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Gender and the formal education sector in Vanuatu

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Introduction

Since Hindson (1995) wrote about educational planning in Vanuatu much has changed, especially in the structure and processes of the government sector. In 1997, the government of Vanuatu introduced the Comprehensive Reform Programme (CRP). And, although the main focus of the CRP is economic development, social reform is also part of the agenda. An integral component of the CRP is the gender provisions, which are (1) the incorporation of gender awareness and gender analysis into policy making at all levels, and (2) the introduction of a strong gender dimension into the collection and analysis of statistics (CRP Co-ordination Office 1997).

As part of the CRP, nine gender benchmarks were developed, including education. However, just what this would involve was not clearly stated in the CRP. Greater clarity was provided by three Ministry of Education guiding documents: the Education Master Plan; the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport Corporate Plan 2002–2006; and the Education for All Vanuatu: National Plan of Action 2002–2006 (Ministry of Education 2001). All refer to gender equity in education, but how this is to be achieved is not detailed. For example, the Education Master Plan states: 'We intend to make our education system ever more equitable' (Ministry of Education 1999:3). Here, the need is identified, but the 'how to' is missing.

Although the government of Vanuatu has committed itself to improving gender equity throughout all sectors of society, in effect, progress has been slow and the government machinery that has been developed to drive those changes has on the whole been ineffective.¹ This has direct implications for the education sector and its capacity to deliver equitable educational outcomes.

As Hindson (1995:333) suggests, there has been an 'ad hoc-ery' in planning and policy development, especially as it pertains to gender equity in Vanuatu. This is due to other areas being prioritised, such as improving participation rates, and to the lack of financial and human resources. Another difficulty has been the unavailability and inaccessibility of quality data (Strachan 2002).

However, it was in this climate that in 2002 the Ministry of Education in Vanuatu contracted the Department of Women's Affairs to undertake a gender analysis of both the formal and

informal education sectors in Vanuatu. The specific objective of the analysis was to establish baselines on gender status across the education sector in Vanuatu and to provide a blueprint for future analyses by the identification of data sources, the collation and analysis of available data, and the monitoring of the education system for gender equity.

The resulting analysis, the *Gender Analysis of the Education Sector in Vanuatu* (Strachan 2002), covered participation rates, employment, qualification attainment and examinations, scholarships, curriculum, and subject choice. This was then put in the context of national population and employment data. Both the formal and informal education sectors were included in the analysis. However, because of incomplete data on the informal education sector, this paper focuses on the formal education sector. At best, it provides a somewhat blurry snapshot.

The findings

Vanuatu's population is not large (196,000), but it does have a very high birth rate and growth in population (2.6 per cent) with the highest growth being in urban areas (4.2 per cent) of Port Vila and Luganville. In 1999 females comprised 49 per cent of the population and males 51 per cent (National Statistics Office 2000). This was an important factor when considering the findings of the analysis. However, despite girls and women having a lower representation in the general population, the findings of the analysis show that they are still disadvantaged when compared to boys and men.

Participation

Education in Vanuatu is neither free nor compulsory. School fees are a major contributing factor to the lower representation of girls in education. If, because of financial constraints, families have to make a choice between their son and their daughter attending school, the boy's education will usually be prioritised. However, over recent years some gains have been made in reducing the gender disparities in accessing formal education, and this has been most evident at the primary school level. The analysis found that:

- females are less likely to have attended school than their male counterparts;

- in 1999, 85.1 per cent of all males and 81.6 per cent of all females aged five and over were attending or had attended school;
- approximately 50 per cent of all children in the 4–6 years age group are attending preschool;
- approximately 50 per cent of preschool enrolments are female;
- in primary schools and secondary schools females are accessing education almost in proportion to their representation in the general population;
- female enrolment rate is growing faster than male enrolment rate;
- a serious concern is the push-out rate for both boys and girls at Years 7, 11 and 13 as a result of the Year 6 and 10 national exams and the PSSC examination at Year 12;
- the push-out rate for girls is particularly high in Years 11,12, and 13;
- in 2001, the enrolment rate in Year 13 was only 1.4 per cent of those enrolled in Year 1 (see Graph 1);
- between 1992 and 2002, girls' secondary school enrolment rate increased faster than boys';
- most school leavers (both males and females) do not access further education either in the formal or non-formal education sectors;
- in 2002, over 50 per cent of law students and Pacific languages students at the University of the South Pacific (Emalus Campus) were female;
- in 2002, female enrolment in extension courses at the University of the South Pacific (Emalus Campus) was less than 40 per cent; and

- females are particularly under-represented as students in vocational, technical and tertiary education (extension courses) in the formal sector.

