

Gender, development and education in Caribbean SIDS

Leith Dunn

Jamaica is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) in the Commonwealth Caribbean. It has high global visibility despite having a small population (2.7 million), because of its human capital and culture. Advances in telecommunications have spread the popularity of Olympic gold medallists Usain Bolt and Shelly-Ann Fraser Pryce BA – the fastest man and woman on Earth; pan-African leader Marcus Garvey; and musicians ‘Bob’ Marley and Tessa Chin, all of whom originate from Jamaica.

Gender, development and gender mainstreaming

Gender is the social meaning given to biological sex differences. These ‘meanings’ are acquired through gender socialisation, a process that enables individuals to learn the roles, responsibilities, norms, attitudes, behaviours and expectations associated with their masculine or feminine identity. Masculine and feminine gender

roles are shaped by agents of gender socialisation, such as the family, school, religious institutions, peers and the media. The gendered realities of masculinity and femininity in Caribbean SIDS are also influenced by differences of class, race, ethnicity and other social factors.

Education institutions are important agents of socialisation. These ‘gendered spaces’ positively and negatively impact national development goals and can reinforce traditional gender roles and norms and perpetuate social, economic and political inequalities that result in females and males having different degrees of access to power and decision-making in both private spaces (households) and public spaces (public institutions). Education institutions can also transform unequal power relations and empower learners to achieve their full potential.

Development as a concept and process has undergone a paradigm shift in recent decades. Gender equality and human rights have



© Shutterstock / Ervin Moann

Several studies show that girls outperform boys in national assessment tests at all educational levels

become more central. As a result, several international conventions and consensus agreements focus on human rights, gender equality and gender mainstreaming as essential for sustainable development.

Gender mainstreaming (GM) is a process and a strategy adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (1997) to promote gender equality in development by integrating gender issues in sector policies, programmes and strategies. GM as a process assesses the likely impact of a policy, programme or law on males and females. GM as a strategy ensures that the concerns and experiences of both sexes are systematically considered in policies and programmes.

Human rights agreements

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right to freedom from discrimination and the right to education. Other human rights agreements include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Other agreements that support development include the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (2000–15), and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD POA), which protects reproductive rights. National strategic plans include: Vision 2030 Jamaica, Vision 2020 Barbados, and Vision 2020 Trinidad and Tobago. National gender policies are also being developed, including Jamaica's National Policy for Gender Equality (NPGE; 2011).

Vulnerabilities of Caribbean SIDS

The 16 Caribbean SIDS face common characteristics and challenges in the current and post-2015 period. These include: small size, physical isolation, rising sea levels linked to climate change and an increasing risk from natural hazards that can become disasters.¹ These factors can exacerbate gender and other social inequalities, hence the need to integrate gender in policy analysis and planning.

The historical legacy of 300 years of African enslavement also impacts on education and equality. Research shows that there are gender differences in access and enrolment; drop-out and completion rates; quality education; socio-economic status; and geographic location. Psychological barriers can prevent those from Caribbean SIDS from pursuing careers in agriculture, despite the need to improve food security.

Most Caribbean SIDS are middle- or high-income countries, but still face financial crises and contradictions. The World Bank (2014) classifies Jamaica as an upper-middle-income country, ranking 96 on the Human Development Index. This masks inequalities that impact on gender, education and development.

Many SIDS face high debt burdens and structural adjustment agreements limit resources for gender, education and development. Jamaica, for example, signed a new agreement with the International Monetary Fund in May 2013 to access US\$1 billion in funding to go towards paying off an external debt of \$13.82 billion (2013 est.), which takes priority over funding education development. Jamaica's public debt was 123.6 per cent of GDP (2013 est.).²

SIDS can use these crises as opportunities to integrate gender in education and increase returns on investment. This can improve education outcomes for boys as several studies show that girls outperform boys in national assessment tests at all educational levels. Blank and McArdle (2003) in their World Bank study entitled 'Building a Lifelong Learning Strategy for Jamaica' showed better labour market outcomes for males; higher rates of unemployment for females and young people aged 15–24 years (27 per cent males and 42 per cent females); gender segmentation in education and training; gender wage gaps in earnings; concentration of females in 'pink collar occupations'; and increased risks for males because of lower education enrolment, completion and performance in an environment dominated by the services sector. The World Bank notes that sector contributions to GDP in 2013 were: services 64.1 per cent, industry 29.4 per cent and agriculture 6.5 per cent.³

