

**GENDER AND ACADEMIC CHOICE IN NATIONAL
CAPACITY-BUILDING:
THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA**

By

Caroline J. Manion

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By:

Caroline J. Manion

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in International Development Studies**

**Saint Mary's University
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada**

May, 2003

Signatures of Committee:

**Professor Gerry Cameron:
Thesis Supervisor**



**Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman:
Thesis Reader**



**Dr. Felixina Jonsyn-Ellis:
External Reader**



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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this thesis is to provide an exploration of the dynamics of women's academic choice within the context of formal education at the tertiary level in The Gambia, West Africa. Using women's decision-making ability as an indication of empowerment, this thesis seeks to assess the impact of the Gambian Government's policy efforts to increase women's access to and retention in formal schooling as an important component of strategies aimed at improving the human capital resource base in the country. Of specific concern is the disproportionately lower engagement of women in science, math and technology training at the higher levels of education in the country. The study broadly addresses issues linked to, a) women's capacity to make relatively autonomous decisions concerning their education and b) the manner in which the early educational experiences of women shape and influence their performance and programs of study pursued at the university level. The explicit goals of the Gambian government to cultivate a science and technology culture and to include all citizens in national development processes provide the backdrop to the central discussion.

The research methodology was implemented over a three-month period and included participant observation, sixteen semi-structured interviews and two group interviews as well as the collection of primary source material and statistics from government ministries and NGOs involved in women's education.

While many of the findings are consistent with the literature on women, education and development, some amount of variation was discovered. First, it appears as though persistent patriarchy alongside economic considerations continues to constrain girls and women's access to and performance in formal education in The Gambia, particularly with respect to women's engagement in science, math and technology subjects. Socialization processes reflective of the patriarchal nature of Gambian society also negatively influence women's decision-making power. Subtle nuances were established with respect to career consideration, household dynamics, and the school environment itself that suggest important context-specific factors that need to be considered when designing and implementing strategies to facilitate women's empowerment through education as a means of providing women with the capacity to actively engage in national development processes.

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Of course, I am indebted to my committee members for their assistance and support. Therefore an abundance of thanks is extended to: Professor Gerry Cameron, for his humour and guidance; to Dr. Linda Christiansen-Ruffman for giving her time, energy and expertise to this project on short notice; and to Dr. Felixtina Jonsyn-Ellis the Dean of Science and Agriculture at the University of The Gambia for her patience and helpful guidance during the field research process. I would also like to thank my research assistant, Ms. Musukuta Badjie, who actively engaged in the research process working hard to recruit participants and help gather information. Musu – thank you for making me feel at home with your friends and family!

While there are many others who have directly and indirectly assisted in the development and completion of this thesis, it is impossible to name them all here. However, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude towards Annette Wright and Henry Veltmeyer for the multiple ways they have contributed to my professional and personal development. Also, my thanks is extended to Suzanne Dansereau, Heidi Taylor, Denis Leclair and Evie Tastsoglou for their valuable assistance and support.

Finally, I wish to gratefully acknowledge the generous financial assistance provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in support of the field research component of this thesis.

Preface

At the outset, I would like to take the opportunity to express that above and beyond anything, this thesis should read like a long “thank-you note”, the sentiment being extended to all the women of The Gambia. This expression of gratitude has been woven throughout the following pages and goes out to those women who have contributed in myriad ways to the construction of this thesis. Further too, I am indebted to all those Gambian women whom I did not have the opportunity to meet, but whose lives may be intertwined with the stories, ideas and themes that emerged from my interactions with their sisters and mothers.

First and foremost is that this research experience was (and continues to be) the most personally rewarding journey of my life. I am grateful to CIDA for providing me with the opportunity to travel to The Gambia and implement my research project. Without this funding, such an experience would not have been possible, and I would not have had the chance to learn from and through the wonderful and fascinating people I met while in The Gambia.

While I was able to implement this research project in accordance with the work plan as outlined in Chapter One – *Methodology*; I actually learned as much about Gambian women’s educational experiences through informal channels as I did via the formal research activities. Overall, women students seemed more comfortable in talking to me in an informal setting. This was a problem that I was continuously challenged by, and therefore, soon came to appreciate that the issue wasn’t so much of a “problem”, rather it merely demanded that I adjust my expectations as to where and how the information I was seeking would emerge from.

Dr. Jonsyn-Ellis, the Dean of Science and Agriculture at the University of The Gambia, assisted greatly in managing this adjustment, and reiterated that it was not “me” or my research that prompted the skeptical response to my requests for interview participants. She expressed that Gambians in general, “do not part easily with information” and therefore, I would have to establish a creative and flexible approach to data collection.

In the end, I was able to complete the number of personal interviews that I had intended, but it remains true that when transcribing many of these interviews I realized that while the participants seemed to be answering my questions fully, they frequently omitted certain information. Fortunately, for the most part I was able to “fill in the gaps” with further information garnered through informal/social interaction with the participants.

I actually was told more when the audio recorder was turned off, and my pen and paper were not in sight. Therefore, I had to hone my memory recall skills upon returning to my compound, where each evening I wrote about and organized the new information that had been revealed to me during the day’s activities. I sensed that women responded to me in a more open manner when I approached them with my own personal stories and questions.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS USED IN THIS THESIS

AES	Annual Education Statistics
BED	Basic Education Directorate
CBO	Community Based Organization
CRD	Central River Division
CRPDD	Curriculum, Research and Professional Development Division
DoSE	Department of State for Education
DSTE	Directorate for Science and Technology Education
DTEVT	Directorate of Technical Education and Vocational Training
FAWEGAM	Forum for African Women Educationalists (Gambia Chapter)
FIOH	Future In Our Hands
GADU	Gender and Development Unit
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GEU	Girls' Education Unit
GTTI	Gambia Technical Training Institute
HTC	Higher Teacher's Certificate
IDA	International Development Agency
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ITHRDD	Information, Technology and Human Resources Development Directorate
JSS	Junior Secondary School
JSSCE	Junior Secondary School Certificate Examination
LRD	Lower River Division
NBD	North Bank Division
NTEVT	National Technology Education and Vocational Training
PLA	Participatory Learning Approach
POP/FLE	Population and Family Life Education
PTC	Primary Teacher's Certificate
RESETT	Regional Education Strategy for the Education and Training of Teachers
RIFT	Remedial In-Service Training for Female Teachers
SMT	Science, Math and Technology
SSS	Senior Secondary School
UOTG	University of The Gambia
URD	Upper River Division
WAEC	West African Examination Council
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
WD	Western Division

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

Gambian Girl

*Awake! Gambian girl awake!
Rise up and fight to take
Your rightful place.
For liberty comes to stay.*

Arise! Pride of our nation Arise!

*Mould yourself today
For a better future a say.
Education comes with a prize*

*Jewel of the Gambia, get up and
Stand:*

*Our future lies in your hand.
Your learning process our nation
Against the odds of discrimination.*

Source: Anonymous author in "Voice of
FAWEGAM", 1999.

1.1 - Challenges

A couple of months prior to departing for the Gambia, I presented a paper¹ on different methodological approaches to understanding and addressing women's educational issues in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. Looking around the conference room, feelings of anticipation soon surpassed those of anxiety that I had been experiencing earlier. I was excited at the prospect of receiving valuable comments and support from this group, many of whom I identified as belonging to the African Diaspora.

¹ This paper – "Competing Methodological Approaches to Understanding and Addressing Issues of Women's Education in Sub-Saharan Africa" - was presented at the 2002 Social Science and Humanities Congress held at the University of Toronto.

The ethnic diversity embodied in the participants at this presentation was in sharp contrast to my earlier presentation of the same paper to a group of white, middle-aged men in suits who nodded their heads in unison at polite intervals in a mass attempt to project critical engagement. However, their lack of questions or comments following the presentation belied their apparent apathy to the issues raised.

The response of the group attending the second presentation was far from apathetic. Indeed, the contempt and hatred evident in the words of a respondent numbed me first with fear and embarrassment, followed quickly by anger at the unfairness of the accusations levelled at me. Her comments seemed not to be directed at the issues raised but rather, at my whiteness and me. After laboriously going over what I had said during the presentation and the charges she made toward me, I realized that she was not so much reacting to what I had said, but for what I represented to her. In her own words, which I will never forget, I was a “white, privileged, oppressor” and because the issues I was grappling with were relevant to the Canadian context, why did I not just “stay at home” [rather than travel to West Africa for research purposes]?

I devoted a substantial amount of time to thinking through her attack - what she said, how she said it, and why I felt the way I did. In the end, this critical self-reflection would serve me well, and hopefully would assist me in understanding my experiences and perceptions while working in the Gambia. However, I also believed that this may not be the last time that I would experience such hostility to my endeavours.

Looking back on my field journals, it was less than two weeks into the research that I wrote – “Am I the ‘right’ person to be asking the questions that I am asking?” I immediately sensed that I had lost my feminist grounding and seriously doubted the

strength of a feminist agenda in the Gambian context. What should I do? However, with some trepidation, I felt compelled to press forward in an attempt to facilitate the creation of a space that I hoped would be filled with the “voices” of Gambian women – using their words to tell a story about their lives, families, concerns and aspirations. I recognized that this was what I wanted to do and became resolute in my objectives and determination.

Taking up the challenges posed by field research, I realized that beyond the idea that such an experience would look good on paper – much more importantly was that it felt good for my soul. I explicitly travelled to The Gambia with the desire to learn from the communities in this special place – this densely populated, but smallest country in Africa. Although I had little inter-cultural experience and subsequently lacked a sense of what was in store for me, the journey I embarked upon would change me forever.

One of the greatest challenges I faced in presenting my research findings has centred on efforts to remain true to my own field experiences, perceptions and observations while not misrepresenting the experiences and lives of the research participants or more generally, the nature of Gambian society. However, I am a feminist and I truly believe in the value of education and the imperatives of gender equality. I have always sought to learn more about and experience African culture in all its complexities. It is for these reasons that I attribute my commitment to this research project. My deepest wish is that this thesis will engage the imagination of those positioned² to challenge the structures and processes that are here identified as constraining the achievement of gender equality in Gambian society and particularly within the education sector.

² I am referring here to policy-makers, educators, NGOs and Gambian men and women in general.

1.2 – Rationale of the Study

The focus of the *National Policy for Advancement of Gambian Women* is on mainstreaming women's issues into national development processes (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). To accomplish this, the policy establishes a framework of goals and strategies for various sectors to operationalize in order to facilitate the effective implementation of "sustainable programmes for the advancement of women" (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). In this context, the empowerment of women through education is perceived as an important catalyst for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of Gambian women.

The mainstreaming of women's issues into development processes is conceived by the Government as a pre-condition for enhancing the human resource base in The Gambia, which is viewed as necessary for the achievement of national development goals (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). The human capital approach to development planning is reflected in The Gambia's *Vision 2020* statement that establishes the nation's development goals of becoming a self-reliant and developed country by the year 2020 (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). A key strategy identified towards the achievement of these goals involves the expansion of educational opportunities to all citizens, but with particular attention given to increasing girls' and women's access to and performance in formal education (DoSE, 2000).

Throughout the history of education in The Gambia, men and women have had unequal access to education (DoSE, 2000). Both enrolment and retention have persistently and consistently shown gender inequalities in favour of male students. Beyond issues of access, details of the *Revised Education Policy – 2000* (DoSE, 2000) indicate that gender inequalities continue to exist in conjunction with a curriculum that

perpetuates gender differences, limiting the range of subjects taught to female students. Women's interest in science and technology has historically been suppressed and women's contributions in these fields marginalized as a result of selection, schooling and social processes (DoSE, 2000). The DoSE (2000) states that the low participation rates of women in SMT education and research has had a detrimental impact on sustainable development processes.

This pattern of sex-differentiation in fields of academic pursuit in Africa is well documented in the literature (e.g., Woodhouse and Ngongko, 1994; Martin, 1991). Corrective policies are currently being introduced in The Gambia to expand equal educational opportunities to women, including increasing this group's engagement in science and technology training. However, change has been slow and it has been widely acknowledged in The Gambia that further research is required for the development of more effective strategies to this end (Girls' Education Initiative, 2000).

1.3 - Objectives

The Gambian government has stated the need for the full participation of all citizens in the realization of national development goals. A key strategy that has been identified by the Gambian government for the achievement of national development goals has been the expansion of higher education specifically linked to the establishment of the University of The Gambia (UOTG) in 1999 (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). The creation of the UOTG is perceived as a critical component of the Government's approach to human capital development. However, many issues linked to women's education, particularly within the university context, are little understood at the policy level (DoSE, 2002). Further, an exploration of the literature demonstrates that female students at the tertiary level in The Gambia lack a strong voice in any research accounts to date.

Therefore, using various methods offered by gender analysis, the objective of this thesis is to explore and assess the dynamics and impact of policy efforts to promote women's empowerment through education. Using women's decision-making capacity as an empowerment indicator, this study connects social capital theory and the human capital approach within the policy framework currently guiding the efforts of the Gambian Government to promote the advancement of women.

Specifically, the research elucidates the key variables that affect the academic choices made by women students at the UOTG. At the core of this thesis is concern for the degree of autonomy that Gambian women experience with respect to such choices, particularly in relation to the programs of study pursued by women students at this institution. Further, the research question links academic choice to women's earlier educational experiences as well as to their future career aspirations.

Two main areas of policy concern are highlighted in this research. One is the capacity of women to make autonomous decisions regarding their academic careers and the other is how women's educational background and earlier experiences may limit the range of academic choices available to them at the tertiary level in The Gambia. Underpinning the analysis of the data collected during the research and the current presentation of the findings, is the assumption that issues related to Gambian women's education should not and cannot be separated from the conditions that shape this group's day to day existence.

The relationship between culture and society is linked to the social aspects of women and gender inequality. Specifically, the nature of this linkage is associated with how the norms of a particular culture are reflected in the social and economic values attributed to women within a given society. Understanding how culture impacts

participation rates of women in formal education as well as the nature of this education, necessitates a research approach that emphasizes a particular view that builds on and from women's experiences. Further it is argued that such an approach should locate these experiences and the words used to describe them, at the centre of analysis (Mies, 1991).

1.4 – Problem Statement

Provocative statistics indicate that thirty-four percent (34%) of Gambian women are considered literate compared with sixty-six percent (66%) of the male population who are able to read and write a simple sentence in any language (Central Statistics Department-The Gambia, 2000:102). At the primary level, women outnumber men in total enrolment as a proportion of total population, with the figures fifty-one percent (51%) and forty-eight percent (48%) respectively (Central Statistics Department-The Gambia, 2000:102). However, at the junior and senior secondary levels there is a reversal in this trend, with a mere twenty-seven percent (27%) of the total female population being enrolled (UNESCO, 2000). Following this pattern, and not unlike the experiences of women in other African countries, Gambian women are represented in further dwindling numbers at the tertiary level of education.

Beyond the gender inequality that exists with respect to access to tertiary education in the country, Gambian women also comprise only a fraction of the enrolments in the Faculty of Science at the University of the Gambia.³ Both the constraints on women's access to higher education and the lower engagement of girls and women in science/math/technology subjects within all education levels are connected in the sense

³ Less than five percent of women students at the UOTG are enrolled in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture.

that processes of gender socialization in Gambian society may contribute both directly and indirectly to the educational opportunities extended to girls and women.

The current government in The Gambia came to power following a coup d'etat in 1994 and is headed by President Yahya Jammeh. The establishment of the Second Republic involved a transition period that focused on the need to reformulate development planning and policy. During the transition period priority policy programs identified, included the expansion of education and health services which was predicated "on the intention to increase access of such services to women" (Jammeh, 1999). The improvement of health and education sectors is emphasized within the human capital approach to development. Similarly, the empowerment approach to improving the socio-economic status of women identifies improved access to quality education and health care services as an essential requirement for women's empowerment (Bloch and Vavrus, 1998).

The policy efforts of the Gambian Government clearly demonstrate the cognizance of policy-makers with respect to the need to promote the active participation of Gambian women in development processes as well as facilitating the establishment of an enabling environment for the socio-economic advancement of women. Importantly, the Government explicitly acknowledges the persistence of patriarchal structures and processes within Gambian society that result in women's:

- limited access to development resources and modern educational facilities and health care
- restricted decision-making power at the state, community and family levels
- discrimination with respect to land ownership and employment despite the fact that the traditional agricultural sector relies heavily upon the labour of women (Jammeh, 1999).

Efforts to promote the empowerment of women through education are predicated on the assumption that this will counter the harmful and constraining impact of patriarchy within Gambian society and promote the harmonization of gender relations towards the achievement of national development goals (The Federal Republic of The Gambia, 1999). The linkages between the human capital approach to development planning and policy that is at the heart of current development efforts in the country and the identified imperatives associated with women's empowerment through education suggest the need to further explore the interface of these two parallel processes.

Strengthening women's decision-making capacity has been identified as a priority area related to women's empowerment (Jammeh, 1999). It is here proposed that the relationship between women's decision-making power and women's education is particularly important with respect to efforts to promote the advancement of Gambian women. Specifically, the capacity of women to direct their academic and professional careers through active participation in selecting their programs of study at the tertiary level is here identified as an important indicator of the impact of gender equity and women's empowerment efforts.

Understanding and assessing the academic decision-making capacity of women students at the UOTG may be enhanced through an exploration of the earlier educational experiences of these women in order to more fully understand the dynamics of women's academic choices. Additionally, the exploration of women's early education in this thesis will be connected to social capital theory which emphasizes the important role of horizontal and vertical social networks at the institutional, community and family levels in providing a supportive and enabling environment for the advancement of women through empowerment processes.

1.5 – Methodology

Common in feminist research is the use of multiple research methods. I chose to follow this tradition and incorporated a variety of research methods into the current study's methodological structure. This decision reflects my opinion that the use of several different research methods would facilitate a stronger contextual understanding of Gambian women and society and consequently would assist during the research analysis and thesis writing phases. Details of the research activities used in this study are provided below and include archival data collection, participant observation, semi-structured individual interviews, and group interviews.

Activity #1 – Archival Data Collection

In seeking to understand the nature of the lower participation of women in the sciences at the University of The Gambia, it is necessary to understand the context of educational processes beyond the boundaries of this institution. Therefore, in order to better inform the research process, I collected relevant information concerning the participation of women in education from kindergarten through to the senior secondary levels in The Gambia. Such information was found in government documents, specifically those drafted by the *Department of State for Education (DoSE)* and the *Girls' Education Unit (GEU)*, as well as published studies conducted by NGOs working in the area of education, for example the *Forum for African Women Educationalists - Gambia Chapter (FAWEGAM)*.

The information gathered from documents not only supplied important contextual information but also assisted in the formulation of the questions that were used during several semi-structured, personal interviews with principals, administrators and teachers at various educational institutions, including primary and secondary schools.

Beyond collecting information related to girls' participation in education at the primary and secondary levels⁴, I also examined documents relating to women's participation and academic choices at other tertiary institutions including, The Gambia Technical Training Institution (GTTI) The Management Development Institute (MDI) and The Gambia College. This was accomplished so that the information gathered could provide support for the analysis and conclusions drawn from the central research concerning women's academic choices at the UOTG.

Activity #2 – Participant Observation

The participant observation (PO) activities included in the field research broadly addressed the need for me to strengthen my contextual understanding of Gambian society. In order to facilitate this process, I felt that it was very important for me to access as many PO opportunities as possible, while ensuring that this did not infringe upon the time available to complete the other methodological activities discussed later. In taking advantage of the PO opportunities available to me I engaged in several different educational contexts including: a) various classrooms at the UOTG; b) a field trip to rural villages and an agricultural training center; c) a gender sensitization workshop held at a Gambian military base, and; d) a research methodology course project during which I acted as an assistant researcher for a group of UOTG students.

Critical reflection of my experiences as a participant observer enabled me to recognize that while as an outsider I would never be able to fully understand the complexities of a society different from my own, I had succeeded in deepening my knowledge of gender issues within the Gambian context. Consequently I believe the PO activities lend a significant degree of credibility to the analysis and discussion of the

⁴ This information included gender disaggregated enrolment and retention statistics.

research findings. The following provides further details concerning my experiences as a participant observer within these multiple educational environments.

Activity #2-a) Participant Observation in UOTG Classrooms

During the summer school session from July through to September I attended five science-related seminars/lectures as well as five arts-related seminars/lectures as a participant observer. I engaged with students in the classroom, explaining my presence as a graduate researcher as well as answering any questions students had concerning my project. During some of the initial participant observation sessions, I announced the opportunity for all interested students to participate in the initial organization and analysis of the preliminary research findings. The creation of such an opportunity was directly linked to the need identified by the Vice-Chancellor⁵ of the UOTG, for students to be exposed to the research process. As part of the University's development, Dr. Ekong stated that it was important that a strong research base be established in order to fulfill its institutional role as a site of knowledge creation and research dissemination.

