

COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH

COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION

**ISLAM AND THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN
AND GIRLS IN THE COMMONWEALTH**

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PREFACE

The conference

The choice of *Islam and the education of Commonwealth women and girls* as the theme of the 2007 annual conference of the Council for Education in the Commonwealth (CEC) was inspired by (i) the interfaith dialogue initiated in 2005 by the Commonwealth Peoples' Forum (CPF)¹ in Malta and (ii) the case for extending earlier CEC discussions on educational equality for women and girls to consider how their position in Muslim societies affects their educational and later life opportunities.

At the Conference, Baroness Pola Uddin chaired the morning's keynote presentations by distinguished Muslim women and made a significant contribution on her own experiences of as a Muslim in Bangladesh and the UK. The afternoon break-out groups developed the morning themes supported by further contributions from more than 70 delegates who ensured that debate was lively. The final session identified policy implications which the Commonwealth might consider at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Uganda (November 2007) and at the 2009 Commonwealth Conference for Education Ministers (CCEM) in Malaysia.

This report is an extended record of the conference proceedings. It introduces Islam and the position of women in Muslim societies, describing the place of education in their lives and what this means in the Commonwealth. It develops these ideas in the context of selected member states in Asia, Africa and Europe and the similarities and differences in their experiences. Finally it considers what the different scenarios might imply for Commonwealth policy.

The proceedings

The pages that follow are divided into three parts. The first part provides a contextual framework in which to position the conference presentations, in relation to the global spread and changing nature of Islam and the ways in which women and education are positioned within it. It introduces Commonwealth commitments to gender, faith and learning, and provides information about Muslims in member states, their implications for human development, including gender parity in their school enrolment. Part 1 concludes with an account of Muslim women mobilising within the faith to reclaim their historically egalitarian position, mindful of the similar approaches used by non-Muslim women's movements and the experience that they encountered. Part 2 begins with a statistical report to the conference on progress towards gender parity in educational enrolment, in the 16 Commonwealth states with Muslim populations of more than one million people. It goes on to locate the remaining presentations in their different country contexts and concludes with an overview of issues to be considered when framing policy to promote the education and later lives of Muslim girls and women. Part 3 proposes a Commonwealth-wide policy agenda in these terms, relating to gender, faith and education in general, going on to identify issues which member states may wish to address in respect of their Muslim communities and of Muslim women in particular.

The report is an extended record of a one-day meeting, intended to serve as a policy tool and as a resource that will enable others to undertake more detailed enquiry.

¹ The CPF is a meeting of Commonwealth Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

“Knowledge of the different civilisations of the Islamic world, of the pluralism of that world, of the plurality of interpretations of Islam, is very, very shallow indeed and a significant contributor to misunderstanding.”

H. H. the Aga Khan

The Independent, London, 14 July 2007

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CEC thanks everyone who contributed to the 2007 Summer Conference.

Too many to name, they include all those who assisted with the preparation and management of the event, and those who presented their work, took notes of what was said, and came to take part in the different discussions. They also include people who have contributed to the preparation of this text, sometimes at very short notice.

Particular thanks go to: the Baroness Pola Uddin for being an inspiring Chair at the opening session of the conference and now for writing a Foreword to this report; the British Council for so generously hosting the event in Spring Gardens; and the Commonwealth Foundation for sponsoring the preparation of these proceedings.

CONTENTS

Abstract	<i>page</i> <i>ii</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>iii</i>
Contents	<i>iv</i>
List of Abbreviations	<i>vi</i>
Foreword	<i>vii</i>

PART I SETTING SCENES

1	Commonwealth: faith, gender and education	<i>1</i>
2	Muslims, Islam and gender	<i>1</i>
3	Islam, learning and education for girls and women today	<i>4</i>
4	Effects of education in Muslim communities	<i>6</i>
5	Muslims in the Commonwealth	<i>8</i>
6	Commonwealth gender strategies	<i>10</i>
7	Researching gender and education in Muslim states and communities.	<i>10</i>
8	Gender, development and education in the Commonwealth	<i>11</i>

PART 2 COMMONWEALTH EXPERIENCES

9	Linking presentations and discussions to wider contexts	<i>12</i>
10	Mapping Islam in the Commonwealth	<i>12</i>
11	Pakistan	<i>17</i>
12	India	<i>21</i>
13	Malaysia	<i>24</i>
14	China	<i>27</i>
15	Nigeria	<i>31</i>
16	Kenya	<i>37</i>
17	The Gambia	<i>41</i>
18	Malta	<i>43</i>
19	The UK	<i>44</i>
20	In sum	<i>52</i>

PART 3 INFERENCES AND INDICATIONS FOR COMMONWEALTH ACTION

21	Commonwealth policy frameworks	<i>54</i>
22	Addressing the Commonwealth as an association of peoples	<i>55</i>
23	Encouraging member states to promote opportunities for Muslim women	<i>57</i>
24	View from the Commonwealth Foundation	<i>59</i>

CONTENTS (continued)

	<i>Page</i>
PART 4	
APPENDIX	
1 Conference Programme	60
2 Conference People	62
BOXES	
1 Advocacy for Muslim women's awareness and community learning	7
2 The only way forward! Education as empowerment in Pakistan	20
3 Primary statistics: Nigeria	36
4 Early childhood <i>madrassas</i> in East Africa	39
5 Sustaining Budgets for a Girls Boarding School	42
6 Malta at the crossroads	44
7 Multiple Identities: Citizenship and Faith in Pluralist Society	47
8 The <i>madrassa</i> children's literacy project	49
9 Muslim women in higher education in the UK	51
10 Implications for Commonwealth Policy	55
FIGURES	
1 Predominantly Muslim Countries Classified by Constitutional Role for Religion	2
2 Timetable showing integrated curriculum at the Garissa <i>madrassa</i> (Kenya)	4
3 Muslim girls at a Muslim school in the UK	5
4 Shaheen Sardar Ali at the CEC conference	19
5 Malaysian students	24
6 Fatimah Kelleher at the CEC conference	31
7 Girls at an Islamiyya school in Kano	35
8 Madrassa classroom, Garissa Kenya	40
9 Islamic learning for women in The Gambia	41
TABLES	
1 Muslims in world regions	1
2 World regions with significant Muslim populations and their human development compared with indicators for all states	2
3 Commonwealth states, Muslim populations and development indicators	9
4 Commonwealth Muslim populations of more than 1 million (2006)	13
5 Net Primary Enrolment Ratios and Gender Parity (2004)	13
6 Net Secondary Enrolment Ratios and Gender Parity (2004)	14
7 Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratios and Gender Parity (2004)	15
8 British Muslim population by Ethnic group	46

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AMS	Association of Muslim Schools (UK)
CCEM	Commonwealth Conference for Education Ministers
CE	Common Era
CEC	Council for Education in the Commonwealth
CEF	Commonwealth Education Fund
CER	Combined Enrolment Ratio* (Students enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the population of official age for the three levels)
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CPF	Commonwealth Peoples' Forum
EA	Economically Active Population ages 15 and older.
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
EI	Education Index* [Index combining adult literacy rate and CER]
f	Female
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FIDH	Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (UK)
GDI	Gender Development Index*
GDP	Gross Domestic Product*
GDPI	Gross Domestic Product Index* [Index of average achievement HDI measures adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women.
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure* [Index of inequality for: economic participation, decision-making, political participation; decision-making; power over economic resources].
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GPI	Gender Parity Index* [ratio of girls to 100 boys]
H	High
HDI	Human Development Index* [Combined measures for life expectancy, literacy, education, and standard of living]
HPI (1)	Human Poverty Index for non-OECD states* [Composite index of deprivation: health/ longevity, knowledge and standard of living]
IIEP	Integrated Islamic Education Programme
IT	Information technology
L	Low
m	Male
M	Medium
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
NPER	Net Primary Enrolment Ratio* [Students enrolled at official age for primary level, as percentage of population of official school age for primary level].
NWFP	North West Frontier Province (Pakistan)
PAS	<i>Parti Islam Se</i> (Malaysia)
PoAGE	Plan of Action for Gender Equality
WAO	Women's Aid Organisation (Malaysia)
WLUML	Women Living Under Muslim Laws

*Data taken from UNDP (2006) <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/>. With multivariate indices, scores range from 1.000 (high) to 0.000 (low)

FOREWORD

By **Baroness Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green and Tower Hamlets**



All our common journeys reveal the complexities of being a woman in a twenty first century. Amid our diversity, they show just how many of us are striving to achieve a cohesive society. Our ambition is threatened when once again religion is used as the key factor to frame the identity of some, but not all groups.

Before coming to this country I was never asked if I was a Muslim. In Bangladesh everyone was Muslim. Growing up in England, in a family which valued learning, my religious identity was not seen as a barrier to my education, employment or to being good to the neighbours. Indeed, I came to believe that it was our Islamic identity and values that had taught me tolerance, respect, and a sense of justice and equality.

In British society outside my home, the degree of ignorance of Islam and hostility towards Muslims always shocked me. The pain deepened when I saw the jaundiced ideas that were being widely accepted; to the effect that Islam itself endorsed men's oppression of women, in the family and in the community.

I did not know what to believe. Throughout my girlhood, I had been surrounded by strong and powerful women, including my mother and my aunts on both sides of my family. My grandfathers were far from the demonic images of the men now said to head Muslim households. In the early 20th century, they had both insisted on education for all of their daughters.

Looking back, I know now that these contradictory experiences explain why I always find myself challenging dangerous myths and stereotypes about Islam, particularly those relating to Muslim women. I also understand that not everyone has had my supportive upbringing, whether they are members of Muslim or other communities, in Britain or other parts of the world.

Those of us originally from the new Commonwealth countries learned long ago that the cultural traditions of our forebears had been successively eroded by colonial, post-

colonial and post-migration values and religious identities. Since 2001, with the global war on terror, there has been a more radical transformation, one that coincides with insurmountable social dilemmas which are in part a result of past policies.

Large numbers of Britain's deprived Muslim population live in multi-cultural areas of one-time industrial cities. They have sub-standard housing and little employment. With poor quality schooling, prospects for their children are few. Discrimination against Muslim women is widespread and 80 percent are not in paid work. There are drugs and resentment among the young. Parents struggle to keep order. Forced marriages are regularly reported, as are honour killings.

In 2001, I was asked by the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, to chair the government's efforts to discourage the radicalisation of political Islam in the UK. I worked with a number of powerful Muslim women, leaders from across the professions and NGOs, to mobilise others to act across the country. We quickly recognised that Muslim women in Britain had been marginalised for too long and that their full participation in mainstream decision-making structures was critical to developing a stable multi-cultural society.

To this day we do not have a single Muslim woman in the House of Commons, although it is a decade since I came to the Lords as the first Muslim peer. Over that time, I have been privileged to travel up and down our country. I have seen so many Muslim women, putting so much into the development of their communities, without any recognition of their contribution. That is why, in whatever work I am doing, it is always a priority for me to share with others some of their heroic tales of survival and success. Their work as mothers, teachers and activists is the bedrock of their family and community well-being. It is they whom we must empower if we are to resolve community difficulties, ensure cohesion, provide education and nurture future leaders.

We are unrealistic in expecting Muslim women to work alone within Muslim communities to redress the complexity of political radicalisation, forced marriage and honour killings. Violence against women and abuse of children plague all our communities, whatever their social and ethnic standing, whatever the faith to which they adhere and wherever they are located. To enable any woman to disclose abuse, we have to ensure her confidence in the systems which offer protection, within her own community and in the wider society.

We mustn't allow ourselves to be bogged down by only talking about the distinctions between the poor and the rich, the deprived and the included, and between one and another faith community, as if all lead parallel and different lives. Such language only seeks to divide. It does nothing to reduce degradation or encourage the cooperation required everywhere to build confidence and empowerment. Only with time and extensive education will women resolve these situations, working in harmony together across communities, countries and world regions.

Hon. Baroness Uddin,
House of Lords

15 January 2008

PART I

SETTING SCENES

1. Commonwealth: faith, gender and education

The 53 Commonwealth states include peoples of different races, languages and religions, at every stage of development, with varied cultures, traditions and institutions. The Commonwealth promotes the freedom of individuals, non-discrimination and equal rights, regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief. It encourages international free trade, poverty eradication and the exchange of knowledge on professional, cultural, economic, legal and political issues². It subscribes to equality for women, universal access to education and the development of human resources for sustainable development, regardless of faith, respecting women and providing education for all³. Secularisation has hidden the contributions by faith organisations to the development of education all over the world. With new faith-led movements, the CEC conference considered the implications of Islam for the education of women and girls in the ‘old’ and ‘new’ Commonwealth.

Table 1. Muslims in world regions (in millions)⁴

Continent	Population 2006	Muslim Populations 2006	Muslim Percentage
Africa	923.2	442.88	47.97
Asia	3970.5	1060.65	26.71
Europe	731.7	50.7	6.93
North America	331.7	7.13	2.15
South America	566.05	3.08	0.54
Oceania	33.54	0.6	1.79
Total	6313.78	1565.28	24.79

Source: www.islamicpopulation.com

2. Muslims, Islam and gender

A fifth of the world is Muslim, about 1 billion people. Most live in Asia, followed by Africa and the Middle East. Of Muslim majority states, 10 are declared Islamic republics, and 22 have made Islam their official religion⁵. States with large Muslim populations fall in the mid-range of international human development, except in Sub-Saharan Africa, where levels are low (See Tables 1 and 2 and Fig 1).

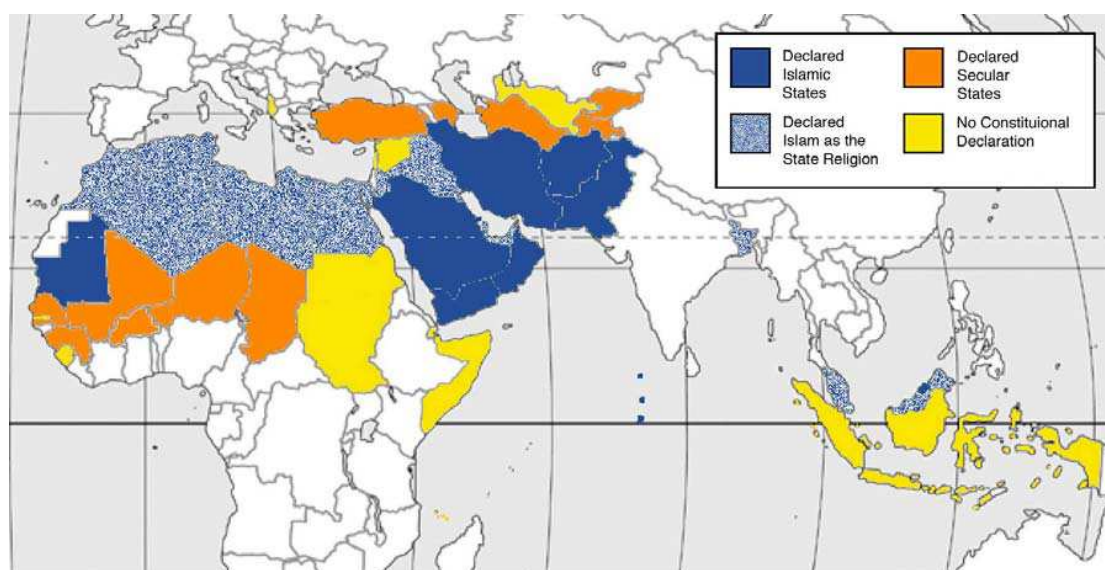
² Commonwealth Secretariat (1971) Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles 1971, Singapore, Issued by the Heads of Government.

³ Commonwealth Secretariat (1991) Harare Commonwealth Declaration 1991, Harare, Issued by the Heads of Government.

⁴ IslamicPopulation.com warns of the difficulty of obtaining reliable statistics for faith-groups and the sometimes significant discrepancies between official data from ‘general’ sources and those from alternative (e.g.) Islamic sources.

⁵ Stahnke, T; Blitt, R.C (2005) *The Religion-State Relationship and the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief: A Comparative Textual Analysis of the Constitutions of Predominantly Muslim Countries*, Washington, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, pp115.

Fig 1. Predominantly Muslim Countries Classified by Constitutional Role for Religion



Source: Stahnke and Blitt (2005)

Constitutional comparisons identify those states which respect human rights to internationally accepted standards, those explicitly preventing religious coercion and those which permit practices not recognised by internationally agreed standards.

Table 2. World regions with significant Muslim populations and their human development compared with indicators for all states

[See List of Abbreviations (page vi) list for column key]

(1) Territories	(2) HDI	(3) GDP per cap (US\$)	(4) Economic activity (f % m)	(5) EI	(6) Adult Literacy %	(7) CER %	(8) Adult Literacy (f % m)
<u>Muslim Regions</u>							
Arab States	0.680	5,680	34	0.66	69.9	62	74
South Asia	0.599	3,072	44	0.58	60.9	56	66
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.472	1,946	73	0.57	63.3	50	76
<u>All countries</u>							
High human development	0.923	26,568	72	0.95	...	91	...
Medium human development	0.701	4,901	65	0.75	80.5	66	86
Low human development	0.427	1,113	72	0.53	57.0	46	70

Source: UNDP (2006)

With Judaic and Christian antecedents, Islam is a text-based faith in the Abrahamic tradition, revering the same God and many of the same prophets, including Jesus. Muslims are adherents of Islam and committed to a life of prayer, with the family the base unit of Muslim society. Like Christianity, Islam is a mosaic of ethnic and cultural

traditions. There are many interpretations of the Qur'an and the *shari'ah*⁶. They are espoused by different sects in different places, with some strongly influenced by the core Islamic, Arabic-speaking countries. This diversity prevents generalisations across Muslim communities and the ways in which they shape gender relations and education. (Sweeping generalisations are no safer in commentary on other faiths, for example across Christian communities, in respect of these and other issues).

At the same time, centuries of conflict between the Jewish, Christian and Muslim worlds have left their legacy. Narratives of prejudice interact with those of reconciliation, between one and another group, with the cultural embedding of alternating intentions to undermine and then accept each other's identities. Internally, each group has at times withheld rights from its own minorities, making invisible the identities of women, ethnic and denominational sub-groups, later enabling their reassertion. In this way, the different cultural orientations of Muslim groups have led some to distort the Islamic principle of equality between men and women, although it is clearly inscribed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Such groups live according to male-centred interpretations of Islamic texts, often subordinating women, their human and civil rights, and their access to health care, education and economic participation.

As in other religious communities, Muslim women have mobilised down the centuries to recover their lost status and rights, using different but complementary approaches in different parts of the world (see Box 1 for contemporary examples)⁷. Many are anxious to challenge the damaging stereotypes of women, within Muslim communities and externally. They claim that multiple forms of pre-Islamic patriarchy underlie misrepresentations of meaning in the Qur'an and *shari'ah*⁸, as the socio-political force behind women's subordination. Some women propose a secularist route to reform through law which protects individual rights beyond the influence of religion and culture. Some call for a reinterpretation of familiar Qur'anic verses and other well-known texts so as to inspire reform from within Islam, with the active support of men and religious leaders. Many take small steps to achieve change peacefully within their daily lives, however difficult in more conservative communities. Another group observes widespread popular demand for reform, even in reputedly reactionary communities. They see women theologians driving the reinterpretation of Islamic texts, encouraged by Muslim middle classes and informed by diaspora experiences⁹.

The CEC conference noted the ways in which patriarchal interpretations of biblical texts had legitimated the (sometimes extreme) subordination of women down the ages, under the banners of Judaism and Christianity¹⁰. It acknowledged the continuing struggle for women's dignity and status within these faiths, with and without the support of men, based on arguments equivalent to those described as being used by Muslim women activists.

⁶ *Shari'ah* is the divine law of Islam, based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. It governs the religious, liturgical, ethical and legal systems that regulate the lives of practising Muslims.

⁷ This section draws on Offenauer, P (2005) *Women in Islamic societies: a selected review of social scientific literature*, Washington, Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, November, pp122.

⁸ Kandiyoti, D (1991) *Islam and Patriarchy*, in N.R. Keddie and B. Baron (Eds), **Women in Middle East History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender**, New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

⁹ Muzaffar, C (2001) *Interview*, Kuala Lumpur, International Movement for a Just World, Frontline, 10 October.

¹⁰ Nye, Malory (2003) *Religion: the Basics*, Google Books, London, Routledge, pp224.

3. Islam, learning and education for girls and women today

Early Muslims sought to fulfil the Qur’anic edict which gave women and men an equal obligation to learn and share knowledge, with each contributing to the development of science, astronomy, medicine and mathematics, and to the first libraries and universities¹¹. From the 7th century, there were celebrated women theologians, teachers, doctors, mid-wives and jurists, among them a number of the Prophet’s wives. Women were revered as mothers and for teaching Islam to their children. Down the centuries, there have always been Muslim women leaders¹², recognised locally, nationally, regionally and now globally as well. This was true over periods when narrowing interpretations of the Qur’an privileged men’s learning, reduced women’s access to knowledge and limited young girls to memorising basic tenets of Islam, because no more was thought to be required of obedient wives and mothers.

Educational and other restrictions have relaxed for many Muslim women, amid other rapid change across much of the Muslim world. Educational gaps have narrowed between non-Muslim states and those with significant Muslim populations, and between Muslim women and men within them¹³. Enrolment has increased at all levels, in secular and religious institutions, with improvement in adult literacy as well. Most school children are learning at least the basics of secular curricula, often embedded in religious frameworks (see Fig 2). Muslim girls are frequently surpassing boys at both primary and secondary levels.

Fig 2 Timetable showing an integrated curriculum at the Garissa madrasa (Kenya)

TIME	8:00	8:35	9:10	9:45	10:20	10:50	11:25	12:00
DAY	8:35	9:10	9:45	10:20	10:50	11:25	12:00	
MON	MATH	ENG	SCIE	B	C/ART	KISW	L	
TUE	ENG	MATH	S/S	PE	R	C/ART	U	
WED	MATH	ENG	SCIE	S/S	E	KISW	RE	N
THUR	ENG	MATH	S/S	PE	A	RE	KISW	C
FRI	MATH	ENG	SCIE	S/S	K	KISW	PPI	H

GROUP	A	GROUP B	
GACHOKI	LYDIA	DOROTHY	MWANZAU
ENGLISH	5L	MATHS	5L
S/STUDIES	4L	KISWA	4L
C/ARTS	3L	SCIE	4L
RE	2L	PE	2L
PPI	1L	TOTAL	15L
TOTAL	15L		

Source: Maxey, K. (2007) CEC.

¹¹ Knowledge, Learning Institutions and Libraries in Islam: Book Publishing and Paper Making <http://muslimheritage.com/topics/>

¹² Woman Muslim leaders throughout the times, Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership, http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Muslim_Leaders.htm; Famous Muslim women, <http://www.jannah.org/sisters/famousmuslimwomen.ppt#256.1>

¹³ See Part 2 (10) below.

