other. Where relevant, they would be reported upon. QA also carries out a special analysis of schools where gender gaps are especially high. This was the case in one primary school.

Although gender analysis was carried out in relation to attainment results and was highlighted in the body of the QA reports, no specific gender recommendations or points of action had been made in relation to secondary schools that have been evaluated. This has been confirmed by examining the reports of the six schools. Normally schools are required to develop action plans in response to QA recommendations. The issue of gender was not considered serious enough to warrant action.

In the case of one of the case study schools, the gender analysis reads as follows:

> *'The analysis of students' performance by gender showed on the whole girls performed better than boys in both English and math[s] across all levels. It is clear that the comparatively weaker performance of boys in contrast to girls had a negative effect on the overall results of the school based examinations for English and math[s].'*

There is no recommendation for follow-up action by the school. The school in question was not taking any measure to investigate the problem.

Students

Notions of masculinity and femininity

Students' views and perceptions were gathered from 12 focus group discussions held with three groups of students from each case study school. In each school, discussions were held with a mixed group of boys and girls, a girls-only group and a boys-only group. A total of 45 boys and 44 girls took part in the discussions. No major differences were noticed in the responses gathered from single-sex and mixed-sex groups. Boys and girls expressed themselves freely in both types of groups, but discussions were livelier in the mixed groups where girls and boys challenged each other's perceptions.

There was also little variation in the responses from the four schools on the traits of typical Seychellois boys and girls from different socio-economic backgrounds and locations. Figure 2.2 lists some of the terms and expressions used by the students.

Figure 2.2. Notions of masculinity and femininity

How do girls see themselves?	*How do boys see girls?*	*How do boys see themselves?*	*How do girls see boys?*
Mature	Weaker sex	Strong	Proud
Hardworking	In need of protection	Dominant partner	Stubborn
Responsible	Vulnerable to rape	Bread winner	Macho
Role models for younger students	Not free	Provider	Will not admit to being wrong
Respected	Burdened by menstruation and childbirth	Head of household	Hide emotions
Disciplined	Easily influenced	Have more prestige	Have more freedom
Able to express themselves well	Change minds easily	Proud	Lazy
Attractive	Orderly	Socialiser	Easily influenced by peers – if you don't drink and smoke you are not a man
Fashionable		Brave	
Outgoing		Free	
Friendly		Intelligent	
Sensitive/fragile		Self-reliant	
In need of protection		Good politicians	
Treated like princesses at home		Serious	
Limited freedom		Emotionally and mentally stable	

There is considerable consensus on what constitutes typical Seychellois boys and girls. Girls have a very positive image of themselves. They consider themselves to be mature, hardworking, disciplined, attractive and outgoing and good role models for younger students. They are multi-skilled, but physically weak and need protection. They are protected at home and as one girl said 'treated like princesses'.

Boys described themselves using a much narrower range of qualities and traits. They see themselves as strong, brave and intelligent, the providers and protectors. They have more freedom than the girls and are less restricted by their parents. They considered girls to be the weaker sex, burdened by childbirth and menstruation and in need of protection. They were better at sports. They said they had more prestige in society and made better politicians. None of them would like to change their sex.

Both girls and boys admitted to being happy and 'comfortable in their skins'. They thought highly of themselves (using different sets of criteria) and rather more negatively of the opposite sex.

Figure 2.3. Students' likes and dislikes

	Activities liked	*Activities disliked*
Boys	Partying/socialising	Homework
	Breaking rules	Research work
	Drinking	Doing household chores/buying gas
	Dancing	Sweeping the class
	Cooking	Religious activities at school
	Socialising at school	Babysitting
	Street racing	Studying
	Playing video games	Reading
	Surfing the net	Break-dancing
	Walking around town	
	Going out with girlfriends/chatting up girls	
	Sports/splaying football	
	Water sports	
	Watching movies	
Girls	Going out with friends	Cooking (a few)
	Watching television	Cleaning louvres
	Listening to music	Doing household chores
	Knitting and embroidery	Contact sports
	Singing/dancing	Violent sports/games
	Reading	Pressured to go to church
	Sports (volleyball, badminton tennis water sports)	Babysitting
	Baking/cooking	Too much homework
	Drawing	
	Quiz competitions	
	Looking after animals	

Likes and dislikes

Girls and boys had similar likes and dislikes. Both genders disliked household chores, looking after younger brothers and sisters and excess homework. Boys however appeared to enjoy more physical, outdoor and risky activities. Girls liked 'quieter' and more indoor activities.

Studies

Both girls and boys felt they had equal opportunities to pursue further studies, choose any career they wished and that all doors were now open. In spite of that, the general consensus was that women were more suitable for the 'caring professions' and those that needed 'patience', while heavy work such as being mechanics or bus drivers should be restricted to men. This stereotyping in career choices was more evident among boys.

Boys and girls (including those students from the low-ability groups) had high expectations and wanted to pursue studies up to university level if possible. Both genders perceived no major obstacles in reaching their goals. Girls seemed to be more conscious of the need for hard work and self-sacrifices in order to attain their goals because of the competition for scholarships. On the other hand, boys (from state schools) felt it would be easy for them to get jobs and succeed even if they did not do very well at school. Parents in general supported them in their career choices, except for those who put a bit of pressure on them to take up the family business.

Girls were given a larger proportion of family responsibilities, looking after siblings and doing household chores. They spent on average between 30 and 90 minutes per day helping round the house with cleaning, ironing, cooking and looking after siblings. Boys spent considerably less time (15–30 minutes) on household chores. They were expected to tidy their rooms and do 'outside' work like sweeping the yard. Some helped with cooking because they found it enjoyable. It would appear that boys did considerably more household chores in homes where there were no sisters. This needs further research.

Girls spent on average much more time doing homework and study than boys. Between 1.5 to 4 hours was spent on homework and research projects. Girls from top sets took extra classes in the evenings for 1.5 hours. The majority of boys (except for those in the top sets) said they spent between 5–30 minutes on study. Most of the time homework was done on Sundays, in class or early in the morning. Their evenings were spent doing sport activities (2–3 hours), watching TV, looking after younger brothers and sisters, playing games and surfing the net (3–4 hours). They enjoyed school because it was an opportunity to meet friends and socialise.

In contrast, both girls and boys in the private school said they spent between 2–4 hours on study every night. The little spare time they had was spent watching TV, surfing the net and talking to parents. Their timetables were extremely full. Some of them trained for sports and others took extra classes in music, dance etc. They found

their days to be too short. Interestingly, girls and boys in the top sets from state schools had similar study and leisure patterns.

Girls and boys chose a wide range of subjects as their favourites: there was no discernable gendered pattern. Students chose subjects in the first place if they liked their teacher and the teaching approach. Boys appeared to prefer subjects that matched their career choices, while this did not appear to be the case for girls.