This activity enabled me to observe the number of women in attendance in relation to men as well as the dynamics of women's participation in the classroom. I observed how often women expressed their opinions, asked and answered questions as well as how well these expressions were received by their peers and instructors. Of particular importance was the drawing out of the qualitative and quantitative similarities and differences observed between the attendance and classroom participation of women in science-based courses in contrast to women in arts-based courses.

⁵ The Vice Chancellor of the UOTG is Dr. Ekong

Careful written notes were produced through this activity which were used initially to assist in the construction and modification of interview questions (see Activity #3 below). During the data analysis phase, these notes provided valuable information with respect to the contextual and objective experiences of female students in male-dominated classrooms. The interviews in turn provided a subjective account of each student's individual academic experiences, thereby facilitating a comparative and more holistic approach to understanding women's experiences in the classroom.

Activity #2-b) Participant Observation as a Volunteer with the GAD Diploma Class

I had the opportunity to participate as a guest speaker, and unofficial student, in the *Gender and Development Diploma Program* offered through the Management Development Institute (MDI) in The Gambia. MDI is closely connected to the UOTG as it provides the classroom space for the majority of the courses offered through this nearby (down the road) university as well as offering UOTG students equal access to library resources. Also, the instructor of the Gender and Development program is a graduate herself of the UOTG.

The time I spent with the GAD class turned out to be very refreshing. In this environment, the concept of gender seemed to embody compassion, sharing, support, teamwork, personal responsibility and above all, a commitment to the objectives of gender equity and gender sensitization. I observed that the instructor "taught" this group by becoming "*one of them*" and "*worked through them*" (Maraizu, 2002). Further, gender as a concept was accepted and understood not as exclusively about women's issues, but about the relationships amongst men and women – about people issues. I observed that the behaviour of the members of the class reflected a spirit of collective action in order to support gender equality initiatives.

Interestingly, out of the twenty-two (22) students enrolled in the class, eleven (11) were men. I was very curious as to the reasons for such a high number, which produced an equal composition of men and women students. When I posed the question concerning the large number of men participating in the program to the group, many individuals spoke of “*changing times*” and that in many instances, gender training is an important component of making one more competitive in the labour market. Not once did any of the students or the instructor make reference to the more personal or political factors that may motivate individuals to embark on gender sensitization training. In other words, things such as family life, relationships, or a desire to challenge oppressive socio-cultural structures and processes were not mentioned by the students when asked why they were there.

The reasoning offered in response to my questions seemed to be more about the market value of gender sensitivity. I wondered just how genuine and meaningful was the learning that took place when performed mainly for market-related reasons, however, I believe it is fair to say that at least in the case of this class, their reasons perhaps were market-driven, yet the knowledge and training that they acquired through this program had been internalized and was being acted upon at each opportunity.

I include a brief overview of my experiences with the GAD class, as many of the ideas and themes included in this thesis were influenced and in some cases validated through my interactions with the students. Many individuals were educators within the Primary and Secondary school system and provided me with an excellent opportunity to gather information that greatly assisted in the analysis of the main research findings.

i) Field Trip with the GAD Diploma Class

I had the opportunity to travel to various rural communities during an overnight field trip. I was able to gather information concerning the lives of rural women, their

agricultural work, and their understanding of gender issues in relation to educational access and quality. This field trip also provided me with an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas, ask questions and listen to the stories of the women students of this program. I was positioned uniquely to learn from both men and women as this group grappled with critical issues of gender inequality in Gambian society.

ii) Gender and Development Workshop at Military Base

Through my engagement with the GAD class I had the opportunity to participate as an observer of a “Gender and Development” workshop that was held at the Fajara Military Base and was facilitated by several of the GAD diploma program students. There were forty-five (45) military personnel participants, and of this total there were four (4) women in attendance. The workshop was facilitated over a seven (7) hour period and included extensive discussions and debates concerning Gambian women’s socio-economic status and gender relations in Gambian society within the context of national development processes.

In order to stimulate dialogue amongst the participants and the workshop facilitators concerning educational and occupational gender stereotypes the participants were asked to draw pictures of scientists and secretaries. Every one of the drawings depicted a man as the scientist and a woman as the secretary, except those submitted by the few women in attendance⁶. Using these illustrations as a starting point, the workshop facilitators engaged in debate with the participants regarding the reasons for the near unanimous depictions of men as scientists and women as secretaries. Most of the reasons

⁶ Two of these women drew male secretaries and women scientists, while the third woman drew women as both scientists and secretaries.

given were variations of the claim “Science is hard work and not suited to women”⁷.

These claims did not go unchallenged by either the women in attendance or the workshop facilitators. Indeed, I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to participate as an observer during the heated debate that ensued as it allowed me to gain a richer understanding of how women are largely viewed by men in Gambian society⁸.

Towards the end of the workshop, the participants were divided into groups and were asked to complete a “24 Hour Activity Schedule” comparing the daily activities of men and women. These schedules were then presented by a member of the group to the rest of the participants. It was at this point that the facilitators and I observed some changes in the attitudes of the men. The schedules clearly demonstrated the extreme imbalances in the amount of work performed by women in an average day compared with the work of men. During the presentations, the male participants expressed “amazement” and “regret” that they (men) were “killing” their wives with work (Workshop Participants, 2002). Many said that they were going to take steps to decrease the work burdens of their wives as a result of this specific activity.

Activity #2-c) Assistant Researcher with UOTG Student Group

During the research I also engaged as a participant in a student group project in an undergraduate “Research Methodology” course at the UOTG. The students chose to look at issues of women’s education in The Gambia, with the specific focus concerning gender desegregated enrollment rates for each of the seven regions in the country. My role as “resident researcher” was to assist them in the development of the research

⁷ Claim made by a male participant at the GAD Workshop and reflective of most of the other responses by the men in attendance.

⁸ I say this because several of the workshop facilitators as well as the instructor said that the views expressed by the men participants were reflective of the views of Gambian men in general.

methodology that they would utilize in order to collect the necessary data. Also, I was to supplement their knowledge of women's education issues, specifically with respect to the women and education literature as it was anticipated that this may provide valuable background information relevant to their own research. It is important to recognize that the relationship between the group and I was bi-directional, as not only was I considered a source of pertinent information, but that the students were both producers of research data and "keepers of the knowledge" that I was seeking as part of my own research.

Through this exchange and teamwork experience the group produced and presented a report that discussed disproportionately lower enrollment figures for girls in all of the regions of the country. Further, the group highlighted the regional differences in enrollment patterns for both boys and girls. This research demonstrated that girls in regions one (1) and two (2), which are the two regions farthest away from the capital, are the least likely to access education. The research also pointed to the fact that even those girls that do enter at the primary level generally drop-out before entering the junior secondary level.

Overall, this group-work exercise, final research report and class presentation enhanced students' knowledge and awareness of some of women's education issues in the country. It was in this way – through research support and discussion – that my presence perhaps assisted in the strengthening of the research base in the area of gender equality and educational access.

Activity #3 – Interviews with Women Students at the University of The Gambia

The criteria established for sampling purposes were relatively straightforward; participants had to be women enrolled in studies at the UOTG. It was deemed desirable to

recruit research participants representing different ethnic and religious backgrounds.⁹ In this way, similarities and differences based along religious and/or ethnic lines could be detected and included in the data analysis and presentation of the findings. It is important to note that the interview participants generally came from urban or semi-urban areas and that most indicated that their families belonged to middle to high socioeconomic groupings.

While this sampling was not representative, the socioeconomic composition of the participants and the insight provided by this group reflects the prevalent and acknowledged class and regional disparities that exist with respect to access to formal educational opportunities. Those regions farthest from Banjul, particularly the North Bank, Upper and Lower River Divisions have consistently demonstrated lower than the country average participation rates for school-age girls (Department of State for Education, 1997).

I completed sixteen individual interviews during my stay in the field. The recruitment of participants for this activity occurred in part, through Activity #2, and partially through the assistance of Dr. Jonsyn-Ellis (Dean of Science and Agriculture), Ms. Musukuta Badjie (my research assistant) and Mrs. Ellen Maraizu (the instructor of the Gender and Development Diploma Program offered by MDI). Upon receiving consent from the participants, each interview was audio taped, labeled confidentially and securely stored for later use during the data analysis phase of my research. However, it is important to note that not all participants consented to the audio taping of the interviews and therefore I completed comprehensive notes immediately following each session.

⁹ This technique was proposed by the External Reader and field supervisor of this research project – Dr. Felixina Jonsyn-Ellis.

I utilized a semi-structured interview format, asking open-ended questions that facilitated the participant's free expression of personal experiences, opinions, perceptions and concerns. Please refer to the attached appendices for further details concerning the questions used, as well as the sequencing of them during the interviews. It was acknowledged that it is critically important to generate information concerning the role of external influences in the academic decisions taken by women students, with their evaluation and perception of their academic experiences to date linked to their future career aspirations.

As the core research activity, the interviews generated information regarding the earlier educational experiences of women students currently attending the UOTG. Data were sought that would elucidate the conditions and dynamics of the educational options available for young girls and how these options were exploited and by whom.

In addition, I asked the respondents to recall their experiences during primary education in order to explore gender-differentiated curriculum as well as the impact of such on the educational goals and achievements of women. Also, the attention paid to the early educational experiences of Gambian girls reflects the recognized need to ascertain the degree of autonomy accorded to individual students in the process of choosing their courses at the junior and senior secondary levels as it is at this educational level that students acquire the pre-requisites for specific programs of study of the tertiary level. Therefore, information on the early educational experiences of Gambian women is critical in connection to socialization theories of young girls in the classroom and the impact this socialization may have on their future academic aspirations and achievements.

Information also elicited from the interviews concerned the current educational experiences of women at the UOTG, including in the classroom, their extracurricular

involvement, on-campus employment and individual perceptions of peer group acceptance. Such information was deemed essential for enhancing an understanding of the role and value of women's participation within the context of the UOTG.

Activity #4 – Group Interviews

This activity was conducted during the first week in September and included both men and women ranging in ages from eighteen (18) to forty-four (44). The topic for this group interview reflected consideration of the perceived impact of gender differences on the effective capacity building of tertiary level students. The group explored ideas related to what skills and training are necessary for the achievement of national development objectives, and how The Gambia, particularly the UOTG, is functioning to meet capacity-building needs for sustainable national development.

1.6 - Structure of Thesis

The current chapter here introduces the topic area as well as providing the study's rationale, objectives, methodology and problem statement. The inclusion of my experience of presenting a paper on women's education in Sub-Saharan Africa has served to highlight my background as a white, middle-class student, as well as indicating some of the issues I critically reflected upon prior to beginning the field-research component of this thesis.

In Chapter Two, the reader is taken on a journey through the vast literature concerning women, education and development. The review of the literature includes an exploration of the relationship between mainstream development discourse and the evolution of approaches taken to address issues of women's education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond discussing the theoretical approaches to women's education, the review also identifies the central questions and debates in the literature as well as detailing the

contributions of various feminist schools of thought with respect to gender equality in access to and performance in formal education. Specifically, Chapter Two serves to connect the theoretical underpinnings of the human capital approach and the practical imperatives of women's empowerment through education within the context of the national development strategies and objectives as established by the Gambian Government.

Chapter Three provides important background information regarding the education sector in The Gambia and specifically, the University of The Gambia (UOTG). Relevant statistical information is included that highlights gender disparities in education. The reader is also treated to an overview of community and state-level initiatives that are currently being coordinated in an effort to facilitate the empowerment of women through education. Specifically, the work of NGOs and CBOs in conjunction with the efforts of the Girls Education Unit, the Department of State for Education and the National Women's Council and Bureau are highlighted. In so doing, the horizontal and vertical social networks that are currently supporting and promoting the advancement of Gambian women through education are demonstrated.

Chapter Four presents the research findings, particularly the analysis of the information generated through interviews, group discussions and the participant observation activities as earlier detailed. The participation of women in SMT education is highlighted. Framing the discussion of the research findings is concern for the extent to which women are able to make autonomous decisions about their educational and career goals as part of the overall objective of assessing the impact of policy efforts to improve women's decision-making capacity through women's education and empowerment. Demonstrated is that while persistent patriarchy is reflected in the socio-economic

conditions of women's lives in The Gambia, that there nonetheless also exists a strong social capital base that represents a key source of support and encouragement for women's education. Specifically, it is demonstrated that mothers play a critical role in their daughter's educational access, retention and performance.

Chapter Five concludes the thesis. A synthesis is provided that links some of the theoretical and conceptual issues outlined in the review of the literature with a summary of the research findings. In so doing, the reader is left with a broader understanding of the complexity of issues connected to women's empowerment through education as well as women's overall advancement within Gambian society. These issues are critical to assessing the impact of policy efforts to expand educational opportunities to all citizens and in particular to Gambian women in order include all Gambians in national development processes. In this way, the concluding remarks situate the research within the context of both the human capital approach to development as well as the facilitation of women's improved decision-making capacity vis a vis women's empowerment through education.

CHAPTER TWO – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 – Introduction

A review of the literature concerning women and education in Sub-Saharan Africa suggests the need to understand how the changes in education evolved from and ran concurrently with the well-documented shifts in mainstream development theory since the 1950's. Although education has been viewed as the key to development and economic growth through modernization, during the early years of the development project the unique needs of women were not included in education planning in the developing world.

However, alternative development models, that evolved from the Marxist/Neo-Marxist and Feminist critiques of the “growth and modernization” schools of thought, challenged development theorists and practitioners to consider the consequences of excluding half the world's population from development processes (Kabeer, 1997). These critiques opened up space for the subsequent shifts in development planning that began in response to the insight offered by these new models. Processes of change have been slow with respect to the ideological, political and practical transformations that were called for by these alternative models. However, it remains true that issues of women's education and the role of women in development have been integrated relatively successfully into mainstream development models as set in motion through the above alternative critiques.

Education broadly conceived has historically played a central role in the development of both men and women in societies throughout the world. Essentially, education has been understood as a means of transferring the knowledge required for basic survival, the building of human capacity, the transmission of cultural and religious

ideologies as well as representing a site for more philosophical knowledge quests as an element of what is now considered “higher education”. For the purposes of the current discussion, the concept of education refers to formal education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa since the beginning of the development project.

The objective of this discussion is an exploration of the literature concerning how issues of education have been represented in various development models throughout the last fifty years. Therefore, key concepts, central questions, models and prescriptions will be drawn from a wide range of development literature and feminist discourse in order to elucidate the key debates that have persisted throughout the development era concerning the relationship between education and national development. Perhaps more importantly, this discussion will explore issues of how the role of women has been incorporated into conceptions and strategies of economic, social and political development in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and specifically within The Gambia.

This will necessarily be inclusive of the conceptual frameworks deployed by a variety of actors working within competing schools of thought as well as policy-makers, international aid agencies and national governments who are or have been, in one way or another, concerned with issues of women’s education in Africa. Prior to beginning the central discussion however, the following will clarify some of the key concepts within development discourse.

2.2 - Conceptualizing Development

The Western perspective of development is divided into economic, political and social aspects. Beginning in the 1950’s, development was generally conceived as a process of modernization and of economic growth, primarily premised on the notion of the anticipated “trickle-down” effect that would see the benefits of economic development

eventually shared with the poorer segments of the population (McMichael, 2000). Therefore, economic development concentrates primarily on economic growth as reflected by the increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country. In this school of thought, industrialization was viewed as the engine of development, with the capitalist class assuming the role as driver of the engine.

However, by the early 1970's it was recognized that economic development had failed to improve the living conditions of the majority of the world's population, and therefore within a context of widespread and rapidly growing poverty there emerged a new development approach. This approach was supported by aid and development agencies around the globe and focussed on poverty eradication and the meeting of people's basic needs (McMichael, 2000). Indeed, this shift in development discourse and practice reflected an increase in international concern for aspects of social development and the imperatives of eradicating global poverty.

The concept of social development is commonly identified with and concerns the "interplay of social structures, processes and relationships vis-à-vis economic and cultural changes" (UNDP, 2000). Development from a social perspective concerns the promotion of social justice and equity and frequently advocates a people-centred and participatory approach to development with the goal of establishing inclusive and stable societies (UNDP, 2000). Although, it is recognized that financial capital is necessary for social development, the basic needs approach described above was characterized by a shift in resource allocation towards the expansion of education and health services¹⁰. Also conceptually included within notions of social development is the need for capacity

¹⁰ The expansion of health and education services is also a key feature of the human capital approach that will be discussed later on in this chapter.

building in order to facilitate the meaningful participation of citizens in both the political and economic spheres of national development activity.

The political dimension of development emphasizes the need for political stability and the institutionalization of political goals as well as the means for achieving them. An important aspect of political development is also viewed as the enhancement of a political system's capacity for problem solving. Relevant for the current discussion is that women in Africa continue to be grossly under-represented at the level of national government and decision making.

According to Nnoli (1995:32) women's under-representation in Government is closely connected to women's disproportionately lower participation in formal schooling, particularly secondary and post-secondary education. Nnoli claims that in many instances, women simply lack the qualifications and leadership training that is necessary for meaningful participation in public political life (1995:33). In the education literature a key question is – how can institutional capacity be strengthened with respect to the delivery of education? Considering the current educational expansion that is underway in The Gambia, it would appear that the Government believes one of the best ways of strengthening institutional capacity is through ensuring that all Gambian people have access to quality education (The Federal Republic of The Gambia, 1999). This strategy assumes that educated Gambians will then take an active role in strengthening institutional capacity thereby enhancing the overall delivery of further educational programming.

Beginning in 1994 the Gambian government started appointing women in “unprecedented” (Jammeh, 1999) numbers to positions of considerable and strategic political power (The Federal Republic of The Gambia, 1999). It has since been claimed by Jammeh that “a rational allocation of portfolios allowing women to run the sectors that are strategic to the elevation of their status and their socio-economic advancement” has proven to be an effective measure in moving forward efforts to facilitate women’s empowerment (Jammeh, 1999: ii). Identified as strategic sectors, the portfolios of Health, Social Welfare and Women’s Affairs, Education and Tourism and Law were assigned to women (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). Presently, a woman holds the position of Vice-President of the country, signalling the success of further efforts to integrate women into public life.

2.3 - The Role of Education in Development

It is readily agreed that the relationship between education and development is comprised of many complexities and ambiguities (Barnhardt, 1994). Some characterize the relationship as an interactive one in which educational development requires economic inputs and economic development requires human capital embodied in the educated population (Barnhardt, 1994). However, critics point to the false promise inherent in an understanding of the relationship as the *key* to modernization, national development and liberation from foreign economic and cultural domination (D’Oyley, Blunt and Barnhardt, 1994). Instead, these scholars maintain that education has become a mechanism of state control, masking the true ambitions of the economic and social elite of retaining their positions of privilege in post-colonial society (Fuller, 1991).

The concept of social capital refers to the “institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of society’s social interactions” (World Bank, 2002).

Broadly defined, social capital includes the social and political structures within a society that facilitate the establishment of societal norms and values (Braatz and Putnam, 1996; Francis et al., 1998; Fukuyama, 1995). Aspects of social capital intersect with a variety of conventional development prescriptions, but for the purposes of the current discussion the specific focus is with respect to the relationship between social capital and education.

It is generally recognized that levels of educational attainment are linked to levels of economic development. However, it is also acknowledged that the benefits associated with education are considerably strengthened not by financial resources alone, but rather that “family, community and state involvement in education” can further improve educational outcomes (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Braatz and Putnam, 1996; Francis et al, 1998). Therefore, it is argued that family and community support of education can actually help compensate for the lack of some resources, thereby strengthening educational outcomes despite the impact of low socio-economic status (White and Kaufman, 1997).

The argument concerning the role of social capital in improving educational outcomes is particularly relevant to issues of women’s education in Africa. First, African women continue to struggle against the economic barriers that constrain their access to education, therefore it is suggested that a strong social capital base is essential for the provision of an enabling environment for women to pursue educational opportunities. However, a social capital base can also negatively influence women’s educational access and performance in that it may reflect social structures and institutions that support norms of oppression and marginalization. Therefore, in some ways the nature of the social

capital in some African nations may actually exacerbate issues of gender inequality in education.¹¹

In the literature, investment in human capital development is frequently associated with education (Coleman, 1988). Closely linked to the concept of social capital, human capital largely refers to individual capacity building and skill- training objectives. These strategies reflect the imperatives of raising incomes, increasing civic participation in national research and development initiatives as well as the promotion of the desirability and necessity of learning as a life-long process (Coleman, 1988; Colleta, 1995). In the development literature, as will be discussed later in *Section 2.5.1*, the concept of human capital is most often applied within strategies to enhance the economic efficiency of investment in education in the developing world (OECD, 2001; Shultz, 1961).

2.4 – Women’s Education and Development

It is widely agreed that the returns on investment for the education of women far outweigh the opportunity costs associated with this education. Although one may argue against this reasoning on the grounds that it assumes an increased burden for women and their contributions to society, the following will briefly summarize the main points of the “cost-benefit” argument that is widely articulated within the human capital approach.