IGDS: Twenty years of teaching, research and outreach

Caribbean SIDS have been positively impacted by the work of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), established at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in 1993. The four IGDS units are located at Cave Hill in Barbados; Mona in Jamaica; St Augustine in Trinidad and Tobago; and the Regional Co-ordinating Unit at the UWI's regional headquarters. Twenty years of multidisciplinary research, teaching, advocacy and publications have supported Caribbean feminist theorising which explains how race, ethnicity, class, nationality and sexuality influence female subordination. Caribbean masculinity studies have also explained changing gender roles and issues affecting males. Research by IGDS and education researchers has increased understanding of parenting, pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational, technical, tertiary and teacher education. Popular debates on male marginalisation in education (Miller, 1994) have evoked diverse theoretical responses. Chevannes (2001), Figueroa (2004) and Bailey (2000) argue that gender socialisation and male privileging issues are the result of male under-participation, not under-performance – males, it is argued, perform as well as or better than females in some subjects.⁴

Some graduates from the IGDS's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are employed in public institutions to mainstream gender, and there is a growing demand for gender-mainstreaming skills globally. Course offerings have expanded to integrate gender in health and in environment. As well as this, internships are used to help improve career readiness.

Gender specialists are needed to promote policy coherence to integrate gender more effectively in the strategic plans of public sector agencies, which tend to be 'gender-blind'. Trained gender specialists can help ministries of education to address issues highlighted in the National Policy for Gender Equality, such as female under-representation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM subjects); gender stereotypes in occupational choices; gender wage gaps in the labour market; and the need for more males in teaching to improve outcomes for both sexes.

The IGDS units are jointly developing a UWI Gender Policy to review policies, curricula and the female/male student ratio.

Conclusions and recommendations

Gender inequalities in education underscore the need to expand gender mainstreaming. Greater efforts are needed to support policy coherence. Crises facing Caribbean SIDS provide opportunities to build institutional capacity, and use the knowledge and skills of IGDS graduates to increase returns on investment in education. The publication of IGDS RCU/Caribbean Development Bank research on gender differences in education in the Caribbean can enhance education outcomes in many countries.

To achieve post-2015 development agenda goals, IGDS partnerships with gender agencies and education ministries can enhance technical capacity to mainstream gender in education and other sectors. Integrating scholarships for gender focal points in ministries, departments and agencies into IGDS undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and short courses can strengthen the institutional capacity of such institutions. Resource manuals to support the process can include Commonwealth Secretariat's *Gender Management System* (Leo-Rhynie et al., 1999) and CARICOM's *Gender Issues in Education* (Bailey et al., 2000).

Endnotes

- 1 UN 2014 SIDS Conference, see: www.sids2014.org/index.php?menu=1496 [Accessed 18 September 2014].
- 2 CIA Fact book 2014. See also: www.indexmundi.com/jamaica/economy_profile.html [Accessed 18 September 2014].
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 The top Matriculant at the UWI Mona campus in the AY 2014/2015 was a Jamaican male with Grade 1 passes in 17 CSEC and CAPE subjects.

References

- Bailey, B., Brown, M. and Yusuf-Khalil, Y., 2000. *Gender Issues in Caribbean Education*. Guyana: Caribbean Community Secretariat.
- Blank, L. and McArdle, T., 2003. *Building a Lifelong Learning Strategy in Jamaica*. Kingston: DFID–World Bank Collaboration on Knowledge and Skills in the New Economy.
- Chevannes, B., 2001. *Learning to be a man: Culture socialization and gender identity in five Caribbean communities*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press.
- Figueroa, M., 2004. 'Old (Female) Glass Ceilings and New (Male) Looking Glasses: Challenging gender privileging in the Caribbean'. In: Bailey, B., Leo-Rhynie, E., eds. 2004. *Gender in the 21st Century: Caribbean perspectives, visions and possibilities*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers. pp. 134–153.
- ILO (International Labour Organization), 2002. *Definition of Gender Mainstreaming in Gender Equality Tool* [online] ILO. Available at: www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/gender/newsite2002/about/defin.htm [Accessed 16 September 2014].
- Leo-Rhynie, E., and the Institute of Development and Labour Law, 1999. *Gender Mainstreaming in Education: A Reference Manual for Governments and Other Stakeholders*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Miller, E., 1994. *Marginalisation of the Black Male*. Kingston: Canoe Press.

LEITH DUNN is a Jamaican sociologist and gender specialist who has worked in higher education and development agencies for more than 25 years. She is a graduate of the University of the West Indies (BSc Hons and MSc, sociology) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (PhD, sociology). She is head of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Mona Unit at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.