



## Dynamics of gender justice, conflict and social cohesion: Analysing educational reforms in Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the role of national level reforms in school curriculum and initial teacher education in gender justice in conflict-affected Pakistan, using a multidisciplinary framework applied to multiple data sets from selected teacher education institutions in Sindh. The school curriculum texts analysed potentially perpetuate gender injustice and foster conflict. While teacher education reforms offer the potential for transformative gender justice, gender remains peripheral in initial teacher education curriculum. Furthermore, institutional practices entrench gendered norms. Lecturers' and teachers' limited understanding of their role and capacity for transformative gender justice pose challenges to education for gender justice, social cohesion and conflict mitigation. Informed by our understanding of gender as a social construct, multiple strategies within and beyond education are offered towards transformative gender justice.

### 1. Introduction

The 2030 sustainable development agenda frames the sustainable development goal (SDG) 4 for education as the key driver for the realisation of the remaining 16 SDGs, including SDG 5 that focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Furthermore, education is seen crucial to the development of peaceful societies, while unequal distribution of education is viewed to foster conflict (UNESCO, 2016a). The interplay between education policies, gender (in)equality and conflict is reflected in the global indicator 4.7 which focuses on education for gender equality and the 'promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence', and requires identifying the extent to which national education policies, curricula, teacher education and students assessment mainstream gender equality (ibid: 397).

Against the above backdrop, international analysis indicates a greater likelihood of armed conflict in contexts of high levels of gender inequality in education (FHI 360 EPDC, 2015). Nevertheless, a review of literature on the relationship between gender, education and conflict highlights a range of theoretical and empirical gaps. For example, studies exploring the relationship between education, conflict and social cohesion, with very few exceptions (e.g. Durrani and Dunne, 2010) seldom focus on gender. Likewise, the literature on conflict and peace tends to focus largely on the gendered impacts of conflict but ignore the gendered drivers of conflict (Wright, 2014). For example, much of the literature talks about young men as most likely to be perpetrators and

victims of violence, and women to be victims of gender-based violence. This limits understanding of the ways the social construction of gender identities is connected to conflict. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence exists regarding how educational reforms, including those in the curriculum and teacher education, may contribute to social cohesion and conflict mitigation (Horner et al., 2015). In addition, conceptualisation and measurement of gender in global education and development discourses have been critiqued (Dunne, 2009) for being too focused on girls in ways that 'limits the potential for discussing complex gender issues that affect the possibilities for gender equity' (Monkman and Hoffman, 2013: 63). Finally, the need to subject assumptions regarding the positive relationship between education and gender equality to empirical scrutiny is highlighted (Khurshid, 2016).

This paper addresses the substantive gaps in the literature in relation to the dynamics between education, gender and conflict by illustrating the interconnections between gender inequality in education and conflict. Theoretically, it addresses narrow conceptualisation of gender in global education policy discourses by utilising a multidisciplinary and innovative framework, drawing on feminist political philosophy and gender, conflict and education studies to analyse the relationship between education, gender justice and social cohesion in the conflict-affected setting of Pakistan. Although the terms 'gender (in) equality' and 'gender (in)justice' are often used interchangeably, in line with our theoretical framework discussed in Section 2.3, we prefer to use the term 'gender justice' to indicate both the ending of as well as the

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provision of redress for gender injustices that results in unequal gender power relations (Goetz, 2007). Specifically, we offer empirical insights into the potential of large-scale reforms in the school curriculum and initial teacher education (ITE) in supporting teachers for mitigating gender injustices in Pakistan. The empirical study reported deploys a multi-method approach, generating data from a range of educational stakeholders in Sindh. The findings offered have wider policy implications beyond Pakistan. The paper draws on a larger study designed to explore the ways social cohesion is integrated into the country's education sector at macro and micro level and the role of teachers in promoting social harmony.

The next section reviews the literature, culminating in offering the 4Rs framework of redistribution, recognition, representation and reconciliation. The subsequent two sections analyse gender justice first in the socio-cultural and political economy of Pakistan and then in education system through the lens of the 4Rs. A discussion of the context of education reforms and research methods follows. The findings are offered in three sections. We first analyse the ways gender and conflict are represented in the curriculum texts. Second, we offer an account of the possibilities of teacher education for transformative gender justice. Finally, we present an analysis of how teachers and lecturers understood gender justice and its relationship to education and conflict. The concluding section problematises the limits of educational interventions for transformative gender justice and offers multi-dimensional implications for the role of education in fostering gender justice and social cohesion.

## 2. Literature review and theoretical framework

This section first locates social cohesion and gender within educational research literature and concludes with the presentation of a theoretical framework for analysing gender justice in education in conflict-affected settings.