It is argued that an educated woman can raise a healthier family. A report from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) suggests that for every year a mother was at school, a reduction in child mortality is realized by nine percent (UNESCO, 2001). With respect to health and development, it is clear that a healthier population is better able to contribute to national development strategies through increased productivity, the ability to learn new

¹¹ The nature of the social capital base in The Gambia will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

skills, as well as enhancing the capacity to participate in a broad range of development activities. Also, educated women tend to have fewer children, thereby slowing population growth, which remains a top concern for governments in the developing world (UNESCO, 20001).

Another benefit that is accrued through the education of women is that they (educated women) are more productive both within the home as well as the workplace. Some research suggests that education can improve the status of women in that educated women tend to make more independent decisions and are more likely to stand up for themselves, thereby facilitating individual empowerment (Reid, 1995). Lastly, some argue the value of the social impact of educated women on encouraging their own children to become educated, which implies that successive generations will be better equipped to participate in development initiatives as well as becoming competitive within the ever-evolving labour market (UNESCO, 2001).

2.5 - Changing Perspectives on Women, Education and Development

Eva Rathgeber (1990) contributes to the feminist literature by outlining the changing theoretical perspectives on women's education and development as well as arguing the persuasive and powerful impact these frameworks have had on both practical and scholarly work. Further, that because the way women and women's issues are represented in development discourse significantly influences and is influenced by a number of fluid variables, the following will provide an overview of three distinct theoretical paths in the field of women and development.

2.5.1 – Human Capital and ‘Bringing Women In’ for Development

The Women In Development (WID) approach represents the first efforts made to bring the role of women and this group’s unique needs to the fore in development discourse and planning. Predicated on the assumptions of modernization theory, WID strategies generally place primacy on western values and view the individual as the agency for social change. Liberal feminism aligns itself with the WID approach as it emerged during the early 1970’s following Ester Boserup’s influential book *Women’s Role in Economic Development* (1970). Focusing on women’s productive role, the WID approach emphasized the need to integrate women into economic systems. Therefore, this strategy called for change within legal and administrative structures that would facilitate the integration of women as economic and political actors equal to men.

Although the WID approach did succeed in making women’s questions visible within mainstream development theory and practice, critics argued that the non-confrontational nature of WID marginalized issues related to the subordination of women (Lourdes and Sen, 1997). That is, by emphasizing the productive role of women, the proponents of WID undermined the need to include issues related to the reproductive roles of women that are directly linked to the social structures of women’s day-to-day existence.

The human capital approach to development can be understood as the main underpinning of many mainstream perceptions of the conditions and imperatives of development strategies. Closely linked in the literature to capacity-building efforts in the developing world, the human capital approach is characterized by the emphasis placed on the need to provide populations in the developing world with the necessary tools required meaningful participation in national development processes. That is, from the perspective

of development as modernization, education functions as a tool that provides the skills necessary to charge the engine of development.

The human capital approach is considered to be the mainstream theoretical approach to women, education and development in Africa. Similar to WID, this approach assumes that the inclusion of women in the development process is necessary in order to attain economic growth. The key question therefore concerns the identification of the most cost-effective strategies to expand the access of women to education in order to maximize their economic contribution to development as skilled workers. Within this approach, development has been most closely linked to the goals of modernization, with industrialization and education as central features of the process.

In the human capital literature, the objective of formal schooling is the development of the “mind and body” to work in modernized industries with modern technologies. Therefore, the hallmark of the human capital approach has been the promotion of western-modelled education systems and improved health and nutrition to promote increased effective and productive participation in modernization processes leading to development (Fuller, 1991). To this end the central question asked is – what is the appropriate quantity of education necessary to achieve this goal? As well, because the human capital approach emphasizes economic efficiency, another central question concerns how the quality of education should be assessed. In other words, should quality considerations be limited to strictly satisfying the demands of the labour market?

This approach, founded on liberal functionalist principles, does not offer a critique of capitalism because its objective is to use formal education as a means of creating effective and efficient skilled workers for a market economy (Bloch and Vavrus, 1998). Within this body of literature, advocates of this approach maintain that individuals attain

as much as they are inherently capable of on the basis of their merit. That is, they reject the claims of critics that this position is maintained through the failure to consider constraining factors such as race, class and gender or the intersections of one or more of these factors.

2.5.2 - Women And Development (WAD) Approach

During the late 1970's, the Women And Development (WAD) approach emerged as a critique of the WID approach. Drawing from dependency theory, the WAD approach framed women's subordination through women's dependence on men's economic power. Within this approach, persistent patriarchy within most societies is perceived to be the root cause of women's inequality. Proponents of WAD argued that the integration of women into the development process was unnecessary, as women had always been a part of such processes (Brett, 1991; Penny, 1991). Rather, scholars and development practitioners within the WAD tradition called for the establishment of alternative social arrangements/institutions to address women's needs within the context of development planning. Therefore, emphasis turned to questions concerning the relationship between women and the development process.

Acknowledging the importance of women's economic contributions to development, the Women And Development (WAD) stresses how women's work in both the public and private domains is part of the structural perpetuation of their subordination within the household and in the broader societal context (Rathgeber, 1990). Further, WAD scholars focused on how the integration of women in development that was pursued under the pretexts of the WID approach sustained existing international structures of inequality.

However this approach too, was not free from criticism. Some argued that it failed to adequately analyze the relationship between patriarchy, modes of production and the subordination of women (Rathgeber, 1990). Further, women's issues risked being marginalized because of the emphasis on the oppression resulting from a global structure based on capital and class, as it is argued that while these structures affect both sexes, men and women are affected differently.

Also, some argue that the WAD approach focuses too much on the productive role of women, thereby diminishing the analytical importance of understanding the conditions of women's reproductive roles. This criticism is linked to the idea that WAD proponents are incorrectly assuming that once international structures reflect global concerns for equality, women's status will improve.

2.5.3 - Gender and Development (GAD) Approach

As attention to women's issues increased as a result of the above two approaches, the GAD framework emerged as an alternative to WID during the 1980's. Indeed, GAD can be thought of as a product of a fusion between the mainstream women's movement and Marxist feminists who were disenchanted with the notion that class analysis alone could explain women's oppression (Visvanathan, 1997). Therefore, an analytical framework that emphasizes gender relations in both the labour force and the reproductive sphere characterizes GAD.

While Nalini Visvanathan (1997:21) identifies Caroline Moser (1993;1989;1987;1986; 1984;1981;1978) as a key writer within the WID approach (above), upon closer inspection, Moser's scholarly work fits more closely with the GAD approach. Moser (1989) has contributed significantly to the way women's issues are treated within development discourse and practice, particularly at the level of

development planning. Moser emphasizes the importance of understanding the reasons why recognition of the important role played by women in 'third world' development has not necessarily been translated into planning practice. Moser's approach to addressing this question has produced a coherent framework for facilitating women's inclusion in development planning. Indeed, this framework has subsequently been incorporated into the gender planning procedures of several government and non-governmental organizations, most notably the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA, 2001).

As a feminist writer within the development discourse, Moser has distinguished two streams of approaches useful for meeting the planning needs of women in the developing world. The concept of "practical needs" refers to those requirements that are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience through their engendered position within the sexual division of labour (Moser, 1989). Often, practical gender needs reflect an immediate perceived requirement that has been identified by women within a specific context. With reference to issues of education, an example of a practical gender need would entail the expansion of educational opportunity for rural women through the construction of more schools in rural areas.

On the other hand, strategic gender needs are those needs "which are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men", and therefore reflect the identification of strategies to bring about systemic change in terms of both the structure and nature of gender relations (Moser, 1989). Examples of strategic gender needs as identified by Molyneux (1985) include the elimination of the sexual division of labour, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, the establishment of political equality and freedom of choice over childbearing. Indeed, Moser concludes that although

many important initiatives have been undertaken to satisfy many of the practical gender needs of women, particularly through educational expansion, that state intervention has nonetheless been slow with respect to addressing the strategic needs of women (Moser, 1989).

The nature of the distinction Moser makes between practical and strategic gender needs coincides with one of the key problems raised both within the feminist as well as human capital literature with respect to women's education. Within both streams there is recognition that education and training can play a powerful role in determining the chances of women finding gainful employment in the wage labour sector.

The empowerment approach is frequently identified with the gender planning strategies associated with the GAD framework (Moser, 1989). Although this approach was most popular during the 70's and onwards into the 80's and largely confined to the work of non-governmental organizations, it has continued to be emphasized within much of the development discourse, specifically with reference to women's education in the South. The purpose of this approach has been to increase the self-reliance of women in order to confront forces of oppression as a function of patriarchy as well as colonialism and neo-colonialism (Moser, 1989).

The empowerment of women seeks a redistribution of power within as well as between societies. Indeed, Moser maintains that the empowerment approach seeks to address women's strategic needs indirectly through the meeting of practical gender needs (Moser, 1989). In relation to education, advocates of the empowerment approach argue that education is a liberating experience, providing 'third world women' with the practical

and strategic tools necessary to confront multiple layers of oppression and subordination.¹²

Thus, it is proposed that GAD emphasizes the need to deploy a more holistic perspective that will include consideration of all aspects of women's lives. As part of this broader emphasis, GAD focuses not just on women (as the both WID and WAD tend to), but on the social relations between men and women.

The GAD approach also expects more State involvement in the addressing of issues of women's oppression as well as the provision of programmes to support the work of social reproduction (Visvanathan, 1997). This can be seen as a reflection of GAD's common base with Marxist and dependency approaches that call for structural reforms. With respect to women's education, the GAD framework suggests that the structural oppression that constrains women's equal participation in education does require State intervention in order to alleviate such conditions. For example, if the State took a more active role in the provision of child-care in Africa, it would enable more women to attend school.

2.6 - Constraints on Women's Participation in Education in Africa

Studies have shown that in Africa, women represent sixty-seven percent (67%) of the continent's illiterates, suggesting that women are not even receiving sufficient training in such basic skills as reading and writing. Efforts to extend primary education to all have been successful to some degree within many African countries (UNESCO, 2000). However, the number of women continuing their education at the secondary and tertiary

¹² For a more in-depth discussion of the empowerment approach see, Vavrus, 1997; Lazo, 1995; Njeuma, 1993; Parpart, 2000 and; Stromquist, 1995.

levels continues to be dramatically less than that of male students attending school at these levels in the majority of African countries (Moser, 1993).

In the literature it is argued that the under-representation of African women in formal education is merely one manifestation of a larger problem (Moser, 1993).

This “problem” is inextricably linked to aspects of the socio-economic conditions and the prevailing cultural norms within a given society. A good place to start when seeking a stronger understanding of gender equity in education initiatives is through identifying the structural factors that lead to women’s marginalization in education. The following then will provide an overview of structures of oppression and subordination that are frequently emphasized in the literature as directly impacting on African women’s access to and performance in formal schooling.

The subordination of women refers to the generalized situation whereby the domination of men over women manifests itself in decreased social and economic power for women as well as in the capacity of men to exert economic power over women. As a result, women come off worse in most measurable indices of the outcome of social and economic processes (Pearson, 1992:294).

Not only does gender inequality manifest itself in decreased educational opportunities for women, but what kind of education a woman does receive may actually exacerbate the persistence of gender differences. Broadly speaking, the reasons for this are related to the quantity of education that girls receive and secondly to the content of the education they receive (Bourque and Warren, 1990). Bourque and Warren (1990) identify three main barriers to women’s education; the economic climate, societal attitudes and expectations and the school environment. Indeed, the school and the workplace are

environments where political and cultural rules and norms are perpetuated and legitimated by contemporary ideologies of exclusion, segregation and avoidance (Tinker, 1990).

Therefore, it is impossible to de-link the reasons for female under-representation at the higher levels of education within Africa from the subordinating structures that shape the daily experiences of women. In fact, it is argued in the literature that the nature of the problem of access of women to educational opportunities is firmly rooted in the social, cultural, legal and economic aspects of their existence (Antrobus, 1991).

It is also argued that the education women receive is a double-edged sword in that it reinforces what are frequently referred to as dispositional barriers (Moller-Okin, 1995). These barriers are related to women's beliefs and perceptions that they are not worth educating because society "says so" (Moller-Okin, 1995:274). It has been proposed that on the one hand education can domesticate individuals, contributing to their acceptance of or passivity in relation to the status quo. Or, on the other hand education can function as a liberating springboard, providing women with the dispositions needed to engage in a dialectical relationship with knowledge and society (Moser, 1993).

This suggests the need to include the early educational experiences of African women in our analysis. In so doing, we are better positioned to assess and understand the nature of socialization processes in the classroom that can reinforce and heighten girls' sense of inadequacy, particularly with respect to subject stereotyping (i.e., "math and science training for boys and arts and home economics for girls"). Arising from this argument is a key question concerning the impact of early education on young girls with respect to their prospects for further education. That is, do women's primary schooling experiences encourage compliance with socially constructed gender roles; or do these

experiences inspire them to reject gender stereotyping through the pursuance of further study and action?

2.7 - Feminism and Education

Feminist theorizing, not unlike other forms of critical social analysis and theory building, is confronted with the challenges inherent to any attempt(s) to realize a cohesive explanation and/or response to a particular form of social phenomena. Upon exploration of feminist literature one may be struck with the diversity of feminist approaches to understanding women's position in the world with respect to sex, race, class, gender and ethnicity considerations (Visvanathan, 1997).

Prior to further discussion of various feminist approaches to gender inequality, particularly with respect to women's education, it is important to express the rejection in the overwhelming majority of the literature of the biological reductionism that is inherent to bio-determinist theories concerning the nature of women's subordination. Rather, it is contended that one cannot de-link the role of biology from the multitude of variables that influence human behaviour (Mies, 1991). Hence, it is from this point of departure that the following discussion will focus on the challenges of fostering an understanding of the social forces that act to perpetuate the subordination of women broadly speaking, and particularly the gender disparity in education in Africa.

Identified as one of the key characteristics of liberal feminism is the distinction made between sex and gender (Tinker, 1997; Young, 1997). A conceptualization of gender is necessary as a tool useful in describing the impact of social norms and how societal expectations affect and indeed shape the behaviour of men and women. These gendered norms exist and act separate from biological sex, which is viewed merely as a socially invariant biological difference (Jagger, 1997:117). Radical feminists however,

extend their analysis to include how social norms have shaped social understandings of sex (Jagger, 1997:127).

For liberal feminists, equality of opportunity for humans is posited as both a means and an end in itself in the elimination of the subordination of women. However, the ambiguity of this concept of “equality” has precipitated a vast array of criticism and speculation amongst feminist as well as non-feminist thinkers concerning the liberal interpretation of this ideal. The most scathing attack on liberal feminist theory concerning the importance of achieving the objective of equal opportunity comes from the socialist feminist camp (Johnson, 1990; Grosz, 1990). Argued is the impossibility of achieving equality within the capitalist system; as it is a system that is structured and indeed functions necessarily on class relations (Johnson, 1990).

Finally, there is the debate concerning the public versus the private spheres of human life, and the extent and desirability of government/political involvement in each of these realms. Liberal feminists argue for the necessity of distinguishing between these spheres of human activity, particularly with respect to protecting women’s rights to manage their own affairs separate from state intervention. However, it remains important to understand the critical necessity of affording strategic government involvement in some aspects of private life in order to help ensure the safety, and security of women in their own homes.

Liberal feminism, having evolved within a context of Western privilege has been effectively criticized on the grounds that it represents an ethnocentric perspective that privileges the viewpoints of white, middle-class women and posits this group’s experiences of subordination as the same as all women. As a consequence, those women already on the periphery (i.e. Black, Hispanic, Disabled, and Indian – WOMEN) have

often been silenced and/or further marginalized. Also, socialist feminism is critical of the purported class-blindness of liberal feminist theory. It is argued here that the oppression and subordination of women can only be understood within the context of class relations of production and reproduction, as well as via a historical materialist approach to class conflict in relation to women.

In contrast to liberal feminists, multicultural feminism and global feminism extend the feminist lens to address and link issues of racism with other aspects of subordination exacted upon women regardless of ethnic background. This extension facilitates a better understanding of the differences amongst women in different parts of the world and in different structural circumstances, as well as their unique experiences of oppression. It also clearly highlights the limits of liberal feminism to accurately reflect and/or represent the experiences of non-Caucasian women.

Further, multicultural feminists have emphasized that the subordination of women consists of several overlapping dimensions linked to class, race, gender and sexuality as well as their unique experiences of oppression. Therefore, it is the expression of such concerns that distinguishes multicultural feminism from strict forms of class-based Marxist Feminism, or class-blind Radical Feminism or elite forms of Liberal Feminism and, finally, the sexist nature of socialism.

The above discussion of various feminist approaches to understanding women's subordination, speaks to the concept of multiple layers and forces of oppression that act upon women in a variety of contexts. Therefore, it is often highlighted in the literature, that there is a dire need for those involved in the education sectors in Africa to sufficiently understand and address the multiple dimensions of women's subordination. In so doing, it is argued that corrective initiatives, such as education reform policies, or new women's

education programmes, could be introduced that would be founded upon a more in-depth understanding of women's unique needs within the African context.

2.8 - The Marxist/Neo-Marxist Paradigm

The Marxist/Neo-Marxist paradigm is largely characterized through the attention it pays to the role of the State in maintaining capitalist relations through education, particularly schools (Bloch, Beoku-Betts, Tabachnick, 1998). The *dependency* branch of the Neo/Marxist theoretical framework examines and seeks to explain how the state creates and maintains capitalism as well as how 'third world' poverty as a function of the dependence of 'peripheral' countries on the market economies of 'core' countries (Scott, 1994)¹³.

Some scholars, particularly socialist feminist writers, point out that both the Human Capital and Marxist/Neo-Marxist paradigms fail to adequately consider gendered social and economic relations (Stromquist, 1989). Socialist feminists argue that women continue to be subjugated within class analyses that ignore how women and men are affected differently as well as interactively by patriarchal as well as class relations (Barret, 1980; Burton, 1985). Therefore, some argue the need to broaden the analysis to include the state-school-patriarchy relationship as opposed to strictly focusing on the state-school relationship (Stromquist, 1989).

Within the context of education systems in Africa, Latin America and Asia, the Neo-Marxist paradigm perceives schools and other training facilities as critically important in the servicing of dependency relations through the reproduction of

¹³ Generally speaking, the dependency school analysis calls for strategies that emphasize cultivating empowerment, self-reliance, and transition to a socialist or communist state. It should be remembered that solutions offered by this school often call for revolutionary transformation to bring about the necessary changes.

international and intra-national class relationships (Stromquist, 1989). Suggested is that education, particularly as conceived through the human capital paradigm, produces and reproduces workers and elite to the end that capitalist relations are perpetuated (Conway and Bourque, 1993). This capitalist cycle of the reproduction of class differences occurs both at the micro and macro level or in other words at the national and supranational levels as a product of educational processes.

Further, Neo-Marxists view educational delivery and expansion in the developing world as a process that deepens the dependency relations of the third world on the first world (Mbilinyi, 1998). This analysis is specifically linked to concern for the aid and education relationship, and questions concerning the role of education in society. Who will benefit from educational expansion? What agency or agencies are the key decision makers with respect to quality and quantity considerations? And, who and what is benefiting from the nature of the curriculum taught?

On the other hand, critical theory as another branch of Neo-Marxism, focuses primarily on educational processes at the national level (Apple, 1982). The key assumption made by scholars within this tradition is that schooling is but one aspect of a much larger social system, and that the nature of educational delivery relies on this system for its form (Apple, 1982; Popkewitz, 1984). Critical theory writers also assume that knowledge is not value-free, but rather is comprised of various layers of historical and ideological forces that shape the way capitalism operates through education according to the contingent needs of capital at different times and within different contexts (Stromquist, 1989). Therefore, the key question that is consistently raised within this paradigm concerns how capitalist processes within education oppress certain actors while

simultaneously maintaining the dominance of others through capitalist power relations (Stromquist, 1998; 1992; 1989; Mbilinyi, 1998).

2.9 - Education and the Aid Relationship

It would be difficult to overstate the role of external influences in the development of education systems in Africa, particularly when one considers the present context of severe and mounting poverty alongside extensive economic crises that threaten and constrain development throughout much of Africa. Therefore, the following will provide an overview of the approaches used by membership organizations and international development agencies to issues of education in Africa. Included will be discussions concerning the role of externally commissioned education sector studies encompassing World Bank responses to the needs of the education sector in Africa. Also an overview will be provided of the approaches to education delivery and expansion undertaken by the African Development Bank (ADB) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA). The key question that is asked in the literature concerns the impact of the aid relationship on education in Africa.