Increasing numbers of Muslim women have university degrees, some from the world's most famous institutions. Elite adherents of Islam, themselves highly trained, may resist secular learning for their children, offering religious education to levels that will protect their standing in adult life. As in other faiths, many Muslims prioritise the education of sons over daughters, particularly if resources are limited and if they deny the obligation to educate girls. For the poor, access to secular schools, *madrassas* and other religious institutions may be limited and of doubtful quality. The protection of marriage prospects encourages the early withdrawal of girls who are enrolled in school.

Fig 3. Muslim girls at a Muslim school in the UK



Source: <http://images.google.co.uk>

In industrial nations in the mid twentieth century, the educational achievements of young Muslim immigrants were weak. As communities settled, performance improved. Muslim girls, proud of their dual identities, are regularly surpassing Muslim boys and native children as well (see Fig 3)¹⁴. Contrary to stereotype, young Muslim women proposing entry to higher education receive strong family support. Where parents are initially reluctant, they may well be persuaded by daughters who are able to explain their ambition in terms of entitlements specified in Islamic texts. As a result, many young Muslim women are entering professional careers and serving as role models to younger siblings and friends.

Across the world, the provision of education in Muslim communities is as diverse as it is for other groups. It is supported by public and (increasingly) private resources, with not-for-profit, non-state actors playing crucial roles. Internationally, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is probably the most prestigious world wide supporter of education at all levels in Muslim communities, while the achievements of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), with growing international programmes, are globally respected¹⁵.

With the increased stability of Muslim diasporas in richer and poorer states of the non-Muslim world, there are officially recognised Muslim schools, sometimes supported by state funding. Such measures may be accompanied by a growing acceptance of Muslim dress (for girls and women) and by prayer rooms in public places. Supplementary *madrassas* have long since been a norm, in places as far apart

¹⁴ Halstead, M. (2004) *British Muslims and Education*, in T. Choudhury (Ed) **Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens**, Durham, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, UK Muslims Research Project.

¹⁵ Aga Khan Development Network, <http://www.akdn.org/>; BRAC <http://www.brac.net/>

as the UK, Australia and Canada, but Muslim leaders are also publicising festivals and issuing blanket invitations for non-Muslims to take part¹⁶.

In spite of the relaxation of educational and other restrictions on Muslim women in many parts of the world, fanatical members of conservative religious groups are using more and less legal political machinery to attract popular support to re-impose regressive interpretations of *shari'ah* in Muslim communities, among which the denial of women's rights to education. It is widely believed that with poverty prevalent across Muslim societies, poorly educated Muslim men are complying with this movement and tightening their control over women, across what some describe as the Muslim patriarchal belt, from North Africa and Central Europe, across the Arabic countries to Asia. Challenging this, it is recognised that countless women from poor Muslim households leave their homes every day to generate income and feed their families. This is certainly the case in South Asia, where Muslim poverty is at its most extreme and where women are among the poorest and least educated in the world. Less widely acknowledged are the wealthy extremists among those who sometimes impose severest of restrictions on women and young girls.

4. Effects of education in Muslim communities

Data are limited, but they suggest that more educated Muslim women marry later, use birth control, and have fewer children and experience less poverty and violence, than those without schooling. Their labour market participation and contribution to family income will also increase, in places where female labour is in demand¹⁷. With economic downturns, all this goes into reverse. Cuts in public spending reduce state financing of education. Household investment in schooling declines, as living standards drop. Children leave school to work at home or generate income elsewhere. Increasing prices and declining wages force women in poor families into badly paid work, in and beyond the legal economy. More and more head families¹⁸. Creeping Islamophobia is eroding Muslim opportunities, with women more adversely affected than men.

Educated women activists committed to advocacy across the Muslim world have come together through school, work and community interests to support religious and professional organisations, and human rights and capacity-building groups. Many offer health, family planning and education. Taking up the cause of Muslim women, they challenge the legitimacy of strictures which infringe their rights. They urge the women themselves to stop validating conservative interpretations of the Qur'an, as collusion in their own subordination.

¹⁶ In 2007, large posters pasted in the London Underground advertised Eid in Trafalgar Square inviting all to attend.

¹⁷ Offenbauer, *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Aslam, Monazza (2007) *Female autonomy and gender gaps in education in Pakistan*, DFID/University of Cambridge, RECOUP Working Paper 3 (pp41).

Box 1. Advocacy for Muslim women's awareness and community learning

Women's Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equity (WISE) is a global network highlighting the appeal of advocacy movements to Muslim women across the world¹⁹. Launched in New York (November 2006) with its next meeting in Kuala Lumpur, WISE has committed itself to creating and supporting 10 female *muftias* who, as *shari'ah* scholars, will advise on social and legal issues affecting Muslim women. WISE represents concerted efforts on the part of Muslim women to reclaim their religious and legal voice on their own terms. Action of this kind is occurring in many places.

Sisters in Islam (SIS) was founded in 1988. It represents professional Muslim women in Malaysia who have spearheaded a Muslim women's movement to promote the Islamic tenet of equality between men and women²⁰. SIS has engaged in high profile interventions, advocating reforms of the *shari'ah* and the media, offering legal services, research and public education programmes. It is committed to the belief that for the *ummah* (Islamic community) to grow and flourish, everyone must have the opportunity to participate fully in all spheres of community life. To achieve an equal partnership of women and men in the *ummah's* development women's experience, thought and voice must be heard in the interpretation of the Qur'an and in the administration of religion across the Muslim world.

Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts (WEMC) is a multi-country research, communication and capacity-building programme. WEMC is a consortium of NGOs and university departments committed to exploring Muslim women's empowerment strategies in a variety of contexts and environments. Registered in Hong Kong, WEMC has activities in four nodal countries, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and China, representing South East, South, West and East Asia, respectively. WEMC aims to strengthen women's agency, capacities and strategic alliances as 'challenges from within'²¹. Its research focuses on the diversity of Muslim communities and countries. It rejects monolithic constructions of 'Muslimness' and 'Muslim women', at a time when exclusionary systems based on minority Arab values are felt to exert undue influence on Muslims in non-Arab societies.

Muslim Women Talk (MWT) Among the plethora of organisations in the UK, MWT²² is a campaign aimed at including the voices of Muslim women from all walks of life. It acts as a conduit between the individual and decision makers within government bodies across the UK to facilitate dialogue, policy and action following the London bombings (7th July, 2005). The campaign is organised by a coalition of British Muslim women's groups, supported by the Home Office. It has a 'Ten Point Plan of Engagement' outlining a series of events taking place across the UK. It aims to identify critical issues and solutions, and reduce the involvement of young people in extremist groups and activities. MWT raises awareness of the diversity of thinking within the Muslim community and across Islamic faith communities in general. The work of MWT aims to inform government on issues such as Islamophobia, extremism and inclusion.

*Muslims and HIV/Aids*²³

Rates of infection for women exceed men's by up to five times in some countries. Low social status, limited education and income, dependency on men in the family and cultural traditions [forced and/or early marriage and FGM], limit women's control over their lives and increase their vulnerability to infection. Men's control of condoms to reduce sexual transmission increases the risk. Reluctance to discuss sexual habits (use of sex workers, female circumcision, condom usage, men having more than one wife, gay sex) and morality in general makes it difficult for researchers to document sexual practices. All occur across the Arab Muslim world and in non-Arab Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and Afghanistan. In Sudan, women talking about the issue and raising it in newspapers and on the radio was found to make a difference. In non-Muslim areas of northern Uganda, women working with the Mosques and with Muslim culture and religion have brought clear results. Religious institutions, mosques and Imams, are vital educators in the fight against AIDS.

¹⁹ Habib, Shahnaz (2007) *Muslim Women Build International Network*, Women's eNews, 7 June 07, <http://www.womensenews.org/>

²⁰ *Sisters in Islam*: <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/>

²¹ *Women's empowerment in Muslim contexts: gender, poverty and democratisation from the inside out* (WEMC) <http://www.wemc.com.hk/web/index.htm>

²² <http://www.muslimwomentalk.com/index.htm>

²³ ActionAid.

With new insights into Qur'anic meanings, reformers advocate the restoration of women's roles, status and rights and oppose gendered politics in many locations. There are Muslim women's rights groups using Islamic frames of reference, all over the world. They are advancing the position of Muslim women, preparing them to challenge difficulties at home, work round poverty, armed conflict, HIV/Aids (See Box 1), as well as to assert their right to alternative sexual identities²⁴.

The internet is a key resource. Activists use it to profile themselves, publicise their aims and achievements, provide information about like-minded bodies and stimulate others to undertake similar work. The success of these groups lies in their confidence, knowledge and understanding of methods of engagement and in the potential of IT. Crucial is the ability to reach out to women in marginal areas, without provoking new harassment.

5. Muslims in the Commonwealth

Of 2000 million people in the Commonwealth, 600 million are Muslim, of whom 80 per cent live in South Asia. Nigeria has the largest Muslim population in Africa. In the old Commonwealth, only the UK has a Muslim community of more than a million. Muslims also comprise large proportions of the tiny populations of the Maldives, the Gambia and Brunei Darussalam (100, 95 and 67 percent respectively). The Maldives and Pakistan are Declared Muslim states, while Bangladesh and Malaysia have made Islam the State religion under Federal law. In Nigeria, three northern states have adopted *shari'ah* law.

There is great diversity between member states with significant Muslim populations (see Table 3). They have a range of low, medium and high scores for economic, social, educational and health achievements, and varying positions on indicators summarising the position of women. Most citizens in most member states live in rural areas (65 per cent) and 75 percent of these are Muslim. Only a small number of member states have large urban majorities (75 per cent). None is predominantly Muslim²⁵. Regardless of the number or proportion of Muslims in larger and smaller populations, there is both overlap and divergence between scores on national development indicators. (See table 3). For example, Malta has a tiny population, a high HDI and a relatively low GDI. In contrast, Tanzania and Bangladesh, with large rural populations, currently have higher GDI than HDI scores.

The variations between states again suggest that aspects of Muslim culture, rather than Islam itself, determine the phenomena observed. In terms of gender, overall figures reveal disparities within states that, with notable exceptions (including educational exceptions), favour men and boys over women and girls.

²⁴Jivraj, S., Tauqir, T. and de Jong, A. (2003) *Safra Project: Initial Findings. Identifying the difficulties experienced by Muslim lesbian, bisexual and transgender women in accessing legal services*. London, Safra Project. www.safraproject.org.uk.

²⁵Packer and Aggio (2007) *MDGs in education: the Commonwealth story*, in A. Keeling et al. (Eds.), **Commonwealth education partnerships**, Cambridge, Nexus Strategic Partnerships, xvi-xx.

Table 3. Commonwealth states, Muslim populations and development indicators [for column key and source see List of Abbreviations (page vi)]

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
HDI Rank	HDI ranks	Country	Pop'n (mns)	Muslim %	Urban %	GDI value	GDPI	GEM value	EI	CER	CER (F)	NPE f:m	Adult Literacy all %F	HPI (1) ²⁶ value	% EA (F)	
<i>Commonwealth states with more than one million Muslims</i>																
18	H	United Kingdom	59.5	3	89.6	0.9	1	0.8	1	93	96	1	..	..	..	55.8
61	H	Malaysia	24.9	59	66.3	0.8	0.8	0.5	0.8	54	52	1	68.2	59.8	45.6	46.1
93	M	Sri Lanka	20.6	8	15.2	0.7	0.6	0.4	0.8	73	76	1	80.7	85.4	8.3	0
126	M	India	1087.1	13	28.5	0.6	0.6	..	0.6	63	64	1	88.7	89.1	17.7	34
134	M	Pakistan	154.8	97	34.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	65	55	..	..	24.4	51.9	32
136	M	Ghana	21.7	30	47.1	0.5	0.5	..	0.5	60	58	1	70.8	70.2	35.5	70.5
137	M	Bangladesh	139.2	88	24.7	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	49	44	0.9	33.5	..	48.9	52.9
144	M	Cameroon	16.0	22	53.7	0.5	0.5	..	0.7	62	56	..	57.9	59.8	35.6	51.8
145	M	Uganda	27.8	16	12.5	0.5	0.5	..	0.7	38	32	0.7	35.4	36	36.3	79.7
152	L	Kenya	33.5	24	20.5	0.5	0.4	..	0.7	66	65	..	56.1	57.7	36	69.3
159	L	Nigeria	128.7	50	47.3	0.4	0.4	..	0.6	55	50	0.9	48.7	..	40.6	45.6
162	L	Tanzania	37.6	50	23.8	0.4	0.3	0.6	0.6	48	47	1	62.9	62.2	36.3	86
165	L	Zambia	11.5	15	34.9	0.4	0.4	..	0.6	62	58	0.9	49.3	47.8	31.3	66.1
166	L	Malawi	12.6	20	16.7	0.4	0.3	..	0.6	47	44	1	58.5	49.8	33.1	85.2
168	L	Mozambique	19.4	20	33.7	0.4	0.4	..	0.5	57	58	1	34.2	..	44.2	84.7
176	L	Sierra Leone	5.3	60	39.9	0.3	0.3	..	0.5	64	64	1.1	51.8	54	43	56
<i>Old Commonwealth states with less than one million Muslims</i>																
6	H	Canada	32.0	3	80	0.9	1	0.8	1	93	96	1	..	..	..	60.2
3	H	Australia	19.9	1	88	1	1	0.8	1	113	114	1	..	..	..	56.1
20	H	New Zealand	4.0	1.2	86.1	0.9	0.9	0.8	1	1	105	1	1	..	..	61.6
<i>Small states with less than 1.5 million population</i>																
34	H	Brunei Darussalam	0.4	67	73.1	..	0.9	..	0.9	77	78	..	85.5	90.2	..	44.3
32	H	Malta	0.4	1	95	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.9	81	81	1	87.9	89.2	..	32.5
98	M	Maldives	0.3	100	29.2	..	0.7	..	0.9	69	69	1	94.8	96.4	16.9	46.1
155	L	Gambia	1.5	95	5.3	..	0.5	..	0.4	50	50	1.1	..	..	44.7	59.3
<i>Large non-Commonwealth states</i>																
81	M	China ²⁷	1311.4	3	39.5	0.8	0.7	..	0.8	70	70	..	90.9	86.5	11.7	69.2
108	M	Indonesia	222.0.0	88	47	0.7	0.6	..	0.8	68	67	93	90.4	86.8	18.5	50.7

6. Commonwealth gender strategies

In the Commonwealth's current Plan of Action for Gender Equality (PoAGE)²⁸, gender is being administratively mainstreamed with health and education. It cuts across all three areas including religion, with education particularly a means of redressing discrimination against women. Media, cultural and religious agencies are seen to have the power to change attitudes to gender, by reinforcing positive images of women. The PoAGE urges approaches through customary laws, practices, traditions and dialogue to support the rights of women and girls, as well as those of boys and men. Education is deemed essential to overcoming cultures of silence and religion, as barriers to women's disclosure of personal practices such as those associated with HIV/Aids.

The PoAGE notes that, in nearly all member states, the Commonwealth's Muslim women are demanding equality with men and strengthening their capacities to achieve it. There are many Muslim women's groups, more and less formally constituted. There are second tier umbrella organisations as well. This is as true of South Asia, South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa as it is of Canada, Britain and Australia. In very small states trends may be similar, but not always aligned with HDI scores, education or the proportions of Muslims in their populations. They may have government agencies representing the interests of women, but popular movements for gender equality may not have yet evolved.

Among the diasporas in old Commonwealth states, diverse Muslim women's groups represent different feminist positions, as well as a range of countries and language groups. Priorities include promoting the interests of women and children in their own local and ethnic communities and raising awareness of Islam in the wider, non-Muslim society, often through participation in inter-faith meetings.

7. Researching gender and education in Muslim states and communities.

The limited reference to faith and to Islam and Muslim culture in particular, is now seen as an error in contemporary research and policy. Increasing interfaith dialogues and moves for inter-cultural understanding are matched by uncertainty at rising intolerance within and between faith groups. The omission of faith in describing educational and gendered processes is seen to have implications for the effectiveness of policy and practice, as well as for stability, security and peace.

Observers note the strong influence of Arabic-speaking, Islamic core nations of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) on studies of Muslim women in non-Arab countries²⁹. They argue for regionally and locally inspired analyses of the situation of women in other places and of the implications of education for their lives. New qualitative research would reconfirm the diversity of interpretations of Islam and Muslim cultures and examine their adaptation in different places. It might compare learning in the range of secular and Islamic institutions, with more and less integrated curricula and their implications for achievement recognition.

²⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *The Commonwealth plan of action for gender equality 2005-2015*, London, Marlborough House.

²⁹ Offenauer, *Ibid.*

Whatever the positions espoused by individuals at the CEC meeting, in respect of the situations in which Muslim women find themselves, there was agreement that a range of background factors must be taken into account in studies of the relations between Muslim women, Islam and education. Those mentioned include:

- differentiating religion and culture; moving beyond cliché and stereotype
- accounting for the history and diversity of Muslim populations
- acknowledging the range of Muslim women's experiences, identities, situations and voices
- comparing the implications of global and local influences on Muslim women's lives
- examining the inter-play between patriarchy, power and faith on Muslim women's lives
- explaining the impact of wealth and poverty
- according value to education in different sectors of Muslim societies

Additional factors inferred in the preceding pages and elsewhere, include: government constitutional positions; the sizes and proportions of Muslims in different populations; their social homogeneity, levels of development and poverty; the incidence of female-headed households; privatisation; the prevalence of HIV/Aids and patterns of conflict.

8. Gender, development and education in the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth prioritises gender in its policies, particularly in respect of parity in education, set as a target of Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goal (MDG) agendas³⁰. By 2004, there were still 27 million Commonwealth children not in school, a third of the world total, nearly two thirds of them girls. Most non-enrollers (85 per cent) were in Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Pakistan, all countries with sizeable Muslim populations. By 2006 improvements were noted at primary level in some of these countries, notably India, Kenya and Mozambique³¹, but their sustainability is not known.

By 2004, gender disparities (favouring boys and men) remained visible in combined enrolment measures for primary, secondary and tertiary levels. They were minor in Australia, Canada and the UK, but increased as HDI scores dropped. At primary levels, things looked better. Twenty seven member states had achieved enrolment parity, a number predating the 1990 start of the EFA movement. Some have reduced disparities since the millennium (e.g. India and Nigeria), although they remain large. Others report boys less likely to be enrolled than girls (Bangladesh, Ghana and the Gambia), while in 10 countries the proportion of girls is declining, with lowest downward ratio in Pakistan. Similarly complex patterns are noted at post-primary and tertiary levels (see Part 2, 10). Straddling high to low levels of development, with very small and large populations, member states with predominantly Muslim populations that have reached gender parity at primary levels include Brunei Darussalam, the Maldives and Malaysia³².

³⁰ Packer and Aggio. Ibid.

³¹ Packer and Aggio. Ibid.

³² Packer and Aggio. Ibid.

Part 2

COMMONWEALTH EXPERIENCES

9. Linking presentations and discussions to wider contexts

Part 2 builds on issues raised in Part 1. It uses a combination of speaker texts, *rapporteur* reports and supplementary information to create a comparative narrative about the situation of Muslim women and girls in selected member states, with more and less significant Muslim populations.

The section begins with a statistical report on progress to gender parity in education in Commonwealth states, which have more than a million Muslims. It goes on to elaborate the situation in new Commonwealth countries of Asia and Africa. It draws brief attention to the situation of Muslim women in Malta, where the CPF initiated the Commonwealth interfaith dialogue in 2005. In Western Europe, reference is primarily to post-industrial Britain, tapping into old Commonwealth experiences. For comparative purposes China is included as a non-Commonwealth state in Asia, with a large Muslim population comprising only a small proportion of the total.

10. Mapping Islam in the Commonwealth

The following paragraphs in section 14 reproduce John Oxenham's presentation to the conference. They review the presence of Muslims in member states of the Commonwealth. Drawing on UN statistics it maps educational performance in those with sizeable Muslim populations. Oxenham explores the extent to which it is faith or other influences which affect the enrolment and achievement of girls in Muslim communities. He notes the implications of social exclusion, cultural heterogeneity and secularisation for access and performance.

Oxenham notes that about one third of the peoples of the Commonwealth are Muslim and number in the region of 600 million persons. In most of the 53 countries, they form minorities, but three countries (Pakistan, Bangladesh and The Gambia), are almost entirely Muslim. In four others (Nigeria, Malaysia, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania), Muslims constitute between nearly half and two-thirds of the populations. Nine more, most in Africa but including the UK, have Muslim populations of more than one million, while South Africa and Canada have Muslim groups that number close to one million. In four smaller countries, Fiji, Lesotho, Swaziland and Trinidad & Tobago, Muslims form between five and ten per cent of the population. The educational performance of the 16 member states with Muslim populations of more than one million is examined below. The following tables present what is known of a range of educational ratios in the 16 countries³³. The overall impression is that the ratios are independent of Islam as such and likely to be the result of educational policies and national income and investments and associated with ethnic and other social and economic indices.

The figures in Table 5 show that only two countries with large proportions of Muslims, Pakistan and Nigeria, have a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of less than 0.90 in primary schools,

³³ Unesco (2006) *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood care and education..EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) for 2007*, Oxford, OUP and Unesco

and in the case of Nigeria it is only just below 0.90. On the other hand, in Bangladesh and The Gambia, both with large majorities of Muslims, girls appear now to outnumber boys.

Table 4. Commonwealth Muslim populations of more than 1 million (2006)

(in millions, in descending order of magnitude)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Muslim population</i>	<i>Muslim %</i>
Pakistan	161.1	157.5	97.8
India	1122.2	154.5	13.8
Bangladesh	144.6	127.3	88
Nigeria	134.4	65.8	48.9
Tanzania	39.2	18.3	46.7
Malaysia	25.8	15.4	59.7
Ghana	22.6	9.9	43.8
Kenya	34.9	8	22.9
Uganda	29.7	4.3	14.5
Mozambique	20.2	3.9	19.3
Sierra Leone	5.8	3.3	56.9
Malawi	13.2	2.5	18.9
Zambia	11.9	1.7	14.3
Sri Lanka	18.9	1.5	7.9
The Gambia	1.6	1.5	93.8
UK	59.8	1.5	2.5
<i>TOTAL</i> <i>for 16 countries only</i>	1845.9	576.9	31.3

Sources: Unesco (2006)³⁴ and www.muslimpopulations.org.

It has not been possible in this paper to follow-up on comments in earlier sections of Part 1 about the situations of women in Muslim women and girls in countries where Muslims are a small minority, but attention is drawn to a wide-ranging study in India during 2005 and 2006³⁵ which has made it clear that Muslim minorities are being marginalised and disadvantaged by the dominant Hindu majority. Consistent with arguments outlined in Part 1, the *Sachar Report* refutes the idea that Islam itself has created this situation. Instead it shows how the worsening educational status of Indian Muslims and Muslim women in particular is due to national government failure to ensure that sub-national state authorities observe the egalitarian provisions of the constitution, which are applicable to all citizens. The report notes that Muslims with the wealth and education go on to educate their own children, both boys and girls, in high quality institutions.

³⁴ Unesco (2006) Ibid, [Table 1 data for populations in 2004 have been multiplied twice by the average total population growth rate 2000-2005]; www.muslimpopulation.com for Muslim populations.