Parental expectations

Parents had similar school expectations for boys and girls. They wanted both to study hard and succeed. They appreciated obedience and good behaviour and liked it when both helped at home. The pressure to project an image of obedience, hard work and exemplary behaviour was felt to be stronger on the girls. Figure 2.4 lists the traits or behaviours that parents liked to see, and those they disliked.

As a general rule, neither boys nor girls felt discriminated against in the classroom. They said they received equal attention from both male and female teachers. (This was borne out by the classroom observations). Students' teacher preference was based more on teacher attitude and teaching style rather than on gender.

Teachers expected more from the girls academically. If a boy and a girl got the same mark, the tendency for the teacher was to praise the boy, but tell the girl she could have done much better.

Both girls and boys however agreed that boys got harder punishments from teachers. They were reprimanded more often in class and spoken to more harshly. Male teachers were careful about how they spoke to the girls and tended to be more protective. Girls agreed that they could get away with more than the boys. This was common to all four schools.

Figure 2.4. Parental expectations

	Parents like it when they:	*What parents dislike:*
Boys	Study well Give priority to studies Are obedient Help with housework Get a good job Keep away from girls	Dress code Laziness Somersaulting in hip-hop dancing Coming home late
Girls	Get good results and are role models in academic areas Are respected for good behaviour and set good examples Study well Are obedient and respectful Do housework	Rudeness and arrogance Disobedience and answering back Not taking studies seriously Giving too much attention to fashion and music Going out with friends Not helping out enough with household chores

Teacher attention and teaching strategies

Both boys and girls preferred lively lessons with a lot of interaction and discussions. They appreciated it when teachers explained carefully instead of dictating a lot of notes, although good notes were considered useful. Girls enjoyed role-plays and group activities more than the boys. Boys liked activities that were fun and where there were experiments and hands-on experiences. They did not like writing notes and reading from books. Both girls and boys did not like it when teachers gave too much homework.

Safety at school

Students said they generally felt safe from outside intruders at school because of protective walls, closed circuit television (CCTV, in one school) and being surrounded by friends. There were potentially unsafe blind spots in all schools (in spite of the CCTV) like toilets, staircases and inside classrooms.

Girls admitted to have experienced gender-based abuse mainly of a verbal nature. Sexual harassment and bullying occurred mainly at S1–S3 in all four schools. Girls were the targets for sexual abuse but boys and girls were the targets of bullying. Bullying and harassment were not major issues at S4–S5 levels. Although all students knew where to report cases of harassment, this rarely happened, as students feared it could get worse and did not have confidence in management. Students from all four schools felt that action was rarely taken and there was no open acknowledgement of the problem from staff in three of the schools.

Teachers

Teacher expectations were gathered from a focus group discussion held with three male and three female teachers in each of the four schools. Individual interviews were conducted with teachers in the three state schools: twelve interviews were conducted with seven male and five female teachers.

Views on gender

Teachers had only a very limited understanding of the concept of gender. Gender was commonly referred to as differences between boys and girls. Gender as a social construct and the school's role in combating stereotyping was not really understood. In many cases, teachers took a resigned and defeatist position for gendered inequality, putting the blame on home or society. The underperformance of boys and the gender imbalance of classes (against boys) were cited as the two most important gender issues in state schools.

Issues related to gender were rarely discussed at staff meetings. Schools had started analysing gender-disaggregated performance data. There was no serious discussion of the results and no strategies had been developed to try to redress the imbalance. One

school had gender as one of the targets in its development plan; it was in the early stages of carrying out a gender audit.

Less than one third of the teachers had had any training in gender or human rights education. Personal and social education (PSE) teachers had covered some aspects in their teacher-training courses and a few others had attended sensitisation sessions in in-school professional development.

The majority of teachers felt that gender should be incorporated into teacher-training programmes and all in-service courses. The interviews had forced them to think of issues they had never reflected upon. Such training would help them to cope with situations at school and develop strategies for redressing imbalances where these were identified. They were not specific on the content of the course.

Self perceptions

Views on masculinity and femininity expressed by teachers were diverse and not as clear-cut as those of the students. About half the male teachers interviewed felt that the man was the dominant figure in the household, whose duty it was to direct the running of the house and give protection to the family. The woman's role was to assist the man and be his companion, as stated in the Bible. Her biological make-up made her more suitable for looking after children. The other half felt that society was changing rapidly. Man was no longer considered the domineering figure and there was equal sharing of responsibilities in the house. They gave personal accounts of how responsibilities were shared in their own homes, even the fact that women traditionally were given more priority and rights over children.

Young female graduates felt that working women had an unfair share of the household chores and responsibility for bringing up the children. Their husbands worked late, went out with friends and they were left to shoulder all the responsibilities. They acknowledged feeling stressed and tired, especially if they held responsible posts at school. Like their female students, some said they sometimes wished they were men because of the extra freedom they enjoyed.

Male teachers felt that females made better class tutors because of their 'caring' nature and the fact that they were better organised and able to combine multiple tasks simultaneously. Two female teachers also felt that women made better class teachers because they were strict, reliable and dedicated. They were of the opinion that men 'did not like responsibility and could not take responsibility', as they had left all the work for mothers and sisters at home, so were not in the habit of behaving responsibly. These views were not, however, the general consensus.

In-school equity

There were no written policies on equal opportunities. In all schools, however, teachers reported an equal sharing of responsibilities: neither women nor men felt discriminated against.

One school ensured that both male and female class teachers or assistant class teachers were appointed. Responsibilities for playground supervision, classroom cover, clubs and representation on the different committees were shared equally. Staff volunteered to act on committees depending on their interests and aptitudes. The ministry appointed heads of departments and heads of year, so the school had no control over the number of male or female established positions. There were more female teachers in the three state schools and more women on the management staff, and this tended to give the impression that women held all responsible posts. Responsibilities were more equally shared out in the private school because there were equal numbers of men and women on the teaching staff (nine males and nine females).

Facilities for staff were considered adequate, although staff in two schools mentioned that their staffrooms were too small and cramped. All schools had separate toilets for men and women.

Teachers were generally not aware of cases of sexual abuse, of staff or students, although some of them had heard 'stories' of past incidents in the school. Eight teachers had witnessed incidents of bullying during playground supervision, especially with newcomers to the school. The schools had no special policies on sexual harassment or bullying, although the offences and the accompanying sanctions were specified in schools' codes of conduct. Teachers were not systematically informed of cases of abuse and felt that it was a matter for management and counsellors.

Gendered differentiation

Most teachers stated that they did not differentiate between boys and girls. They said they enjoyed teaching both, that they treated them equally and saw all as **'students'**, not as 'boy' or 'girl' students. Technical teachers, however, acknowledged that they sometimes treated boys and girls differently. Girls would be given plastic to work with instead of wood because of their inability to handle heavy machines. In agriculture, girls would be made to weed and boys to hoe. The lack of protective clothing and appropriate facilities made the teachers protective towards the girls.

