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Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713410984>

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Online publication date: 22 June 2010

To cite this Article Vaughan, Rosie Peppin(2010) 'Girls' and women's education within Unesco and the World Bank, 1945-2000', Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 40: 4, 405 — 423

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/03057925.2010.490360

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2010.490360>

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Girls' and women's education within Unesco and the World Bank, 1945–2000

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By 2000, girls' and women's education was a priority for international development organisations. While studies have examined the impact of recent campaigns and programmes, there has been less exploration of ideas about girls' and women's education within development thought in the immediate post-colonial period, and the political mechanisms through which this came to be a global concern. Through a study of policy documents, this paper investigates how the education of girls and women came to be prioritised within the two principle UN agencies involved with education since 1945, the World Bank and Unesco. A shift in priorities is evident, from ensuring formal rights and improving the status of women, to expanding the productive capacities of women, fertility control and poverty reduction. While the ascendance of human capital theory provided a space for a new perception of the role of women's education in development, in other policy arenas women's education was central to exploring more substantive, rights-based notions of gender equality. Ultimately, the goal of improving girls' and women's education fitted into diverse development agendas, paving the way for it to become a global development priority.

Keywords: gender; education; Unesco; World Bank

Introduction

By the last decade of the twentieth century, the education of girls and women had become a development priority for the majority of international agencies, both multi-lateral and bilateral. Girls' and women's education was identified as 'the most urgent priority' in the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990 (Unesco 1997, 149); by the same year, 44% of World Bank education projects proposed activities to improve female education (Winslow 1995, 165). Moreover, the second half of the twentieth century featured a global rise in global levels of female enrolment (Unesco 2003; see, for example, King and Hill 1993). Rather than evaluating the success of gender education policies and strategies, however, this article seeks to reveal the underlying ideas about girls' and women's education within two key international organisations, Unesco and the World Bank, and explores why such approaches have changed over time.

The expanding international education agenda has been accompanied by academic studies examining shifts within it. Overviews by Jones (1988, 2005, 2006), Chabbott (2003) and Mundy (2006, 2007; Mundy and Murphy 2001) have explored thinking on education and development during this period, highlighting the vast scenario of shifts

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in governance and funding strategies, and the differing political, economic and social theories underpinning them. However, these have paid little attention to how the education of girls and women has been addressed within the global agenda. In contrast, analyses of education policy conceptualisations surrounding gender equality have been conducted at national level (see, for example, Kenway 1997; Arnot, David, and Weiner 1999; Marshall 1997). Many such feminist authors have drawn on critical policy analysis techniques which see policy as socially constructed text that can, if effectively scrutinised, reveal the underlying conceptions of society and the interest groups which it represents; such analyses can draw attention to and challenge the taken for granted or dominant assumptions informing policy; expose the effects of policy on the ground, especially whether they increase inequality and impact disproportionately on disadvantaged groups; and provide insight into injustice and inequity, helping to challenge assumptions about the desirability and rationality of the official logic of outcomes and indicators (Ozga 2000, 46–47). Until recently, however, there has been little such investigation of understandings of gender and education within *international* policy.

Unterhalter (2005, 2007) provided the first critical analysis of theoretical understandings at international level of gender and education and global social justice since the 1970s, distinguishing between instrumental and intrinsic conceptualisations of gender equality and education. According to her typology, those couched in the ‘Women in Development’ (WID) framework link education to efficiency and growth, centre on getting more girls into school and are concerned with the instrumental effects of girls’ education for society and national development. Alternately, intrinsic understandings prioritise the inherent rights of girls and women to education. Formal intrinsic approaches draw on liberal approaches to equality and prioritise the right to access education. Substantive, intrinsic equality agendas are evident in the ‘gender and development’ (GAD) model, which positions power structures as responsible for ongoing gender inequality in education and wider society, and is concerned with the removal of such structural barriers; and are also evident in the capability approach, in which evaluations of gender equality are based on the freedoms that people have to achieve what is valuable to them.

This article explores the extent to which these framings have been specifically manifest within education strategies of Unesco and the World Bank, demonstrating how their approaches to the education of girls and women have been linked to and influenced by wider shifts in their development priorities in the post-war period, and arguing that the consensus seen in the 1990 Education for All (EFA) goals belied differing approaches and priorities. I also argue that their conceptual framing of the education of girls and women to some degree reflects differences in their mandates and modes of operation. The analysis involved examination of key Unesco and World Bank documents and policy texts relating to the education of girls and women, including General Conference resolutions, Unesco publications and World Bank policy papers, over the period 1945–2000. Secondary literature was used to relate the changing conceptualisations of gender and education to broader shifts within these organisations and development thinking in general.

1945–1960: pursuing women’s rights to education in a new global arena

The foundation of the United Nations provided an unprecedented opportunity for the formal recognition of women’s rights on a global scale. The UN Charter (1945) and

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) were the first international instruments to specifically refer to equal rights for men and women.¹ As the agency charged with overseeing both the cultural and educational operations of the United Nations, Unesco straight away became a focal point for efforts to improve the education of girls and women. The principle of educational equality was built into Unesco's constitution and promoted to member states through international conferences, reports and surveys. The issue was a specific focus of the 1952 International Conference on Public Education, which resulted in a special recommendation being issued to national Ministries of Education on the 'Access of Women to Education'.² It was recommended that all new educational laws and regulations be based on 'the principle of women's equality of access to education', and that compulsory education of the same duration should be provided to both sexes, with the same facilities for pursuing and continuing studies available to girls and women (Unesco 1953). This principle was also promoted through a series of international meetings on the provision of free and compulsory education, with regional conferences on South Asia (1952), the Arab states (1954) and Latin America (1956). Moreover, for the first time, the systematic collection of gender-disaggregated educational statistics from member-states allowed cross-country comparisons, and for progress to be tracked over time; for example, *Access of Women to Education: A Preliminary Statistical Report* (Unesco 1952a) covered over 130 countries and territories; and presented a statistical description of levels of female enrolment in primary, secondary and higher education.