³⁵ Government of India (2006) *Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India*, New Delhi, Prime Minister's High Level Committee, pp425 (Sachar Report) November, 2006 [47-86].

Table 5. Net Primary Enrolment Ratios (NPERs) and Gender Parity (GPI) (2004)

Country	Muslim	NPERs		GPI
	%	<i>f</i>	<i>m</i>	
Pakistan	97.8	56	76	0.73
India	13.8	87	92	0.94
Bangladesh	88	96	93	1.03
Nigeria	48.9	57	64	0.89
Tanzania	46.7	91	92	0.98
Malaysia	59.7	93	93	1.00
Ghana	43.8	65	65	0.99
Kenya	22.9	77	76	1.00
Uganda	14.5	117*	118*	1.00
Mozambique	19.3	67	75	0.90
Sierra Leone	56.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Malawi	18.9	98	93	1.05
Zambia	14.3	80	80	1.00
Sri Lanka	7.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
The Gambia	93.8	77	73	1.06
UK	2.5	99	99	1.00

*GER only

Source: Unesco (2006) Table 5. (note 34)

Table 6. Net Secondary Enrolment Ratios (NSERS) and Gender Parity (2004)

Country	Muslim	NSERS		GPI
	%	<i>f</i>	<i>m</i>	
Pakistan	97.8	23*	31*	0.73
India	13.8	43	54	0.80
Bangladesh	88	51	45	1.11
Nigeria	48.9	25	30	0.82
Tanzania	46.7	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Malaysia	59.7	81	71	1.14
Ghana	43.8	35	39	0.90
Kenya	22.9	40	40	1.01
Uganda	14.5	12	14	0.87
Mozambique	19.3	4	5	0.78
Sierra Leone	56.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Malawi	18.9	23	27	0.86
Zambia	14.3	21	27	0.78
Sri Lanka	7.9	83	82	1.00
The Gambia	93.8	41	49	0.83
UK	2.5	97	93	1.03

*GER only

Source: Unesco (2006) Table 8. (note 34)

Table 7. Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratios (GTERs) and Gender Parity (2004)

Country	Muslim	GTERs		GPI
	%	<i>f</i>	<i>m</i>	
Pakistan	97.8	4.0	3.0	0.80
India	13.8	9.0	14.0	0.66
Bangladesh	88.0	4.0	9.0	0.50
Nigeria	48.9	7.0	13.0	0.55
Tanzania	46.7	0.7	1.7	0.41
Malaysia	59.7	38.0	27.0	1.41
Ghana	43.8	2.0	4.0	0.48
Kenya	22.9	4.0	2.0	0.60
Uganda	14.5	3.0	4.0	0.62
Mozambique	19.3	0.7	1.6	0.46
Sierra Leone	56.9	3.0	1.0	0.40
Malawi	18.9	0.3	0.5	0.54
Zambia	14.3	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Sri Lanka	7.9	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
The Gambia	93.8	0.5	1.9	0.23
UK	2.5	70.0	51.0	1.37

Source: Unesco (2006) Table 9 (note 34).

The above experience of minority Muslims in India supports findings of another recent study which sought to answer the question: *Why 60 million girls still aren't in school and what to do about it?*³⁶. The authors note that children and especially girls out of school the world over come disproportionately from ethnic, linguistic and cultural minority groups, whatever the religion to which they adhere.

During the CEC conference, it was stressed that efforts to provide equitable education and opportunity to women and girls must involve boys and men as well. The Commonwealth Secretariat has recently published a co-authored study of the participation and performance of boys in secondary schools in selected member states³⁷. While none has a significant Muslim population and there is no comment on faith, continuing research may explore such these issues.

A second point stressed at the Conference was described by Kelleher as 'the border where culture ends and religion begins'. While the idea resonates with Lockheed and Lewis (Footnote 23), they scarcely mention religion, beyond noting that in predominantly Christian and Muslim countries, the schooling of girls lags behind that of boys. This compares with predominantly Buddhist states, where gender parity seems easier to achieve. They do list culture as a factor in the treatment of girls, but see it as less important than other (e.g. economic) factors. They suggest that a significant positive influence on girls appears to be the homogeneity of a society. A stark comparison is drawn between Bangladesh and

³⁶ Lewis, M. A; Lockheed, M.E (2006) *Inexcusable Absence: Why 60 million girls still aren't in school and what to do about it*, Washington D.C, Center for Global Development.

³⁷ Jha, J; Kelleher, F. (2006) *Boys' underachievement in education: an exploration in selected Commonwealth Countries*, London, Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth of Learning.

Pakistan, both predominantly Muslim and both members of the Commonwealth. Bangladesh is relatively homogeneous in ethnic and linguistic composition and has made great strides in giving girls access to primary school. In 2004, the GPI for the Primary Net Intake Rate stood at 1.01 in favour of girls, with 97 per cent of them enrolled, against 96 per cent of the boys. Furthermore, the School Life Expectancy (SLE) of a girl was 9.3 years against 9.0 years for a boy, well beyond primary school levels in both cases. Pakistan in contrast comprises many different ethnic and linguistic groups between whom relations are often those of superordinates and subordinates, with some wielding more of the state's power than others. Subordinates have less schooling overall, especially among girls, so that in 2004 the GPI for the Net Primary Intake Rate stood at 0.76 in favour of boys, with 100 per cent of them enrolled, against only 76 per cent of the girls. The SLE was 7.1 years for a boy, against only 5.2 years for a girl. In other words, the social exclusion of whole groups of people seems to be a more powerful explanation for gender imparity in schools, even where the various groups share the same religion.

The situation of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes of India is analogous to this. Their subordination and exclusion moved the government of India, as far back as 1947 and independence to fashion special protections and provisions to promote their inclusion in mainstream society. Despite those early steps, the GPI has still not reached equality, but at 0.94 is pleasingly high, even if it remains slightly tilted in favour of boys. Similarly, the School Life Expectancy is 10.9 years for a boy, against 9.4 years for a girl. Despite the discrepancy, however, even girls in India can expect to progress beyond the former 5 year cycle of primary schooling and in some cases beyond the current 8 year cycle of basic schooling.

In all these cases, the inference is that patterns of social heterogeneity and exclusion should be examined before other influences on gender imparity, among them religion.

Referring to Kelleher, below, it is not unusual for member states to have aspects of culture in common, but adhere to different religions. Early marriage of girls may represent cultural practices predating a particular religion. Over time such practices are assimilated into the religion and histories of the two become confused. Where this occurs, there is a need to redress practices no longer acceptable, without threatening the tenets of the religion in which they have become embedded. This implies negotiation with women and men to find ways of ameliorating the practice without undermining the religion.

Experiences in three non-Commonwealth countries support this thesis. Turkey, Iraq and Yemen are socially heterogeneous, predominantly Muslim countries, where the leadership, itself Muslim, felt that local interpretations of Islam and their practices stood in the way of modernisation. Atatürk in Turkey, the Baathist party in Iraq and the Maoist revolution in Yemen all took steps rearrange their country's social order, secularising national government and separating it from religion. Now, decades later, the GPI stands at 0.96, 0.94 and 0.80 respectively for Turkey, Iraq and Yemen, which is generally high when compared with 0.94 for developing countries as a group. SLE is 12.0 for boys, 10.1 for girls in Turkey; 10.9 for boys, 8.2 years for girls in Iraq; 11.0 for boys, 6.5 for girls in Yemen, compared with 10.5 and 9.7 for developing countries taken together. It would seem that repositioning religion within secular states without a reduction of social heterogeneity and exclusion is unlikely to achieve the effects being observed in Bangladesh.

In contrast, the Shah's regime in Iran tried to enforce secular modernisation, but now an avowedly theocratic Islamic regime holds sway. Yet the country has achieved a GPI of 0.99 and a school life expectancy of 12.7 years for boys and 12.2 years for girls, well above the averages for developing countries as a group and indeed equivalent to Universal Secondary Education. It would appear that Islam, or religion *per se*, is not the limiting factor. Yet more support for this interpretation comes from a Commonwealth member state. Malaysia has a high proportion of Muslims, who were at one time a disadvantaged group. Deliberate affirmative action to reduce social and economic disparities has led to a GPI of 1.00 and the SLE for boys at 12.3 years is more than a year less than for girls, at 13.5 years.

Differences of wealth and income also explain the urban rich sending girls to school more than the rural poor. None of this has much to do with religion.

ASIA

11. Pakistan

Pakistan is a Declared Islamic State, with low human development and poor scores on gender and educational indices (See Table 3). With 154 million people, 97 per cent are Muslim, nearly all Sunni. About 2 per cent are Shia. Small non-Muslim groups include Hindus, Christians, Qadianis and a few Parsis (Zoroastrians). A third of the population lives in towns. There are marked discrepancies along class and caste lines, differentiating city-based minority elites from the low caste majority dependent on the land for subsistence. Remote rural areas are least likely to identify with either State or Islamic law, living under customary rules set by tribal elders.

Women play a productive role in Pakistan's economy in a myriad ways, but their contributions are not always reported³⁸. For two decades, survey estimates of economically active women have fluctuated so wildly, as to be unreliable. Referring only to wage labour, they do not measure the unpaid contributions made by Muslim women as a matter of course throughout their lives, ignoring their input to agriculture and livestock production. Many women engage in home-based piece work, which however badly paid, may be a source of pride, enabling them to contribute to household finance. Informal sector work is significant but not recognised.

Difficulties encountered by Pakistani women and girls are well-documented³⁹. There is strong son preference and frequent peri-natal death of daughters and mothers. Women constitute 48.5 per cent of the national population. From childhood, many girls are restricted, particularly in poor communities, to protect marriage prospects that will in time enhance the family. From an early age, girls may be degraded by fathers, brothers and husbands, even used as currency in interfamilial deals. Distressed women may have nowhere to turn, as mothers, sisters and friends collude in their abuse to protect themselves. *Shari'ah* laws penalise women associated with charges of rape, adultery and other marital relations, whether they are accused or bringing charges themselves. The Hudood Ordinances, adopted

³⁸ Johnson Lewis, J (2001) *Pakistan: Status of Women & the Women's Movement*, **Encyclopedia of Women's History**, http://womenshistory.about.com/library/ency/blwh_pakistan_women.htm [From Library of Congress *Pakistan: a Country Study*, Federal Research Division.]

³⁹ Weiss, A (1998) *The Slow yet steady path to women's empowerment in Pakistan*, in Y.Y. Haddad and J.L. Esposito (Eds.) **Islam, Gender and Social Change**, Oxford, OUP.

in 1979, made it nearly impossible for women to prove rape and those who tried risked prosecution and jail for bringing false charges. For many years, nearly all women in jail have been indicted for these reasons.

Women's groups have been active in Pakistan since shortly after independence, with increasing numbers promoting women's rights. The Shirkat Gah centre for participation was formed in 1975, followed in 1981 by the umbrella group, Women's Action Forum⁴⁰. With other groups, they played key roles in annulling the Ordinances (2006) and introducing a Women's Protection law⁴¹. Priorities continue to include securing women's political representation and raising the awareness of women and the wider public about women's rightful place in the family and the community.

Pakistan ranks 89 out of 94 countries on the Education Development Index (EDI). There are limited educational opportunities for the majority of women and girls, although schooling is compulsory from the age of 5. Distinguished NGOs, notably the Aga Khan Foundation, are working to improve educational opportunities for girls, boys and adults as well. There is significant disparity in favour of boys, even at the pre-primary school level (GPI at 0.74)⁴², and girls' primary entry is 72 per cent of that of boys (GPI values at around 0.75)⁴³. The gap narrows by to 85.5 per cent at secondary level, but still compares poorly with Bangladesh, where secondary GPI rose from 0.52 to 1.05, placing girls ahead of boys, a reversal on the previous period⁴⁴.

Gendered educational disparities arise from the lack of investment and insufficient schools, familiar in low income states. Enrolment may be staggered, with girls schooling curtailed, especially in poor rural families. They enter late and are withdrawn around puberty to protect them from sully family honour. Parents prefer single-sex schools, especially for daughters, for whom female teachers are also desired, but the doubling of single sex schools, 1988-1998, is said to have been at a ratio of 2:1 in favour of boys⁴⁵.

As in non-Muslim states with limited resources, women teachers are reluctant to take rural postings on grounds of safety, reduced career prospects and isolation. Increasing private schooling however modest is too expensive for most families. There are concerns with quality and the official recognition of what they teach. Child labour reduces demand for schooling and attainment, with many combining school and work, most often in family enterprises. Out-of-school girls in rural areas are likely to work the land. Boys are less likely to be in paid work, with those who are employed unlikely to be in farming⁴⁶. With such poor performance in school, Pakistan's literacy levels are among the lowest in the world. About

⁴⁰ Shirkat Gah, <http://www.shirkatgah.org/>; Johnson Lewis, J (2001) Ibid.

⁴¹ Zahra, S (2007) *Women in Pakistan. Victims of the social and economic desecration* (March) http://www.marxist.com/Asia/women_in_pakistan.html.

Quraishi, A (1997) Her Honor: An Islamic Critique of the Rape Laws of Pakistan from a Woman-Sensitive Perspective, *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Vol. 18, No. 2.

⁴² Unesco (2003) *Gender and education for all: the leap to equality, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*, Oxford, OUP.

⁴³ Figures were not available for all countries. Afghanistan is one notable example. Existing data would suggest that Afghanistan's GPI for education would be among the lowest.

⁴⁴ Unesco (2006) *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ Mahmood (1997) cited in Unesco (2003) *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ Bhalotra, Sonia (2007) *Is child work necessary?* *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 69, 1, 29-56.

half the adult population has basic skills and above, only one third of them women. A larger proportion of older than younger people lacks basic skills.

Despite the statistics there has been change affecting the expectations of girls and women from poorer families. The availability of running water, gas connections for cooking, the influence of the media, and increased access to basic education for younger women are lightening women's work load, raising aspirations and changing the pattern of family relationships⁴⁷.

Fig 4. Shaheen Sardar Ali at the CEC conference



Source: Kees Maxey (CEC)

Women are being encouraged to study beyond basic schooling, with education increasingly viewed as an investment in future security. Increasing numbers are entering secondary and tertiary institutions and making professional careers in all walks of life. They include renowned artists, academics, architects, doctors and politicians⁴⁸. Benazir Bhutto, twice prime minister, was a stellar example of the possibilities for well-educated women from high class families, regardless of the battles with men opposing her and her inability to repeal laws which discriminate against women.

⁴⁷ Weiss (1998) Ibid.

⁴⁸ For examples see: <http://www.jazbah.org/profiles.php>

Box 2. The only way forward! Education as empowerment: Experiences from the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, by Shaheen Sardar Ali, University of Warwick [Rapporteur notes: Lalage Bown (CEC)]

Shaheen Sardar Ali approached her theme with liveliness and an astonishingly wide perspective. The audience could not doubt her commitment to her faith and gender equality, or her legal knowledge and political experience. She emphasised the importance of education in women's empowerment and in their negotiating multiple identities, as daughters, mothers and spouses, teachers and workers. Her starting point was the paradox of the lack of access of many Muslim women to education, when education is the bedrock of Islam, starting from the Prophet's injunction to READ.

For Sardar Ali, it is wrong to accept stereotypes of Islam which construct women as subjugated and inferior. Islam is not monolithic. The present-day reasons for restricting women's education in some communities are not in accordance with theological discourse, inspired by political, cultural, social and class factors. Keeping half a population (women) out of the frame, as has happened in Pakistan, makes it easy for authoritarian regimes to keep control. Establishment Islam derived from Arab culture and customs in the society in which Islam first emerged. From the early days, it has been challenged by women demanding rights to which in the Qur'an they were entitled.

Sardar Ali presented illustrations of how down the centuries gender has been an issue confronting Establishment Islam. The first involved the Prophet's daughter. After his death in 632 she expected her share of his children's inheritance to be in accordance with provisions made by her father. The grounds for the claim were declared invalid by the patriarchs and her rights were denied. This distortion of the Qur'an has contaminated Islamic law ever since.

The second vignette points to how in Islamic history there has been a tendency to write women out of the script, making invisible their achievements. In 656CE, the first civil war of Islam saw a collision between the Caliphate and rebel Arabs, following the appointment of the fourth Caliph, Ali. Aisha, Muhammed's favourite wife, led the rebel Arab army into the Battle of Bassorah (Basra), apparently directing the fight from a howdah on the back of a camel. The engagement became known as the Battle of the Camel, hiding the name which would have revealed as woman the commander of one of the armies.

A third example challenges the Taliban obstruction of women's access to education in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province (NWFP) since 1996, on the grounds that it is contrary to Pashtun culture which values women's equality with men, in education and other areas of life. During the 2nd Anglo-Afghan war, the strength and leadership of Pashtun women became legendary from the beginning of the final battle which took place in July 1880, at Maiwand. With the British on the point of victory, Malalai (a village woman supporting the Afghan army) raised her veil as a banner to rally the men in disarray. When an Afghan flag bearer was killed, she seized it, leading the army forward, until the Afghans routed the invading forces. Pashtun women remember the story, knowing that if the need arises, there will be another Malalai. As a constant reminder, many girls bear her name⁴⁹.

Today, there is a degree of confusion about education in Pakistan. In NWFP which borders Afghanistan, there is *de facto* Taliban autonomy, which restricts girl's education. Elsewhere in Pakistan, various levels of provision are made for girls and, anecdotally, men have been heard to express pride in the schools for girls in their area. In an example from the north, a 70 year old man takes visitors to his local school. He is proud that for more than 100 years it has offered education to girls and boys equally. A much younger man sits on a horse nearby, a radio blaring modern music held to his ear, urging the villagers not to send girls to school.

Sardar Ali talked about how difficult it has been for women to publish work on women's rights in Pakistan. One of her own articles was first accused of inciting invasion from across the border and then used as a pretext to stop people sending girls to school. Today it is a standard text on university reading lists in many countries.

Finally, there are always questions. Sardar Ali asks:

- How do you produce insurgents like myself, if in the name of Islam girls' schools are endangered?
- Why do people back off the moment I start reciting what the Qur'an says about education?
- Why may text from the Qur'an not be used to protect the interests of women?

One explanation lies in the low levels of literacy of the men in positions of power. This is not only in Pakistan, but in many countries. To address such issues, confronting men head on will not work. For women to be strong catalysts in achieving change, it is imperative that they act from within Islamic traditions, to reaffirm the centrality of education in Islam and the empowering possibilities consequent upon the Prophet's exhortation: READ!

⁴⁹ Ewing, Garen (2007) The Second Anglo-Afghan War 1878-1880, www.garenewing.co.uk/angloafghanwar

Whatever the reported fragility of Pakistan's middle classes⁵⁰, such transformations are influencing the ability of women to negotiate for authority and mobility within their families and beyond. With university qualifications, sometimes from Muslim institutions, they are increasingly visible in the public domain. It is suggested that Pakistani women are better treated than previously and better than most Muslim women elsewhere, including those in the Arab-speaking countries. They admit that, for the majority, their situation vis-à-vis men, remains one of systemic subordination.

At the CEC conference, the keynote address by Shaheen Sardar Ali, presented education as crucial to women's empowerment in Pakistan, based on her experiences in NWFP (See Box 2). Sardar Ali pointed to the importance of understanding how history shapes the present, in order to plan strategy for change. Highlighting inherited pre-Islamic patriarchy as the force which denied rights and status to Muslim women, Sardar Ali argues that change to empower women has to be within Muslim and Islamic frameworks, with women at all levels of society the principal agents in bringing it about.

12. India

Most of this section is taken from the conference presentation by Kasturi Sen, *Muslim women and Muslim communities in India*. Where the editors have used other sources to supplement Sen's text, these are cited.

India has 1,087 million people and 12 percent (138.2m) are Muslim, 68 million of them are women. About a quarter of the populations of Kerala and Bengal are Muslim, with sometimes very small proportions in other states. Indian Muslims are mainly Sunni and 10-15 per cent is Shia with each group following a number of distinctive legal codes. Muslims are members of 350 ethno-linguistic groups and most live in northern states. All are conscious of complex identities and inter-group differences, and how these differentiate their approaches to Islam. There are major differences between Muslims and members of other Indian faith groups, with historical tensions between Muslims and Hindus.

Although most Muslim women in India have suffered significant disadvantage over time, they have included significant leaders in the past and more recently. They include the learned Razia Sultana of India who came to power as regent in 1234 CE⁵¹, Sakandar Begum and her daughter who were political leaders of Bhopal in the last half of the 19th century. Begum Shah Nawaz who died in 1979 aged 80 was a lifelong member and activist of the Muslim League, daughter of its famous Leader Muhammad Shafi.

Since independence, there have been periods (1950s-60s) when Muslim communities have reduced the stringency of adherence to *shari'ah* law, to a degree reconciling Muslim and Hindu customs. Creating something of an India-wide culture, this belied the notion that life in India's Muslim communities and women's position within them was solely defined

⁵⁰ Rashid, Abbas (2004) *Reviewing the state of the middle class*; **Daily Times**, 14 August.

⁵¹ Reese, Lyn (1995) *Sultana Razia*, in Ruth Ashby and Deborah Gore Ohrn (eds.) **Her story: Women Who Changed the World**, London, Viking, 34-36.

by Qur'anic interpretations⁵². Kazi reminds us that not only were the property rights accorded women in classical Islam rarely respected in the post partition blending of Hindu and Muslim cultures, it saw Muslim communities in some states (e.g. Bihar and Kerala) imposing Hindu dowry practices and other marriage rituals demeaning to women. With exceptions, Muslim women in India of whatever social status are disadvantaged in relation to men in their own communities and in respect of women of equivalent social status in other ethno-religious groups.

From the mid-1970s a number of forces have seen systematically unravelling commitments to a secular, pluralistic, multi-cultural India. They have worked to marginalise India's Muslims without regard for the profound differences between them, with frequently appalling implications, particularly for women.

For Kasturi Sen, the period began with the transition to neo-liberal economic management and the unprecedented increase in poverty in India, particularly in Muslim communities. The Sachar Report⁵³ on the Status of Muslims sent shock waves through India's liberal communities, many of them dazzled by India's miracle growth, if blind to her violence against the poor (land-grabbing and expulsions) often associated with policies introduced in their name. Sachar highlights widespread structural discrimination against Muslims (in employment, education, housing, health care and access to credit among others) endorsed by the combined forces of virulent Hindu nationalism and India's internationally acclaimed success in its economic policies. Another dimension is the global war on terror to which India together with Pakistan have been enthusiastic signatories. The main ideological weapon of the reactionary Hinduvta groups (religious fascists) has been that Muslims in India are socially and politically 'anti national' as well as terrorists participating in a 'global plot' to overthrow the rest of the civilised world. Ideally, they should either undertake a loyalty test to India or be deported to Pakistan, where their true loyalties supposedly lie. This anti Muslim Hinduvta attitude was the underlying reason for the massacre of more than 3000 Muslims in the state of Gujarat in 2001. Racist attitudes against Muslims are not restricted to the Indian subcontinent, but they are having a devastating effect on the Indian Muslim community and in particular, on women in the front line of the onslaught. Sachar catalogues glaring discrimination in India and the exclusion of the Muslim community from the economic miracle, ironically dubbed as the 'Hindu growth rate'. A major Sachar contention was that at 60 years after independence, the country had systematically failed (except in token cases) to ensure participation in governance for its largest minority group. As a result poor Muslim women remain the least visible and represent a major failing of the hopes of a democratic and pluralist society at the time of independence.

