

## CHAPTER 8

# The Reproduction of Gendered Inequalities in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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### Introduction

#### **Nigeria's development and gender profile**

Nigeria, on the west coast of Africa, has an area of 923,769 square kilometres. In 2006, its population of 140,003,542 spoke more than 400 languages and belonged to more than 250 ethnic groups (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007). It has a low Human Development Index – ranked 158 out of 177 countries (UNDP, 2003) and high ethno-religious and regional tensions. The struggle for economic and political dominance leads to high-profile assassinations, religious intolerance and ethnic clashes at the slightest provocation. This situation, coupled with the political influence of kinship, lack of transparency in government and other factors creates space for corrupt practices and disregard for the rule of law. This in turn paves the way for marginalisation of less powerful groups and individuals.

Women face discrimination in the economic, political and social spheres and in educational opportunities. Nigeria's Gender-related Development Index (GDI) was 0.551 in 2006, ranking 139 out of 157 countries and only 18 positions away from the worst performer. Fafunwa observed that:

*'... for too long, woman has lived in the shadow of her male counterpart and this has, over the centuries, created a psychological complex in the female gender as she is made to play a second fiddle.'* (1990:7)

Generally, socialisation patterns in Nigeria place enormous restrictions on women, while demanding a higher input to domestic labour. Girls are in many cases, reportedly denied the same quantity and quality of food as their brothers. Moreover, parents generally prefer to have boys because of the higher prestige society accords males. Indeed, Anyawu (1995) observed that nursing mothers are better cared for if the baby is a boy. A UNICEF and National Planning Commission (NPC) report further states that:

*'In Nigeria's patriarchal society, women suffer marginalisation even at the family level. Just as girls in some parts of the country are excluded from decision-making concerning their choice of spouse, women are often not allowed to take part in decisions on how many children to have or when to have them. The right to make such decisions, especially among the Yoruba, is seen to be exclusively that of the man.'* (UNICEF/NPC, 2001: 256).

The same source noted that women were often excluded from family decisions on matters that are deemed important. It noted further that at the community level, women 'have traditionally been excluded from direct participation in decision-making' even though some women's forums provided avenues for females' expression of their aspirations. This is because decision-making is 'considered the man's exclusive domain' and because 'they were considered too weak and emotional to exercise responsible leadership' (ibid.). While such attitudes are prevalent throughout Nigerian society, they are likely to be more deeply rooted in the North, where it was only in 1976 that a decree allowed women to vote in, or to contest, elections. UNICEF/NPC gave an account of how a female political activist was expelled from Kano,<sup>1</sup> flogged in Zaria<sup>2</sup> and imprisoned 17 times during Nigeria's First Republic (1960–66) for participating in politics (Bakari, 2005).

Despite Nigeria signing up to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, there is still institutionalised discrimination against females, as the instances below illustrate:

- The Penal Code (applicable in the North) excludes forced 'sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife' from the definition of rape as long as she has attained puberty.
- Sections 350 and 363 of the Criminal Code cover the same offence (unlawful and indecent assault), but provide for a lesser punishment when the victim is female (two years' imprisonment) compared to when the victim is male (three years).
- Wife beating is seen as a legitimate practice under many traditional Nigerian customs. The Penal Code [Section 55 (1) (d)] does not recognise as an offence those acts that do not occasion grievous harm and are done by 'a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife, such husband and wife being subject to any natural law or custom in which such correction is recognised as lawful'.
- A husband is generally regarded as having the legal power to decide on family property, even without consulting the wife. Irrespective of the wife's contribution, assets are usually acquired in the husband's name.
- Under customary law, the wife is often treated as property in the event of her husband's death. Especially in the South East, 'she is one of the properties to be inherited' (UNICEF/NPC, 2001: 238–239).

Such discriminatory practices as sanctioned by the state no doubt have a telling effect on education institutions as well. This research will contribute towards exploring how such discriminatory practices impact on education institutions.

## **Nigeria's education system**

### *Overview*

Nigeria's formal educational system has been considerably transformed since independence. The overall philosophy of education in Nigeria, as outlined by the National Policy on Education, is to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and to promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding. The National Policy on Education gave the basis for the nation's philosophy of education as:

- The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen,
- The full integration of the individual into the community,
- The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

Formal education in Nigeria is highly rated in the nation's development plans, as education is viewed as the instrument for change and the attainment of national development goals.

Nigeria currently operates a three-tier formal educational system, known as the '6-3-3-4' system of education. This comprises basic education (comprising six years' primary and three years' junior secondary education), three years' senior secondary education and four years' tertiary education. As at 2006, there were more than 54,000 primary and more than 18,000 secondary schools across the country (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2007). There are also some 200 universities, monotechs, polytechnics and colleges of education, which enrol hundreds of thousands of students. These institutions have been set up and are run by a variety of proprietors including the federal, state and local governments as well as corporate bodies, NGOs and individuals.

### *Gender and education*

In its national education policy, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) recognises that education is 'an instrument par excellence for effecting national development ... and a dynamic instrument of change'. The national education policy is based closely on Nigeria's national goals and identifies the following as the core beliefs underlying the country's philosophy on education:

- Education is an instrument for national development; to this end, the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction of people and ideas are all aspects of education,
- Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for the general development of the society,
- There is need for equality of educational opportunities to [sic] all Nigerian children, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, each according to his or her own ability,
- There is need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria; to this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine individuals' direction in education (FGN, 1998: 7).