Unesco's most visible priority for girls' and women's equality was equality of educational opportunity as an intrinsic right. This *formal* understanding of gender equality emphasised legal and constitutional provisions, as opposed to *substantive* approaches, which focus on the ability of individuals to access resources, services and rights beyond legal provisions (Subrahmanian 2005; Unterhalter 2007, 56–73). Yet at the time, the promotion of equal educational rights was in many ways a radical step, and the liberal feminist agenda it embodied was in its own terms a powerful platform for securing equal citizenship and reclaiming the state from the disproportionate representation of men and male interests (Connell 1994, 140–2). Moreover, the broad mandate of securing access was acceptable to a range of campaigners, many of whom had more radical agendas; for many women's rights advocates working within Unesco, securing women's access to education was a first step along a longer path of challenges. The framing of educational equality as 'equality of opportunity to access education' followed the liberal discourse of rights within the UN as a whole. Jain (2005, 31) notes that the UN's concerns in its first decade were chiefly framed in terms of formal and legal rights and a liberal understanding of equality, in which legal reform and the provision of *access* to resources (such as education and healthcare) was regarded as the required and satisfactory level of equality. Yet within these activities, agreement on a clear definition of equality between men and women remained elusive (Jain 2005, 22–3).

Beyond a notion of equal formal rights, and improving women's status, however, Unesco's vision of modern societies in its mainstream operations balanced equality of educational opportunities with appropriate differentiation. Unesco's flagship concept and programme on 'Fundamental Education', which drew on modernisation theory that dominated economic and development thought at the time, focused on how personal attributes – values, attitudes and dispositions – enabled individuals to lead their societies out of backwardness to progress and modernity (Jones 2005, 29–32; Jain 2005, 51). The programme contained an understanding that the roles of men and women in

society should be based around certain natural differences between the sexes; with the more efficient facilitation of what was seen as the 'natural roles' of women encouraged as a way of hastening social and economic development. Fundamental Education for girls and women was largely centred on socially important responsibilities, such as bearing healthy children, maintaining their health, running the home, feeding families and educating their young; women's lack of education therefore endangered the development of modern families. Without education, a woman in India for example:

The ignorant, illiterate, superstition-ridden woman, who lives by her fears and her doubts, whose world is peopled with gods and goddesses who wish to work her harm, can pass on to her children only what she herself believes and possesses. (Unesco 1947, 89)

The recommendations of the 1952 International Conference on Public Education also envisaged differential social outcomes to education as the natural and most desirable result. It was 'useful to provide ... courses which prepare girls for their family responsibilities' (Unesco 1953, 262). In higher education, it was advised that 'university studies permit women to specialise in fields particularly suited to feminine aptitudes', with special attention to be paid to the training of women as social workers (Unesco 1953, 263). Fundamental Education, in particular, should 'give women a practical, effective and moral education which will prepare them better to fulfil their natural role in the family and in society' (Unesco 1953, 262). The goal of equality of access should be followed as long as 'account [is] taken of differences in psycho-physiological development between the sexes' (Unesco 1953, 259).

The vision of modernisation in Unesco's mainstream operations therefore entailed an essentialised understanding of difference between the sexes, with the understanding that 'women' was a biological rather than a socially constructed category. Education should facilitate these different roles, through different subjects to be studied at school. Also central to this vision for the future was a conceptualisation of a modern state with the participation of all citizens; Unesco encouraged an active role for women in social and civic life through education for citizenship and also convened a series of activities and publications along this theme (Unesco 1951, 1952b; see also Unesco 1954, 1955, 1959).³ But within this vision of the modern state, particularly in the Fundamental Education programme, the idea of different roles for the sexes persisted. While education's role in development was to enable individuals and communities to determine their own path in the process of change that many former colonies entering the global economy faced, this did not include a concern with the social structures underpinning and determining such changes, and the distribution of higher living standards between different groups, or how education could affect such distribution, including the different roles of men and women.

However, in other areas of work, Unesco pioneered more radical approaches to women's education. Through commissioning research and organising meetings which brought together policymakers, experts and non-governmental campaigners, Unesco encouraged discussion about education's role in women's status and roles in society and the social construction of gender difference; here, more substantive understandings of educational equality were explored, focusing on the intrinsic benefits for women of educational reform. At a meeting in Paris in 1949 on 'Obstacles to the Equality of Educational Opportunity for Women', participants were concerned that beyond legal provisions for equal access, education should bring about greater

equality and similarity in the roles of men and women⁴ (Unesco 1949a, 1949b). Indeed, the persistence of unequal access was attributed to a ‘tyranny of tradition’: the legacy of earlier eras in which women were required to perform roles solely within the household. Any ‘innate differences in endowment, intellectual or moral, between the sexes’ was dismissed, with participants instead exploring the idea that education could work to eliminate such essentialised understandings of difference (Unesco 1949a, 3). The committee thus urged that:

a sincere effort should be made by men and women alike to re-examine and correct these assumptions in the light of modern conditions, and that such re-examination and correction should form part of the educational experience of adolescent boys and girls, and of adult education of both sexes. (Unesco 1949a, 3)

Modern society required the reform of social institutions such as the household and family; policy recommendations included similar vocational guidance for boys and girls; education in housekeeping and child-rearing for both sexes; and the reorganisation of households, household equipment, and childcare to be divided equally between men and women (Unesco 1949b, 5). After the early 1950s, however, internal decisions steered Unesco’s activities towards more general equality concerns; women’s education gained very few mentions in the resolutions of the General Conference after the early 1950s, with the Executive Board noting surveys but giving no directives.