All this has created a ghettoised Muslim community, desperate for jobs, education and health care and the preservation of a way of life to which they are entitled in a so-called democracy. Without other recourse, they look to their own capacities and turn to

⁵² Kazi, Seema (1999) *Muslim women and ideas of gender in British India*, London, Minority Rights Group International, pp40.

⁵³ Government of India (Ibid) [Throughout, Sachar reports on the situation of women, but this came about only after Muslim women's groups had realised that not one woman was appointed to the Commission and not one meeting with women was planned as the Commission toured the different parts of the country to collect its data].

community elders, in a retreat to the past. This has increased the power of the reactionary Jamaat Islami al Hind to represent Indian Muslims. They argue the case for the reinstatement of Muslim personal law, prioritising restrictions in marriage, divorce and education for women, promoting *madrassas* rather than state school education for children and a severe curtailment on the freedom of movement of women outside the domestic sphere.

Falling into dual patriarchal cultures (Hindu and Muslim) and prey to negative effects of a global economy, Indian Muslims continue to fight to better their lives, most notably, through education, with schooling for children valued highly. Recent research comparing Muslim communities in several states shows Muslim literacy to be rising, although about 25 percent of Muslim children have never been to school and, among those who do enrol; there are higher levels of dropout than among non-Muslims. In Bihar, one of the poorest states, Muslims were enthusiastic about educating girls at secondary levels, but despite high levels of initial enrolment, dropout was high, either because of fear and insecurity during communal strife, or for lack of Urdu as the medium of instruction in high schools. Similarly in Maharashtra, primary enrolment was problematic for lack of Urdu medium teaching.

The first ever comparative study of 10,000 Muslim and Hindu women in India⁵⁴ examined the social and economic status of Muslim women in India and the roots of their disadvantage. It suggests that the stereotyping of communities may be a precondition for discrimination, by fixing identities in rigidified social and cultural realities. Economically, Muslim women are disproportionately represented among the poor. They have the lowest per capita incomes of any group in India, related to their lack of assets, poor education and employment in unremunerated family business and/or badly paid in the informal sector. These situations lead to segregation and ghettoisation. The study concludes that it is the aggregate economic differentiation between Hindu and Muslim women in an area that influences all other aspects of their lives, refuting categorically that religion is the major deterrent to the education of girls.

The study found lower levels of literacy among Muslim women than among their Hindu counterparts with the same background in the same location confirming economic poverty rather than religion as the main deterrent to progress. This was true across all communities and caste groups. It notes a pervasive demand on the part of even the poorest Muslim women for secular education. It highlights the fact that when public provision is destroyed, as it has been in India over the past two decades, the poor (among whom Muslims are disproportionately represented), who suffer most and find themselves forced to retreat into the world of reinvented traditions. There are regions where Muslim women fare better (as in the south), but this is almost entirely attributable to state-wide patterns of asset and resource distribution. The study also illustrates that the status of Muslim women worsens in the face of very low levels of education among Muslim men. They impose stricter controls on the lives of women and on the education of girls, so as not to render them unmarriageable.

The future development of education for Muslim women must be in the light of understanding the depths and complexity of the obstacles they face and their diversity in

⁵⁴ Hasan Z; Menon R (2004) *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India*. New Delhi, OUP.

the different regions of the world, not least in South Asia. It must heed the significance of the powerful histories of the women's struggle, the gains made and the complex socio-political systems they inhabit. In addition there is need to consider the effect upon the lives of women, of the current and pernicious world order, without stereotyping Islam as a generic category.

13. Malaysia

Brief reference was made to Malaysia at the CEC conference, but its importance should be acknowledged in this report. Malaysia has achieved so much in the last 50 years (See below Part 2, 14), politically and economically, and it will be host to CCEM in 2009. Long seen as the model for an outward-looking, predominantly Muslim nation, the federal state, mosques and individuals are now engaged in struggles which may threaten its success, with some women increasingly vulnerable.

Malaysia has a multi-ethnic population of 25 million, dominated by Malays and indigenous groups, followed by Chinese and Indians. The majority lives in towns. Malaysia falls just within the group of states with high levels of human development (HDI 61), well below neighbouring Singapore (HDI 25) and Brunei Darussalam (HDI 34)⁵⁵. Following the tiger economies of the 1970s, Malaysia is the only large new Commonwealth nation to have achieved and sustained this level of well-being and the only predominantly Muslim state to have done so, outside the oil rich Middle East.

From the mid 1970s to the Millennium, Malaysia endorsed UN policies and introduced a range of its own to promote the equality of women, with implementation backed by federal law⁵⁶. By the late 1980s, women were making important contributions to growth in Malaysia's industrial economy, at rates of labour market participation similar to those in the post-industrial world. Today, women represent half the Malaysian workforce and are evident in most walks of professional and public life. Many belong as a matter of course to professional and community organisations. For some time, the enrolment of girls/women at primary, secondary and tertiary levels has surpassed that of boys.

Malaysia's ability to sustain these achievements may be in doubt. This is not for recognising that jobs held by women have in the main been of lower status than those held by men or that internal differences within education at different levels prepared women for less advantageous positions within professional arenas⁵⁷. It is related to how radical Islam is challenging the fabric of the secular state, weakening the status of women within it.

⁵⁵ Statistics in this section come from UNDP (2007) *Human Development Report*, New York., OUP.

⁵⁶ Women's Aid Organisation (2001) *Women's equality in Malaysia: Status Report*, Selangor Darul Ehsan. <http://www.wao.org.my/aboutus.htm>

⁵⁷ England, Vaudine (2005) *Malaysia struggles with Islamic path*, International Herald Tribune, 13 May.

Fig 5 Malaysian Language Students



Source: British Council Malaysia⁵⁸

Malaysia is a federation of thirteen states in SE Asia. Government is by federal and state legislatures. At independence, the Chinese minority represented the educated elite and dominated the economy and is still the largest middle class group. Measures to restore status to the majority Malay population were introduced in the 1970s and 1980s. This saw the revitalisation of Islam, to the extent that Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed declared Malaysia an Islamic state (2001) with a two thirds majority in Parliament. Yet to be constitutionally ratified, Malaysia remains a secular state, with Islam the official religion.

The public has gradually come to question the implications of ruling party acceptance of conservative Islamist reforms, but although Prime Minister, Badawi declares Malaysia to be a moderate Islamic country, with government and religious leaders sharing power and respecting non-Muslims, others are less sure⁵⁹. There is disquiet at government inability to contain extremism and the way it is played out in inter-party rivalry in parliament, between the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the dominant party in the ruling coalition government, and the increasingly powerful voice of political Islam, the Parti Islam Se Malaysia (PAS)⁶⁰.

Since 2001, a separation of powers has meant a secular federal authority and Islamic legislatures at sub-national state levels, with the one not permitted to rule on matters under the jurisdiction of the other. With the *shari'ah* representing the interests of Muslims (who include all Malays), there is a gap in legislative provision for adherents of other faiths (10 million) when their complaints fall in *shari'ah* domains (in matters relating to marriage, inheritance and punishment for local crime, or when adherents want to change faith). With Islamisation, issues such as these have become major concerns for Malaysian women of any faith, threatening human rights and presumed entitlements to equality with men on all issues. Nowadays, it is anti-Islamic and illegal for non-clerics to question matters of faith and women have lost the right to act as witnesses in law. Two

⁵⁸ <http://www.britishcouncil.org/ru/east-asia>

⁵⁹ England, Ibid.

⁶⁰ Anwar, Zainah (2004) *Islamisation and its impact on laws and the law-making process in Malaysia*, in *Women Living Under Muslim Law*, December, 71-77. <http://www.wluml.org/>

states under the administration of the Parti Islam Se (PAS) have introduced *hudud* ordinances and recognised *zina*⁶¹ as a crime (now abolished in Pakistan), along with other measures which regulate women's behaviour⁶². As in Pakistan and Nigeria, a number of *shari'ah* court cases are pending in which women are testing their civil rights, in respect of this legislation, with wide publicity in Malaysia and internationally. It has taken time for these tensions to become visible across Malaysia and outside, in part because of the separation in daily life of secular and Islamist groups in the different states. They now feature significantly in the Malaysian and international press⁶³.

Education in *madrassas* pre-dated colonial schooling in Malaysia. They continue in remote areas as the principal source of learning, but elsewhere Islamic schools with a broader curriculum offer the history of Islam, Arabic language and *fiqh*⁶⁴. In some states, children are required to attend both Islamic schools and those offering a modern curriculum, although there is no official recognition of achievements in Muslim learning. In terms of enrolment in recognised primary programmes, Malaysia is likely to reach parity between girls and boys by 2015. At secondary levels, girls have already surpassed boys. The extent to which high levels of classroom level IT provision has contributed to this is difficult to assess.

There are reports of international disquiet at the conservative interpretations of Islam that are being encouraged in Malaysian institutions, particularly at tertiary levels, to the effect that they compare adversely with equivalent provision in other states⁶⁵. Particular concern is with how they encourage the formation of Islamist cadres, reinforced by what is for some the racial segregation of Muslim schools, with children of Chinese and Hindu families taught separately from Muslim Malays. Radical demands for excluding non-Muslims from national examinations have not as yet been heeded.

Malaysian women's movements (along with other organisations) espouse many causes. Many have become politically active in women's affairs, supporting women caught up in complex *shari'ah* processes, alerting the country as whole as to how Islamisation might affect women's lives and in some cases defending gay and lesbian rights. SIS and other groups are working to a carefully planned campaign, supported by key politicians and academics in Malaysia and beyond. They acknowledge the warmth of popular support they are receiving, from men as much as from women⁶⁶, but against them, some devout women are resisting their cause as anti-Islamic, and some of those more secularly inclined refute the implications of changes taking place.

Meanwhile there are reports that: more and more women are covering up and wearing head scarves; fewer men are shaking a woman's hand; there are more calls to prayer; more examples of women not being allowed into government departments without appropriate clothes; men are entering polygamous relationships, while women may not

⁶¹ Extra-marital relations.

⁶² Anwar, Ibid.

⁶³ Anwar, Ibid.

⁶⁴ Fiqh is Islamic jurisprudence. It is an expansion of Islamic law, complemented by the rulings of Islamic jurists to direct the lives of Muslims

⁶⁵ Anwar Ibid.

⁶⁶ Murat, Nora (2004) *Sisters in Islam: advocacy for change within the religious framework*, Women Living under Muslim Laws, 141-145. <http://www.wluml.org/english/>

sue for divorce. Educationally, it is difficult to see what will happen. For secularists the issue is to what extent the state should intervene and when⁶⁷. Having removed gender disparities in education and work twenty years ago, through political will and affirmative action (Part 2, 10) there is concern that they will reappear⁶⁸

14. China

Most of the paragraphs that follow on the educational experiences of Muslim women in China were prepared by Maria Jaschok for her presentation at the CEC conference.

Since 1978, Chinese Muslims have had more freedom. Mosques have been rebuilt, the Qur'an is read, the study of Islam is permitted and a small number of Chinese-Arabic Schools have opened, run by Muslims. Three per cent of China's population is Muslim. Amounting to between 18 and 25 millions, they belong to 10 ethnic minorities scattered across the country and concentrated in small groups. Many are in remote rural areas and lack basic needs. Access to education is a problem and its poor quality is contributing to delinquency in young people, even imprisonment. There are 30,000 mosques and 42,000 imams (mullahs). Most are Sunni, following Hanafiyah doctrine and *shari'ah* as law. With limited local resources and weak leadership, there is doubt in the Chinese Muslim community at its ability to keep pace with global change and they feel poorly supported by the wider Muslim world.

Maria Jaschok asked how her work on Islam and gender in China might compare with equivalent research in the Commonwealth⁶⁹. Like Shaheen Sardar Ali, her starting point was that there is no single construct of the Muslim or the Muslim woman. Gender, class, ethnicity, age, education and geography all contribute to religion. Together they represent dynamic and multi-faceted Muslim identities⁷⁰. Jaschok noted many similarities between her observations in China and those being drawn from experiences in the Commonwealth, at the CEC conference. She also identified elements unique to China.

She described Chinese State management of ethno-religious minorities and religious education, before profiling women's mosques in Muslim communities of Central China. Her approach embedded education within a gendered political culture, where women negotiate for voice and representation, as they confront the patriarchal interests of State, Party and Islamic institutions. Presenting education as a tool of empowerment for women, she asks who controls the curriculum, appoints teachers and frames the educational culture. Only with this knowledge, does it become possible to redress

⁶⁷ England, Ibid.

⁶⁸ Anwar, Zainah (2004) Ibid.

⁶⁹ See Jaschok, M and Shui J.J (2000) *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam*, Curzon. Jaschok was also on current work for the DFID Research Consortium *Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts*.

⁷⁰ Estimates of the Muslim population in China vary from about 25-40 million. Its great diversity is constituted by varied settlement patterns (from 'closed' communities to wide dispersal), by its spectrum of ethno-religious, socio-economic and political constellations. Among the ten ethnic minorities in China- (Uyghur, Kazak, Salars, Yirghiz, Uzbek, Tatar, Tajik, Dongxiang & Bao'an, Hui), Hui Muslims, dispersed over all of China, constitute more than half of the entire Muslim population; the Dongxiang Muslims, to be found in northwest China (Gansu), are counted among the poorest.

constraints on women's ability to achieve educational ambitions, in the face of a totalitarian Party/State and weakening provision of education at local levels.

All Chinese, including members of minority populations, enjoy the right to education. The Law of Nine-Year Compulsory Education (1986) stipulates six years of primary and three years of middle or lower secondary schooling. Three enduring problems (poverty, tradition and lack of political will) are compounded by prejudice. They restrict and inhibit the access of girls and women to what are usually excellent educational provision and entitlements, across the nation and enshrined in law.

More than 30 million Chinese live in poverty, most in the western provinces, home to China's Muslim population. Muslims have the lowest levels of literacy among the young and adults in their middle years. Most of those lacking basic skills are girls and women⁷¹, with gender discrimination the most important barrier to girls' learning. An enduring preference for sons is reflected in the uneven allocation of family resources to education. Parents' concerns over safety and security in and around schools make them reluctant for daughters to attend. State (secular) schools are perceived as male domains and Muslim parents are unwilling to expose daughters to danger, imagined and real. This distrust is reinforced by the lack of suitable female teachers and inappropriate, dilapidated facilities. The inability of schools to allow girls to observe Muslim codes of purity, propriety and cleanliness, through failure to provide water and separate lavatories, is a significant deterrent. The result is widespread resistance on the part of conservative parents to permit Muslim daughters to enter secular co-educational schools. Lack of political will is apparent in the weak implementation of laws of education, leaving girls particularly disadvantaged. Compulsory free education policies may not be enacted at local levels. Rather they are contravened or bypassed by other local authority statutes. Local leaders, religious and secular, are accused of lingering feudal mindsets when it comes to creating opportunities for female education.

China is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1998), endorsing individual freedom in respect of religious practice. In 2005, Regulations on Religious Affairs were issued, underlining the right of Chinese citizens to freedom of religious belief, but they stipulate that actions to implement the Regulations must first serve to protect China's political *status quo*, by:

- safeguarding the stability of the country,
- ensuring that religious groups eschew foreign domination
- conforming to comprehensive controls set by the Department of Religious Affairs, affecting all aspects of religious life.

The Chinese State forbids religious content in public sector education. The emergence of increasing numbers of private/religious schools is testimony to the decentralised reform of China's educational system. It reasserts belief and identity as key parameters, in this case of diverse Muslim populations, with new local educational strategies being pursued by Muslim leaders⁷².

⁷¹ See UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah (Beijing Nov. 05) presenting REPORT on 'Gender Achievements and Progress in Education' (GAP).

⁷² Rights enshrined in the Chinese Constitution and in the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy, include independence of finance, independence of economic planning,

The mosaic of formal education in China is dominated by state-controlled, public sector schools. In the remote Muslim Dongxiang and Baoan communities, the schools are poorly furnished, poorly staffed and seen as irrelevant to Muslim girls. A largely alienated Muslim community views such schools with detachment and little faith. Traditionally, mosques have provided religious instruction for children and adults, often incorporating secular content. Today they are allowed to run schools, except in Xinjiang Province in western China where strict control of Muslim communities persists. Mosque-based schools teach in the Islamic tradition of *jingtang jiaoyu*, a religious education infused with the wisdom of generations of Chinese religious scholars and *ahong*, other religious practitioners, often Imams. Such education is highly gendered. Men's mosques cater to the religious needs of boys and men. Girls are instructed in rudimentary religious knowledge by female relatives at home, in particularly in the conservative areas of Dongxiang and Baoan Muslims. As in many low income states, girls' education falls victim to the inadequacy of unsafe public schooling on the one hand and to unsuitable provision in formal Islamic education on the other.

A different situation prevails in central China, where there is a history of women having their own sites for prayer and education, ultimately provided by independent mosques for women. For over 300 years, women's mosques (*qingzhen nüsi*), under the leadership of a female *ahong*, have supported the education of Muslim girls and women, offering the most female-centred and female-controlled educational environment in China. Here girls have been taught basic scriptural knowledge, and Persian and sometimes Arabic languages. Women receive ritual instruction and guidance for proper Muslim practice at home. Spiritual and emotional support is provided by the *ahong* to women who seek counsel. The curriculum reflects the long history of education in women's mosques, with teaching and texts steeped in the mutually reinforcing traditional ideals of Muslim women's virtue, inspired both by Confucianism and Islam.

Since the 1990s, private religious schools have flourished in Muslim communities, supported by Muslim leaders and believers. Fees are either waived or heavily subsidized by the community, regardless of whether the school is set up outside mosque compounds as *zhuanke xuexiao* (special knowledge schools), as Sino-Arabic schools (*zhong a xuexiao*) or as Muslim culture schools (*musilin wenhua xuexiao*). Subjects range from modern Arabic, Islamic knowledge, Chinese history, to social science, English and IT skills. Unlike more traditional forms of education, these private schools may be co-educational. They grant a safe Islamic environment and parents are likely to give permission for daughters to attend.

In sum, the educational situation for Muslim girls and women in China depends on local implementation of national laws, provisions and entitlements. What happens also depends

independence of arts, science and culture, organization of local police, and use of local language. Modelled on the Soviet-Union, 5 autonomous regions, 30 prefectures, 117 counties, and 3 banners were established after communist takeover. Autonomous administrative areas, as well as the various rights granted to them, are affirmed by the government as a positive example of local self-rule in ethnic areas, and an acknowledgement of minority self-determination unprecedented in Chinese history. They are seen as preserving the culture of minority peoples within a larger, stable Han Chinese society. Critics of this policy point to lack of autonomy, given government-appointed officials, and they draw attention to the real site of authority. Whilst the head of local government comes from the minority population, the local Communist Party secretary does not.

on geography, membership of given ethnic communities, socio-economic circumstances and the quality of local leadership. Patterns of contact with the outside world, in this case, the Muslim world of Middle Eastern countries, are also influential. Whether through the funding of mosque schools or the supply of teachers and textbooks, the MENA has a considerable effect on the content and organisation of education for women and girls in China. Not all Muslim communities are equally receptive to such influence, but in certain regions, the impact of Wahabi orthodoxy is clearly felt. It will be interesting to observe how these developments play themselves locally.

Studies on the ramifications of participation by Muslim girls in different educational programmes explore identity formation, religious and political allegiances, gender relations and career decisions. They suggest that one of the themes of the CEC conference, education as a tool of empowerment for girls, needs careful interrogation. Education is not a neutral concept, but laden with the values and agendas of those who shape texts and appoint educators. These must be challenged when examining empowerment for women in the Chinese Muslim diaspora.

Comparisons between state-sector education and religious private schools suggest contrasting life trajectories for Muslim girls. Other dichotomies oppose: adherence to secular and religious values; aspirations for worldly careers and Muslim roles for women (mother, wife, nurse, carer); gender egalitarianism and gender complementarity; ethnic and Muslim identities. The choice of schooling appears to have a formative influence on the subsequent lives of Muslim girls, informing women's ability to act for themselves, women's struggle for betterment, women's conceptions of a good world and women's yearning for *houshi* or afterlife. Muslim women, like other women, can only constitute themselves (some more consciously than others), from the sources of meaning and belonging that are available to them.

Questions arise as to whether women's mosques represent a good tradition on which Muslim women can rely, when imagining a more just society for themselves and their daughters. Older Muslim women in China point with pride to their unique sites of congregation, their own women leaders, their own Muslim women teachers, and their centuries' long tradition of women's mosques, serving the needs of Muslim girls and women. They ask why, in recent years, younger Muslim women accuse them of handing down an irrelevant heritage, why their curricula are considered out of touch with modern demands. They wonder how their age-old sites of education for women might adapt to rapidly modernising society and continue what they have always done to great effect: serve girls and women, the most vulnerable members of a changing society. 'Educate women, educate society', was a phrase a Chinese *ahong* quoted to me. This is their challenge and their opportunity, as Chinese society experiences change that is gathering ever more momentum.

AFRICA

15. Nigeria

At the CEC conference, Fatimah Kelleher's paper was on *Religion, culture and the global education agenda in Nigeria*. She drew from her own experience of growing up in

Northern Nigeria and from subsequent work in wider areas of the Commonwealth. The elaborated text below was developed from Kelleher's PowerPoint slides, rapporteur notes by Casmir Chanda (CEC) and other published sources.

Background

With around 140 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. It has a low level of human development, high levels of poverty and low levels of educational enrolment. There is extreme wealth held by a minority in most states, while 70 per cent of the people live on less than US\$1 a day, 90 per cent on less than US\$2 a day. Overall poverty dropped in the decade to 2004, but in some states it has grown, sometimes dramatically⁷³. Four per cent of the population (15-49) is HIV positive and there is 20 per cent mortality among infants under 5⁷⁴. Seven million children are not in school and there is a high dependency on aid and debt relief.

Fig 6. Fatimah Kelleher at the CEC conference



Source: Kees Maxey (CEC)

Nigeria is a federal democracy of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. It has a diverse population, with three dominant cultural-linguistic groups, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo located in the north, southwest and south east respectively. Approximately 200 languages are spoken with over 400 dialects. Forty five per cent of the population is Muslim residing predominantly in the north and 45 per cent is Christian residing mainly in the south. Ten per cent of population adheres to indigenous religious practices.

⁷³ National Bureau of Statistics (2004) *Nigerian Living Standards Survey* (NLSS) Abuja.

⁷⁴ (UNDP 2006) Ibid.

