Gender Equality and Education in Yemen Development

Ali Mohammed Ali Al-Agri

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I. Introduction

Although gender equality and girl's education have been of high priority for Yemen since the unification in 1990, the gender gap in education, particularly taking account of socio-economic status remains very large and the number of out-of-school girls is still high (Central Statistical Organization (Yemen), 2007; International Bank of Reconstruction Development, The World Bank and Yemen, 2010; Ministry of Education - Government of Yemen, 2003b; UNESCO, 2008; World Bank, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2013) which reflects the high level of inequalities in the country where the gender gap is 0.51 (World Economic Forum, 2013, p. p 13). This essay will critically reflect on the gender situation in education in Yemen. The following section will present a background about the context in which gender inequalities and education policies are being structured; highlighting the key demographic, political, historical, and economic characteristics of the country. In the third section, we will look at the gender status in Yemen in relation to the school education; key challenges facing girls' education, and what has been done so far to tackle some of these issues. A more in-depth analysis of the socio-economic, cultural, historical, and political factors that shape the power relations in the Yemeni society will then follow in an attempt to explain the huge gender disparities and gaps that occur. Finally, by applying two gender theoretical lenses, namely Women in Development (WID), and Gender and Development (GAD), the essay will conclude that unless the government of Yemen (GoY) considers a broader approach (GAD-guided approach for example) in dealing with gender inequalities and power distribution at different levels; social, economic, legal, religious and political, it would be more likely that all its WID-oriented solutions will fail to close the gender gap. This will result in the denial of the right to equal citizenship for almost half of the Yemeni population.

II. Background

Politics

The Republic of Yemen (RoY) was officially born in 22 May 1990 after the unification of the south and north, formerly named the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) respectively. Prior to the unification, the
two countries had two different political ideologies; the socialists in the south and the republicans in the north. The YAR became a republican country after the 1962 revolution with the support of the Nasserites in Egypt ending the long rule of the Zaidi Imams who were controlling the country for centuries. The biggest tribe in the country called "Hashed" to which the former president "Saleh" belongs supported the republican state during and after the 1962 revolution. President Saleh ruled the YAR since 1978 and continued to be the president of Yemen after the unification until he was forced to step down in 2011 after the Arab spring uprising in Yemen. On the other hand, the south gained its independence in 1967 after its anti-colonial struggle ending a century of British colonialism. Whilst the regime in the north was more affected by the tribal system and the conservative culture inherited from the imamates' era, the socialists in the south were more liberal and western influenced due to a long colonial history as well as the influence of the communist and socialist ideologies.

The unification seemed to fail to accommodate the two contrasting regimes and cultures in one unified system. Hence, a civil war between the south and the north broke out after four years from the unification. President Saleh won the war in 1995 with the support from his tribe "Hashed" and the biggest Islamic party in Yemen; "Al-Islah" which is also headed by the Shaikh Al-Ahmar who is the head of Hashed tribe (Hussein, 2012). This has its strong implication on the Yemeni political and social context until now as Yemen constitution and systems become very highly influenced by both the conservative Salafist ideology of Al-Islah as well as the norms and cultures represented by Hashid tribe (Hussein, 2012). At a later section of this essay we will look more closely at this complex influence and try through some examples to read its impact on reinforcing and reproducing gender disparities.

Population

The RoY is considered the second biggest country in the Arab Peninsula with a population of about 24,526,703 about 50 percent of whom are female and around 42 percent are within the age group of 0 – 15 year old. Around 70 percent of the population live in rural areas (Central Statistical Organisation (Yemen), 2013).
Yemeni women continue to suffer from a very high illiteracy rate. Only 47 percent of women are literate compared to 81 percent for men (UNESCO, 2012). In rural areas the likelihood for girls and women to be educated is very low (El-Kogali and Suliman, 2001; Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011; The Supreme Council for Women - Yemen, 2008; UNESCO, 2011; World Bank, 2002). According to UNESCO (2011) "In Yemen, women living in urban areas are almost three times as likely to be literate as women living in rural areas" (p. 67).