Unesco also encouraged the exploration of the relationship between culture and women’s status through commissioning social science studies, and actively promoting the exchange of information and research, discussion and consultation. Assumptions about the naturalness of sex differences were questioned and explored as socially and culturally constructed markers of social hierarchical divisions. Publications included an edited collection on *Women in the New Asia: The Changing Roles of Men and Women in South and South-East Asia* (Ward 1963); and articles in the *Unesco Courier* such as ‘Women have always been men’s equals in Burma’ (Unesco 1952c) and ‘A woman’s life in an African Village’ (Unesco 1957). Unesco also conducted studies and surveys of the political rights of women in a large number of countries in Asia and Africa, publishing, for example, *The Status of Women in South Asia* (Appadorai 1954); and commissioning the highly reputed French political scientist Maurice Duverger to write *The Political Role of Women* (1955).⁵

Jain (2005, 62) notes that Unesco’s concern with women’s emancipation, and in particular the importance of them gaining positions in public and political spaces, ‘foreshadowed realizations of the worldwide women’s movement several decades later’. However, an arguably oppositional and more traditional conceptualisation of gender was expounded in Unesco’s mainstream educational operations during this period, which positioned gender equality in a narrow and instrumental way. Activities relating to either position, however, were ultimately driven by Unesco’s desire to spearhead the global acceptance of particular norms, and lead the world in philosophical debates about economic and social rights. Notably, problems specific to developing countries were rarely addressed explicitly, which Jain suggests may have been due to a belief that educational equality would naturally evolve with the process of nation-building and economic development that many former colonies and developing economies were believed to be embarking upon (2005, 35). It was when the UN launched its ‘First Development Decade’ in the 1960s that its activities became more focused on issues of ‘development’.

1960–1975: planning for development

In the 1960s, Unesco's efforts to promote equality of access to education for girls and women were augmented and re-invigorated through campaigns, regulatory mechanisms, and survey reports. Now the access of women and girls became more systematically monitored; each year, Unesco conducted a survey on one aspect of girls' and women's access to education (Table 1); compiled from questionnaires sent to member states and other territories, the reports consisted of both quantitative data on levels of participation, and qualitative accounts of legal provisions, actual levels of provision, gender enrolment levels, difficulties relating to obstacles, drop-out and absenteeism, and conducive economic, social and cultural conditions.

In most instances, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) used each report to put a Recommendation or Resolution to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); these acted as non-binding statements of guidance for the education policies of member states of the UN.⁶ Unesco also convened a series of regional meetings on girls' and women's education, to discuss common national problems and measures for resolving them, and prepare regional and national programmes. The recommendations of these meetings were brought before regional meetings of Ministers of Education to discuss short- and long-term planning (Table 2).

Table 1. Key Unesco surveys on girls and women's education and related instruments, 1960–1975.

1961	<i>Access of Women to Out-of-school Education</i>	ECOSOC Recommendation 771 (XXX) G1 on Access of Women to Out-of-school Education (July 1961)
1961	<i>Access of Women to the Teaching Profession</i>	ECOSOC Recommendation 821 (XXXII) VA on Access of Women to the Teaching Profession (July 1961)
1962	<i>Comparative Study on the Access of Girls to Elementary Education</i>	ECOSOC Recommendation 884 (XXXIV) on Equal Access of Girls to Elementary Education (July 1962)
1964	<i>Access of Girls and Women to Education in Rural Areas: A Comparative Study</i>	ECOSOC Recommendation 961 (XXXVI) D on Access of Girls and Women to Education in Rural Areas (July 1963)
1966	<i>Access of Girls and Women to Secondary Education</i>	ECOSOC Resolution 1068 (XXXIX) on Access of Girls and Women to the Various Forms of Secondary Education and to Higher Education (July 1965)
1967	<i>Comparative Study on the Access of Girls and Women to Higher Education</i>	ECOSOC Resolution 1208 (XLII) on Access of Women to Higher Education, Jobs and Professions (May 1967)
1968	<i>Comparative Study on the Access of Girls and Women to Technical and Vocational Education</i>	ECOSOC Resolution 1327 (XLIV) on Access of Women to (Technical and Vocational) Education (May 1968)
1970	<i>Equality of Access of Women to Literacy: A Comparative Study</i>	ECOSOC Resolution 1512 (XLVIII) on Elimination of Illiteracy Among Women (May 1970)
1970	<i>Comparative Study of Co-education</i>	CSW Resolution 6 (XXIII) on Co-education (April 1970)
1973	<i>Study on the Equality of Access of Girls and Women to Education in the Context of Rural Development</i>	

Table 2. Unesco meetings on girls' and women's education, 1960–1965.