Nigeria is also a signatory to international commitments that guarantee human rights, especially those to do with the right to education. It has signed up to the Dakar Framework for Education for All (the EFA goals), which includes eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a particular focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of high quality. Nigeria has also expressed its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and targets to be achieved by all UN member states by 2015. Member states are expected to reflect the MDGs in Programmes of Action as part of their development plans. All MDGs are gender responsive, but specific to education and gender equality are Goals 2 and 3, which aim to achieve primary and secondary education for all children and to eliminate gender disparity in education.

The Nigerian education philosophy is therefore based on: (i) the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen, (ii) the full integration of the individual into the community, and (iii) the provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all. The application of this philosophy is, however, complicated by ethno-religious and geopolitical differences in the country, which result in perceptions of marginalisation and mutual mistrust.

In 2005, the Universal Basic Education databank released projected figures for primary school enrolment up until 2016. The expected number of students enrolling for junior secondary school in 2005, for example, was 20,688,772 (11,458,355 boys and 9,230,417 girls). The growth rate for enrolment is assumed to be 2.5 per cent; therefore, a total of 32,326,206 (17,903,680 boys and 14,422,527 girls) may be registered for junior secondary school in 2007.

Most secondary schools in Nigeria are government owned, but there are few private schools owned by individuals and private or religious institutions. The government controls all matters related to policies and programmes through the Ministry of

Education at the federal level and State Ministries of Education at the state level, while management processes fall within the purview of individual schools.

In Nigeria, 35 per cent of youth aged 12–17 years attend secondary school. Young people in urban areas in the south and those in more economically advantaged households are most likely to attend.<sup>3</sup> There is concern that education largely reproduces and reinforces the wider social discrimination and economic and political disparities experienced by girls and women.

Significant gains in terms of gender equality can be made at the secondary school level. Through education, girls can become more empowered and self confident, as they acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values that are critical for negotiating their place in society. In this regard, many of the benefits normally attributable to education issue from the secondary rather than primary level, which underlines the importance of building on any gains at the primary level with high secondary participation rates.

Literature suggests that multidimensional factors account for students' selection of subjects. Parental influence, students' interests and aspirations, as well as certain factors within the schools, all play a complementary role in determining what students study. Leach (2003a: 102–104) observed that females are encouraged to study traditionally 'feminine' subjects to maintain the public versus private domestic spheres and because science and mathematics are seen as high status, difficult and objective, while 'feminine' subjects 'are seen as less important and suitable for the less intelligent'. Women sometimes feel unable to study sciences, and both male and female students believe some subjects, particularly home economics, are more appropriate for females and the core sciences for males (Harding, 1992; UNESCO, 1997; Dunne, Leach et al., 2004). In these cases, gender, rather than ability or capacity, plays a role in determining what subjects students choose to study.

## **The Research and the Sample**

### **The research**

The study was carried out in Kogi, one of 36 states in Nigeria, situated in the north-central part of the country. Kogi is a historic state also referred to as the 'Confluence State' because two major rivers that run through Nigeria (the River Niger and River Benue) converge in its capital city of Lokoja. Kogi State is not only a confluence of rivers, but also of cultures, religion, ethnic groups and languages: the state therefore provides a rich source of data for the survey.

Fieldwork was carried out from 4–24 May 2007 by a team of eight researchers: four men and four women. In common with all the countries in the study, the Nigerian exploration used classroom observation, focus group discussions with students, administrative staff, school inspectors and support officials, as well as interviews with teachers and principals and senior education managers.

The field researchers made several field trips to the schools in groups of three to five. For every visit, the team would spend the whole day in school, making observations and conducting interviews and discussions.

Different instruments were applied in addressing the main task of the research, but the chief instrument used was in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed by the research team in collaboration with the central facilitator at the Commonwealth Secretariat. Other instruments used were documentary evidence, observation and focus group discussions with students (males and females), teachers and principals and education ministry officials. The interviews were guided by the research task, as well as by the insights gained through documentary evidence and classroom and other related observation.

Five schools were involved in the study, each unique in its type, nature and location, to enable the researchers to capture a wide range of responses as regards gender practices across cultures, language, religious and ethnic groups. The selected schools covered all the three senatorial districts in the state. They were:

- A boys' government secondary school located at a suburban town about 60 kilometres from the state capital
- A co-educational community secondary school located at a rural settlement about 200 kilometres from the state capital
- A girls' government secondary school located in a rural settlement about 300 kilometres from the state capital
- A co-educational government secondary school in an urban setting within the state capital
- A co-educational private school located in a suburban area on the outskirts of the state capital

**The schools**

All the schools had the same pattern and levels of classes stipulated by the government as enunciated in the National Policy on Education, although not all had complied with the recent prescribed format for separating grades 7 to 9 from grades 10 to 12. The different levels or grades are shown in Table 8.1.