Comparing well-being between states within Nigeria, life expectancy at birth is 61.4 years in Lagos and 60 years in Imo. It is much lower in the predominantly Muslim areas of Kaduna (36.6) in Bauchi (36.7) and Borno (37). In terms of adult literacy, the picture is worse. Nearly 76 per cent of adults in Imo were literate in 1993, only 2.7 per cent of adults in Sokoto and 10 per cent in Borno were so categorised⁷⁵

Nationally, European-styles of education developed towards the end of the colonial era. By 1950 the country had in place a three-tiered system of primary, secondary, and higher education. At independence in 1960, the movement for universal primary schooling saw huge increases and inspired further secondary and tertiary development. By 1990 there were thirty-five polytechnic institutes, military colleges, and state and federal universities, plus colleges of education and of agriculture, enrolling between 150,000 and 200,000 young people. In line with the well-being indicators above, there remain marked differences between regions, states and groups within them.

Focussing on the education of Muslim women and girls, Kelleher highlighted two issues: (i) in northern Nigeria girls are less likely to attend and complete basic education than boys; (ii) cultural practices confused with religious observance act as a barrier to girls' education.

She raised three questions:

- Is there a causal relationship between Islam and girls' lack of access to education?
- Can religion be separated from cultural practices that impact negatively on girls' education?
- Under what conditions should the global education agenda for girls be taken forward in Islamic northern Nigeria?

The issues are many. Muslims in northern Nigeria include those who live in large urban communities in ancient towns and cities, a rural peasant majority and a substantial (9 million) minority of pastoral nomads. Most Muslims are Sunni with a small number of Sufi. Since 1999, northern Nigeria has seen the principles of a growing political Islam incorporated within its constitutional processes, including the option to re-establish *shari'ah* over secular law. In some states, the adoption of severely patriarchal, parochial forms of criminal *shari'ah* is perceived as detrimental to rights while others, Zamfara and Sokoto, are now governed by *shari'ah*. Since 2000, this has seen a number of harsh judgements, in which Muslim women accused of adultery and pregnancy out of marriage, have been lashed or sentenced to death by stoning⁷⁶. As elsewhere, there are also reports of FGM, child marriage, polygyny, rape, son preference, early marriage of girls and discrimination in inheritance, employment and education.

Nigeria has a flourishing civil society sector working to enhance professional, political, social, economic and cultural life, often encouraged by international organisations. Of the many women's rights groups, 500 are said to be members of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations of Nigeria (FOMWAN)⁷⁷. They offer support to Muslim women

⁷⁵ Saddique et al (n.d) www.onlinenigeria.com/education/index.asp

⁷⁶ Amnesty International (2003) *Amina Lawal: Sentenced to death for adultery*, September. Howard-Hassmann, Rhoda E. (2004) *The Flogging of Bariya Magazu: Nigerian Politics, Canadian Pressures and Women's and Children's Rights*, **Journal of Human Rights**, 3, 1, 2004, 3-20.

⁷⁷ FOMWAN <http://fomwan.org>

deemed to have contravened *shari'ah* and work more generally to promote community awareness of how to protect women's rights, particularly in the northern states⁷⁸. Some urge caution with interventions which may backfire⁷⁹. For example, challenging the gendered stereotypes of practice in clan-based patriarchy may exacerbate women's marginalisation, their reduced education and limited economic opportunities. In an environment where the socio-political climate is not always supportive of girls and women, boys are more likely than girls to attend and stay on at school, with girls participating less and less where conditions are worsening. With fluctuating growth over the last decade, the educational situation of Muslim women in Nigeria has declined and there are sustained imbalances in labour force participation. By 2004, official statistics note that 45 per cent of Nigerian women were economically active (UNDP, 2006). Although the proportion dwindles in the North, most there are believed to be fully productive in farming and petty commerce, often enjoying a measure of independence thought unusual in other Muslim countries.

Educational history

In pre-colonial times, education was mostly in *madrassa*-like schools. It emphasised the learning of Qur'anic texts for the purposes of religious practice, with literacy in Arabic restricted to those from ruling households. Down the centuries there have been many educated Muslim women in Nigerian history, some of whom have left an inspired legacy as successful rulers of large emirates, leading wars against invading forces. One of the most famous women was Nana Asma'u (1793-1864). A poet, teacher, and role model for Muslim women, she was the daughter Uthman dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate (in what is now northern Nigeria)⁸⁰. Himself a reformist Sheikh who had written extensively on Muslim culture, religion and politics, he criticised Hausa elites for violating the *shari'ah*. Against their principles, he promoted education for women. Nana Asma'u also wrote prolifically, with a number of books on Islamic education. She developed the Yan Taru movement, teaching women poems containing the teachings of Islam forming a cadre of women teachers who traveled through the Caliphate educating women in their homes (Mack, 2000). Through Yan Taru, Nana Asma'u provides a role model for women today, a legacy from learned women of past generations in Nigeria's Muslim north.

Under British rule, rivalry between Protestant and Catholic missions saw a rapid expansion of schools across the Christian South, allowing education to consolidate an already marked religious disparity with northern Muslims⁸¹. Within the North, Muslim leaders wanted colonial and Islamic schooling for daughters as well as sons. The British,

⁷⁸ Naiya Sada, Ibrahim; Adamu, Fatima L. Ahmad, Fatima L. (2006) *Promoting women's rights through shari'ah in northern Nigeria*, Zaria, British Council/DFID/ Ahmadu Bello University (Centre for Islamic Legal Studies), pp36.

⁷⁹ Howard-Hassmann, 2004, *Ibid*.

⁸⁰ Bewley, Aisha (2004) *Muslim Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, Ta-Ha Publishers, p. 118; Malami, H.U. (2002), 'One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol 13(1): 109-113.

⁸¹ Bassey, M. O (1991) *Missionary Rivalry and Educational Expansion in Southern Nigeria, 1885-1932*, **The Journal of Negro Education**, 60, pp. 36-46. Amnesty International (2003) *Amina Lawal: Sentenced to death for adultery*, 25 September.

fearing that well-educated Muslims would challenge their rule, played missions and Emirs against each other to inhibit the development of Muslim schools⁸².

The result by 1914 was 1,100 primary school pupils in the north, compared with 35,700 in the south. There were no secondary schools in the North, eleven in the South. Further divisions arose within the northern region from vocationalised indigenous instruction in craft, manual and life skills for children (mainly boys) in poor areas (both rural and urban), Qur'anic education in Muslim communities and European schools catering to the socially more differentiated⁸³.

Since independence

By the 1970s, more than half the school-age population was enrolled in indigenous schools. Most were private with little government regulation. Over the same period, very young children received religious instruction with basic Arabic and copying. Those who went beyond primary ages learned the meaning of Arabic texts, following classical disciplines, with some continuing to Islamic centres of advanced learning. In the late colonial period, formal Muslim schools were established in the northern cities and run on European lines. They catered to the children of the devout well-to-do who wanted a European education for their children, in a religious environment.

Before independence, it was rare for girls and women in Islamic schools to attend a European school or university in Northern Nigeria⁸⁴. Many enrolled in the 1970s, when six years of primary became mandatory and new institutions were established at all levels. Typically boys went on to secondary and higher education, while marriage remained the preferred post-primary path to adulthood for girls. Resisting this, the number of girls and women enrolling in schools, adult education programmes and universities steadily increased. Today, Muslim women students are a common sight in universities and other tertiary centres. Few opt for science or technology, but many take Islamic Studies, Arabic and Hausa, often with English, education and library sciences. Professional working women educated in such institutions are also increasing.

Several writers note the number of Muslim women who have become community activists and joined political parties, human rights organisations and other women's groups⁸⁵. They justify such activities outside the home, referring to the teachings of Nana Asma'u and her father. They explain their educational aspirations as preparation for service to the community, not as a means of personal fulfilment, the while emphasising that only educated women can be good wives and mothers. Many deny that secular education leads Muslim women to adopt European and American values and gender norms, any more than men. They see themselves as trying to adapt their roles to create new options within Muslim culture and religion.

⁸² Kazenga Tibenderana, P (1983) *The Emirs and the Spread of Western Education in Northern Nigeria, 1910-1946*, **The Journal of African History**, Vol. 24, No. 4. (1983), pp. 517-534.

⁸³ Charlotte S. Neisser (1955) *Community Development and Mass Education in British Nigeria*, **Economic Development and Cultural Change**, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Jul., 1955), pp. 352-365.

⁸⁴ Werthmann, Katja (2000) *Seek for Knowledge, Even if it is in China! Muslim Women and Secular Education in Northern Nigeria*. In: Thomas Salter und Kenneth King (Eds.) **Africa, Islam and Development: Islam and Development in Africa: African Islam, African Development**. University of Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, 253-270.

⁸⁵ Werthman, *Ibid.*

Fig. 7. Girls at an Islamiyya school in Kano



Source: Pratt and Doney⁸⁶

As yet these trends may have a limited effect on more conservative Nigerian Muslims who assume corruptive influences in secular education, particularly for girls and women. They continue to withdraw girls from school at 9 in the belief that as wives and mothers they will work for subsistence in the fields or trade from home.

Box 3. Primary statistics: Nigeria⁸⁷

In primary education, nationally:

- 8.1 million primary aged children are out of school.
- 60 per cent of these children are girls (67.2 NPER for 2002/2003 and GPI of 0.82).
- 45 per cent of enrolled primary school children are girls, 41 per cent in the northern states.
- In several northern states, girls' enrolment is below 35 per cent.
- The effect of the urban / rural divide is significant with female enrolment as low as 20 per cent and below in some northern rural local council areas.

These and other factors reduce Nigeria's prospect of achieving UPE by 2015. Poverty, lack of physical infrastructure, poor finance, teacher shortages and cultural barriers particular to the region, also contribute. Nationally too, under-funding is causing an overall decline in a once flourishing education system, not least at tertiary levels.

⁸⁶ Pratt, David; Doney, Malcolm (n.d.) *Girls head for school*, **Developments Magazine**
<http://www.developments.org.uk/articles/girls-head-for-school/>

⁸⁷ Unesco (2007) *Education for all by 2015. Will we make it? EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Islam and Muslim culture

Many Nigerian Muslims insist that the Qur'an is clear that the education of girls and women is an expectation within Muslim doctrine and Islam, as well as a way of life in northern Nigeria for more than 600 years. For others, the issues surrounding education for Muslim girls remain complex and sensitive, even among political leaders. They include denominational influences, places and communities of residence and parental attitudes and aspirations. Kelleher examines cultural and religious barriers to the education of Muslim women in Nigeria, recognising contested interpretations of the Qur'an and their implications for girls' education. For her, the Qur'an was a landmark text in defining the rights of women. Far from discouraging the education of Muslim girls, it esteems the scholarly women of the early Islamic period, and asserts women's rights to property and inheritance. At issue is where religion ends and culture begins.

Kelleher notes that while detailed knowledge of pre-Islamic cultures is scarce, their continuity has to be assumed as Islam evolved as a dominant faith, adapting to different social environments, between rural and urban areas, within and between nations. This brings her to consider the extent to which there is an identifiable Islamic culture separate from the many Muslim cultures as a pivotal issue.

She concludes listing some of the complexities at the interface between religion, culture and poverty:

- the poor are those most likely to withhold girls from education, in towns and rural areas
- cultural practices serve multiple functions, with early marriage meeting religious obligations and offering economic and other security
- education is may be seen with deep suspicion and deemed irrelevant to Muslim girls, but lack of educational infrastructure exacerbates such beliefs.

To resolve these issues, women will have to navigate political Islam, engage with religious leaders, in general and in respect of girls' education. It will be necessary to integrate religious and secular learning, with every measure introduced underpinned by major infrastructural growth and targeting. One way forward may be to synthesise elements of Nigeria's *madrassa* system with components of secular school programmes. Another is to provide role models. This requires much more than changing governments, but reforming systems and building appropriate capacities.

16. Kenya

Kenya has 34 million people, low human development and high unemployment, crime and poverty. Most Kenyans live in rural areas (80 per cent) and below the poverty level of US\$1 a day. Although the Constitution accords equal rights to all citizens, but regardless of faith, women's rights are restricted, politically, socially and economically. Citizenship entitlements are transferred through men and, in most ethno-religious groups, women have inferior property and inheritance entitlements. Discrimination is most apparent in rural areas, where there is continuing reluctance to educate girls especially at higher levels. Just over half the population has basic literacy and numeracy. Two thirds of them are women. Women make up about 75 percent of the agricultural work force and are increasingly active in small urban businesses. Their average monthly income is about

two-thirds that of men. Most have difficulty in obtaining employment other than on the land. When they do, they are promoted more slowly than men and subject to being summarily dismissed⁸⁸.

Violence against women by men is serious and widespread across religious groups, with rape, wife-beating and other domestic abuse all commonplace. In spite of media campaigns, legislation to prevent this is weak, although in some cases police have been spurred to act against perpetrators. Economic displacement and the spread of AIDS affect women disproportionately and contribute to the increasing numbers of homeless children, also vulnerable to abuse and prostitution. Large internally displaced (40,000) and refugee populations (200,000 in 2006) from neighbouring states, mostly in appalling situations, increases these difficulties. Although Kenya banned FGM and early marriage in 2001, and signed the Maputo protocol condemning it in 2005, the laws are difficult to enforce. Half of all women in Kenya, regardless of faith, are thought to have undergone FGM at early ages, a heritage of pre-Islamic and pre-Christian cultures. Government bodies and NGOs are trying to raise public awareness of dangers of the practice through affirmative education campaigns. They are also encouraging the adoption of alternative rites of passage to lead adolescent girls to womanhood, without recourse to FGM⁸⁹.

There has been a Muslim presence in Kenya since the 8th century, which has grown down the centuries with Arab and South Asian settlement. Amounting to 20 per cent of the population today, most Muslims live in the coastal region, but there is a large community in Nairobi. The diversity of Muslim groups is repeatedly stressed, associated with patterns of past settlement, local conversions and inter-marriage with non-Muslims. Most Muslim are Sunni followers of Shafi'i. There is a sizeable Hanafi community, but Ja'fari, Isma'ili, Zaydi and Ahmadi groups are small. The different groups of Kenyan Muslims are frequently in conflict among themselves and continuously subject to discrimination by non-Muslims, particularly in employment⁹⁰. The parallel secular and customary legal systems came to an end in 1967, after independence from Britain, but Islamic law continues to be practised in *Kadhis'* courts. There "all the parties profess the Muslim religion" in cases involving "questions of Muslim law relating to personal status, marriage, divorce, or inheritance", each one of which is a determinant of the situation of women. These procedures leave Muslim women particularly vulnerable to restrictions on rights, harassment and violence, with 80-90 per cent thought to been subject to FGM in Eastern, Nyanza and Rift Valley provinces.

Nobel prize-winner, zoologist and environmental campaigner Wangari Maathai has been a force encouraging organisations in Kenya to promote women's rights and political and economic empowerment, more and less successfully for several decades⁹¹. In 1990 a Muslim woman, Fatma-Abeyd, formed the Kenya Anti-Rape Organization to support victims and their families and change attitudes to towards sexual violence⁹². Following

⁸⁸ Afrol News, <http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles> last accessed 12 November 2007.

⁸⁹ WLUML (2007) Kenya: Muslim religious leaders join the fight against female genital mutilation www.wluml.org.uk

⁹⁰ Sperling, D.C. (1998) *Islam and the Religious Dimension of Conflict in Kenya*, Conference organized by the Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR), Nairobi, 12-13th November 1998.

⁹¹ Afrol News (2001) *Women's equality bill causes controversy in Kenya*, www.afrol.com/News2001/ken001

⁹² Hélie-Lucas, Marie-Aimée and Kapoor, Harsh (1991) Dossier 18, Grabels, WLUML.

the global gender conferences of the late 1990s, in Beijing and New York, women's organisations were key drivers in 1999 in bringing the Kenya Equality bill to Parliament, only to see it frustrated for not ensuring equal rights to property, inheritance and choice of marriage partner. Meanwhile, the League of Muslim Women of Kenya resisted the bill, and others more recent, because it promoted values in respect of marriage and inheritance deemed incompatible with Islam⁹³.

Kenya is one of the few low-income countries to have achieved universal primary education⁹⁴. There are eight years of compulsory schooling starting at age six. Primary education in government schools became free and compulsory in January 2003, resulting in rapidly increased participation. Net enrolment rose to 77 per cent in 2004. It reached 42 per cent of the age cohort in secondary schools. GPI of 1.1 was achieved in each case, marginally favouring post-primary girls. At tertiary levels, women represented about 60 percent of those enrolled, 2 per cent of all those eligible⁹⁵

Around 21 per cent of primary school age children (Oxfam estimates 1.7 million children) were out of school, while the introduction of free primary education led to overcrowded schools and a lack of teachers. This saw large numbers of pupils dropping out. Despite good results for gender parity at primary education, corresponding GPI's for secondary and tertiary level education are becoming less impressive at 0.86 and 0.58 respectively, and women's labour market opportunities and political representation remain stifled.

The Elimu Yetu Coalition, an advocacy organisation⁹⁶, identified low teacher expectations and gender-stereotyped learning materials, sexual harassment, and inadequate sanitary facilities, as factors hindering girls' school participation and completion. As elsewhere, the lack of single sex schools was another reason for Muslim girls not attending school and dropping out early. There is now a forceful movement, involving women's organisations, mosques and religious leaders, working to raise awareness across the Muslim community of the un-Islamic implications of indifference to girls' education. The decision by the Muslim Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya to deliver Friday *khutbas* (sermons) to educate congregations against FGM in the 30 mosques of Isiolo and Garissa⁹⁷ were landmark events. Religious patronage of schools has also sought to target improvements in the prospects of Muslim girls. Elimu Yetu notes that the Young Muslim Association provides preferential bursaries for girls.

⁹³ Afrol News (2001) Women's equality bill causes controversy in Kenya, Nairobi, February, afrol.com

⁹⁴ World Bank (2007) MDG Report, Washington DC.

⁹⁵ Unesco (2006) Strong foundations: Early Childhood care and education, Paris, EFA/GMR 1997.

⁹⁶ Elimu Yetu Coalition (2005) 'The challenge of educating girls in Kenya', *Beyond Access: Transforming Policy and Practice for Gender Equality in Education*, Oxford, Oxfam. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/>

⁹⁷ Muslims talk about female genital mutilation <http://www.speroforum.com/>

Box 4. Early childhood *madrassas* in East Africa by Azim Nanji (Institute of Ismaili Studies, London).
Rapporteur Notes of the presentation, Casmir Chanda (CEC),

Azim Nanji began by noting that 75 percent of the world's Muslim children are educated in *madrassas*, rather than through state education sectors. It was recognised more than 20 years ago in East Africa that Muslim communities were not doing well educationally. In the face of international debate on whether investment to improve skills should be at nursery or university levels, the Aga Khan Network (AKN) decided to prioritise intervention in early childhood education (ECE), for children aged 5 and over. Communities would develop their own *madrassa* programmes, with a curriculum extending beyond religion but remaining in tune with local cultures. The language of instruction would be Swahili, with classes in basic English and Qur'anic instruction in Arabic. Interactive pedagogies would be developed in training (see below), so as to avoid rote learning and recitation.

AKN quickly realised that existing *madrassa* teachers (Moalim) were not equipped for ECE. The response was to create a programme to train young unmarried women and certify them as *madrassa* teachers. The programme started with four ECE *madrassas* over twenty years ago. There are now 482, with 20 000 pupils and 800 teachers in 3 countries, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania (Zanzibar). There is a high turnover of staff, as teachers become eligible for marriage and leave. A number of have also moved on to other employment, for example to work for other international organisations.

The programme encourages communities to see themselves as the people responsible children's learning and raise funds themselves to support it. This has meant resisting external finance from sources such as the World Bank, UNICEF and the Gulf States, and protecting the scheme from being taken over by the state. That said, the World Bank is funding a longitudinal study to look at the impact of the programme, once students go on to primary and secondary school. Initial findings suggest that the ECE *madrassa* experience is reducing later dropout. This has created pressure to extend the ECE *madrassas*, to enable older children to stay on, effectively to complete primary level learning without having to leave to attend a state school.

AKF believes that education should be holistic. It should have a broad focus. It is essential to work with existing institutions, seeking to change their views and without confrontation. In the early days, to avoid resistance, the Moalim were asked to help develop the new women teachers to teach the Qur'an and parents worked hard to ensure the Moalim was kept on side. In the family, we seek to engage both men and women, otherwise support may only be superficial. In some communities there is now such pride in their *madrassa* that they have introduced uniforms.

Similar initiatives might be replicated in other countries of the region and further afield, but it must be remembered that there is no universal solution to educational challenges and one size does not fit all. In this case, there is a need to decide what aspects of the ECE *madrassa* model can be taken forward in different circumstances.

The Integrated Islamic Education Programme (IIEP), initiated by the Ismaili Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), uses government teachers as mentors to promote positive images of women and encourage parents to value education for their daughters. AKDN has also introduced a programme to improve the quality of teaching and remove gender bias within secular public schools. The introduction of the IIEP schools supported by the AKDN was designed to meet both curriculum needs and parental demand for an Islamic education for girls and to discourage parents from marrying daughters at early ages. In order to ensure that girls go on to secondary schools, the AKDN has trained pupils as teachers, when they complete primary and secondary schooling.

Fig. 8 Madrassa classroom, Garissa Kenya



Source: Kees Maxey (CEC)

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Another AKDN innovation committed to enhancing the situation of young women and improving their educational prospects has been the creation of early childhood *madrassas* in Kenya and neighbouring East African states. See Box 3 for an account of this work presented to the CEC conference.

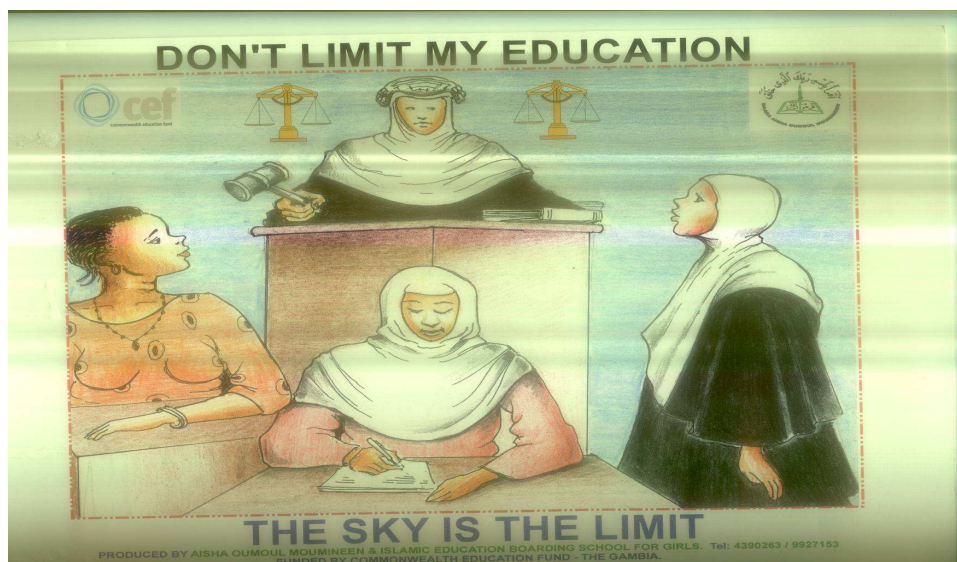
17. The Gambia

The Gambia was paid little attention in the CEC Conference, but Oley Dibba-Wadda who spoke at the conference of CEF support for Muslim women is from the Gambia and contributed the case study described in Box 5.