1960	Meeting of experts on Education for Girls in Tropical Africa
1962	Meeting of experts on Access of Girls and Women to Education in Rural Areas of Asia, Bangkok
1962	Conference on African Women and Adult Education, Dakar
1963	Conference on Educational Planning in Developing Countries with special reference to Women's Education, Sweden
1964	Meeting of experts on the Access of Girls to School Education in the Arab States

These activities reflected a shift to more formal educational planning. Parity of access between boys and girls also featured in large-scale regional conferences, and the regional plans which emerged from these meetings (for example, the 1959 Karachi Plan, the 1961 Addis Ababa Plan and the 1962 Santiago Plan) detailed manpower needs, costs per pupil, population growth estimates, enrolment projections and targets, required external assistance, expansion of teacher training, numbers of administrators (Unesco 1960, 1961a).⁷ Unesco's Convention against Discrimination in Education was adopted by the General Conference in 1960, with member states encouraged to ratify and incorporate the provisions into their education systems. At the 1966 General Conference, a long-term unified programme promoting equal access of girls and women to education, science and culture was adopted with special budgetary provisions (Chaton 1968; Unesco 1985a, 1).

A far more explicit concern for the *economic* impact of improving women's social and reproductive roles through education by now was emerging. Unesco's regional education plans emphasised the importance of school-level education, particularly primary education, for economic growth. The Addis Ababa Plan (Unesco 1961b), for instance, displayed a more overtly instrumental rationale, focusing on the economic outcomes of women's education:

The need is urgent for the increased use of educated 'women power' in the working life of the community in such callings as nursing, social work and teaching. Increasing attention in school curricula and in adult education must be given to child care and domestic science. (Unesco 1961b, 6)

Women's schooling was to aid economic growth through the improvement of women's nurturing roles and economic activities relating to their existing domestic social roles.

This contrast to the previous, more general notion of the importance of women's education in the perceived transition to modern societies was particularly evident in Unesco's concept of *functional literacy*. This explicitly instrumental approach went on to be employed in a number of projects in member states in the 'Experimental World Literacy Programme' between 1966 and 1974 (Jones 1988, 159–211; 2005, 62). Functional literacy was specifically aimed at developing literacy as part of vocational education, imparting work-related skills, and within this assumptions were made about gender differences (Unesco 1970c, 9). Experimental projects on women's education were launched on technical education and literacy in Upper Volta, primary education in Nepal, and technical education in Chile (Unesco 1970a, 8–9; 1975; Chaton 1973, 79).⁸ Productive roles for women were not envisaged as much as reproductive, family-centred ones (Unesco 1968, 4; Jones 1988, 186). An explicit distinction was made between, on the one hand, education projects for industrial workers and

agricultural workers, and on the other, education projects for women (Unesco 1970c, 19–22). In a project in Tobago, for instance, direct economic participation was encouraged in activities regarded as typically feminine, centring around the home or social activity: handicrafts, local and cottage industries, and tourism (Unesco 1973).

The concern with education's contribution to economic growth in the 1960s was linked to a focus on the specific issues facing developing countries, as a growing number of newly independent, former colonies became members of Unesco.⁹ Unesco readily took up ideas emanating within contemporary economic thought, in particular the relationship between education and economic growth, outlined in two new theories in development economics which gained ascendancy during the period within policy circles: human capital theory and modernisation theory (Jones 2006, 53).¹⁰ It was these considerations which drew the World Bank into educational operations during this period. The World Bank's original mandate for lending to national governments had not included support to education at all, as this had been regarded as an investment likely to bring private returns rather than national benefits. In the early years of the 1960s, however, Unesco's Director-General forcefully conveyed to the leaders of the World Bank that educational expansion was crucial to growth, and that the expansion and consolidation of educational systems in newly independent states was a sure way towards modernisation (Jones 2006, 53–4, 101–4).¹¹ Subsequently, drawing heavily on human capital conceptualisations of education as schooling to improve skills, secondary and technical education came to be promoted in World Bank projects over the course of the 1960s, and later in the decade primary education was added to its portfolio (Jones 2006, 137).

The World Bank's first *Education Sector Working Paper* (1971) was entirely silent on female education. Significantly, the second working paper (World Bank 1974) noted the gender disparities in primary and secondary enrolment in the poorest countries and contained an annex demonstrating the global distribution of such disparities. However, the chapter on 'education and equity' contained nothing on female education beyond a concern that the lack of adequate nutrition for child-bearing mothers and their children might impair the mental capabilities of their children, and a need to instruct parents on diet (World Bank 1974, 37). The overwhelming concern remained the instrumental role of education in facilitating women's contribution to national economic growth through their reproductive roles.

The focus on formal equality and the instrumental aspects of girls' and women's education within the World Bank and Unesco's mainstream activities can be linked to the wider concerns with economic growth in the international development community; in which the women's efficient functioning as mothers was central to economic growth in the growing number of former colonies joining the UN as member states. However, the role of status, power and gender in determining educational access and outcomes was generally not addressed; ultimately leaving more complex aspects of educational participation unexplored.