In spite of their profession of equal treatment of girls and boys, teachers held very stereotyped views on how they differed in their learning styles and abilities. In general, they felt girls were better at languages and boys at science. In one school, teachers were of the view that boys learned best by discovery, investigation, practical 'hands on' experience, group work and asking a lot of questions. They said that they had more enquiring minds than the girls; that they were better at maths and general concepts and learned through 'manipulative and visuals'. Girls were more reserved and learned by rote, they were more organised and self-motivated and liked to copy notes. They were also more independent learners and liked reading and writing. Their preference was for a 'book-based style'. Many teachers said that teaching boys posed more of a challenge and teachers 'had to go that extra mile' with them.

Teachers in the private school had less polarised views on the learning abilities of boys and girls. They had high expectations of both genders and felt that the boys could be very competitive when challenged. Two teachers said they had a marked preference for teaching boys.

With regards to attitude towards work and behaviour, the majority of staff from state schools spoke very highly of girls who they said were **naturally** more responsible, serious and mature. Girls volunteered to do presentations and help in school. They were punctual and more regular with homework. Teachers thought that girls were more conscientious and made better prefects. They took their classroom supervisory duties seriously and would report cases of misbehaviour.

Teachers generally felt that boys could be disruptive, rude and hard to control, that they liked to rebel and challenge authority, but that many tended to become more serious and pick up at post-secondary level. Boys were reluctant to report on their friends or co-operate with management. They succumbed more easily to peer-pressure. Teachers said that these negative attitudes in boys were inculcated, tolerated at home, in families and there was very little the school could do to combat that.

According to one head teacher, the home culture encourages girls to stay home and study while boys are allowed to run wild. He quoted the example of an Indian boy who was the star student at the school a few years ago. His academic success was attributed to the fact that 'he was brought up the way girls are' in Seychellois society.

Very few teachers admitted to giving harsher punishments to the boys and being gentler with the girls. Large numbers however admitted not thinking along gender lines when they were in front of a class. When allocating tasks, teachers admitted to some gender bias. Girls would be given lighter duties but generally the boys shirked their responsibilities and left the work for the girls to do. The pattern was for girls to sweep the classrooms and boys to empty the bins and lift heavy furniture.

Although teachers from the private schools felt that girls were generally more hard working and regular in handing homework, there were also good role models among the boys. In some classes, the top performers were boys. It was not unusual for the top scorer to be male in the top sets in state schools as well, but the majority of the high fliers were girls. Students in the private school were not required to do cleaning duties. Responsibilities were shared but boys would automatically be chosen to do heavier work, like carrying furniture.

Textbooks and other learning materials

All state schools follow the same national curriculum and use the same recommended textbooks imported by the Ministry of Education. Textbooks are on loan to students. The textbooks reviewed were English, geography, history, biology, physics and maths textbooks for S4/S5 levels. They were mostly recommended books for

IGCSE exam preparation: none was produced locally. The majority were recently published books or new editions of books published from 1996 onwards in the UK.

The English textbooks were generally well balanced, showing pictures of both males and females in a variety of occupations, including non-traditional images of female boxers and male ballet dancers. There was however a preponderance of texts involving male figures such as Martin Luther King, Rasputin and male Internet 'whiz kids'. Many of the passages were modern and thought provoking, with scope for discussions on issues such as equal opportunities, race ethnicity etc. Only two of the textbooks *New Expressway English 4* and *Certificate in English Language* (published in the UK, but intended for a Malaysian and African school audience) were heavily biased in favour of males.

The series of maths textbooks *Mathematics in Action* was also well-balanced, with cartoon illustrations of men and women and male and female names used in exercises and problem-solving activities. This was not the case for one of the physics textbooks, *Physics for You* by Keith Johnson and Stanley Thorpes (1996), where all illustrations and cartoons were heavily biased in favour of males. The biology textbooks had many diagrams, but very few illustrations.

The geography textbook *Wider World Geography* and history textbook *GCSE Modern World History* carried illustrations relevant to the topics and events covered, reflecting the historical and cultural realities of the periods and countries presented. The history textbook, although concentrating on male leaders and politicians, had many posters and cartoons, which highlighted women's important roles during the world wars.

The only local material reviewed was the personal and social education (PSE) programme. A number of the themes covered in this programme contribute directly to the promotion of the universal values of democracy, human rights and sustainable development. The four strands of the PSE programme are 1) moral education, 2) careers education and guidance, 3) education for citizenship and 4) family life and health education (FLHE). The FLHE component is the one that incorporates relevant aspects of growth and development, sexuality education, gender roles, interpersonal and social skills, family role responsibilities and relationships, personal achievement and leisure, population issues and measures for sustainable development. Concerns faced by youth and adolescents in Seychelles, such as high incidence of sexual behaviour, unwanted pregnancies, increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse, the growing number of teenage pregnancies and other family problems are adequately addressed in the programme. The programme emphasises the importance of the family, and aims to promote positive attitudes and behaviour towards parenthood, as a basis for better family living, parental care, gender equity and equality. It also raises concern and develops positive attitudes and behaviour towards conservation measures needed for sustainable socio-economic development and improved quality of life of the Seychellois people, in view of the fragile nature of Seychelles ecosystem.

The methods and teaching approaches advocated are highly participatory and interactive, encouraging students to take control of their own learning. Following these books, the teacher is to act as a facilitator and, through methods such as case studies, role plays, interviews, songs and drama, encourage young people to think, communicate, make decisions, solve problems and adopt positive behaviours. Teachers are encouraged to evaluate not only knowledge, but also personal development, skills, attitudes and values.

The reviewed textbooks were, therefore, considered as reasonable tools that could be exploited by teachers with a concern for gender equality. The PSE textbooks, in particular, and their underlying exploratory, collaborative teaching and learning styles were conducive to approaches promoting greater participation and equity.

Processes within and outside the classroom

Classroom processes

A total of 20 lessons were observed in the four schools. Equal numbers of male and female teachers were observed teaching. Five or six lessons were observed in each of the state schools and four were observed in the private school. The lessons observed were maths (three), history (one), English (three), geography (two), biology (one), PSE/careers (four), PE (four) and agriculture (two). The focus of the observation was on (i) teacher student interaction, (ii) use of instructional language and quality of language and questioning and (iii) student/student interaction.

The lesson observations in general yielded minimal gender data as, in about half of the observations, very little teacher/student interaction took place. Students were either doing individual class work or taking notes. In two of the state schools, the noise level from outside and in the corridors was sometimes so loud that it prevented any meaningful interaction from taking place. It those instances it was almost impossible for researchers at the back of the class to follow the lesson.

In the ten lessons where teacher student interaction could be observed, girls and boys were given equal attention and teachers involved both by asking and inviting questions. Teachers spent roughly equal amounts of time giving attention to boys and girls and helping them with work. Many teachers both in the state and private school had good teaching techniques and delivered lessons efficiently. The majority of the lessons were teacher-directed, but with varying opportunities for discussion and interaction.