**Table 8.1.** Grades by junior or senior secondary level

<i>Level</i>	<i>Grade</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Grade</i>
Junior secondary 1	7	Senior secondary 1	10
Junior secondary 2	8	Senior secondary 2	11
Junior secondary 3	9	Senior secondary 3	12

The term 'grade' is equivalent to that found in the British school system. Students transiting from the junior to the senior levels must sit a nationwide promotion exam to qualify. Differences in student enrolment at senior secondary level (as will be seen in the analysis) are often connected with this process.

Three out of the five case study schools are government owned; one is a community initiative supported by government, the other is a private school. Three schools are co-education secondary schools, while the other two are single-sex schools: one boys' school and the other girls'. Although there are certain basic features that cut across the structure of all school types, management processes and practices are based on the individual school's discretion. All were established between 1923 and 2001. The older schools have witnessed various administrations and management styles. In three of the schools, the principal is assisted by two vice-principals: one is in charge of personnel/student administrative matters, while the second handles academic matters.

All schools have teachers employed by the government, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA), the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), or by private institutions and there are more men than women. In addition to their teaching roles, teachers also sit on various committees. There was a high rate of teacher attrition in almost all the schools and students are sometimes left alone without subject teachers. In some of the schools, the PTA is actively involved in the management processes and takes decisions<sup>4</sup> on such issues as employment of part-time teachers or repair of toilet facilities etc.

Enrolment in all five schools reveals 34.96 per cent girls compared to 65.04 per cent boys with a 15–30 per cent drop-out rate for girls and a 7–18 per cent drop-out rate for boys. The most common reasons for boys' dropping out of school are monetary (where parents cannot afford the financial demands of their schooling) and male truancy. The reasons for girls dropping out of school are financial (where parents are gender-biased in choosing whose education is funded by available household resources) or associated with early pregnancies. Reasons for dropout by both sexes include household chores, especially for girls, child labour or the death of a parent, family member or benefactor.

## **The Findings**

### **Education system and processes and practices**

Education managers and inspectors, predominantly men, revealed their thoughts and practices as regards gender. They believe that efficiency in performance of principals and teachers is gender-related and its impact can sometimes be negative or positive. When female principals or teachers are absent for pre-natal or post-natal reasons, they are interpreted to mean incompetence occasioned by 'natural deficiencies', which impacts negatively on their jobs. According to them, in the course of their supervision and inspection of schools they come across problems with female

teachers and managers much more often than they do with males. For example, they frequently referred to female teachers as being always on maternity leave, leaving early to breastfeed their babies or nursing their sick children in the hospital etc. In essence, they identified what Connell (2001:34) calls the 'reproductive arena' as a 'deficiency'. Connell explains:

*'In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organised in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity'.*

This finding is in agreement with Connell's (2002) observation that some males accept women's rights in principle, but engage in habitual practices that perpetuate male domination of the public sphere. With this strong belief and thought-pattern, female heads and teachers tend to exert themselves twice as hard (compared with their male counterparts) to please education managers and school inspectors.

This position corroborates the affirmation by the top management officers that schools and offices in the education ministry headed by females do better. Their performance is, however, ascribed to females' weaknesses and paradoxically, to their 'natural tendencies' to be thorough as a result of '(extreme) fear of intimidation'. In this regard, the good performances of females in managing educational institutions and departments are seen not as a result of their competence, but out of fear of failure, which make them work harder and spend extra time to 'measure up'. This is a clear case of deliberately misrepresenting merit and ridiculing women's success, which is occasioned by the gendered notion that the female sex is weaker and not supposed to lead males. Feminine 'deficiencies' were exploited to naturalise male authority through the institutionalisation of a firm male-dominated management hierarchy, both at the student and staff levels. Both male and female staff and students interviewed appeared fully aware of this discourse.

Male respondents displayed prejudice against female leadership in various ways and strongly opined that male-dominated school management has nothing to do with gender inequity. Rather, it is seen as an appropriate action taken in order to ensure effective management of schools. Dismissing gender considerations in appointments, a top senior officer in the Ministry of Education declared that gender was not an issue in the ministry, because 'as you can see, some of our departments are being headed by women'. He used this as an excuse to downplay the need for gender sensitivity in appointment of staff to positions of higher responsibility.

Most of the male respondents agreed that the management of schools is male dominated, but they believe that the status quo will not harm female teachers or students. Ironically too, even though some school inspectors claim that gender is not an issue in terms of school headship/leadership, they still believe that it is more convenient or even necessary for a female to head a girls' school and a male to head a boys' school, on the basis of each 'understanding their own gender better'.

While it was claimed that gender is not a factor in the provision of equipment and instructional materials in schools (since the same policies, type of education and opportunities applied to all), students were however given access on the basis of preconceived notions of the types of subjects suitable for the different sexes.

It does appear that the education managers interviewed are gender-unaware. This is because they feel strongly that gender issues should not be considered or infused in the preparation of curricula themes, schemes of work or lesson delivery, because there is no glaring gender disparity in the current uniform practices. It is also understandable for them to think the way that they do, as none of them has ever attended training to enhance their knowledge and skills in gender-related issues, let alone gender-related interventions. In such situations, school, rather than being life enhancing, might be life impairing.