Since the early 1990's externally commissioned studies of education in Africa have become more numerous and influential than independent research or national research accounts (Samoff, 1996). The context for these studies is the foreign aid relationship. This trend is primarily attributable to the shift from project-focused aid to an emphasis on sector programme and policy support for policy elaboration of education in Africa (Samoff, 1996). The overriding concern identified in all such education sector studies is that of maximizing the economic efficiency of aid for education within a context of limited resources and ever increasing demands for educational expansion (Samoff, 1996). However, as counters to economic efficiency considerations, some scholars

question whose agenda is being catered to with the delivery and expansion of educational opportunities in Africa?

In order to understand the diversity of studies that have been generated on national education systems in Africa, the first question that arises concerns the definition of a sector study. Some studies include all education and training activities (World Bank, 1992; FINNIDA, 1994; UNDP, 1993; UNESCO, 1993). Some studies are confined to either formal or non-formal education systems in Africa (World Bank, 1992; African Development Bank, 1991). Others still limit their focus further, for example, to issues of curriculum, or textbooks, or teacher training, or education statistics (UNESCO, 1993; World Bank, 1990). However, a common theme can be identified amongst the vast array of education sector studies that have evolved through the sponsorship of external aid agencies – that is each study acknowledges the imperative of enhancing the development of human resources throughout Africa.

Notwithstanding the wide variety of approaches taken by different education sector studies, there is a readily observable similarity amongst them with respect to method and format (Samoff, 1996). Essentially, these studies are intended to provide an informed basis for foreign assistance, whether it is for a specific project or for a more broadly based education program, or even to the entire education sector as variously defined. Because of these similarities, these externally commissioned studies of education in Africa tend to share common analytical themes. The following will briefly detail some of the points of convergence within this literature, as it is this body of research that is currently shaping the majority of education policy formation in Africa (Samoff, 1996).

The general theme within these studies is that of the crisis of education in Africa, at all levels and in all its forms.¹⁴ Further, the majority of these studies emphasize the incapacity of national governments to effectively address the crisis of education in their respective countries. These are important “findings” in the sense that they substantiate claims that education in Africa requires the “assistance” and “expertise” of Western aid agencies, thereby providing support for continued external interventions into national spheres of control.

Another common theme is that of the problems associated with quantity over quality considerations in education delivery in Africa specifically linked to concern for the economic efficiency of education spending (Samoff, 1996). Further, many studies highlight the need to better accommodate the demands of the labour market within the school curriculum.¹⁵ As discussed above, these points of convergence suggest that externally commissioned education sector studies continue to place primacy on the economics of education as characterized within the human capital approach.

In the African Development Bank’s “Education Sector Policy Paper” (1999), a revised “vision” of the Bank’s mandate and mission suggests a redefinition of priority areas and initiatives aimed at promoting flexible, efficient and effective interventions that are responsive to the needs of Regional Member Countries (RMC’s) in their human resource development strategies. In this publication, the central mandate of the Bank is stated as being “to contribute to the economic development and social progress of its regional members” (Education Sector Policy Paper, 1999:3). A key component of this

¹⁴ For instance see World Bank, 1993, 1991; USAID, 1991; CIDA, 1994 and; Finnish International Development Bank, 1990.

¹⁵ Examples of such studies in which quality and quantity consideration are prevalent see World Bank, 1991; World Bank, 1990 and; SIDA, 1992.

commitment is the importance attributed to human resource development, particularly with respect to health and education within member countries. Thus, a clear relationship is evident between the conceptual framework of the African Development Bank (ADB) and the theoretical foundation of the human capital approach.

The central role of education according to the ADB is to promote economic growth. Although social development is included in much of the rhetoric surrounding the promotion of overall national development, it is quite clear that effective social development is supported as a means of economic development, not necessarily to be pursued as an end in itself. The ADB argues the importance of education using historical evidence that demonstrates that no country in the world has achieved sustained economic growth and social development in the absence of universal primary education and a minimum of fifty percent (50%) adult literacy (ESPP, 1999:10). However, although education is perceived as a means of triggering and sustaining economic growth and social development, it is also recognized that education alone is insufficient with respect to wealth creation and particularly for generating adequate resources that are necessary for the sustainability of educational development (ESPP, 1999).

In order to better understand the argument offered by the ADB with respect to the importance of education, the following will briefly outline a number of anticipated outcomes of education. The first impact identified by the ADB is directly connected to the imperatives of economic development and concerns the high returns that can be expected from education through increased productivity and higher potential for innovation and growth. Also linked to the objectives of economic development, the ADB proposes that a better-educated population will enjoy an advantaged position with respect to world trade

and the capacity to take advantage of information and to absorb new technological developments.

Secondly, it is argued that within a context of the widespread poverty that characterizes much of Africa, education can help the poor by opening up new income-generating opportunities conducive to raising their standards of living. As detailed earlier in *Section 2.2*, the eradication of poverty is a core objective of social development efforts.

Thirdly, the Bank argues that education can play a role in addressing and correcting the gender disparities that exist within many African societies, particularly with respect to women's participation in the economic and political spheres. This outcome is closely linked to the objectives of women's empowerment through education in that it is anticipated that empowered women will successfully challenge oppressive social, political and economic structures and processes and consequently will be integrated into development processes on equal terms with men.

Fourth, it is proposed that an educated population is more responsive to civic development and less to violent conflicts, thus contributing to region stability and peace building efforts (ESPP, 1999). In this way, the ADB envisages education as a means of facilitating political development. In turn, politically stable countries are more likely to receive development assistance from international donor organizations and countries. As well, political stability is often a requirement for attracting foreign direct investment which in turn contributes to the financial pool of resources available for a country's development purposes.

Although many of these benefits are elements related to the social value of education in and of itself, especially as a mechanism of empowerment, it remains quite

clear that the ADB focuses on the economic benefits attributed to the development of education systems in African. However, this should not be surprising considering the importance given to strong macroeconomic and sector policies that the Bank argues support the role of education as a catalyst for bringing about sustained economic growth and social development. Further, that the Bank's adherence to the principles of "strong macroeconomic policies" may also be viewed as a corollary of the approaches to educational reform and expansion as endorsed through various international aid agencies and reflected primarily in the conditionalities placed on aid disbursements.

2.10 - Higher Education in Africa

Generally speaking, the literature on women's participation in higher education in Africa speaks to the prevalent inequalities that are demonstrated by the significantly lower numbers of women as a proportion of total enrolment.¹⁶ Indeed, such inequalities are perceived as explanatory variables of African women's continued under-representation in a range of activities from political decision-making to labour force participation at the management level (Hollos, 1998; Agheyisi, 1985; Biraimah, 1991).

Although much of the literature indicates support for increasing the participation of women at the higher levels of education, many feminist scholars point out that access to education does not necessarily mean equality, particularly for post-degree women entering the labour market (Stromquist, 1998; Snyder and Tadesse, 1995). Another set of questions has evolved that challenges how and why education should be pursued. It is argued that we need to go beyond questions of access for women, and ask what type of education women receive, and how long they study, at what degree levels, and how this

¹⁶ The statistical work of UNESCO provides some of the most comprehensive and up-to-date data with respect to enrolment statistics throughout Africa.

relates to patterns of gender-based inequality in the workforce, in wages, and in political and economic life.¹⁷ Specific questions need to be asked concerning the way politics and state policies interact with each other to shape women's access to higher education as students and as faculty. Therefore, in the literature it is often argued that we need to know:¹⁸

- a) Which state systems create more opportunities for women and why?
- b) What policies within those systems are advantageous for women?
- c) How state policies shape the political economy to increase or decrease labour market opportunities for women with degrees?

Universities in the African context generally reflect acceptance of the "three universal missions" of the university as one of the "great world institutions" that has taken root widely in modern Africa (Ajayi, Lameck, Goma and Johnson, 1996:191). In the literature these missions are considered to be the acquisition, the transmission, and the application of knowledge. Further, in consideration of these missions it is often argued by African as well as Western researchers that universities are crucial in the development and progress of African societies (Ajayi, Lameck, Goma and Johnson, 1996; Bray, Clarke and, Stephens, 1986). Others however are more sceptical of the motivations to provide Africa with aid assistance, underscoring the role of Western influence in the shaping of education, particularly higher education in the developing world (Fuller, 1991).

¹⁷ These questions represent the author's synthesis of some of the questions raised within a wide variety of feminist literature. The objective is to demonstrate that much of the work on women's education has over-emphasized issues of access to the detriment of quality and relevance considerations.

¹⁸ This set of questions evolved from the work of Kelly and Slaughter (1991) and Rathgeber (1991).

The primacy placed on the role of African universities in national development processes has been a more recent phenomenon. This is with reference to the historical preoccupation with the provision of basic education that has characterized educational expansion in Africa since the 1950's as a strategy of human capital development (Buchmann, 1996; Gould, 1993; Snyder and Tadesse, 1995). However, the production of skilled human resources is a central objective that is shared by advocates of education at all levels. Indeed, at the university level human resource development is frequently deemed essential for political development and the delivery of community services as well as the generation of developmentally relevant research (Ajayi, Lameck, Goma and Johnson, 1996).

In the literature on higher education in Africa, there is a perceptible movement in the way the role of the African University is envisaged (UNESCO, 1993; Ajayi, Lameck, Goma and, Johnson, 1996). Indeed, a major contribution of African universities and scholars has been the introduction of the concept of the 'developmental university' (Yesufu, 1973; Court, 1974; Saint, 1992). This concept is predicated on the recognition that development in all its dimensions is a requirement for the improvement of living conditions and the enhancement of quality of life for a nation's citizenry.

Further, it is widely acknowledged that socio-economic development is becoming more knowledge-intensive and is relying more heavily on professional and managerial specialists than in the past. Thereby, it is suggested that a greater emphasis on making African universities more relevant to development needs is necessary. (Biraimah, 1991; Ajayi, Lameck, Goma, Johnson, 1996; Hadden and London, 1996). Relevance in this sense refers to the capacity of institutions of higher education to respond to the needs of society and satisfy society's expectations of them (Popkewitz, 1984).

Conclusions drawn during the 1998 World Conference on Higher Education noted the need for attention to the role of the African University in the service of society (World Conference on Higher Education Summary, 1998). That is, the focus of higher education should complement and contribute to efforts to alleviate poverty, enhance social capital resources, build human capital and facilitate political stability through “interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches (World Conference on Higher Education Summary, 1998).

2.11 - Conclusion

The situation concerning women’s education in Africa is multi-dimensional as demonstrated throughout the above discussion. Alternative theoretical and practical understandings of women’s education and women’s role in development processes offered by Feminist and Marxist/Neo-Marxist schools of thought expand the objectives of education as framed by the Human Capital approach. The expansion and improvement of educational and health care delivery which, are hallmarks of the Human Capital approach are predicated on the imperatives of economic development. Feminist and Marxist/Neo-Marxist critiques have challenged policy makers to include aspects of social and political development in development planning as necessary components of a holistic approach to improving the living standards of the world’s poor as well as facilitating the socio-economic advancement of women.

This chapter has also highlighted the importance attributed in the literature to social capital in improving educational outcomes. The concept of social capital is particularly salient with respect to women’s education in Africa and as discussed earlier, it refers both to the horizontal and vertical social networks that shape social interactions at the state, community and family levels. It is proposed that these networks can provide a

supportive and enabling environment for the promotion of women's access to and performance in formal education. In other words a strong social capital base that value's women's education plays an important role in facilitating women's empowerment through education.

Overall, this review of the issues surrounding women's education and development in Sub-Saharan Africa has demonstrated that there exists a comprehensive understanding within the literature of both gender inequality and the role of education in development. Also, this review has touched upon some of the alternative models of educational expansion and delivery that incorporate gender equality in education as a priority area. However, what is noticeably absent is a prescription, or a strategy to follow that will facilitate the necessary changes to the social, economic and political structures that are at the root of the problem of women's unequal access to education. What needs to be provided is a framework useful in guiding the transition of African schools at all levels, into locations of social transformation towards the attainment of gender equality.

Chapter Three – Education and Society in The Gambia

Mama Let Me Go To School

*Can't I pound the coos after school!
Can't I cook after school!
Can't I sell after school!*

*I can launder after school
I can sweep after school
I can fetch water after school*

Say yes Mama; let me go to school

*Do I really need a child now?
I am only fourteen years old!
Marriage can wait for me I am sure*

*Oh Mama please don't take me
Away from school
Don't take my brother
And leave me behind
I want to read and write like him*

*Oh Mama please don't leave me
Behind*

*I want to be a teacher
I want to be a doctor
I want to be an engineer and a pilot
Too!*

*Mama, Oh Mama! Please take me
Back to school*

Source: Anonymous author in "Voice of FAWEGAM", 1999.

3.1 - Introduction

Upon arrival in The Gambia, I immediately observed specific gendered activities that initially pressed upon me that I was a visitor in a society very different from the one I had left in Nova Scotia, Canada. On the drive from the Banjul International airport to my

accommodations, I gazed out upon the flat and dusty earth from the air-conditioned car and viewed the activity in the fields and streets. These first images of the country were to leave lasting memories – women carrying huge, ornately painted ceramic bowls on their heads, long flowing gowns in a fabulous array of colours, and goats and cows grazing tufts of grass by the roadside. I also saw sporadic pockets of men sitting together under shade trees, brewing what I later discovered was *Aytaya* – green tea, brewed in a particular manner and an integral part of most social occasions.

From these initial impressions, I deduced that women seemed to be the workers and men the...sitters? The, socializers? Their role was (or I was hoping) merely unknown as of yet to me! However, the socially endorsed gendered division of household labour that I was catching a glimpse of would continue to be problematized in my journals and my thoughts as the months rolled on, never to be reconciled with my own cultural relativistic tendencies. For me, although I believed it was not my place to pass judgement, I nonetheless remained astounded at how hard all the women I saw worked, particularly in contrast to the predominant male past time of sitting and chatting with other men.

To me, the gendered nature of daily activities was one of the *key* challenges to realizing gender equity in education. This was based on the assumption, as mentioned earlier, that we cannot de-link issues in women's education from other issues affecting women's lives. Educational access and performance is intimately connected to other socio-cultural processes that influence the life choices and opportunities to participate in national development available to women.

3.2 - The Education Sector in The Gambia

Reflecting the prevalence of Islam in The Gambia, the formal education sector includes both Madrassah (Arabic School) and conventional Western school systems. It is

estimated that approximately fifteen (15) percent of the total school-age population is enrolled in Madrassah. These schools offer training in the Islamic sciences as well as structured studies of the Koran. While Madrassah schools play an important role in educating Gambian youth in a variety of subjects and are often relied upon by poorer families for the provision of education for their children,¹⁹ the focus of this study has been exclusively on gender issues in formal Western education. Therefore, it is to this subject that we return.

The official entry age into the formal school system is seven (7) years in The Gambia. The primary cycle or basic education spans nine (9) years; the secondary cycle, three (3) years and; tertiary education spanning three (3) or more years.

The Republic of The Gambia's *Draft Education Master Plan 1998-2005* details revised sector policy initiatives that have been designed to increase the educational access and retention rates of women and girls in The Gambia (DoSE, 1997). The stated goal of the *Girls' Education Programme* is to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio from 44 percent in 1996 to the target of 90 percent by 2005 in basic education.²⁰ In 1996, over half of all basic education²¹ enrolments were boys, with women comprising an even smaller proportion of enrolments (35 percent) in grades ten through to twelve. Statistical documentation of the gender disparity existing in the Gambian education system is consistent with gender disaggregated enrolment figures from other countries in the

¹⁹ Many Gambian families find Madrassah education more affordable and therefore send their children to these schools. Also, there is a commonly expressed perception that this form of education is more suitable for girls in order to prepare them for their "careers" as wives and mothers in accordance with Islamic principles. That is, Madrassahs offer girls all the necessary knowledge to fulfil their obligations as women in a Muslim society.

²⁰ Low enrolment rates for women are found to be worse in rural areas, particularly areas in the North Bank and parts of the Western Division. Lower completion rates and high dropout rates are more prevalent beyond the basic level.

²¹ Basic education includes grades one through to nine.

sub-region²². In Sub-Saharan Africa, over half of the total number of students currently out of school are girls (United Nations, 2002).

Enrolment rates for girls have increased at a moderate rate since the 1990/91 academic year in the Gambia. Between 1990/91 and 1996/97, girls' enrolment rates increased from 37 percent to 52 percent at the lower basic level and from 7 percent to 16 percent at the upper basic levels. While girls' enrolment rates increased during this same period from 2 percent to 3 percent at the senior secondary level, it is also true that after grade six (6), the enrolment gap between boys and girls widens. Studies have shown that the dropout rates for girls beyond grade six (6) are significantly higher than those of boys. Furthermore, the key reason identified by the DoSE for this pattern is that of the cost of schooling relative to parent's income (DoSE, 1997)

Table 1.0 – Regional Overview of Literacy and Enrolment Rates and School Life Expectancy in The Gambia

Local government area/residence	Literacy Rate (1993) (in percentages)		Gross Enrolment Rate (1996) (in percentages)		School Life Expectancy in Years (1996)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Urban	63.9	40.3	42.1 Banjul + Kanifing	35.6 Banjul + Kanifing	7.0 Banjul + Kanifing	5.6 Banjul + Kanifing
Rural	47.6	18.0	36.5 (approx.)	23.1 (approx.)	4.9 (approx.)	3.2 (approx.)
Brikama	57.5	27.6	44.7	35.0	6.5	5.0
Mansakonko	58.1	20.9	46.5	27.9	6.1	3.7
Kerewan	55.2	22.6	35.0	21.5	4.7	3.0
Kuntaur	43.1	12.7	30.5	17.0	4.1	2.3
Janjabureh	44.9	16.9	40.5	25.5	5.3	3.4
Basse	32.4	10.8	21.7	11.5	2.9	1.6
Total	54.4	26.4	40.1	28.6	5.9	4.2

*Source: UNDP/CSD, 1997.

²⁰Countries in the West African sub-region sharing similar gender disparity ratios include Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau (UNESCO, 2001).

Table 1.0 demonstrates the considerable disparities between the educational attainment amongst different geographical areas in The Gambia as well as between boys and girls. Rural girls and women appear to be most marginalized with respect to accessing educational opportunities. However, the GER for girls in the urban areas in 1996 is still lower than the GER for boys in the rural areas during the same period. With respect to the focus of this thesis, the above table clearly illustrates the gender differences in enrollment and retention rates between boys and girls in the Kanifing/Banjul area.

3.3 – Science, Math and Technology (SMT) Education in The Gambia

Lower participation rates of girls in SMT training in The Gambia has been identified as a major hindrance to national development processes (DoSE 1996, 2001, 2002). Seeking to cultivate a science and technology culture, the government is currently taking steps to facilitate increased engagement of all citizens in SMT education. Indeed this goal and the actions required to facilitate the achievement of it are consistently highlighted in several reports put out by the DoSE in 2002²³. As a valuable component of these efforts, specific strategies are currently being developed and implemented widely throughout the country to encourage greater engagement of girls' in SMT subjects. The following will provide an overview of these initiatives.

Broadly speaking, the main assumption that underlies the majority of such efforts is that the attitudes of girls towards SMT subjects must be improved²⁴. This reflects the seemingly widespread belief that girls' themselves are the problem, and that the problem is not necessarily directly connected to socialization processes that suppress their interest

²³ These documents include the Third Education Sector Programme – 2002 Annual Donor Review Report; The Basic Education Programme 2001-2002; and the Annual Sector Review 2002.

²⁴ This assumption will be further discussed in Section 4.2.1 with reference to an interview with the Assistant Head of the National Women's Bureau and Council.

in SMT. For this reason, some of the strategies seem to reflect more attention being given to the practical needs of women to increase their participation in these subject areas with too little attention being given to the strategic needs of girls'. Specifically, this is with respect to removing constraining social structures that continue to present SMT as a predominantly male domain.

An article in the *Forum for African Women Educationalists – Gambia Chapter* (FAWEGAM) newsletter, several observations are made concerning the gender differences in participation rates in SMT with girls' tending:

- To achieve less well in mathematics and science
- To have a less favourable attitude to these subject areas
- To be less confident in their abilities to effectively perform in these subjects
- To more readily opt out of SMT subjects when the opportunity arises (Coker, 1999)

Coker, a teacher at a senior secondary school in Banjul, also links women's generally disadvantaged position within the labour market to the fact that the majority of Gambian women simply do not possess the skill-set that is acquired through SMT education. And, considering that more and more employment opportunities require employees to be able to draw upon and apply SMT skills, this suggests that women remain marginalized from accessing many jobs due to their overall lack of SMT capacity.

In the *Annual Sector Review 2002* report (DoSE), it is stated that the Directorate of Science and Technology (DSTE) is currently responsible for three educational programmes associated with efforts to stimulate a science and technology culture in The Gambia. These programmes include *Secondary and Tertiary Education; Science and Technology Education* and; the *Computer Literacy Expansion Program*.