Girls participated more actively in English and history lessons in the top sets in state schools. Boys were more active in the maths and single agriculture lessons in the lower sets. In one top English set dominated by girls, the teacher encouraged competition between the sexes. This competition provided an opportunity to attack the other gender. The few boys in this class were vocal and sometimes scathing in their remarks. This pitching of one gender against the other was also evident in the

careers lesson on positive attitudes in the workplace. The teacher chose only one case study of a young irresponsible male worker to illustrate her lesson and generate discussion. Boys were labelled for their lack of responsibility, punctuality and discipline in the workplace. The presentation and the ensuing discussion turned out to be very biased against boys.

In classes where there were discipline problems, both male and female teachers reprimanded boys more often and in slightly harsher terms. They were seen as inattentive, liked to disturb others, and did not comply with the dress code. Although boys were in general less well behaved, many teachers were more impatient with boys than with girls.

In the three PSE lessons observed, dealing with sensitive issues such as HIV/AIDS, child abuse and contraception, boys monopolised the lessons by asking the majority of the questions and constantly seeking the teacher's attention. Although two of the teachers dealt with the topics efficiently and in an open manner, the girls seemed to be reluctant to air their views in front of the boys. In the lesson on contraception, the teacher was not well-prepared and confused contraception with abortion. The lesson was delivered in Creole, giving the boys opportunity to use crude language and embarrass the girls.

In state schools, random seating arrangements were a great deterrent to good classroom communication. Students dictated seating arrangements by pulling furniture and seats where they wanted to. There was considerable disruption at the beginning of the lesson while students found desks and chairs and 'convenient' places to sit near windows and doors: preferably at the back of the class. Teachers rarely intervened. Only in one lesson did the teacher spend at least 15 minutes trying to get the students to settle down, rearrange the desks in an orderly fashion, sweep and tidy the room. In this instance, students responded and calmed down.

In many of these classes, boys and girls sat separately, as illustrated in Figure 2.5 below (although the desks were not neatly aligned as in the plans). When invited to work in pairs or in groups, students automatically formed groups of the same sex unless directed otherwise by the teacher. In the lessons observed, teachers ensured that they formed mixed groups (although this may have been largely due to the presence of observers). The large gender imbalance in some classes made it difficult to form balanced groups.

In the three state schools, the classrooms where observations were conducted were dull and unattractive. There were no posters or charts on the walls and the notice boards were torn. Some of the blackboards and fans were unusable and many needed repainting. The classroom atmosphere in the private school was focused, purposeful, and conducive to learning. Boys and girls were mixed and seemed to get on well. They chatted to each other and there seemed to be a good spirit of 'camaraderie'.

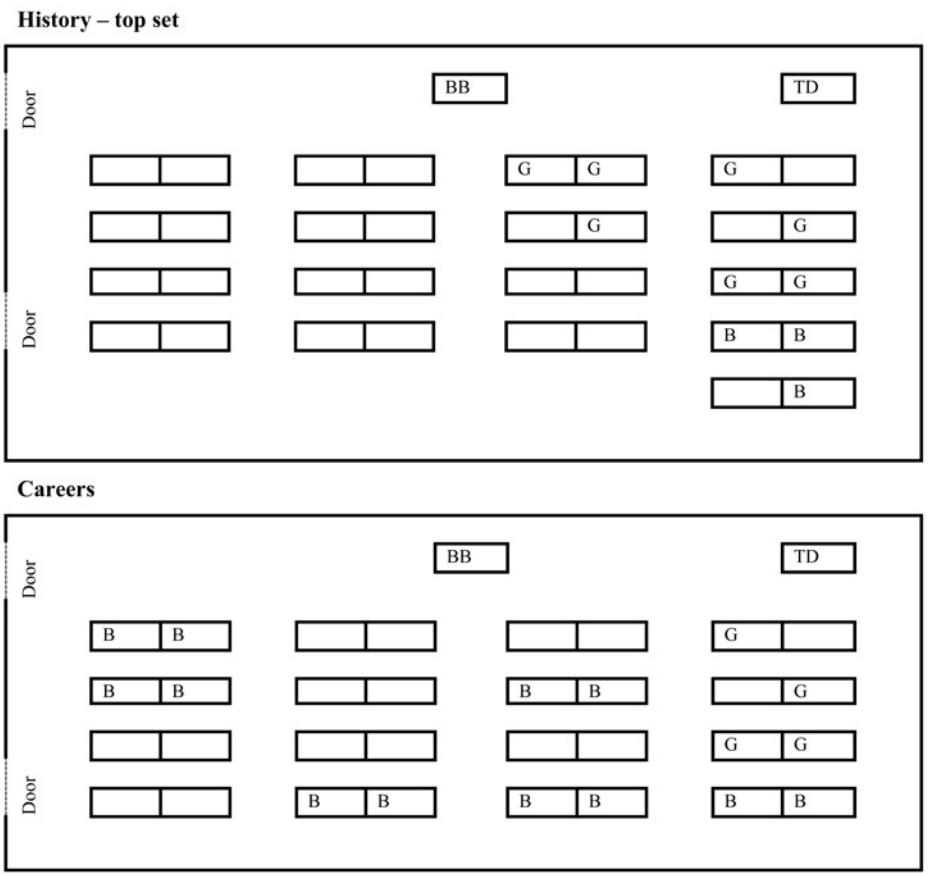
During observations, teachers addressed both genders respectfully using appropriate language in the classroom. However, the shouting and loud noises from neighbouring

classes and the playground indicated that this might not always be the case. There were no major instances of sexist language being used in classrooms. Almost all teachers knew their students and addressed them by their first names. In two of the lessons observed, one in the state school and one in the private school, the teachers would frequently use the term 'guys' to refer to the whole class ' hurry up guys', 'pick up the books guys'. The girls appeared to be used to this form of address and followed instructions.

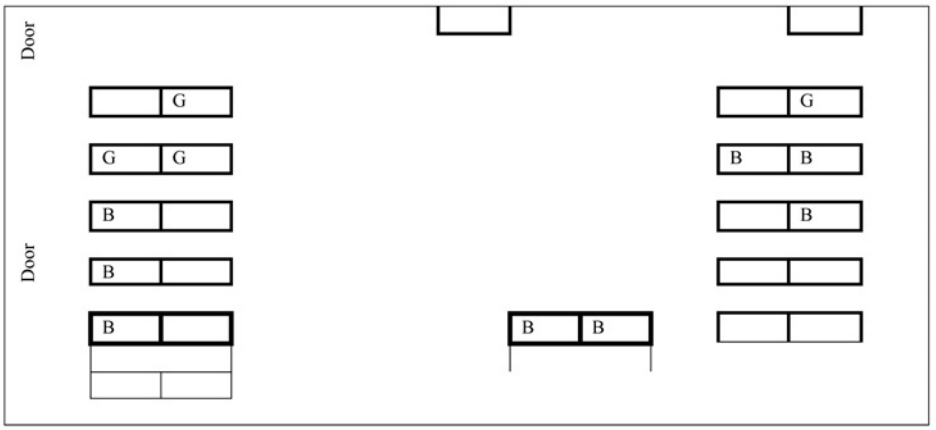
Setting, performance and examinations

In line with its policy of inclusive education, the Ministry of Education does not condone rigid streaming, but secondary schools have considerable autonomy to determine student groupings. The usual pattern was (i) for classes to be streamed by