Yet while women's education as a policy issue within the mainstream programmes of Unesco and the World Bank was now deeply affected by such economic rationales, in other operations Unesco continued to explore the definition of equality for women, questioning the meaning of the word 'status', and the importance of education in securing women's access to power. Unesco's Long-Range Programme for the Advancement of Women, launched in 1966, led to further research activities which addressed the relationship between the status of women, and social and economic arrangements, including the contribution of education (Unesco 1985c, 4). Special

issues of Unesco journals offered comparative studies of women's status, and the roles of men and women, such as the *International Social Science Journal* (1962), the *Unesco Courier* (1964), the *Impact of Science on Society* (1970 and 1971), and the *International Review of Education* (1973). Pushing beyond the access agenda, case studies were produced on educational process and outcomes: on co-education in Chile, Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany (Unesco 1971a, 1971b, 1971c); and on the relationship between educational opportunities and employment opportunities, in Argentina, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast and Sri Lanka (Unesco 1974a, 1974b, 1974c, 1974d).

Through such publications the contribution of education to women's status and position in society could be explored more fully. For example, *The Education and Advancement of Women* (Unesco 1970b), authored by Jacqueline Chabaud, strove to provide a definition of equality beyond educational access, exploring further the links between education and equality in other spheres of life, advocating equal opportunities in career choice, and equal sharing of domestic duties between the sexes. Rather than merely facilitating participation in national development, education was also required to play a part in enabling a new set of gender relations to emerge, 'tantamount to undertaking a complete reshaping of society' (Unesco 1970b, 23–4, 154).¹²

Such activities can be linked to more general moves within the UN to build institutional arrangements for providing greater opportunities for women, and the build-up of interest and activities which laid the foundations of the resurgence of the international women's movement in the 1970s. In 1967 the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (DEDAW), and in 1970 the UN initiated a Programme of Concerted International Action for the Advancement of Women (Jain 2005, 45–50; Chaton 1968). In its research and discussion activities, Unesco foregrounded the intrinsic importance of women's development, promoting the exploration of the relationship between women's education, status and power, and pressing for a more substantive understanding of equality that looked beyond the acquisition of legal rights that by now had been attained in many developing countries. In this way, many of the concerns that were later articulated by critics of the WID model – which came to be termed the GAD approach – were fostered by Unesco in this period.

1975–2000: divergence and consensus in the construction of an international agenda

The mid-1970s saw a new global wave of feminist activity heralded by the International Women's Year (1975). Calls for progress in girls' and women's education were underpinned by a number of international commitments, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979; and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990; both of which offered legally enforceable commitments concerning the right of women and girls to education. The second and third World Conferences on Women, held in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985), also sustained the international policy focus on women.

Unesco's mainstream activities now revealed more substantive equality considerations. From 1975, the Director-General was required to submit a report to each General Conference on how Unesco's recent activities had contributed to improving the status of women (Unesco 1976); and Unesco's programme on equality of educational opportunity for women was reinvigorated, undertaking a substantial range of

new activities in the following decade. In contrast to *Learning to Be* five years earlier, Unesco's first medium-term plan, *Thinking Ahead* (1977), contained a substantial section on women. *Thinking Ahead* prioritised 'women's inferior position in the world' and their ability to exercise their rights. Since gender difference was conceptualised as socially constructed, the main obstacles to equality of access to education were:

traditions and preconceived ideas, stereotyped distinctions and excessive differentiation between the roles of men and women as they are usually portrayed by the media and by school textbooks. (Unesco 1977, 42)

Gender was now described in terms of unequal power relations. The text of *Thinking Ahead* referred to 'machismo, to mention only one example, which helps to perpetuate the domination of one sex over the other' (Unesco 1977, 43). Development was thus seen in terms of improving women's 'fundamental political rights and their effective participation in political structures', such as their 'ability to gain a hearing in the groups and assemblies which make the decisions, from the village council or co-operative association to the highest administrative bodies of the country' (Unesco 1977, 44). The functional literacy projects in Nepal, Chile and the Upper Volta, which had focused primarily on providing access to literacy to women, were now reassessed:

it was thought that working towards equal access of women to education would eventually assure equality in this field. However, as the projects broadened their focus over the years ... they revealed the necessity for a broader approach on international policy level to the whole problem of bringing about *full equality* between men and women and for assuring the full participation of women in development. (Unesco 1975, 107, emphasis added)

Thus 'full equality' was distinguished from the earlier goal of equal access to education; and there was a perception that ensuring equal access to education did not necessarily entail equal rights and freedoms in other areas of women's lives; there was therefore a stronger, more radical commitment to social change.

During the 1980s, the social, cultural, political and economic roles of women around the world, and the 'struggle against sexism in education' were on Unesco's agenda (Unesco 1989, 10). Efforts were made to emphasise the significance of gender stereotypes and prejudices within educational materials and to campaign for their elimination at national level by commissioning reports (Unesco 1985b, 12).¹³ A series of publications spotlighted the stereotypes projected in the media; and a series of activities promoted equality in technical and vocational training for women (Unesco 1983, annex I v–vi; 1985a, 20). A programme on 'Women's Studies' was initiated to co-ordinate social science research on women and women's status around the world, involving regional meetings in Latin America and the Caribbean (November 1981), the Arab States (May 1982) and Asia (October 1982). The concern with redefining the roles of men and women continued in Unesco's second medium-term plan (1984–1989), which contained a major programme on the Status of Women (Unesco 1984, 277–285; 1985c, 5–6). Director-General M'Bow stated at the time:

I am convinced that any promise of a new world and any hope of a change in the nature of relations between individuals and peoples will only be realised when the archaic opposition between masculine and feminine roles at all levels of responsibility and decision-making within societies has finally ceased. (Unesco 1983, 62)

The concern with equal outcomes to education was particularly evident in Unesco's programme to promote Equality of Educational Opportunity for Girls and Women, launched in 1985 under the Status of Women programme (Unesco 1985a, 49–51). The programme's purpose was:

not simply to ensure *educational equality* but to assist Member States in offering *equality through education*. (Unesco 1985a, 51)

Thus, education should be designed, 'not only to open up specific opportunities but also to change values' (Unesco 1983, 1). Equal outcomes to education, such as employment, were now considered as an important part of the goal of equality (Unesco 1983, chap. 4).