### 2.1. Education, social cohesion and conflict

The promotion of social cohesion is positioned as a key purpose of education, particularly in younger nations where nation-building is a key priority (Heyneman and Todoric-Bebic, 2000), and countries affected by conflict (Tawil et al., 2004). Interpretations of social cohesion are diverse. While some definitions stress 'common identity and a sense of belonging', others emphasise 'an active civil society' or 'equality and social solidarity' (Green and Janmaat, 2016: 171). Most definitions link the term to a societal property, based on the promotion of positive relationships, trust, solidarity, respect, (structural) inclusion, collectivity, and common purpose and associate it with social justice and equity.

In broad terms, education inequality includes inequality in access, quality and outcomes of education; a lack of respect for difference in educational structures, processes and content; and inequality in participation in educational decision-making. Educational inequality, as measured by skill inequality, is positively correlated with violent crime and political unrest and negatively correlated with political and civil liberties (Green et al., 2006). Furthermore, education inequality interacts with wider social disparities, intensifying the risk of conflict (UNESCO, 2016a). Likewise, greater level of gender inequality in education, as calculated from group differences in mean years of schooling, is reported to be associated with intra- and inter-state conflicts (FHI 360 EPDC, 2015). Additionally, countries characterised by high levels of gender inequality, as measured by fertility rates and participation in the labour force, are more likely to experience internal conflict (Caprioli, 2005). What might explain this link? Rather than seeking explanations of conflict and violence in the 'manifestations of gender inequality', analysis needs to focus on the 'ideas about masculinities and femininities which are used to justify these inequalities' (Wright, 2014: 5). In other words, masculinities and femininities produce genderings and are

product and productive of violence (Sjoberg, 2013). The link between conflict and gender injustice is better understood through Galtung (1990) conceptualisation of conflict which includes not only (i) armed conflict or direct violence but also (ii) structural violence—social injustices embedded into social structures—and (iii) cultural violence—any part of culture that renders direct violence or structural violence acceptable in society. Furthermore, gender is integral to 'structural and cultural violence for gender forms the basis of structural inequality' (Caprioli, 2005: 164).

The impact of education on social cohesion is multifaceted, with education being both a conflict driver and a means to mitigate it (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000; Davies, 2010; Smith et al., 2011). Linking education to conflict, UNESCO (2016a: 103) contends that if curriculum texts and teacher pedagogies 'inculcate prejudice, intolerance and a distorted view of history, they can become breeding grounds for violence'. By contrast, education strengthens social cohesion when it fosters a sense of inclusion, participation and respect for diverse social groups (Novelli et al., 2015). Likewise, 'the content and quality of education and knowledge provided are key to reducing violence', by supporting 'women, girls, boys and men to understand, question and challenge gendered norms and behaviour that underpin forms of violence' (UNESCO 2016b: 52). Teachers' and educators' role as agents of socialisation is vital in validating masculinities that are non-violent, caring and favour gender justice (Connell, 2002; Wright, 2014).

### 2.2. Education and gender justice

Gender justice has been given renewed emphasis in SDG 4 but concerns remain regarding its measurement. For decades, the dominant method of measuring gender justice has remained the gender parity index in education participation and attainment, which frames gender as a noun (Unterhalter, 2012). This limits the identification of gender as a social process, with potential to both reproduce and transform social injustices (Dunne, 2009). By contrast, Butler (1990) frames gender as a verb, performed discursively within the constraints of particular social contexts and produced within unequal power relations. Kessler et al. (1985) argue that schools as institutions are characterised by a gender regime constituted through everyday practices that construct a range of femininities and masculinities ranked in terms of prestige and power. Indeed, Durrani (2008) highlight, through multi-site ethnographic case-studies of schools in Pakistan that the gender regime in schools maintained, reproduced and reinforced the gender hierarchies that characterise Pakistan. Gender identities are constrained therefore both by access to resources and the formal and informal regulation of social institutions including the school (Dunne, 2009).

Despite the widely held assumptions between education and women's empowerment, more often than not, education, both in the Global North (e.g. Arnot, 2006; Kennelly and Llewellyn, 2011) and the Global South (e.g. Dunne, 2007; Author, 2008), sanctions and perpetuates injustices, through the privileging of the traditionally masculine structures, practices, forms of identifications and gendered teacher pedagogies. With respect to masculine structures, there is 'a higher concentration of men in senior management positions in school boards and education ministries in rich and poor countries alike' (UNESCO, 2016b: 43). Even when women are headteachers, governing boards often constitutes predominantly men as in Karachi, Pakistan, resulting in their restricted decision-making power (Kirk, 2004). Second, school practices sustain the gendered, hierarchical organisational patterns through minimal teacher interaction across gender boundaries, as was the case in Botswana and Ghana (Dunne, 2007). Third, schools actively promote gendered identifications both through the official and the hidden curriculum. For example, while curriculum texts in Pakistan naturalised home as a woman's legitimate, ideological and physical space, female teachers and adolescent girls remained inside the school premises, guarded by a male gate-keeper (Durrani, 2008). By contrast, male teachers moved out of school at will and boys too were allowed to

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