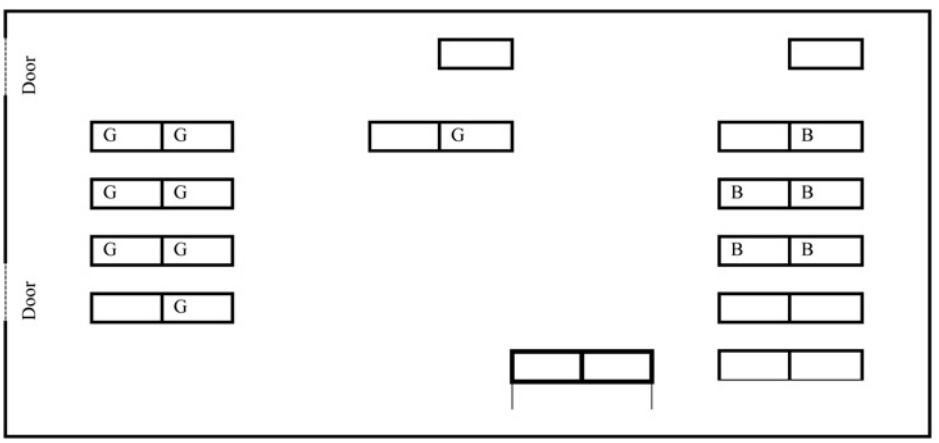
Figure 2.5. Plans of classroom seating arrangements



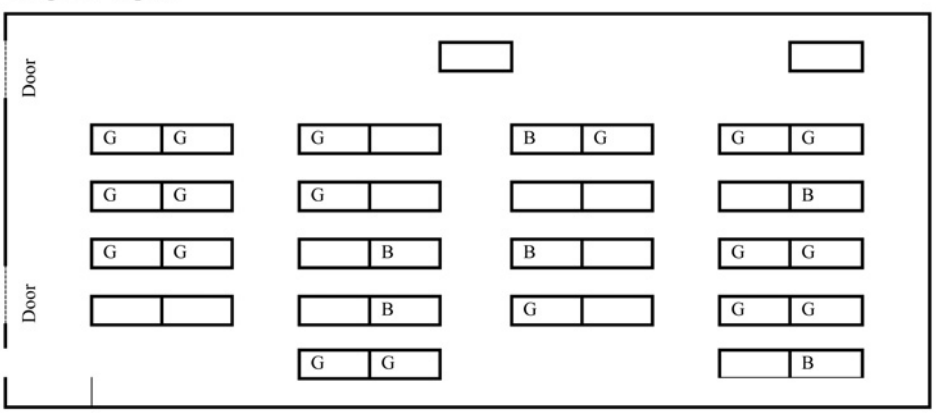
Maths – low set



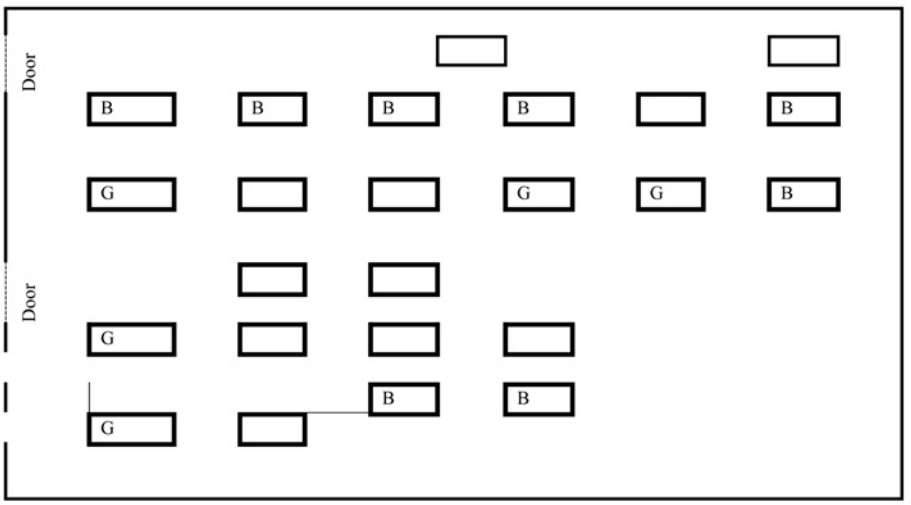
Social sciences – middle set



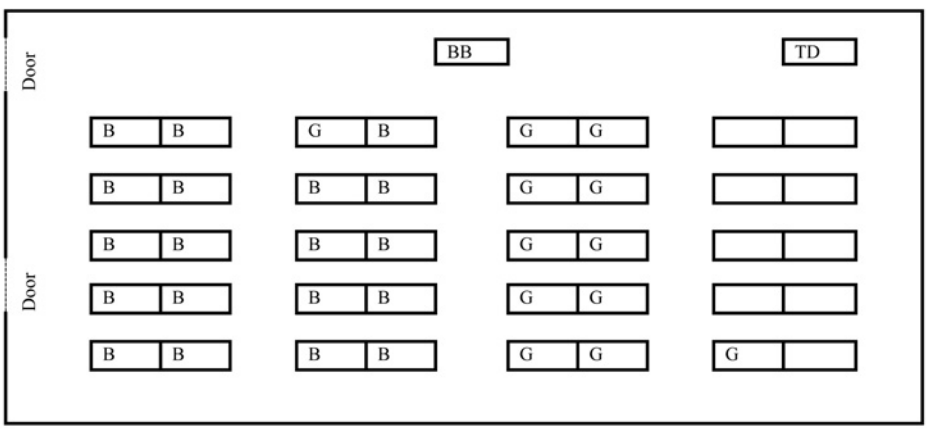
English – top set



Agriculture



PSE



ability at S1 to S3 levels where students follow a common curriculum, and (ii) to have subject settings at S4 and S5 when students are preparing for the IGCSE international examinations. One of the state schools was starting to implement plans to 'de-stream' at S1 level, but the process was not fully underway so it did not impact on the research. The primary 6 national examination results are used to allocate students to classes in S1 and those of the co-ordinated examinations at S3 are used to confirm student subject options and sets at S4. Table 2.9 below shows the national mean scores for key subjects at primary 6 and secondary 3 from 2000–2004.