Graph 1 shows the very high push-out rate. In Year 1 there are 7,500 students. By the time they reach Year 13, only 133 are left. This has huge implications for Vanuatu's future supply of tertiary graduates.

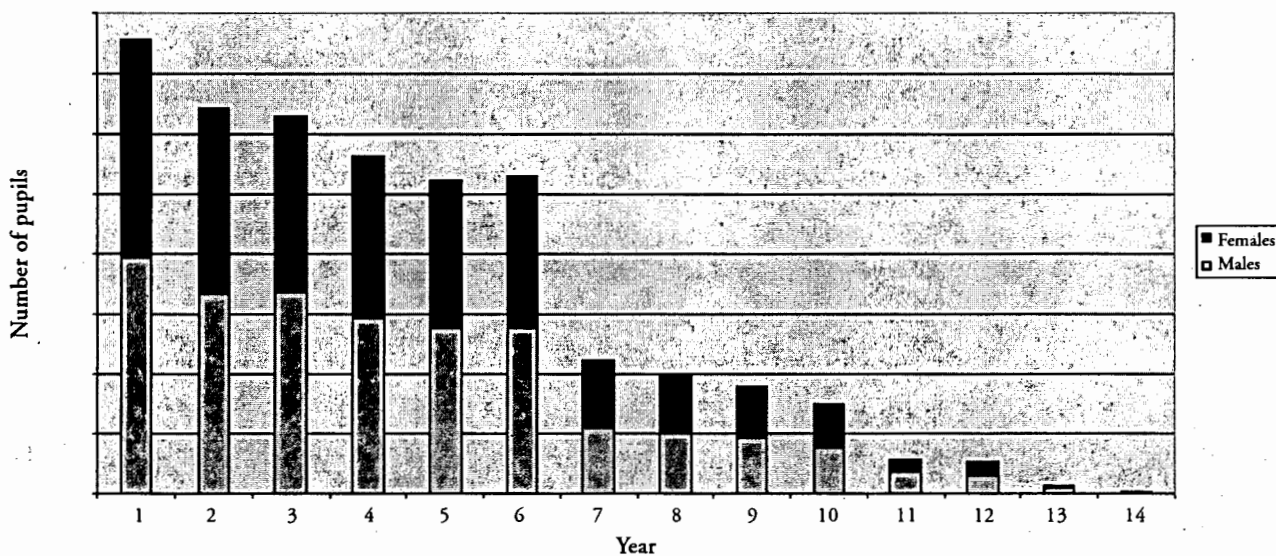
Employment

The Vanuatu 2000 Labour Market Survey (Vanuatu Statistics Office 2000) provides a detailed picture of employment in the formal sector of the Vanuatu economy. Much of the information provided is sex disaggregated. The survey showed:

- the formal sector employs very few people (14,272);
- approximately one third are women (4,684).
- men and women tend to be employed in stereotypical jobs, for example engineers (male) and secretaries (female);
- men are more likely to be employed in senior positions that therefore attract higher salaries;
- employment opportunities are mainly those that traditionally employ men (the exception is accounting); and
- for women to access non-traditional areas of employment they will need to study and gain qualifications in fields that are non-traditional for women.

The education employment data (Ministry of Education Youth and Sport 1999, 2000, 2001) parallels the national employment data. For example, only one-third of those employed in education and one-third of those employed in

Graph 1 2001 Enrolment by Year and Gender (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport)



Vanuatu's formal sector are women. Some of the greatest gender disparities in education occur in employment, for example:

- less than 2 per cent of preschool teachers are males (this was one of the few areas in education where men are under-represented);
- 36 per cent of secondary teachers were female (2002) and 50.1 per cent of primary teachers are female (2001);
- in 2001, only 30.4 per cent of primary school principals and 8 per cent of secondary school principals were females;
- 34.7 per cent of employees in the administration of the Ministry of Education were females;
- the median salary for males in the administration of the Ministry of Education is P12–14 and for females, P8–10;
- teaching staff in tertiary, vocational, technical and non-formal education are predominantly male; and
- there is no female representation on the Teaching Service Commission.