**Poverty**

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the region with about 17 percent of its population living under the international poverty line of less than US$1.25 a day. Although the poverty rate has dropped from 41.8 percent in 1998 to 34.8 percent in 2005 – 2006 the number of poor remain around 6.9 million people (Central Statistical Organization (Yemen), 2007). This is because Yemen also has a high population growth rate of 3 percent and fertility rate of 4.94 percent (UN Population Division, 2011) which is a key challenge to the GoY. According to the World Bank (2002) poverty in Yemen can be linked to many factors including; "lack of education", large household size with large number of children and "geographic location" (p. 5). Having this in mind, if we reflect on the facts outlined earlier; i.e. high level of illiteracy among women, high fertility rate, and high growth rate, we can conclude that in Yemen, poverty affects girls and women more than anybody else, especially in rural areas where a bigger proportion of the population lives.

**Education**

There are two cycles of school education in Yemen; basic education (grades 1 – 9) and secondary education (grades 10 – 12). This applies to public and private schools, which by law are both obligated to use the same central developed curriculum although each private school can have its own extra-curricular which differentiates it from other schools. Children are expected to attend basic education at the age of six.

**Gender and education**


Attracting girls to and keeping them in school is a key goal in the national Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS 2003 – 2015) (Ministry of Education - Government of Yemen, 2003a). All efforts of the MoE and its donor partners (DPs) that are gender related are cooperated under the leadership of the girls' education sector at the MoE. This is a sector headed by a female deputy minister and was set up by the MoE in an attempt to improve girls' education and reduce the gender gap in the Yemeni schools (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008). However, there are still thousands of girls out of schools, dropping out schools at early stages is common, and for girls who represent 80 percent out-of-school population, it is unlikely that they would enrol in school compared to boys (UNESCO, 2010, p. 60).

**Status of gender in education in Yemen**

Whilst gender parity is more concerned with proportion of girls and boys enrolled in schools, gender equality is a more complex concept (UNESCO, 2000; UNESCO, 2003; Unterhalter, 2012). Hence, achieving gender equality is always more difficult than achieving gender parity. The latter could be seen as a path to achieving gender equality. In order to achieve gender equality in education, both girls and boys should be provided equal opportunities to school enrolment, teaching and learning processes, learning outcomes, higher education, and access to labour market (UNESCO, 2003; UNESCO, 2008).

Generally speaking, one can argue that the focus in Yemen has mostly been directed toward improving the gender parity index. However, Yemen is not unique in this. Many countries have also been informed by the MDGs approach to gender with its narrow focus on gender parity (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005; Unterhalter, 2005b; Unterhalter and North, 2011; Unterhalter, North and Parkes, 2010). In other words, focusing on number of girls and women compare to those of boys and men (Unterhalter, 2012). The problem in the case of Yemen is that even achieving gender parity remains questionable. According to UNESCO (2011) it is less likely that Yemen will achieve gender parity by 2015 (p. 74).
According to Yemen recent (2013) joint annual report (JAR), the net enrolment rate for girls in basic education is 72.83 percent compared to 90.32 percent for boys with a gender parity index of 0.81 (Ministry of Education - Government of Yemen, 2013). As the gender gap continues in basic education, the situation in secondary education gets worse. Enrolment of girls in secondary education in Yemen continues to be one of the lowest in the region as shown in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female-to-male ratio</th>
<th>Overall rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
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*Source: (World Economic Forum, 2013, p. 56)*

Enrolment is not the main challenge for the MoE. Dropout rates are very high, especially for girls from the poor and rural areas. The dropout rate in all levels in 2011 – 2012 was 9.4 percent for boys and 10.7 percent for girls as reported by Ministry of Education - Government of Yemen (2013). Dropout rates are higher in most vulnerable areas such as poor and conflict-affected governorates. In Al-Jauf governorate, for example, which is one of the most underserved governorates in the north of Yemen, the dropout rate for girls at secondary level is 12.76 percent compared with 4.12 percent for boys. Abyan, which is another poor and conflict-affected governorate in the south, has the highest girls' dropout rate of 27.33 percent (Ministry of Education - Government of Yemen, 2013). These figures reflect the diverse contexts that contribute to gender inequalities in the country. This implies that the MoE need to have multi-dimensional solutions to handle gender issue depending on the various reasons behind it.