The main objectives of these programmes focus on increasing overall enrolment rates at these levels, although with somewhat limited attention being given to facilitating

an enabling environment for girls to access SMT educational opportunities as well as improving girls' performance in the classroom. The DSTE has identified the need to enhance teacher training in SMT subjects as a priority area towards strengthening the overall delivery and quality of SMT education. A core component of this enhanced teacher training has been to provide gender sensitization training that emphasizes the need for teachers to be aware and incorporate their understanding of the unique needs of girls with respect to the teaching and learning of SMT.

Aiming to improve educational quality within the area of SMT, the DSTE has embarked on a series of activities intended to move the process of achieving these goals forward. These activities have included workshops for SMT educators and regular meetings of the Science Teachers' Working Group (DoSE, 2002).

Improving the teaching and learning resources for SMT subjects is a key component of current DSTE efforts. Indeed, the explicit mandate of the DSTE is provided in the following passage found in the *Interim Strategic Plan – 2000/2001*.

The central aim of the work of the DSTE continues to be...identifying issues, developing policy and co-ordinating initiatives to improve the curriculum methodology, and quality of students and teachers in science, mathematics and technical education (DSTE, 2002)

The *Science and Technology Education Programme* is divided into distinct administrative units all of which remain within the boundaries of the work of the DSTE.

These units include:

- Teaching Methodology Improvement Program
- The Textbook Program
- The Laboratory Facilities and Equipment Provision Program
- ICT in Science Program
- The Computer Literacy Expansion Program (DoSE, 2002).

Each of these programs has been developed in accordance with the imperatives of strengthening the overall delivery of SMT education in tandem with efforts to encourage more students to develop an active interest in these subjects. With the exception of the Teaching Methodology Improvement Program, all units emphasize the critical nature of ensuring that students and educators have access to the appropriate resources necessary for effective learning and teaching. Indeed, the challenges associated with providing adequate SMT training resources were repeatedly mentioned as a major constraint on efforts to achieve the goals established within the conceptual framework provided by UNESCO's Science and Technology for All initiative (DoSE, 2002).

With respect to enhancing girls' participation in SMT, the DSTE in conjunction with the Girls' Education Unit (GEU) organized SMT clinics for girls in 2002. While eighty-five girls participated in these clinics, the high costs associated with running them as well as some logistical problems (i.e. insufficient number of staff and educators) has meant that this initiative may not be able to be expanded or continue at all.²⁵

Overall, it appears as though the DSTE, DoSE and the GEU all recognize that the lower participation rates of girls in SMT subjects is a problem that is hindering women's competitiveness in the labour-market and ultimately limiting the capacity of all citizens to meaningfully participate in national development processes. Successful development within the current global economic climate is demanding a high degree of technological know-how as well as the capacity to adapt to changing demands for SMT expertise. And, as previously mentioned, the explicit development objectives of the Gambian government reflect recognition of these demands. However, it must be also be acknowledged that

²⁵ From conversations with staff at the GEU and the DSTE, 2002.

change may be slow and that there will be a lag between the implementation of strategies aimed at increasing the participation of women in SMT and the anticipated results.

3.4 - The University of The Gambia

The University of The Gambia (UOTG) is located in Kanifing Administrative Division – an urban region close to the capital, yet far removed from the rural provinces. Established in 1999, the UOTG may still be considered to be in its infancy, although it is quickly expanding its degree options and is experiencing dramatically rising enrolment rates. Currently, the UOTG boasts four faculties offering Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees, as well as a new (2001/2002) Bachelor of Education degree programme. The following table (2.0) provides enrolment details for each of the faculties at the UOTG.

Table 2.0 – UOTG Enrolment Figures for the 2001/2002 Academic Year (in percentages)

Faculty	Male (n=139)	Female (n=35)	Total
Economics/Management Sciences	89	11	100 (n=174)
Humanities and Social Sciences	72	28	100 (n=174)
Medicine/Allied Health Sciences	88	12	100 (n=174)
Science and Agriculture	74	26	100 (n=174)

Source: UOTG Registrar, 2002.

The figures in this table represent gender disaggregated percentages of total enrolment by faculty at the UOTG. We see that most women are enrolled in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Science and Agriculture faculties. Most men are enrolled in the Economics/Management Sciences and the Medicine/Allied Health Sciences faculties. However, these figures also show that women are under-represented within all UOTG faculties.

At the UOTG during the 2001/2002 academic year, men comprised fully 80 percent of the institution's total enrolments, leaving women to account for the remaining

20 percent. This disparity was evident around campus and during the research participant recruitment phase of the project methodology. Indeed, many of the women that I did encounter were librarians, cleaners, cooks or secretaries for the administrators.

There are four main centres of activity that comprise the functioning of the UOTG. The Management Development Institute (MDI) provides the classroom space for many of the courses offered by the university. MDI is approximately a five-minute walk from the actual UOTG Administrative Building which, as well as housing administrative offices, also offers a computer lab, a lecture hall and additional classroom space. Further up the road is the UOTG Faculty building where more classrooms are available as well as the offices of UOTG faculty. The UOTG library is about a twenty-five minute walk from this area and is also home to some faculty offices as well as one other classroom.

3.5 - Key Actors in Gender Equity and Education Initiatives in The Gambia

Those involved with the promotion of gender equity in education represent an array of varying perspectives and approaches. While the government of The Gambia explicitly promotes the empowerment of women, the rationale frequently invoked in support of women's empowerment by the government emphasizes the positive impact this will have on national development processes. In other words, empowered women are more likely to become educated and support the education of others, as a consequence it is assumed that the overall education level of the Gambian population will rise, resulting in increased productivity leading to increases in the economic growth rate of the country. Two important theoretical assumptions are implicit in this strategy. One is that economic growth will lead to development; and the second is that gender equality can be achieved through the empowerment of women.

In order to illustrate the activities of some of the key groups and actors involved in women's issues in The Gambia, the following section provides an overview of the approaches deployed in the service of the goals of gender equity and the empowerment of Gambian women.

3.5.1 – NGOs Involved with Women's Issues

The poems included at the beginning of chapters one, three and four were written by Gambian women and obtained from FAWEGAM newsletters (1999). These poems reflect upon many of the issues explored in this thesis concerning the patriarchal structures and processes that exist within Gambian society. Through the publishing of these poems, FAWEGAM is opening up spaces for the voices of girls and women in The Gambia as well as facilitating public awareness around issues of women's education. The efforts of FAWEGAM and other women-focussed NGOs represent key sites of resistance to the negative impact of patriarchy on women's access to and performance in education.

The following section will provide a brief review of the NGOs currently involved in education and training activities that seek to promote the empowerment of women. Out of the sixty-two (62) NGOs registered with the NGO umbrella organization, Tango, there are approximately fifteen (15) NGOs involved in women's issues in The Gambia (TANGO, 2002). Of these fifteen (15), six (6) NGOs focus specifically on women's issues (TANGO, 2002).

Many core activities of these groups focus on facilitating women's economic independence through increased and specialized education and training. The modalities and objectives of the NGOs indicated in Table 3.5 reflect the assumptions that education is the most effective instrument in promoting the women's empowerment and, that the empowerment of women will lead to an increase in women's meaningful participation in

national development processes. This overview seeks to provide the reader with a sense of some of the ways in which issues of women's education and socio-economic status are being addressed within the Gambian context.

Table 3.0 summarizes the main activities of several NGOs working in The Gambia concerned specifically with women's issues.

Table 3.0 – Activities of NGOs Addressing Women's Issues in The Gambia

Name of Organization	Programs and Services Offered	Objectives of Programs and Services	Program Beneficiaries
Agency for the Development of Women and Children – ADWAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls' education advocacy Local institutional capacity-building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Enterprise development and functional literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and children
Community Action for Development Association – CADA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health Education Scholarship programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education (DoSE is the collaborating agency) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women, children & orphans Students
Forum for African Women Educationalists Gambia Chapter – FAWEGAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness raising and campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girls, women, boys and men
Future in Our Hands – FIOH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School building Women cooperatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economics training Education, with a special emphasis on women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women, men and youths
St. Martha's Society (S.M.S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching skills in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tie & Dye Soap making Tailoring and embroidery Cookery practicals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dress making Food preservation To improve the education of girls and women to become self-reliant and economically independent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young girls and women between the ages of 14-21
The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices - GAMCOTRAP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research Creating awareness on harmful traditional practices Promotion of human rights of women and the girl-child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy for the rights of children and women Gender equity initiatives Empowerment of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and children Society in general
The Gambia YMCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education, skills training Gender sensitization and community mobilization Information and Technology Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UTC, IT Rural development Youth and women's issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women, men and youths
Women in Service Development Organization and Management – WISDOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life skills training centre Adult education/literacy Awareness creation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult education/literacy Awareness creation programmes Entrepreneurial training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and girls
Worldview The Gambia – WTG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education Communication for community mobilization for gender equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women and youths

Source: Author's synthesis of information from, *Directory of NGOs in The Gambia*. Published in 2002 by The Association of Non-governmental Organizations – TANGO.

Many of the activities of the NGOs included in Table 3.0 act as vehicles for mainstreaming women in national development processes. The focus of many is on women and children with the objectives generally emphasizing capacity-building and integrating women into national development processes. This is particularly consistent with the central tenets of the *Women in Development (WID) Approach* that is supported by the Women's Bureau as mentioned above. In this way, women are to be brought into the development process through increased productivity as facilitated through increased education and training. No mention is made to the gendered nature of the entry points into the labour market and development processes that are available, differently to men and women.

The above table provides ample evidence that issues of women's education and development remain a priority for many NGO's. Importantly, the table also indicates that some groups are working in collaboration with government ministries and sectoral departments. This suggests the strengthening of linkages between community level-mobilization and public policy at the government level. As will be detailed below, there exists a strong social capital base at the State level in The Gambia that is encouraging the empowerment of women through education. Therefore, it is important that vertical linkages between State and community social networks be strengthened. In forging these linkages, the Government and NGOs can work together towards the overall establishment of an enabling and supportive environment for women to access educational opportunities.

3.5.2 - The National Women's Council and Bureau

The National Women's Council and Bureau was established by an Act of Parliament in 1980. In the Act, the responsibilities of the Council are stated as:

The council shall advise government on all matters affecting the development and welfare of women and on any other matters referred to it by the Secretary of State (Act No.9, 1980, reviewed 1996)

The Woman's Bureau acts as the executive arm of this Council. The Bureau is located in the capital, Banjul, and offers the public free access to a library well-stocked with learning resources specific to women's issues. As a member of the global community, The Gambia is signatory to the commitments embodied in the following conferences and summits:

- *1985 World Conference on Women (Nairobi, Kenya)*
- *1990 World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand)*
- *1990 World Summit for Children*
- *1993 Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, Austria)*
- *1994 International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, Egypt)*
- *1995 World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, Denmark)*
- *1995 World Conference on Women (Beijing, China)*

This last conference produced a Declaration and Platform for Action, which, among other things reaffirmed women's rights as human rights. Further, it proclaimed that peace is essential to the advancement of women and that the lifecycle perspective should be adopted in eliminating gender-based inequalities in development. Overall, it was agreed that girls should be accorded equal opportunity in their own right and as tomorrow's women (Ministry of Education, 1996)

In order to fulfill its obligations as part of the UN Decade on the Status of Women (1975-1985), the government of The Gambia through the National Women's

Council embarked on implementing an ambitious, *Women in Development Project* in 1985. The *Women in Development* (W.I.D.) project was divided into five components:

- Skills development and training (with sub-components that address literacy and numeracy rates among women)
- Information, education and communications
- Agriculture (with sub-components that address issues of appropriate technology and credit facilities)
- Safe motherhood and family planning
- Institution building (i.e. strengthening the capacity of the Women's Bureau)

These components reflect a broad-based understanding of what is required in order to bring women into development processes on equal terms with men. With the exception of the last component, each component emphasizes the need to provide education and specialized training to women in order to facilitate women's economic independence from men as a pre-condition for the advancement of Gambian women. The last component of the W.I.D. project specifically concerns increasing the capacity of the Women's Bureau to effectively represent women's issues and the unique developmental needs of women at the State and community levels.

3.5.3 – The Department of State for Education (DoSE)

The disparity in socioeconomic performance between men and women has been attributed to gender-based differences in levels of education (DoSE, 1999). For example, out of the twenty-seven percent (27%) of Gambian women who are considered literate, less than twenty percent (20%) have attained a University education (Njie-Saidy, 1995). Therefore, the government through the Department of State for Education has developed the National Action Plan for Education with the overall aim of stimulating the participation of girls in education at all levels.

The following is a brief overview of some of the main objectives of this Plan:

- The creation of awareness, understanding, appreciation and acceptance among Gambians of the importance of female education and training for national development
- The fostering of community action towards increasing the proportion of girls enrolled in schools
- To encourage the retention of girls in school and the reduction of the dropout rate for girls from 25 percent in 1993 to 5 percent in 2003²⁶.

However, some Gambians I spoke with expressed concern for the ensuing repercussions as a result of women's empowerment through education and training. Although such empowerment has been identified as a prerequisite for development, the consequences of such are feared in that they will "threaten the balance of the social system"²⁷. However, the government recognizes the importance of women gaining independence from men, economically and otherwise and therefore is promoting the striking of a new "balance" through the restructuring of gender roles and responsibilities within the family (National Policy on the Advancement of Gambian Women, 1999). Such efforts on the part of the Government are extremely important components of facilitating the empowerment of women through education towards women's overall socio-economic advancement in Gambian society and should be celebrated by those currently promoting women's access to and performance in formal education.

Fatou Faye, the current Director of The Gambia Technical Training Institute states:

As the education and training of women and girls would surely affect men's control over the family, and the fact that men would lose the privilege of women continuously taking care of their needs... [they] may undermine efforts that would enable women to relinquish such responsibilities (Faye, 2000).

²⁶ The Gambia Department of State for Education, 1996.

²⁷ Working Paper, Management Workshop for 'Managers of the Community, The Gambia, 2000.

And therefore, she goes on to express that:

Gambian women need to be able to make use of their social, economic and even political rights; they need to make sure that the legal provisions [mentioned above] are put in place through their respective councilors/the Women's Bureau. And in addition to this, women should set their priorities right within the household and society at large (Faye, 2000).

However, when Faye claims that women should “set their priorities right within the household and society at large” – she also acknowledges just how difficult a challenge this frequently is. In many conversations with powerful women in The Gambia, I was consistently privy to the fact that these women returned home from work and assumed their role as “dutiful wives”²⁸ and mothers. In every instance, similar sentiments were expressed such as:

- “I would not attempt to wear the trousers in the family – what would my children think?”
- “I have certain responsibilities at home – housekeeping, maintaining the family”
- “My brother and former in-laws could never understand why I wanted to do so much in my career, but there are trade-offs and I must respect my duties at home too. I am tired a lot”

The words of these women speak to the idea that stimulating and maintaining social transformation towards the goals of gender equity in all facets of life remains a complex and difficult issue. Interestingly, even those women who appeared to be successful with respect to their careers in The Gambia readily explained that they, too, assumed different roles and at home than at their workplace. It was explained that as professional women, their jobs often involved decision-making responsibilities that

²⁸ This was the way these women referred to their roles in the home.

required that they perform leadership roles²⁹. At home however, these same women would defer their decision-making capacity to their husbands and remain quiet and passive. As well, these women would all perform household chores on their own or perhaps with the help of a daughter or daughter-in-law, without the assistance of male family member. It would seem then that despite achieving a degree of empowerment through education and securing a professional career, these women did not challenge the gendered division of household labour, nor were they attempting to gain greater control over their own and their family's affairs through exerting their decision-making capacity.

3.5.4 – The Girls' Education Unit (GEU)

This unit represents the administrative branch of the Girls' Education Initiative as developed through the Department of State for Education in The Gambia. The GEU's mandate is to:

Provide equal opportunities and access for girls from an early age, thus creating an enabling environment for girls and women to compete equal with boys and men (DoSE, 1998).

The Girls' Education Initiative is included in the above-mentioned *Draft Education Masterplan 1998-2005* and gives the responsibility of ensuring its successful implementation to the GEU. As one of the priority programmes, efforts addressing girls' education are shaped by two central objectives:

- To increase the enrolment and retention rates of girls in schools.
- To improve the quality and relevance of education for girls.

In order to achieve these objectives, the GEU in collaboration with the DoSE, UNICEF and other development partners such as the World Bank and the IMF has

²⁹ It is important to note that professional women in The Gambia often face significant challenges to their authority. Also, that women's contributions at work are frequently devalued by the men they work with.

identified broad strategies to be implemented within the context of the current education policy framework. These strategies may be loosely categorized as follows:

- Policy Development
- Capacity Building
- Service Delivery
- Advocacy and Social Mobilization
- Community Empowerment
- Partnership and Alliance Building

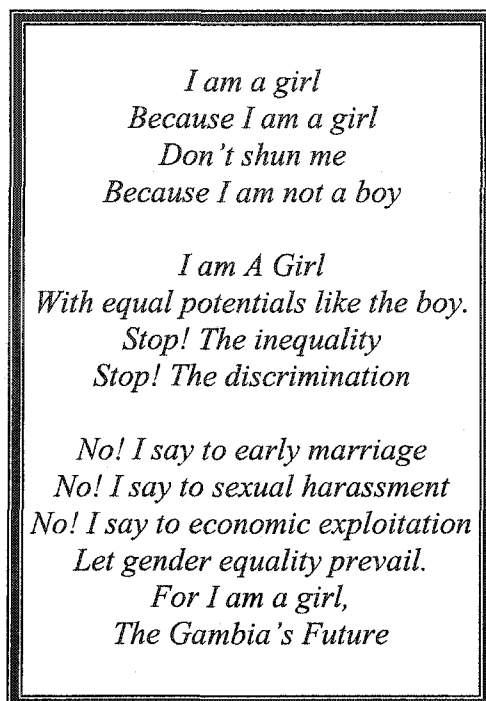
Some of the constraints on achieving these objectives that have been identified by the GEU are consistent with those frequently found in the literature. Specifically, the direct cost of schooling is viewed as a key barrier to women's equal participation in educational opportunities. There is also concern with respect to parental perception of the relevance of western education and the fear of erosion of traditional values attributed to this form of schooling. Sexual harassment and the exploitation of girls also militates against their equitable participation in education. The final barrier identified the traditional pattern of gendered division of labour in the home along with early marriage and pregnancy. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter Four's presentation of the research findings.

3.6 - Conclusion

Overall, the above discussion has sought to provide an overview of the nature of the education sector in The Gambia and in so doing has provided a framework for the discussion of the research findings in the following chapter. Also, the current chapter has introduced the key issues linked to the dynamics of women's access to and performance in formal education as well as providing an overview of the main actors concerned with these issues in the country. Many of the issues that have been identified in this discussion are consistent with those detailed in *Chapter Two- Review of the Literature*. However,

Chapter Four further explores women's educational issues by locating the experiences and words of the study participants at the center of analysis. In so doing, the aim of the discussion is to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the perspectives of women students at the UOTG as they reflect upon their earlier educational experiences, social and cultural processes that affect them, and their career aspirations.

Chapter Four – Results



Source: Anonymous author in "Voice of FAWEGAM", 1999.

4.1 - Introduction

Many of the initiatives aimed at extending access to education as well as improving the overall quality of education in The Gambia are predicated on the assumptions inherent to the human capital approach as detailed in *Chapter Two – Review of the Literature*. The goals of human capital development are frequently associated with aspects of economic development. However, the linkages between the objectives, programmes and activities of the DoSE, the GEU and NGOs also provide evidence that social development objectives have been included in current development planning in The Gambia. The co-existence of these two development planning frameworks may be attributable to the influences of both the World Bank (emphasis on economic

development) and the African Development Bank (emphasis on economic *and* social development).

Efforts to extend equal opportunities for education to women and girls in the country are systematically presented as the most effective way of empowering women to engage meaningfully in national development processes. In order to assess and evaluate the policy impact of women's empowerment through education initiatives it is here proposed that we must first identify and explore the constraints on girls' and women's access to and retention in formal education.

4.2 - Constraints on Women's Participation and Performance in Formal Education

The Gambian government supports increasing women's participation in formal education, and is particularly concerned with stimulating the interests of students in SMT training for future careers in related fields. In all the government documents, studies and reports that I read, the success of national development initiatives aimed at increasing economic growth was perceived to hinge upon expanding educational opportunities to all. While extending equal educational opportunities to women and girls is a top priority for the government (Jammeh, 1999), reflective of the human capital approach to development, education is viewed as a critical capacity-building component towards the facilitation of women and men's participation in national development efforts.

While women appear to be valued for certain services they may provide to their families and their communities, their capacity for making or even significantly influencing decisions concerning themselves or their households remains quite low. The problem is that low decision-making power within the family can suggest two unfortunate outcomes. One is that women remain disempowered within their homes, lacking the capacity to choose particular paths to pursue for their own individual or their family's

benefit. And, secondly is that young girls growing up and watching their mothers remain marginalized from decision-making in the home and community, may also learn these gendered roles and thereby internalize attributes they believe are appropriate for them. In this way, girls and women together seemingly perpetuate processes that suppress their engagement in taking decisions that will affect their lives.