Disparities were also evident in seniority in the Ministry of Education. In 2002, all the directors and the Director General of Education were male.²

Qualification attainment and examinations

Although males are typically more qualified than females, this gap is closing. Females are increasingly successful in examinations, although there is little overall difference in the performance of males and females (Strachan 2002):

- rural females have lower and fewer qualifications than urban females and both rural and urban males (National Statistics Office 2000);
- males have more and higher qualifications than females (National Statistics Office 2000);
- females have a higher acceptance rate than males into Year 7 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport 1999, 2000, 2001);
- because of the inconsistency of data, progress was uneven and difficult to track in the Year 10 examinations;
- in 2001, slightly fewer females than males sat Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate examination (Strachan 2002);
- in 2001, males outperformed females in the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate examination (Strachan 2002); and
- fewer females than males sit New Zealand Bursary, but are more successful in gaining entry to university 7 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport 1999, 2000, 2001; Strachan 2002).

Curriculum and subject choice

Information on subject choice by gender in the formal sector is not routinely collected, therefore the picture is incomplete. However, overall the data (Strachan 2002) indicates that males and females are studying gender stereotypical subjects:

- in the formal sector, at some institutions, data on subject choice by gender is only available at institutional level;
- females are most under-represented in physics at both secondary school and tertiary levels;
- it appears that accounting is becoming an increasingly popular subject choice for females in secondary, tertiary and technical education;
- males are more likely to take physics and chemistry;
- at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology males and females are studying gender stereotypical subjects; and
- the integration of a gender perspective into the curriculum in the formal education sector is still in the early stages.

Scholarships

A limited number of scholarships to study overseas at tertiary level are offered each year. Most study is undertaken in the Pacific region. The University of the South Pacific is the largest recipient of scholarship awardees. However, there are large gender disparities in the area of scholarships that severely limit women's access to tertiary education:

- fewer females (about one-third) than males apply for scholarship, but when they do apply females are awarded scholarships in proportion to their application rate (Strachan 2002);
- at the tertiary level, males and females tend to study gender stereotypical subjects although this is not as marked as before (Strachan 2002); and
- Graduates are mainly employed in the government sector and are usually in gender stereotypical jobs (Vanuatu Statistics Office 2000).

The small number of women gaining tertiary scholarships has a strong flow-on effect. It results in fewer women employees in the formal sector, with most of who have lower seniority than their male colleagues and who therefore earn less.

Recommendations

The *Gender Analysis of the Education Sector in Vanuatu* (Strachan 2002) also included recommendations for action.

For policy development

The recommendation given the highest priority was that covering the area of policy development. The Ministry of

Education was urged to develop a 'Gender Equity in Education Policy' that would cover both the formal and non-formal education sectors. This was considered essential if the Ministry of Education's planning for gender equity was to avoid the 'ad hoc-ery' referred to earlier (Hindson 1995:333).

To facilitate the development of such a policy and to gain the commitment of Ministry of Education staff, it was also recommended that all staff responsible for policy and planning within the ministry undertake training in research, gender equity, how to develop policy with a gender perspective, and gender mainstreaming. Quantifiable indicators also need to be developed and included in the proposed policy. In addition, it was considered essential that designated person/s in the Ministry of Education be given the responsibility for gender equity in education. At present this is not the case. However, all staff should be encouraged and expected to include a gender perspective in their work.

It was also recommended that the policy target those areas of gender disparity identified in the gender analysis and include strategies specifically designed to reduce the identified gender disparities. The target areas were to:

- reduce girls' drop-out rate in Years 11, 12 and 13;
- recruit more men to train as pre-school teachers;
- recruit more women to train for secondary teaching;
- recruit more female students into technical education and non-formal education;
- increase the number of female principals and females in other senior positions in the education sector;
- recruit and promote more women in the administration section of the Ministry of Education;
- include women on the Teaching Service Commission and that the *Teaching Service Act* be amended to ensure this;
- encourage more females to take the sciences and technical subjects so their training and career choices are broadened;
- develop and raise awareness amongst parents and communities about the value of educating girls in non-traditional areas of training;
- encourage girls and women to apply for scholarships, including postgraduate scholarships;
- provide career guidance for both males and females at the secondary school level that includes encouraging both males and females to study and work in non-gender-stereotypical areas;
- encourage employers to employ both males and females on merit in non-traditional areas;

- employ and promote more women in the non-formal education sector; and
- include a gender perspective in future curriculum development.