*So what are the general barriers to girls' education in Yemen?*
The available literature refers to a variety of factors that affect girls' enrolment and retention in schools. They can be categorised as follows:

a. **Accessibility:**

The location of the school building is a key factor that affects parents' decision about sending their children to school, especially girls from rural areas (Al-Wa'ily and Abdullah, 2010; Alim et al., 2007; Beatty, 1996; Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011). Wherever schools are located far away from their houses, it is more likely for parents to send their boys only, especially after girls reach grade four as culturally it would not be acceptable for girls to travel long distances without being accompanied by a male relative. Other factors related to accessibility involve; lack of only-girls (single sex) schools or separate classrooms for girls, lack of adequate facilities in schools, especially toilets for girls, and lack of female model role teachers (Alim et al., 2007; Beatty, 1996; Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011). Finally, conflict and violence become threatening factors that affect access to education, especially for girls (UNESCO, 2011). Conflict and violence against women and girls contribute significantly in increasing inequalities. According to Begum (2012), women and children have suffered the most from the crisis associated with the Arab spring uprising that started in early 2011. They suffer, for instance, from limited access to food and jobs, and poor security conditions (Begum, 2012).

b. **Community attitudes toward girls' education:**

While they agree with Al-Mekhlafy (2008) and Beatty (1996) that parents' lack of interest and appreciation of their girls' education is a key challenge, Mizuno and Kobayashi (2011) add that teachers and other educators also could play a role in reinforcing and reproducing gender biased norms and attitudes. Hence this justifies the interest of JICA in its pilot project called Broadening Regional Initiative for Developing Girls' Education (BRIDGE) in enhancing school educators and parents' perception about girls' education (Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011, p. 15). On the other hand, both Al-Mekhlafy (2008) and Beatty (1996) linked negative attitudes to high level of illiteracy among parents which results in lack of awareness of the importance of education. Families' economic status also is another reason why parents do not
see the value of investing in their girls especially that the opportunities for them to get employment is very limited, Beatty (1996) argues.

c. **Socio-cultural and socio-economic factors:**

Almost all the above-mentioned barriers are influenced by some social, cultural, or economic factor or a combination of some or all of them. This includes, for instance, community demands for only-girls schools, for female teachers, and what Alim et al. (2007) refers to as "culturally reasonable" location for the school building. Other socio-economic factor that heavily challenges gender equality and girls' education is the early marriage phenomenon (Al-Azzi et al., 2007; Beatty, 1996; Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011). Finally, poverty is clearly a burden that complicates the context and makes girls and women, especially in rural areas more vulnerable (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008; Beatty, 1996; Central Statistical Organization (Yemen), 2007; Government of Yemen, World Bank and UNDP, 2007; Khalife, 2011; Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011; The Supreme Council for Women - Yemen, 2008; UNESCO, 2010; UNESCO, 2011; World Bank, 2002; Yuki, 2003).

*How does the MoE in Yemen respond to these challenges?*

The MoE's Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS) 2003 - 2015, sets its second priority to "decrease the enrolment gap between boys girls and between urban and rural areas with more attenuation to children of poor families" (Ministry of Education - Government of Yemen, 2003b, p. 14). However, as outlined earlier, the gender gap is still large according the MoE's latest JAR of 2013.