Table 2.9. Mean scores of P6 and S3 students, by subject, by gender

Mean scores of primary 6 students, by subject, by gender

	Maths		*English*		*Science*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
2000	36.1	46.0	44.3	56.0	44.6	52.9
2001	33.2	39.9	43.2	55.9	41.0	48.0
2002	25.5	33.5	35.1	47.1	47.2	57.6
2003	31.2	38.3	36.6	48.1	38.9	46.3

Mean scores of secondary 3 students, by subject, by gender

	Maths		*English*		*Science*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
2003	14.9	21.5	33.4	46.6	22.2	28.8
2004	17.5	23.3	39.4	53.3	28.8	35.4
2005	16.5	24.2	39.3	53.0	37.7	35.8
2006	16.7	24.4	40.7	55.7	27.7	34.3

At both P6 and S3 levels, boys' underperformance is consistent across all subject areas. Equally significant is the drop in mean scores between P6 and S3 for boys and girls in maths and science, the slight drop for boys in English and the consistency, and in some cases improvement, in the English scores achieved by girls. Table 2.10 below (using 2006 figures) illustrates by the gender imbalances in S1 to S3 classes in all regional schools.

Across the three state schools, boys constituted about 40 per cent of the top stream and 60 per cent of the lower streams. The pattern remains fairly constant, with small percentage point fluctuations between secondary 1 and secondary 3. Table 2.11 shows the pattern in the three case study schools, but in secondary 5.

Table 2.10. Regional gender distribution among top and low streams, S1–S3

Grade level	*Top Stream*		*Lower Streams*	
	M (%)	*F (%)*	*M (%)*	*F (%)*
Secondary 1	45	55	64	36
Secondary 2	41	59	61	39
Secondary 3	46	54	66	34

Table 2.11. Gender distribution among top and bottom streams, S5 per cent

	Boys (Top)	*Girls (Top)*	*Boys (Low)*	*Girls (Low)*
School A	10	21	16	12
School B	9	23	9	8
School C	16	20	9	12

These figures illustrate interesting patterns, as the gender imbalance in favour of girls continues in the top stream, but the lower streams have become equal. This may indicate that the boys who have dropped out at the end of S4 were those who might have been in the lower streams. This may confirm previous conceptions of the constitution of this especially at-risk group of boys, and merits further investigation.

The private school had two, non-streamed classes from S1 to S5, with setting for maths only at S4/S5 levels. Boys and girls were equally distributed in the two classes in the private school, which had more boys than girls at S5 level. There were ten girls and 13 or 14 boys in each class.

The schools' streaming and setting arrangements undermine boys' chances to sit for international exams. Table 2.12 shows the number of students who have been registered, nationally, for the 2007 IGCSE exam.

There are more girls than boys enrolled for all the examinations both at core and extended levels. The three case study schools show the same pattern of participation. This situation is again not acceptable from an equity point of view and schools may need to examine how their selection and grouping arrangements disadvantage boys through early labelling.

Table 2.12. S5 students' participation in external Cambridge (IGCSE) examination

Subject	*Core*		*Extended*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
English	237	307	157	307
Mathematics	262	368	61	98
Co-ordinated science	120	242	75	127
Combined science	149	227		
History	78	191		
Geography	253	350		

Figures for 2006 from the private school show that all 19 girls and 29 boys were entered for English, French, maths, geography and biology. Because of subject options, more boys than girls took physics and chemistry exams, while more girls chose history and English literature.

Outdoor activities

One PE lesson was observed in each school. Classes were usually combined for PE and conducted by two teachers (two males or one male and one female). In one lesson, girls and boys were separated throughout and had different activities – which were often less physical and strenuous for the girls. The groups came together at the end to evaluate and congratulate each other. In other lessons, there were separate warming-up exercises for boys and girls, but groups were mixed for skills practice and volleyball training. In the private school that was practising for athletics, girls ran one lap less during the warm-up activity, but joined in with boys for long jump and high jump practice.

In all schools, boys and girls wore shorts and T-shirts and those who did not bring their PE kits did not participate. There were more girls sitting on the sidelines. There was good interaction between teachers and students and among students. Teachers encouraged both genders. Girls were less active and complained of the heat, headaches and tasks set for them more often than the boys did. Teachers and boys encouraged them and the atmosphere was friendly.

Facilities for PE were rather cramped in one state school and students were playing on the one hard court in the middle of the school. Facilities in the other two schools were adequate although students could be quite noisy and disturbed classes in the vicinity. Balls and game posts were the only equipment in use. The private school had spacious facilities and transported students to the national stadium for athletics practice. PE lessons were examples of healthy and friendly interactions between boys and girls.

One of the two agriculture lessons, on application of fertilisers, had a practical component conducted outdoors, with a class of six boys and six girls. The agriculture patch was a very small area, with only two beds of lettuce, littered with bottles, boxes and papers. The boys fetched the water in two plastic watering cans while the girls picked up litter. There were two spades, used by the boys to prepare the beds. The teacher demonstrated the application of the fertiliser and handed the fertiliser to the boys only. The girls watched and were accused by boys of being lazy, and not wanting to dirty their 'precious' hands.

Other school activities

Participation in extra curricular activities (ECA) was relatively low and the number of clubs was limited. Head teachers mentioned transport problems as a constraining factor. In two of the state schools for which figures have been provided, boys were

more active in the sports and art clubs while care clubs, ecology and wildlife clubs, and Creole festival clubs attracted more girls. Wildlife and other environment clubs are usually very active and enjoy a high profile nationally. In one school, there were 19 girls and only 1 boy in the wildlife club. In the private school, boys were more active in the sports and music clubs and girls in the drama and dance clubs. There was more or less equal participation in the maths club.

Girls were more active in competitions and activities organised at school and national level and won most of the awards at end-of-year prize giving ceremonies as seen in table 2.13 below.

School management processes and practices

The management teams in the state schools consisted of a head teacher and two deputy heads: one for curriculum and one for pastoral issues. There are seven subject departments, headed by heads of departments (HODs). The private school had a much smaller management team consisting of a head teacher, a deputy head teacher and a head of curriculum. There are more females on management teams in all schools. Table 2.14 below lists the distribution of staff across the four schools.

Table 2.13. Gender-wise receipt of best performance awards

	Boys	*Girls*
School A	15	19
School B	11	21
School C	20	30
School D	11	17
Total	**57**	**87**

Table 2.14. Gender profile of school management teams

	School A		*School B*		*School C*		*School D*	
	M	*F*	M	*F*	M	*F*	M	*F*
Head teacher		1	1			1	1	
Deputy		2		2	1	1		1
HODs	4	5	2	5	3	6		1
Total	**4**	**8**	**3**	**7**	**4**	**8**	**1**	**2**

Interviews were held with three head teachers (two females and one male) in the state schools and with the deputy head teacher responsible for the secondary section in the private school. Three staff meetings were observed in the state schools, but it was not possible to observe a staff meeting in the private school.