There are two significant differences between The Gambia and sub-Saharan countries like Nigeria and Kenya. The Gambia is 95 percent Muslim, but has only 1.5 million people. The Mandinka amount to nearly half the population and another three or four

minority groups comprise the remainder. The Gambia's level of Human Development is low (HDI rank 155). As in Kenya and Nigeria, the majority of the people live in poverty (64 per cent), with marked differences in opportunities between urban and rural areas. Women suffer severe discrimination.

Fig 9 Islamic learning for women in The Gambia



Source: Aisha Oumoul Moumineen Qur'anic Memorization and Islamic Education Boarding School for Girls (2007)

In 1980, the Gambia ratified the 1979 *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)*. It has yet to adopt its provisions in national law. Until then, it permits continuing abuse of women's rights in respect of marriage, divorce, and FGM with its attendant damage⁹⁸. This is permitted through the co-existence a secular legislative and a conservative patriarchal *shari'ah* which prevents reforms for women on the grounds that those proposed are not Islamic (FIDH, 2005). Son preference affects the enrolment of girls at school and allows their early withdrawal on a number of familiar counts: having to look after younger siblings, fetch water and wood, accept early marriage and undertake paid domestic work.

Islamic education is provided by traditional Qur'anic schools, modernised Arabic Islamic schools (*madrassas*) and reformed Muslim schools. These last integrate elements of secular curricula while retaining instruction in Islam and Muslim culture. Influences of a global culture are affecting young men making them resist traditional Islamic education and expected respectful behaviour in the household and community⁹⁹.

⁹⁸ Walraven G et al. (2001) The burden of reproductive-organ disease in rural women in the Gambia, West Africa, *Lancet*, 357(9263):1161-1167.

⁹⁹ Okuma, M. K. (2002) *Education: Adaptation to and Effects from the Changing Society—Cases from Village J and Village N, The Gambia*. Report to the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.

Box 5. Sustaining Budgets for a Girls Boarding School (Notes received via Oley Dibba-Wadda)

The Gambia is predominantly Muslim (95 per cent). In spite of the Islamic injunction to educate all children, The Gambia has one of lowest female literacy rates (about 37%) in Sub Sahara Africa (SSA).

There are problems with education for girl-children. Some Muslim parents have lost confidence in the Western type of school. Where girls have access to Islamic religious education, they have little chance of continuing beyond basic learning, due to the lack of Islamic secondary and higher education. The average girl, especially in the rural communities, ends up marrying as a young teenager. Most learn to recite a few verses of the Qur'an, without reading or writing, let alone the ability to understand the meaning of the words.

In 2001 the Aisha Oumoul Moumineen Qur'anic Memorization and the Islamic Education Boarding School was established by a qualified female teacher from the national school system, who transformed her house into a school. Her vision is of a society in which women are capable of representing themselves in religious and social arenas, no longer dependent on men to interpret and take decisions for them.

The school offers education for girls and women in Arabic script and knowledge of the Qur'an and other Islamic texts, including the Tawheed, Hadith and Fiqh, but the teacher wants to create a cohort of women who understand Islam and are able to speak for women and girls. She wants them to have skills, for example, in medicine and health, to allow women to attend women in accordance with Islam, but this assumes a well-educated female population.

The short term objectives of Aisha Oumoul Moumineen Qur'anic Memorization and Islamic Education Boarding School for Girls are: to assist the girls to recite and memorize the Holy Qur'an according to the universal standards; to read, write and speak Arabic as the language of the Qur'an; to read, write and speak English language as the official language of The Gambia; to integrate women into the madrassas or even into conventional secular schools for further unlimited education.

Budgetary Support for Islamic schools Although 15% of the primary school children in The Gambia are in *madrassas*, they do not receive funding from the central government. This limits what the madrassas can offer, particularly to girls, many of whom attend to learn high Islamic moral values.

Aisha Oumoul Moumineen Qur'anic Memorization and Islamic Education Boarding School for Girls had 16 girls in 2001 and 82 at the end of 2006. Most are children of Gambians residents, but a quarter is from diaspora families and was born in Europe or America. Their parents have been attracted by the curriculum and boarding facilities at the Muslim school and choose to enrol their daughters.

CEF intervention

The Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) aims to ensure that public school finance is sufficient to provide for the needs of boys and girls. It supports innovation to encourage access to education for all children, especially girls. CEF The Gambia is in partnership with the Aisha Oumoul Moumineen Qur'anic Memorization and Islamic Education Boarding School for Girls to help it sustain its budget. It helped with pay for a grain mill provided for the School, (i) to reduce the time that girls spend grinding for their meals and (ii) to generate income.

With the continuous collaboration with CEF, the School today earns enough to supplement its educational expenditure, including food for the girls (on average £85 a month). It has expanded the curriculum to include the teaching of English and maths, hiring specialist teachers in these subjects. The proprietress asked for teacher support from the Department of State for Education, which has posted a female teacher to the School at Government's expense for the 2006/07 academic year. Nevertheless, the boarding school charges the lowest fees among all such institutions of memorization and boarding and the increase in enrolment continues.

To date 17 girls have completed learning the Holy Qur'an in the same way as their male counterparts. Of these, 4 girls have returned to families in the USA and enrolled in the local schools. Eight girls have entered *madrassas* in the Gambia so as to continue with a broader range of subjects (4 of these have memorized the Holy Qur'an according to international standards), and 5 girls are currently revising to complete the memorization stage.

Challenges for the future:

Access to this school is still limited due to lack of land to build the School. Some parents still cannot afford the fees yet they can't be reduced because of the high costs of boarding. Modern teaching and learning materials and equipment (computers) that can help ease this type of learning are not available.

Six years of modern primary and secondary schooling are offered in The Gambia. There is very little pre-primary enrolment, but an improvement in the participation of girls is

noted with the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education at parity in 2004 and 79 per cent of children enrolled. In spite of the lack of civil society organisations promoting the interests of women, a number of free state primary schools, girl friendly schools and a girls' education desk have been established within the Ministry of National Education and efforts have been made to encourage poorer families to educate daughters¹⁰⁰. In tertiary education (see below), the FIDH report (2005) quotes a number of sources suggesting that women make up 39 per cent of students, but are concentrated in professional subjects such as medicine. Estimates for adult literacy imply that about two thirds of women and half the men have at least basic skills.

ActionAid introduced Reflect and anti AIDs programmes into the Gambia some time ago. Now the Commonwealth Education Fund is reinforcing the abilities of communities to manage educational finance using a range of techniques. Box 5 is an example of a Muslim boarding school for girls, which aims in time to enable them to broaden their understanding beyond the faith to empower women in quite practical ways in the Gambia.

EUROPE

18. Malta

Malta is a Mediterranean Island. Like Brunei Darrusalam it has 0.4 million people. Malta is a predominantly Catholic country strategically located between Southern Europe and North Africa. Many Maltese women are trapped with low levels of education and few employment prospects, comparing unfavourably with Maltese men and with women in neighbouring parts of Italy¹⁰¹. Parity of primary enrolment is some way off, possibly feasible by 2015¹⁰².

Malta's 1.0 per cent Muslim population is tiny, when compared with 67 per cent in Brunei Darussalam, but as a minority, Muslim women in Malta are seen to be disadvantaged in comparison with Catholic women. Although few in number, they are mobilising to persuade government to improve their position in education, health, social and economic spheres¹⁰³. They are pressing for raising public awareness of the nature of Islam and Muslim culture, in the face of Maltese hostility towards the steady flow of North African Muslims, largely men, who are reaching Malta by boat, seeking refuge and livelihood in Europe. (Box 6 captures the contribution from Malta in the final session of the CEC conference).

¹⁰⁰ International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH), 2005 *Note on the situation of Women in Gambia*, New York, 33rd session, 5–22 July.

¹⁰¹ Bartolo, Romina (2005) *Participation of women in employment in Malta: the position of the UHM*, in P. G. Xuereb, ed. **Working for an Inclusive Society**, University of Malta, European Documentation and Research Centre, Jean Monet European Centre of Excellence, pp5. [See <http://aei.pitt.edu/6032/>]

¹⁰² Packer and Aggio, Ibid.

¹⁰³ Gatt, Carol. (2005) *Muslims in Malta: Avoiding Discrimination*, in Xuereb, Peter G., ed. Ibid. pp 17.

Box 6. Malta at the crossroads, Elizabeth-Claire Mikkelsen, Malta High Commission. Rapporteur notes Peter Williams/Rosemary Preston

It is important to be mindful of the histories of Islam and Christianity and that the Bible and the Qur'an have common roots. Malta may be seen as a cultural crossroads. It is a small state that offers a meeting place for different faiths and cultures from Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. The Maltese language has been heavily influenced by Arabic.

In today's world, Malta is uniquely placed. As a member of the European Union it is in the frontline of European attempts to come to terms with unregulated migration from Africa. Second to Britain as a European member of the Commonwealth, Malta's role in pioneering the Commonwealth's *Dialogue on faith and development* (Valletta 2005), should not be overlooked. Malta has only a very small Muslim population, but scholars are beginning to examine the situation of Muslim women.

19. The UK

If Britain today has a high (if falling) HDI rank (18) and a high GDI score (ranked 20), it is in third position in the Commonwealth, behind Australia and Canada on these and other indicators (see Table 3). Within Britain, the wealth of very wealthy has increased significantly and they are ever more segregated from the majority population¹⁰⁴. The proportion of people living in poverty has also grown, with Britain ranking 15/18 high income states, barely ahead of the US, Ireland and Italy¹⁰⁵. Since the economic reforms of the 1980s, nearly a third of children have been living below the poverty line. Less differentiation is reported between poor men and women than a decade ago, but single parent households, mostly headed by women, are disproportionately disadvantaged.

From the 1960s, the post-war women's movement in Britain inspired improvements in the situation of women, in the home, in the community and on the labour market. There were significant gains in civil rights, education, labour force participation and professionalisation. At the same time there remain and may even be growing discrepancies in pay, occupational status, conditions of employment and responsibilities in the home. Violence against women is increasing, while fear of reprisal and humiliation lead to only a tiny minority pursuing charges of rape in court and even fewer able to prove their case, the lowest levels in Western Europe¹⁰⁶.

Of 60 million people, about 93.6 per cent are European in origin (Office of National Statistics, 2001). Ethnic minorities make up the rest (2 per cent Afro-Caribbean and African; 1.6 per cent Indian; 1 per cent Pakistani; 0.4 per cent Bangladeshi; 0.3 per cent Chinese; with 0.9 per cent who are members of other groups). The majority population is Christian (71.6 per cent), adhering to a range of denominations, followed by nearly a quarter who profess no religion (23.2 per cent). Of declared non-Christian minorities, Muslims are the largest group (at around 2.7 per cent), followed by Hindus (1 per cent), Sikhs (0.6 per cent), Jews (0.5 per cent), and others at 0.3 per cent together¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ ONS (2004) *Distribution of wealth, Social trends*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ UNDP (2007) *Human Development Report*, Oxford, OUP.

¹⁰⁶ BBC News (2007) *Cameron urges tougher rape laws*, 12 November.

¹⁰⁷ Peach, C (2006) *Muslims in the 2001 Census of England and Wales: Gender and economic disadvantage*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 29 No. 4 July pp. 629-655

Trade between Britain and the Muslim world goes back to the 8th century CE. In the 18th century, Yemeni sailors settled in coastal ports. A number of British converts to Islam were reported, and the first mosque was established in Cardiff in 1860. More Yemenis arrived at the turn of the 20th century. In the following decades, most immigrants were from war torn Europe, but seafarers from Somalia and elsewhere settled in major ports. Muslim Kashmiri arrived in the 1930s. From the 1950's large numbers of migrants from former colonies contributed to reconstruction after the Second World War, many of them South Asian Muslims. Those from India and Pakistan arrived in the 1950's and 60's. Bangladeshis came in the 1970s. Recently, Muslim refugees and asylum-seekers have arrived from war-torn countries, including Somalia and ex-Yugoslavia.

There are an estimated 1.8 million Muslims in the UK, 4 per cent of the population (See Table 3). Most (74 per cent) are from Commonwealth countries in South Asia. The remainder include white British and other Europeans, North Africans, and large numbers from Middle Eastern countries. From the Commonwealth, there are sub-Saharan Africans and small numbers from the Caribbean. Nearly all Muslims in Britain are Sunni (98 per cent), with Shia a small minority and even fewer Isma'ili. The diverse ethnic and national origins of Muslims in Britain have seen the importation of many languages (more than 50), along with a range of cultural practices, customs, dress and food. There are also differences in the ways in which Islam is interpreted and adapted to non-Muslim contexts. Immigrants are categorised in terms of national identity (e.g. Pakistani), but people from different areas of the same country have different languages, dialects and customs. Most Bangladeshis and North Africans live in the London area. Pakistanis are spread in urban centres across the country.

In Britain, the majority of migrants, especially in the decades following arrival, lived in the poorest housing and took the meanest work for the lowest pay. Over time they have become established and many interact more equally with the host populations. This may have taken a generation, but Muslims from different groups are now visible in many areas of professional life. Some are distinguished and honoured.

The controversy of the late 1980s that surrounded the publication of *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie¹⁰⁸ contributed to the emergence of a politicised Muslim identity in the UK. It led to calls for legal recognition of Muslims as members of a faith group (rather than as a racial minority) with rights equal to those enjoyed by other religions. There have since been campaigns for a Census question on religious affiliation, legislation against incitement to religious hatred, the banning of religious discrimination and for state funding of Muslim schools (see below).

If minority poverty in Britain is declining, it remains high, at double the level of the native population. Muslims have the highest rates of unemployment. Nearly 70 per cent of Bangladeshis, more than 50 per cent of Pakistanis and 45 per cent of Black Africans belong to low-income households. Large families with few earners in poorly paid jobs are key factors. Three-quarters of children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin have parents who earn less than half the average income for the UK. Only a small proportion of Muslim women are in paid employment¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁸ Rushdie, Salman (1988) *The Satanic verses*, London, Viking Press.

¹⁰⁹ New Policy Institute (2007) The Poverty Site, www.poverty.org.uk

Table 8. British Muslim population by ethnic group

	<i>Number of Muslims</i>	<i>Muslims as % of ethnic group</i>	<i>Ethnic group as % of Muslims</i>
White	179,733	0.4	11.6
<i>White British</i>	63,042	0.1	4.1
<i>White Irish</i>	890	0.1	0.1
<i>Other White</i>	115,841	8.6	7.5
Mixed	64,262	9.7	4.2
<i>White & Black Caribbean</i>	1,385	0.6	0.1
<i>White & Black African</i>	10,523	13.3	0.7
<i>White & Asian</i>	30,397	16.1	2
<i>Other Mixed</i>	21,957	14.1	1.4
Asian or Asian British	1,139,065	50.1	73.7
<i>Indian</i>	131,662	12.7	8.5
<i>Pakistani</i>	657,680	92	42.5
<i>Bangladeshi</i>	259,710	92.5	16.8
<i>Other Asian</i>	90,013	37.3	5.8
Black or Black British	106,345	9.3	6.9
<i>Black Caribbean</i>	4,477	0.8	0.3
<i>Black African</i>	96,136	20	6.2
<i>Other Black</i>	5,732	6	0.4
Chinese	752	0.3	0.1
Other Ethnic Group	56,429	25.7	3.7
Total	1,546,626	3	100.2

[Source: ONS (2001) Census]

A third of adult Muslims in Britain have no qualifications, but even those with education are challenged to find work. For the few with higher education, 14 per cent of Muslim graduates are without work, compared to 6 percent of white graduates¹¹⁰. They are three times (13%) more likely to be unemployed than university educated Christian men (4%). Among women graduates, 18 percent of Muslims are unemployed, compared with 4 percent of Christian and Jewish women¹¹¹.

Muslim populations are among the youngest in the country. Nearly half are under 25 (about a third of Muslims were under 16 years of age in 2001). About half a million are in education, accounting for between 5 and 6 per cent of the school population (Halstead, 2005). Several studies confirm links between low school performance and poverty, parental unemployment, residence in deprived neighbourhoods and ghettoisation. Other influences include: social class; fluency in English; levels of parent and teacher

¹¹⁰ Open Society Institute Report (2005) *Muslims in the UK: Policies for Engaged Citizens*, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme, Budapest, Hungary.

¹¹¹ Office of National Statistics (2007) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>

expectations; a lack of Muslim teachers and role models; the quality of schooling; personal factors; and racial and religious discrimination (Islamophobia). Disaffection among young Muslims stems from a lack of school and community respect for Muslim identities and failure to provide for their religious, cultural and spiritual needs. The under-performance of Muslim boys of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali origin is also associated with alienation, manifest in their high rates of exclusion (Halstead, 2005).

Box 7. Multiple Identities: Citizenship and Faith in Pluralist Society (Basil Mustafa, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies)

The discourse on minority communities in Western Europe, North America and Australasia has been shifting from its traditional focus on race and ethnicity to a new ground of faith belonging.

It has been often asked what one might mean by a European Muslim. Why should individuals choose to be identified not only as British or Belgian, but also include Islam as an essential part of their self identity? To choose to do this represents a consciousness of belonging to a distinctive faith community, in addition to and within the wider belonging of being an equal citizen, deriving security from finding security in citizenship associated with faith and its moral and spiritual anchorage.

It is through Islam that Muslims learn the purpose of the creation, their role in society and their duties within their family and the extended human community. Faith can give meaning to a productive and fulfilling life, where values such as honesty and social responsibility are part of the general ethos. Islam enables Muslims to maintain a sense of the sacred in a modern setting that often obscures or denies the sacred. Faith enables people to balance their material and spiritual needs in a constructive manner. Without reference to faith, the moral maze of modern life becomes disorienting for Muslim men and women, making them concerned to affirm a Muslim identity alongside membership of a modern state.

The values of human freedom, justice and the sanctity of life are enshrined in Islam, on the basis of the dignity accorded to humans by the Creator. By virtue of being His creation, humankind can explore the world, exploit its resources and seek material progress and happiness. To encourage balance and moderation in this effort, direct personal accountability to God is uniquely emphasised in Islam. Muslims around the world are reminded in every Friday congregation prayer of the cardinal virtues enjoined by the Qur'an in the verses "Allah enjoins justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbids indecency and abomination and wickedness" (16:90). "God orders that you return trusts to their owners and that if you judge between people, you judge justly" (4:58). These exhortations serve to remind believers of their duty to uphold the rule of law, to play their part in advancing the common good of society and to remain steadfast on the path of peace and social justice. These teachings form an excellent material for a citizenship class and when put together as basic building blocs, Islamic teachings can promote participatory democracy within a pluralist society and strengthen dedication to the core values of European societies.

Patterns of Muslim settlement in Britain affect schooling. In the North of England, Muslims are often concentrated in deprived areas. Low levels of local investment mean poor quality schooling and limited post-school opportunities. In Bradford, Muslim children make up the largest group (33 per cent) of minority pupils in local state schools¹¹².

In Britain, there are 12 years of compulsory free education beginning at age 5. Legislation and policy since 1944 mean that gender parity was long since achieved.

¹¹² Halstead, 2005, *Ibid*. [Official school-based data categorises students according to ethnicity. Religion has to be inferred from data on ethnic origins. This is less than ideal when attempting to assess the faith-based needs of pupils].

Today they stand at 1.0 and 1.07 for boys and girls respectively¹¹³. Most Muslim children in Britain attend one of 3 types of school: state schools, church schools and Muslim schools, either private or state-funded where they are available. Parents of Muslim girls may prefer daughters be educated in single-sex secondary schools, despite their declining numbers, but there is some diversity. Not all want their children to attend faith-based or Muslim schools (Halstead, 2005).

Local Education Authorities (LEA's) provide guidance to schools to make them attractive to Muslim pupils, but leave their adoption to the discretion of the school. Measures suggested include *halal* meals, prayer facilities, recognition of Muslim holidays, adaptation to school uniforms and appropriate showering arrangements (See Box 7 for an example of preparing teachers to understand Islam in British schools). Failure to make these provisions may lead Muslim parents and pupils to feel isolated from the school environment. They may then call for schools in areas that serve large Muslim school populations to be re-established as Muslim voluntary-aided schools or seek separate Muslim schools (Halstead, 2005).

Muslim organisations have made efforts to engage in government educational policy. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) has campaigned with the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS UK) and affiliates for the state-funding of Muslim schools. Other organisations have also responded to government consultations and identified concerns over Islamophobia in education, lack of parental choice and poor educational achievement. They have highlighted the importance of children's spiritual development, a neglected dimension of secular education (Association of Muslim Social Scientists, 2004)¹¹⁴.

It is now recognised that Muslims place great emphasis on their children's education and that the performance of Muslim children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin is improving. In line with national trends, girls are outperforming boys and non-Muslim pupils with similar social backgrounds. Academic achievements in the best performing Muslim schools show good results when compared with non-Muslim schools, but their numbers remain small. In spite of the improvement of grades in public examinations now being achieved by girls from all ethnic groups at secondary school level, wide gender and ethnic disparities persist. Their impact falls hard on Muslims, on Muslim women in particular.

Muslim schools in Britain

Amid media controversy, Muslim schools were first granted state funding in 1998 (BBC News)¹¹⁵. Compared with 123 private Muslim faith schools, there are 7 state-funded (voluntary-aided) Muslim schools in Britain, with plans for a further three¹¹⁶. Although nearly 50 per cent of Muslims support faith schools, less than 0.5 per cent of British Muslim children attend Muslim faith-schools. Those that exist are required to teach the National Curriculum, but are free to teach their own religious syllabus and encourage a Muslim school ethos¹¹⁷. Private Muslim schools vary in size, philosophy and curriculum. Some are 'Darul Uloom' institutions, based on models from South Asia. They combine

¹¹³ UNDP (2005) *Human development report*, Oxford, OUP.

¹¹⁴ AMSS (2004) *Muslims on Education*. Report prepared in conjunction with AMSS UK, the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism (FAIR), For Education and Development (FED 2000) and the Muslim College UK.

traditional Islamic education with the English National Curriculum, although this is not a requirement. Some succeed. Others fail to ensure standards and may prove unsustainable when private funding ceases.

Critics suggest that Muslim schools encourage extremism, intolerance and segregation across ethnic and faith sub-groups, fail to prepare children for citizenship in a multicultural society, and offer inferior learning to girls. While there are media attempts to link Muslim unrest in Britain to faith-school teaching, Muslim faith schools claim levels of success on a par with non-Muslim schools, citing Muslim girls' schools outperforming non-Muslim schools in school leaving examinations and in preparation for higher education. For example, Feversham College for girls in Bradford produced General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at a higher rate than the national average¹¹⁸. The Association of Muslim Schools (AMS UK) offers prospective schools advice on achieving official registration, and helps new and existing schools fulfil statutory requirements for registration and prepare for inspections¹¹⁹.