Al-Mekhlafy (2008) states that:

The Ministry of Education has adopted a strategic plan to ensure sustainable, integrated interventions aimed at achieving universal basic education by 2015. The interventions focus on both improving the low general enrollment (boys and girls together) and narrowing the gender gap—goals that require integrated, multidimensional, and persistent interventions. (2008, p. 270)
Various key strategies have been implemented by MoE to improve enrolment and retention in basic education with more attention given to girls. These strategies aim to improve access, quality or institutional capacity. They include; improving school infrastructure, providing financial incentives for parents, recruiting more female teachers, improving school management, improving institutional capacity of the MoE, combating illiteracy, improving quality, and a parallel secondary education reform (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008).

Alim et al. (2007) argue that MoE efforts in relation to school infrastructure are not yet more girl-focused. Analysing data about the number of school buildings in rural and urban in the years 2000 - 2005, Alim et al. (2007) find that percentage of increase of schools is higher in urban than it is in rural areas; i.e. 9.6 percent for rural areas compared to 15.4 percent for urban (p. 17). They also state that number of co-education schools in rural areas is very high which does not reflect sufficient appreciation of the importance of having only-girls schools to enhance girls' retention (Alim et al., 2007, p. 18).

Providing financial incentives for parents in order to encourage them to send and keep their girls in schools is another strategy that the MoE is applying. Incentives are provided in various types including, school feeding programs, provision of school kits for girls (bags, notebooks, pencils, ...etc), exemption from textbook fees for girls in grades 1 – 6, and conditional cash transfer programs (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008). Whilst financial incentives programs are favoured by many countries and aid agencies (Filmer and Schady, 2011; Fiszbein et al., 2009; IEG (Independent Evaluation Group), 2011), they have their weaknesses. According to Stromquist (1997) financial incentives are limited in their impact since they "are applied to a select few", they do not solve the roots of the problem, and they can create "feelings of exclusion" among those who are not benefiting from them especially "boys or parents of boys" (Stromquist, 1997, p. 56). Al-Mekhlafy (2008) also questions the sustainability of financial incentives strategies.

As illustrated earlier, the lack of female teachers has been seen as a key challenge for girls' enrolment and retention in Yemen, hence, the MoE in response
has taken different actions to increase the provision of female teachers as one of its key strategies (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008). However, in rural areas where the need for female teachers is high, the availability of highly qualified teachers is low. A university degree is the minimum qualification required by civil service law for one to be employed as a teacher. Some DPs in agreement with MoE have been able to contract and train some secondary graduate teachers to teach in basic schools in rural areas (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008), which seems to be working in terms of increasing girls' enrolment rates (UNESCO, 2008). UNESCO (2008) cited that this strategy along with other community mobilization strategies "has contributed to a 32% increase in gender parity in the primary school GER" (p. 129). However, this again is not encouraging enough unless the law of university degree requirement is revisited and adjusted at least for a temporary phase until enough qualified teachers are available and encouraged to work in rural areas.

The involvement of female staff in decision making and advocacy of gender equality efforts is vital for success. However, there seems to be a large gap here as well, as the female representation at the MoE "is as low as 9%" (Alim et al., 2007, p. 22).

Linking secondary education strategy with that of the basic education, providing literacy programs that aim at reducing illiteracy rates among adults, and building the capacity of the MoE at different levels for a better data management and decision-making are other supportive strategies that the MoE in Yemen is applying in an attempt to increase the numbers of girls who enrol and stay in school (Al-Mekhlafy, 2008). Part of the capacity building is targeting the school management as a key player in the whole girls' education game. JICA is one of the key DPs who worked with the MoE in this particular area through its pilot BRIDGE I project (2005-2008) aiming to "establishing an applicable and replicable model of good school management and enhancing girls' education based on community participation" (Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2014).