Gender awareness among management staff

There was greater awareness and understanding of gender among head teachers than among teachers generally. Head teachers from the three state schools were knowledgeable about gender, could identify gender issues in their own schools and admitted concern for issues such as boys' disciplinary problems, lack of motivation, underperformance and classroom gender imbalance. They were aware of gender-unfair practices operating in the school, and some very stereotyped behaviour by teachers. One school had an action plan on gender, although it had not been implemented. The head teacher, who was new to the school, was in the process of sensitising teachers and gathering baseline data to revise and implement the plan. She was committed to gender issues and had undertaken a study on gender as part of her Master of Business Administration (MBA) course in education administration.

Another head teacher, conscious of the large gender imbalance in secondary 1 classes, had replaced setting with mixed-ability teaching. He described his initiatives as a 'hard lonely battle' because teachers were largely opposed to the move. They found it difficult to teach mixed-ability groups because of the large range of abilities and the lack of resources to cater for different needs. Parents were also opposed to the practice, fearing that it compromised their children's education. The head teacher showed great determination to persevere and was equally committed to giving both sexes a fair chance, and he actively encouraged the school's female football team. He felt that the ministry should give more direction to schools and provide research and data to sensitise teachers and parents.

The deputy head teacher from the private school felt that gender was not an issue in the school. Boys and girls performed equally well and the school set high expectations for all. Girls were more conscientious and more regular with homework, but the differing needs of boys and girls were understood and catered for. Management and staff were aware that boys needed the 'extra push' and provided special encouragement and counselling whenever necessary.

Responsible posts

Three of the schools had student councils/committees to ensure participation of students in school activities. Students elected prefects and student committees. The schools set the criteria. In one school, the student committees showed a clear gender bias in favour of girls and an under-representation of boys. The total membership comprised 63 girls and 26 boys; the position of chair was held by ten girls and three boys; vice-chair was held by eight girls and five boys; secretary was held by ten girls

and three boys, and 35 girls, as opposed to only 15 boys, were ordinary members. The school has 28 female peer educators as opposed to ten male peer educators. Peer educators are role models for other students. In the two other schools, the practice was to appoint a boy and a girl prefect for each class, resulting in more balanced committees. The two head teachers from state schools said that staff had enormous problems identifying boys with the right qualities to become head boys in their schools.

Some teachers and head teachers seemed to lay more emphasis on the disciplinarian role of prefects, rather than the leadership one. In this frame, a good prefect was one who maintained discipline in the absence of the teacher, who made sure that exercise books were collected and cleaning duties performed. He/she was expected to report instances of misbehaviour to management and act a 'mini teacher'. Girls appeared to be more comfortable in these roles while boys were reluctant to tell on their friends and risk being ostracised by their peers.

Counselling services

All schools had a counsellor and counselling services were available to boys and girls. Girls were more willing to seek advice and made more use of this service, while boys would report to the counsellor only in cases where they were referred, even in the case in the one school with a male counsellor. One explanation given by a head teacher was that boys did not approach counsellors for fear of appearing weak or being teased by their peers. They tried to resolve the problems themselves and often ended up in more trouble.

Peer educators are role models for other students. They receive training in leadership and life skills. They are students who guide and counsel their peers on HIV/AIDS, drug and substance abuse, pregnancies and other adolescence-related problems and lead by example. Some of the qualities required for a peer educator were responsibility, friendliness and commitment. The majority of peer educators in the state schools were girls. Table 2.15 outlines the number of peer educators in the three state schools.

The unequal gender balance suggested to some that girls were more responsible and were better role models. The male counsellor said it was very difficult to persuade the boys to become peer educators and that he had noticed very little change in boys' attitudes during his 12 years as counsellor.

Table 2.15. Number of peer educators in state schools

	Boys	*Girls*
School A	12	29
School B	9	30
School C	10	28
Total	**31**	**87**

Discipline/suspensions

All schools had a code of conduct: head teachers felt it applied equally to all and that all received fair treatment. They felt that girls were more obedient, responsible and compliant. Boys were more often reported for misbehaviour and breaking rules and were sometimes involved in more serious offences such as alcohol, drugs and gambling. Table 2.16 outlines the number of students suspended in 2006.

Over twice as many boys were suspended from schools in 2006, and over half of both boys and girls suspended were from one school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Education system processes and practices

There is insufficient leadership on gender at the Ministry of Education and the persistent belief that gender is not a major problem in schools. The ministry should reinstate the Gender in Education Committee, which can champion the cause of gender and lobby policy-makers.

Members of the ministry's Quality Assurance team felt they had sufficient training in order to be able to identify gender issues at school, and gender was not perceived as a major problem in secondary schools. More gender research and data is however needed to help QA staff understand the changing concepts and emerging challenges of gender in Seychelles schools and develop indicators that can measure these effectively. In order to be able to report on the gender dimensions of the hidden curriculum, training in gender analysis and the design of gender-sensitive instruments is also needed. The QA service with its limited staff will not be able to do this on its own.

Students

The research revealed that the way in which many Seychellois boys constructed their masculine identity was problematic. Boys were being brought up with narrow standards of masculinity and associated male identity with physical strength and prowess, social status and dominance. Femininity was equated with childbearing and

Table 2.16. Number of students suspended, 2006

	Boys	*Girls*
School A	12	8
School B	71	24
School C	20	12
School D	3	1
Total	**106**	**45**

womanhood. Hard work, and responsibility were considered feminine traits and not necessary for successful careers. Boys also held more stereotyped attitudes of appropriate jobs for men and women, shying away from the more caring professions like nursing and early childhood education, showing a predilection for more physical and risky activities to demonstrate their manliness.

Boys portrayed themselves as 'breadwinners', 'heads of families' and 'protectors', oblivious to the realities of the Seychellois society and to the fact that 47 per cent of the households were headed by women. It would appear that schools were not helping them to challenge these stereotypes or preparing them for a future where they would not necessarily be the breadwinners and would be expected to participate to a greater extent in household responsibilities.

Boys need to be provided with opportunities at school to reflect the diversity of masculinities that can free them from narrow and limiting possibilities. Careers and personal and social education programmes must be evaluated for their efficiency in changing stereotyped attitudes and developing self-awareness. It is strongly recommended that personal and social education and careers education be delivered by confident teachers who can address emerging challenges boldly.

Girls' expressions of femininity were more rounded, giving them more freedom to express themselves and not overly restricting them. However, the interviews revealed that many girls were caught up in a paradoxical situation attempting to reconcile their wish for greater freedom and economic independence with the need for protection and approval by men.

Gender identities are fixed by early socialisation in the home. Seychellois homes provide girls with a stable, protective and structured environment to learn valuable attributes of responsible and caring behaviour. Many boys were deprived of this opportunity to develop responsible behaviour by being allowed more freedom and a more lenient and unstructured environment at home. This may make them more prone to negative peer pressure, street influences and anti-social behaviour. More research must be undertaken to determine patterns of socialisation in the home, which may be putting boys at risk, and links between the boys' projections of masculinities and the rising incidence of acts of violence, vandalism, bullying and sexual harassment in schools.