Many Muslim parents send children to informal lessons out of school to supplement education in core subjects and to give religious, Arabic and mother tongue instruction. They sometimes seek LEA advice to ensure good performance. Such schools may be attached to mosques as *madrassas*, but Muslim parents recognize that their teaching may be inappropriate, if the Imams themselves were taught by rote learning, lack English and have very limited knowledge of British ways of life. To compensate, there are a number of UK training institutions for Imams, validated by British universities, and the Government is also encouraging the creation of links between *madrassas* and mainstream schools.

Box 8. The *madrassa* children's literacy project¹²⁰

Funded by a UK government department, Muslim pupils attend supplementary schools (*madrassas*) for up to 10 hours a week for religious education. Hitherto, there has been no communication between *madrassas* and mainstream schools. The project will initiate dialogue to build bridges and foster understanding between teachers, governors, parents and children from different communities, to reduce the fear and distrust which currently exists between them.

¹¹⁵ BBC News (1998) *Government agrees to fund Muslim schools*, January 9, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

¹¹⁶ Hansard (2007), 11 June.

¹¹⁷ Halstead, M (2005)

¹¹⁸ See Halstead (2005) *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ See Association of Muslim Schools (AMS UK) <http://www.ams-uk.org>

¹²⁰ QED-UK (2007) Bradford, www.qed-uk.org

The education of Muslim girls and women in Britain

Muslim girls and women are damaged by negative stereotypes that place them in restrictive families with their only prospect an early arranged marriage. Teachers may internalise the stereo-types and give little encouragement to the education and career development of these girls, when the girls themselves have high academic aspirations which their parents endorse. The success of increasing numbers of British Muslim women in universities confirms this reality¹²¹

Controversy continues over (mainly British born) girls wearing Muslim dress in schools requiring uniforms. They encounter both tolerant and punitive responses, which may include exclusion for wearing the long *jiljab* and the face-covering *niqab*. At home, these girls may be living proof to parents that education is not turning them from faith, but allowing them to bridge the gap between home and school. At school and in the community, they are asserting a new Muslim identity¹²².

Literacy and English language

Although there is little illiteracy among adults, fluency in English is a barrier for some Muslim women in the UK, including those who were among the 'first generation' of migrant families. It explains in part their low economic participation. Other deterrents are heavy domestic commitment, often due to socio-economic circumstances and a lack of domestic appliances (4th PSI Survey). In other cases, women may not want to work and feel that their spoken English is sufficient for their daily needs¹²³. Not all Muslim women live in poverty. There is ample evidence of an emerging Muslim middle class among South Asian Muslim families. Here too, women may choose not to engage with English or the labour market.

This may change for new Muslim women arriving as brides, with families or as refugees and asylum seekers. To be admitted and apply for citizenship, they are now expected to have specified levels of English. For those already here, cuts in adult literacy classes and English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching make learning English increasingly difficult, with long waiting lists and charges. Crucially, asylum seekers may not attend classes in their first six months of residence¹²⁴. For some Muslim women, classes may be too far away or clash with their other responsibilities.

As elsewhere, there are Muslim women's groups across the country. They work within Islamic frameworks to help Muslim women to obtain quality services in education, health and social welfare and to protect women's rights across the Muslim community.

¹²¹ *Modern Traditions? British Muslim Women and Academic Achievement*, **Gender and Education**, (2001, Vol. 13, 2, 137-152).

¹²² Dwyer, C. (1999) *Veiled meanings: British Muslim women and the negotiation of differences*, **Gender, Place and Culture**, 6, 1, 5-26.

¹²³ Ahmad, F; Modood T; Lissenburgh S. (2003) *South Asian Women and Employment in Britain: the Interaction of Gender and Ethnicity* (2003) London, PSI.

¹²⁴ Salusbury, Matt (2007) *Campaign gives voice to migrants*, The Guardian, 20 July, <http://education.guardian.co.uk/tefl/>; Simpson, James, (2007) *How English lessons got lost in translation*, The Guardian, 20 July. <http://education.guardian.co.uk/tefl/>

Box 9. Muslim women in higher education in the UK (Fauzia Ahmad, University of Bristol)

Summary notes Rosemary Preston

The presentation drew on three UK studies of South Asian Muslim women, higher education and employment¹²⁵. The studies challenge stereotypes of Muslim families restricting their daughters and that university is a secularising environment. They assume the diversity of Muslim women's backgrounds and experience, but are cautious in applying contentious terms such as modern and traditional in Muslim contexts.

The research finds that Muslim women in Britain seek higher education for personal and pragmatic reasons. Supported by parents, many feel that it is something that they have to have. University creates opportunities for financial and personal independence and enhanced social status. A degree increases employability in a racist and sexist labour market, especially for those wearing hijab. It allows women a deeper understanding of their own identities, and of how these interact within their families, networks and the wider community.

Pragmatism informs their careful choice of university and discipline. Many negotiate family pressure to apply for prestige courses (medicine and law) at prestige institutions, choosing to 'branch out' into the Arts, Politics and Social Sciences, the while confirming their middle-class aspirations. Signalling individuality, such women are nevertheless defining an 'elite' status both for themselves and for their parents.

A number of the women in the studies believed that a degree would lead to a good *halal* marriage, to suitably qualified husbands, who would value intellectual ability in a wife, supporting her at home and in her career. Others worried that the increased age of graduate women might limit such prospects. With Muslim girls out-performing boys at all levels of education, parents were sometimes doubtful of locating husbands of similar stature to their daughters: graduates in stable employment, who would welcome a wife with equal or higher qualifications. For those lacking an extended family or a large social network in Britain, some parents were said to find the task daunting. There was awareness that some parents saw the earning potential of daughters with degrees as a form of insurance in the event of marriage breakdown or financial loss. Muslim families often find themselves caught in a double bind. They will be viewed as backward and old fashioned by the wider Muslim community for not educating daughters. If they do, they may be blamed for pricing them out of the marriage market and allowing them to age beyond the point that they will make suitable wives.

The research showed that, rather than restrict the movement of daughters and sisters, Muslim families identify with their feelings and purposes. Parents want to be accommodating and have expectations which reveal a strong family educational ethos. Mothers encouraging daughters to study wish them to achieve independence and fulfil academic and other career ambitions which had not been available when they were young. They do not want to see their daughters solely dependent upon a future husband and his family, often in a subordinate position. Fathers too gave powerful support and were often seen as the primary motivators of their daughters' university careers. In some cases, teachers had given encouragement. Others were less supportive in part because of assumptions about restrictive Muslim and Asian families committed to arranging daughters' marriages.

¹²⁵ Ahmad, F (2007) *Muslim Women's Experiences of Higher Education in Britain*, **American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences**, Vol. 24, No. 3: 46-69. Ahmad, F., Modood, T. and Lissenburgh, S (2003) *Ibid.* Tyrer, D. and Ahmad, F (2006) *Muslim Women and Higher Education: Identities, Experiences and Prospects, A Summary Report*, European Social Fund and Liverpool John Moores University.

Table 8 (continued...)

For parents wary of potential secularising effects of university life, a daughter's positive experiences through higher education have helped demystify pre-conceptions and paved the way for younger siblings, neighbours and friends to do the same. Families are beginning to see that it is possible to study and live within a university environment in the UK and remain loyal to Muslim culture and religious sensibilities. The achievements of pioneer women (the first in their family to enter higher education) have signalled the attainability of university life and a degree at the end of it to younger family members and to others in family and community networks, especially women. Even young Muslim mothers, with children in day-care, find themselves free to pursue higher education, often with the support of husbands, parents and in-laws.

Most of the women interviewed identified Islam as their core identity, distinct from their Muslim and British cultural identities. They felt empowered by their educational experiences, identifying more closely with Islam. Far from turning these women away from their religious and cultural selves, their experiences of higher education and professional work have helped women to rationalise multiple identities in complex ways and enabled them to critique non-Islamic practices that have infiltrated Muslim cultures.

There were few accounts of anti-Muslim racism on campus, but aspects of mainstream university culture left some Muslim women students feeling excluded. Examples include racist remarks from lecturers and colonial biases in recommended reading. Ignorance on the part of staff and fellow students about Islam and Muslim cultures left some of the women alienated from the majority white middle class student population. Others were uncomfortable in the secularised student environment and social scene, with its emphasis on clubbing and drinking.

The personal satisfaction of study and achieving a degree was immense, as was the prospect of proving themselves to their families and others through economic independence and lives that would be qualitatively different from those of their parents. For pioneers, their achievement was symbolically even more important.

Beyond the UK

Australia, New Zealand and Canada report similar experiences with their diaspora Muslim populations and in the patterns observed relating to the education of women and girls¹²⁶.

20. In sum

The opening section of this report noted the common histories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as closely related religions espoused in established patriarchal societies, with believer access and status in the faith shaped over time to reproduce the gender imbalances of the wider society. At times, usually over very long periods, this has disempowered women in terms of what are now described as religious, civil and human rights, including in their access to education.

Down the ages in each faith, reputed women leaders and scholars have overcome the obstacles of patriarchy. Many have fought to restore women's rights, with different movements using equivalent arguments to justify their cause, as independent activists and from within Christian, Muslim and other faith movements. Significant achievements have been made in some cases, but everywhere inequalities remain entrenched. There are also signs of a tacit understanding of the transience of gains made and how changes beyond

¹²⁶ Ahmad, F. (2007) *The education of Muslim Women and Girls: Canada and Australia*, London, CEC.
Asmar, C. (2005) 'Internationalising students: reassessing diasporic and local student difference' *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 30, No. 3: 291–309

the control of those affected lead to the reconstruction of what were thought to be barriers successfully removed.

Muslim women and girls find themselves in very different social and economic situations, within culturally diverse Muslim populations. A minority are in advantaged households and communities. The majority are not. Focussing on education for Muslims in Commonwealth countries, the report has highlighted rapid change in the access of Muslim girls to increasing amounts of education and their entry into professional training and careers. In every country cited, it has been able to show the increasing public authority of Muslim women associated with more advanced education, no matter how few they may be as yet to achieve such status.

Key points affecting Muslim women and girls in the Commonwealth are that:

- with exceptions, most members of majority and minority Muslim communities in new Commonwealth states live in poverty.
- the marginalisation of large minority Muslim populations in Commonwealth states (India, Nigeria) is similar to that in large minority Muslim populations in non-member societies (China).
- most members of new Commonwealth Muslim minority groups living in the old Commonwealth diasporas remain subject to racial and religious discrimination, alienation and poverty, particularly women.
- where Muslims are a minority, girls may be doubly alienated, within the household and community, as well as in relation to the wider society.
- tensions are rife between adherents of movements inspired by different interpretations of Islam, cutting across communities and social classes with clear implications for women and girls.
- conservative religious practice may hold sway where poverty and isolation deprive men as much as women of status, education and employment.
- influenced by cultures of globalisation and counter to claims that secular education will turn learners from Islam, especially women, there is growing demand for religious instruction as a supplement to secular curricula, with appropriately trained teachers and equality of opportunity for girls and boys.
- even in apparently conservative communities, the success of Muslim women's rights movements in raising awareness is visible everywhere, with the situation of Muslim women and girls a matter of urgent debate, across communities, nationally and internationally, on the street and in the media.
- increasing numbers of Muslim girls are enrolling at all levels of education, often outperforming boys. Still in the minority, they are continuing through secondary and tertiary levels and taking up professional careers, in old and new Commonwealth nations and in Arab states as well.
- some girls from diaspora communities may be sent to countries of origin to attend Muslim schools.
- significant numbers of educated diaspora girls are using their identities as Muslim citizens of their adopted states to assert their continuing allegiance to Islam and to seek careers on terms equal to those of non-Muslim peers.
- the drive for education and qualifications amongst Muslim women permeates diaspora networks between new and old Commonwealth nations, encouraging attitude change everywhere.

PART 3

INFERENCES AND INDICATIONS FOR COMMONWEALTH ACTION

21. Commonwealth policy frameworks

There are two dimensions to proposing Commonwealth policy arising from the presentations and discussions at a conference such as that on *Islam and the education of women and girls*.

- (1) Proposals have to be mindful of what is possible within the statutes which govern relations between the Commonwealth (as an international authority) and its individual member states, without discrimination or preference towards selected interests and groups, in respect of the issues being engaged. In the present case faith and gender have to be presented as generic priorities, along with education at whatever level. Making a Commonwealth-wide case to support Muslim women and girls may breach each of these principles.
- (2) Proposals have to be relevant to current Commonwealth-wide programme rationales and commitments. This second dimension presents the Commonwealth as an association of peoples, encouraging them to adopt policies that they perceive to be best suited to their own circumstances and to the situation of sub-groups within them.

Richard Bourne in the closing session of the CEC Conference addressed the first of these two dimensions (See Box 10). Most of the suggestions from delegates fit the second course of action, indicating ways in which the educational experiences of women and girls in Muslim communities might be enhanced in selected member states.

Bourne reminded the meeting that the Commonwealth is a secular, intergovernmental association with citizens of many faiths. If the largest religious group in the Commonwealth are Hindus, followed by Christians and Muslims, all of which have diverse sects and affiliations, he asked how the Commonwealth might prioritise the educational needs of Muslim girls, as opposed to those of (for example) post-Christian boys, or peace education among Buddhist Sinhala in Sri Lanka?

Bourne then drew attention to the weakness of the official Commonwealth's position in the promotion and support of, given its lack of influence over policy decisions of individual member states. In relation to current Commonwealth-wide commitments, he suggested that a focus prioritising gender, poverty reduction and empowerment, might be more easily accommodated to the Commonwealth's secularist commitments and ongoing pro-poor work with indigenous women, which includes increasing their access to education of an acceptable quality. Finally, he mentioned the Commonwealth initiative to encourage interfaith dialogue and the forthcoming report of the Expert Group on Respect and Understanding, each of which may propose ways to harness faith as a force for different forms of human development.

Box 10. Implications for Commonwealth Policy (Richard Bourne, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit)

Richard Bourne outlined obstacles to be borne in mind when proposing Commonwealth-wide policy in education relating to the interests of women and girls belonging to different faith groups.

Three main obstacles

Firstly, the Commonwealth is a secular, intergovernmental association with citizens who follow all faiths and none. No one really knows the accurate religious breakdown of a population nearing 2000 million, but it may be that the largest group are Hindus, followed by Christians and Muslims and all of these have varied sects and affiliations. It may be asked why the official Commonwealth should devote preferential attention to the educational needs of Muslim girls as compared, for example, with the needs of secular or post-Christian boys, or peace education among Buddhist Sinhala children in Sri Lanka.

Secondly, the Commonwealth, as a collection of institutions and traditions, carries heavy historical baggage related to imperial / Christian / Anglican hangovers. Hence, although at least six of the 53 member states have Muslim majorities, and there are significant Islamic populations in several more, Commonwealth traditions have tended to see Islam as 'other'. The Head of the Commonwealth is also Supreme Governor of the Church of England; multi-faith Commonwealth Day observances rarely take place in mosques, temples or synagogues. It may be asked how high a proportion of the CEC, or any other Commonwealth association, are worshipping Muslims.

Thirdly, the Official Commonwealth has, overall, only a weak role in education. Although there are exceptions, such as the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol, an international agreement, or the Commonwealth of Learning, a specialised agency, the Commonwealth has only a modest impact on the education of its citizens. The relevant Commonwealth Secretariat staff is small. The adjurations of Commonwealth Ministers of Education - the classic case is the four consecutive statements for education about the Commonwealth - are often not followed up.

Scope for policy initiatives

There are current openings, derived from official Commonwealth strategies. The expert group on Respect and Understanding, chaired by Amartya Sen, will report to the Kampala CHOGM. Although Sen is opposed to faith schools, his report is bound to take discussion of multi-faith and multiculturalism into the concern of leaders. The Commonwealth Foundation is committed to a strand of activity on faith and development, seeing the interaction of faiths as important for promoting human development. Both of these present current opportunities for those who see Muslim girls as exceptionally disadvantaged in education. Civil society, and the Commonwealth Teachers' Grouping, can take forward ideas about the education of Muslim girls in ways less constrained than the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Commonwealth is an association of peoples as well as governments, and this formulation places great responsibility on civil society bodies to pursue ideas beyond the level of a report, workshop or conference. Involvement of Muslim groups themselves in improving the chances of young women is of course crucial.

A definition that focuses on gender, rather than faith, may get beyond the secularist limitations of an intergovernmental Secretariat. If Muslim girls are more disadvantaged than other girls are they become a key concern for anti-poverty commitments and the Millennium Development Goals. I am not sure how far this is true, having recently attended a workshop organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat on Indigenous women's rights, which pointed to the educational problems faced by this group. Nonetheless, it is a policy approach worth exploring.

22. Addressing the Commonwealth as an association of peoples

Approaches through official intergovernmental forums and agencies may be more effective if made through the Commonwealth in its capacity as an association of peoples. They would enable governments and civil society organisations to act on ideas relating to the education of women of different faiths with greater flexibility and fewer constraints than those within which the Commonwealth Secretariat operates. They would require commitment and capacity on the part of all participating bodies, national and

international (e.g. the Commonwealth Teachers' Grouping), to ensure that ideas are pursued beyond reports, workshops and conferences and are converted into action.

The involvement of faith group representatives would be crucial at every stage, with women playing a major role in assessments, policy formulation and interventions, from pre-planning through to post-project evaluations. A resounding message of the CEC Conference was that targeted and holistic community level initiatives are more relevant than top down approaches to increasing women's educational participation and empowerment.

Meantime, in planning action there are two starting points. There seems to be widespread agreement that it is not Islam or other faiths which justify the discrimination and ill-treatment of particular categories among female adherents, but the legacy of patriarchy which aligns societies within hegemonic relations dominated by men. Restoring the balance requires a reinterpretation of doctrine and text, to take account of social expectations at the time of writing and those prevailing when new textual analysis is undertaken. Secondly, focussing on international statistics for educational performance over recent decades, the marked improvements in girls' access to and performance in education in many parts of the world may be taken to imply a welcome relaxation of patriarchal strictures.

A range of approaches might respond to these observations intending to further enhance women's education and life chances within the different faith groups to which they belong.

Commission a Commonwealth wide survey on faith, gender and education in member states

The Conference proposed a survey of religious diversity across the Commonwealth and the ways in which different faith groups support and detract from the education of women and girls, in more and less advantaged sub-groups. The purpose would be to identify action to increase and sustain effective commitment to education among Commonwealth faith groups, including Muslims.

Such a project, planned holistically, would be able to address a range of issues.

- describe the patterns of faith and gender across member states
- compare faith-related educational experiences in old and new Commonwealth states
- compare the effects of interaction between countries of origin and diaspora communities on aspirations and understanding of how education can help fulfil them.
- take account of parameters of diversity within and between faith groups, the social background of adherents and the significance of spirituality.
- examine ways of working with men to promote the well-being of women within religious communities, highlighting successful examples.
- consider how to mobilise faith to increase and sustain education at all levels
- enable provision for older adult women, as well as for young women and girls, recognising that educated mothers and older women have special competencies. [As mothers, particularly as educated mothers, adult women play at least three crucial roles: they are better able to improve the quality of life and mortality rates for those around them in their immediate family and local communities; they are more likely than their husbands to support their children's

- education and more especially to encourage their daughters in their educational aspirations; and they are also better positioned to challenge oppressive cultural practices].
- plan to empower participants by building research capacities, providing training in data collection, analysis and dissemination, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and by developing skills in IT processes.
 - challenge stereotypes which produce gendered inequality in IT use, as inherently masculine and leading to male jobs.
 - demystify the potential of IT among traditionally oriented faith group representatives
 - afford opportunities to strengthen management and administrative efficiency in the delivery of budgeted programmes and identify ways to reduce problems of mis-spent and under-spent allocations, with the loss of significant sums of money, thought to be pervasive in national educational systems.
 - examine in some depth conditions under which membership of minority faith groups encourages confidence in individual identities and a sense of purpose to be achieved through educational experiences.

Monitoring girls' educational progress and effects

The Commonwealth should ask its Secretariat to assess all its member governments on their performance on four prerequisites of gender parity highlighted by the EFA/GMR reports¹²⁷. They relate to the extent to which governments are:

- promoting education for girls, as well as boys, and for women, as well as men.
- implementing targeted measures to redistribute resources within education and other sectors, in order to reduce the costs of education for families, eradicate child labour and gender discrimination at work
- strengthening the role of NGOs, religious and other organisations engaged in education.
- engaging directly with women and girls in order to promote social change through education.
- examining the contributions of NGOs and civil society and the understanding of different religious groups working to support these endeavours and not militate against them.

23. Encouraging member states to promote opportunities for Muslim women

Initiatives

At the same time, and in response to the findings of a Commonwealth-wide faith survey (as outlined above), member states should be encouraged to initiate specific action and research in respect of Muslim women and girls, relevant to their own communities.

Such initiatives should:

- be planned and developed from within Muslim communities, aiming to meet their cultural and educational expectations, seeking support elsewhere as appropriate, locally and internationally. [Maryam Bibi works in the NWFP of Pakistan for 'Kwondo Khor', a civil society organisation that promotes women's empowerment in education in tribal areas. She described how women advocates wear the *burqa* as a way to assure local tribal chiefs and leaders that the organisation is authentically Islamic and therefore not 'hostile' to religious beliefs. Kwondo

¹²⁷ UNESCO (2003) Ibid. FA

Khor facilitates exchange and helps secure the support of tribal elders. Similarly, Muslim women's groups in Northern Nigeria have developed their own education and information packs for local use on issues such as (See note 76)

- work within, rather than challenge, Muslim community hierarchies to better facilitate local education and training and to disentangle doctrinal teaching from patriarchal interpretations of beliefs, attitudes and practices.
- address needs of men and young boys as part of any educational programme for Muslim women and those of other religions as well. [Several participants noted the complementarities between the education of men and women: education influences, and in many cases, enhances Muslim women's marriage prospects, but the realisation of those prospects depend upon there being prospective male partners who are suitably educated]
- act on lessons learned from research and interventions seeking to reduce the stress of Muslim women and girls alienated in non-Muslim communities, so as to increase their sense of belonging and community identities.
- investigate the similarities, differences and concerns associated with Muslim women's experience of education in countries as diverse as the UK, Pakistan and Nigeria.
- explain diaspora differences in educational attitudes and experience among Muslim minority women from different places of origin and compare them with the experiences of similarly placed minority women of other faith groups.
- harness the guidance and support of civil society, of Muslim organisations in particular, and use the resources of inter-government agencies like the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation to fuel initiatives. [These might include disseminating information about good practice developed by like-minded organisations (e.g. Oxfam, UNESCO, UNICEF and the ILO)]
- taking care not to be seen to be defining a religion, support Muslim women's efforts to awaken women's understanding of the teachings and principles of the Qur'an, so that they too learn to challenge cultural practices, wrongly attributed as Islamic. [Similar approaches might be used in other religious communities to enable civil society to question misinterpretations in the religious teaching, relating to women's education]
- strengthen the networks created through such work to support the women involved and disseminate information about themselves.
- identify women of all religions who might serve as role models to inspire co-religionists, particularly in the case of marginalised minority faiths.
- create opportunities for women to shadow mid-ranking and senior women in education, media, government, and the scientific, legal and medical professions. This is an area that the Commonwealth Secretariat and partners could usefully develop.
- assist educated women to form alliances to improve education in their own communities.