Two studies were conducted about the impact of BRIDGE I on improving parity and equality (i.e. Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011; Yuki et al., 2013). Both studies
find that by improving school management and enhancing the community participation in the school planning, discussion and evaluation, the project succeeded in increasing female enrolment. They also find that the project succeeded in improving the relationship between the schools and communities, and helped in developing a more positive attitude among parents and school staff towards girls' education (Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011; Yuki et al., 2013). The project focused on getting girls into school by improving the school through enhanced management supported by grants. Community was involved in planning and managing these grants to improve schools with focus on supporting girls' education. Mizuno and Kobayashi (2011) see the strength of the project in promoting equality lies in its approach of transforming the" typical traditional mindsets of stakeholders" (p. 2). However, both studies also find that not all the schools maintain the same level of success after the project withdrawal. Whilst this shows the importance of having enough financial resources for the school to be able to improve, Yuki et al. (2013) assert that there is a linkage between the attitude of school leadership towards the importance of community participation and the sustainability of the project's successes in their schools. In other words, if such attitude is positive they will continue to encourage community involvement in school planning and development. Mizuno and Kobayashi (2011) also find that the project successes, as measured by frequency of ranking done by interviewed sample from beneficiaries, were higher in areas such as; provision of toilets for girls, provision of separate classrooms, provision of female teachers, and enhancing parents' appreciation of girls' education. These are areas that have less to do with norms and traditions, although the success to build a positive attitude towards education could be a starting point.

On the other hand, Mizuno and Kobayashi (2011) find that the project could not make a significant impact on areas that are most affected by the socio-economic and cultural background of the family. These areas include for instance, early marriage, too much work for girls are home, and parents not being able to afford girls' education. Therefore, the study concludes that such socio-cultural norms "cannot be changed in a short time. They need to be addressed on a continuous basis" (Mizuno and Kobayashi, 2011, p. 10)
III. Is it really that complex?

As outlined earlier, the failure to merge two different ideological wings after the unification resulted in new forms of inequalities and challenges for women activists. The pre-unification situation in the south was more supportive to women than it was in the north. Women were the pioneers to be organized in the south after its independence, forming a women rights organization in 1968, named "General Union Yemeni Women (GUYW)", which was not the first women organization in the south (Dahlgren, 2010). Both the south and the north had family code laws, however, the southern version was more liberal. Unlike the northern family code, the south version did not elaborate on wife’s duties and responsibilities (Dahlgren, 2013; Hussein, 2012). The two family codes were cancelled and replaced by a new conservative Personal Status Law (PSL) which was issued by a presidential decree in 1990 (Dahlgren, 2013).

As mentioned earlier, the fact that the largest conservative party and the largest tribe in Yemen were key to enable president Saleh in 1995 to win his war with the south, had a tremendous impact on the political atmosphere in the country. The parliament was headed by the Sheikh Al-hmar, the sheikh of Hashed, and the majority of its members were of either the president Saleh’s party, the General People's Congress(GPC), or Al-Islah Party, the largest Salfist Islamic party in Yemen. The result was a more conservative constitution and policies that are not in favour of women, and even the women activists' clubs in the south were closed (Dahlgren, 2013). These new conservative and tribal wings were of most powerful influence than any other groups or ideologies. For example, as a result their influence, the bill proposed in 2009 for setting 18 year-old as a minimum age for marriage could not be passed due to Al-Islah parliament members claim that it was against Islam to set a minimum age for marriage (Al-Azzi et al., 2007; Dahlgren, 2013; Hussein, 2012; Khalife, 2011).

This "dual legal system"; a state legal system influenced by conservatives, and a tribal law, according to Hussein has resulted in the denial of women's rights even when law is available to protect such rights (Hussein, 2012). The PSL was influenced
by such dual system through three drivers according to Hussein (2012) all of which emphasise the subordination of women to men. These drivers are; "guardianship" which is derived from Sharia, "sisterhood" which is reinforced by the constitution, and "dependence" which is a tribal and customs derived factor (Hussein, 2012).

But how does religion become a political threat in Yemen?