### **School and class environments**

Classrooms, like any other structure around the school compounds observed, were built with block and cement. Only two out of the five schools had an adequate number of classrooms that were also in good condition, perhaps owing to their recent establishment. The other schools not only had insufficient classroom numbers, but these rooms were old, dilapidated, poorly furnished (seats and desks were often provided by individual parents, with students having to carry them to and from school), some with dusty non-cemented floors, others with no doors or window shutters and roofs partially blown off (exposing students to the elements). Not having enough classrooms means that rooms are over-crowded: a normal class scenario witnessed 64 students seated in one classroom. This situation seems to disadvantage girls, in particular, who are expected by society, school officials and male students to be shy, quiet and timid.

Three out of five schools observed had school compounds that had no fencing or clearly defined boundaries. One particular school compound was a thoroughfare, as vehicles and people pass freely, even when classes and exams are going on. The school environment therefore did not seem to be conducive for effective teaching and learning for both sexes.

Although the schools are visibly connected to an electric power supply, electricity was not constant and this interrupted the schools' daily activities. The standard of hygiene and sanitation is very poor in four of the five schools observed. Inadequate water supply was another challenge that students faced, as they had to trek long distances to fetch or buy water. The lack of water in the schools also affected the state of toilets (where available); for example, in one of the schools, teachers bluntly refused to teach as a result of the stench from the toilets. Absence of water and hygiene facilities, and poor hygiene practices are important reasons for children, especially girls, not to go to school or to drop out. It is difficult for girls to remain in school in such harsh school environments as the ones reported on here.

Even more serious than these grave issues, was the fact that the trek to collect water exposed girls to the threat, and sometimes reality, of rape en route – purportedly by a gang/or gangs of male students. Such a situation potentially undermines any of the benefits of school; this is even more the case given the high HIV/AIDS prevalence in many areas of Nigeria.

### **School management**

The spillover effect of the influence of education administrators is the gender spread of principals and their deputies across the schools surveyed. Among the five principals, four were men and one was a woman; of the 10 vice-principals, nine were men and one was a woman (she was also the principal of the affiliated junior secondary school).

The female principal was head of the all-girls school. Her deputies, however, were men: they are expected to guide her in the running of the school, since women are thought to lack the requisite leadership qualities and skills. The principal narrated the experience of her former employment as the head of a co-educational school where upon resumption of duty, several male teachers resigned their appointments because they could not tolerate a female principal. The ministry reasoned with the ‘protesters’ and posted her to the girls’ school. She also reported on having been intimidated to be hyper-aware of her actions, so that she would not be labelled as a ‘non-performer’ as a result of her being female. This finding is important in the sense that it explains one of the reasons why schools reproduce and transmit gendered beliefs and practices from one set of students to another. Provided that gendered micro-politics persists among teachers and are actively supported by the policy-makers as shown in this case, there is little hope for redressing and structurally eliminating harmful gendered traditional practices.

The school management on its part plays a strong role in gender stereotyping by delegating assignments and headship of various departments and committees based on gender. For example, committees such as those managing finance, exams, continuous assessment and the timetable are headed by males, while the social and food committees are headed by females; this was the pattern throughout the survey. Invariably, the students see the same trend in larger society replicated in their schools, and form attitudes reminiscent of societal gender expectations. Specific facilities for female teachers such as maternity leave, being able to leave early for nursing mothers and separate toilets (for males and females) were allowed. However, there is no recognised government policy to allow paternity leave (for males) in Nigeria.

Consciously or unconsciously, gender determines teacher/student interactions and responses. For example, most male students are said to be rude and disobedient to female teachers, but respectful and obedient to male teachers. This is because students believe that it is only male teachers who have the authority, as well as the physical power, to control them. In matters of health, however, female students prefer to approach women teachers and male students prefer men teachers. In class,

both male and female students prefer female teachers because they were perceived to be kind, gentle and responsive: 'just like mothers'.

Students were involved in classroom management as monitors and prefects. Their assignments include keeping order and discipline in class and assisting teachers in many different tasks. These assignments differ in some cases for boy and girl prefects/monitors. For example, matters concerning discipline and supervision of boys and girls were exclusively for boys. This is because, according to the school ethos, girls are not expected to exercise control over boys, who consider it degrading to receive directions from or obey their female colleagues.

Most schools (especially the co-educational and girls' ones) had special rules for girls in addition to the common rules and regulations for boys and girls. These rules have to do with dressing, movement and association. They are justified as being in girls' own interests, to reduce their risk of suffering harassment. Girls must be seen to dress decently and should not mingle with boys or men, visit boys' hostels or receive male visitors in their hostels. None of these rules applied to boys' conduct, thereby entrenching the biased nature of responsibility. The schools support division of labour based on sex/gender roles. Both boys and girls performed chores such as sweeping, fetching water, dusting the blackboard and picking up refuse, but girls were held more accountable. Boys were assigned physically strenuous tasks and any considered to be dangerous for girls.

## Teachers

In theory, teachers attach great importance to educating both girls and boys. However, they believe that there are some differences in capacity and performance in certain subjects for girls and boys, and also that there are differences in their expressed choice of subjects. They think that girls tend to like and do better in arts subjects, while boys aim for science subjects. There were exceptions, however, where some girls do better in the sciences and some boys do better in the arts.