The conference counselled that:

1. More needs to be known about the detailed influences of Islam and other religions on the opportunities for education available to women and girls and on the factors that affect take-up and performance. A survey covering the 53 countries of the Commonwealth would be useful for this.

2. Where particular interpretations of Islam or of other religions tend to militate against education for women and girls, the women affected should be supported to take the lead in challenging such interpretations.
3. Initiatives to question interpretations of particular religions should be relevant to the stated needs of communities concerned and not be externally dictated.
4. Where women question prevailing interpretations of doctrine, they should do this from within existing community hierarchies, not in opposition to them.
5. Explorations of prevailing interpretations of religion should be undertaken by women and men jointly.
6. Focussing on women and girls, the educational and other interests of men and boys should not be threatened.
7. International organisations like the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation would best be involved through monitoring and disseminating good practice in moving religious views in stronger favour of education for women and girls; and in strengthening civil society to help with such movements.

24. View from the Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is examining the part played by religion in promoting tolerance, respect, enlightened moderation and friendship among people of different races, faiths and cultures. It commends initiatives at national, regional and international levels and encourages the Commonwealth Secretariat to strengthen its interaction with bodies that seek to build a common platform of unity against extremism and intolerance. Heads of Government have requested information about initiatives to promote mutual understanding and respect among all faiths and communities in the Commonwealth.

PART 4

APPENDICES

1. Conference Programme

Islam and the Education of Women and Girls in the Commonwealth

Tuesday 26th June 2007, 10.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. British Council, Spring Gardens, London.

INTRODUCING THE CONFERENCE

Context

The celebration of diversity is a key tenet of Commonwealth commitment to equal rights for all citizens and an end to unacceptable disparities between them. Education in the Commonwealth is a human right. It is fundamental to overcoming inequalities of gender, race, colour, creed and political belief, which influence access to education and its quality. This year, the CEC Annual Conference will examine trends in faith and education, seeking to learn more of the ways in which Islam shapes the educational lives of women and girls.

Rationale

Islam is set to overtake Christianity as the world's most popular religion by the middle of the century. Evolving rapidly, Islam comprises a number of theological traditions and practices vary from country to country. One third of the Commonwealth is Muslim. Most live in new Commonwealth states, where Islam may or may not be the dominant faith. Others belong to Muslim diasporas living in old Commonwealth societies. Outside Muslim communities understanding of Islam is limited, in respect of differences between Muslim groups, the roles of women among them, and the ways in which these shape the education of girls and the quality of their later lives.

The summer conference

At the conference, Muslim women will elaborate the themes indicated above, paving the way for small group discussions of issues emerging from what they have said. These might address any number of themes: religious and secular influences on women's learning; Muslim women and their daughters' ways of knowing; interactions between Islamic and secular schooling; global culture, Education for All, Universal Primary Completion and the performance of Muslim girls; Muslim women and higher education; The options are endless and group facilitators will welcome suggestions.

ISLAM AND THE EDUCATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE COMMONWEALTH

10.30-11.00 Registration and coffee

11.00 Chair: *Valerie Davey, Executive Chairperson, CEC*
Welcome: *Martin Davidson, Chief Exec of the British Council*

11.15 Chair: *Baroness Manzila Pola Uddin of Bethnal Green and Tower Hamlets*

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

The ONLY Way Forward! Education as Empowerment: Some Experiences from the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan

Shaheen Sardar Ali, University of Warwick

Girls' Education in the New Commonwealth: religion, culture, and the global education agenda in Northern Nigeria

Fatimah Kelleher, Commonwealth Secretariat

Education in the Commonwealth Muslim diaspora: women and girls in Britain

Haleh Afshar, University of York

1.00-2.00 Lunch

1.30-2.30 Chair
Sally Keeble, MP

CEC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

2-30-3.30 CONTINUING DISCUSSION

Group 1 Gender harmonies and discord within Muslim educational traditions in the Commonwealth

Facilitator: Lalage Bown (CEC)

Discussant: Kasturi Sen (INTRAC) The Muslim communities in India
Maria Jaschok (University of Oxford) Muslim minorities beyond the Commonwealth

Group 2 Women, girls and education in Islamic and non-Islamic states

Facilitator: Casmir Chanda (CEC)

Discussants: John Oxenham (CEC) EFA/UPE and Commonwealth Muslim societies
Oley Dibba-Wadda (CEF/OxfamGB) Gender work in Muslim communities of the poorest Commonwealth countries
Azim Nanji (Institute of Ismaili Studies) Early childhood *madrassas* in East Africa.

Group 3 The Commonwealth Muslim diaspora in the UK: meeting needs and increasing understanding

Facilitator: Moses Oketch (University of London, Institute of Education)

Discussant: Basil Mustafa (University of Oxford and MCGB) Citizenship, faith identity and education in the UK
Fauzia Ahmad (Bristol) Muslim women in HE in the UK

4.00-5.00 Chair : *Rosemary Preston (CEC)*

Concluding panel: Muslim women, girls and education: Commonwealth policy implications
Elizabeth-Claire Mikkelsen, High Commission of Malta
Richard Bourne, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit
Andrew Firmin, Commonwealth Foundation

Closure: *Valerie Davey, Executive Chairperson, CEC*

2. Conference People

Haleh Afshar [*Sudden floods in Yorkshire prevented Haleh Afshar from travelling to London for the meeting*]

Haleh Afshar, Professor of Politics at the University of York, OBE, is distinguished for her work in both development and women's studies. She teaches and researches Islam and politics, women and conflict, and race and equality. She leads an active group of research students working in these fields. Her current research relates to women and work in Iran, and women, war, violence and survival in a number of other countries. In the UK, jointly with Mary Maynard, Haleh Afshar is part of a flourishing group working on issues related to race and ethnicity. They have just completed work on a comparative study of empowerment and dis-empowerment of British women in their third age, funded by ESRC.

Haleh Afshar has recently chaired a partnership of the Muslim Women's Network (MWN) and the Women's National Commission (WNC) working on a study of Muslim women in the UK. It draws on what Muslim women are saying about their faith, lived experiences and the impact of education on their lives. The report of the study was published in November 2006 by MWN and WNC: *She who disputes: Muslim women shape the debate* http://www.thewnc.org.uk/wnc_work/muslim_women.html.

Books by Haleh Afshar include: *Iran a revolution in Turmoil* (Macmillan 1989); *Islam and the Post Revolutionary State in Iran*, written under the pseudonym Homa Omid, (Macmillan 1994); *Islam and Feminisms* (Macmillan 1998).

Fauzia Ahmad

Fauzia Ahmad is Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, Department of Sociology. She was a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at Brunel University for several years, and worked as Senior Research Officer for the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). Her work has concentrated on the identities and representations of South Asian Muslim women associated with their motivations and experiences of higher education in the UK and its impact on relationships with their families.

Fauzia Ahmad has recently completed a major ESF supported study on Muslim women, experiences of higher education and employability with David Tyrer with whom she co-authored the summary report, *Muslim Women and Higher Education: Identities, Experiences and Prospects*, ESF/Liverpool John Moores University, (2006). Other interests centre on Muslim women's experiences of marriage, divorce and social welfare, and British Muslim, multiculturalism and responses to terms such as 'moderate Muslim' (with Tariq Modood). She currently sits on the Executive Committee of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists UK (AMSS UK) and acts as Consultant to the Muslim Women's Helpline, UK.

Publications include 'Modern Traditions? British Muslim Women and Academic Achievement', *Gender and Education*, (2001, Vol. 13(2): 137-152); (with Sarah Sheriff) 'Muslim Women of Europe: Meeting Social Welfare Needs', *Social Work in Europe*, (2001, 8 (1): 2-10); (with T Modood and S Lissenburgh), *South Asian Women and Employment in Britain: the Interaction of Gender and Ethnicity* (2003) London, PSI; 'Methodological Dilemmas, Tensions and Contradictions in Theorizing South Asian Muslim Women', in Puwar, N. and Ranghram, P. (Eds) *South Asian Women in the Diaspora*, (2003) Oxford: Berg; 'The Scandal of 'Arranged Marriages' and the Pathologisation of BrAsian Families', (2005) in N. Ali, V. Kalra and S. Sayyid (Eds) *A Postcolonial People, South Asians in Britain*, Hurst Publications; 'British Muslim Perspectives on Multiculturalism' (with Tariq Modood), *Theory, Culture and Society* (2007, 24(2): 187-213).

Shaheen Sardar Ali

Shaheen Ali, Professor of Law at the University of Warwick and at the University of Oslo. She directs Warwick's International Development Law and Human Rights Masters Programme. She was the first female Professor of Law in Pakistan and Director the Women's Study Centre at the University of Peshawar. She has served as Minister for Health, Population, Welfare and Women's Development in the government of the Northwest Frontier Province, Pakistan. She regularly acts as a consultant for a range of international bodies, including DFID, NORAD, UNICEF, UNIFEM, to name a few. She was a member of the British Council Task Force on Gender and Development and served on the National Commission of Inquiry on Women as well as the Prime Minister's Consultative Committee on Women in Pakistan. Her monograph *Gender and Human Rights in Islam and International Law: Equal Before Allah, Unequal Before Man?* is now on the reading list of all the world's leading law schools, and her new undergraduate course on Islamic law has attracted considerable attention. She has written more than two dozen articles as

well as chapters for many books. She has been Chair of the National Commission on the Status of Women of Pakistan and a founder member and Co-ordinator of the South Asian Research Network on Gender, Law and Governance (SARN).

Richard Bourne

Richard Bourne, head of the CPSU from its foundation up to July 2005, is a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies. He has been involved in Commonwealth activities since the end of 1982 when he became Deputy Director at the Commonwealth Institute, Kensington. In 1989, he moved to establish the non-governmental Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and in the 1990s he was a Special Adviser to the Commonwealth Secretariat for the Iwokrama Rainforest Programme in Guyana, held posts at Surrey University and the London Institute of Education, and ran the Commonwealth Non-Governmental Office for South Africa and Mozambique from 1995-7. He has written many reports and books, most recently *News on a Knife-Edge*, John Libbey, London (1995); *Britain in the Commonwealth*, Royal Commonwealth Society and Commonwealth Secretariat, London (1997); and, with colleagues, *School-based understanding of human rights in four countries: a Commonwealth study*, Department for International Development Education Research No 22.

Lalage Bown

Lalage Bown, until recently joint Vice-Chairperson of CEC, made her career in university adult education, in six universities in four Commonwealth African countries and then in UK institutions. During 16 years in Nigeria, she was working in a multi-religious environment, including six years in a society with an Islamic majority. She has had a long-standing interest in issues of gender in education, from literacy to universities and has also done some work on gender and development and on women, science and technology.

Casmir Chanda

Casmir Chanda is Zambian living and working in the UK. She holds a Doctorate in Education from the University of Cambridge, where she was a Chevening Scholar. She has also held a Cambridge Commonwealth Trust Scholarship and other awards. Casmir's subjects of special interest include gender in education, school improvement, classroom teaching and learning, Education and HIV/AIDS. She authored the Commonwealth Consortium Briefing Note *Gender and Education in the Commonwealth* (2006). She has served as a teacher and school administrator in Zambia and the UK, and worked closely with the Commonwealth Countries League (CCL) and the 'Campaign for Female Education' (CAMFED). Casmir is a member of CEC, CCL and RCS. As a Christian, Casmir has taught world religions in Religious Studies and Philosophy and Ethics. She brings directly relevant experience to CEC and is pleased to represent the younger generation of the Commonwealth beyond the UK.

Valerie Davey

Valerie Davey's passion for education took her into politics. After studying Theology and History at Birmingham University and Education at the Institute in London, she taught in Tanzania in the mid 1960s. There, she learnt among other things, the importance of politics. Returning to Bristol, she became an Avon County Councillor, serving on the Education Committee with a special interest in early years education and adult / further education. As Labour MP for Bristol West (1997-2005), Valerie Davey was a member of the Education Select Committee and from 2001, a Parliamentary Chairperson of CEC. Thanks to the British Council, she was twinned with a woman MP in Tanzania. In 2006, Valerie became Executive Chair of the CEC.

Martin Davidson

Martin Davidson joined the British Council in 1983, with successive postings in China and Hong Kong. His last overseas post was as Director of the British Council in China from 1995. Renowned as a leading professional in cultural diplomacy, he returned to London in March 2000, as Director for East Asia and the Americas and later as Director for Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. He became Deputy Director-General of the British Council in 2005 and in April 2007 succeeded Sir David Green as Director General.

Oley Dibba-Wadda

Oley Dibba-Wadda is a specialist in gender and women rights issues, relating to education and international development. Oley was born in Oxford, UK and grew up in The Gambia in a multi-religious family, with

her mother a Christian and her father a Muslim. She is married to a Muslim Gambian with four children and has performed the Hajj in Mecca. Oley became Human Resources Manager in *The Gambia* (the country's only 5-star hotel) and then worked for an EC funded Rural Development Programme. Visiting projects across The Gambia, a Muslim seeing for herself the problems women were facing, led to a Masters in Gender Analysis at the University of East Anglia and a National Diploma in Gender and Development from the Management Development Institute in The Gambia. In the NGO sector she worked with Concern Universal West Africa Regional Office and then as OGB Regional Coordinator for West Africa, with responsibility in 5 countries. She has spent time as Grants Coordinator, Donor Liaison Officer and International Fundraising Coordinator. Now at Oxfam GB, she is Gender Project Manager for the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF), working in 16 of the least developed Commonwealth countries in Africa and Asia. Her key responsibility is to raise awareness to encourage gender equality in education in Kenya, Malawi, Ghana and Bangladesh focussing on quality as well as access. Oley has organized charity fundraising events; assessed two international project evaluations (DFID funded *Rural Women and Girl Child Education Project in Ghana*; the EC funded *Small Holder Irrigation Livelihoods Enhancement Project* for Senegambia). She designed gender-training manuals for Concern Universal and reviewed human resource policies, handbooks and international security guidelines in West Africa. On behalf of CEF, she has edited a special issue of *EQUALS* the newsletter of the *Beyond Access: Gender, Education and Development Project* (Vol. 19, 2007), at the Institute of Education in London. The theme is civil society coalitions in Africa and Asia and their contribution to Gender equality in education.

Maria Jaschok

Maria Jaschok is Director of the International Gender Studies Centre (IGS), Queen Elizabeth House (Dept of International Development), and Senior Research Scholar at the Institute for Chinese Studies, University of Oxford. Since 2006, she has been a member of the central Research Management Committee of the 5-year DFID Research Programme Consortium, *Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts: gender, poverty and democratisation from the inside out*, and research director of the component on China. Maria Jaschok's key interests lie in the areas of religion, gender and development; feminist ethnographic theory and practice; and the implications of religious and ethnic marginality for citizenship. Long-term collaborative research in central China has been concerned with female education and rural poverty, the importance of religion in local welfare and citizenship initiatives, and the local impact of international, faith-based philanthropy. Maria Jaschok is a founder member of Women's Initiative on International Affairs in Asia and a co-founder of Women and Gender in Chinese Studies Network (WAGNet). She is a member of the Editorial Boards of a number of international journals. Her deep knowledge of Islam and women in China enables her to contribute comparative beyond the Commonwealth perspectives on: state management, Islamic Education and gender in a field of tension; women and non-state educational expansion under Muslim control; and women's mosques / madrassas positioned between political Islam and the State.

Selected publications include: 'Review: Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities and Other Subaltern Subjects', May 2005, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 16(2): 269-274; *Chinese Women Organizing Chinese Women Organizing: Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers* (co-edited with Ping Chun Hsiung, Cecilia Milwert, Red Chan, Berg Publishers, 2001); (co-edited with Shui Jingjun) *The History of Women's Mosques in Chinese Islam* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000); *The Communist Party, Allah and Women's Liberation: The Place of Religious Life in the History of Chinese Women* (2000); 'Outsider within': *Speaking to excursions across cultures*, *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 1(1): 33-58 (2000); 'Chinese Educational Reforms and Feminist Praxis: On Ideals, Process, and Paradigm', in M. Agelasto and Bob Adamson (eds) *Higher Education in Post-Mao China*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press (1998): 321-344.

Sally Keeble

Sally Keeble has been MP for Northampton North since 1997 and a vocal advocate for the town in Parliament taking the concerns of constituents to the highest level of Government. She has campaigned on family finances, law and order, and local environmental issues, working closely with residents' groups and community organisations. She is a member of the powerful Treasury Select Committee, scrutinising Government policy on the economy, and has served on the Home Affairs and Education Committees of the Parliamentary Labour Party. She was a minister in the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions from 2001 - 2002 and in the Department for International Development from 2002-2003. She was

Vice-Chair of a commission on voluntary sector funding, set up by the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations. The *Schools for Africa* campaign, which she launched in 2004, has won support from outside Northampton. Over 60 UK schools take part in the campaign, sending boxes of school equipment, toys and clothes to orphans and other vulnerable children in Africa.

Fatimah Kelleher

Fatimah Kelleher is Education Programme Officer at the Commonwealth Secretariat, London. She recently led with partners on the Forum on *Flexible Education: Reaching nomadic populations in Africa*, held in Garissa, Kenya, June 2006. Fatimah has worked previously with civil society, NGOs and governments in Nigeria, Sudan and the UK, and has been involved in varied education programmes since 1997. Most recently, she has been a contributor / author of studies on boys' underachievement and teacher deployment in selected Commonwealth countries.

Basil A.J. Mustafa

Basil Mustafa is the Nelson Mandela Fellow in Educational Studies at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. He is Associate Tutor in Islamic studies at the Oxford University Department for Continuing Education. His taught courses include 'Islam in the Modern World'; and 'Islam and the West. He is also the convener of the 'Islam in Education' programme at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. The programme seeks to contribute to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural work of British schools, to share good educational practice, and to provide opportunities for enriched understanding of Islamic beliefs and values. Basil Mustafa is a member of the Abrahamic Faith Group convened by the Bishop of Oxford, and has served as a public policy advisor (2000-2006) in the Inner Cities Religious Council at ODPM. Much of Basil Mustafa's professional career has been in the field of higher education management. He is currently Bursar of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and Chair of Oxford Islamic Finance Ltd.

Publications include: 'JESUS in Muslim Thought', in Richard Harries(ed) *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*, London, Continuum International Publishing Group (2006); *Good Governance and Education: Implications for Human Security in Iraq*, paper presented to International Cooperation for the Future: A Human Security Perspective, at the United Nations University Global Seminar, Hokkaido University, Japan, (2004); 'Public Education and Muslim Voluntary Organisations in Britain', *Westminster Studies in Education* (2001, **24**(2): 129-136); 'Education for Integration: Case Study of a British Muslim High School for Girls', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (1999, **19**(2): 291-298).

Azim Nanji

Azim Nanji became of Director of the Institute of Ismaili Studies (London) in the autumn of 1998. Previously he was Professor and Chair of the Department of Religion at the University of Florida. He has written and edited a number of books including: *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition* (1976), *The Muslim Almanac* (1996), *Mapping Islamic Studies* (1997) and *The Historical Atlas of Islam* (with M. Ruthven) (2004). Most recently he was an Associate Editor for the revised Second Edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* (16 Volumes, New York, 2005), and is currently preparing *The Historical Dictionary of Islam* to be published by Penguin.

Azim Nanji has served as a Member of the Steering Committee of the Aga Khan Development Network, Master Jury of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture and Task Force Member for the Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations (AKU-ISMC). He is Vice Chair of the *Madrassa-based Early Childhood Education Programme in East-Africa*, which helps under-privileged Muslim communities operate pre-schools, providing curriculum, designing materials and training young women from participating communities to become teachers. Nearly five thousand girls (and boys) have benefited to date from Resource Centres in Mombassa, Zanzibar and Kampala.

Moses Oketch

Moses Oketch is Lecturer of Educational Planning and International Development in the School of Lifelong Education & International Development at the Institute of Education, UK. His interests include Comparative/International HE Policy and Management, Economics of Education, HE Finance and Management, Globalisation and HE Policy Reforms, International Human Resource Development, and Social Cohesion. He has published widely in these areas.

John Oxenham

Zambia, Indonesia and Turkey gave John Oxenham his empirical experiences of school and literacy education. Research, field-work, teaching and writing at IDS, Sussex, helped him get his thinking on education and its interactions with broader life and employment into some perspective. A concluding stint at the World Bank Institute sharpened his skills in evaluating the outcomes of educational efforts. Working now with CEC keeps him alive to the need to bear always in mind the inter-dependencies between school, post-school and lifelong education.

Rosemary Preston

With several languages, Rosemary Preston has moved comfortably from multilateral policy levels to the most remote and sometimes disrupted communities on three continents. She has taught and researched at all educational levels, from pre-primary to post-graduate and post-experience professional development for senior executives in human development, aid sector management and consultancy. Her interdisciplinary writing examines global, cross-national and comparative aspects of human development, particularly in respect of women and ethnic minorities in low-income states. Labour and war-related migration, are major themes, as are policy analysis, organisational processes, civil society participation and social anthropology. For 11 years Rosemary Preston directed the International Centre for Education in Development at the University of Warwick. She has edited two international journals [*Gender and Education* (1994-2000) and *Compare* (1999-2004)] and has considerable experience of NGO governance.

Kasturi Sen

Kasturi Sen is the Research Director at International NGO Training and Research Centre (INRAC) and a social scientist who has worked in public health and civil society issues for the past twenty years. She has a doctorate from the University of Exeter (1986) in Islamics, Sociology and Economics. Over the past ten years she has been involved in the co-ordination of a number of multi-national studies for the European Commission (1993-2004), the most recent of which was an international meeting on Citizenship and Young People of Muslim Origin, in selected countries of the European Union.

She was a Visiting Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi, India) Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health between January and March 2004 and from 1996 until 2004 was based at the University of Cambridge's Institute of Public Health as a Senior Research Associate, combining some teaching with field research in South Asia and the Middle East in the main.

Among Kasturi's areas of interest are cross-national issues of research methods, encouraging multi-dimensional studies especially of vulnerable groups such as older people, and the need for applied research particularly in the health and social sectors. She has published widely both in Europe and internationally in peer reviewed journals.

Manzila Pola, Baroness Uddin of Bethnal Green and Tower Hamlets

Baroness Uddin was born in Bangladesh and brought up in London. A youth and community worker in Tower Hamlets she became the first Bengali woman to sit on a local authority in Britain, when she was elected as a councillor in Tower Hamlets in 1990, and served as Deputy Leader there for two years. As a community activist, she helped to initiate many projects, such as a women's health and advocacy project, counselling services for families, an IT project and notably the Jagonari Centre, the first purpose-built women's education and training centre in the country. In 1988 she obtained a social work qualification from the University of North London and began a long career with Newham Social Services. She headed initiatives on domestic violence and worked as a child protection officer and team manager. She continues her social services career as an independent consultant. When she received her peerage in 1998 as one of Tony Blair's "working peers", Uddin was the youngest woman on the government benches. She was the first Bengali and the first Muslim woman to enter the Lords, and the only Muslim woman in Parliament. She swore by "Almighty Allah" as she took her seat. She has continued her work in education, health, children, local government, equal opportunities and human rights.