If women and girls do not generally participate to a significant extent in decision-making that affects their lives, then who does? In many cases, students remain at the whim of school principals and parents when it comes to selecting their programs of study following the transition to Secondary school. While this may be the case for both boys and girls at this level, for girls this pattern seems to characterize the nature of most decisions taken throughout their lives. According to the statements made by interview participants and through informal conversations I engaged in with women at the UOTG, it would seem that for most women that important male family members provide the greatest input into the decisions affecting the lives of the girls in their families.

An overwhelming majority of participants said that during their early years of education, they felt that they had little or no control over their schooling. This is not so surprising, given that as young girls it is common practice in most societies for parents to play important roles in educational decision-making on behalf of their young children who may be inadequately prepared to do so. However, it remains true that girls often have little influence over the type of schools they attend, how long they remain enrolled and how much time they spend studying.

In too many cases it seemed, stories were recounted to me of siblings or friends who were pulled out of school at an early (and in some instances, not so early) stage by their parents for various reasons. Often this was attributed to changing economic

circumstances of the family that resulted in less income available for the education of children and therefore girls were more frequently pulled from classes than boys were. Also, during the transition from grade nine to ten, many parents fear that their daughters will become pregnant or be sexually harassed at school and therefore decide that their daughters should be removed from school and married off. In this way, parents appear to wield a tremendous degree of influence regarding whether or not, or how long, their daughters will remain in school.

With respect to choices regarding women's educational endeavours at the tertiary level, most of the participants spoke of making specific decisions affecting their academic careers themselves. However, the analysis of the interview data suggested that while women may identify themselves as making such decisions, the criteria identified as influencing these decisions appeared to be heavily weighted towards family considerations, including the expectations of husbands, fathers or uncles. In each case, these family members were the main sponsors of the women's education, and therefore maintained a direct line of power over the choices made by them concerning their programs of pursuit as well as their career aspirations.

Many of the women I spoke with lamented the fact that they must live with their in-laws in the same compound (or nearby). Out of the sixteen (16) interview participants, six (6) were married and all stated that they found it extremely difficult to strike a balance between the expectations of their husbands and in-laws, their domestic work burden and the demands of university level coursework. However, each of the women who identified married life and child care as a constraint on their educational performance also expressed that the difficulties associated with such circumstances did not severely impede their academic progress.

During the interview activity, many stories were recounted to me involving the forced and/or early marriage of friends and family members of the participants. Although I expected that several of the married participants had themselves been subjected to this practice, not one of them indicated as such during our interactions. However, the stories told of the experiences of others suggested to me the women may have been using a “third person” approach to divulging sensitive information.

Regardless of the validity of this information with respect to the research methodology, the stories enhanced my understanding of the practice. Specifically, this was with respect to the sensitive nature of the problem, the traumatic effects forced/early marriage had on the psycho-social development of the girls, as well as the constraints imposed by husbands (and in general, married life) on the educational performance and attainment of women.

The following sections provide a discussion that connects some of the paradigmatic debates detailed in *Chapter Two – Review of the Literature*, with some of the more salient structures and processes that militate against Gambian women’s access to and performance in formal education. Some of the structures and processes highlighted are taken from previous studies concerning the relationship between the socio-economic status of women and this group’s educational experiences and are discussed in tandem with some of the research findings from the current study.

The following sections represent the themes that emerged during the content analysis phase of the research project. Therefore, the following sections concerning the gendered nature of the school environment, the economic constraints relevant to the cost of education, the practice of forced and early marriage and women’s heavy work burdens,

represent the key constraints to women's education as identified by the research participants.

4.2.1 - The School Environment

The school environment itself is yet another site that is not generally considered favourable for girls. The DoSE (1997) expressed concern that there aren't enough "role models" projecting positive images of successful, educated women to girls in the education system. At all levels, Gambian schools have a much larger number of male teachers than female. For example, in the 2001/2002 school year, only thirteen (13) percent of all Senior Secondary teachers were female (DoSE, 2002).³⁰ Furthermore, women currently account for a mere five (5) percent of all school principals in the country.

Within the school environment, gender biased curriculum and learning resources continue to constrain efforts at achieving gender equality in education. Studies conducted by the DoSE and the Girls' Education Unit demonstrate that learning and teaching materials and texts present information that is discriminatory and is presented in such a gender-biased manner. In some instances, these studies have demonstrated that teachers themselves have not been "adequately exposed to gender sensitive issues" (DoSE, 1997) – a concern that is at the very core of efforts to promote gender equality.

The stereotyping of school subjects and the use of male-oriented learning tasks has been demonstrated to significantly influence the subject choices of students (Kabiru, 1993). Specifically, it is argued that traditionally male-dominated subjects such as science and math are not the choice of most women students because these are perceived to be

³⁰ Issues related to positive women role models in the education system will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Four – Results.

almost the exclusive domain of men. In turn, the marginal participation of girls in these subjects consequently limits their career options and prospects.³¹

The physical school environment has been identified as a further factor in the disproportionately lower female participation in formal education. The physical environment of schools affects girls differently than boys. Issues related to shared toilet facilities highlight parental concern with respect to the increased risk of harassment and abuse girls face when they must use the same facilities as boys. Intervention strategies have been simple – install separate toilet facilities for girls – and have been widely implemented, achieving much success, particularly in the rural areas.

4.2.2 - Economic Constraints

One study participant told me a story of her friend who lived up-river in a rural community. Miriama (not her real name) was the eldest daughter in a family of seven children. Miriama was in her third year of school when her parents withdrew her because they could not afford to send all the children to school and a choice needed to be made. Her parents chose to educate their three sons. When recounting this story, the study participant stated:

It hurt her (Miriama) so bad she cried. Now she has moved to the city where she works as a cleaner. She is getting married. But she is still sad that she could not finish her school (Study Participant, 2002).

³¹ In chapter four, the analysis of women students' perception of subject stereotyping is explored in greater detail. It should be noted that the participants' perceptions of their career prospects can be a determinant in decisions not to pursue SMT subjects in school. This theme is directly linked to the perceived constraints imposed on women's career options, i.e. small market for women scientists and/or mathematicians etc...

The above quote speaks to several of the issues relevant to the current discussion. First, in Miriama's case her parents removed her from school because they could not afford to pay the school fees for all their children. Miriama did not have a choice whether or not to stay in school. Second, the participant recounting this story to me surmised that Miriama's lack of schooling limited the employment opportunities available to her. Third, the choice of Miriama's parents to educate their sons demonstrates an undervaluing of girls' education. In The Gambia, the education of boys is frequently viewed as a better investment (compared with investing in girls' education) because men often have greater income earning potential and may be expected to financially assist their parents in their elderly years (FAWEGAM, 1999).

In a World Bank study concerning the reasons why Gambian households under-invest in girls' education (World Bank, 1995), the direct cost of schooling emerged as *the key variable influencing this group's educational access and retention*. It was estimated that at a minimum, twenty percent (20%) of a household's disposable income is required per child for primary school each year (World Bank, 1995). On average, there are six children per family in the Gambia. This suggests that the cost of schooling remains prohibitively high for parents wishing to send all their children to school.

In recognition of the economic constraints that militate against girls' access to and retention in formal education, the DoSE in conjunction with the Girls' Education Unit implemented the *Girls' Education Scholarship Scheme*.³²

³² Details of this strategic intervention are provided in the DoSE's Draft Education Masterplan 1998-2005 (1997).

The objectives of this strategic intervention include:

- Gender equity in access to education
- Increased retention and performance rates of girls in basic education and subsequently at the senior secondary level
- Reduce costs of girls education by at least 50 percent (DoSE, 1997)

In order to achieve the stated goals of gender equity in education, financial assistance for girls in the most deprived regions³³ was committed by the government and is to be distributed through the DoSE and the Girls' Education Unit (GEU). It is anticipated that through the provision of financial assistance, the DoSE will consequently succeed in reducing the "incidence of poorer parents in the two lowest economic quintiles having to make a choice of who to educate" (DoSE, 1997).

On one hand, reducing the cost of education in The Gambia may be the single most important strategy for improving the enrolment rates of girls at the basic level. On the other hand, it may also be argued that retaining girls in school will demand a more complex configuration of strategies emphasizing the role societal and familial expectations play in the higher drop-out rates for girls after basic education (or sooner). However, President Jammeh has put "money where his mouth is"³⁴ and through the education sector ministries has begun the process of making education more affordable.

For girls, lower basic education is now free. While the free education for girls initiative originally began in the most economically deprived regions in the country, starting in 2002/03, this policy was extended to all girls in The Gambia, regardless of their home region. Also in an effort to reduce the costs associated with sending girls to school,

³³ As previously mentioned, these regions include Upper and Lower River Divisions, North Bank and Central Divisions. Another component of the scholarship scheme will provide partial scholarships for "needy and meritorious girls in the Western Division, Kanifing and Banjul administrative areas (DoSE, 1997).

³⁴ Quote used from a conversation with the Dean of Science and Agriculture at the UOTG, 2002.

the DoSE decreased tuition at the upper basic level from \$15(US) to \$5(US) and at the senior secondary level from \$25(US) to \$20(US). The reduction in school fees applies both to boys and girls as part of the Government's effort to improve access to education for all citizens. However, the lowering of school fees has been identified by the DoSE (1999) as a key strategy in addressing the economic constraints impeding women's access to and retention in formal schooling.

Parents of girls in school have been accorded important responsibilities with respect to improving the retention and performance of girls in school. It is expected that those parents with daughters receiving a scholarship will diligently monitor their children's progress and performance in school by visiting the school regularly, meeting with educators and actively discussing and "getting involved" in their education (DoSE, 1997). Also, sponsored students will be provided with, and required to attend regular guidance and counselling services that have been developed in accordance with the objectives of encouraging and supporting girls' persistence and performance in school.

The importance of a strong social capital base that can effectively support and encourage girls' education is reflected in the DoSE's emphasis on the need for parental involvement in their daughters' education as well as enhancing the social capital embodied in the guidance and counselling services available to students. Not only is the DoSE concerned with improving the overall perception of parents with respect to the value of educating their daughters, but the DoSE is also focusing on the responsibilities of parents to actively support, through engagement and participation, their children's education. The DoSE anticipates that the creation and/or strengthening of social support

networks at both the community and state levels will have a positive impact on women's empowerment processes through education (DoSE, 1997).

4.2.3 – Forced and/or Early and Teenage Marriage and Pregnancy

Another key constraint on girls' access to and retention in school relates to the socio-cultural processes around marriage prevalent in The Gambia. Early/teen marriage and pregnancy is understandably a major concern for parents with respect to their daughters' future. The opportunity costs associated with educating girls in tandem with concerns about harassment and pregnancy "help to tip parents' decisions about schooling" (DoSE, 1997).

Forced and early marriage characterizes the life pattern of the majority of Gambian women. Although such practices are generally recognized in Gambian communities, and indeed were once a source of pride for parents (as a means of ensuring the girls' virginity prior to marriage), the inherent problems associated with forced and/or early marriages are currently a topic of heated debate in the country. For many parents, it comes as a relief to "marry off" daughters, if only to initiate the inevitable at a time when a daughters "value" is at its highest. Regardless of the reasons for the preponderance towards forced and early marriage, decisions made by families to subject their daughters to this process are insensitive to the future of the girl child and the individualism of the person (Women's Bureau, 2001).

Table 4.0 – Age of Marriage Patterns in The Gambia (in percentages)

Age Group	Never Married	
	Male	Female
15-19	96.9	60.6
20-24	87.5	25.0
25-29	60.8	9.0
30-34	29.8	4.4
35-39	15.0	2.7
40-44	9.5	2.3
45/49	6.5	2.3

Source: Central Statistics Department, The Republic of The Gambia, 1993.

Table 4.0 suggests two particularly noteworthy marriage patterns. First, are the clearly evident disparities between the marriage patterns of men and women in The Gambia within all age ranges. Second concerns the earlier average age of marriage for women compared with men, as well as the overall higher rate of marriage of women in the country. These patterns reinforce and link up with some of the other issues relevant to the current discussion concerning the dynamics of women's access to and performance in formal education in The Gambia.

As the family unit³⁵ is centrally important to the social structure and processes that characterize Gambian society, members of a woman's family play key roles in determining her future and composite life experiences. Indeed, I cannot overstate the importance attributed to family ties amongst this study's participants and reflected in all my interactions with Gambian people. Considering the integral nature of such relations, it must be assumed that family responsibilities and expectations influence the degree to which women make independent decisions as well as the nature of the decisions made.

³⁵ In The Gambia, the concept of the family unit is broader and encompasses immediate and extended family members belonging to the same patrilineal ancestry.

Table 4.0 demonstrates that by the age of twenty-five (25) seventy-five percent (75%) of Gambian women are or have been married at least once, compared with less than thirteen (13) percent of men who have been or are married by this age. These statistics are linked to the pattern of the early marriage of women to husbands who are usually older, in fact we see that the age at which the majority of Gambian men are married is thirty-four (34).

Marriage usually includes new and multiple responsibilities for women. Not only is a woman charged with the tasks of maintaining a home, cooking and cleaning, caring for children and her husband, but also a woman is expected to abide by the rules and expectations of her new family – her in-laws. This will be discussed later in *Chapter Four*, however it is important at this point to introduce some of the issues associated with early and/or forced marriage.

Many girls are removed from school prematurely in order to marry. In many instances this occurs prior to completion of primary education, although it may happen at any level. Too often, even if a woman is permitted to continue attending school, the responsibilities of married life demand so much time and energy that she is ultimately unable to continue her studies and/or perform to her full educational potential. Following the analysis of the research data, one of the central themes that emerged concerned the relatively high influence a woman's husband and his family had over her life-choices, including decisions regarding her education.

Also, women face the added challenges of adapting to and integrating themselves into a new family unit upon marriage. In some instances women leave parents who are supportive of their education and begin living amongst in-laws who do not value women's

education as highly. At this point, the influence of family can remove the opportunities available to women to continue their studies, regardless of the level of education they possess. As will be discussed later in the thesis, even those women who do continue on to secondary and tertiary education, frequently experience influence from others which distorts their academic choices (i.e., what subjects and programs of study they pursue).

4.2.4 - Women's Work Burden

Previous studies on women's access to education in Africa identify that girls' domestic work burden significantly impedes this group's participation in formal schooling as well as negatively impacting upon their educational performance if they do have the opportunity to attend school. The Women's Bureau conducted a survey on violence against women and results indicated that fifty-seven percent (57%) of respondents identified women's heavy workload as an act of violence (Women's Bureau, 1991). It has been estimated that on average, women work about sixteen (16) hours per day. Consequently, women are systematically denied the opportunities to acquire capacity building skills that are required for the achievement of some degree of independence and socio-economic progress. The heavy work burdens of women also beg the question of how much time women actually have to "participate in national development processes" or on the other hand, considering that women already work such long hours we could ask "in what ways are women's contributions to development under-valued and/or remain unrecognized?"

Table 5.0 provides an example of a typical day in the life of a Gambian girl who is enrolled in formal education. The information used in this table was garnered from several participants as well as through informal conversations I had with educators. The activities identified in this table were verified as authentic representations of the daily routine of

girls attending school during group discussions and conversations with my researcher assistant. However, several participants also pointed out that variations were many, and dependent upon the nature of the household and family expectations.³⁶

Table 5.0 – Comparative Work Schedule of Girls and Boys Enrolled in Formal Education (Urban and Peri-Urban Area)

Time	Girls' Activity	Boys' Activity
6:00 am	- wake up and bathe - pray	- wake up and bathe - pray
6:30 - 8:30 am	- help prepare breakfast - sweep, collect water - assist in getting younger siblings bathed, fed and dressed	- take breakfast - review homework/study - get ready for school
8:30 - 9:00 am	- walk to school - ensure siblings arrive at school safely	- walk to school
9:00-3:00 p.m.	- attend classes	- attend classes
3:00 - 4:00 p.m.	- collect siblings from school and walk home	- walk home
4:00 – 6:30	- sweep, clean and collect water and fuelwood - mind younger family members and assist with farm chores	- rest, play with friends - pray - study
6:30 – 7:30 p.m.	- assist in dinner preparation	- pray and study
7:30 – 8:30 p.m.	- take dinner - clean up after dinner	- take dinner
8:30 – 10:30 p.m.	- bathe and pray - study - retire to bed	- bathe and pray - study - retire to bed

Source: Author's synthesis of data generated through formal interviews and interactions with women as well as through participant observation activities at the GAD Workshop (see *Chapter One, Section 2-b-ii*)

The serious imbalances that are evident between the responsibilities of girls and boys clearly demonstrate that on average, girls simply have less time to devote to studying. Furthermore, because of the energy required to perform their extensive domestic obligations, girls frequently do not have the energy to learn effectively.

³⁶ Participants suggested that the economic situation of a household as well as the geographical location of the family significantly influences the nature of the daily activities of the girl-child.

Socialization processes relegate menial and labour-intensive child-care, housework and cooking tasks as the responsibility of women. A “Taboo system” that promotes belief that this is the natural order to man/woman responsibilities perpetuates these socialization practices. For example, a husband who cooks is deemed to be dominated by his wife and therefore may be considered “foolish”. During the course of the interviews, it was discovered that in some cases, women themselves also play a role in perpetuating gender-differentiated socialization processes by socializing their female children differently from their boys³⁷. While boys are playing, resting or studying mothers frequently give sole responsibility for household chores to their daughters. In turn, this limits the amount of time and energy girls can spend studying.

Such processes militate against the empowerment of women through education and training as the heavy workloads of women and girls are a major deterrent to girls’ education. Not only does this domestic work burden block access to education and training opportunities, but it can also be linked to the disproportionately higher dropout rate from school among girls. Beyond demanding much of women’s time, the energy required to complete household chores takes away from the energy necessary to learn effectively and therefore often results in lowered academic performance in the classroom.

In this way we can observe that the gendered division of labour is perpetuated within the family, with girls internalizing their expected roles as care-givers and domestic workers within the household. In Chapter Three, it was demonstrated that a strong social capital base exists at both the State (DoSE, GEU, and DSTE) and community levels (NGOs) in The Gambia, which has created a progressive environment for women to

³⁷ However, during the interview process some mention was made of mothers who challenged such processes within their own homes, and instead divided up household chores equally amongst the children.

equitably access educational opportunities. The maintenance of the gendered division of labour is reflective of the structures and process of patriarchy within Gambian society that persist alongside the social capital that is providing an enabling environment for women's education.

4.3 – Education Levels of Parents

The education and income levels of parents are important variables in the educational attainment of children (Biraimah, 1991). The research findings demonstrate that all of the study participants had parents who had completed at least some level of schooling. With respect to the relationship between the education levels of parents with the educational experiences of the study participants. Out of the sixteen (16) participants, four (4) had both parents who had completed high school. Nine (9) of the participants had at least one parent who possessed a high school diploma. And, seven (7) of the women students had parents who either had completed primary education (3 participants) partially completed primary education (2 participants) or had no primary education at all (2 participants). In this latter group, it should be noted that in all cases the mother had not received any formal Western education, although three (3) of the participants indicated that their mothers had received formal Koranic training.

Earlier generations of Gambians had even lower participation rates in formal education than the generation of students who participated in this study (UNDP, 1997). This suggests that the above findings indicate that the parents of this sample possess higher levels of education than that of other members of their generation. This finding is consistent with the literature that claims educated parents are more likely to send their children to school and specifically, that educated women are more likely to ensure that their daughter's have access to educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2000).

It is important to recognize that for this group, most participants expressed that parental encouragement, particularly the support received by their mothers, was one of the main factors in their educational success. Therefore, in the next section we will turn to a discussion of parental support – both financial and emotional – as a determinant of the educational experiences of women.

4.4 – Parental Support – Emotional and Financial

The women students who participated in this study all indicated that they received both financial and emotional support towards their formal education from their family. The majority of participants expressed that the bulk of the financial burden of sending them to school was borne by their fathers. Their mothers were the ones who provided emotional support, particularly in the form of taking an active interest in their schooling.

Since my father is the breadwinner of the family, so he financed my education. But emotionally, it was my mother who was there for me (Study Participant, 2002)

And,

It was more because of them [that I went to school], especially my mom. My dad, he would rather that us go to school, but then he was not much involved. But my mom was like, pushing us to go to school, making sure we didn't miss school, she comes to the school to see what we are doing (Study Participant, 2002)

Many of the women spoke of their mother's involvement in their schooling, particularly with respect to participating in parent/teacher interviews, asking questions about their schoolwork and assisting with homework.