Teachers used the same strategy in teaching boys and girls and believed that if there was any difference in the way girls and boys learn, it must be attitudinal. For example, it is generally believed that girls tend to be more attentive and more disciplined than boys with lessons. Table 8.2 gives an example of the characteristics of girl and boy

**Table 8.2.** Perceptions of the characteristics of male and female learners

<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>
Love/preference for art subjects	Love/preference for sciences
Like maths	Like maths
Timid and shy in class	Confident, domineering in class
Look up to boys in class	Look down on girls in class
More serious, disciplined	Less serious, less disciplined

learners from the co-educational schools' perspective, as seen by teachers and school managers.

However, teachers' role is seen to be paramount in students' choice of subjects. In one school, for example, both boys and girls performed well in mathematics because they liked the two teachers of that subject. In the sciences (biology, chemistry and physics) teachers think that boys do better than girls (??? physics), while in the arts (languages and social sciences), girls do better than boys.

Teachers were of the general opinion that male and female students should be allowed to assume their natural roles in future, depending on their choice, even if that choice is influenced. This means if a girl chooses to play a 'feminine' role or 'masculine' role, she should not only be allowed, but also encouraged in that direction. However, they strongly objected to the idea of allowing boys to study 'feminine' subjects such as home economics. Teachers exhibited preconceived notions and strong prejudices as to the roles of females and males. The schools, undoubtedly, seemed to be preparing students to conform to the society's gender stereotyping of girls and boys.

In terms of behaviour, teachers believed that students generally misbehave and are very difficult to control. Students commit offences such as stealing, loitering, truancy or absence from school, violence against male teachers who try to correct them, bullying, rape and many other types of violence (for example, a girl could instigate her boyfriend to attack and beat up other students or even male teachers who disapprove of their promiscuity). To maintain discipline, teachers use corporal punishment on both male and female students, but in different ways. Male students are considered stronger and worse behaved and tend to receive harsher punishments than girls. Gender also determines the type and method corporal punishment. For instance, boys would be flogged on the buttocks, while girls would be caned on their palms. One of the teachers explained that they could not flog girls on their buttocks without evoking sexual connotations.

Most of the teachers are concerned about the numerous cases of sexual harassment by male students and teachers to female students and teachers, and by female students to male teachers.<sup>5</sup> Such cases often result in teenage pregnancies, which may lead to abortion and other reproductive health challenges. The issue of violence, particularly against female students, appears to be serious. Reports indicated various forms of violence such as 'senior' boys sexually harassing girls, including junior girls (12–15 year olds); groups of boys collectively raping girls; harassment of teachers (male and female) by boys and even girls (through their boyfriends); male students physically assaulting male and female teachers; bullying etc. Even as the researchers were leaving a particular school, they witnessed a male student slapping a male non-teaching staff member when he tried to stop the boy from beating a girl. Yet laws / policies fail to mention or address harassment in schools. Such cases were left for the school authorities to deal with. The only form of reprimand or punishment for such behaviour is a transfer or withdrawal from school<sup>6</sup> of the students involved.

The situation in the single-sex schools was different. Female teachers were said to be punishing girls, often accusing them of enticing male teachers to befriend them. Girls disagreed with this assertion, but rather claimed that male teachers harassed them sexually and they were too afraid to report such cases. They claimed further that female teachers harassed them verbally and assaulted them physically for allegedly having male teachers as boyfriends. In the boys-only school, meanwhile, there are reported cases of bullying of younger students by older ones. Coined as 'seniority', the school ethos permits some students to send others on errands. Refusal to obey such directives attracts physical assault and other forms of 'punishment' from the older students. Within this context, too, some older students snatch food items and money from junior students. Victims hardly ever report such cases for fear of reprisal attacks by the older students.

Teachers believe that laws/policies are neither definitive nor practicable on harassment, because most such cases are not considered to be harassment or violence, even by the school management and/or the Ministry of Education. For instance, it is not unusual for a senior boy (student) or a teacher to 'befriend' an adolescent girl and have sexual relations with her. If she becomes pregnant, the penalty only applies to the girl. She would be withdrawn from school and becomes the victim who loses the chance to continue schooling, while the boy (or male teacher) go unpunished.

## **Students**

The students appeared aware of the different social expectations of boys and girls. The boys were happy and indeed proud to be boys: thankful to God for their ascribed roles as males, and liked the qualities attached to boyhood. A boy said he liked being a boy and gave the following reasons:

*'When I exercise authority in the house, my parents are happy. They both like me for doing manly jobs like washing their cars, playing football, protecting my sisters from any danger or fighting bad boys. Also to make sure that they don't go out especially at night. I pity my sisters, but that's how God made them.'*

Boys liked the authority and physical power associated with being male and some said they would prefer to die than to be born female.

Girls also projected themselves as proud and happy to be girls, but there were certain qualities attached to being girls that they did not like. These include their vulnerability and lack of security, weakness, lack of freedom and feminine roles assigned them by society. Girls want to study to become nurses, accountants and teachers. When asked why the preference for being a nurse instead of being a doctor, the response was: 'I prefer to be doctor, but I am not good in the subjects (sciences). I know I can be a teacher or nurse. Then I can marry a doctor'. Others feel that society, particularly family institutions and negative values attached to educated females, could serve as a hindrance to their education. Boys and girls live in mutual suspicion, in a kind

of love/hate/fear relationship. Some of the boys claimed girls were 'seductive' and that this distracts boys from being serious about their studies.