However, given the lack of financial and human resources it is unrealistic to expect all these areas to be targeted at the same time. The Education For All Vanuatu: Action Plan 2002–2006 has already identified some priorities, for example, improving girls' access to education. It would seem sensible that in the first instance these be the targeted areas. And, given the financial constraints, such initiatives would need to be donor funded.

For data collection

To assist with the facilitation of monitoring progress and identifying trends, it was also recommended that the Ministry of Education Annual Reports and Statistical Digests need to consistently report and comment on the same data from year to year. It was suggested that every three years a comprehensive gender review be carried out to identify trends and progress. Sex-disaggregated data on scholarships, examinations, participation, push-out and drop-out rates, and employment rates should be routinely collected on an annual basis. Because of the present scattered nature of data, it was also recommended that all data be centrally located within the Ministry of Education. Other recommendations included that:

- further training be given to staff on data collection and statistical analysis;
- the Ministry of Education look at how they can improve the return rate of data from schools (and that this might involve the training of principals);
- the Ministry of Education Annual Reports include sex-disaggregated data on senior positions within education so that progress on increasing women's representation in senior positions both in teaching and in administration can be tracked and the strategies monitored for effectiveness;
- senior secondary examination results be disaggregated by gender, school and subject choice and be reported on each year in the Ministry of Education annual report;
- data on senior secondary (Year 11–14) examinations (from both Anglophone and Francophone schools) be sent to the statistics division of the Ministry of Education on an annual basis; and
- senior secondary schools be required to collect data on subject choice by gender and provide this annually to the Statistics Division of Ministry of Education.

Conclusion

The gender analysis highlighted some areas of gender disparity and inequity in education in Vanuatu, as well as identified some areas where considerable progress has been made. Changing attitudes, setting in place new and fairer systems and practices, and developing gender-sensitive curriculum takes time.

The Vanuatu government's official policy on gender equity identifies gender mainstreaming as the most effective tool for achieving gender equity in the government sector (Department of Women's Affairs 2001). Gender mainstreaming is also included as a strategy in the CRP Matrix and, 'is a strategy that makes women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs' (Department of Women's Affairs 2001:5). It is this integrated approach that is the key to success. Gender equity must not be viewed as an added extra to people's workload, but as integral to their work, to be considered and included in all planning and implementation. For this to occur, education staff will need training and support in gender equity and gender mainstreaming.

A 'Gender Equity in Education Policy' needs to be developed so that priorities are identified, strategies planned, indicators developed and a time line established. The 'how to' achieve gender equity in education needs to be a central focus of the policy. Critical to effective monitoring and evaluation is the collection of baseline data that is consistently reported on. There were gaps in the gender analysis because data was not available or was not available in a readily accessible form.

The gender analysis also identified some areas where further research is needed. Two are highlighted here. Firstly, it was particularly difficult to gain in-depth data on the non-formal education sector. The sector is diverse, geographically scattered and seriously under-resourced. The result is that how gender is played out in the non-formal education sector is not clear. A gender analysis needs to be undertaken that focuses solely on the non-formal education sector. This will help give a much clearer picture of gender issues in education in the rural areas of Vanuatu.

Secondly, only one tracer study has been undertaken that looks at work, or other, destinations of graduates. It is unclear where graduates are employed and if they employed in areas commensurate with their skills, qualifications and the needs of the country. Further tracer studies on returning graduates need to be undertaken at regular intervals, it was recommended that this occur every three years.

Because the government of Vanuatu has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it is able to take special measures to reduce gender disparities. These special measures, for example, reserving a certain number of scholarships for females, are not discriminatory either under CEDAW or the Constitution of Vanuatu. They allow the government to take positive steps to work towards gender equity in education. What is clear is that unless special measures are taken, with Vanuatu's rapidly growing population, gender disparities in education will remain the same or will worsen.

Notes

- * While undertaking the gender analysis, the author was working as a technical adviser for the Department of Women's Affairs in Vanuatu.
- 1. Vanuatu has ratified both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Both these international conventions include articles that focus on improving educational opportunities for girls and women.
- 2. During 2003, the administration of the Ministry of Education was undergoing a reform process. It is unclear at this stage if this will impact on women's representation at this senior level.

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