These conceptual changes within Unesco reflected theoretical developments of the late 1970s and early 1980s, in particular the development of the 'Gender and Development' (GAD) approach (Unterhalter 2005, 20–6). When related to education, the GAD approach's concern with gender power relations in society demanded a focus not only on levels of access to education, but also the gender-related messages imparted during the educational process, and the gendered outcomes of schooling. Thus the previous concern with getting girls and women into school came to be accompanied also by a greater focus on the levels of equality experienced later on, such as equality in career choice and access to political power. These shifts towards casting women's education in terms of gender power relations came at a time of increasing radicalisation of ideas within Unesco generally, when Director-General M'Bow explicitly allied Unesco's work with the notion of a New International Economic Order (NIEO). However, stymied by budgetary limitations and increasingly isolated due to its radical agenda, Unesco's became increasingly marginalised during the 1970s and 1980s, and its educational operations were increasingly overshadowed by those of the World Bank. As Mundy explains, by this period, Unesco's work in education had become 'at once more ambitious, diverse, fragmented, and diffuse' (1999, 39).

After the mid-1970s women's education featured much more prominently within the World Bank's development strategies. While the World Bank's rationale for increasing levels of girls' and women's education was broadly instrumental, there were two main characteristics to its approach at this time. First, by the 1970s the World Bank was prioritising the elimination of poverty and extreme economic inequalities alongside aggregate growth of national economies. Thus the 'problem' of female education was largely understood in terms of increasing their contribution to the economy as a way out of poverty:

In the traditional as well as the modern sector, the key to becoming a part of the economic mainstream is education. If women are to make their greatest possible contribution to the national effort, access to quality education is essential ... where women remain uneducated not only is their contribution to society limited, but the potential contribution of the next generation is also limited by inadequate preschool education. Clearly, then, the education of women is crucial if the cycle of poverty is to be broken. (World Bank 1975, 18)

Significantly, the deficiencies of girls' and women's education were conceptualised in terms of the *needs* of women, rather than the *rights* of women; 'countries with a high ratio of educated females to males perform better in meeting basic needs than those

with lower ratios' (World Bank 1980, 89). However, couching women's education in terms of needs suggests a passive conceptualisation of women as recipients of development policies, rather than a consideration of women as active agents with individual interests and freedoms (Unterhalter 2007, 49–51).

Second, the economic contribution of women was increasingly not limited to social and nurturing functions (i.e. that economies are more likely to grow if the family unit is working efficiently, especially with women operating as housewives) but understood in terms of their potential for direct economic productivity. With rising attention to women in development circles, the World Bank became concerned that ignoring the roles of women in the labour market was jeopardising the successful implementation of projects in developing countries. This coincided with a shift in the World Bank's operations from chiefly supporting large-scale technical infrastructural developments, to projects concerned more with building up local and national human resources. By 1975, for example, it concluded that it was not possible:

to design and carry out a project intended to increase the productivity of thousands of small dairy farms in a society in which women do most of the work of caring for the animals and marketing the product without explicitly addressing women's roles. (World Bank 1975, 6)

Thus it would ensure that 'so large a proportion of the world's human resources is not underutilized' (World Bank 1975, 29). Influenced by theoretical developments highlighting women's productive role in the economy such as Boserup (1970), the World Bank appointed a 'Women in Development' (WID) advisor in 1977, and in 1986 established a WID unit which subsequently influenced many operational policies (World Bank 1979, iii). The World Bank's 1988 publication on education in Africa (1988, 60–1) presented increased economic productivity as the first reason for promoting female education, particularly, in the eyes of the Bank, due to the significant levels of self-employment of African women. By now, therefore, the education of girls and women came to be an important factor in the 'education–economic growth black box' theory that was central to the human capital framework (Resnik 2006).

Interestingly, the extension of discussions on equality between the sexes, along with the increased interest in women's role in economic growth and development, provided new ground for exploring links between the two. In particular, in the light of international concern over growing population levels, there was a new interest in links between education and fertility. Earlier research had suggested that the more education a woman received, the more children she was likely to have, due to her increased understanding of health and welfare issues. However, in 1975, a report by Helvi Sipilä, the first Assistant Secretary-General to the UN (noting the absence of attention to women in the papers prepared for the World Population Conference in 1974) prominently made a link between higher status of women, education and lower fertility. She noted that:

women in some societies may participate fully and equally in the process of economic production, but find themselves constrained by traditional expectations as to the division of labour at home. Or they may wield considerable power within the family but very little in the governance of the community or country. (Quoted in Jain 2005, 60)

With population growth one of the most pressing development concerns of the 1970s, the contribution of education to female status meant that calls for increased female

education were therefore set to become one of the major issues in the years to come. This argument held considerable potential for both those concerned with economic growth, and those concerned with women's rights and status. It was adopted by the World Bank over the following decades (for example, King and Hill 1993).