Boys were confident and ambitious to take any of the courses or subjects perceived to be difficult and 'no go areas' for girls. The girls were ambitious and confident to study as far as possible and become doctors, engineers, journalists, politicians, actresses, pharmacists etc, but societal/parents' expectations (desires and demands) keep them from actualising their dreams.

The schools' ethos and practices, as translated in teachers' attitudes and behaviour, did more to direct students to take courses based on gender, as well as reinforcing gendered beliefs, than any other factor. One girl was afraid of any mathematics-related course and suggested that this was because she was female. A boy wanted to study home economics, but could not do so as a result of prejudice against a boy taking the course by teachers and students alike. In another instance, the male-only secondary school didn't teach home economics, because it was taken for granted that boys do not need such a subject. Boys in the school claimed that, even if they were interested in registering for the subject, they would not be able to do so.

Girls also complained of little or no time to study to get good grades. According to them, their average day begins at 5 or 6 am and ends at 8 or 9 pm, with hardly any time for rest or recreation. Table 8.3 provides an overview of girls' and boys' routines during an average day: during term-time and the holidays.

Further concerns expressed by both boys and girls related to school welfare and security. Different factors affect their studies such as lack of teachers in some subjects, the distance to school, lack of water supply, lack of toilets (poor hygiene and sanitation), lack of furniture in the class (students having to carry desks to and from school every day), lack of security (the school compound is open and unprotected), exposure to snakes and scorpions while trekking long distances in search of water and the seemingly incessant cases of sexual harassment, especially rape.

### **Textbooks and learning materials**

Teaching and learning materials in classrooms range from the blackboard to illustrative maps and charts. All the schools have libraries, but most lack books. Where science laboratories exist, equipment was in short supply or not available at all. Male students were favoured in science subjects over females, and formed the majority in science classes.

Although textbooks and learning materials were in short supply, a gender analysis was conducted on samples of those available. Two textbooks were analysed, one each for English and chemistry. The textbook on English language was chosen because it is a core subject and all students in all the schools use it; the chemistry textbook was chosen because chemistry is a core subject for all science students.

**Table 8.3.** Gender differentiated daily schedules: term-time and holidays

Time	An average school day	
	Girls	Boys
5-7 am	Wake up, help mothers sweep compound, prepare breakfast for family. Attend to young ones	Sleep, wake up, listen to radio, wait for breakfast
7-7.30 am	Eat breakfast, bathe and go to school	Eat breakfast, bathe and go to school
2-3 pm	Return from school, eat lunch, wash dishes	Return from school, eat lunch, rest
3-6 pm	Prepare supper	Sleep/rest/go out to visit friends, play football
6-8 pm	Eat supper, wash dishes	Read, watch TV or go out
8-10 pm	Watch TV, video, read	Watch TV, video, read, go out
10-11 pm	Go to bed	Go to bed
Time	An average holiday day	
	Girls	Boys
5-7 am	Wake up, help mothers sweep compound, prepare breakfast for family. Attend to young ones	Sleep, wake up, listen to radio, wait for breakfast
7-8 am	Eat breakfast, wash dishes and bathe	Eat breakfast, bathe
8 am-1 pm	Wash clothes (for juniors, parents), run household errands, prepare lunch	Help father in market, farm etc./ sometimes free
1-3 pm	Eat lunch, wash dishes	Eat lunch, rest
3-6 pm	Prepare supper	Go out (visit friends, play football etc).
6-8 pm	Eat supper, wash dishes	Eat supper, watch TV, go out
8-10 pm	Read, watch TV etc.	Go out, read, watch TV etc.
10-11 pm	Go to bed	Go to bed

The cover page of the English textbook (Titled: *Senior English Project for Secondary Schools Students Book One* authored by NJH Grant, S Nnamonu and D Jowitt) shows a picture of six males and a female. The illustrations in the textbook do not depict males and females in equal or close to equal numbers. Pictures of boys/men outnumbered those of girls/women by 11, i.e. 22 male compared to 11 female pictures. Nor are the images similar in size, position or aesthetics: the pictures of girls are smaller than those of boys, as if viewed from a distance. The illustrations also depict males and females in a variety of roles, traditional and non-traditional. Images of males include the following:

- A man standing with a long hoe in a discussion with another male farmer

- A hardworking farmer ploughing with an ox
- A farmer resting under a tree with a hoe beside him (implying rest after hard work)
- A man tilling a piece of land
- An old man telling other males the history of their locality
- Men playing musical instruments, with some dancing and others fishing
- A male poultry farmer
- Two men walking through a forest

Females, on the other hand, are shown carrying baskets of fruit, carrying a baby and dancing. Table 8.4 lists the gender roles as depicted in the book.

On the whole, this book depicts a great deal of gender bias and stereotyping, showing men as hardworking, landowning, controlling finances, making decisions for the family and as managers. Roles or positions such as priests, warriors, rulers/leaders etc. were exclusively for males. Boys were regarded as heirs to the men. The females, on the other hand, were depicted as mere helpers to men or domestic servants. However, non-stereotypical and non-prejudicial terms such as ‘passenger’, ‘people’, ‘being’, ‘individual’, ‘veterinary doctor’, ‘secretary’, ‘parent’, ‘humanity’ etc were also used.