They supported me financially and emotionally throughout my formal education mainly by providing private classes, both during school period and on vacation. My parents paid school fees and provided other educational material for me. I had enough emotional support, especially from my mom. She is very concerned, which she expresses by having conversations with me, going through my records at school, helping me do my assignments and guiding me in solving problems (Study Participant, 2002)

4.5 – Social Class

The amount of financial support of girls' education depends to some extent on family resources and social class. Qualitative analyses of the women students uncovered an unexpected pattern. Eleven (11) out of the sixteen (16) interview participants indicated that they had received some form of private tutoring during their junior and/or senior secondary education. That such a large percentage of the participants had access to extracurricular tutoring implies that these students had quantitatively more parental support with respect to financial resources. This pattern also reflects the socioeconomic background and current status of the family.³⁸ This suggests the importance of social class in helping women students to overcome the obstacles to the education of girls in Gambian society.

This pattern seems to suggest that tutoring contributes to better school performance and thus perhaps assisted the majority of the participants in their pursuit of tertiary level education. Although this finding indicates evidence that the study participants generally came from relatively high socioeconomic backgrounds, this was certainly not true for several of the participants. One of the participants who did not indicate that they had received private tutoring expressed that her family supported her –

³⁸ Although it is also true that strong convictions with respect to the value of tutoring for their children (perhaps if they themselves received this form of assistance with their schooling) may influence parents decisions to somehow find a way to pay for tutoring if at all possible.

especially her mother – by encouraging a more equitable division of household labour between the boys and girls.

She makes sure that there is an equal distribution of work in the house between the boys and the girls to enable me to have more time with my books (Study Participant, 2002)

This indicates one way in which families without economic means are able to support the education of girl children and the importance of mothers' support in mitigating against discriminatory structural conditions.

4.6 - Religion

Religious beliefs and spirituality play integral roles in the functioning of Gambian society. In the Gambia, ninety percent (90%) of the population is Muslim, nine percent (9%) Christian, and one percent (1%) follow indigenous/animist belief systems (World Factbook 2002). In the current study, eight-seven percent (87%) of the participants were Muslim, with the remaining thirteen percent (13%) being Christian.

Both Islam and Christianity however have been integrated into traditional, animist belief systems, thereby making the practicing of each quite unique to the West African context.³⁹ For the most part, there is not any religiously based conflict nor is there any inter-ethnic rivalry. However, in the literature, women's socio-economic status and their disproportionately lower participation rate in formal schooling has been attributed in part to prevailing religious ideology that significantly influences the construction and maintenance of oppressive gender roles.

As was earlier detailed, the sample group for the in-depth interviews included participants from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds. It may be argued that

patriarchy and hierarchical power structures militate against the empowerment of women within both religious belief systems. In consideration of the primacy attributed to religious factors in determining the life choices and patterns of women, I decided to include a discussion concerning the relationship between religion and the status of Gambian women as it relates to educational participation and performance. However, contrary to many studies that characterize religion as a key determinant in how society perceives the contributions of women, participants in the current study denied experiencing religiously based constraints on their education.

While the participants' failure to identify either Islam or Christianity as a constraining influence on girls education may be unique to this small sample group, it may also be characteristic of religion in this country. Dr. Omar Jah Jr., an Islamic scholar, publicly presented a discussion in The Gambia during the Summer of 2002. I have chosen to include some of Dr. Jah's discussion here as I believe that he offers a progressive vision of the role of women and education in society towards the good of both the individual and society.

Some Islamic scholars suggest that gender equality is a fallacy and irrelevant to Muslim society. Instead, Dr. Omar Jah Jr. argues that in Islam there is a "complementary and harmonious dualism" in the gendered obligations and rights of Muslim people.⁴⁰ Jah claims that cultural attitudes and practices that privilege the rights of men over those of women are frequently incorrectly confused with the dictates of Islam in its pure sense. The main point made in this argument is that questions of rights and gender equality are

³⁹ Across the African continent, Islam and Christianity have generally been adapted into the pre-existing animism and other forms of African spirituality, thus altering the way each is practiced and observed within specific socio-cultural contexts.

⁴⁰ All quotes and references in this section are taken from Naban, Ismalia M.S. (2002). *Outass Omar Jah Defends Islam*. The Gambia News & Report Weekly. Vol.11, No. 32, ISSN 0796-0972.

misplaced and that the central question concerns contextually specific conceptualizations of justice – “*It is therefore a form of justice in Islam to treat unequally*” (Jah, 2002)

Jah claims that the feminist movement has mistakenly attacked the fundamental assumptions about male and female identity as opposed to addressing structural inequality and specific injustices against women as he claims that these are at the root of women’s oppression. Jah proposes that prior to, and since the advent of Islam, women have “*always be wronged in one way or another all over the world in all civilizations*”. For this scholar, power [or the abuse of] and *not* religion is the main weapon of men in maintaining women’s historic oppression and subordination.

Jah argues that education is a pre-condition for the “righting” of women. That inequality has been more a matter of ignorance on the part of women, but that as women become educated this will enable them to “realize” equality. Rather than a right, Jah identifies education as a fundamental obligation under the teachings of Islam and therefore both men and women must commit to their studies and society must support them in their endeavours. The discussion suggests the dynamics of difference with respect to the way human rights are conceptualized in Muslim society and particularly within The Gambia. According to Jah though, while many may reject gender equality as a foreign and irrelevant concept within The Gambia, Islamic ideology nonetheless provides for and indeed requires societies to support individual realization of equality in accordance with the principles of harmonious dualism.

4.7 – Women and Science/Math/Technology (SMT) Education

Increasing the participation of girls and women in SMT education is widely mentioned and/or discussed in many *Department of State for Education* publications and by teaching personnel in general in The Gambia. In these publications, the focus is on

improving women's engagement in SMT training at the primary and secondary school levels. It is assumed that increasing girls' interest and participation in SMT subjects at these levels will subsequently improve the enrolment rates of women in SMT education at the higher levels of education (DoSE, 2000). The underlying assumptions of this strategy reflect the idea that in conjunction with SMT skill-building training, the attitudinal barriers that suppress girls' interest in SMT must be addressed at the lower levels of education.

During an interview with the Assistant Head of the Women's Bureau, she stated that the learning of math and science requires a different skill set, attitude and study schedule on the part of the student. It was indicated that girls often simply do not have the time to devote to the practicing and studying of the subject material as a consequence of their heavy domestic workload. However, beyond needing more time and energy to apply to the learning of math and science subjects, it was further argued that the attitude of girls towards these subjects must change if the objective of increasing girls' participation in them [math and science subjects] is to be realized.

This last comment put an interesting twist on how low female participation in the fields of science, math and technology (SMT) is to be addressed within the Gambian context. Speaking on behalf of the Women's Bureau - the organization charged with the task of responsibly and effectively representing the needs of women – the Assistant Head suggested that women and girls are the problem in so far as their attitudes towards these subjects is the primary cause of their marginalization in these fields. This woman continued to explain that policy programming was required to stimulate educational processes that could effectively challenge the attitudinal barriers that constrain women's engagement in SMT training.

Unfortunately, the research was constrained by a lack of current statistical data indicating the presence and degree of gender-based differences in enrollment patterns in these subjects at the primary and secondary levels. However, anecdotal evidence combined with information concerning the remedial strategies initiated towards increasing the quantity and quality of the SMT education delivered to girls and women provided sufficient evidence that gender inequality with respect to SMT training is indeed a problem of considerable scope in the country.

My sample reflects this low proportion of women students who consider themselves to in science courses. Out of the sixteen (16) participants, two (2) were enrolled in science-based programs of study at the UOTG. For the sake of clarity, the following discussion will be divided according to various factors and aspects of girls' early SMT education (at the primary and secondary levels) as well as how they chose their programs at the tertiary level.

4.7.1 - Secondary School

At the secondary level, the curriculum includes the subjects: Math; English; Social and Environmental Studies as well as; General Science. Student's marks coming out of grade nine (9) are the major determinant of the courses they will take at the senior secondary level. Parents and school principals are the main actors that influence the academic programs students pursue at this level.

Parents are key players at this point in a child's schooling as they [the parents] often choose the type of education to be received.

What they [parent] want you to become is what you take in school...their [the parents] choice is your choice (Study Participant, 2002)

Several of the participants also indicated that when they graduated from junior secondary school, the principal of the senior secondary school that they enrolled at was *the* decision-maker as to what program stream that students would begin in. Generally, the framework for such streaming was provided by the junior secondary marks of the student. A simplified illustration of this streaming framework is provided in Table 6.0 below.

Table 6.0 – Student Streaming According to Academic Strengths at the Secondary Level

Area of Demonstrated Academic Strength	Program Stream
English	Arts
English and Social and Environmental Studies	Humanities
Math <i>and</i> General Science	Sciences
<i>All</i> subjects	Economics

Source: Author's synthesis of data from interviews with students and educators in The Gambia, 2002.

It is important to note that no official record could be obtained indicating that the above framework had to be rigorously followed by principals in the school streaming process. However, while this system may not be officially dictated and enforced through the DoSE, data from a wide variety of interviews certainly suggested that subject streaming within the education sector is at least tacitly endorsed at the level of government.

After the junior secondary exams, students who are good at math are taken to the science class or commerce while those who are good in other fields are also taken to their respective classes (Study Participant, 2002)

Assuming that student streaming into subjects according to demonstrated academic strengths does occur – what is the relationship between this process and the autonomy accorded to students in shaping their academic careers? What is the relationship between gender and academic performance in specific subjects? These questions direct our attention to the salient issues related to women's early experiences in education and their programs of study at the tertiary level. That is, the point where students are streamed

according to subject performance actually marks the beginning of a period of education that provides students with the qualifications, motivations and pre-requisites to pursue specific degrees at the UOTG (or other post-secondary institutions)

In describing how she was streamed into Science, one participant stated:

Because actually what made me do science – I was not interested in doing science – but since I was really good in math and things like that, I was like...because when I choose my subjects, what they do is give you a list of courses that the school offers, and you look at what you want to do, then you go home and fill out what you want to do. And, I chose Arts, English, Literature, things like that. But when I went when they called me, they said ‘you know, you can do this, why don’t you do this [math/science/automotive], so I had to change everything, you know add math here...(Study Participant, 2002)

This statement describes a process whereby a student was streamed into science against the student’s original intentions, presumably by the school’s staff/administration. When I asked the staff at the Girls’ Education Unit about such practices, it was expressed that often in an effort to increase girls’ participation in science and math education, secondary schools will “encourage” those who show “promise” in these areas to continue studying SMT subjects at the senior secondary level. However, it remains true that the choice of students is frequently a “non-issue” in that “what students want, is not necessarily what is best for them or the society in general”⁴¹

Interestingly, this same participant who was changed from Humanities to science is currently enrolled in Development Studies in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the UOTG. When asked about this, she detailed how she had pursued post-secondary training

⁴¹ These ideas were stated by staff at the Girls’ Education Unit – DoSE, 2002.

at the technical college in The Gambia – GTTI, and after graduation had even tried to work in accounting and administration. However, she said:

Then I discovered what I was really interested in and I was just doing it [tech] because they wanted women to do it, the encouragement was there. But deep down I wasn't satisfied. Then I decided to try and work, you know in accounting and administration. Actually, when I went to the University, I wanted to do accounting, but then I ended up doing development studies, then I just love it so... (Study Participant, 2002).

The above discussion of the results demonstrates that students frequently do not select their programs of study to a significant degree. However, it may be suggested that in a way, students can affect change as a function of their commitment and motivation to succeed in a given academic area. With respect to science and math education, the cultivation of higher degrees of such attributes towards the learning of these subjects, could increase the rate of students being streamed into these areas, as well as could facilitate enhanced student performance in math and science.

4.7.2 – Guidance and Counseling Services

Several strategies have been identified in the literature that may facilitate increased engagement of girls and women in science and technology. An underlying assumption that characterizes most of these strategies is that boys and girls must be exposed to situations that encourage and indeed require students to shift traditional gender roles – to stimulate a fluid learning environment where typical girl/boy activities are reversed (Upitis, 2001). Strategic and gender-sensitive academic guidance and counseling services have also been identified as an effective means through which gendered subject stereotyping may be challenged, thereby suggesting that more women can be encouraged to develop and explore their interests in science, math and technology.

This is particularly relevant to the current study in which the majority of participants attributed a high value to guidance counseling as provided through their schools.

Accessing these services was a great help in shaping what I really want to be doing in the future. Even though the [guidance] center is at easy reach for all students, many do not go there. I think counselors should make sure that all students are called in for interviews regarding their future careers (Study Participant, 2002)

Also,

I think that counseling services are very important and can help you make better informed choices (Study Participant, 2002)

However, some participants suggested that the nature of the counseling could be made more relevant to academic issues, as opposed to personal/family concerns.

The counseling services were offered to students from troubled homes or students with difficulties such as inability to pay fees or meet academic requirements. They also counseled both males and females on peer pressure, teenage pregnancy and AIDS. I personally never had a problem that took me to them for counseling (Study Participant, 2002)

The majority of the participants indicated that counseling services were available at the schools they attended, both at the primary and secondary level. However, even those participants who did not have access to such services expressed how vital these are for students, specifically with respect to making academic and career choices. Such findings suggest that implementing targeted and strategic academic and career guidance and counseling services has the potential of yielding positive results with respect to challenging subject and career stereotyping. Beyond this, successful incorporation of these services within the entire education sector may contribute substantially to

gender-sensitization initiatives and the overall encouragement of women to pursue male-dominated subject areas.

While formal guidance and counseling services do not currently exist at the UOTG, such facilities will be implemented and developed according to the needs of students in the near future⁴². Despite the lack of such services at this stage in the University's development, each of the participants said that they had sought and received valuable academic, career and/or personal advice from members of the UOTG faculty. Indeed, several students explicitly praised the "motherly" role assumed by the Dean of Science and Agriculture for her willingness to provide guidance and assistance to any students in need. Overall, the statements of the participants suggest that professors at the UOTG as well as some administrators remain accessible and willing to assist students with respect to academic/career/personal decisions.

4.7.3 - Learning Resources

It is frequently mentioned in the literature that the teaching and learning of SMT subjects is optimally facilitated through access to the necessary resources, including lab equipment and textbooks. Therefore, the participants were all asked questions regarding the quality and quantity of such resources in their junior and senior secondary schools, as well as how equitably these were distributed amongst the students.

There were never enough teaching materials for all and so we would often use them as a group. Although we [the girls] would be included as part of the group, I remember that the boys always took charge over the use of books and lab equipment. They decided what to do I guess (Study Participant, 2002)

⁴² While this is "unofficial" (i.e. was not expressed by any administrators), plans for establishing guidance and counselling services were expressed by participants, one faculty member and a member of the UOTG Student Union.

When the participant was questioned concerning the teacher's response to this behaviour (i.e. did the behaviour go unacknowledged and/or unchallenged?), she stated:

Yes, we all eventually got to use them [the learning materials] ...the teachers seemed to assume that this was 'ok' [that the boys decided how to use the materials] and the girls accepted it as well so long as we still go to use them (Study Participant 2002)

It would have been interesting to be able to delve deeper into the general state of learning resources in The Gambia, however this was not the subject of this research project. What is important is that ten (10) out of the sixteen (16) participants indicated that they felt their school had sufficient resources and that these materials seemed to be evenly distributed amongst girls and boys. The other participants expressed varying degrees of resource availability, yet none attributed their lack of interest in SMT subjects to deficiencies in resource availability.

Further, a theme that emerged in the analysis was that in answering this question, over half of the participants indicated that they felt that women had even greater access to learning resources in science and math subjects. It was believed that this occurred because the teachers and the other students (the boys) wanted to encourage girls to pursue math and science training.

We had lab apparatus, field trips...you know. The resources were well distributed between males and females. In fact the males gave me priority if resources were scarce because they wanted to encourage me to stay in the sciences since only a few females are willing to take the challenge (Study Participant, 2002)

And,

We had enough lab materials. Sometimes I think that the girls had more because they were trying to encourage us (Study Participant, 2002)

The above two statements suggest that efforts to encourage girls' active engagement in SMT education are yielding results at the level of educational delivery. It is suggested that in some instances, both the vertical social relationships between teachers and students and the horizontal social networks that characterize peer group interaction in the classroom contribute positively towards women's access to and performance in SMT education and training. However, the nature of the social capital base within some educational settings maintains subject stereotyping criteria. As a result, it remains unlikely that girls within some educational contexts will receive the encouragement and support that they require to pursue their studies in non-traditional subject areas.

4.7.4 - Teacher/Peer Attitudes

The attitude of teachers towards the education of girls has been identified in the literature as a key factor in the academic success achieved by women students. This is particularly true in the case of science and math education where historically girls have been subjected to a gender differentiated curriculum that has them receiving training in what have been perceived to be appropriate subjects⁴³. The participants were asked questions concerning the nature of their teacher's attitudes towards girls' participation in SMT subjects.

I was never encouraged in math or science as they [teachers] would tell us they [the subjects] are for boys (Study Participant, 2002)

All the boys in my class wanted to do science and math. The teachers told us that boys always wanted to do these subjects because they [subjects] were more suited to boys (Study Participant, 2002)

⁴³ Traditionally, these subjects have been English, Home Economics and Social and Environmental Studies.

Statements such as the above suggest that in some instances, teachers were perpetuating gender stereotyping that maintains that “boys do math and science” and/or “science is not for girls”. One participant (2002), who excelled in math and science throughout her early education, stated that when she would “beat the boys”, the teacher (a man) would berate the boys for “letting a girl” perform better in these subjects.

The issue of teacher attitudes towards girls’ education intersects with several of the emergent themes from the research. While it was noted that many teachers and education sector policy actors explicitly support the concept of gender equality, too many in-service educators remain ignorant of the ways in which teachers perpetuate the internalization of attitudinal characteristics that impede women’s educational access and performance. Thereby this would suggest the need to critically examine the dominant pedagogy in Gambian classrooms and identify the verbal and non-verbal channels through which gender stereotypes are transmitted and/or maintained within the context of formal education.

However, while there were many anecdotes shared concerning the lack of encouragement girls received with respect their participation in SMT training, there were also nearly as many positive examples provided by the participants of teachers and peers actively supporting girls in school. The majority of the research participants also perceived many of their classroom experiences as reflecting a process whereby girls received special attention by teachers. This emerged as a problem in some cases as it was expressed that boys consequently believed that girls “got off easy” with respect to teacher expectations for their school work.

One participant recounted her experiences of being bullied by boys during her primary and secondary education as follows:

I think they bullied me most because I was doing very well. I was always the only female who was between 1st and 4th in the class. So I think I was being bullied because of that (Study Participant, 2002)

This participant did indicate that the bullying ended for one year – the only year that she had a female teacher who was “very strict” and “the boys wouldn’t dare touch me” (Study Participant, 2002). However, the following year the bullying began again and continued until she reached senior secondary level. Although the bullying caused her and her family great distress, she maintained her commitment to her studies throughout these experiences, and she is currently enrolled at the UOTG in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture.

Important for this discussion is acknowledging that in some of the previous excerpts from transcribed interviews, the participants mentioned that schools explicitly encouraged their engagement in SMT subjects. That support for women’s SMT education is being felt at least on some levels by some individuals should be applauded as at a minimum it indicates that positive change is occurring that is opening up spaces for women to pursue their studies in non-traditional areas. It is recognized here that the data related to teacher/peer attitudes towards girls’ education does not indicate any strong causal relationship between certain attitudinal characteristics and positive early education experiences for girls. Rather the objective of this line of analysis is to facilitate a deeper understanding of one potentially influential factor in the early education of the participants of this study.

4.7.5 - Role Models

The Gambian *Department of State for Education* and the *Girls' Education Unit* explicitly recognizes the importance of positive female role models within the education sector – as teachers, principals, institutional administrators and/or government officials. However, the overwhelming majority of participants in the current study expressed low opinions of the few woman teachers they had been taught by. It would seem that here again, despite overcoming significant obstacles to accessing and completing formal teacher training, women teachers nonetheless continue to be significantly challenged by gendered processes that maintain the sexual division of labour. That is, female teachers not only have professional careers to maintain, but they have additional domestic responsibilities including household chores, cooking and childcare that perhaps affect their performance in the classroom as teachers (i.e., reduced time and energy).

Somewhat unexpectedly, almost all of the study participants expressed more favourable attitudes towards the quality and nature of the instruction that they received from male teachers. While most used words such as “warm”, “caring” and, “patient” to describe the behaviour of male teachers in the classroom, women teachers were described by the majority of participants as “impatient”, “strict” and “apathetic”. Indeed, one participant who used this latter adjective to describe the women who had instructed her during the early years of her education, further expressed that “*most of them [women teachers] are too busy keeping up appearances to teach us properly*” (Study Participant, 2002).

Most of the participants stated that only a few women taught them during their primary and secondary school years. Moreover, the majority of their female teachers taught home economics – a subject that remains the almost exclusive domain of women

teachers and students. This pattern is inextricably linked to issues of subject stereotyping and directly feeds into concerns that education can contribute to the domestication of students or it can liberate and empower them to challenge gender stereotyping. Through presenting Home Economics as a predominantly female subject, taught only by women to girls, students are receiving messages that reinforce traditional, patriarchal gender roles, thereby contributing the maintenance of the status quo.

Role models that reinforce positive attitudes and images of women's success in education are not only found in the school environment. While in-service gender sensitization training is currently being provided in The Gambia – the entire structure of Gambian society reinforces gender stereotypes to the detriment of women's empowerment, academically and otherwise. Therefore it is important to explore some of the more obvious socio-cultural processes that perpetuate girls' marginalization in formal education, particularly in SMT subjects.

4.8 - Student Choice

Only two (2) of the study's participants are currently enrolled in the Faculty of Science and Agriculture at the UOTG. However, six (6) of the participants were streamed into SMT subjects during their senior secondary years. The reasons for not continuing their SMT education at the tertiary level are complex and despite extensive questioning, key information seemed to remain somewhat elusive. However, a theme that emerged in the analysis that speaks to the multiple and overlapping reasons for women's disproportionately low participation in SMT education and similarly this group's perceived lack of interest in such subjects, concerns labour-market issues.

During the individual interviews, as well as in the group-interview setting, participants were asked a series of questions regarding:

- Future career aspirations
- How closely linked their program of study is to their career goals (i.e. in what way would their university education assist in the realization of their career goals?)
- External variables/actors that influenced career/academic plans for the future
- Why higher education is important to them

Results indicated that the majority of participants did not aspire to careers involving math, science or technology specifically. During the group interview, several of the students indicated that they did not perceive there to be “a lot of jobs in science or math” (Study Participant, 2002). Such concerns were generally discussed, and it was stated by one participant (who did aspire to a career as a scientific lab researcher) that,

You guys don't see the importance in it [SMT skills], because you don't understand it. You don't know that it [SMT] is everywhere and you need this education to get the jobs you want (Study Participant, 2002)

However, it is important to recognize that when making their academic choices, many students did reflect on their perceptions of the labour market in The Gambia.⁴⁴ Although articulated differently, all participants expressed an interest in using their education to obtain a job that would position them to contribute to national development efforts.

Higher education is very important to me. It helps me discover my potentials and capabilities, and also enables me to specialize in a field where I can make a an impact in the socio-economic development of my country. With higher education one is able to make great impacts – but with little education, the limitations are many since the know-how is lacking (Study Participant, 2002)

⁴⁴ The actual state of the labour market is not the issue in this analysis, as the objective of this line of inquiry was to ascertain the perceptions students held concerning the nature of the Gambian labour market. The international labour market was not mentioned by any of the participants – all indicated that they expected and wanted to remain in The Gambia to pursue their career goals.

Meeting familial expectations also emerged as a central theme in the participant's academic choices as they relate to their career aspirations:

It's really important to me because it makes me feel better and relieved that I am fulfilling the dreams of my mom who didn't have the opportunity to get an education and she now wants me to (Study Participant, 2002)

Not all the participants expressed that they were content in their programs of study at the UOTG. This theme intersects with others throughout the research in that ten (10) of the participants received State Sponsored University Scholarships. It was expressed that in at least three (3) cases, the State "streamed" women into specific programs (all of which were not science or math oriented). However, the staff at the *Department of State for Education*, and the *Girls' Education Unit* would not comment on the criteria or conditions placed on these scholarships. Therefore, it is impossible to say whether or not students are streamed into programs based upon gender differentiated criteria or perhaps as a reflection of demonstrated student ability in a certain program area.

They are not much linked [her program of study and her career aspirations] as I wanted to study political science but by giving me a scholarship, the government dictates what I should read. They forced me to read history or lose my scholarship! I wanted to be a political scientist (Study Participant, 2002)

A further theme that emerged with respect to the majority of participants who were enrolled in arts-based programs of study was the desire to help others. In most instances the women indicated that they desired to engage their skills as women's rights activists, as social scientists and social workers. They perceived growing opportunities in these areas, and also were concerned with contributing to efforts aimed at improving the socio-economic status of women in The Gambia generally.

Higher education is very important to me because I want to liberate myself from ignorance and again, I want to be among the policy makers of my country especially with the advent of the women's emancipation and opportunities to take on challenging tasks (Study Participant, 2002)

Many of the participant's statements concerning their career aspirations and the rationale behind them seem to reflect the recognition that the nature of the current labour-market in The Gambia cannot support a large influx of SMT specialists. This then suggests an area in need of further research as long-term policy planning must include specific consideration for the employment opportunities available to graduates from SMT programs of study, including both women and men. This also suggests that the need to examine the gendered dynamics of the labour-market functioning with respect to facilitating the integration of qualified women into professional and leadership positions in The Gambia. However, while these issues are intriguing and relevant –they are not the subject of the current discussion and therefore we will turn now to the concluding Chapter for some closing remarks.

CHAPTER FIVE – CONCLUSION

5.1 - Introduction

The Government has stated that by the year 2020, The Gambia is to become a self-reliant and fully developed country (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). The Gambia lacks a strong natural resource base for development purposes and therefore the strengthening of the human resource base has been identified as the means through which development objectives can be realized (Republic of The Gambia, 1999). The strengthening of the human resource base is directly connected to the human capital approach to development, which is characterized by the expansion and improvement of both educational and health care services. The expansion and improvement of educational and health care services reflects the need to provide citizens with the tools (i.e., skill-training) and energy (i.e., good health) required to participate effectively in development processes.

Reflecting the priority placed on information and communication technologies as well as innovative scientific research and development within the global arena, President Jammeh has indicated the need to cultivate a science and technology culture in The Gambia (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). The Government has also stated the need for the full participation of all citizens in national development processes (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). Within this development planning framework - the strengthening of the human resource base and the cultivation of a culture of science and technology - the integration of women into development processes has been identified as a priority area for policy efforts (The Republic of The Gambia, 1999). Indeed, the mainstreaming of women

into national development processes has been identified as a pre-condition for the achievement of the national development objectives as identified above.

5.2 – Overview and Discussion of Research Findings

The objective of this thesis has been to evaluate and assess the policy impact of gender equity in education initiatives currently underway in The Gambia. The empowerment of women through education is a central objective of gender equity in education policies. Specifically, the Government anticipates that the empowerment of women through education will effectively improve the socio-economic status of Gambian women in two ways. First, educated and empowered women will gain equal access to development resources and outcomes (i.e., modern education and health care). Secondly, it is anticipated that empowered women will achieve greater control over their own individual development and that of their families through women's greater decision-making power at the family, community and state level.

A couple of different angles have been used in this thesis as a means of assessing and evaluating the policy impact of efforts to promote women's increased decision-making ability as an outcome of women's empowerment through education. First, it has been shown that in The Gambia, girls generally do not have the power to choose whether or not they attend school, or how long they remain in school if they are enrolled. Secondly, we see that women frequently do not choose their programs of study at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels.

Women's lack of decision-making power with respect to their education is also reflective of women's low decision-making power at the family, community and state levels. Indeed, in order to better understand women's educational decision-making power,

we must extend our lens to the patriarchal structures and processes that constrain women's empowerment through education.

A central feature of the presentation and discussion of the research findings has been the constraints on women's access to and performance in education. Not only has the discussion focused on elucidating some of the major constraints to achieving gender equity in education, but also these constraints have been specifically linked to Gambian women's overall socio-economic position in society. It would seem that while women's empowerment through education may facilitate the socio-economic advancement of Gambian women, that women's currently low socio-economic status within Gambian society directly constrains their power to take advantage of expanding educational opportunities.

This thesis has also connected the issues related to the constraints on women's access to and performance in formal education with women's marginalized participation in SMT education and training. The Government of The Gambia, in seeking to cultivate a science and technology culture has identified the promotion of girls' and women's engagement in SMT as an integral component to achieving this goal. The lack of much evidence of girls and women participating in SMT education and training may be attributable to a time-lag between the implementation of remedial strategies and the achievement of the desired outcomes of these (i.e., increased engagement of girls and women in SMT subjects). However, the research findings nonetheless indicate that some women have been encouraged to participate in SMT training.

The patterns we see concerning women's disproportionately lower enrolment and retention rates in formal education in The Gambia are reflective of the complex and multifaceted social processes that remain largely beyond the control of girls and women.

As outlined in both *Chapter Three* and *Chapter Four*, the key barriers to women's access and successful performance in formal education at all levels include the following:

- Low decision-making ability
- Gender biased school environment
- Direct and indirect cost of education
- Forced and/or early marriage and pregnancy
- Heavy domestic burdens
- Parental/family attitudes regarding the value of educating girls

With respect to the disproportionately lower engagement of girls in SMT education, some of the above constraints also influence this pattern. The heavy domestic burden of girls and women continues to undermine their performance in school, particularly their achievement in mathematics and science. The attitudes of peers and teachers have also been identified as a major influence on the attitudes of women towards SMT subjects. Throughout the interviews with women at the UOTG enrolled in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, it was consistently expressed that girls generally did not enjoy learning math and science. Further, it was acknowledged that the readiness of girls to opt out of SMT educational opportunities was condoned within the school system as it was commonly assumed that boys and not girls are naturally inclined to perform well and be interested in these subjects.

However, as mentioned above we do have evidence that some women have received encouragement to pursue SMT education. This has occurred within a policy framework that reflects a strong social capita base at the State level. The horizontal linkages between the National Women's Council and Bureau, the Department of State for Education, The Girls' Education Unit and the Directorate for Science and Technology Education demonstrate the existence of a potentially effective enabling environment for the promotion of girls' and women's participation and retention in SMT education.

Not only do these horizontal linkages hold promise for improving educational access and outcomes for girls and women, but this progressive institutional framework with respect to the promotion of the advancement of Gambian women also suggests the strengthening of the social capital base at the community and family levels. As we have seen, there exist linkages between governmental departments (such as the ones mentioned above) and NGOs involved in women's issues in The Gambia. Also, many of the activities of the GEU, DoSE, DSTE as well as NGOs specifically identify community sensitization and mobilization around women's education as goals of their efforts. This implies that important vertical linkages are being forged between state level gender equity initiatives and community/family level actors involved in the promotion of women's education.

It should be clear that the socio-economic status of women as it has been traditionally conceived, significantly determines the educational and career options of girls and women. Women are generally not the decision-makers within the home, nor are they frequently consulted with respect to important issues. Unfortunately, despite the critical role women play in maintaining families and households, the contributions made by women to their communities remain largely marginalized and under-valued.

The influence of persistent patriarchy in The Gambia continues to militate against the empowerment of women through education because patriarchal structures and processes often can be seen to constrain women's equal access to and retention in formal schooling. However, the presence of women-focused NGOs signals that efforts to address the harmful and constraining impact of patriarchy on the socio-economic advancement of Gambian women are currently underway.

It is appropriate at this point to applaud the Gambian Government for creating and implementing a policy framework that supports women's empowerment through

education. It has been shown that the Government is currently taking an active role in facilitating women's equal access and performance in formal educational opportunities with men. The Government is also working closely with NGO and CBOs towards achieving the goals of gender equity in education. The strong social capital base that has been discussed in this thesis suggests that over time and in conjunction with a policy framework that promotes women's empowerment through education that women's decision-making power will be strengthened thereby further advancing women's effective participation in national development processes.

Appendix #1 – Impact of Research Project

I) Introduction

The impact of this project has fallen into three main categories: a) Exposure of Students to Research Process; b) Advocacy and Social Mobilization; and c) Strengthened Research Base – Women’s Education. The following will provide further details concerning the impact this research has had within the above areas.

I-a) Exposure of Students to Research Process

The University of The Gambia has identified the need to stimulate a research base amongst its students as required for the overall development of this newly established institution. This objective is also in line with the mandates of universities worldwide in that the promotion of original and creative research and analysis is a central aspect of their existence. As such, establishing a strong research base within the UOTG is directly linked to the capacity building objectives of this institution. Further, expanding and promoting the research agenda at the UOTG is indirectly linked to the capacity building objectives of the Gambian government in that the university is responsible for providing the appropriate tools with which university graduates will be able to contribute meaningfully to national development processes.

In an effort to accomplish the objective of exposing students to the research process, I solicited the assistance of several students during the preliminary organization and analysis of the data. This involved sifting through and categorizing a large quantity of field notes produced through participant observation activities, interviews and group interviews. One of the volunteer assistants actively participated in the recruitment of several of the interview participants. This was a particularly valuable contribution, as without her knowledge of the community, and her impressive social network, recruitment would have been very difficult considering that many students were not around campus during most of August (as this was during the school break).

I-b) Advocacy and Social Mobilization

Through the research activities, the university community has been challenged to critically evaluate the educational experiences of women and why women’s participation in science and math continue to be low. However, it is important to note that the Dean of Science and Agriculture is a woman – Dr.Felixina Jonsyn-Ellis – the External Reader for this thesis. Working alongside Dr.Jonsyn-Ellis, I realized that she is a strong advocate for gender equality within the education system, and specifically with respect to women’s participation in science and math.

Formal and informal interaction with students at the UOTG and at other primary, secondary and tertiary institutions stimulated further discussion around issues of access and gender equality in education. Institutions of higher learning are argued to be key engines for capacity-building processes and strengthening poverty reduction strategies through the meeting of social and economic requirements.

The objectives of capacity building extend to increasing women's participation in sustainable development processes; therefore the research was strongly linked to CIDA's priority of promoting and supporting gender equality initiatives. In the same way, this project contributed to Canada's ODA program objectives of poverty reduction, and the contributing to a more secure and equitable world.

1-c) Strengthening Women's Education Research Base

Upon completion of the thesis, copies will be sent to the UOTG as well as the Department of State for Education (The Gambia) – Girls' Education Unit. At both locations, the thesis will be made publicly available. It is anticipated that the information and analysis included in this thesis may be used to enhance the knowledge base concerning issues of women's education at the administrative and governmental level.

Appendix #2 – Interview Participant Consent Form

GENDER AND ACADEMIC CHOICE IN NATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA

Caroline J. Manion

Department of International Development Studies

Saint Mary's University,

Halifax, NS. B3H 3C3

Phone > 902-492-8742

Email > estrgrm@netscape.net

I am a graduate student in the Department of International Development Studies at Saint Mary's University. As part of my Masters thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Gerry Cameron. I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of the study is to explore gender differences in relation to formal educational opportunities in The Gambia, particularly at the tertiary level.

This study involves the interviewing of adult Gambian women who are currently attending the University of The Gambia. Approximately 20-30 interviews will be scheduled, and will take place on campus at the University. Each interview is expected to be completed within 1½ hours. During the interview, participants will be asked a series of closed and open-ended questions in the presence of the above named researcher. The interview questions have been developed to elicit information related to the early educational experiences of Gambian women now attending the University. Of particular importance is the generation of information regarding how women students choose their individual programs of study at the tertiary level as well as linking these decisions to their future career aspirations. Each interview will be audio taped following the recorded consent provided by each participant. Please note that you may choose not to have the interview audio taped, but continue to participate in the research (written records will be secured – see below).

Through their involvement in this study, participants may expect to gain a sense of the value of their own lived educational and socioeconomic experiences. The process of sharing experiences in a supportive and genuinely interested interview environment may also facilitate feelings of empowerment for the women participants. **It is important to note that there are no anticipated risks associated with this research, and your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Each participant will be assigned a number that will be used to identify interview notes and/or audiotapes of the interviews. One list that matches numbers

with the names of participants will be secured in a locked security box. The above named researcher will remain the sole keyholder to this box. Also, no identifying information will be used in the written work. Please do not put any identifying information on any of the forms. To further protect individual identities, this consent form will be sealed in an envelope and stored separately. Furthermore, the results of this study will be presented as a group and no individual participants will be identified

If you have any questions, please contact Caroline Manion at 902-492-8742 (home phone number) or at email address > estrgm@netscape.net

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Dr. Eric Lee at ethics@stmarys.ca, Chair, Research Ethics Boards.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's
Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix #3 – Interview Questions

GENDER AND ACADEMIC CHOICE IN CAPACITY-BUILDING:
THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA
RESEARCHER: CAROLINE (CARLY) MANION
Supplement to Methodological Information:
Individual Interview Questions

Demographic Information:

- I. Age:
- II. Place of Birth:
- III. Ethnic Group:
- IV. Marital Status:
- V. Children:
- VI. Level of Education:
- VII. Program of Study:
- VIII. Employment:

Open-ended Questions:

1. What level of education have your parents attained?
2. Assuming that you have completed primary and junior and senior secondary education, please describe your earliest experiences of formal education.
Subset of questions that will be used to clarify this question:
 - a) In what ways did your family support your early schooling – i.e. financially, emotionally etc.?
 - b) Did you attend school with siblings? How do you think their early educational experiences may have been different than your own?
 - c) How did your teachers treat you during these years? How many of these teachers were women? If both male and female teachers taught you, do you feel that there were differences amongst teachers in method, support involvement or qualifications?
3. When did you begin to plan on pursuing your education at the post-secondary level?
4. Where did you consider attending (out of country or otherwise)?
5. Please describe your experiences during the years you spent attending junior and senior secondary school?
Subset of questions that will be used to clarify this question:
 - a) In what ways did your family support your secondary education?
 - b) Did you attend school with siblings? How do you think their early educational experiences may have been different than your own?
 - c) Did both male and female teachers teach you? If so, please describe any differences and similarities between the teaching practices of your teachers (male and female).
 - d) Were you or any of your classmates (male or female) actively encouraged to develop an interest in math and/or science?

- e) What types of resource materials were available for students, particularly for science or math class? Were these used and distributed equally amongst the students? If not, how were students selected to receive them? If they were shared, do you feel that these resources were shared equally?
6. Were there student guidance services at the high school (s) you attended? If so, did they offer career-counselling services? Did you access these services? If so, were they helpful? Please describe your experience (s). If relevant, please comment on the ways that such services could be improved or expanded to meet the needs of students?
7. If counselling services were unavailable, did you actively seek advice and guidance from others? If so, please describe your experience (s). Do you feel such services are important? Why or why not?
8. Please describe your application process to the University of The Gambia?
9. Are you currently enrolled in a science or technology program of study, or arts and humanities based program?
10. Did you receive academic counselling from any university staff, particularly with respect to your choice of program of study? (i.e. sciences or arts/humanities)
11. Please comment on how closely linked you feel your program of study is to your future career aspirations?
12. Please describe and comment on your experiences in the classroom. How often you speak in class – or attempt to do so. How do you feel the professor and your classmates receive your opinions, ideas and answers?
13. Describe your on-campus experiences, specifically your involvement in “university life”.

Subset of questions that will be used to clarify this question:

- a) Is employment for student’s on-campus available? If so, do you currently work on-campus? Why or why not?
- b) Recognizing that the University of The Gambia is a relatively new institution, are there currently any student organizations or societies established? If so, do you participate? Why or why not? If so, please describe your experience(s).
- c) In your life, so have obligations or prior commitments that limit you participation in “university life”? Please comment on the extent to which you feel that your experience on-campus is a positive one? Also, please comment on any negative aspects that you feel should be addressed.

Appendix #4 – Feedback Letter

GENDER AND ACADEMIC CHOICE IN NATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE GAMBIA

Caroline J. Manion

Department of International Development Studies

Saint Mary's University,

Halifax, NS. B3H 3C3

Phone > 902-492-8742

Email > estrgrm@netscape.net

Dear Research Participant,

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation of your valuable involvement in the above named research project. Without the support and participation of people such as yourself, research such as mine could not be accomplished. The nature of the research reflects my passionate concern for the unique needs of women in The Gambia with respect to their education and individual career development. Your participation has enabled me to compile important information that will be used to construct my Master's thesis, where you and other Gambian women from the University will figure prominently. You and your needs and experiences are at the centre of this research and I will send a completed copy of the final report to the University of The Gambia where it will be made publicly available. Once again, thank you for your time and energy, which you freely gave in order to make this research possible. I wish you the best of luck in all your future endeavours.

Sincerely,

Caroline (Carly) Manion

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**Saint Mary's
University**

Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3H 3C3

Research Ethics Board

tel 902.420.5728

fax 902.420.5104

e-mail ethics@stmarys.ca

web www.stmarys.ca/academic/reb

Saint Mary's University

Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Subjects

This is to certify that the Research Ethics Board has examined the research proposal or other type of study submitted by:

Principal Investigator: Caroline Manion

Name of Research Project: Students in IDS Programs Across Canada

REB File Number: 2003-014

and concludes that in all respects the proposed project meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability and is in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Conduct of Research Involving Humans. Please note that approval is only effective for one year from the date approved. (If your research project takes longer than one year to complete, submit form #3 to the REB at the end of the year and request an extension.)

Date:

Feb. 17, 2003

Signature of REB Chair:

John E. MacKinnon

Dr. John E. MacKinnon