The tendency to see the other gender in a more negative light reveals the need for greater understanding and interaction between girls and boys. School processes and practices in state schools, however, seemed to be segregating the students and in some classes observed, putting them in competition against each other. The tendency for many teachers to hold up girls as models of discipline, maturity and hard work can destroy boys' self-esteem even further.

Special intervention and counselling programmes must be developed to engage boys more fully in school. Teachers must develop and use a variety of teaching strategies that answer to the needs and interests of both girls and boys.

Teachers

There are enormous differences in perceptions depending on teacher's gender, age, nationality and subject specialisation in state schools. Such a divergence of views within a small sample indicates that there are different sets of value systems and expectations operating in schools and students may be receiving conflicting messages about appropriate behaviours. There is evidence from classroom observations that this is already taking place. In such situations, it is important that schools make their own position on gender equality and equity very clear.

Gender issues need to be frequently discussed with staff and misconceptions need to be clarified, by producing updated data on student performance and behaviour. Management must take clear leadership for gender and equity issues and the school must have clear written policies to guide all teachers. This was not happening in case study schools and no school had a written policy on equal opportunities. The majority of teachers had not received formal up-to-date training in gender and equated sex with gender.

Many teachers held stereotyped views on girls' and boys' attitudes and performance, which generally went unchallenged. The labelling of boys, and to a lesser extent male teachers, as 'irresponsible' and 'unmotivated' was institutionalised and echoed by all categories of staff male and female in state schools. Such labelling was frequently used as an excuse by men and boys themselves to abdicate responsibilities. Similarly, the belief that 'girls/women are multi-skilled and can cope with more than one thing at a time' placed undue pressure on girls to meet expectations. Management staff lacked expertise, support and strategies to challenge these deep-rooted beliefs and practices. It is evident that repeated messages of low expectations of boys will progressively affect their self-esteem and performance and drive them to rebel against school. There is urgent need to conduct more research and redress this situation.

The pervading negative discourse on boys masked the fact that large numbers of girls in low ability streams were also underperforming and felt threatened by the rough and unruly behaviour of boys. Schools did not adequately cater for their needs. Teachers seemed very reluctant to discuss issues of class or socio-economic status.

Teachers take part in constructing gender through interactions and relationships with students and cannot pretend to be gender neutral. They need to be aware of their influence and the messages they send out daily. The ministry must organise more gender-sensitive training for all its staff and gender must form an integral part of all teacher-training courses

Sexual harassment and bullying are growing concerns in schools. Teachers were not informed or involved in combating this problem. It was not openly discussed or tackled efficiently, and students considered the practice of dealing with isolated cases to be ineffective. Students said they developed their own mechanisms to counter harassment as they grew older and stronger. This leaves the younger and more

vulnerable students unprotected at school. Schools need to go beyond the approach of dealing with isolated cases and involve everybody, students, parents and teachers, in preventing and eliminating harassment.

Although male and female teachers reported getting along well with one another and did not feel discriminated against, women teachers appeared to shoulder the major part of responsibilities in state schools in order to get things moving and to avoid confrontation. Management tacitly condoned this arrangement in order to preserve peace, although some young female teachers secretly complained of being overburdened and harassed by long-serving male teachers who refused to do their share of work.

Processes within and outside the classroom

In spite of their stereotyped views and statements, teachers were in general professional in their approach and attentive to both genders. Many teachers also came out very strongly on their 'gender neutral' stance during the interviews. They were convinced that gender was not an issue as far as their teaching was concerned. They wanted to be seen as being gender-fair and non-discriminatory in their practices and were therefore conscious of their own classroom behaviour. They addressed both genders respectfully and asked an equal number of questions. They had mastered all the outward trappings that, in their view, rendered them gender-fair. They did not, however, appear to reflect more deeply on how their teaching might have impacted differently on boys and girls.

The segregated seating arrangements in many classrooms and students' automatic reflex to form single-sex groups when asked to organise themselves for group work may suggest that teachers had a superficial understanding of gender and may not have recognised the gendered contexts within which they operated. Girls were largely 'invisible' in the PSE classes, in the low ability classes and the practical component of the agriculture lesson. Teachers did not seem aware of this situation or adjust their teaching styles. Awareness raising and training could address these issues.

In 11 of the lessons observed in state schools, teachers appeared to conduct their duties in a 'clinical' manner. They entered classrooms, delivered lessons and left oblivious of the noise and litter. Although interactions within the classrooms were correct and acceptable, there was very little friendly interaction with teachers and students outside the classrooms. Teachers did not question their teaching methods or attempt to explain the poor behaviour and performance of boys. They had few strategies or solutions to propose. There is a need for teachers to reconnect with students, and cater for differing learning needs and interests. Action research could be encouraged in schools to promote reflective thinking and action.

All secondary schools (except for the private school) have adopted streaming because it is easier to manage. Setting and subject options require complex timetabling arrangement and adequate numbers of classrooms and teachers. These are not always

available in schools. Schools need greater guidance on grouping students to ensure that the ministry's policy of equal opportunities is enforced. It is too serious a matter to be left entirely to schools.

Finally, certain particularly sensitive PSE lessons might be taught in single-sex classes, so that both genders' needs are catered for.

School management processes and practices

Many school management processes and practices are heavily gendered and both girls and boys are affected in their social and academic development. Gender is not considered a serious issue in spite of glaring imbalances in access to certain curriculum areas and participation and performance in examinations.

Although school managers are more gender-aware than teachers, they lack the skills and strategies to address the situation. Gender is insufficiently researched and monitored by education managers.

Schools do not actively challenge gendered behaviours or acknowledge their role in the reconstruction of identities preferring to blame the family, the mass media, female teachers and the society at large. When questioned about the school's responsibilities, many head teachers and teachers admitted 'helplessness' in dealing with the boys. Counselling and persuasion did not appear to work and they considered their efforts to be a waste of time. School practices and processes were unquestioned. Thus it was impossible for them to see how some school practices such as rigid streaming and setting could be alienating boys.

The ministry's policy statement is clear on the principle of equity. The ministry must monitor its implementation in schools and send out clear messages that it is unacceptable for any group to be discriminated against. It must support school management teams in its efforts to create more gender-friendly schools. It must sensitise parents and the public on its policies and choices to deliver on its promise of equity. There is currently stiff opposition from the more vocal parents. Parents however should be made aware of inequalities arising out of rigid streaming practices and engaged in the process of boys' empowerment.

Overall

Making sense of gender in Seychelles schools has proved to be a formidable challenge because of the lack of data and research to guide the process. The Ministry of Education should encourage more debate, training and research in gender so as to deepen teachers' understanding and commitment to gender and 'human rights' education.

Schools will not be able to bring about changes on their own, but trained staff working in partnership with parents, other partners and the ministry can start the process of reflection and reconstruction. The case study schools were willing to take up the challenge.