The chemistry textbook was written by ST Bajah, BO Teibo, G Onwu and A Obikwere. It made use of tables, graphs, circles, test tubes, drawings and so on. The drawings were clear and of different shapes and sizes. The front page depicted a male and a female: the male is shown drying a material, while squatting, while the female is depicted carrying out an experiment in a laboratory; she is wearing a white apron. Gendered pronouns ‘he’ and ‘his’ were used, especially when pointing at contributions made by different authors. No female scientist was acknowledged throughout the text, whereas male scientists dating back to 1787 were acknowledged for their contributions.

**Table 8.4.** Gender analysis of textbook imagery

<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Hardworking, own land, controls finances	Good housewives
Protectors	Helpers
Marry women and protect them in a house	Involved in petty trading
Men as heirs	Potters and weavers
Name newborn babies	Perform domestic chores
Adventurers	Wash men’s clothes
Conquerors	Cook meals for the household
Holy priests	

**Processes within and outside classrooms**

One key feature in all the co-educational schools studied was the gendered nature of student interactions both in and outside the classroom. In the classroom, gendered interactions were noticeable through the creation of gendered space. All sitting arrangements were structured in such a way that boys and girls grouped themselves differently. The boys tended to sit separately and tended to occupy the front seats, while the girls occupied the rear seats. It is also striking that students reveal that they choose to sit along gender lines without influence from the school authority. However, school authorities approved of this arrangement and said it’s a logical thing to do.

The same practice was observed outside the classrooms. Observation in the playgrounds, morning assembly and dining areas all showed a segregated cluster of boys and girls working, playing and standing separately. Only occasionally, did we see boys and girls interacting.

The major reasons advanced for this segregation ranged from religious to cultural and biological explanations. It was explained that boys and girls were encouraged to observe strict seclusion, especially during adolescence. Both boys and girls also cited religious factors and physiological factors (especially for girls during menstruation), as reasons for segregated seating arrangements along gender.

**Classroom Processes**

Most classrooms observed recorded high student numbers (for example 48-64) to one subject teacher. This questions teacher productivity and students’ receptivity in terms of learning. The teaching method used by a majority of the teachers is the lecture method, with occasional questions to students to get feedback. As a result of large number of students in one class, the teachers could hardly spend two minutes with any one individual student.

Tasks on classroom upkeep were shared out among students. An example of a daily schedule in a co-education school is presented in Table 8.5.

**Table 8.5.** Gender analysis of a typical school’s daily classroom schedule

<i>Tasks</i>	<i>People responsible</i>	
Conducting morning session	Boys	-
Fetching water	Boys	Girls
Sweeping/cleaning classroom	Boys	Girls
Monitoring class	Boys	-
Solving questions on blackboard	Boys	Girls
Running errands for teacher(s)	Boys	Girls
Serving tea to visitors	-	Girls

When some students were asked if they were comfortable with this arrangement, both boys and girls said they did not want to change the way things were because it fits with their gender roles. However, some male and female students argued that boys should be spared fetching water, as this is perceived to be the responsibility of women. This is unsurprising because students are blinded by gender-stereotyped socialisation and engage in gender inequity and discrimination without the slightest notion of the harm that can be done to their development processes as a result. Although there were fragments of empathy for the different gender roles, especially by the boys, students are generally oblivious of the interventions that could be made through policy. This finding shows that the schooling process is already preparing students to accept and appreciate their assigned gender roles in preparation for adulthood.

***Sport and recreation activities***

In all the co-educational schools studied, different sports and recreation activities exist for both boys and girls. In the single-sex schools, too, sports that are deemed inappropriate for a particular sex were not available. For example, football and badminton facilities were not provided in the girls’ school. Perhaps more disturbingly, the teachers in charge of sporting facilities in the co-educational schools have pre-conceived notions about the types of sports male and female students should engage in, which in all cases is reflective of the opinions of school management/authority. Table 8.6 lists recreation and sporting activities and students’ participation by sex.

Girls play all the balls games played by the boys, except football, although some girls expressed their desire to play the game had it not been for discouragement by society as translated in the school ethos. There is little or no form of encouragement from teachers in charge of these sports for students to engage in sports across ‘gender lines’, as girls are rarely considered or groomed to become captains of teams. For example, sports kits are provided through the sports captains, who are often boys (except in the female-only school). In addition, it was observed that girls were hampered by their skirts (which is the approved mode of dress) during sports: they could not run or jump as easily as their male counterparts.

**Table 8.6.** Gender analysis of sporting and recreation activities

<i>Sport</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Recreation</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>
Football	X		Debate	X	X
Volleyball	X	X	Dancing		X
Basketball	X	X	Music		X
Handball	X		Snooker	X	
Athletics	X		Picnics	X	X
Badminton	X		Field trips	X	X
Table tennis	X		Knitting		X

## Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

This study concludes that the lack of a policy that specifically addresses gender discrimination is one of the major causes of the institutionalisation of discriminatory practices in schools. This policy gap is itself a product of patriarchy, which strenuously attempts to institutionalise male norms as the standard. Neither national nor local policies consider gender as an essential issue to be addressed, hence the lack of policies or affirmative action that take into account the strategic needs and circumstances of girls.