The World Bank's approach to women's education in this period therefore heavily reflected the instrumental understandings of the WID approach; less concerned with the content of what girls learned, how they learned, or whether they faced gender inequalities after their years in school; the main concern was enhancing women's economic productivity (Unterhalter 2007, 51–4).

The 'Education for All' (EFA) campaign, launched jointly in 1990 by Unesco, the World Bank and Unicef, marked an unprecedented level of educational co-operation between these organisations, in which the education of girls and women was specified as a key priority. Analyses of the understandings of gender equality within EFA have criticised the goals as limited, with a concern with getting equal numbers of girls and boys into school as opposed to gender power relations, and a heavier focus on primary and basic education for girls. Moreover, in the new coalition of agencies, intrinsic and instrumentalist arguments were unproblematically combined, masking potential inconsistencies between the two (see, for example, Unterhalter 2007, 3–19).

Yet while the EFA goals appeared as a consensus between the participating agencies, underlying different approaches remained within the two organisations and can be identified in their activities over the course of the 1990s. During this decade, Unesco took an active role in the campaign in monitoring and co-ordination; but also strove to recapture its position as a global intellectual forum, encouraging dialogue on different aspects of gender equality and education.

Despite Unesco's relative revitalisation, the World Bank remained dominant in the campaign and persisted with an instrumental approach to girls' and women's education, tending to justify the prioritising of girls' education through studies demonstrating the economic outcomes. For example, *Priorities and Strategies in Education* (World Bank 1995b) discusses girls' and women's education primarily in terms of its suggested impact on fertility levels. Woman's education was first and foremost couched as important for family welfare, by improving both her productive and reproductive roles. This position had been outlined in the highly influential earlier Bank-sponsored research publication, *Women's Education in Developing Countries* (King and Hill 1993).

However, in the latter half of the 1990s, policy literature reveals a shift from the WID approach of distinct components focusing on women within particular projects, to an attempt to 'mainstream' gender into all World Bank strategies (World Bank 2005, 2–3). In 1997 a 'Gender and Development' unit was established, and the World Bank's policy on gender was further outlined in a 2001 publication, *Engendering Development* (World Bank 2001). By the end of the 1990s, the World Bank increasingly referred to 'gender' instead of women, and prioritised 'empowerment' for women – a significant shift as far as national policy-making was concerned, especially in countries where 'gender' was an unfamiliar concept (see, for example, World Bank 1999, 2001). The World Bank's shifting position on gender and education should be seen in the context of broader developments in international development discourse. Since high levels of criticism of the non-beneficial social impacts of structural adjustment measures in the 1980s, the World Bank now expressed an increased sensitivity to issues of poverty and basic needs, in discursive terms at least.¹⁴

An analysis of the positions within the EFA movement in the 1990s reveals that the more radical demands of the international women's movement in the 1970s and

1980s had not filtered through. Kabeer (1994, 7–8) argues that the rhetoric of equality which the Decade for Women saw was too controversial to translate into policy, as it ultimately involved a redistribution of power and resources. Instead, therefore, she argues that the new focus on women was accommodated within the official agencies of development by linking it to the emerging concern with poverty alleviation and basic needs. Prioritising the education of women and girls fitted into this new emphasis. Moreover, it enabled a number of agendas to be accommodated under one policy goal. It was now central both to human capital-based models concerned with increasing productivity, and also to welfare approaches, in that it focused on improving women's responsibilities for family and child welfare. It was also seen as crucial in improving women's status and social and political participation. Yet the cause of girls' and women's education also provided a potential lever towards redefining gender relations, as championed by critics of the original WID approaches. However, in practice most strategies in the 1990s, often directly related to or influenced by the World Bank's dominance, continued to focus primarily on access to education, as opposed to issues relating to content and outcomes, thus avoiding contentious issues of realigning gender roles and power relations.

Conclusions

Gender, education and equality have been conceptualised and framed in a number of different ways by Unesco and the World Bank during the post-war period, strongly linked to the shifting understandings of progress and 'development' which they were working towards. Instrumental approaches which concentrated on the benefits of women's education for development were present throughout the period, although the specific rationales shifted over time. The perceived transition to the 'modern' world in the immediate post-war decades meant that education was essential to encourage women's active participation in public and civic life, and their contribution to national economic and social development, through essentialised, differentiated roles. By the 1980s, a different framework had developed which emphasised more specifically the contribution of women's education to economic development linking women's education to specific economic outcomes, in particular, productivity and fertility. Backed up by research reports and rate-of-return analyses, the education of girls and women was approached from a human capital perspective, which was adapted towards concerns with poverty reduction, with women themselves conceptualised as an underprivileged, passive minority, a position particularly evident within the World Bank. Changing ideas on education and development, particularly human capital theory, provided a space for a new perception of the role of women's education in development. Primary (and to some extent secondary) education, previously sidelined in favour of technical and vocational education, came to be seen as particularly important to economic growth; coupled with WID's highlighting of female economic participation, this meant that by the 1970s and 1980s girls' and women's education came to be perceived as a key focal point for development projects.

At the same time, intrinsic arguments had also been advanced. In the initial post-war decades, Unesco's activities on women's and girls' education largely centred on securing girls' and women's equal opportunity to access education as part of a wider movement to universalise formal rights through the new institutions of international governance. Later, as part of a normative questioning of instrumental approaches, a more substantive understanding of equality was increasingly put forward which, rather

than focusing on the incorporation of women into processes of production, centred on the restructuring of gender power relations, drawing on rights-based frameworks.