Salafism or al-salafiah is a very right-winged conservative Islamic sect that is mostly dominant in and supported by Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). One of their fundamentals is the assertion on loyalty to the political ruler despite being corrupted (Bonnefoy, 2011). During the war against the Soviet, many Yemeni fought in Afghanistan (Bonnefoy, 2011), where Taliban started as the first seed to what is known now as Al-Qaeda. The returnees from Afghanistan were one source of what is known now as Ansar Al-Sarihah in Yemen (Al-Qaeda in Yemen). Skeikh Abdul-Majeed Al-Zindani, for example, is a famous Yemeni radical figure who has been voted as a "global terrorist" by the US and UN (McGregor, 2007), for being a key supporter to Bin Laden (U.S. Treasury Department, 2004). After unification, Skeikh Al-Zindani was assigned as the fourth member of the four-member transitional presidential council. He is still a key member of Al-Islah party, a member of the Shura Council (house of councils), and "the founder and head of Iman University" (Wikipedia contributors, 2014). Salfi students and scholars are reproduced from Iman University as well as Al-Hadith Centre, a centre in the north of Yemen supported by KSA to teach Hadith; which refers to what prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) done or said that is excluding the Holly Quran, and to promote salfism. Finally, after the Gulf crisis in the early 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Yemeni expatriates were forced to return back as part of the political tension between Yemen and KSA due to Yemen's supportive stand with Iraq. Citing one of her women's rights practitioner interviewee, Strzelecka (2013), states that those returning expatriates were already influenced by the salafi ideology and start to reflect it in their interaction with their families adding more restrictions on women (Strzelecka, 2013). If the key political, constitutional and religious organs in the country are being deeply influenced by mentalities that were shaped in KSA or Afghanistan, one can easily predict the status of women's rights in Yemen.
Why are traditions and norms not women friendly?

Some of the focal traditional believes that hinder development for the country, is "honour". Honour is seen as "one of the most important criteria against which individuals are evaluated" (Al-Azzi et al., 2007, p. 117). This is the case in many other Muslim countries. In Pakistan, for example, Irfan (2008) cited that "Honor of the male members of the family is understood to reside in the bodies of the women of the family, and in protecting this honor the man aim is to regulate and direct women's sexuality and freedom to exercise any control over their own choices/lives" (p. 2).

By violating one's honour he or she is exposed to denouncement and disgrace. This is because honour is not something that is related to the individual or his or her family only, it rather is a whole society issue (Al-Azzi et al., 2007). Understanding this cultural factor is vital to realize the complexity of development in Yemen. One can link almost every other norm or tradition completely or partially to the honour protection that is a cumulative concern for the whole society including women and girls themselves. Early marriage, for example, is most of the time seen as a way of honour protection (Al-Azzi et al., 2007; Hussein, 2012). Other examples of barriers motivated by honour protection include society demands for: female teachers for girls, only-girls schools, schools located in a safe walking distance for girls, and the dropout as a result of the lack of these requirements or at an age when girls are seen more vulnerable.

Poor families see girls financially as a burden (Al-Azzi et al., 2007; Khalife, 2011) since the likelihood for them to work is less compared to boys, hence early marriage helps them reduce this burden. On the other hand, for some families a daughter is seen as "an economic asset because of the payment of a dowry, in the form of money or gifts offered to the bride by the groom prior to marriage" (Khalife, 2011, p. 16).

Whilst early marriage is one of the most terrific examples of violence against girls, there are many other examples of honour violence against girls and women in
most of which females are the victim and the ones to be punished while male are most of the time released free (see for example Al-Azzi et al., 2007; Khalife, 2011).

Between a society which sees women as a vulnerability to their honour, and a radical religious group who are powerful and influential and who see women as awra (i.e. private parts) that should be covered (Al-Azzi et al., 2007), Yemeni girls and women seem to be drawn with a little of hope for survival. A high level of poverty and a low rate of literacy complicate the situation even further. In such a context girls are more likely to be prepared for marriage than for school, hence dropout continues, early marriages increase, gender inequalities widen, the society gets less productive and more vulnerable and the loop continues. Stromquist (1997) states that educating women has a positive contribution to economic, social and political development. By denying about half of the population in Yemen their right to formal and informal education, the promise for development in the country will be questionable.