The study found that both institutional (school-related) and societal factors have a strong influence on the preservation, refining and transmitting of gendered beliefs and practices in the schools surveyed. The schools appear to be erecting powerful barriers to females' entry into the world of work. This is being done through the inculcation of the belief that boys should be prepared to dominate their physical environment, while girls should be prepared for marriage, child rearing and 'playing second fiddle' in society. Indeed, the study established that apart from deliberate discrimination against girls in the types, forms and processes of education provided for them, their personal integrity is also at times attacked in schools. Issues such as physical assault and sexual violence against women and girls appeared to be an unfortunate reality in some of the schools studied.

This study reveals first of all that parents prefer to educate their sons rather than their daughters, even if they can afford the education of both sexes. Therefore, under conditions of extreme poverty, girls are easily withdrawn from school. Regrettably, some of the girls tend to agree with their parents' positions, believing that if they acquire higher qualifications, they would be less likely to get married. Teachers, therefore, being part of society and many being parents themselves, they are influenced by such beliefs. Thus, teachers' attitudes and behaviours tend to favour male students over their female colleagues. Many teachers (both male and female) hold the belief that male students are more competent and able than female students. Teachers see girls to be the 'weaker sex' and more fragile physically, intellectually and socially than boys.

The study further reveals that boys and girls are encouraged by the school ethos and practices to choose subjects along gender lines. More males than females choose science subjects, while teachers and the general school environment encourage male students to choose and perform better in these subjects. A subject such as home economics, which is largely seen as feminine, is not even taught in the boys-only school. What is more disturbing is the fact that none of the teachers or officials interviewed supported the idea of infusing gender issues into the curriculum, and no one liked the idea of students being encouraged to take subjects across gender lines.

The management of the schools studied also reveals strong male bias. Perhaps, the major problem is the way in which schools reinforce the perpetuation of this maleness in leadership. Boys were found to play a more predominant role than the female

students. The head boy was generally more active and has authority over both boys and girls, while the head girl has authority only over girls.

There is a strong interrelationship between existing patriarchal policies and formal and informal practices in the schools. This study has concluded that patriarchy is the main covert principle that determines policy formulation and/or its lack of implementation. The schools' ethos tends to ignore or suppress females' gender identity. In other words, discrimination based on gender is legitimated and often 'encouraged'. This legitimisation cuts across the hierarchy. The schools' staff members and students are ideologically stratified into binary opposition camps: feminine and masculine, with the major focus of discourse by both sexes centring on feminine 'inferiority'.

The main finding of this study is that institutional life in the schools studied is gendered and that gendered relations affect retention, participation and performance of boys and girls. To borrow Connell's words, the schools studied are 'substantively, not just metaphorically, gendered' in that 'organisational practices are structured in relation to the reproductive arena' (Connell, 2001:35). Since school is a 'masculine' institution, whose 'cultures appeal to highly masculine values of individualism, aggression, competition' (Collinson and Hearn, 2001:146), gender 'neutral' equitable policies on the ground become largely ineffective in addressing gender-discriminatory practices. Indeed, such policies tacitly reinforce gendered perceptions, beliefs and practices with negative consequences for gender-fair practices. The practices in these schools are themselves a reflection of the patriarchal values dominant in the wider society, as respondents consistently referred to practices and beliefs in society to explain or justify what went on in the schools.

The following actions need to take place:

- The development of a gender-sensitive policy framework for schools in Nigeria. Without a legal framework, victims of gender discrimination stand unprotected and this viciously sustains and promotes the discrimination against them. Such a policy needs to be formulated so that it can redress the existing gender imbalance as a short-term strategy, as well as ensure gender-fair and gender-sensitive education institutions in the long term.
- A concerted effort to infuse gender issues in the formal school curriculum at all levels.
- The development of school-level gender equity policies to guide recruitment, admissions, course placement, promotion etc. of teachers and other staff.
- The development of a comprehensive policy on sexual harassment, with clearly defined procedures for complaints and investigations, which do not result in further risk or threat to the complainant. Such a policy requires the active involvement of all stakeholders, i.e. male and female members of staff and students.

- The development of less hierarchical in-school relationships, especially between members of staff and students. There is the need to reduce the unequal power relations existing between students and teachers.
- Teacher training and awareness raising on gender issues as they affect enrolment, retention and achievement and the consequences of teacher action and inaction.
- The infusion of gender issues into teacher education curricula, with a view to re-orienting teachers and helping them unlearn the gendered perceptions of their worldview.

### **Notes**

1. This is an ancient Islamic city/state and now one of the northern states that practises the Sharia legal system.
2. An ancient Islamic city and now part of Kaduna state.
3. Nigeria DHS EdData Survey 2004: Key Findings.
4. Community ownership of schools is vital to a conducive learning environment.
5. It is considered to be 'sexual harassment' against male teachers by girls if the girls dress in an 'attractive' manner.
6. Withdrawal hardly ever takes place because the (female) victims are seen to be attracting boys through their behaviour and style of dress in such cases.