While dominant perspectives can be identified, different approaches within the two organisations meant that during each period there was no homogenous, unified framework at international level beyond the goal of increasing access. Unesco, as an institution in which the ideas that guide policy are negotiated between many governments and civil society groups, often produced 'consensual' recommendations without strong orientations. The World Bank consistently provided instrumental, growth-based rationales which contrasted with the intrinsic, rights-based ideas elsewhere in the UN in the 1970s and 1980s. The World Bank's more centralised structure of policy-making formed clearer policy messages which became more dominant in the wake of Unesco's relative decline.

These shifts also reflect changing ideas on women and development within the UN. Jones (2005, 1) notes that UN agencies involved with education have not been able to isolate themselves from basic ideas within the UN system. Moreover, by the end of the twentieth century, it was possible for a common agenda to be adopted simultaneously by a number of agencies despite differing priorities and ideologies with regards to the nature of development. The goal of improving girls' and women's education was able to fit into the causes of individual rights, social progress and equity, increasing economic productivity and poverty alleviation, enabling such a goal to be positioned as an unequivocal good. While education appears as a benign and acceptable policy goal (few would argue against increasing levels of education), improving girls' and women's education may also have been an uncontroversial way for agencies to respond to the women's movement without taking on the more challenging aspects such as changing gender relations and the redistribution of power. However, divergent conceptualisations continue to exist and debates in the international community over aims beyond equal access continue today (Unterhalter 2007).

In an increasingly structured global education agenda, understanding the historical contingency of ideas about gender is particularly important. The growth in remit and activities of international development organisations since the 1940s, especially in relation to the funding of education projects and research into education and development, has meant that shifts in priorities and conceptualisations within these bodies may have increasing implications for nation states. In the first few decades of its existence, Unesco's activities on girls' and women's education mainly centred on international declarations, limited research, and expert missions and individual fellowships. However, increasing levels of aid to education, and in particular the inclusion of education in the World Bank's lending priorities, has meant the opportunities for international leverage have grown significantly.¹⁵ As international education goals and conceptualisations now have the potential for a greater impact on girls' schooling and gender relations (see, for example, Leach 1998), it is particularly important to understand the historical context to their conceptual underpinnings.

Acknowledgement

The research in this article, was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Notes

1. Prior to the establishment of the UN, nations had periodically sought to establish treaties and agreements, e.g. the charter of the League of Nations contained several references

- to women (Berkovitch 1999, 72–4). For a discussion of such activities, see Iriye (2002, 9–36).
2. In the same year, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 'to implement the principle of equality of rights for men and women contained in the Charter of the United Nations' (Jain 2005, 23–4).
 3. A number of publications over the period addressed this topic, such as *Education in Citizenship for Girls Today* (Unesco 1959), *The Political Education of Women* (UN Department of Social Affairs 1951), and *Civic and Political Education of Women* (United Nations 1964).
 4. Participants were drawn from various UN bodies including CSW and Unesco, international non-governmental organisations, and women's organisations (Unesco 1949a).
 5. This examined the part played by women in politics in Norway, France, Yugoslavia and the German Federal Republic, and came to be recognised as one of Unesco's main accomplishments in the social sciences at the time (Sewell 1975, 184). Stressing the absence of women from political life, he focused on the problem of representation and the lack of women officeholders, and the barriers to women holding public office, as opposed to only considering voting levels.
 6. Recommendations are norms, agreed by member states, which are not subject to ratification, but which member states are invited to apply. They are intended to influence the development of national laws and practices. A Resolution is a decision of a UN body as a statement of intent, generally regarded to be non-binding on member-states.
 7. The Karachi and Addis Ababa Plans aimed to provide universal compulsory primary education by 1980. Each state was required to prepare a detailed national plan for the achievement of these goals. These regional conferences were the first instance of a UN institution formulating, adopting and promoting common goals through international conferences, setting a template for over 50 more such goals in the following decades (Jolly, Emmerij, and Weiss 2005, 18).
 8. In programming, due to pressure from elsewhere in the UN, Unesco's goal of the eradication of illiteracy was sidelined for a focus on secondary, technical and vocational education, favoured by the UNDP and the World Bank who at that stage were providing much of the funds for Unesco's field operations (Jones 2005, 62).
 9. By the start of the decade, there had been a rapid increase in membership from newly independent countries, jumping from under 30 countries in 1946, to over 100 by 1962 (Sewell 1975, 269).
 10. Human capital theory, developed by Schultz and Becker in the mid-1960s, proposed that the relatively high and sustained levels of economic growth in the West were not only due to the application of appropriate technologies, but also a country's possession of knowledge and skills. Modernisation theory centred on the role of rational, scientific actors in the transformation of economies, and therefore highlighted the role of formal schooling in this process (Jones 2005: 30–2). Unesco thus began to orient research towards issues such as *The Social Prerequisites to Economic Growth* (1964).
 11. Opponents in the World Bank pointed to the risk of losing the Bank's 'AAA' credit rating through projects that did not produce economic returns. Supporters argued that foreign investment would not be fully utilised without the development of human resources (Jones 2006, 101–2).
 12. This was also published in French and Spanish, in order to reach a wider audience.
 13. National reports included China, France, Norway, Peru, Ukrainian SSR and Zambia.
 14. For example, through the shift to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).
 15. UNESCO has always suffered from a considerably limited budgetary capacity for education (Jones 2005, 54).

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