IV. Conclusion: Applying gender theoretical frame to the Yemeni context

*Women in Development (WID)*

'Gender' in WID framework "is equated with women and girls, who are identified descriptively in terms of biological differences" (Unterhalter, 2005a, p. 18). It sees schools as the main channel for educating girls and women, and a vehicle to economic growth (Mannathoko, 2008; Parpart, Connelly and Barritteau, 2000; Unterhalter, 2005a).

Clearly, the Yemeni MoE strategies and discourse about education in relation to girls and women is more WID-oriented. We have seen that the focus is more on parity that on equality, which is a reflection of WID nature that is more oriented towards parity (Mannathoko, 2008). Almost all the interventions of the MoE and its partners are trying to reduce the gender gap and increase gender parity. Although other factors that affect girls education might be mentioned in MoE plans and reports or those of its DPs, the subordination or females, the inequalities, the power
relations between men and women are not at the focus yet. WID approach would behave in a similar way (Parpart, Connelly and Barritteau, 2000; Unterhalter, 2005a).

Although WID framework is more practical in terms of informing policies and setting measurable targets, it is not the best framework to use to enable us to understand and work with the complex context in Yemen. WID does not help in reading the nature of inequality, socio-economic and socio-cultural factors that prevent women and girls from enjoying their rights to, in and through education. Countries which made good achievement in terms of gender equality has realized the need for a much complex approach. In Egypt, for example, the MoE in partnership with the UNICEF a "multi- and intersectoral approach" (Sultana, 2008, p. 15) was key in achieving gender equality in the Girls' Education Initiative (GEI) in Egypt, which targeted schools in similar rural, conservative and poor societies like those in Yemen where most inequalities exist.

**Gender And Development (GAD)**

Unlike WID, the GAD framework goes beyond access and consider quality (Mannathoko, 2008). It goes a step further from just talking gender parity to demand challenging inequalities politically (Unterhalter, 2005a). It emphasizes the need to understand "the way in which gender, class and race are interconnected and how their defining characteristics are socially constructed" (Parpart, Connelly and Barritteau, 2000, p. 55). It distinguishes between two types of interests; women's interest or practical needs, and gender interests or strategic interests (Parpart, Connelly and Barritteau, 2000; Unterhalter, 2005a). The transformational relationship between the practical needs and strategic interest is of a centre interest of GAD (Parpart, Connelly and Barritteau, 2000).

The complexity of the gender inequalities in Yemen needs to be examined in a way the compasses such complexity. GAD framework seems to be more accommodating to studying the gender situation in Yemen. Such a broader and multi-dimensional approach is important for a more effective assessment of gender equality; an assessment that will consider "the relational dimensions of gender inequalities"(Stromquist, 1997, p. 397). It is only by understanding the
interrelationships between the social, political, religious, cultural and economic factors and their role in shaping the power relations between men and women, that we can assure equality both in treatment and opportunities for both men and women (Stromquist, 1997).

Because GAD framework deals with gender in association with the multi-dimension and shifting social relations and power distribution, and because it "highlights the complexities surrounding the changing institutions of the school and education at large" (Mannathoko, 2008, p. 130), it can be more helpful in reading the Yemeni context. It will enable us to question the different religious arguments that are gender related and level of change possible. It gives more space for understanding and tackling such religious, socio-economic and political factors that affect gender equalities. Understanding these factors is important according to GAD where seeking equality entails "the removal of the structural barriers to gender equality: unfair laws; labour-market practices; management regimes in institutions; barriers to women’s decision making in all settings; inequitable processes with regard to the distribution of time, money, and schooling" (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005, p. 22). This might not be any easy task in a context where talking about gender and equality could be seen as a religious taboo in itself; which could explain the scarcity of literature in this area in Yemen. However, it is only when those social, religious and political process are faced that we can hope for equal access and opportunities in education for both girls and boys.
References:


