A Time to Enrol, a Time to Stop…

Policies, perceptions and practices influencing the right to basic education in Yemen

Lucienne Maas

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Een tijd van beginnen en een tijd van stoppen met school...

De invloed van beleid, percepties en praktijken op het recht op schoolonderwijs in Jemen

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father Jozef Maas who has shown me the delights of social inquiry in his own humble way.

Contents

List of Tables

Acronyms

AES	Annual Education Survey
BEDS	Basic Education Development Strategy
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer
CSO	Central Statistical Office
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
EFA	Education for All
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
HBS	Household Budget Survey
IE	Inclusive Education
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MLA	Monitoring of Learning Achievement
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PWP	Public Works Project
SFD	Social Fund for Development
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNHCHR	United Nations High Commission for Human Rights

UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

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Abstract

This study aims to understand why some children in rural Yemen stop their basic schooling while others do not. Basic schooling is defined as nine grades of compulsory schooling in Yemen. All of the children in the study had access to basic resources such as nearby schools, female teachers and piped water in their communities – all reasons identified in the literature as potential barriers to basic school completion.

Despite improvements over the last two decades, Yemen continues to show some of the worst education statistics in the region. The international education development community has long identified Yemen as a focus country for education aid, which started in earnest in the early 1990s. Having only initiated its mass schooling system in the late 1960s and having only a handful of schools to start with, the initial focus of education development was on access. Enrolment increased dramatically in the system's early decades, but school completion lagged behind and the gender gap remained wide. In the 2006/07 school year, gross enrolment rates in basic schooling were 64 per cent for girls and 74 per cent for boys. Only about half of the children who start also complete primary school (the first six grades of schooling). Grade repetition rates are high and many children start school later than the required age of six. Both of these factors contribute to children stopping school before they complete the nine grades.

International education development aid continues to play an important role in Yemen's schooling system, although at present (2011) due to recent changes in priorities of major donors and civil unrest, donor investment in the schooling system has come to a near halt. Schooling has also been disrupted by political turmoil, which has increased the chance still further that children will stop school.

The theoretical starting point of this study is the view of childhood and schooling as sociological phenomena. Various developments in the sociology of childhood and schooling point to relevant angles from which stopping school can be explored. Studies on the sociology of childhood and education have also influenced education development theory, with the most recent and widely adopted approach identified as 'rights-based'. A rights-based approach views education as a human right, with the child as the rights-holder and adults as duty-bearers. The rights-based approach has seen a recent shift away from an overly legalistic interpretation of rights, to a focus on individual capabilities, influenced by the theory of Amartya Sen.

Inequalities in school completion are a central theme in the sociology of education in the West and education development in the South. The broad categories of class, gender and ethnicity have been shown to help explain differences in education outcomes. However, more nuanced issues, such as identity and individual differences, are also at work, as are factors within schools. Overall, most research has centred on childhood education as a product (completion of a specified number of grades) rather than a process. For children, however, the process may be paramount, as stopping or continuing school is something happening to them now. The active role of children is underlined by the new sociology of childhood, as well as by the sociology of education. These perspectives, and the rights-based approach to development, view children as able to influence their schooling as well as their society; children are active participants in their own social world as well as the adult world. This means that both worlds need to be explored in order to understand children's behaviour, such as stopping or staying in school.

My research is based on four linked research questions aimed to shed light on the main research question of why some children who have access to schools and resources stop school before they complete their compulsory nine grades:

1. What does basic school 'completion', or stopping before 'completion', mean for the different education actors, including children? And how can differences in views be explained?

2. Why do some children decide not to complete basic education? Who are the children who decide not to complete basic education? What are the influences of gender and status and how can they be explained?

3. What is the role of the school in children's decision to stop school? How do the practices of teachers affect stopping school?

4. How do the meanings of stopping school, reasons for stopping school and the role of schools in stopping school affect practices of education development agencies relating to basic school completion?

My research methodology gave priority to data gathering from children, and includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research, which took place in the south of Yemen, covers 35 schools and their surrounding communities in the governorates of Abyan, Lahej and Aden. The quantitative tools include a household survey involving one school-aged child and one parent in 700 households, 13 group discussions with a total of 81 school-aged children attending school, and a school and teacher survey involving the 35 schools and 120 teachers. The qualitative tools include in-depth interviews with 30 children who had recently stopped school in three school catchment areas, classroom observations in the three schools and interviews with key informants from the three school catchment areas. In addition, interviews were held with key informants from education development actors.

My main findings show that despite having access to schools, female teachers and resources such as water, a relatively high number of children stopped school before completing their nine grades in the study area (though the drop-out rate was less than the national average). Children especially tended to stop school around puberty. But due to high repetition rates and frequently delayed starting in school, the number of grades completed was low. Boys completed more grades than girls, but children from all status groups stopped school. My in-depth research showed that children from the same household often had different schooling outcomes, boys as well as girls and across all status groups. My adult and child informants placed much less emphasis than might be expected on the costs of schooling (direct or indirect), though cost is the primary reason identified in the literature for stopping school, including studies in Yemen.

Among the various actors involved in schooling (planners, implementers and users), different views emerged on basic school completion. Education development agencies and the central Ministry of Education view school completion as a right for all, while teachers as well as chil-

dren and their parents do not view school completion as necessary for everyone. Education development agencies and the Ministry of Education tended to recite the global agenda of Education for All (EFA), identifying education as a human right. However the EFA strategy appears to be narrowed down in practice, equating 'basic education' with the completion of six grades of primary school and three grades of secondary school. Global education targets tend, understandably, to focus on numbers, especially the number of children completing nine grades. Yet this can be criticized as failing to fully address the right to education.

Children and their parents had their own views on schooling, considering schooling to be an activity limited to the time of childhood without much relationship to the future in social or financial terms. They did not see stopping school before reaching grade nine as 'dropping out' as they did not see schooling as a process with an end defined in terms of a number of completed grades. In addition, child development in rural Yemen is linked to abilities and behaviours rather than to levels of schooling completed. In this regard, there is a strong link between the onset of adolescence and stopping school. Many children and parents said that children stopped school when, and because, they were 'ready' to begin the transition to adulthood. The key skills needed for this transition are not taught by school, so children stop school to learn these skills elsewhere. Teachers had yet another view. They saw school completion as something desirable for society, but they did not see the need for all children to complete nine grades. They further questioned the ability of all children to do so, often linked to the support system that children have in the home.

Children said that they were the ones who decided when to stop school, supported by their parents and teachers. However, a closer look at the reasoning given by children who had stopped school suggests that their roles in decision making are smaller than they imagine. Adults do play an important part. Parents use the child's schooling status as a tool to strengthen or defend their own position in society. Fathers and mothers play different roles in this, and children are required to support family and group solidarity rather than prioritize the individual goal of school completion.

Many children who stopped school identified teachers' discriminatory behaviour as their main reason for stopping. Children are not dismissed from school, but teachers do use a range of behaviours to make the child

feel pressured or forced to stop school. Observations of teachers confirmed that teachers can actively prevent certain children from completing more grades. Yet this discriminatory behaviour is found towards children from all status groups and towards boys as well as girls. Teachers' behaviour can be explained as a way to strengthen their own social position through their influence over the child's schooling. The need to defend their position in society is now all the more urgent due to society's disillusionment with schooling.

Implications for education development practice are important to me as an education development worker. In this regard, I highlight some points of interest. Universal basic school completion is a key goal of education development agencies, but children who stop school, as well as many others, question the usefulness of basic school completion. It is difficult to explain why the benchmark of nine grades of basic schooling would fulfil the need for education. Numerical targets set by education development agencies – measured in years of schooling – cannot be equated with fulfilment of the right to education, and they do not combine well with traditional Yemeni ideas of education.

The role of the reproduction of adults' social positions also needs to be considered by education development agencies. This study's findings on schooling and social reproduction are very different from established views in which schooling is believed either to support reproduction of structures (especially inequalities) in society or is seen as providing opportunities for individuals to transcend those structures. In Yemen, enrolling in school is now an accepted part of childhood education, but basic school completion is not. Schooling is not seen as supporting or countering the reproduction of gender roles in society, or as a tool for improving socio-economic positions. My findings suggest rather that schooling plays a different role in social reproduction; adults – mothers, fathers and teachers – use schooling of children as a tool to strengthen their positions in society, using the pressure of group and family solidarity.

Addressing discriminatory practices in school has been and still is a key aspect of education development practice to prevent children from stopping school prematurely. Traditionally, discriminatory practices have been addressed through activities like teacher training targeting discrimination by gender and status. My results show that discriminatory practices often go beyond the usual lines of gender and status and include an

individual aspect in which teachers use the child's schooling status to strengthen their own position in society vis-á-vis the child and the child's family. This is rarely considered in present education development practice.

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Samenvatting

Dit onderzoek gaat over de vraag waarom sommige kinderen hun schoolopleiding van negen verplichte leerjaren in Jemen niet afmaken, zelfs als de gebruikelijke oorzaken van voortijdig schoolverlaten die in de literatuur genoemd worden, zoals een te grote afstand tot school, de afwezigheid van vrouwelijke docenten en het feit dat kinderen thuis nodig zijn om water te halen, zijn weggenomen. Hoewel het de afgelopen twintig jaar iets beter gaat, is Jemen volgens de statistieken op onderwijsgebied nog altijd een van de zwakste landen van de regio, en de internationale gemeenschap heeft Jemen aangewezen als speerpunt voor ontwikkelingshulp op het gebied van onderwijs. Deze hulp is begin jaren negentig echt op gang gekomen.

Omdat het stelsel van onderwijs voor iedereen in Jemen pas eind jaren zestig ingevoerd is en er in het begin maar een handvol scholen was, lag het accent van onderwijsontwikkeling in Jemen aanvankelijk op toegankelijkheid. Het aantal leerlingen nam spectaculair toe, maar lang niet alle leerlingen voltooiden hun schoolopleiding en het sekseverschil bleef groot. Tegenwoordig (2006/2007) volgt ongeveer 64% van de meisjes en 74% van de jongens schoolonderwijs, terwijl naar schatting slechts 50% van de kinderen de basisschool of de eerste zes klassen volledig doorloopt. Er zijn veel zittenblijvers en lang niet alle kinderen gaan op de leeftijd dat ze leerplichtig worden naar school. Beide factoren dragen eraan bij dat kinderen de school verlaten voor ze negen leerjaren doorlopen hebben. Internationale ontwikkelingshulp speelt nog steeds een belangrijke rol in het onderwijsstelsel in Jemen, hoewel er op dit moment (2011) door recente veranderingen in de prioriteiten van belangrijke donoren en de onrustige situatie in Jemen bijna een einde is gekomen aan

de investeringen van donoren in het onderwijsstelsel. Het onderwijs heeft ook veel te lijden gehad van de maatschappelijke onrust, waardoor de kans op schooluitval is toegenomen.

In de theoretische uitgangspunten van dit onderzoek worden jeugd en onderwijs beschouwd als sociologische verschijnselen. Verschillende ontwikkelingen in de jeugd- en onderwijssociologie wijzen op relevante invalshoeken van waaruit schooluitval kan worden onderzocht. Sociologisch onderzoek op het gebied van jeugd en onderwijs heeft ook invloed gehad op de onderwijsontwikkelingstheorie. In de meest recente en in brede kring ingevoerde 'op rechten gebaseerde' benadering wordt onderwijs beschouwd als mensenrecht, het kind als gerechtigde en volwassenen als degenen op wie de plicht rust. Daarnaast is er onder invloed van de *capabilities theory* (mogelijkhedentheorie) van Sen binnen de op rechten gebaseerde benadering recentelijk een verschuiving geweest van een al te legalistische interpretatie van rechten naar een meer op het individu gerichte aanpak.

Ongelijkheid op het gebied van het afronden van de schoolopleiding is een centraal probleem in zowel de onderwijssociologie in het Westen als in de onderwijsontwikkeling in het Zuiden. Het is bewezen dat brede categorieën als klasse, gender en etniciteit een rol spelen bij het verklaren van verschillen in onderwijsresultaten, maar dat genuanceerdere factoren als identiteit en individuele verschillen ook meespelen, evenals factoren binnen de school. Over het algemeen heeft het accent echter gelegen op het product of resultaat van onderwijs voor de jeugd in plaats van op het proces, terwijl voor kinderen misschien juist het proces voorop staat. Stoppen of doorgaan met school is immers iets wat ze doen, of wat ze overkomt, in het hier en nu. De actieve rol die kinderen spelen wordt belicht door zowel het nieuwe vakgebeid jeugdsociologie als door de onderwijssociologie en de op rechten gebaseerde benadering van ontwikkeling. Volgens deze benaderingen zijn kinderen in staat om invloed uit te oefenen op hun opleiding en de maatschappij om hen heen; kinderen nemen actief deel aan hun eigen sociale leefwereld en aan die van de volwassenen. Dit betekent dat beide werelden onderzocht moeten worden om het gedrag van kinderen, zoals stoppen of doorgaan met school, te begrijpen.

Dit onderzoek is gebaseerd op vier onderling gerelateerde onderzoeksvragen die licht moeten werpen op de centrale onderzoeksvraag: waarom sommige kinderen die toegang hebben tot scholen en hulp-

bronnen de school verlaten voor ze de negen verplichte leerjaren van hun schoolopleiding doorlopen hebben.

1. Wat betekent 'afmaken' van de schoolopleiding of voortijdig schoolverlaten voor de verschillende onderwijsactoren, met inbegrip van kinderen? En hoe kunnen verschillen tussen de gezichtspunten verklaard worden?

2. Waarom besluiten sommige kinderen om de schoolopleiding niet af te maken? Wie zijn de kinderen die besluiten om de schoolopleiding niet af te maken? Wat is de invloed van gender en status en hoe kan die worden verklaard?

3. Welk rol speelt de school bij het voortijdig schoolverlaten? Welke invloed heeft het optreden van docenten op het voortijdig schoolverlaten?

4. Welke invloed hebben de betekenissen van voortijdig schoolverlaten, redenen voor voortijdig schoolverlaten en de rol van scholen bij het voortijdig schoolverlaten op de aanpak van onderwijsontwikkelingsorganisaties als het gaat om het afmaken van de schoolopleiding?

Bij de onderzoeksmethodologie lag de prioriteit bij de verzameling van data bij kinderen en er zijn zowel kwalitatieve als kwantitatieve methoden gebruikt. Het onderzoek vond plaats in het zuiden van Jemen, onder 35 scholen en de omringende gemeenschappen (de rayons van de scholen) in de gouvernementen (provincies) Abyan, Lahj en Aden. Tot de kwantitatieve instrumenten behoorden een enquête die afgenomen werd bij een kind in de schoolleeftijd en een ouder in 700 huishoudens, 13 groepsdiscussies met in totaal 81 kinderen in de schoolleeftijd die naar school gingen, en een enquête onder scholen en docenten waaraan de 35 scholen en 120 docenten deelnamen. Tot de kwalitatieve instrumenten behoorden diepte-interviews met 30 kinderen die recentelijk van school gegaan waren in de drie schoolrayons, observaties in de klas in de drie scholen en interviews met sleutelfiguren uit de drie schoolrayons. Daarnaast zijn interviews gehouden met sleutelfiguren binnen verschillende onderwijsontwikkelingsactoren.

De belangrijkste resultaten van dit onderzoek geven aan dat relatief veel kinderen van school gaan voor ze de negen leerjaren doorlopen hebben, ook al hebben ze toegang tot scholen, zijn er vrouwelijke docen-

ten en hulpbronnen zoals water, en ligt de schooluitval onder het landelijk gemiddelde. Kinderen in deze gebieden stoppen met school als ze al wat ouder zijn, vooral rond de puberteit, maar doordat veel kinderen blijven zitten en vaak pas later met school beginnen, blijft het aantal afgeronde leerjaren laag. Jongens doorlopen meer leerjaren dan meisjes en kinderen uit alle lagen van de bevolking stoppen soms met school. Uit nader onderzoek blijkt echter ook dat kinderen uit hetzelfde huishouden vaak verschillende opleidingsresultaten hebben, los van de factoren gender en sociale status. De volwassenen en kinderen die deelnamen aan het onderzoek legden veel minder de nadruk op de (directe of indirecte) kosten van een schoolopleiding dan verwacht kan worden op grond van de literatuur. Daarin worden schoolkosten als de belangrijkste reden van schooluitval genoemd. Dit geldt ook voor de literatuur over Jemen.

De verschillende actoren die bij educatie betrokken zijn (degenen die het onderwijs plannen, implementeren of genieten) hebben verschillende visies op het afmaken van de schoolopleiding. Onderwijsontwikkelings-organisaties en het centrale ministerie van Onderwijs zien het als een recht voor iedereen, maar noch docenten, noch kinderen en hun ouders vinden dat onderwijs noodzakelijk is voor iedereen. Ontwikkelingsorganisaties die zich met educatie bezighouden en het centrale ministerie van Onderwijs sluiten zich aan bij het wereldwijde initiatief Educatie voor Allen (Education for All, of EFA) waarin educatie als mensenrecht beschouwd wordt. De EFA-beweging ging aanvankelijk uit van een alles-omvattende definitie van educatie, maar beperkt zich tegenwoordig tot schoolonderwijs, vooral de eerste negen jaar (zes jaar basis en de eerste drie jaar voortgezet onderwijs) voor kinderen. Het is begrijpelijk dat onderwijsdoelen op wereldschaal gericht zijn op cijfers: het aantal kinderen dat negen leerjaren doorloopt. Dit kan echter ook beschouwd worden als een te beperkte aanpak die niet volledig tegemoet komt aan het recht op educatie.

Kinderen en hun ouders hebben een andere visie dan de ontwikkelingsorganisaties die zich met educatie bezighouden; zij zien onderwijs als een activiteit in de jeugd die weinig te maken heeft met de toekomst in maatschappelijke of financiële zin. Ze beschouwen stoppen met school voor het negende leerjaar niet als 'schooluitval' omdat ze het onderwijs niet zien als een proces met een einde gedefinieerd in termen van voltooide leerjaren. Bovendien houdt de ontwikkeling van kinderen op het platteland in Jemen verband met het vermogen om bepaalde taken uit te

voeren en bepaald gedrag te vertonen in plaats van met het bereikte onderwijsniveau. De sterke samenhang tussen het begin van de adolescentie en stoppen met school heeft hiermee te maken. Veel kinderen en hun ouders verklaarden dat kinderen van school gingen wanneer, en omdat, ze 'klaar' waren voor de adolescentie. Omdat de school niet wordt beschouwd als de plaats om belangrijke vaardigheden die noodzakelijk zijn voor de overgang naar volwassenheid te leren, gaan kinderen van school om deze vaardigheden ergens anders op te doen. Docenten hebben ook een afwijkende opvatting. Zij beschouwen het afronden van de schoolopleiding als wenselijk voor de samenleving, maar ze vinden het niet noodzakelijk dat alle kinderen negen leerjaren doorlopen. Ze betwijfelen ook of alle kinderen daartoe in staat zijn, wat vaak verband houdt met de ondersteuning die kinderen thuis krijgen.

Uit de resultaten blijkt dat kinderen het idee hebben dat zijzelf bepalen wanneer ze stoppen met school, daarbij gesteund door hun ouders en docenten. Bij nadere beschouwing van de redenen van kinderen om te stoppen met school blijkt dat kinderen een veel kleinere inbreng hebben in de besluitvorming en dat volwassenen een belangrijke rol spelen. Ouders gebruiken de schoolopleiding van hun kind (of het afbreken daarvan) als instrument voor het versterken of verdedigen van hun eigen maatschappelijke positie. Vaders en moeders spelen hierin een verschillende rol, en kinderen worden geacht om het gezin te ondersteunen en solidair te zijn met de groep in plaats van voorrang te geven aan hun persoonlijke doel om de school af te maken.

Veel kinderen die voortijdig van school gegaan zijn noemen discriminatie door docenten als belangrijkste reden om te stoppen met school. Kinderen worden niet van school gestuurd, maar docenten zetten kinderen op verschillende manieren onder druk om voortijdig van school te gaan. Observatie van het gedrag van docenten levert steun op voor de bevinding dat docenten bepaalde kinderen soms actief beletten om meer leerjaren te doorlopen. Deze discriminatie door docenten treft kinderen uit verschillende lagen van de bevolking en zowel jongens als meisjes. Een verklaring voor dit gedrag van docenten is dat zij hun eigen maatschappelijke positie willen versterken via hun invloed op de schoolopleiding van het kind. Deze neiging wordt versterkt omdat hun positie sinds kort wordt bedreigd door een verlies van het maatschappelijk vertrouwen in de belofte die het onderwijs biedt.

Implicaties voor de praktijk van onderwijsontwikkeling. Omdat de auteur werkzaam is binnen de ontwikkeling van de educatie worden enkele zaken die van belang zijn voor de praktijk van de onderwijsontwikkeling belicht, zonder te diep in te gaan op dit veelomvattende onderzoeksterrein. Universele afronding van het schoolonderwijs is belangrijk voor ontwikkelingsorganisaties die zich met educatie bezighouden, maar kinderen die voortijdig van school gaan en vele anderen trekken het nut van afronding van het schoolonderwijs in twijfel. Dat negen jaar schoolonderwijs een graadmeter is voor het voltooien van de verplichte basisopleiding en voor zowel het vervullen van de elementaire behoefte aan onderwijs als het voldoen aan het recht op educatie, is moeilijk uit te leggen. Wanneer ontwikkelingsorganisaties doelen stellen die gericht zijn op het afgeronde aantal jaren onderwijs, wordt daarmee niet voldaan aan het recht op educatie en deze doelen komen niet overeen met traditionele Jemenitische opvattingen over educatie.

De rol van het reproduceren van de maatschappelijke positie van volwassenen moet ook in aanmerking genomen worden door ontwikkelingsorganisaties. De resultaten van dit onderzoek op het gebied van onderwijs en sociale reproductie wijken sterk af van gevestigde opvattingen. Daarin wordt onderwijs ofwel beschouwd als middel om maatschappelijke structuren (vooral ongelijkheid) te reproduceren, ofwel als manier om individuen binnen deze structuren kansen te bieden om hun maatschappelijke of economische positie te verbeteren door extra jaren onderwijs. In Jemen is naar school gaan onderdeel geworden van de verwachtingen van onderwijs voor de jeugd, maar het afmaken van de schoolopleiding niet. Onderwijs wordt niet gezien als factor die het reproduceren van rolpatronen gebaseerd op gender in de maatschappij ondersteunt of tegengaat, of als hulpmiddel om de sociaal-economische positie te verbeteren. De resultaten van dit onderzoek wijzen er eerder op dat onderwijs een andere rol speelt in de sociale reproductie; volwassenen, moeders, vaders en docenten gebruiken onderwijs aan kinderen als instrument om hun eigen maatschappelijke positie te versterken, waarbij ze solidariteit met de groep en het gezin als drukmiddel gebruiken.

Het aanpakken van discriminatie op school is nog steeds een belangrijk aspect van de praktijk van ontwikkelingswerk op het gebied van educatie, om te voorkomen dat kinderen voortijdig van school gaan. Van oudsher bestaat de aanpak van discriminatie uit trainingen voor docenten en andere activiteiten gericht op het bestrijden van discriminatie op

grond van gender en status. Uit dit onderzoek blijkt dat discriminatie in de praktijk verder kan gaan dan de gebruikelijke discriminatie op grond van gender en status. Er kan een individueel aspect meespelen waarbij het versterken van de positie van de docent ten opzichte van het kind en het gezin waaruit het komt een belangrijke rol speelt. Hiermee wordt zelden rekening gehouden in de huidige praktijk van onderwijsontwikkeling.

Note on recent developments

I carried out my research in Yemen in 2008 and 2009. In early 2011 the situation in the country changed dramatically as young urban Yemenis became involved in the so-called 'Arab Spring' civil uprisings. The situation has especially affected schools and schooling. At present about one-third of the schools that were involved in my research are not functioning, either because the governorate is involved in armed conflict between rebels and the government (Abyan), or because displaced families from Abyan are living in the schools. The three rural schools where I did my qualitative research are fully functional, but teachers there say that the start of the new school year saw an increase in the number of children quitting school. At present the situation continues to be fluid and unpredictable.

1   Exploring basic schooling in Yemen

1.1   Introduction

This study aims to understand why some children in rural Yemen stop their basic schooling while others do not. All of the children in the study have access to basic resources such as schools, female teachers and piped water in their communities – all reasons identified in the literature as potential barriers to basic school completion. Yemen's formal education system is relatively new, and efforts made over the past two decades have increased enrolment. However, school completion rates are not increasing at the same speed, and there is a persistent gender gap in school completion (World Bank and Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) 2010). International pressure on Yemen is mounting to achieve the agreed Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education (six grades) by 2015 as well as the country's own goal of realizing universal basic education (nine grades) by 2025. The main focus of efforts towards these goals is getting more girls into school as well as keeping more children in school until completion.

The Republic of Yemen is situated on the Arabian Peninsula, but the country does not have the large quantities of oil and gas of its neighbours. In addition to this lack of natural resources, Yemen has the worst human development indicators in the region. It ranked 133 out of 169 in the 2010 Human Development Index and ranks lowest in the region on aspects of gender development (UNDP 2010). Yemen further has high child mortality rates, high maternal mortality rates, a large proportion of poor food-insecure households, high child malnutrition rates, rapid population growth (3 per cent) and several internal conflicts raging. This is all in addition to the country-wide explosion of civil unrest that began in

early 2011 (after this research was completed). Yemen has some of the worst education indicators in the region as well.

The current study looks at basic education in Yemen. It follows the Education for All (EFA) initiative in defining 'basic education' in an all-encompassing fashion, including, for example, informal education provided to children in the home as well as formal schooling. In education development practice the term 'basic education' is often used to mean basic schooling for children. 'Basic schooling' is defined here, as in Yemen, as nine grades: six grades of primary school and the first three grades of secondary school (or lower secondary school). Specifically, this study focuses on what is known as school 'drop-out'. Early on in my research I realized that the word 'drop-out', as translated into Arabic, is not widely used in Yemen, especially among children. They did not see themselves as 'dropping out' of a set process, but rather as simply 'stopping' school. This thesis therefore uses the term 'stopping school' throughout.

In terms of international education statistics, Yemen has one of the lowest basic school completion rates (nine grades), as well as the widest gender gaps in access to and retention in basic schooling (Abdelmalik et al. 2009). The gross enrolment ratio (GER)[1] was estimated at 76 per cent in 2007/08, and 64 per cent for girls. Gross rather than net enrolment is used by the Ministry of Education because registration at birth, although required, is not widespread practice in Yemen. Statistics on children by age are therefore not readily available. An estimated 1.8 million children of basic education age are not enrolled in school and therefore do not complete school. Of those children who do enrol only half complete primary education, with many more boys than girls finishing (World Bank and MoPIC 2010, Abdelmalik et al. 2009).

Table 1.1
Gross basic school enrolment Yemen 1998/1999 compared to 2007/2008[2]

	Boys	Girls	Total
1998/1999	80%	42%	62%
2007/2008	85%	64%	74%

Source: Adapted by author from World Bank and MoPIC (2010: 35) and UN data.

Access to school in Yemen has improved over the past two decades. Enrolment rates rose between 1998 and 2008 (Table 1.1). Despite this increase, however, Yemen's global indicators compare unfavourably to those for the world or even the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2
Gross school enrolment 2005/2006 data compared

	Total		Girls	
	Primary	**Lower secondary**	**Primary**	**Lower secondary**
World average	105	78	102	76
MENA average	105	79	103	79
Yemen	83	50	72	34

Source: Adapted by author from World Bank and MoPIC (2010: 36).

Table 1.3
Retention rates till grade six, 2006/2007 by location and gender[3]

	Total		Urban		Rural	
	Girls	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**
Gender separated schools	73	76	86	89	68	71
Mixed schools	42	66	55	69	41	66

Source: Adapted by author from World Bank and MoPIC (2010: 44), which bases its calculations on the Annual Education Survey (AES) 2006/07.

Especially in regard to gender, Yemen is not doing well. Only 57.5 per cent of girls complete six grades of school compared to 71 per cent of boys. Although less clear, national statistics also suggest inequalities related to ethnicity and class. Yemen's national statistics often equate class with location, since class or status is difficult to identify otherwise. Some 87 per cent of children who never enrol in school are from the rural areas, which also tend to be poor. Similarly, the lowest enrolment rates are

in the poorest governorates, which again are often rural (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 40). Regarding school completion, inequalities are found by gender and location. Retention rates in primary school are highest for boys and girls in urban single-gender schools (Table 1.3).

Nationally, ministry data show that most children stop school in grade one (when 19 per cent of boys and 18 per cent of girls stop school), followed by grade nine (when 18 per cent of boys and 16 per cent of girls leave school). Stopping school is especially common among girls in grade six. Looking separately at data for primary and lower secondary schooling, more girls than boys stop school during the primary grades (Table 1.4) (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). Grade repetition is high in Yemen, with a national average of more than 5 per cent per grade for boys and 4 per cent for girls (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 46). There is an official policy of automatic promotion in the first three grades. Yet this policy does not seem to be widely implemented, as many children repeat grades in the first years of school. Girls have slightly lower repetition rates than boys (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4
Grade repetition and dropout rates Yemen 2006/2007[4]

	Repetition Rate			Drop Out Rate		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
Grade 1	5	5	4.9	18.7	19.1	18.3
Grade 6	5.5	6.5	4	12	9.5	16
Grade 9	6.2	7	4.8	17.4	18.1	16.1
Grade 1-6	5.8	6.4	5.2	11.8	10.5	13.6
Grade 7-9	6	6.9	4.3	11.7	11.2	12.5

Source: Adapted by author from World Bank and MoPIC (2010: 46), which uses data from the Annual Education Survey (AES) 2006/07 and 2007/08.

Regarding learning performance, national Monitoring of Learning Achievement (MLA)[5] data show results to be low and to decrease further in the higher grades (Table 1.5). Girls do better than boys, and urban

children do slightly better than rural children (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 56).

Table 1.5
Yemen Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) survey results 2005[6]

	4th grade	6th grade
Total	49	31
Boys	47	29
Girls	50	33
Urban	48	33
Rural	49	29

Note: The MLA included life skills, science, mathematics and Arabic language.
Source: Adapted by author from World Bank and MoPIC (2010: 56).

These numbers paint a bleak picture of schooling in Yemen, but they do not explain why some children stop school while others do not. Few studies in Yemen have tried to explain why children leave school prematurely. One recent study used a supply and demand approach[7] to assess motivation for schooling. Some 63 per cent of heads of household participating in the study identified 'attitudes of people' (assumed to be parents) as a main obstacle to children completing school (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 42). This finding is a starting point, but it offers little specific explanation. No detail is provided on what these attitudes are, how they were formed and why they are not addressed in current programming.

The aim of the supply and demand approach is to find a balance between what is supplied by schools and what is demanded by those who use the schools. Typical programming based on this approach is, on the supply side, rehabilitation of school buildings and enough desks and textbooks. Typical programming on the demand side includes cash incentives for parents and school supplies for girls. However, though supply and demand programmes have been in place for years, children still stop school; and the issues identified by heads of household as barriers to school completion continue to be felt, as the recent study highlights. This indicates a need to further explore attitudes towards schooling, not

only from the point of view of heads of household but also from the viewpoints of other adults and of children who have stopped attending school.

In the West, many studies have examined children's motivation for completing their education, especially in relation to inequalities linked to class (Brown 1987, Willis 1977, as quoted in Willis 2003/2006: 515, Ogbu 1994/2003: 765) and gender (Walkerdine et al. 2001, Arnot and Fennel 2008). However, these provide little insight into why children stop school in Yemen, where the local context gives school completion an entirely different meaning than in the West.

The concept of 'mass schooling' is based on the assumption that completion of a specific number of grades is beneficial for all children, as well as for the nation. Governments throughout the world have integrated this idea unquestioned into their national education policies and implementation strategies. This seems to be true of Yemen too. The Yemeni mass formal education system is relatively new. It was introduced in the early 1970s as two separate systems in the North and South after the end of the civil war. The two systems were integrated in 1990 when the two countries united to form the current Republic. Both systems defined the purpose of education as to develop citizens loyal to the respective regimes (Lackner 1985, Messick 1993, Al Noban 1984). Since 1990, the school system has received increasing support from international education actors. Within the country, a poverty alleviation strategy was developed that assigns schooling a wider role in addressing poverty.

Before establishment of the mass schooling system, education in Yemen was provided informally through child rearing at home and formally by religious teachers. Underlying this education was a view of childhood development as the acquisition of skills to perform tasks and to demonstrate certain behaviour for socialization (Messick 1993). The introduction of mass schooling changed the lives of children in Yemen, but it nonetheless remained an additional activity next to children's existing pursuits. This is different from the West where schooling takes up the majority of children's daytime hours.

Over the years in which mass basic schooling has been implemented worldwide, global ideas on basic school completion have remained fairly consistent. However, strategies for promoting basic school completion have changed, as reflected in education development practices. Education development practice tends to mirror the current attitudes of inter-

national development agencies, which in recent years have followed a rights-based approach (Tomasevski 2003, Alston and Robinson 2005). In terms of education, this means that basic schooling is perceived as a right and also as an opportunity for individuals to develop their capabilities in order to achieve social justice (Sen 1999, Unterhalter 2007, Nussbaum 2000, Biggery 2007). This is unlike the more instrumentalist view of schooling. Instrumentalists view school as a tool to address poverty. They expect an increased number of children in school to lead to economic growth, which in turn will trickle down and result in poverty alleviation (Cammish and Brock 1994, Becker 2002, Brock 2011). Increased school enrolment in Yemen has resulted in some macro-economic growth, but it has not led to the alleviation of poverty at the household level (UNDP 2005, 2007). Neither do extra years of primary schooling result automatically in better employment opportunities. Yemen is one of the few countries where experience is a better indicator of employment than schooling. At present, attitudes towards schooling in Yemen, as elsewhere, are strongly influenced by the neoliberal globalization paradigm, as well as by the increased tendency to view schooling as a right.

The current study aims to better understand why boys and girls stop school. To do so, it probes beyond statistics and the frequently mentioned barriers to schooling, such as lack of access and resources. These barriers have been largely addressed in much of Yemen. Schools have been built and resources provided, such as textbooks and training for female teachers. Still, some children stop school while others do not. The current research looks into why. The focus of the study is on children who have access to schools with sufficient basic infrastructure and resources such as female teachers and are located in communities where water is easily available (thus not requiring children to spend long hours fetching it).[8]

The study's starting point is the assumption that both schooling and childhood are sociological phenomena. In the new sociology of childhood, children play an active role in their own development. They are social beings in their own right, contributing to social reproduction of their society as well as contributing to change. To understand school completion, the study explores the different meanings of basic school completion for the different education actors and how these meanings are formed and influenced. In addition, it looks at which children do not complete school and why, incorporating the role of status and gender as

well as intra-household differences in school completion. The role of society in schooling and the role of basic school completion in society is also explored by looking at childhood itself as both an important part of life and as a period of transition to adulthood. A better understanding of why children stop school can provide new insights into education development practice. These, in turn, may have implications for education-related development agencies working in Yemen. Thus, the study also looks briefly at the practices of education development agencies that claim to be using a rights-based approach, this being the latest and most widely accepted and practiced approach in development theory.

1.2   Theoretical starting points

1.2.1 Current views

The current study views childhood and schooling as sociological phenomena. The sociology of both childhood and schooling, especially with regard to the relationship between school and society, points to relevant angles from which stopping school can be explored. Indeed, childhood education is more than basic schooling.[9] It includes informal child rearing at home and in the community as well as formal education in schools. How people understand childhood education and the role that schooling plays, as well as how schooling is experienced, determines the relationship between school and society. Societies differ. A sociological understanding of education and childhood is needed to understand how schooling, and therefore stopping school, is viewed in any particular one (James et al. 1997, James et al. 1998, Corsaro 2005, Moore 2004). Studies on the sociology of childhood and education have influenced education development thinking. Recent approaches view education as a human right with the child as rights-holder (Jonsson 2003, Tomasevski 2003). A human rights-based approach to education thus reflects a broad human rights-based approach to development, which is defined as follows:

> [A] conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress (OHCHR 2006: 22).

According to a rights-based approach to education development, stopping school results in inequalities in schooling outcomes which may be an outcome of discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power. Inequalities in school completion (as a product) are a central problem in the sociology of education in the West and in education development in the South (Moore 2004). In the West, qualifications and employment opportunities following school completion are the main concerns in relation to inequalities in education outcomes. In Yemen, however, inequalities are discussed mainly in terms of numbers of children completing nine grades. Virtually all children in the West complete basic schooling. The policy focus there is thus to motivate children to earn good marks and continue their schooling further. In Yemen, the policy focus is on motivating children to stay in school and complete the nine grades. Inequalities in schooling outcomes are often seen as the result of discrimination, especially in terms of class, ethnicity and gender. While these broad categories are certainly at play in explaining differences in education outcomes, more nuanced issues, such as identity and individual differences, are also at work, as are factors within schools (Moore 2004). Overall, research has centred on childhood education as a product (completion of a specified number of grades) rather than a process. For children, however, the process may be paramount, as stopping or continuing school is something happening to them in the here-and-now.

Mass schooling in Yemen has not yet achieved the same status as in Western society and elsewhere, where school is viewed as children's primary occupation. In Yemen, school attendance may be considered an additional burden rather than a replacement for other activities or an opportunity (Boyden 1997). Some argue that schooling needs to be seen as a new form of work for children, since children's participation in school will eventually contribute to the economy (Qvortrup 2001). Like elsewhere in the South, in Yemen schooling is often seen as something 'given' to the child; it is then the child's responsibility to decide what to do with that gift (Nieuwenhuys 1994). Indeed, many children in Yemen perceive the decision to continue or to stop school as one that they are allowed to make.

The idea that children can exercise their agency and have some form of power is reflected, among others, in the work of Foucault (1980). He argued that aspects of power are inherent in all social relations. Power is

not situated with one person; rather, every person has some level of power, including children. Relationships reflect the use of power and resistance to its use, as discussed by Harris (2004, 2006) in relation to her work with young people in Tajikistan. Children are often identified as those with the least power, because they are viewed as 'not yet beings' (Verhellen 1994/2000: 9) with evolving competencies (Lansdown 2005, 2001). Yet children can exercise agency. This is highlighted in the new sociology of childhood, which identifies children as able to influence their schooling as well as their society (Archer 2000, James et al. 1998, Corsaro 2005). The new sociology of childhood considers the discourse on childhood to be sociological rather than developmental. It therefore views the individual child and her/his internalization of adult knowledge, skills and values as an important element in a collective dynamic whereby children contribute to changing the reproductive model (see Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). This thinking is reflected in Corsaro's (2005) theory of interpretative reproduction: '[I]n order to make sense of the adult world children come to collectively produce their own peer worlds and cultures' (Corsaro 2005: 24). Thus, children are active participants in their own social world as well as in the adult world. Both worlds need to be explored to understand children's behaviour, such as whether they stop or stay in school.

Viewing children in their own right also means that both the product and the process of childhood socialization are important. Schooling, as a form of child socialization, is often viewed as a product only; a tool to prepare children for adulthood, treating children as 'not yet beings' requiring education. To understand stopping school, the process of childhood socialization is important, including the role of the child in that process. Corsaro notes that this process brings out the 'unique contribution that children make to their own development' (Corsaro 2005: 5). Rights-based education development views children as rights-holders and therefore as contributors to their own development. Rights-based education development practice often uses the word 'empowerment', speaking of 'empowering children' to claim their rights. Empowerment then is closely related to children exercising their agency or children participating in decisions that affect their lives. This idea is the basis of the 'participation articles' of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Within the sociology of education, various theories explain differences in educational outcomes. These are in some regards similar to the various theories of childhood as well as the rights-based approach to education development. One, the functionalist approach, sees the problem as being linked to 'educability or the individual's socially determined capacity to respond to the demands of the schooling system' (Moore 2004: 18). Another, based on the so-called 'conflict theory', sees processes within the school as determining differences in education outcomes (Feinburg and Solits 1992). Conflict theory in the sociology of education can be compared to the social reproduction theory in childhood sociology. Reproduction of society is said to include the reproduction of what is defined as the educated or knowledgeable person. Knowledge is socially produced, and school is one of the sites where knowledge is derived and replicated. The introduction of a mass schooling system changes this process, adding a global dimension. World culture theorists in particular emphasize the limited influence of society on mass schooling (Moore 2004: 3, Ramirez 2003, Bolli 1996, Posusney et al. 2003). Others disagree, arguing that local dimensions of society do influence schooling in important ways (Anderson-Levitt 2003). In either case, the relatively new institution of mass schooling has introduced a new view on the cultural production of the educated person. People involved in schooling take this new view on board, but also develop their own views, which are reflected in their behaviour towards schooling, including stopping school (Levinson and Holland 1996: 24). Views on schooling may therefore also reflect resistance towards how the school defines the educated person, as it may go against the definition of the educated person already in place.

Some argue that mass schooling, with its specific definition of an educated person can result in the de-skilling of children (Rival 1996) and that mass schooling is not necessarily good for all societies (Harber 2004). A rights-based approach to education development takes universal human rights as its starting point, which is a similar basic principle to universal basic schooling. The debate between universalism and relativism brings up common issues, whether related to human rights or the right to basic schooling. In both debates, there is a call for a middle ground which acknowledges that 'all human rights have to be applied and realized in a particular economic, historical, social, political context' (Arts 2010: 10). This is also true of the right to education, though this ideal seems far removed from practice.

In both the sociology of childhood and the sociology of education an interpretive school of thought has emerged that brings together the universalist and relativist perspectives. Regarding the rights-based approach to schooling, the interpretivist approach was a response to the failure of both the functionalist and the conflict theorists to explain why schooling has not achieved what it set out to achieve; to become a tool for economic growth and social equity, especially in countries of the South (Moore 2004: 64, Levinson and Holland 1996). The interpretivist approach identifies an active role for children while acknowledging the influence of reproduction within and outside of the school and the relationship between school and society. This relationship reflects the position of families in relation to the school, the way the school positions the child and how children position themselves in relation to the school. School and society are therefore two interacting structural dynamics, whereby school is part of both the educational system and society in terms of changes in the world of work and family organization (Moore 2004: 116). With regard to the school system, in Yemen, as elsewhere in the world, mass schooling was introduced with the aim of preparing children for the labour market, but also to produce supportive citizens for government regimes. This too reflects the dual influence of the functionalist and the conflict theorists at the time. Schooling's function was to spur economic growth and to reproduce society, in terms of reproducing existing power structures (Moore 2004, Meyer et al. 2000: 90).

The evolution of ideas on the sociology of childhood and education is reflected in education development theories and approaches. In the 1990s the Yemeni mass schooling system was increasingly influenced by global education strategies, due to the arrival of international aid. The notion at the time was that schooling was a key tool for improving economic growth and would enable Yemen to become part of the global economy (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). Subsequently, the basic needs approach shifted the focus from the macro level to the individual, identifying education as a basic human need. The human needs approach brought a debate on what number of grades was necessary to fulfil the basic human need for education (Unterhalter 2007). Those supporting this approach were criticized for failing to address education as a basic right of all (to be fulfilled now and not postponed through the setting of faraway targets). The rights-based approach was thus introduced, which

views schooling as a means to achieve social justice for all. This approach is based on the human rights standard of the right to education to be addressed now (Walker and Unterhalter 2007, Nussbaum 2000, Sen 1999, Tomasevski 2003).

The rights-based approach has been embraced by most international education development agencies,[10] including those present in Yemen. Rights-based agencies with a focus on children[11] have adopted a child rights-based approach in accordance with the comprehensive UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR 1989, Jonsson 2003, Save the Children Alliance 2005). UNICEF and Save the Children are two international agencies that have adopted the child rights-based approach and both play an important role in education development in Yemen. As a long-time staff member of Save the Children, I have been part of the process of adoption of the rights-based approach throughout the agency. I am therefore heavily influenced by this approach.

The child rights-based approach gained ground within the United Nations with the involvement of Amartya Sen in developing the Human Development Index. Sen's 'capabilities approach' is closely linked to the rights-based approach (Sen 1999). With the United Nations' adoption of the rights-based approach, bilateral donors, as UN member states, were also expected to have embraced the rights-based approach to development (Robinson 2005). Other organizations, such as financial institutions like the World Bank, though considered part of the UN family, are more reluctant to claim the use of a rights-based approach. Instead they suffice to say that their work contributes to the fulfilment of human rights (Danino 2005: 509, World Bank 2010).

Rights-based programming with a focus on children gathered momentum after adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. This Convention was lauded as a much-needed framework for cooperation to promote the fulfilment of children's rights as identified in General Comment No. 5 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR 2003). The Convention on the Rights of the Child is one of the most comprehensive human rights instruments available, as it combines all human rights into one instrument. It has an excellent 'empirical record', as it was ratified by almost all states in the world in a short period of time, unlike most other conventions (Arts 2010: 18). As a legal instrument, the Convention identifies four general principles which are to be considered in the implementation of all of its articles: the right

to non-discrimination (article 2); the best interest of the child (article 3); the right to life, survival, and development (article 6); and the right to be heard (article 12) (Save the Children Alliance 2005). These four principles are important in rights-based education development as well and are returned to throughout this thesis. Inequalities in education are particularly linked to the principle of non-discrimination; education is linked to the right to development; and children's agency and empowerment are linked to the right to be heard. The principle of 'the best interest of the child' can be linked to debate on the purpose of schooling for children in rural Yemen.

Also relevant to the current study are the six basic principles of a child rights-based approach: (i) the child rights claims of rights-holders; (ii) the corresponding child rights obligations of duty-bearers; (iii) the capacity of rights-holders (children) to claim their rights; (iv) the capacity of duty-bearers (adults) to fulfil their obligations; (v) monitoring and evaluation of outcomes and processes guided by human rights standards and principles (UNCRC); (vi) informing of programming by recommendations of international human rights bodies and mechanisms (UNCRC) (Lansdown 2005: 2). Child rights-based good practice points to the importance of process, which includes consideration of cultural context, avoidance of top-down strategies that directly challenge community practices, and emphasis on people's need for capabilities to challenge their situation (Unterhalter 2008, Gready and Ensor 2005). Thus, a rights-based approach involves rights-holders and duty-bearers. In the case of children's rights the rights-holder is the child, while the duty-bearer is often identified as the state. There is, however, increasing acknowledgment that all adults have an obligation towards the fulfilment of children's rights. This includes education development agencies. These principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child rights-based approaches are used in this study's analysis of the research data.

Recent theories in the sociology of childhood and education, as well as the child rights-based approach in education development, acknowledge a role for the child. Within schooling, this is often equated with schooling being 'child-centred'.[12] The focus then is on children and their learning, which is closely linked to children's motivation as reflected in their behaviour within and outside the classroom. With regard to

Yemen, this also includes stopping school. Maehr and Meyer (1997) explain motivation for schooling as personal investment:

> ... certain actions taken by persons based on the resources they have. Persons have time, talent and energy, but when and how they use these resources for a certain action differs between persons and is influenced by individual aspects, situational aspects and interactive factors (Maehr and Meyer 1997: 372).

The exercise of individual agency is an important part of motivation for schooling, identified as 'who one is', 'what one should strive for' and 'what one should become' (Maehr and Meyer 1997: 385). 'What one should become' in the West is often understood as a job in the labour market. Yet in Yemen this not automatically the case. Class, gender, ethnicity and personal attributes, but also the schooling system and how it functions, influence 'who one is', as well as what one strives for and hopes to become.

Theories of motivation that focus on the individual (personal investment) may be criticized as too Western. In the South, collective or interactive aspects may be more important (Stephens 1995). In societies such as Yemen's where the collective and interactive aspects play important roles, both the collective and the individual must be taken into consideration to understand why children stop school. Most interventions supported by international development agencies in Yemen, including those that claim to use a rights-based approach, seem aimed at the individual (e.g. provision of school supplies) or the environment of the individual (e.g. teacher training), and less at the group dimensions or the ultimate purpose of schooling. Mass schooling itself is not questioned, nor are questions raised on the way that it is implemented. Theories on motivation for schooling tend to take the role of the child into consideration, but they continue to view schooling as a product rather than a process in which the child plays a role as an actor in the here-and-now.

Acknowledgement of the role of the child in the sociology of childhood, education and education development has been paralleled by an increased separation of children from their parents and the creation of peer cultures supported by schooling (Corsaro 2005: 106). Joining peer groups is often viewed as a way for children to achieve autonomy from the rules and authority of adults, such as teachers, and to gain control over their lives, while also reflecting a desire for communal sharing and

social participation (Corsaro 2005: 149, 191). Research on peer cultures often focuses on the positive or negative impact of peers on children's development, such as peer influences in stopping or staying in school (Corsaro 2005: 108). However, it is also important to identify the role of the child and to explore peer cultures as they are now, rather than looking only at the outputs of peer cultures on the futures of children. Peer cultures exist as a result of 'children's attempts to make sense of, and to a certain extent to resist, the adult world' (Corsaro 2005: 111). Peer cultures are important for children in Yemen and play a role in how children view schooling and why they stop school. But they are less influential than family (see Chapter 3).

1.2.2   The research questions

These theoretical starting points on the sociology of education and childhood, as well as ideas on education development approaches, underscore the main research questions guiding this study. The primary research question is formulated as follows:

> Why do some children in Yemen who have access to schools and resources stop school before they complete their compulsory nine grades of basic schooling?

To shed light on this question, it is decomposed into a number of component questions:

1. What does basic school 'completion', or stopping before 'completion', mean for the different education actors, including children? And how can differences in views be explained?

2. Why do some children decide not to complete basic education? Who are the children who decide not to complete basic education? What are the influences of gender and status and how can they be explained?

3. What is the role of the school in children's decision to stop school? How do the practices of teachers affect stopping school?

4. How do the meanings of stopping school, reasons for stopping school and the role of schools in stopping school affect practices of education development agencies relating to basic school completion?

Research question four requires a detailed study in itself and is not the main focus of this research. However, it is important to me from my perspective as a development worker, to relate the research findings to education development practice and therefore to highlight some key points for practice. The concluding chapter does this, though realizing that further study is needed on these issues. As a practitioner, throughout the research I constantly considered how to apply what I saw, heard, found and analysed in my and others' education development practice. This was an important motivation for me to start this research.

1.3   Research approach and methods

This research took place in 35 school catchment areas[13] in three governorates in the south of Yemen. One of the governorates was studied in-depth. The schools in the 35 catchment areas were all above average in the Yemeni context in terms of access and resources (e.g. infrastructure, female teachers, piped water), thus bypassing the most frequently identified barriers to schooling in the South: distance to school, lack of female teachers and the need for children to collect water. This enabled the current research to focus on why some children stop school despite having access to schools and basic resources. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to collect data. It included a household survey, a survey of teachers, observations within schools and classrooms, key informant interviews and in-depth interviews of 30 children who had stopped school.

1.3.1   From development work to academic research

This study came about as a result of questions that I could not answer during my many years as a development worker with non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[14] I wanted to delve deeper, to understand through academic research why not all children are motivated to participate in services, such as basic schooling, that are identified by adults as being good or even a fundamental right.

This study concerns a group of children in Yemen. I do not know all of these children personally. Through my work with Save the Children I became acquainted with some of them from a distance, and I eventually interacted more intensively with a number of them. The research enabled me to get to know many of the children much better. I saw them at

home as well as in their communities and at school, and I met the people who played an important part in their lives. I had worked in the area where the research took place for the previous three years in development projects including education programmes. Before Yemen, I also worked in education development programmes for children in Afghanistan and Palestine. All of these programmes had more or less the same aims: to get as many children as possible enrolled in school, and later also to keep children in school for as long as possible. My work reflected the trends in international education development. Over the years, more emphasis was placed on girls, gender and numbers, but this still did not provide me with an understanding of why some children stop school.

Not being a primary school teacher myself, I often found myself at odds with other development workers (local and international), especially if they were teachers, when I discussed with them the point of getting all of these children into school and trying to keep them there. My initial observations were such that I did not think that any child could find real enjoyment or benefit from school. I was told that it was our task as development workers to make school more enjoyable and to make sure that the children learn basic literacy and numeracy. But why? Why bother when children tell you that they have attended three years of schooling under difficult circumstances and have now forgotten how to read and write because they do not use it? Children who did go to school were mostly positive about schooling. They said that all children should go to school. When I asked the children who had stopped school why they had stopped, most shrugged their shoulders and looked away or giggled. They knew that development workers (such as myself) wanted children to go to school and that not going to school was seen as backward and traditional. Parents also tended to indicate that they wanted their children to be schooled, but their actions often spoke against this.

Through talking to children and their parents, I started to understand the complexity of their reasoning about school completion or stopping school. It was not the Western stereotype of a male family member forcing a powerless girl to stop school or a boy having to leave school for other labour. I came across more and more children who said that they themselves had decided to stop school. Still, I assumed that 'children wanting to stop' was a reflection of what others expected or demanded of them rather than children exercising their agency. I wanted to understand why they felt that it had been their decision to stop school. My

need to understand this coincided with my own struggles with shifts in development programming. I work for an international development organization which, like many, had shifted towards a rights-based approach. This included the right to participate in decision making. I wondered why, as development workers, we seldom tried to learn what children think about schooling. Why do we not meaningfully integrate information from children on schooling into our programmes? Why do development workers consider schooling to be an area over which children have little to say? Why assume that school is good for all?

I realized that development workers rarely question the purpose and relevance of mass schooling. We all feel comfortable with the system; it is very similar to practices that we know from our own countries. How is it possible that all countries in the world, with all of their differences, have similar mass schooling systems? In Yemen, examples of the global schooling system were introduced by and through colonizing powers, especially the British. I was puzzled as to why the schooling system – though imposed by the colonizers – was carried on more or less as is after the colonizers left, though with different aims in mind.

Mass schooling has been fully implemented in the West, but Yemen continues to experience problems in enrolling all children and motivating them to stay in school for the first nine years. In Yemen, as in many other countries of the South, girls especially tend not to complete their basic schooling. As a result, there is an enormous push for girls' schooling. Educated girls are said to make better mothers and to be better able to contribute to the economic development of their country. Yet it was difficult for me to use these arguments to get more girls into school. I could not say that women without schooling do not contribute as well to the development of their country, and nobody could see how a few years of schooling would enable a woman to contribute more. Regarding the argument that schooled girls become better mothers, I felt that to be patronizing, as to become a mother was the pride of every girl. They could not see that a few years of schooling would make them any better. The only benefit that they could identify was that schooling would make it easier to help their future children with their homework. I could not motivate children to complete school with the argument that they would be able to get employment and a better income later, as employment opportunities are very scarce in Yemen.

As a development worker I needed other arguments or ways to moti-
vate children to complete their basic schooling. To find them, I delved
deeper into the reasons why children stop school. But I found few stud-
ies on stopping school that included children's views. Most centred on
the reasons put forward by parents. High cost, lack of female teachers
and lack of latrines for girls were often mentioned and were reflected in
the interventions I was involved in. These interventions sounded fine
and seemed to make a difference, but to me they left the heart of the
matter untouched.[15] Because the interventions were aimed at keeping
more children in school, it seemed to me that we were using children as
a means to reach our development agency goal of universal basic educa-
tion, rather than using schooling to enable children to reach their own
goals.

The rights-based approach and the capabilities approach gave me a
new way of looking at schooling, but these approaches do not really
question schooling as it is. I felt that to be able to understand school
completion and stopping school, children needed to be asked. Schooling
as it is implemented had to be questioned, and the analysis had to in-
clude critical questioning of the function of schooling in society. This
should be part of a rights-based approach but in my view was not.

1.3.2 Research locations

The 35 school catchment areas in which this study took place are located
in three governorates in the south of Yemen: Lahej, Abyan and Aden
(Map 1.1)

Map 1.1
Yemeni governorates with the three research areas starred
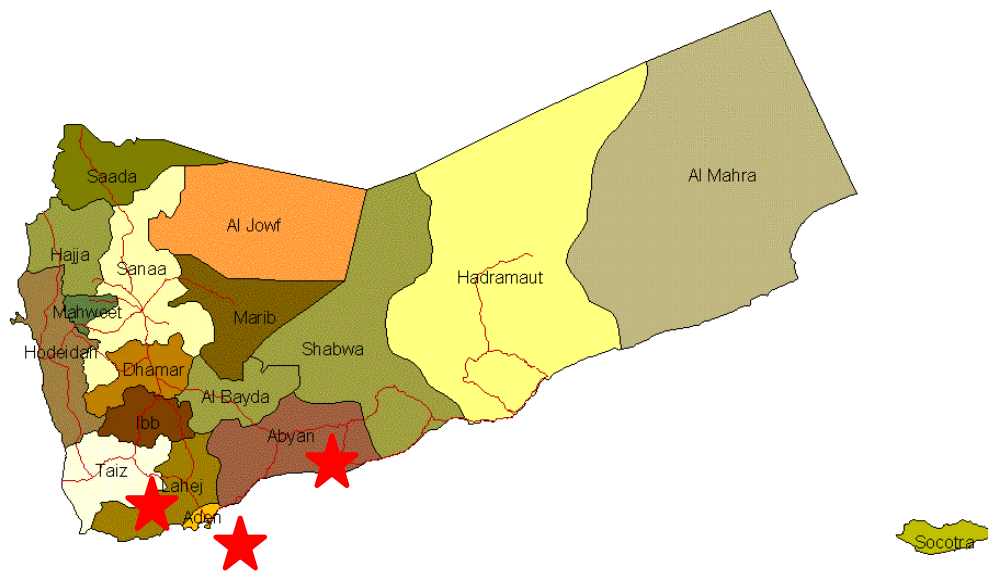
These governorates are linked to an education project that I was involved in as an employee of an international NGO. The NGO had a history of working in these three governorates and the Ministry of Education had requested the organization to focus there. It was also the Ministry that had identified the 35 catchment areas for inclusion. The schools in all 35 areas were classified as 'average' in terms of access and resources. Furthermore, they were to benefit from a range of interventions to make them more 'inclusive', which so far meant making the schools accessible to children with disabilities by building ramps and separate classrooms for children with hearing difficulties. Four of the 35 schools involved in the survey had such a separate classroom, while eight schools also had ramps.

My surveys confirmed that the 35 school catchment areas were not the most isolated relative to the local situation. Overall, Yemen's popula-

tion is highly dispersed. The majority (70 per cent) lives in rural areas scattered over 160,000 communities (CSO 2004). The communities studied in the 35 catchment areas were relatively concentrated, located near a paved road, and all had schools. In geographic and climatic terms, three types of areas were represented: rural areas along the coast of the three governorates with hot and humid, semi-dessert-like conditions; rural areas in the valleys of the foothills in northern Lajeh and Abyan governorates; and urban neighbourhoods in the port town of Aden. Three school catchment areas were chosen for the qualitative component of the research. These were broadly representative of the whole sample in terms of types of school. In terms of communities, the catchment areas chosen for the qualitative study were all rural, but with differences. One of the catchment areas was rural and small, but located on a main road. The two others were somewhat less rural, as they were located in the district centre of one of the governorates. The selection of the three school catchment areas made it possible to do an exhaustive study whereby all children who had recently stopped school could be identified, as all three communities had easily identifiable boundaries.[16]

1.3.3   Data collection

To answer the research questions, I used a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The quantitative component of the research (surveys of households, teachers and schools) was implemented in all three governorates, in the catchment areas of all 35 schools. The qualitative research was implemented in three school catchment areas in a single governorate. In data gathering, my priority was on gathering data from children. As explained above, I wanted children to be the main source of information due to my conviction that to understand why children stop school, we must ask those children who have stopped school, considering them as members of society in their own right and not as members 'to be' (Mayall 2000: 126, Qvortrup 1997: 101, Corsaro 2005, James et al. 1997).

   The quantitative research tools were used first, and the qualitative research tools followed. The former included surveys of households, teachers and schools. The latter consisted of group discussions with children in school using task-based participatory activities; in-depth interviews with children who had stopped school, also using task-based activities; interviews with key informants; and school and classroom ob-

servations. Interviews and conversations were all recorded in field notes. In addition, school-, district- and governorate-level data from the Ministry of Education were obtained and compared.

Starting research with a survey may be considered unusual. However, I had worked for several years in the study area and had implemented group discussions with children and parents on education and other issues. I therefore decided to start with the survey and use group discussions with children later to better understand the survey data, rather than using group discussions to inform the surveys. The survey results helped me to identify issues for the group discussions. Similarly, my interviews with individual children who had stopped school were informed by the results of the surveys as well as the group discussions.

1.3.4 Research tools

Sampling

The 35 school catchment areas or schools were sampled first, followed by households in the catchment areas and teachers in the schools. The school catchment areas were classified as urban/peri-urban and rural based on population density. For the second stage of sampling, all school catchment areas were listed by governorate along with their approximate populations. Then 30 clusters were identified from each of the lists using a random number from a banknote.[17] In each cluster, eight households were randomly selected by spinning a pen, choosing each third household to the right of the direction the pen pointed. In each household, the number of school-age children was identified, and one child was selected randomly by pulling a number. One of the parents, whoever was at home, was interviewed as well. The sample was thus composed of one parent and one child in approximately 700 households. Sampling of teachers was done randomly from a list of all teachers present on that day in the school. Further, teachers were observed for one school session of 45 minutes, followed by an interview with the teacher using a questionnaire. Approximately 120, or 10 per cent, of all teachers were included in the sample.

For the qualitative research, a district with three schools and their catchment areas was identified as representative based, for example, on size, enrolment, type of school and location. The student councils of the three schools participated in group discussions using three activities fol-

lowing a presentation on the main findings on stopping school from the household survey. The first activity involved a discussion about when children stopped school. Here, each individual child could indicate when he/she thought that most children in the community stopped school. In a second activity, children brainstormed about why children stop school – answers were recorded on cards which were then grouped. Together, the children identified one issue (group of cards) that they thought was most important to explore further. The identified issue was used for the third activity in which the children asked the 'but why' question three times. This is a technique that generates three answers to a question, each of which is further queried with the 'but why'. As such, a tree or spider-like structure is created. Each answer to the 'but why' question is recorded on cards or on a flipchart. Thirteen group discussions were implemented: seven with boys and six with girls. A total of 81 children participated, 37 girls and 44 boys between ages 10 and 16.

In the same three school catchment areas an exhaustive study was done of children who had stopped school in the previous two years. Thirty children were interviewed (10 boys and 20 girls). These children were initially identified through the head teachers of the schools, though additional children were added later, identified through word of mouth and by my local research assistant. During the interviews task-based activities were again used to obtain and document data, as well as to guide the discussion. These activities included a demographics table, a timeline of a usual day, a timeline of the child's life (past, present and future) as well as a timeline of the process of stopping school. The children were also asked to create a diagram of who supported their schooling and who did not.

The field research took place over a period of 16 months (from August 2008 to December 2009) in which I spent all of my time in Yemen and the majority of my time in the school catchment areas under study. For the survey, I trained and supervised surveyors, as well as data entry workers who input data in English. An intern who could not read Arabic performed the data analysis using SPSS 16.[18] For the qualitative research I trained and supervised facilitators to implement the group discussions, while I conducted the individual interviews myself with the help of my local research assistant. I remained at the research locations for extended periods of time, lodging with local people.

For all of the research tools used involving children, permission was obtained from the parents and the child; all surveyors working with children were trained in the basics of child protection in the research process and were required to sign a document committing themselves to uphold child protection principles.[19] Consent the children and parents was obtained before the start of the interview. This required that the surveyors provide enough information to enable children and parents to give their informed consent. Both parents and children signed or thumb-printed the space on the survey questionnaires; the child's questionnaire had to be signed by both the parent and the child. The same protocol was used for the group discussions, but with the parents providing verbal permission and the teacher signing the consent form. The results of the surveys were disseminated through workshops, at the national and governorate level to staff of the Ministry of Education and at the school level to children, teachers and parents' councils.

Informed consent is promoted by the organization I work for, as well as by other organizations and researchers as part of a child rights-based approach to development in which children's participation is a guiding principle (Save the Children 2003, Schenk et al. 2005, Johnson 1996). The need to consult both parents and children to gain permission for children to participate in research continues to be debated. France et al. (2000/2002) argue that to be 'safe' is to ask both parents and children for consent. However, this renders the issue of confidentiality and anonymity for the child meaningless (France et al. 2000/2002: 155). Especially in the context of school, informed consent is difficult to implement due to the role of teachers within the school environment (France et al. 2000/2002: 158). In my research, the consent obtained for the survey did not have much meaning, other than that it gave the children a sense of importance as they had to sign or fingerprint the questionnaire.

Children are seldom heard in research, despite the importance of knowing what they think and do (Boyden and Ennew 1997: 16). Children's participation in research (providing data as well as reflective views on data and methods) improves the relevance and appropriateness of decision-making on children's issues. It puts into practice the shift of view from children being beneficiaries of adult intervention towards them being rights-holders (Save the Children Alliance 2003: 11, Lansdown 2001). Research with children demonstrates that if we do not involve children, we cannot fully understand their needs. There is also a

risk of missing out on the contributions of children – contributions that can be innovative and rich (Johnson and Evan-Smith 1998: 3). For my research I tried to collect data from children. I also tried to create ways for children to reflect on the data (such as the survey results), to provide input on language use (such as using 'stopping school' rather than 'dropping out of school'), and to improve the methods (such as adjusting the questionnaires and the task-based activities through piloting). I also gave them opportunities to provide additional data, taking them along to visit some households or areas of their community.

For research with children, as with adults, methods should be selected in such a way that they contribute to address the research questions. But methods are also influenced by ethical, psychological and legal considerations in relation to the position of children in terms of their evolving capacities (Lewis et al. 2000/2002). A precondition for involving children in research is that an environment be created in which children's participation can develop (Save the Children Alliance 2003: 13, Milne 1996, Corsaro 2005: 45). This requires from the researcher an understanding of the children's political and social context, the fact that children have different capacities to participate, that a variety of communication methods may be needed, and that in research with children ethical issues are as important, if not more, as in research with adults (Johnson 1998: 21, Nieuwenhuys 1996: 55, Chawla and Kjorholt 1996: 42: unch 2002). A main ethical challenge that adult researchers must overcome when investigating children is the difference in power between children and adults based on age and status (O'Kane 1998: 37, Christensen et al. 2000). Corsaro (2005: 48) identifies the importance of the ability of the researcher to establish a good relationship with the child, being aware of the power imbalance between children and adult researchers. Furthermore, children develop their own concepts, language and cultures through interaction with one another. Access and interpretation will therefore be a challenge for adults (Boyden and Ennew 1997: 1). Corsaro (2005: 50) identifies group interviewing and the use of multiple methods as means to reduce power imbalances between children and researchers, as well as strategies to overcome the influences of adults who are 'listening in' while doing the research with children, influencing their answers and behaviour. It must be acknowledged and integrated into the analysis of the data that children's answers, as well as adults', are influenced by the interactional context, including the views and assumptions of the researcher. As high-

lighted by Spyrou (2011), research with children needs to take into consideration the processes that shape their answers, including the research context and power imbalances. He recommends being 'reflexive about the processes by which knowledge about children is produced' (Spyrou 2011: 161).

Other ethical issues in research with children are privacy and confidentiality (Spyrou 2011). Both privacy and confidentiality often clash with the requirements of agencies, which may be prompted to ignore these if, for example, information comes forward that the child is exposed to abuse. Agencies may require two adults to be present with a child in order to protect the child from possible harm from an adult who is in a more powerful position. Child protection then overrules the promises of confidentiality and privacy needed for the research, often justified through the principle of the best interest of the child. It is almost impossible to interview a child without the presence of their parents, siblings or others. The surveyor is seen as a visitor and of great interest; a request to be alone with a child is not understood and viewed with suspicion. By interviewing the parent at the same time as the child, this research addressed the issue of privacy in a limited way. In the current research, extended periods spent in the household meant that there were more opportunities to spend time with the child without the listening presence of others.

In my research, I tried to take into consideration the recommendations identified above, including the use of multiple methods involving children, as well as group interviewing. Each method generated different data and therefore demanded a focus on the process and the research context in the analysis as recommended by Spyrou (2011). Corsaro (2005: 49) identified the use of micro-level methods or qualitative ethnographic research as an appropriate means of exploring children's relationships and how they influence change and social reproduction. My in-depth individual interviews, using task-based activities, can be identified as such. However, due to the absence of privacy and therefore confidentiality, children's answers were influenced by those around them questioning what they said or correcting their answers. This may result in findings not reflecting what children really think (Spyrou 2011).

Implementation

Overall the methodologies as well as the sampling identified for this research were implemented as planned. Nevertheless I came across a number of challenges. As noted above, the schools involved in the survey were not randomly identified. They were identified by the Ministry of Education based on the Ministry's desire for these schools to be developed into 'inclusive' schools through the interventions of the agency I work with. Neither were the governorates where the research took place randomly identified; these were chosen because the agency I work for had experience and knowledge in these three governorates. Following the survey, the profile of the 35 school catchment areas confirmed that they were above average in terms of social and economic indicators. Thus, the schools lacked the most commonly identified barriers to schooling. All households in the catchment areas had access to a school and a nearby water source; all schools had female teachers; and all of the communities were reachable by car. This meant that the selected schools were in no way typical or representative of the country as a whole. Rather than a challenge, the bias in my sample gave me a chance to explore why some children leave school *even in the absence of these common barriers or pressures.*

The Ministry of Education in Yemen must approve any activity that has to do with schooling, including a household survey on schooling. The Ministry of Education also requested me to allow it to provide feedback on the questionnaire and study design. All tools were shared but no feedback could be given; though without the feedback the permission was not forthcoming. Eventually permission was obtained without feedback on the tools but on the condition that Ministry staff would be included as surveyors. I therefore had to abandon my initial plan to use young people as surveyors and open surveyor recruitment for all. Ministry staff as well as others were recruited and trained and put into teams of two (one male and one female). The influence of Ministry staff was mostly felt in the teachers' survey: some staff were very critical of teachers, while others were more lenient. Thus the results seem to have evened out in the end (see also later in this section). During the training and subsequent piloting, the trainees provided feedback on the language used in the questionnaire, but no questions had to be omitted or added.

Obtaining data on the numbers of children enrolled in school and other statistics proved to be difficult, as different numbers were given by

the individual schools and the district and governorate departments of the Ministry of Education. The three sets of numbers were compared and interpreted in relation to when the numbers were obtained (at the start of the school year enrolment numbers are higher, as children may register but then not turn up) and aspects like resources (the Ministry of Education as well as schools may claim a higher number of girls to be enrolled in order to obtain extra resources such as school supplies). The numbers obtained from the school were often used, as they seemed most plausible and could also be physically verified while at the school by comparing them with other numbers and re-checking when large discrepancies appeared.

The household survey was meant to be a demographic survey of the area. However, the requirement that the household had at least one child between the ages of 6 and 17 eliminated some households from selection, such as young households and households with only adults. In the urban areas, a further selection was required because a building may house many households. At this point, the surveyors along with the supervisor determined the number of households within the building and randomly selected one of the households. If the person to be interviewed was not at home at the time of the first visit, houses were visited twice, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The surveyors did not select an adjacent household if no one was home or the house did not fulfil the survey requirements. Once the household was identified, one child of school age, roughly between ages 6 and 17 was randomly selected. Using the household data, ages of children were verified in as far as possible; often the mother knew the time between each of her children rather than their exact ages, for example. After obtaining consent, the child and the parent were interviewed, separately if possible to reduce parental influence on the child's answer. There were no problems entering the homes; only five homes refused to participate in the survey (all in Aden). Which surveyor conducted the interview depended on who was selected. The male surveyor interviewed the father or the child, while the female surveyor could interview father, mother and child. For each four surveyors there was one supervisor; different groups of surveyors were used for each governorate, but to ensure quality the same supervisors were used.

For the qualitative research there was no interference by the Ministry of Education. The groups for the group discussions were formed around

the student councils that had been elected some weeks earlier, at the start of the school year. This was the most practical way of getting children together. As part of the education project, student councils were to be informed of the results of the survey. This was combined with task-based activities linked to the findings of the survey for my research. Boys and girls participated in separate groups. One group discussion was done with a mixed group but results are not included as girls did not fully participate in this group despite frequent probes. Children participating in the group discussions were all attending school. They therefore had to rely on experiences of other children who had stopped school to talk about why children stop school. They often used someone they knew who had stopped school as an example but quickly moved on to discuss the issue more broadly as a result of the 'but why' exercise.

Research question four relates to the practices of education development agencies and implications for them of meanings and reasons for stopping school and the role of schools in the process. Data to answer this question was gathered from key informants, observations of schools and project documents, as well as from minutes of meetings and documents from the education development partners. In Yemen, most education development actors[20] form a loose group that represents them towards the Ministry of Education in support of their basic education strategy. Through a signed partnership declaration[21] this group supports the implementation of the Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS) 2003–2015.

Reflections on implementation

The research methodologies identified and implemented provided both quantitative and qualitative data which was at times difficult to compare. The household survey included too many questions due to requests from various sides (the Ministry of Education, NGOs[22]) to capture certain aspects of schooling. The survey would have been more meaningful for my research if it had focused more on stopping school rather than schooling as a whole. However, school enrolment was also important for the project baseline. When developing the survey questions it was not yet clear that the focus of my research would be on stopping school only. On completion of the survey and the realization that the schools in the sample were all schools that were accessible and had basic resources, I decid-

ed that my research would focus on stopping school and less on school enrolment.

Being a known development worker with an international agency that implements projects in the research areas could have influenced how people responded to my research. Often people did not identify me as a Westerner, due to my dress and my ability to converse in basic Arabic with a Palestinian accent; they often identified me as a Syrian. However, my position as a development worker did link me to access to resources for the community. This could have affected how people answered questions. This is often much less so with children than with adults, but adults quite quickly told children what their expectations of me were. This was obvious in some of the answers to the survey, but was overcome when doing the in-depth interviews with the children. One of the most difficult assumptions, especially among adults, was that as an international development worker I am in favour of schooling. They assumed that I perceived children who did not go to school as no good, and that I blamed parents for not sending their children to school. This preconception was especially strong among those who had children in school. These people made sure to impress upon me their agreement with my assumed viewpoint, as they saw this as increasing the chance that my organization would implement a project in their community. Those who had children who had stopped school still had this assumption, but there seemed to be less of an urge to show me their agreement. They focused on providing reasons beyond their control to explain why their child no longer was in school. These were often linked to how I as the development worker could 'help' them to get their child back in school, for example, by providing resources. By focusing on understanding stopping school as viewed by children, these assumptions were much less influential on the data.

Not being a native or fluent Arabic speaker, and Arabic being a rich language with a range of expressions that can vary by geographical area, language was an obstacle that I needed to overcome. This was less a problem with the quantitative research and much more so with the qualitative research. Fortunately I have spent a number of years living in Arabic-speaking countries, including Yemen, which gave me some understanding of how people express themselves. Having also spent a lot of time talking to children, using different task-based activities as part of my work, gave me an additional 'feel' for how children express themselves

and what activities generate what information. Using task-based activities brought in an additional type of language in the form of drawings and the like that helped me to understand the views expressed. However, this kind of language also needs to be interpreted and used by the facilitator and the children. During the qualitative research, a 20-year-old woman who had studied English worked as my assistant. However, we rarely spoke English, as I needed to understand any ambiguities in Arabic to gain a better grip of what was being expressed. At times I could not understand everything, or missed certain nuances of what was said.

The household survey as well as the in-depth interviews included the identification of the socio-economic status of the household using guidelines. Following the interviews, both surveyors were asked to agree on the status of the household. Despite the guidelines and the agreement of both surveyors, there was a level of interpretation. Thus, in the household survey, socio-economic status was identified by a number of different people, while for the in-depth interviews I identified all levels with my research assistant. This meant that comparison was difficult. Comparison was further hampered by the need to adjust the guidelines for the rural areas. The survey showed the magnitude of differences between urban areas and rural ones. The guidelines for the rural areas therefore had to be simplified.

Different surveyors than the household surveyors were used for the teachers' survey because of teachers' status issues, as well as the observation skills required. The same group of surveyors did the teachers' survey in all three governorates to ensure quality and reliability. Although the observation checklist seemed straightforward, many of the items were open to interpretation, and surveyors could have biases towards certain teachers, especially as there were Ministry of Education staff among the group. Some of the Ministry staff tended to tick certain behaviour as observed when they judged this behaviour as desirable. For example, one of the checklist items on behaviour was 'knows all children by name'. When the surveyor observed a teacher using the names of children a few times, it was ticked. This is understandable because the surveyors who were Ministry staff wanted to show that the teachers were good. Others, however, had a tendency to score lower because, for example, they felt that they were better in teaching than the teachers observed. Both tendencies probably evened one another out to some degree. As teachers are rarely observed, observations must take into account their adapting behaviour

when someone is watching them. Surveyors were encouraged to judge the time they thought that the teachers were doing their normal teaching or disregard the observation; nineteen observations were disregarded for this reason.

Documenting the results of the group discussions was challenging. The most important aspects for me were to ensure that the children wrote a few words on the cards reflecting their answers, ensuring that the grouping of the answers was correct, and ensuring that the consensus (end of activity two) reflected everyone's wishes in as far as possible (most children participating in the group discussions were literate). The use of student council members had several drawbacks. Often, the 'better' and more 'vocal' students were elected to the student councils, as well as children from higher status groups, such as the sons and daughters of teachers. Random other children, who happened to be nearby, were also asked to participate, until we had groups of 6–10 children. I did however observe that the emphasis was on the contributions of the members of the student councils, despite the use of task-based activities which encouraged each child to contribute. The groups were required to come to a consensus at the end of the second task before moving on to the third activity (the 'but why' exercise). Here the contributions of the student council members were obviously more dominant. An advantage in this was that student council members were more experienced in providing their opinions, which possibly enriched the data. A consensus at the end of activity two was needed for focus in activity three. This could have resulted in the choice of issues identified by the dominant children as most important. This drawback was overcome in most groups through the 'but why' exercise that followed the consensus. Often issues that were highlighted before were identified again in the 'but why' exercise.

Capturing the discussion was important to fully understand what was written on the cards, as only key words were used. I therefore needed an idea of the process of the discussion. The discussions took place after the activity with each of the facilitators, so I lost quite a lot of their details. I do not think, however, that this obstructed my understanding of what came out of the discussions. Each group discussion had a facilitator who explained the exercise and then withdrew, only listening to what the groups were saying. However, they were present, and their presence may have influenced the groups' answers. But their presence also removed

attention from the foreign researcher. Most children knew the facilitators and had done similar activities with them in the past. Because of that familiarity and the given task, the groups were so lively that the influence of the adults present was much less than, for example, in the individual interviews. Multiple group discussions often took place simultaneously. So I walked around and took notes, while the group facilitators informed me of the gist of the discussions. This was not easy, as children were talking at the same time, having side conversations with one another, and changing topics quickly. It was therefore unavoidable that much of the group discussions could not be documented in detail.

In the individual interviews, most children took pride in completing the different tasks and creating their own timelines. But this took time. I learned, as described by Corsaro (2005: 52), that despite my imperfect Arabic the children felt more comfortable discussing their lives with me than with my research assistant. The research assistant was known in two of the three school coverage areas. This could have resulted in better access to the households, but it could also cause tension between the assistant and the child. Tension might emerge, for example, if the assistant is considered threatening in any way, influencing the answers of the child. Both myself and the assistant observed the situation and determined whether it would be better for the assistant to spend more time with the mother while I continued with the child.

The interviews with the children and other key people, such as fathers and mothers, could not be taped. I requested the use of a tape recorder several times, but people refused. Also, the interviews and discussions were often informal and the exact point at which the interview started and the chatting stopped was too fluid to be able to start a tape. Often the interviews with the key informants took place while waiting for the child, resulting in not always being able to focus on specific issues identified by the child. People had no difficulty with my taking notes. Notes were finalized twice a day; at lunch time and at the end of the day. I verified and completed my notes with the research assistant, and when needed, I went back to the child to verify data.

Finding children who had stopped school was easier than I had expected as the teachers were well aware of who had stopped school and other children knew exactly where they lived. Discussing with these children their experience of stopping school did take time. Children needed to be probed to think about their decision to stop school; and the task-

based activities were important probing tools. Sometimes, we re-visited tasks to complete them or to question inconsistencies. With two children I returned a few days later to see if the child had things to add, as these children had for some reason been reluctant to talk during the previous visit. This gave the children a chance to think about the issues, and they did have important information to add. None of the children who were approached refused the interview altogether. One girl made it very difficult and refused initially, but we were able to interview her later. She explained that she had been upset about stopping school and had not wanted to discuss it. As I was staying in the village, key informants who were mentioned during the individual interviews as an important influence in the child's decision making were contacted and interviewed when available, often in the late afternoons or early evening.

During the survey of the teachers, I monitored the observations done by others, but I was unable to complete many observations myself. Therefore, in addition to the observations done as part of the survey, I also observed almost all of the teachers in the three schools that were studied in-depth. Observations of the teachers were not problematic as I had become a regular feature in the schools and the village, and the teachers were quite relaxed about having me around after a while. As I was observing all of the teachers and had explained that my focus was on how the children interacted in class rather than their teaching, none seemed to feel targeted, singled out or left out. As I was a foreigner and considered an expert, none of the teachers was upset about having me observing them, which was different from reactions during the survey. My observations were done by first spending time in the school and some classes without taking notes, sitting in the back of the classroom ensuring that I was observing the children rather than the teacher. After a few days of observations I started to take notes, again ensuring that it was clear to the teacher that I was observing the class and not her/him. During the initial observation periods the teacher often tried hard to show me that the children knew the subject matter and that the teaching was therefore well done. The teachers often repeated the lesson from the previous day and tried not to do anything that was unfamiliar to the students so they could provide the correct answers. But the teachers could not keep this up and as they got used to having me in the class they went back to their usual routines.

The data generated through the methodologies as described above helped me to answer the research questions, but also left some gaps. Because the focus was on those children who had stopped school, no comparison could be made with children who were in school regarding their motivation to be in school. The household survey gave some indication of why children stay in school, but further qualitative research is needed to understand what motivates those children to stay.

1.4   The situation in the research areas

The survey of the schools and the household survey provided information on the general characteristics of the research areas. In the rural governorates where the research took place, most income was generated by agriculture, including fishing, while in urban Aden, port activities, trade and the large civil service were key sources of household income. Most agricultural activities related to fruit and barley/wheat, as well as small-scale vegetable gardens. Livestock was important too, with larger flocks of goats and sheep in the flat areas and smaller flocks for household use in the foothills. Trade and small informal businesses were part of almost every household's livelihood. In the area where the in-depth research took place, many of the men were employed in the army as well.

Households[23] in the research areas lived in 2.5 rooms on average. Most owned their house (90 per cent), had their own latrine/toilet (69 per cent); had electricity (93 per cent); and had access to television (97 per cent), radio (66 per cent) and telephone (65 per cent). As many as 80 per cent reported having piped water into their home.[24] Having piped water does not mean that they always had water. Water piped into homes from a central source provided water intermittently, making a storage tank essential. However, the majority of households said that they spent no time collecting water since it was piped into the home. Of the households who did not have (enough) water piped into their home, only 24 per cent said that children were involved in water collection; they also reported that this work involved the son more than the daughter.

The communities around the three schools where my in-depth research took place were situated in the foothills with some agricultural activity in the nearby valley, reflecting the conditions of a rural/semi-rural area. These communities were located in a district with an estimated total population of 26,558 (CSO 2004). An estimated 5,000 people

lived around the schools (Ministry of Education Lahej/CSO 2004).[25] This community had a central water storage tank as well as piped water. Electricity was limited however. Of the three school catchment areas, one had 24 hours of electricity each day, while the other areas had a generator that supplied one-third of the houses with a few hours of electricity in the evening; another one-third of the families had their own small generator, which left roughly one-third of households without electricity. This is higher than the average of all households surveyed.

Regarding the socio-economic status of the households, the surveyors were asked to give their impressions of the social, as well as the economic situation of the households. Social and economic situations were judged separately, as families with high social status are not necessarily economically well off. The guide for this part of the survey was developed based on the literature, especially Bujra (1971) and Gerholm (1977), and my personal observations, as well as discussions with key informants. The guide for economic status centred on assets; that for social status centred on the profession of the head of household.[26] Table 1.6 summarizes the results of this subjective assessment.

Table 1.6
Social and economic status as identified in the household survey

	Survey (N=703)
Social status	
High	33%
Upper middle	30%
Lower middle	25%
Low	12%
Economic status	
Well off	18%
Above average	23%
Below average	33%
Poor	26%

As Table 1.6 indicates, the surveyors assigned most of the households to the higher social status levels, while the opposite is true for the economic

status of households. I used similar guidelines to assess the socio-economic status of the children who were interviewed in-depth; these children had all stopped school (Table 1.7).

Table 1.7
Social and economic status of households of children
who stopped school as identified by author

	# of households (N=30)	%
Social status		
High	4	13%
Middle	20	67%
Low	6	20%
Economic status		
Well off	3	10%
Average	17	57%
Poor	10	33%

Source: Compiled by author from information assessed during the in-depth interviews.

These households were identified (as in the survey) as mostly of average status both socially and economically. My observations of households with children who had stopped school showed an overall profile that is poorer in economic terms and with more households at the lower end regarding social status. While the survey results showed little difference in terms of gender, I did observe gender differences within households where children had stopped school. All of the households identified as high social (3) or high economic (4) levels were households of girls who had stopped school. Thus, girls may be more affected by status differences than boys, and schooling of girls may have a stronger social aspect than for boys. For example, in high-class families it is often unacceptable for girls to attend school for reasons related to the risk of shaming the honour of the family. These results should be interpreted with caution because although I trained the surveyors to identify the social and economic levels of households, differences in interpretation between my observations and those of the group of surveyors could nonetheless have occurred.

Among the 35 schools involved in the research were 7 girls-only schools, 5 boys-only schools and 23 schools which had both boys and girls enrolled (co-ed).[27] The schools had on average 43 children per class.[28] This corresponds with the Ministry of Education figure of 42 children per classroom for all schools in the governorates that participated in the survey. It is much higher than the national average for rural areas of 23 children per class and somewhat lower than the figure for urban areas, with more than 50 children per class (an estimated 45 per cent of urban children study in classrooms with more than 50 children) (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). As the 35 schools were not located in the country's most isolated areas, ratios were expected to have this in-between character. The 35 schools had student-toilet and student-water tap ratios averaging 150 children per toilet and 100 children for every water tap (of these most of the toilets were observed as not functional, while approximately 75 per cent of the taps had water). Only toilets in the girls-only schools were identified as girls-only toilets. None of the co-ed schools had separate boys' and girls' toilets. The 35 schools had a total of 2,611 teachers and 35,685 students enrolled in the 2007/08 school year.[29] There were thus 13.7 children per teacher, which is lower than the average of 30 children per teacher recorded for the three governorates as a whole by the Ministry of Education (World Bank and MoPIC 2010).

The three schools involved in the in-depth qualitative research can be identified as rural/semi-rural. Two schools were located in the centre of the district, and the other school was located in a village on the main road connecting north and south Yemen. The schools had a total enrolment (school year 2009/10) of 1,107 children, of whom 56 per cent were boys and 44 per cent girls. The schools had a total of 113 teachers; 54 male teachers and 59 female teachers. This translates to 9.5 children per teacher[30] (less than the average for all 35 schools). The overall average for the three schools was 30 children per class. However, figures for the boys-only school were lower, at 25 children per class, while the girls-only school had 40 children per class and the co-ed school had 26 children per class.

1.5   Remaining chapters

This chapter explained the rationale and objectives of the study. The aim is to explore why children stop school when they do have access to schools and basic resources. To better understand why some children

stop school my research explores the concept of school completion and how this is viewed by the different education development actors: Who stops school and why? How is children's reasoning for stopping school influenced by individual, interactive and situational factors? To understand stopping school and what it means for education development practice, the current study views childhood and schooling as sociological phenomena. It draws on theoretical frameworks that explain the relationship between school and society and motivations for schooling. It furthermore considers theories underlying child rights-based education development, acknowledging the role of children and taking into consideration product as well as process. An understanding of why some children complete basic schooling while others do not can provide useful insights for education development actors, their education strategies and their education programming.

The remaining chapters are organized as follows.

Chapter 2 explores the concept of school completion and discusses how different groups view 'school completion', how these views can be explained, and what this means for stopping school.

Chapter 3 examines inequalities in school completion by gender and status group as well as intra-household differences, looking at household characteristics, reasoning for stopping school, and influences on this reasoning. It discusses who stops school and why in relation to family and occupational structures.

Chapter 4 looks at school and classroom practices and their role in decisions to stop school. School and classroom observations feed into this discussion as well as the stories of children who had stopped school. It discusses the role of the school in inequalities in school completion and the implications of this for the role of schooling in society.

Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, returns to the research questions as outlined in this chapter, reflecting on how and the extent to which they have (or have not) been answered. It then reviews the practical implications of the findings for education development in Yemen.

Notes

[1] UNESCO (2010) defines gross enrolment ratio as total enrolment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the total school population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year. It

is a substitute for the net enrolment ratio when data on enrolment by age are unavailable.

[2]Adapted from World Bank and MoPIC 2010, p35, based on Ministry of Education and UN data.

[3]Adapted from World Bank and MoPIC 2010, p44, which bases its calculations on the Annual Education Survey (AES) 2006/2007.

[4]Based on World Bank and MoPIC 2010, p46 which uses data of AES 2006/07 and 2007/08.

[5] MLA is an international assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of nations' educational systems and is learner centred. It monitors what is taught and what is learned, how and under what conditions. The idea is to measure the quality of education. It is a programme developed jointly by UNICEF and UNESCO (UNESCO 1995).

[6] MLA is an international assessment of achievement to evaluate the effectiveness of educational systems of nations and is learner centred. It monitors what is taught and what is learned, how and under what conditions in order to measure the quality of education. It is a programme developed jointly by UNICEF and UNESCO (UNESCO 1995). The results are adapted from World Bank and MoPIC 2010, p56. The MLA included life skills, science, mathematics and Arabic language.

[7] A demand-supply approach explains schooling as a process similar to the market, in which two sides, - supply (the side that provides the schooling service) and demand (the side of those that use the school) - influence each other. Decision making regarding use of the service is therefore dependent on what is offered on the supply side and what is demanded on the demand side. When there is a match, the service (school) is used. The demand-supply approach is based on the early economic theory of Adam Smith.

[8] This does not mean that Yemen does not have a water problem. The water has to come from a large distance or from a deep well. Adults are involved in water collection rather than children.

[9] The MDGs focus on primary schooling, while the Yemeni Ministry of Education has goals for both primary and basic schooling. The right to education refers to basic schooling and is used for this study.

[10] Education development agencies are defined in this chapter as those international aid organizations that provide resources in support of education development in Yemen. They include bilateral donors, UN agencies and international NGOs. These are all international agencies. No Yemeni NGO could be identified as playing a substantial role in schooling due to the Ministry of Education's unfavourable stance towards involvement of NGOs in the schooling system.

[11] Agencies that focus on children can be defined as those agencies that identify children as their target group or claim benefit for children from their development aid. Adults can also be targeted if the targeted adults have an impact on children as well. Agencies that identify themselves as child centred are child focused but also put the child at the centre of their work. This means that children are seen as active partners and participation of children is required in all aspects of the work. Child rights-based organizations are child centred and children are seen as rights-holders (Jonsson 2003, Save the Children Alliance 2005).

[12] Child- or student-centred approaches to education put the child at the centre of education rather than others involved in the schooling process.

[13] School catchment area refers to the area around the school where children of school age live and are expected to make use of that school.

[14] I have worked for more than 20 years with different Save the Children organizations.

[15] The differences were not great however; Save the Children, for which I work, supported for example the campaign to abolish school fees, although we knew that these were minimal and that there were other costs that were much more important. We also supported the push for more female teachers to keep girls in school, although we knew that it would be problematic to ensure that female teachers move to and stay in the rural areas. We also supported the building of extra toilets for girls, although we knew that these toilets would break down as their design required water and water is scarce.

[16] Some urban school catchment areas overlapped so more than one school could be used by the same child.

[17] Cluster sampling is a method to derive information about coverage; in the case of my research coverage of schooling services, or school enrolment (Hoshaw-Woodhard 2001)

[18] Data entry and database management were not without problems, due to frequent electricity cuts, viruses resulting in data loss and re-entering of data several times.

[19]This is based on the child protection policy paper developed by Save the Children (Save the Children Alliance 2003a).

[20] They include donors (European, North American and Japanese), UN and related agencies (UNICEF, WFP, World Bank, UNESCO) and international NGOs. There are additional agencies that support education in Yemen, especially donors from the Gulf States. These tend to finance the Ministry of Education directly without any conditions, making fewer contributions to educational strategies and not participating as part of the group. Most international NGOs are Western-based and are often registered as charities. Charity also play an im-

portant role in Islamic societies based on the references in the *Quran* of which one of the five pillars is the requirement to give alms to those in need (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2009). Islamic NGOs play an important role in development and also refer to human rights, especially in relation to their compatibility with the *Quran.*

[21]The partnership declaration is signed by the government of Germany, DFID, the government of the Netherlands, Japan, USAID, the World Bank, UNICEF and WFP. International NGOs agreed in principle to support the implementation of BEDS 2003–2015, though they were not required to sign the partnership declaration (international NGOs are not seen as influential as they are not donors, they often receive funding from the donors that signed). The partnership declaration included on the government side, the Ministry of Education, MoPIC, the Social Fund for Development (SFD) and the Public Works Projects (PWP) (Education Development Partners for Basic Education 2010, annex).

[22] A number of local NGOs requested questions be included on the questionnaire that would be useful for their programmes.

[23] Those eating from one kitchen.

[24] Time needed to collect water has been identified as an important barrier to the enrolment of children in school in Yemen (World Bank and MoPIC 2010).

[25] Numbers are estimated based on a 1994 census.

[26] Economic status was identified as follows:
> *Well off*: Several electrical appliances visible, more than 3 rooms+ a well-furnished guestroom, walled compound.
> *Above average*: 2–3 electrical appliances visible, 2–3 rooms+ a guest room, own entrance, new items visible.
> *Below average*: 1 electrical appliance, 2 rooms, roof made of iron/in disrepair, no separate guest room, some new items visible.
> *Poor*: No visible electrical appliances, 1 room, iron roof, no new items visible, use of wood for cooking rather than gas.

Social status was identified as follows:
> *High*: Powerful (*Sayyid, Qadi, Sheikh,* highly educated (doctor)).
> *Upper middle*: Some power (military officer, *Qabili*, high government position, above average educational levels (engineer, teacher at university or head teacher).
> *Lower middle*: Limited power (manual professional, merchant).
> *Low*: No power (*Akhdam, Abid,* displaced person, woman headed household).

[27] Often schools in Yemen have the first three grades mixed; while after grade three the school becomes either a boys' or a girls' only school. Some schools

were identified as co-ed schools because they had a second shift for secondary schooling where boys and girls were taught together.

[28] Numbers were obtained from the school as well as the district Ministry of Education.

[29] Numbers were obtained from the schools during the school survey, from the fieldwork as well as from the governorate Ministry of Education.

[30] Numbers were obtained from the schools during the school survey, from the fieldwork as well as from the Ministry of Education.

2   School completion: What is enough?

2.1   Introduction

'Basic school completion' is a globalized concept that assumes a minimum of nine grades' required schooling. It is promoted by UNESCO through its Education for All (EFA) strategy and has become the basis of education development practice (UNESCO 1997). Global documents identify a wide, all-encompassing definition of basic education, though they also accept that in practice 'basic education' means the implementation of nine years of schooling for children. This is also reflected in documents from Yemen's Ministry of Education, which has adopted the globalized concept while in practice focusing on nine grades of compulsory schooling for children. Many children, however, do not complete their compulsory basic schooling of nine grades, and views of what basic schooling entails and how many grades is enough for basic schooling differ between the different education actors, such as education specialists, the Ministry of Education, communities, teachers, parents and children. The current study focuses on the schooling of children and therefore uses the term 'basic schooling' rather than the wider concept of basic education.

Various Ministry of Education documents point to Yemen's aim of achieving universal basic education by 2025, also indicating that implementation involves compulsory schooling at the primary and lower secondary levels. National documents on the subject reflect the influence and agendas of other actors as well, especially donors, which do not always support one another (Ministry of Education 2010, 2003). Listening to the various actors, I found that teachers, who have to implement these national strategies, think the more grades children complete the better. But they do not have the specific target of nine grades in mind, nor do

they assume that this is needed for all children. Children and their parents, those who use the system, do not seem to view school completion as finishing a specific number of grades but rather in terms of when a child has had enough and is ready to move towards adulthood. This chapter explores these different views. It first discusses the international discourse on basic school completion and its impact on educational policies and strategies in Yemen. This is followed by a focus on the people who implement basic schooling at the community level (teachers) and the receivers of basic schooling (children and parents). Specifically, it looks at how these different actors view school completion. The final part of this chapter explores how these differing views at the community level can be explained. Communities do not always look at child development in terms of numbers of years or grades. In Yemen, community notions of childhood, especially the phase of transition to adulthood, do not appear to correspond with current popular notions of mass schooling. Furthermore, the idea of completion of basic schooling as defined globally does not fit well with the communities' perceptions of what is relevant for the education of a child.

Views of education development agencies, however, are often seen as 'best' and efforts in education development programming tend to focus on convincing those who implement and use the mass schooling system to take on their view. But how does this stroke with rights-based programming in education development?

2.2   Global strategies and approaches, national policies and programming

National education policies are powerfully influenced by the views embodied by global strategies such as EFA, promoted by UNESCO, as well as UN-supported approaches to education development, such as the rights-based approach. In Yemen, under the influence of donors, strategies for mass schooling have come to reflect the global views and EFA-promoted practices (UNESCO 1997).

2.2.1 Global strategies

The idea of a global education strategy started with EFA in 1948 as part of the universal declaration of human rights. Here, UNESCO recommended that its member states make primary education free, compulsory

and universal. This was followed by various global efforts to reach universal primary education, both as a stand-alone goal and as an element of other development goals. In 1971, the United Nations 2nd Development Strategy set universal primary education as a target to be reached by 1980. In the ensuing decades, this target was regularly revised. In 1990, at the Jomtien education conference, the different efforts came together in adopting the World Declaration on Education For All. This identified six years of schooling as optimal (primary education) and set the target of 2000 for achieving this goal (UNESCO 1990: 74). Due to a lack of progress towards this target, the Dakar Education Conference was organized in 2000, which in turn influenced the education Millennium Development Goal (MDG): universal primary education by 2015. Although the Dakar conference further defined basic education, it remained unclear on the number of grades needed to complete basic education. Basic education was defined as 'the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings (formal, non-formal and informal) that aim to meet basic learning needs' (UNESCO 2009: 407). It was thus interpreted as including early childhood education, primary education and basic life skills for youths and adults, as well as literacy (UNESCO 1997). Basic education aims at meeting the basic learning needs of all:

> [Basic learning needs include] essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacity, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning (Article 1, World Declaration of Education for All, UNESCO 1990).

The Dakar conference as well as the MDGs showed other global influences of the time. The influence of global neo-liberalism, for example, is evident in the EFA's expectation that poverty would be reduced through increased numbers of children in school and that setting quantitative targets was a good way to make nations accountable (Colclough 2006: 63, Kremer et al. 2009). These ideas have been criticized, first as being unachievable and second as not resulting in accountability of nations, as the focus is on number of years of schooling rather than the original goal of basic education as a process of lifelong learning (Torres 2000). Based on a rights-based approach, the goals and targets have also been criticized because of their failure to view education as a right in the

here-and-now, with duty-bearers who can be held accountable for their achievement. Rather, it is seen as something that can be put off till a certain date, with no sanctions for non-achievement. Because the targets are never reached, the right to education remains unaddressed (Tomasevski 2003, Unterhalter 2007).

The right to education, in regard to basic education, is defined in article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

> 1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; ... (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

Article 29 adds information on the direction that a child's education should take for children to develop to their 'fullest potential' (OHCHR 1989). The global EFA strategy views basic education through a wider, all-encompassing lens as 'the whole range of educational activities taking place in various settings... that aim to meet basic learning needs' (UNESCO 2009: 407). Both the right to education and the definition of basic education accept that what is often meant in practice is supporting the implementation of a certain number of years of schooling for children. This is clearly reflected in the MDGs (Unterhalter 2008, Torres 2000). The right to education therefore is identified in practice as the right to basic schooling, which is also the case in Yemen.

Yemen defines basic schooling as nine grades of schooling for children: primary schooling (six grades) plus lower secondary schooling (three grades). This only partially reflects the definition of UNESCO (Tembon et al. 2008, Lauder et al. 2006: 3, Moore 2004: 82, Unterhalter 2008, Torres 2000). UNESCO defines primary education as follows:

> Programmes normally designed on a unit or project basis to give pupils a sound basic education in reading, writing and mathematics, and an elementary understanding of subjects such as history, geography, natural sciences, social sciences, art and music. Religious instruction may also be featured. These subjects serve to develop pupils' ability to obtain and use information they need about their home, community or country.

It defines 'primary cohort completion rate' as '[t]he number of pupils who complete the final year of primary school, expressed as a percentage

of the number who entered the first year'. 'Lower secondary education' is defined as follows:

> ...a program generally designed to continue the basic programmes of the primary level but the teaching is typically more subject focused, requiring more specialized teachers for each subject area. The end of this level often coincides with the end of compulsory education.

'Drop-out rate by grade' is defined as the '[p]ercentage of pupils or students who drop out of a given grade in a given school year' (UNESCO 2009: 412–413).

As the EFA definitions of basic education and basic learning needs have not been adjusted to the shrunken practice of basic schooling, confusion is widespread on the number of grades needed, as well as on the outcomes of the nine grades of basic schooling. EFA now recommends eight to nine years' exposure to systematic education to achieve basic education (Torres 2000: 26), while the outcomes of the nine grades of compulsory basic schooling are no more than topics identified in the definitions of primary and lower secondary schooling.

Criticism of mass schooling is aired especially by world culturalists such as Boli and Ramirez. They hold that global mass schooling as promoted by UNESCO forces states to adjust their schooling models to the global model. This means that around the world one sees the organization of basic compulsory schooling into six years of primary schooling and three years of intermediate or secondary schooling (Boli 1996: 7, Ramirez 2003). UNESCO's educational statistical requirements are often identified as providing nation-states no choice other than to accept global mass schooling in order to be taken seriously by the international community. The critics argue that the global model of mass schooling is not necessarily the best way to run a schooling system, but is often perceived by all as the best way or the only acceptable way (Ramirez 2003: 240, Anderson-Levitt 2003: 4). Children and their parents often share this view, despite the fact that the global model of schooling often challenges traditional definitions of the educated person. This results in the use of two definitions; one used at home and one used at school. This may create tensions in societies regarding knowledge obtained in school and that gleaned from other sites of learning (such as the home) and affect how people view schooling (Levinson and Holland 1996: 26, Torres 2006, Limbert 2010). These tensions are also evident in the implementa-

tion of schooling, indicating the importance of the relationship between school and society. The early Western educationalist Durkheim (1956: 80) highlighted this relationship in his definition of education:

> [Education is the] influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined.

This definition focuses on the child, but it includes all aspects of a child's education, including formal schooling, and highlights the role of social reproduction as well as political arrangements (Moore 2004, Stromquist 1999, Bernstein 1996/2006, Marshall and Arnot 2008). Despite globalization of schooling, society plays an important role in defining knowledge and what needs to be learned, including what is expected to be learned at school. Local views are especially influential in terms of the functioning of mass schooling at the school level (Harris 2006: 81, Ramirez 2003).

2.2.2 Global approaches

Closely connected with global policies and strategies is the global approach promoted in education development. As discussed in Chapter 1, at present the rights-based approach is upheld by most international education development actors, including the United Nations. A (child) rights-based approach views children as rights-holders who can legally demand their right to be met; adults are viewed as duty-bearers with an obligation to fulfil the right of all children to education (Tomasevski 2003). A rights-based approach is said to have 'increased accountability as a result of duty-claim relationships, provision of better protection of the most vulnerable from power exertion and can be used as a challenge to power' (Jonsson 2003: 60). A rights-based approach identifies action as mandatory rather than voluntary, as all people have legally established claims and entitlements. People are rights-holders. They are active participants by right and must therefore be provided with the space and ability to participate. Power structures in the way of fulfilment of rights must be addressed and changed (Save the Children Alliance 2005: 25, UNICEF/UNESCO 2007, Unterhalter 2008: 26). The rights-based approach has advantages, but it has critics as well. As such, the rights-based

approach is said to fail to address the relationship between economic development and human rights, so it does not really challenge power. It is also thought to be too dependent on the legal system (a system that is often inaccessible to the poor and controlled by those with power); and it is said to be unable to protect those who are most vulnerable (Uvin 2002, 2004, Gasper 2007: 10, Gready and Ensor 2005). The rights-based approach is also criticized as having mixed results in legal terms, as the duty-holders often use religion or culture to justify their reservation clauses, avoiding translation of children's rights into local laws (Unterhalter 2008, Freeman 1995). These criticisms are often addressed with the capabilities approach (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2000), which asks for more attention for the individual and a strengthening of the legal aspects of rights (Ensor 2005: 254, Gasper 2007, Alston and Robinson 2005).

The capabilities approach moves away from looking at the quantity or quality of resources and particular outcomes in numbers. It states that human capabilities are needed to be able to claim human rights and to live a valuable life. Walker and Unterhalter (2007a), in their edited volume, as well as others have looked at Sen's capabilities approach in relation to education. They conclude that the capabilities approach 'combines a normative idea with considerations of how to link this with practice not just in education but in a wide range of political, economic and social fields that bear on education' (Walker and Unterhalter 2007a: 239). The capabilities approach sees education, including schooling, as a way to develop capabilities and to 'expand human freedoms, agency and empowerment', which in turn can be used to evaluate whether rights have been achieved (Walker and Unterhalter 2007: 14, Fennel 2008, Nussbaum 2000). It remains unclear what the specific capabilities are to be obtained through schooling. Sen refrained from defining the different capabilities, arguing that these are dependent on the context. Others have attempted to identify them. For example, Terzi (2007: 37) identified basic capabilities for education as including literacy, numeracy, sociality and participation, learning dispositions, physical activities, science and technology and practical reason. Although literacy is arguably Western based, and some would argue of little value to those in illiterate societies, literacy is believed to expand human capabilities and therefore to be an essential capability. Societies that are literate are identified as having a higher level of well-being than societies that are not literate (Terzi 2007, Nussbaum 2000). Nonetheless, this again ignores the fact that schooling

may not always be the best choice for every child and accepts the value of mass schooling without question (Walker and Unterhalter 2007a: 246, Harber 2004).

The rights-based approach emerged after the global EFA documents were developed, but it is deemed appropriate for the initiative because EFA documents call for the fulfilment of the right to education for all. Although most actors, policies and strategies claim to work towards fulfilment of the right to education, programming in education development to achieve EFA seldom shows a rights-based approach. Programmes support countries in achieving EFA, including Yemen, by focusing on schooling and making nine grades of basic schooling compulsory by law. The assumption is that nine grades is the minimum of schooling required to provide for the basic learning needs of children and therefore to fulfil the right to education. Support to basic school completion is provided through programmes that can be categorized as 'global', as these programmes are found around the world. Yet research on what programmes 'work' (which programmes increase school completion rates and reduce the gender gap) has found a continuing influence of the earlier frame of reference, rather than the more recent (child) rights-based frame of reference (Herz and Sperling 2004, Tembon and Fort 2008, Rugh 2000, also for Yemen see Al Mekhlafy 2008, Alim et al. 2007, Beatty et al. 2007). Education development agencies appear to use these programmes without fully acknowledging that their 'success' may not in fact be relevant to fulfilling the right to education of all children now. Programmes tend to focus on numbers (if enrolment and completion rates are good, then the programme is said to work), as well as on gender (if more girls complete school, the programme is said to work). Use of the completion of a number of grades as a development goal is criticized as ignoring the content of schooling, assuming that the content 'schools' a person and that this 'schooling' is useful for the person who goes through the schooling, besides the fact that education is not seen as a right, as already noted (Unterhalter 2008, Lynch 1997: 35, Torres 2000: 41). In addition, a focus on girls has been criticized because that which works for girls may not work for boys (see Kim et al. 1998 for research in Pakistan).

It seems therefore that education development agencies, as well as global strategies, use rights language in their theoretical approach, but their practical programming has remained as before (Uvin 2002, Jonsson

2003: 52, Ansell 2005, Torres 2000: 24). Three often opposing practices in education development can therefore be identified: (i) the interventionist approach, which sees education as a right but focuses on increasing numbers of enrolled children with a range of interventions rather than changing the system; (ii) the institutional approach, which expects institutional change to ensure the implementation of the right to education; and (iii) the interactionist approaches which view schooling as a way to address inequalities in society (Unterhalter 2007, 2008). All continue to have a strong focus on schooling as a product, with emphasis on inequalities of schooling outcomes, especially by gender. A rights-based approach should question schooling as being the only tool to fulfil the right to education. However, Unterhalter (2007) has argued for the continuation of all three approaches to address inequalities in schooling outcomes. How best to implement all three approaches and to make the shift towards a rights-based approach is less clear.

There appears to be some contradiction between the global institution of schooling, global education strategies, and global education approaches. The rigid institution of schooling seems unable to fulfil the right to education or to ensure that the global goals outlined in the strategies are met. But even though schooling does not seem able to do this, formal mass schooling remains the focus of education development actors, as evident in their strategies, polices and approaches.

2.2.3 National policies

Yemen ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and explicitly identifies the right to education in its education strategy. The education strategy also states support for the education MDG 'to achieve universal primary education by 2015', as well as the strategic goal of reaching universal basic education (schooling) by 2025 (Ministry of Education 2008). Indicators used by the Ministry of Education to measure progress towards achievement of these goals reflect the global influence of education statistics and include school completion and drop-out rates (Ministry of Education 2009). In its concluding remarks on the achievements of Yemen in fulfilling the rights of all children, the UN Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child identified no aspect of the country's education as a shortcoming, though there were comments regarding general discrimination of children from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities, which are expected to include educa-

tion as well (UNCRC 2005). Although visible in education strategies, global influences are much less evident in Yemen's educational laws. The present mass schooling system was established in the 1960s following the revolutions in South and North Yemen. In the North this resulted in Decree No. 16, which established the Ministry of Education in 1963, followed by the Education Act, which mainly regulates the organization of education. Following the civil war and unification of North and South, the new Education Law 45 of was enacted in 1992. Law 45 goes beyond the organization of schooling and specifies the main goal of education as to defend the homeland and national and Arab unity and to meet the needs of society. It does not, however, specify what this entails. Beyond this main goal, some articles in Law 45 are obviously influenced by global education strategies, but often in an incomplete and limited way. For example, article 9 makes reference to inequalities, but not with regard to gender: '[T]the state wants to achieve social justice and equal opportunities in education taking into account social and economic conditions that stand in the way of some families to take advantage of the right of children to education'. Article 15 states the aim of education in terms of what a good citizen should be capable of: (i) '[t]o contribute to community building, spiritual, moral, mental as well as physical'; (ii) '[to uphold] religious values in accordance with the Holy Quran and human rights, as well as respecting the rights of others'; (iii) '[t]o promote research and inquiry for long term learning'; (iv) '[to uphold t]he teacher... as a role model'; and (v) '[t]o challenge conspiracy against Yemen, Arab and Islamic unity' (Website of the Ministry of Education 2010).

Neither Law 45 nor any other document of the Ministry of Education provides a vision for education as yet, but the Ministry of Education and the Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS) programme led by the World Bank have produced a draft which states the following:

> **The Vision:** The Ministry of Education commits itself and endeavours to high quality basic, and secondary education and adult literacy services by 2025 that is in harmony with the best universal educational management and quality standards, and with emphasis on science, and information & communication technology, in order to prepare students and adult learners for a productive life, develop their ability for continuing their higher education, and/or facilitating their entry to the labour market, and contribute to achieving sustainable development for Yemen and alleviate poverty (Ministry of Education August 2009: 6).

Yemen's education laws, as well as the recently drafted vision, are influenced to some extent by global basic education strategies. But they also demonstrate the importance of national politics, including a balancing of modern mass schooling with traditional education values, and the state's political agenda for North and South Yemen. The influence of global ideas such as neo-liberalism is also evident in the recent vision with its references to economic growth, which are lacking in other Ministry of Education documents. Yet Yemen's labour market is small and job creation has not kept pace with school completers. Most employment is in the large informal and agricultural sectors, with the nation's small private sector dominated by a few traditionally family-owned businesses with little demand for skilled workers. It is estimated that of the working population of 4.2 million, about 90 per cent work in the informal sector, including about 41 per cent in the agriculture sector and 44 per cent in the services sector, which consists mainly of agriculture-related activities. Regarding youth unemployment, although difficult to calculate, official youth unemployment is estimated at 29 per cent and is highest among the 18–25 age group with a rising trend (UN 2005). Youth unemployment figures focus on young people who have completed schooling and want to be employed outside of the home and informal sector. Most of the girls who participated in my research did not consider employment outside of the traditional job of housewife.

Interestingly, youth unemployment is viewed mainly as 'the result of employers feeling that graduates do not have the basic skills needed for the job, the slow rate of economic growth and the difficulty of the formal sector to expand' (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs 2003, as quoted by the World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 41). The first reason suggests a disconnect between schooling and the available jobs, but it does imply that jobs are available, which seems questionable. The stop in expansion of the civil service due to lack of financial resources especially affects girls, as the civil service is one of the few opportunities for acceptable employment for them. At present an estimated 20 per cent of heads of household are employed in the civil service, of which 17 per cent reside in the rural areas (WFP 2010). This figure does not include women, as they are rarely identified as heads of household, or young people, who tend to form part of an extended household.

2.2.4 National programming

Education strategies are supposed to reflect the education laws in Yemen, but as discussed above, this is not always the case. Education strategies tend to reflect more the influence of global strategies than national laws. The Ministry of Education and the World Bank recognize that the implementation of the strategies has been difficult and has not led to the expected continued increase in numbers of children in school. Their analysis sees the constraints as related mainly to the schooling system itself, primarily the lack of coordination between strategies and investments in the different subsectors (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). These strategies and investments can be better understood by looking at the range of policies and programmes that the Ministry of Education has adopted in order to implement its education strategy:

- The Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS) 2003–15, which has five components: (i) realization of justice and equality; (ii) improving quality; (iii) institution building; (iv) improving internal efficiency; (v) illiteracy eradication and organization of adult education.

- The Education for All Law (2002) which encourages the inclusion of marginalized children.

- Establishment of the Girls' Education Sector (2005) involving a wide range of measures to promote girls' education.

- The Technical Education and Vocational Training Strategy 2005–15.

- The Literacy and Adult Education Strategy, which includes the creation of a government agency for literacy and adult education.

These various policies and plans, which are supported by different education development actors, demonstrate the influence of global EFA strategies more than the influence of Law 45 or the draft vision. The focus is on schooling for children, but education of adults is also included, as well as programmes which go beyond basic schooling. The policies and programmes also address inequalities, especially in terms of gender and status, and mention social justice as an aim to be pursued. All of these policies and programmes are supported by the international donor community through both financial and technical assistance. International

donors are said to work well together in education in Yemen. Almost all of the major donors are party to a partnership agreement aiming at greater harmonization and alignment within basic education, as well as co-financing the Basic Education Development Strategy (BEDS) (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). Despite the donors working together, they each have their own focus, which results in policies and programmes with a mixed integration of global strategies, as well as contradictions between the legal basis of education in Yemen (Law 45) and donor-supported programmes and strategies that are supposed to support the implementation of that same law.

The BEDS programme is most relevant to my study. This strategy was developed by the education development agencies (mainly donors), and endorsed by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education 2003, Al Mekhlafy 2008). It shows the presence of global influences, which can be identified as different from the overall Education Strategy of the Ministry of Education. Most development agencies claim to support the right to education, as well as the EFA global education strategy and the MDGs. Those that signed the declaration supporting BEDS 2003–15 implement this through a variety of approaches and activities.

The diversity of education development agencies in Yemen is similar to that found in other countries. The participants often work from different principles, histories and politics (Haan 2009: 36, Dreher et al. 2008, Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2009). International agencies working with a focus on children use a child rights-based approach and are represented mainly by two agencies in Yemen: UNICEF[1] and Save the Children.[2] They are the focus of my discussion of what the results of the current research mean for education development practice in Yemen. Both child-focused agencies identify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the basis of their activities (UNICEF/UNESCO 2007, UNICEF 2008a, Save the Children 2005).

Contradictions between the various donor-supported strategies and programmes can be identified in the recent draft vision of education, supported by one donor (the World Bank). This vision does not correspond in all respects with the different programmes and strategies under way. The vision defines education as a means to spur economic growth, while most of the strategies and programmes focus on addressing inequalities and social justice. This contradiction highlights the differences in views between education development actors and the Ministry of Ed-

ucation, as well as between the different actors. As a result, the Ministry is sending several different messages, possibly causing confusion, to the people who must implement Law 45, donor-supported strategies and programmes, as well as the vision. It is then perhaps no surprise that views on basic schooling differ between those who implement the system, those who make use of the system and those who plan the system (Ministry of Education 2003, World Bank and MoPIC 2010, Alim et al. 2007, UNDP 2007, Becker 2002/2006, Al Mekhlafy 2008).

2.3   The local situation

2.3.1 The research areas

The views of those who plan (education development agencies and the national government) can be identified in documents. But the views of those who implement and use the schooling system must be derived from what they do and say. Findings of the household survey of 2,053 school-age children[3] living in the catchment areas of the 35 schools in the current study indicate higher enrolment[4] and lower rates of children stopping school than the national averages. Some 89 per cent of all children of school age (6–17 years) were enrolled in school: 92 per cent of the boys and 85 per cent of the girls. Of the 11 per cent not enrolled, 2 per cent had never enrolled and 9 per cent had stopped school: 65 per cent of the children who had stopped school or never attended were girls, and 35 per cent were boys. Until age 12, enrolment for both girls and boys was more than 90 per cent: 93 per cent for girls and 97 per cent for boys. After the age of 12, enrolment rates dropped to 77 per cent for girls and 87 per cent for boys aged 13–17. Regarding ethnicity/class and location, more children from rural households (46 per cent) stopped school than children from urban households. However, urban girls in Aden as well as rural girls in Abyan both showed a large drop in enrolment in the older age group (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1
Survey enrolment rates of all school aged children in the household
by age and gender

	Age 7 – 12 years old		Age 13 – 17 years old		Total N=2053
	Boys N=615	**Girls N=541**	**Boys N=873**	**Girls N= 644**	
Aden	98%	93%	95%	79%	91.3%
Lahej	96%	94%	85%	84%	89.8%
Abyan	98%	92%	82%	70%	85.5%
Total	97.3%	93%	87.3%	77.7%	2053

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

Some 71 per cent of the children participating in the survey stopped school before or in grade six, and 89 per cent of those who had stopped school, stopped before or in grade eight. Surprisingly, the survey data show no significant differences in grade completion by gender (the figures are therefore not shown here).

Enrolment rates were difficult to measure for the three schools that were studied in-depth due to unreliable population data, but can be estimated as 75 per cent.[5] This is lower than the average of 89 per cent for the 35 schools. Comparing the statistics for two school years, 2008/09 and 2009/10, suggests that the three schools increased their number of boys, more girls enrolled in the first nine grades, and no children stopped school. Figures by grade however show an erratic picture of numbers going up and down, for both boys and girls. A reduction in the number of children from grade to grade may indicate that children have stopped school or that they are repeating a grade. In addition, the first grades show large numbers of new children, especially girls, which could hide children stopping school in other grades. Although the overall numbers from the three schools indicate that no children stopped school in the year depicted, children who had stopped school that year were identified and interviewed. This means that the data obtained from the schools and the Ministry of Education must be interpreted with caution.

The children who had stopped school and were involved in my in-depth research reported, like the children in the household survey, that they mostly stopped school before reaching grade six. There was a gen-

der difference, however. Sixteen out of the 20 girls and 8 out of the 10 boys had stopped school by grade six, with a few more girls than boys stopping school in these early grades (Table 2.2). When looking at ages among the children who had stopped school and were interviewed in-depth, the average age of stopping school for girls was 13.7 years and for boys 14.1 years.

Table 2.2
Stopping school by children interviewed in-depth by grade, age and gender

Grade	Grade at stopping school (by grade)		Age at stopping school (in years)		Total children (N=30)
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
1st	-	2	-	6, 8	2
2nd	2	-	9,11	-	2
3rd	2	4	9, 9	10, 9, 12, 10	6
4th	1	3	10	12, 11, 9	4
5th	3	7	13, 13, 15	13, 13, 12, 14, 13, 12, 15	10
6th	2	2	14, 13	14,16	4
7th	-	-	-	-	0
8th	1	1	15	12	2
9th	-	-			0

Source: Compiled by author from in-depth interviews of children who had stopped school.

Among the children interviewed in-depth, gender inequalities were found (see table). Girls tended to stop school in grade five, while boys stopped school in a greater range of grades. Considering age (which is difficult as the ages reported in years are unreliable), most of the children seem to have stopped school at about age 10.[6] Two children were younger than 10, 20 children were 10–15 years old, and 8 were older than 15. Both the large number of children stopping in grade five and the ages at which the children indicated that they had stopped school suggest that puberty and the subsequent transition into adulthood play a role in the decision to stop school.

Looking at the schooling status of the siblings of the children who had stopped school, a more complicated picture emerges: Stopping school cannot be generalized by gender or status groups, as almost all of the children who had stopped school had siblings who completed school (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3
Schooling outcomes siblings of children who stopped school
(from in-depth interviews)

Sibling	Boys who stopped school (N=10)	Girls who stopped school (N=20)	Total (N=30)
Average number of brothers N=94	3.4	3.0	3.2
Average number of sisters N=72	2.4	2.9	2.65
Average number of brothers never been to school older than 6 years N=26	1.4	0.6	0.8
Average number of sisters never been to school older than 6 years N=20	1.4	0.3	0.7
Average number of brothers stopped school before grade 9 N=26	1.2	0.7	0.9
Average number of sisters stopped school before grade 9 N=20	0.6	0.7	0.7
Average number of brothers completed grade 9 N=22	1.0	0.6	0.7
Average number of sisters completed grade 9 N=17	0.7	0.5	0.6

Source: Compiled by author based on in-depth interviews of children who had stopped school.

The group of children studied in-depth was small, so these data should be interpreted with caution. However, they do suggest that the school completion status of families of boys who stopped school is no different from that of girls who stopped school. Overall, girls who stopped school had fewer brothers and more sisters, and fewer brothers and sisters who never went to school than boys who stopped school. In addition, girls who stopped school had fewer brothers who completed school, but also fewer brothers who stopped school than boys who had stopped school. Regarding their sisters, the differences are much smaller. Therefore, it

cannot be said that the school completion status of siblings in the households of boys who stop school are better or worse than in the households of girls who stop school. Boys who stopped school had more siblings who did not go to school at all, as well as more siblings who completed basic schooling.

Regarding grade repetition, 17 per cent of children in the survey reported having repeated at least one grade. This is lower than the national average, while gender differences are similar to the national average with more boys (66 per cent) than girls repeating grades. Among the children interviewed in-depth who had stopped school, grade repetition is much more prevalent. Half of these children repeated at least one grade, with boys repeating more than girls (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4
Grade repetition by gender of children who stopped school
(from in-depth interviews)

Grade repeated	Boys (N=10)	Girls (N=20)	Total (N=30)
Total number of children who repeated 1st grade: % of children who repeated 1st grade:	3 30%	3 15%	6 20%
2nd %	4 40%	1 5%	5 17%
3rd %	1 10%	5 25%	6 20%
4th %	3 30%	5 25%	8 27%
5th %	-	2 10%	2 6%
6th %	1 10%	-	1 3%
7th %	2 20%	-	2 6%
8th %	-	-	-
9th %	-	-	-
Total number of repetitions	14	16	30

Source: Compiled by author based on in-depth interviews of children who had stopped school.

According to the interview data, boys who stop school repeat grades almost twice as much as girls who stop school, and most grade repetition takes place in the earlier grades with a peak at grade four (see table). Boys especially tend to repeat the earlier grades. The grade repetition figures reflect the situation of the family as a whole, as these children also have twice as many brothers who repeated a grade than sisters. Seven children who stopped school did not repeat any grade. These were all girls. None of the boys stopped school without repeating a grade. Six children repeated more than one grade; four of them were boys. The results suggest that boys may be 'allowed' to repeat more grades, indicating that school completion may be more important for boys. Or they may indicate that boys do not mind repeating grades as much as girls, or that girls perform better in school. The relatively large number of children (all girls) who stopped school without repeating a grade indicates that 'bad' school results are not necessarily a reason why girls stop school. There were, however, seven girls who stopped school because they did not want to repeat the grade. Thus, issues of shame and grade repetition are perhaps more important for girls than boys.

Regarding starting school, 49 per cent of the six year olds within the survey sample had started school (51 per cent of girls and 49 per cent of boys). This is higher than the national average. The survey data support the idea that starting school at a later age brings a greater risk of not completing school, as 91 per cent of the children who started school at age six completed grade nine, versus 63 per cent of children who started school at age seven. This is mirrored in the data on the 30 children who stopped school, but with a gender difference: Boys start school at a wider variety of ages than girls. Not only do they start earlier, they are more likely to enter school at a later age. More than half of the boys entered school at age six or younger, compared to one-third of the girls. More than half of the girls started school at seven years of age.

A situation analysis indicated that the research areas were representative of above-average communities in terms of access to schools, access to schools with female teachers and access to water. Better access and resources seem in this case to result in increased enrolment, with children tending to stop school later and more children starting school at age six than the national averages. However, despite better access and resources there were still children who stopped school before completing basic schooling, including more girls than boys and more children from

rural areas than urban areas. The situation in my research areas thus provides an opportunity to explore views on stopping school beyond the typical reasoning of lack of access and resources. In the study area, children stopped school even though there was access to school and resources.

2.3.2   Local views on school completion

Local views on education and schooling are expected to be informed by global and national views as expressed in school regulations and other documents reaching local communities. Communities are expected to take on these national and global views over time, alongside their existing views on education. Local views are explored through the language used by teachers, parents and children, as well as through people's impressions, practices and experiences of mass schooling as they know it in their communities.

Language used

The language on school completion or non-completion used by teachers, parents and children shows many differences. These provide insight into the meanings given to school completion and school dropout.[7] In Ministry of Education documents, school completion is translated as *tekamalat – kml*, which means completion, accomplishment and finishing. At the school level, however, most teachers use a different word: *anha – inha*, which means to conclude, determine or fulfil. *Anha* has a similar meaning to *kml*, but with a less strong connotation of a fixed time or number of grades completed. Teachers use the word, for example, when talking about a child who has stopped school, including when the child stopped school before finishing the required six or nine grades. For dropout, the Ministry of Education uses the word *tasarab – srb*, which means leaking from the flock or herd.[8] The word suggests that dropping out is seen as a leakage from the system or the group, rather than an individual child missing an opportunity to complete something of value. Teachers use this word as well. But when speaking informally about individual children who stopped school, most teachers use the word *tarakat – trk*, meaning 'to leave or abandon'. This word has a more negative connotation than *srb*. Both words (*srb* and *trk*) seem to indicate that there is a start to schooling. The word *trk* conveys that there is an end that has not been reached. It relates to leaving or abandoning something that had

been started before completion. *Srb* has a less strong connotation of failure to reach an endpoint, with its reference to leakage and its focus on the system rather than the child. For teachers, the end of schooling is closely related to the school they work in. Those who teach primary school, for example, talk about completion of primary school grades. This terminology seems to be closely related to the international words 'dropout' or 'wastage', which are also used in Yemen, both of which have a negative connotation (Achola and Pillai 2000).

In comparison, children do not seem to have a particular word for school completion. They use *waqaf – wqf*, meaning to stop/finish, when talking about having stopped school. This word indicates that they have stopped a certain activity, without indicating that the activity has a clear end which has (or has not) been reached. This is further illustrated by a conversation I had early in my research with a 12-year-old girl who had stopped school:

> LM: Can you tell us when you dropped out/*tarakti* from school?
> F: (Frowns and looks puzzled) Uhhh, I did go to school for 4 years.
> LM: Yes, ...and when did you stop/*waqafti* going to school?
> F: Ahh, I stopped/*waqafet* school last year… in the summer.
> LM: So you have not been to school for three months now?
> F: No, I stopped/*waqafet* school last year… I have not been to school for a year now.

I started the conversation by using the word *trk*, which I had heard from the teachers, thinking that it would be more appropriate than the word *srb*, which is found in the official Ministry of Education documents and was used by my research assistant. But during the conversation I realized that I needed to use a different word, as the children did not use the word *trk* or *srb* 'dropout' as used by teachers and the Ministry. Their language seemed to show that children did not see themselves as having 'dropped out' from a process. By stopping/*wqf* school, they indicate that they have come at the end of a process which has no link with the specified term of nine grades. Parents used a variety of words for school completion with the focus on stopping school. Some used terminology similar to that of teachers; others used terminology more like that used by children, often linked to their status group. As children consider themselves having stopped school rather than having 'dropped out' of school, the word stopping school is used throughout this study.

Views of children, parents and teachers

To gain a better understanding of people's experience with the education system, the household survey explored school impressions of parents and children. In addition, teachers were asked their views regarding children stopping school through the teachers' survey. The views of children, parents and teachers often seemed linked to their perceptions of the usefulness of schooling, now and in the future.

Table 2.5
Children's positive experiences of school (multiple responses)[9]

	% of Responses (N=1571)
Friends at school	25%
Helpful teacher	22%
Learning values	22%
School is interesting	19%
Learning is fun	8%
Pay time	1%
Learning to read and write	1%
Other	2%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

Table 2.6
Children's negative experiences of school (multiple responses)[10]

	% of Responses (N=783)
Teacher is not nice	26%
Lack of books and supplies	8%
Lack of facilities/space	4%
Teacher is often absent	11%
School is too hot	9%
Other students are not nice	14%
I do not learn anything	3%
School is boring	9%
School is too far	2%
School is dirty	3%
Violence/Hitting	3%
Other	8%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

Children. Few of the children surveyed had a positive overall impression of their school experience, though they mentioned social relations and the social skills and values learned at school as most positive. One-quarter of the children said they did not have an overall negative impression of school (Table 2.5). The majority did have a negative impression focused on the quality of education and social interactions, such as 'the teacher was not nice', 'other students were not nice' and 'the teacher was often absent' (Table 2.6). More than two-thirds of the children surveyed mentioned the teacher or the teacher's absence as a negative or positive aspect of the school experience. This shows that the quality of teaching and teachers' behaviour is important to children. It affects their school experience and in turn their views on schooling. It is interesting to note the marked absence of references to the learning of academic skills such as reading and writing at school as part of school impressions, either positive or negative. In addition, the survey results show few gender differences. Status differences are difficult to identify too. My in-depth research did show gender and status differences in regard to how children experience teachers and school. These results are discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

Parents.[11] Parents' impressions of school are similar to their children's. Very few parents said that they had no positive impressions, and even fewer had no negative impressions about the child's school. Like their children, the majority of parents identified the quality of teaching and the socialization of the child as both positive and negative aspects of schooling (tables 2.7 and 2.8). Almost three-quarters of the parents mentioned the teacher as either a positive or negative factor in their child's schooling. In contrast to their children, one-quarter of the parents mentioned the importance of academic skills and the role schooling could play in their child's future. Although the parents were asked specifically about the child who was selected for the interview, the results are unclear about whether the parents really were talking about their own child's schooling, or whether they were commenting on school in general. Their answers were likely linked to their experiences with that particular child's schooling, but mixed with other influences, such as general perceptions of schooling. Parents who had multiple children in school may have been reflecting on different children's experiences. Overall, parents did not seem to have strong feelings, either positive or negative, towards the

school and what it was supposed to achieve. Like their children, parents' focused more on the social experience that children have while in school now, rather than what attending school could mean for the future. Tables 2.7 and 2.8 summarize parents' responses.

Table 2.7
Parents' positive experiences of school (multiple responses)[12]

	% of Responses (N=1548)
Teacher is helpful/good	20%
School is useful for child's future	25%
Child has many friends at school	19%
School is fun for the child	16%
Learning is fun	5%
Child learns discipline/manners at school	12%
Other	3%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

Table 2.8
Parents' negative experiences of school (multiple responses)[13]

	% of Responses (N=857)
Poor quality/behaviour of teacher	24%
School too costly	7%
School does not have facilities for girls	7%
Teacher is frequently absent	13%
Other children are mean	11%
Child feels bored at school	7%
Child does not learn at school	8%
Road is not safe/ School is too far	7%
The school is dirty	2%
School is too hot for children	6%
Other	8%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

In summary, both parents and children identify many more positive aspects of schooling than negative aspects. Both identify the teacher as the most important factor underlying their impressions of school. This was further explored through the in-depth research with children who had stopped school and through the classroom observations. Parents'

and children's impressions of school are similar for boys and girls, so the survey results do not suggest inequalities in this regard. Perhaps the lack of gender differences in views and impressions of schooling by parents and children reflects the fact that school is not seen as a place where gender roles are learned. Rather, school is seen as a place separate from society where children pass part of their childhood. Furthermore, schooling is seen as a time-bound, isolated activity in the child's life, very much linked to childhood itself. There seems to be no link between impressions of schooling and completion of nine grades, either by parents or by children. The in-depth interviews did reveal differences among children, both gender differences and differences between children from the same family. This is further explored in Chapter 3.

Teachers. Unlike parents, teachers' views on schooling did differ for boys and for girls. Most teachers said that girls attended school because they 'like to go to school' and because it gave them 'access to paid employment'. That girls become 'better mothers' and that schooling makes 'their parents proud' were also frequent responses (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9
Teachers' perceptions of why girls attend school (multiple responses)

Response	% identified
Girls like to go to school	66%
Girls learn important skills at school	37%
Girls learn important values at school	15%
Girls who attend school become better mothers	22%
Girls who attend school can get a job/earn an income	56%
Girls have to go to school – it is the law	3%
It makes parents proud/modern when their daughter attends school	22%
Girls who attend school make better marriage partners	3%
Girls look after their siblings on the way to school and at school	11%
Other	6%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

Regarding why boys attend school, teachers most often mentioned the belief that boys can get a better job after attending school. This was followed by 'boys like school'. That the boy becomes a better father and can be a better leader were also often mentioned (Table 2.10).

Table 2.10
Teachers' perceptions on why boys attend school (multiple responses)

Response	% identified
Boys like to go to school	40%
Boys learn important skills at school	20%
Boys learn important values at school	13%
Boys who attend school become better fathers/leaders 1	26%
Boys who attend school can get a job/earn an income	66%
Boys have to go to school – it is the law	5%
It makes parents proud/modern when their son attends school 2	13%
Boys who attend school make better marriage partners	5%
Boys look after their siblings on the way to school and at school	0%
Other	15%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

When teachers were asked why they think that girls do not complete basic schooling, they mostly mentioned girls getting married/engaged, followed by the 'girl is not interested in completing her schooling', 'the cost of completing school is too high' and 'the girl needs to stay home to help' (Table 2.11). Teachers said that boys do not complete school because they need to help at home, followed by the boy not wanting to complete his schooling, as well as cost of school completion being too high for parents (Table 2.12).

Table 2.11
Teachers' perceptions on why girls do not complete basic education
(multiple responses)

Response	% identified
It was enough – she learned enough	7%
Girls' secondary school is too far from home	5%
Not enough female teachers in higher grades	0%
Daughter(s) need to stay at home and help with chores when they get older	26%
Costs for completing school too high	25%
Girl will become difficult when completing school	4%
Girl does not want to complete school	31%
Girl is getting engaged/married	55%
Girl is not clever enough to complete	13%
Not good for reputation of girl to complete school	7%
Not good for girls to be with unfamiliar boys and men when she is older	5%
Other	32%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

Table 2.12
Teachers' perceptions on why boys do not complete basic education
(multiple responses)

Response	% identified
It was enough, he had learned enough	12%
Boys secondary school is too far from home	1%
Not enough books and supplies for higher grades	2%
School space is inadequate for higher grades	1%
Not enough qualified teachers for higher grades (subject teachers)	3%
Boy need to help father when older	46%
Boy does not like to complete school	36%
Boy is not clever enough to complete school	18%
Boy is getting engaged/married	7%
Cost of completing school too high	23%
No need for boy to complete school/he does not learn more at school	4%
Other	35%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

The 'other' category is high in both tables. Despite being asked to write in the questionnaire the reason identified as 'other', many surveyors did not. Furthermore, the data entry did not allow additional subcategories to be entered under 'other'. My observations and going through a sample of the questionnaires suggests that reasons identified under 'other' could have been classified under one of the given categories. Only in a small number of cases was the reasoning actually very different. Reasons identified under 'other' that were different seemed to be linked mainly to individual children and included reasons such as boy or girl is an orphan, boy or girl is sick/disabled, and the family moved away.

When observing teachers' practices and talking to individual teachers, certain aspects of teachers' views on school completion came to light, often linked to school policies aimed at increasing the number of children completing their basic schooling. Examples of these policies are provision of certificates upon completion of grade six and grade nine and automatic promotion in the first three grades. These policies made exam results important to the school, as these demonstrate how successful the school is, based on the percentage of children who pass or fail their exams. Exam results also fed into the statistics collected by the Ministry of Education, to show progress towards their national goals. Schools and teachers are therefore inclined to make sure that children who enter grade six or nine are good enough to pass the test at the end of the school year, though they are less concerned about the number of children that completes basic schooling. This is illustrated by my conversation below with one of the head teachers (HT) after I had observed a third grade class.

> Field notes 22-11-2010
> HT: The students in this class are not very good. They are lazy and do not study well. I think that many will fail at the end of the year.
> LM: But I thought that students cannot fail in the first years of school?
> HT: Officially not, but the teachers are allowed to judge if children are ready to go to the next grade. In this class it is clear that many are not ready.
> LM: Really? How do you know as we are still at the beginning of the school year?
> HT: The third grade is difficult and we have to make sure that the students do well.
> LM: Why do you think so?

HT: In grade four the children have to pass a test; if they do not pass, it looks bad for the school, because I have to report the number of children who participate in the test and how many pass.

LM: Aha.

HT: For me, the problem is the automatic promotion of children. It is good and it is not good. Many children come to school when they are too young or too old. Their parents do not help them and they learn little. But still we have to promote them. That is not good. Parents and children need to learn that attending school is not just for fun. They need to fully support it.

LM: But how does automatic promotion affect this?

HT: With the automatic promotion we cannot force children to study, or punish them with bad marks. Children and parents become lazy. I do not want lazy students in grade four as they will make the school look bad with their bad results.

This conversation suggests that the head teacher is not concerned with the number of children that completes basic schooling or a certain grade. It is likely that other teachers in the school also focus on the number of children who pass the test. This attitude among teachers towards schooling is encouraged by the school system, as the system identifies a school as 'good' based on the number of children who participate and pass the test. The result may be that teachers do not implement automatic promotion or not allow all children to participate in tests.

2.3.4 Children's time

The literature often equates stopping school with children needing to work or help at home and therefore not having the time to be in school or to do homework (Crawford 1998, Warnock Fernea 1995, see also Schlemmer 2000). Views on school completion may therefore be influenced by how time is best spent. Maehr and Meyer (1997) found that the choice to do certain school tasks outside of school, such as homework, as well as to spend time in school depends on the availability of resources to do the task, including time, as well as support from the reference groups the child interacts with, especially the family. As schools are close by and water is easily accessible in my research communities, children spend little time walking to and from school and collecting water, which are often identified as reasons for children not to attend school in Yemen (Alim et al. 2007).

To better understand how children who stopped school spend their days, one of the tasks included in my in-depth interviews with children who had stopped school were timelines of a usual day. Below are two examples of these daily timelines for a girl and a boy who had stopped school.

> Farida (16 years) usually wakes up for prayers, goes back to sleep and then wakes at 8.00 AM but stays in bed till 9.00 AM. She gets dressed and clears her room and has breakfast with her mother at 10.00 AM. After breakfast, at 11.00 AM she helps her mother to prepare lunch for the whole family. They have lunch together at 12.00 PM. After lunch she does the washing up. In the afternoon she and her mother rest and read the *Quran*. At 4.00 PM they get ready to go out; Farida also attends the local *Quran* club (a female relative set this up) once a week or visits her family with her mother. She seldom visits friends or others. At 8.00 PM she joins her family in a light dinner that she prepares with her mother. After dinner she watches TV and talks. At 11.00 PM Farida goes to bed.

> Mohammed (12 years) wakes up for prayers and then goes back to sleep. He wakes up at 6.00 AM to go to the market to prepare everything for his uncle's stall. Mohammed helps his uncle until 10.00 AM, and then has breakfast, either at home or at the market. After breakfast he runs errands or lingers in the market with his friends. At 12.00 PM the market is over and Mohammed goes with his friends and the other men to the mosque to pray. At 1.00 PM Mohammed has lunch at home. After lunch he meets up with his friends somewhere outside and relaxes until 3.00 PM when he goes with his friends to the mosque to pray. At 4.00 PM Mohammed goes home and runs errands for his mother. From 5.00 PM till 7.00 PM he plays football with his friends. Then he goes home, has dinner, watches TV and goes to sleep at 9.00 PM.

These are fairly typical of the timelines that I collected from children who had stopped school. They suggest that while children are involved in work, both in and outside of the home, the time spent on these activities is limited and should not prevent children from attending school. The types of activities that children are involved in seem to indicate that they are not replacing their time at school with income-generation or other major activities. Key informants and my observations confirmed that opportunities for income-generating work are scarce in the district centre. At home, one may argue, there is always something to do that can indirectly contribute to household income. The timelines, however, sug-

gest that the time spent 'helping at home' does not involve long hours for the boy or the girl. Table 2.13 indicates what the children who had stopped school identified in their timelines as their main activity.

Table 2.13
Main daily activity of children who have stopped school
(single answer) (N=30)

Activity	Boys[14]	Girls
House work		19
Fire wood collecting		1
Selling qat[15] in market[16]	2	
Picking fruit	1	
Construction work	1	
Helping traditional healer	1	
Goats/fields	2	
Selling fruits/vegetables in market	2	
Minibus assistant	1	

Source: Compiled by author from in-depth interviews of children who had stopped school.

Only one of the girls who had stopped school did any form of work outside of the house. This girl indicated that she collected firewood for the house.[17] A few girls mentioned attending *Quran* lessons in the afternoons once or twice a week. One of the girls did this because she wanted to become a teacher of religion with small groups of students in her home later. None of the girls indicated aspiring to find work outside of the home. For boys this was different, as boys aspire to and are involved in jobs outside of the home. Although boys indicated interest in jobs and were observed to 'work', this work was not necessarily done because of poverty. It could be seen more as preparation for their future roles as adults than as a full-time occupation.

The in-depth interviews often revealed that siblings, especially among the girls, share tasks to be done in the home. In regard to school tasks however, none of the timelines indicate that boys or girls who stopped school spent time helping siblings with homework. In fact, boys and girls who had stopped school often said that one of the reasons for their bad

school results was the refusal of older siblings to help them with their homework. This may indicate that in regard to school, siblings do not support one another. Unlike work in the home, schoolwork is seen as belonging to the individual. This may reflect the influence of Western individualism through mass schooling and educational practices.

Data in Table 2.13 suggest that the activities of children who had stopped school are linked to their expected future roles as adults and are therefore important for the transition from childhood to adulthood. Children may have been involved in these activities while they attended school as well, but now the activities have a different meaning: what was a chore when attending school, now becomes a skill to be engaged in responsibly. For example, a boy in school is unlikely to spend time at the market, as the busiest time at the market is during school hours, but he will do this during the holidays. However, it is not acceptable for a boy who attends school to 'linger' at the market waiting for little jobs to be done. They do go to the market for errands but do not spend hours there. Yet this is acceptable for boys who have stopped school, as it is part of learning new skills and finding work. Similarly, girls are more likely to join their mother on social visits[18] once they have stopped school than while they are still in school. Girls attending school do join their mother on visits, but in a different capacity: they come to see other girls, while a girl who has stopped school stays with the adult women. This also reflects the perceived link between schooling and childhood, and between stopping school and involvement in activities linked to the transition to adulthood.

2.3.5 Schooling and the future

The development of mass schooling is associated with the future of the individual as well as that of society. As shown up to now in this chapter the school experiences of children and their parents, as captured through their impressions of school in the household survey, show a focus on the present. Schooling is seldom linked to the future. To further explore the link between schooling and the future of the child, parents (and children) were asked what they wanted the child to be or do in the future. Most respondents had the same dream for children, boys and girls: to be a 'professional in paid employment' (Table 2.14). This category mainly refers to civil service jobs in the government, such as in education, health, social services and agricultural services. The 'other' category contains

responses such as pilot, secretary, sheikh and lawyer. The military, although a civil service job, was kept separate because it has become one of the few civil service jobs left, as other governmental departments are overstaffed.

Table 2.14
Parents and children on what they want to be in the future
by gender of child (unprompted single answers)

	Parents (N=698)		Children (N=693)	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Educated	10%	8%	3%	7%
Professional (teacher, doctor, engineer, etc.)	77%	77%	72%	79%
Farmer / Fisherman	1%	0%	1%	0%
Have own business	1%	1%	3%	1%
Married with children	0%	2%	2%	1%
Good Father / Husband (or) Mother/ Wife	0%	7%	0%	5%
Military	2%	0%	2%	0%
Rich	0.5%	0%	1%	1%
To live abroad	0.5%	0%	1%	0%
Other	7%	5%	13%	6%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

At present it is unlikely that many of the children will end up as professionals in civil service employment, as the different government departments have a surplus of staff (except the army) and are under pressure to reduce rather than enlarge (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). In addition, in rural areas there are very few civil service positions. Many boys used to migrate to urban areas to find jobs there (for girls this was much harder). But now this too has become harder for both girls and boys, as there are fewer jobs available in the cities. Very few of the parents, or siblings, are in civil service jobs (except the army). Their aspirations are therefore not based on role models close to home but more likely derived from stories, television or the example of distant relatives. Parents and children were asked if they thought that schooling was re-

quired to achieve what they/their child wanted to do or become. Almost all parents and children did believe school to be important for achieving the identified goals and professions (Table 2.15).

Table 2.15
Schooling essential to reach dreams:
parents and children by schooling status

	Parents (N=698)	Children in school (N=644)	Children not in school (N=49)
School is essential to reach dreams	96%	96%	84%
School is not essential to reach dreams	4%	4%	16%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

Thus, parents and children link schooling with a professional job in the civil service, although they know that the jobs they aspire to may not be available. The answers given by the parents and children indicate an ideal, linked to the past when schooling was promoted with the goal – and some reasonable prospect, at least for boys – of employment as a civil servant, following the revolution. Adults, parents and teachers are often heard repeating the government rhetoric from that time: 'Go to school so you can get a job with the government and an income.' The absence of gender differences in the answers further supports the pervasiveness of this ideal, as opportunities for jobs are much greater for boys than for girls. In fact, to become a professional, a university or college education is needed, which is out of reach for most of the rural children involved in my research. Perhaps the parents and children provided answers in the survey reflecting what they would have liked to become, or what people expect you to say that you want to become, rather than what is seen as realistically achievable. The in-depth interviews with boys who had stopped school showed a great divergence between their expressed aspirations, what they are currently doing, and the more general aspirations of children as expressed in the survey (Table 2.16).

Table 2.16
Boys interviewed in-depth and who stopped school;
their activities and aspirations

Activity they do now	Aspirations for the near future
Fruit and vegetables market	Bus driver/truck driver
Fruits and vegetables market	Travel to Saudi Arabia and work there
Goats/fields	Bus driver
Goats/fields	Army
Qat market	Army
Qat market	Army
Market/mini bus	Driver
Construction	Army
Fruit picking	Army
Herbal medicine	Herbal medicine

Source: Compiled by author from in-depth interviews of boys who had stopped school.

The aspiration to become a 'professional' was not mentioned by the boys (or girls) interviewed in-depth. Boys focused their aspirations on the army or on having their own small businesses. Few boys or girls in the household survey identified having their own business (self-employed) or joining the army as an aspiration, suggesting that in the abstract this may not be seen as desirable. A recent survey in four urban areas of Yemen among youths (12–24 years of age) found that young people, girls as well as boys, are involved in small income-generating activities at an early age and contribute to household income (Badri Bakeer et al. 2009, Save the Children 2009a). The children in my research did not appear to be involved or interested in income generation through small businesses. This difference may be due to my research population being located in both rural and urban areas, with a focus on younger children than in the urban youth study. Urban areas may offer more opportunities for small informal businesses; and older youths are more likely to be involved in their own businesses. The in-depth interviews with girls did not generate much data on their aspirations; even talking about marriage was difficult for most girls. There is a perception that girls are not 'allowed' to say that they would like to get married as it is up to God. Many of the girls repeated several times that marriage, as well as their

future, is not in their hands and that it will happen when the time is right. When girls were asked where they would like to live in the future three girls said they would like to leave their present location and move to an urban area, indicating an aspiration for a different kind of life in the future. However for girls, where they live is closely linked to whom they marry.[19]

In the in-depth interviews, many of the boys who had stopped school mentioned their aspiration to join the army, suggesting that they worked to fill the time until they are accepted.[20] These boys, and to a lesser extent the girls, appeared to link their present activities with their aspirations for the future. They can therefore be said to be strategic in the kind of work they do now and what they want to do in the future. However, none of the boys considered schooling to be important for achieving their aspiration, while some girls mentioned that their years of schooling will be useful to help their children. This may reflect the fact that the boys who stopped school had already decided that schooling was not relevant for their future, while the girls spoke of the usefulness of the schooling they had already done and said that more schooling was not needed.

While discussing and developing the timelines, children generally did not link their own agency and efforts (for example, studying hard for school or working hard) with achieving their aspirations. This was especially the case among girls who indicated that their future was not in their hands at all. But boys expressed aspirations. Their daily activities at the time of the interview and their downplaying of the role of schooling suggest that boys consider job opportunities, outside of family businesses, to be linked more to who you know than to who you are in terms of qualifications and skills. Boys help out now, strategically positioning themselves to reach their aspirations[21] (see also World Bank and MoPIC 2010). Only one boy said that he wanted to travel abroad for work, indicating the limited opportunities perceived there. Most Yemenis who migrate abroad work as unskilled labourers. No formal qualifications are necessary. Schooling is therefore not viewed as a requirement to work abroad. Knowing people who are working abroad and having financial support to pay for the travel are more important.

The differences between the aspirations identified by the survey and by in-depth interviews demonstrates that different research methodologies can produce different results. The answers in the in-depth interviews

were obtained using participatory interview techniques; it was only after a certain amount of conversation that children were able to say what they wanted to do in the future as part of their life timelines. During the survey, there was no time to have such in-depth conversations. Children were talking to unknown adult surveyors, so answers may more closely reflect publically acceptable views. Certainly the survey responses more closely mimic what people are expected to say, resembling the government rhetoric to mobilize people for schooling.

2.4 Differences in views explained

As discussed in the previous section, educational actors differ in their views on school completion, especially in relation to basic schooling and the way that basic schooling is implemented. The difference is most marked between what is written in public documents (reflecting global and national views) and what is practiced and experienced locally, as expressed by Ministry of Education staff, parents and children). Torres (2000: 20) argued, in his evaluation of EFA worldwide, that 'the concept of EFA has limited meaning for the people at the intermediary and lower levels of the education community; teachers in particular as well as the general public'. Torres' observation suggests, however, that it is the global view on school completion that is the 'correct' one and that should be disseminated to others. Although global and national policy discourse often reflects the EFA ideals, programmes in practice often come down to the numbers of children completing basic schooling.

Very different views on the ideals and practice of basic school completion are held within local communities, with ideas also differing between teachers, parents and children. Local communities do not tend to view child development in terms of age in years or education in grades. Furthermore, they have their own perceptions of the role of schooling in childhood, especially its contribution in the phase of transition to adulthood. Finally, local communities have a distinct view of the purpose of schooling, and they seldom link school completion to the future of the child or society. These different perceptions are discussed in turn in the sections below.

2.4.1 Age in years and grades

In the West, the biological age of children became important with the arrival of mass schooling. Schools required children to be grouped by age into grades, linking childhood activities to age (Moore 2004, Ansell 2005: 82). More recently this strong link between age and childhood development has been criticized by supporters of the new sociology of childhood who argue that using age to define children is linked to the developmental approach to childhood which is too rigid and fails to identify what children can or cannot do (McNamee et al. 2005: 227, James et al. 1997). As a researcher from the West, I was also conditioned to look at children in terms of age in years. My research was initially designed taking age in years as a starting point. I had to adapt this when it became clear that the communities where my research took place did not look at children and child development in this way. Initially I used the minimum age of starting school (6 years) and the maximum age of the child as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (17 years, article 1, UNCRC 1989). During my research, when children were asked about their age, very few of them gave an immediate answer; most looked for support from adults in identifying their age. Even with their parents' help there was rarely a definite answer; often at least two numbers were provided. After a short discussion, a number was chosen. When there was a big difference between the different people involved in identifying the age, I used an events calendar to identify the age as accurately as possible. The situation was further complicated because most people in the rural areas only use the Islamic calendar. In practice, age in years is therefore not a very useful criteria to define a child or group of children, because few children know their age, and their lives and relations with adults are not defined by age. Only some 30 per cent of Yemeni children receive a birth certificate at birth; most children receive a birth certificate later, when they enrol in school (UNICEF 2005b). Some 87 per cent of school-aged children surveyed had a birth certificate, but as most certificates were issued several years after birth, exact dates of birth are not always reflected in the certificates.

Age in years is therefore not that important in childhood development in Yemen. This corresponds with observations by others that non-Western societies are less segregated by age in years (Corsaro 2005: 198). Child development is defined more by tasks, capabilities and behaviours. For example, religious practice views child development in line with the

ability or expectation to perform certain religious tasks (such as praying and fasting) rather than age in years (Crawford 1998, Davis et al. 1989, Starret 1998). However, a saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammed does use years to identify three stages of childhood, with each stage consisting of seven years. Stage one refers to the child being innocent and without reason, stage two relates to the child needing to learn reason, and stage three relates to the use of reason (Starret 1998: 103). Despite indicating the three stages as each taking seven years, the emphasis is on tasks and behaviour to identify the different stages of childhood. Religious as well as household tasks reflect a combination of physical ability and behaviour and are dependent on gender and the socio-economic status group of which the child is a part. Some of these tasks are linked to schooling. While a child attends school, certain activities are not (or not yet) acceptable, such as spending time at the market and joining the adult women during visits. Activities that are not (or not yet) acceptable for children to engage in while in school often start to be allowed during the transition to adulthood. Schools can therefore delay the transition to adulthood, because school attendance is associated with childhood. As the different stages of childhood are linked to tasks and behaviours, people may expect schooling to support the learning of these tasks and behaviours. If this does not happen, people may be disappointed in schooling or may see schooling as not contributing to child development. In Yemen, it often remains unclear what tasks children learn per grade and what they will have mastered by completing the nine grades. So people develop their own views on the role of school completion in child development based on their experiences. This was illustrated by a conversation I had with the mother of a girl who had stopped school (the girl, aged 11, failed to pass grade three and repeated grade two).

> Field notes 19-12-2009
> MF: It is time for my daughter to learn more skills at home. She has been to school for several years, … five years … right? And this is good … I would have liked my daughter to spend more years in school, but she does not want to spend more time in school. Now that she is at home she can help me and learn skills needed for her to become a good wife and mother... Ha, ha (laughing), she has spent more time in school than me, so she can become a better wife and mother than me.

This commentary demonstrates that years in age and numbers of grades are used interchangeably (the mother thinks that her daughter has

been to school for five years while she has only been able to complete grade two). The mother views schooling as 'good' but without clearly knowing why. She is not convinced that by spending more time in school her daughter will have a better future as a wife and mother, as she shows scepticism that her daughter will be a better wife and mother than she herself because of completing more grades.

2.4.2 Transitions to adulthood

Worldwide, mass schooling is seen as an important tool to support children's transition from childhood into adulthood. School is said to provide the skills needed to work, earn an income and be an independent adult (Moore 2004). My research indicates that this is not the case in Yemen. School is not seen as preparing children for adulthood; schooling can even prevent children from participating in activities that are important for their transition to adulthood. Expected roles and responsibilities for adulthood in Yemen do not always include participation in the labour market, especially for girls. Children and parents often referred to children's 'readiness' in terms of their development to join school or to stop school. The school was seen to play only a passive role, not itself contributing to this readiness of the child.

That children start school in Yemen at different ages also indicates that age is not a defining factor for starting enrolment. When parents and children were asked why they started school at the age they did, answers usually fell in one of the following categories: 'because he/she was big/mature enough', 'because he/she needed to enrol at that age', 'because he/she was ready for school', 'because other children of the same age went to school'. Thus, they did not always refer to age. The issue of 'being ready' for school or 'being big/mature enough' brings in an individual aspect of the child. Children are judged individually as being ready (or not) for school, based on their behaviour or size, not because they are part of a certain age group. Regarding stopping school, my research suggests that the idea of 'readiness' is even more important, but here it is linked to being ready to start the transition towards adulthood. School is not seen to play a role in this transition. The child's 'readiness' to stop school is viewed in terms of the ability to do certain tasks and demonstrate mature behaviour, rather than by age in years or completion of a certain number of grades.

The transition to adulthood or adolescence is linked to bodily changes as well as to social changes reflected in the tasks that children are expected to perform and the behaviour they are expected to display (Davies et al. 1989, Starret 1998). The onset of puberty is not the same for all children within or between societies. In the Middle East, research by Davis et al. (1989) identifies the onset of puberty as 12–14 years, and two years earlier for girls on average than for boys.[22] Regarding behaviour, three stages of (male) childhood were mentioned several times during my research. These were mentioned earlier and are best conveyed in a saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammed: 'Play with your son for seven years, then discipline him for seven years, then be his friend for seven years, then give free reign to him' (Starret 1998: 103). The second period of seven years, in which discipline is called for, coincided with the start of religious education in the past and of formal schooling now. In the third period, the parents are called upon to be the child's friend. This can be likened with the transition to adulthood, when the child gains a more equal footing with the parent. In practice, however, these stages refer to parental behaviour, to aspects of child rearing and informal education especially identified with fathers, and to boys rather than girls. Neither do the three stages follow exactly the seven years mentioned earlier (use of the number seven may be mainly symbolic, as this number is often found in biblical writings and oral traditions). The time identified for the start of disciplining, after the child's first seven years, coincides loosely with the start of school (which starts officially at six years of age, and in practice is often started at seven years of age). Starting school at that age may therefore be viewed as acceptable and the role of school perceived as to provide an additional form of discipline for the child.

This local perception of childhood may explain in part the importance of the teacher and socialization, which the surveyed children and parents indicated were particularly positive aspects of school. The saying indicates that disciplining may become less important during the third seven years in the lives of children, which coincides with the time that children prepare themselves for the transition to adulthood. Perhaps with the onset of puberty/adolescence, disciplining, including the disciplining provided within schools, is seen as no longer required.

Views on the disciplining of girls are a bit different. Girls are believed to be in need of more discipline in adolescence, due to their importance in protecting the honour of the family. Yet the disciplining required at

this stage may be different from that which is expected from school. Parents and children did not refer to different types of discipline for boys and girls in schools. This may mean that children at this age are believed to be better disciplined at home, because the home environment does provide for a gender difference.

An important marker for the onset of puberty linked to behaviour is fasting during Ramadan.[23] During Ramadan all adults are required to fast, which includes all children who have passed puberty. This suggests that all who have passed puberty are adults. Schooling may then be seen as no longer required, as it is part of being a child.

Adolescence is not always identified as a separate stage in childhood development. In some societies the social transition from child to adult is more direct. Activities that one is expected to do as an adult are not new but are done in a different way at the start of adolescence, with more seriousness and no longer as chores (Ansell 2005: 82). It has been argued that politico-socio-economic changes, including the introduction of mass schooling, put more emphasis on adolescence as a stage in childhood development as well as making childhood longer (Davis et al. 1989, Meijer 2000). In my research areas, adolescence as a stage can be identified as the stage between stopping school and marriage, further highlighting that schooling does not play an important role during adolescence for those children who stopped school. As marriage must often be delayed due to its high cost, especially in the urban areas, adolescence seems to extend longer in urban than in rural areas (Starrett 1998).

Adolescence, either long or short, is perceived as a distinct period of childhood in Yemen. This can be inferred from the language that is used. Two words are found in official discourse to refer to the stage of adolescence: *murahaqh - rhq* and *bulugh – blgh*.[24] *Bulugh* refers more to the physical changes of puberty and *murahaqh* is used to identify behaviour. These are both classical terms, closely related to scriptures. They are heard throughout the Middle East but tend to be used by people with religious knowledge or who are schooled (Davis et al. 1989: 51). The word *murahaqh* connotes both attaining physical puberty as well as a behavioural component related to being overburdened or oppressed and has a negative undertone. It is often used to describe the period following the stage of physical changes (*bulugh)* and is mainly used to explain boys' adolescent behaviour, almost as an excuse, while it is much less used for girls. Although *murahaqh* is linked to youth, it can also be used to explain out

of the ordinary behaviours of older people. For example, if an old man wanted to marry a young girl, the man may be said to be *marahaqh*. Other words often used in relation to behaviour following *bulugh* are *rushd – rshd* and *'aql – 'ql. Rushd* translates as 'to take responsibility', while *'aql* translates as reason/maturity; both words are identified as positive. Other words used in relation to adolescence are *shab* and *shaba'*. These are new words that translate as male and female young people and especially refer to young people who have completed their schooling and are waiting to get married. These words are much more commonly used in towns than in rural areas. In the countryside, the words *ragel* and *emmrha'* or man and woman are used to indicate that one is no longer a child. This is often related to having married, while no specific words are used to indicate adolescence (see Davis et al. 1989 and Starret 1998, which are both based on research in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa region[25]).

In my research areas, children participating in the groups, as well as parents, identified 'readiness' as a reason to stop school and to start the transition towards adulthood. Children in the groups would say that the boy or girl is (or is almost, especially in regard to girls) *ragel* (man) or *emmrha'* (woman) or they used the word *jahez* (ready). During the discussions they also mentioned the word *'aql,* translated as 'having reason' or 'being mature', similar to the terms used elsewhere in the Middle East. Children in the groups often said that when children are 'ready', they stop school.

Readiness is therefore not linked to school but to the individual child. In this view it is not the education system or the school that decides when one is 'ready', for example, by the number of grades completed. Rather, individual children determine when they are ready, linked to the attainment of a certain role or ability to perform certain tasks. Not all children stop school. The focus then is on readiness in terms of the individual, including physical as well as social aspects. This is illustrated by the following conversations in which boys and girls were asked why children stop school. Both boys and girls decided that it would be easiest to do the task if they talked about a person they knew who had stopped school. These are the conversations that took place before the children in the group discussions started the task.

B1: I do not know anybody who stopped/*waqaf* school.
B2: Those bad boys who spend the whole day at the market. They stopped/*waqaf* school.

B3: You know Ahmad, don't you? He is one of them. He is your cousin!
B2: Yes, he is your cousin. Why did he stop/*waqaf* school?
B1: Ahmad did not stop/*waqaf* school! He works in the market, he is look-ing after his father's business. He is old/*ragel,* so had enough/*khalas.*
B2: Of course he stopped/*waqaf* school. He is only one year older than us. He was in grade seven last year.
B1: Ahmad is different; he is clever and strong and can do the work in the market easily. I want to work in the market when I grow up as well.
B3: So he stopped/*waqaf* because he wanted to work.
B2: Let us think of Ahmad for the exercise.
B1: I do not think so. Let us think of someone else. You know Ali, the one from that poor family?

G1: Oh, I know, Mona stopped/*waqafet* school!
G2: Mona who had that wonderful engagement party the other day?
G3: Oh yes, Mona... she was so beautiful at that engagement party... you know, she is marrying someone from the Basheer family!
G1: So she will have a big house to live in, when she gets married!
G3: She told me that she will not get married soon, he will go to Saudi Arabia for a few years to work.
G4: So why did she stop/*waqafet* school then?
G1: Because she is engaged now and ready/*jahez* to get married. She is al-most *sit*/*emmrha* and too big now to be in school.
G4: She still stopped/*waqafet* school though, so we can use her for the ex-ercise.

In both of the above conversations the speakers identified children who had stopped school in early adolescence. But the conversations also suggest that identifying a child considered to have 'stopped' school is not straightforward. Overall there is a negative connotation to *wqf*/stopping school for the children in the group discussions. They do not want any of the children that are relatives or close friends (same status groups) to be identified as children who had *wqf*/stopped school. They easily find justifications for why those children stopped school, which tends to be different from children who stopped school and are not direct friends or relatives. The two conversations identify children stopping or leaving school as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood and start to participate in adulthood-related activities, such as getting married and helping father in his work. They suggest that for different children there are different times for stopping school, not related to the number

of grades they completed or how old they are. Even the children who are in school do not seem to share the notion of universal schooling or the need to complete nine grades in order to be considered schooled or 'ready'. Neither do the conversations show concern with what can be achieved with school or what one misses by stopping school, other than that it has a positive sound to it and close friends/relatives/children from the same status group are not supposed to stop school. Mass schooling does not seem to be perceived as playing a role in the future of the child in terms of expected roles and responsibilities. It is viewed more as an activity that takes place during childhood and stops when children begin the transition to adulthood.

2.4.3   Mass schooling and being schooled

The introduction of the Western-based system of mass schooling has resulted in two co-existing forms of education: one at school and one at home. Each of these are perceived as having different roles. Mass schooling is a relatively new institution in Yemen. It was added to the traditional child-rearing practices that were already in place, which included the religious education often given by a person outside of the immediate family (Messick 1993, see also Mitchell 1988 and Starret 1998 for Egypt and Limbert 2010 for Oman). Parents determine a major part of their children's overall education through their rearing practices, which include 'the reproduction of their values, the identification of their children with them and an expectation of their loyalty' (Archard 1993: 176, see also Rugh 1997 for the Middle East). Mead (1930/2001), in her early study showed that culture makes a difference in child-rearing practices and therefore how one is educated. How societies define 'knowledge' and who is an 'educated' or 'schooled' person differs too. In addition, children appropriate and construct their own worlds, strengthening differences in and between societies even further (Corsaro 2005: 285).

Mass schooling, however, claims to be universal and is similar in structure throughout the world. Mass schooling is shaped by expected outcomes of schooling for childhood from the point of view of the state, which in turn is influenced by global education strategies. But global education strategies such as EFA remain vague. While idealized outcomes of basic education are identified, outcomes of what basic education has become in practice are not. Thus, it remains unclear for education actors

– globally, nationally as well as locally – why it is good or necessary for children to complete nine grades of school.

In Yemeni communities there is an understanding of what is considered formal education and how an educated person is defined based on the past. Yet it remains unclear to them what it means to be 'schooled', how a 'schooled person' is defined and where schooling fits in the education of children. As elsewhere in the Middle East, traditional formal schooling is closely linked to religion. The search for knowledge and the communication of this knowledge to others has always been an important aspect of Islam. Formal schooling has long been organized around either Islamic studies with a 'learned man' or through academies/*madrassa-madarris* (Messick 1993 for Yemen, Eickelman 1985, Peer 1997/2003: 94, Limbert 2010 for other countries in the Middle East).

This search for knowledge as preached by Islam was never implemented with all people in mind. Girls as well as certain status groups seldom had access to education, which was closely linked to professions such as preacher and judge (see Messick 1993 and Tibawi 1979 for Yemen and Herrera et al. 2006 for Egypt). Knowledge and power were and are still closely linked, and 'men of learning' have much influence on society. How the 'educated person' is defined and who therefore 'men of learning' are, changes over time as shown by Eickelman (1985: 65) in his study in Morocco.

In Yemen, an important change occurred with the revolutions in the 1960s. The Imam (schooled in religious knowledge) was no longer the person with the knowledge and therefore the leader. Another person (a young officer educated at a foreign military academy) with very different knowledge became the new leader (Messick 1993). These changes affected perceptions of who is 'educated' and went hand in hand with changes in schooling in which the 'new' learned men replaced the *Uluma* or traditional 'men of learning' (Ahmed 1992: 147, Zaman 2002). This took place not only in Yemen but throughout most of the Middle East. In Yemen, the 'new' men of learning were in the North the young army officers, while in the South they were British-educated civil servants (Messick 1993, Lackner 1985: 109). This developed further into the 'new' men of learning being graduates from the Yemeni mass schooling system after unification of North and South in 1990 (see also Chapter 3).

The earlier schooling systems (religious, military, colonial) did not provide access to schooling for all. Instead, they were designed to fill

certain limited positions. These systems did however indicate what could be done with the schooling that was received. For example, if one was able to memorize the *Quran*, one could become a religious teacher, or if one had completed schooling in the colonial system, one could be employed in the colonial administration. With the arrival of mass schooling following the revolutions, the function of schooling changed from filling certain positions to producing people who support the new regime, with less concern for how individuals would use their schooling (Lackner 1985: 109, Al Noban 1984: 118). Under pressure to become part of the expanding global economy, Yemen's government, influenced by international donors, began to work towards economic growth. Schooling became a tool to achieve this growth, providing children with the opportunity to learn skills so that they could participate in the labour market (Fennel 2008: 37, Lackner 1985). Schooling was promoted as being a gateway to a better life in financial terms: 'investment in children's schooling now is the solution for children for a better life later' (Morice 2000: 203, Shakry 1998, Shami et al. 1995, for Yemen, Vom Bruck 1987: 396, Dorsky et al. 1995). This implies that the more years children spend in school, the better their future will be in regard to income. The counterview, that this is not the case and that additional years in school at some point in childhood/adolescence may even diminish opportunities, is illustrated by the story of Ahmed.

> Boy 15 years old
> Ahmed stopped school in 2007 and did not pass the sixth grade exams. Ahmed wants to join the army, like his two older brothers. He explained that due to the war in the north of the country, it is now easier to join the army because they are in need of soldiers. Normally nine years of schooling is needed to join the army, but he heard that boys are now being accepted with fewer years of schooling. He sees the army as the last form of accessible government employment; government employment is seen as a secure, and it gives a pension, despite the low wages.

Ahmed decided that the army would be a good future for him, based on the expectation that it would provide some financial security. He knows that there is a schooling requirement to get into the army, but does not see this as mandatory. He does not think that fewer years of schooling will make him less of a good soldier. Although he has not yet been accepted in the army, he still stopped school. He has now been out of school for two years, as well as not having passed sixth grade. Ahmed

shows no concern about this and says that if he had not stopped school he might miss out on the chance to join the army. This illustrates that, in practice, people do not want to take risks; they do not believe in the promise of financial gains as a result of schooling. Attending school does not mean that school is a priority in the lives of children or that children change their original tasks or drop them because of school (Nieuwenhuys 1994).

In my research areas, schooling was not a priority in children's lives. Tasks at home continued and expectations to obtain a better income upon school completion were low. Schooling in Yemen is said to have the least effect on the income of poor people. With an additional year of schooling, income from labour increases for the non-poor by 3.5 per cent, but only by 1.7 per cent for workers from poor households (World Bank 2007). However, more years of schooling does influence the type of work a boy does. The more years of schooling they have, the more likely they are to work in the public sector (Assaad et al. 2009: 22). In Yemen schooling seldom improves access to employment, both because schooling is not perceived to match the needs of the labour market and because the labour market is unable to absorb all school graduates. As a result, work experience is more important than school certificates for entry to the labour market (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). Completion of more grades does not seem to provide economic benefits in Yemen, especially for poor parents and children.

Neither is schooling perceived as providing social benefits or cultural or social capital (Bourdieu 1986: 110, Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). For girls, social and cultural capital is related to marriage chances. My research indicates that school completion is perceived both as positive and negative for marriage chances. Some girls believed that they had a better chance of marrying a schooled husband if they were schooled themselves, assuming that boys from a richer family were more likely to be schooled. Other girls, however, brought up negative aspects of being schooled. School completion may expose girls to unwanted social criticism because she spends more time in the public space. It may therefore reduce her marriage chances. The role of schooling in relation to socioeconomic mobility for boys and girls is further discussed in Chapter 3.

Differences in views between those who plan the schooling system and those who implement and use it are linked to this lack of a relationship between schooling and society in Yemen, both economically and

culturally. This is partly explained by the sudden and fast process of introduction of mass schooling and the rapid rise of the state as the new actor in education. The absence of dialogue between state and society on the role of schooling in the education of a child has been identified in various developing countries (Archard 2004: 167, Kagitcibasi 1996: 97, Harris 2006: 74), as well as for Yemen (Alim et al. 2007). The views of the users, implementers and planners of the schooling system, as expressed in this study, demonstrate that the state's view of completion of nine grades of schooling as desirable, supported by global education players, is not shared by Yemeni society (including teachers, parents and children). School completion rates are lagging behind school enrolment rates; the two even seem to be negatively related. For example, the urban girls who participated in my survey were the second most likely group to stop school, despite the higher overall enrolment among urban girls (see Chapter 1). This is unexpected, as urban areas have a longer history of schooling, they have better access to schools and resources, and the best opportunities for accessing the labour market. In addition there are indications of a decrease in boys' enrolment in secondary education, though the secondary school years are when children are more focused on the labour market than in primary schooling (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). Both indications are recent and further study is required before making any firm conclusions. But the suggestion is that views on school completion and subsequent changed practices have not trickled down over time. Motivation for schooling even seems to be on the reverse (see also Chapter 4).

2.5 Conclusion

In the sociology of education and perceptions of childhood, it is important to determine how views and concepts are formed. This chapter explored the differences in attitudes between those who plan, implement and use the schooling system in Yemen. Each group of actors has its own frame of reference on education development. The view of those who plan, especially education development agencies, tends to be identified as 'best', although they are not always able to explain why they view the right to education as equivalent to the completion of nine grades of schooling. The principles of a rights-based approach in education development demand that the views of those who implement and use the system be taken into consideration.

In addition, the use of different frames of reference can be identified among and within education development actors. Education development actors are criticized for using rights language in their theoretical approach while their practical programming remains unchanged (Uvin 2002, Jonsson 2003: 52, Ansell 2005, Torres 2000: 24). The Yemeni schooling system seems to be using different frames of reference too: one linked to economic growth and one linked to a political endeavour to produce loyal citizens. Teachers, parents and children have their own views based on their own frames of reference in which schooling is seen as a time-limited childhood activity that provides for socialization.

Differing views based on differing conceptual frameworks have created a confusing situation of which education actors seem to be unaware. There is a large difference between the ideal of basic education and what it has become in practice, between the most recent theoretical approaches and the actual programming in the field, as well as between what is written in documents (global and national strategies) and what it carried out in schools (teachers, parents and children). Torres (2000) in his evaluation of EFA identified problems in communication of the concept of EFA from the global to the local and argued that EFA did not 'reach' certain people at the local level. It is, however, unclear with what and why the people at the local level need to be reached. For local actors, furthermore, it remains unclear how mass schooling can contribute to the education of a child and to child development. What are the benefits of completing a certain number of grades, now and for the future? Children and their parents do not think of child development in terms of numbers (years of age or grades of schooling completed), but in terms of tasks and competences. Schooling is therefore not seen as a process that has a certain end in terms of a number of grades. Children do not 'drop out' of school but 'stop' school because they are 'ready' to move to the next phase of life. School is part of childhood; it is not seen as playing a role in the phase of transition towards adulthood.

A rights-based approach to education development requires different contexts to be taken into consideration. This means incorporating differing views on the fulfilment of the right to education. Education development practice, however, has not yet taken into account these differing views, but often dismisses these as 'wrong' and in need of change. Fulfilling the right to education does require change, but for change to be successful differing views must be considered and reconciled.

Notes

[1] UNICEF has the global strategy 'All children everywhere: A strategy for basic education and gender equality' (UNICEF 2007), as well as specific notes on how to use a child rights-based approach in education programming (UNICEF 2008). The 'child-friendly school' is a recent initiative. It is a comprehensive school-based programme to make schools more accessible to all children and forms the basis of all UNICEF education work, also in Yemen (UNICEF 2004, 2008, Mannathoko 2008). UNICEF implements its programme through the Ministry of Education with local NGOs as partners.

[2] Save the Children has guidelines in how to use a child rights-based approach. It regionally identifies the use of comprehensive inclusive education (IE) as an approach to its programming in education. The 35 schools included in my study are all part of a comprehensive IE project. The schools were identified as inclusive schools by the Ministry of Education but have not had any specific inputs to qualify them as inclusive schools and were required by the Ministry of Education to be part of the project (Save the Children 2009).

[3] All children of school age in the households were included.

[4] Enrolment in the survey was calculated by using the sample of all children of school age of the households involved in the survey. National enrolment figures are calculated based on estimated population figures. For the three schools involved in the in-depth research, enrolment rates were calculated using estimated population figures as well.

[5] With an estimated population of 5,000 of which 30% or 1,500 children are estimated to be of school age, an estimated 75% enrolment rate can be calculated with the 1,107 children enrolled.

[6] The average age of children who were interviewed and stopped school is 14.1 years for boys and 13.6 years for girls, with a range of 7–17 years. As most stopped school at least one year previous, the age upon stopping school is younger.

[7] Translations of the words were done by me through discussions with the informants as well as the research assistant. The Wehr Dictionary (Wehr 1994) was used in support.

[8] This word is also used as an official word for absenteeism from school (without a good reason).

[9] 668 children out of 685 answered the question about their positive impressions of school; 29 children, ~4%, said they had no positive impressions of their school experience; 644 children answered the question and gave 1571 responses.

N= the total number of responses =1571. The 'other' category consisted of answers such as "computers," and "food."

[10] 624 children out 685, 91%, answered the question about their negative experiences at school; 146 children, 23%, said that they had no negative experiences/impressions of school, and were removed from the analysis. The remaining 478 children gave a total of 783 responses. The table below displays the children's answers by percentage of response (N=783). The 'other' category consisted of answers such as "homework," "school management is strict," and certain subjects.

[11] 60% of the parents were mothers; unfortunately results could not be analysed by fathers and mothers due to a problem with the data entry.

[12] 9% of the parents said that they had no positive feelings about the interviewed child's school (N=643); they were removed from analysis. The table shows the responses of the respondents (N=589) by percentage of responses (N=1548). The 'other' category included responses a lot of vague responses like "school is good."

[13] 18% of all eligible adult respondents (N=685) did not answer the question about their negative impressions/ experiences concerning the interviewed child's schooling. Out of the remaining 562 respondents, 15% said that they had negative comments about the child's educational experience. The table shows the responses by the respondents (N=477) by percentage of total responses (N=857). The 'other' category included "lack of facilities (laboratories, etc.)," infrastructure of the school, "hitting," and the workload of the children.

[14] All boys' activities were with their father or another older male family member. They do not get paid other than in kind, mostly some of the left over produce.

[15] *Qat* is a mildly narcotic drug grown in Yemen that is used by the majority of Yemenis on a daily basis. The fresh leaves of the bush are chewed and kept in one cheek for several hours. Women have been more and more involved in chewing *qat* as well (Al Zalab 2000).

[16] There are two boys who were involved in *qat* selling at the local market. They were also observed to be chewing *qat* as they are paid in kind, which is often a bunch of *qat*. The research area is not a big *qat* growing area.

[17] This child's family has a traditional bread oven that uses wood.

[18] Social visits in the afternoon are an important aspect of life for women and girls in Yemen. Potential wives for sons are often identified at these gatherings (Meneley 1996).

[19] In Islam, marrying is a religious duty, and as almost all marriages are arranged by the parents, children have little to say on the matter. Girls can refuse suitors, however, while boys can influence their mother's propositions.

[20] Yemen ratified the Convention as well as the Optional Protocol on child soldiers, making it illegal for children younger than 18 to be involved in active combat (UN 2008). However, there is evidence that children are involved in the war that is raging in the North (Human Rights Watch 2008). The government denies this allegation as the war is fought through local tribes.

[21] Apprenticeship is often the basis for boys to take on the work of their fathers. In some professions, apprenticeship is more than just learning a skill. See for a description of the teaching-learning process to become a minaret builder Marchand (2001).

[22] This is based on the occurrence of a growth spurt, girls' start of menstruation, start of seminal emissions and bodily changes.

[23] Every year all adults are required to fast for a one-month period from sunrise to sunset. This means abstinence from food and drink as well as sexual intercourse. A girl who is menstruating is not allowed to pray or fast.

[24] For these terms, explanations were provided by key informants as well as the Wehr Dictionary (1994).

[25] Davies et al. studied young people in Morocco while Starret's study focused on Egypt.

<table>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Why some children complete more grades than others: structures of the family</td></tr>
</table>

3.1   Introduction

In the sociology of education, inequalities in schooling outcomes, especially in terms of school completion, are identified as an important social problem. Schooling is often seen as reinforcing these inequalities through discriminatory behaviour in schools by gender, ethnicity and class. In education development practice using a rights-based approach, inequalities in schooling outcomes are also important to address. A key standard here is the human rights principle of non-discrimination. It has been argued that children, besides facing discrimination as a group (based on age), also face discrimination based on their identity or that of their parents (CRIN 2009). However, the sociology of education as well as that of childhood argue that the reproduction of inequalities in school completion should not be seen as a passive process. Children are identified as playing an important role, which is also acknowledged by a rights-based approach to development (Moore 2004, James et al. 1997/2004, Verhellen 1994/2000). Children do not automatically adopt the values and ideas of adults. They construct their own realities, by their own actions and in response to those of adults, contributing to reproduction as well as to change (Corsaro 2005).

Differences in school completion are not always viewed locally as inequalities, and while inequalities are a problem, differences are not. Stopping school provides for a difference in schooling outcomes between individuals, but does it automatically mean that inequalities exist in other aspects of life?

My research in Yemen confirmed that gender and class (status) do not fully explain inequalities in school completion. My findings show intra-

household differences in schooling status that go beyond gender and status. Within households of all classes one can find boys and girls who stop school, those who complete school and those who never went to school at all (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1
School status of children in households of children who stopped school

School status of children in household:	# of households (N=30)
With children who are in school	24
With children who stopped school	17 (not including children interviewed)
With children who completed basic schooling	17
With children who completed more than basic schooling	9
With children who never went to school	6
With no children who completed basic schooling or having a chance to complete basic schooling	3

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

The majority of the households had children in school at the time of the research.[1] Households had as many children who had stopped school as had completed basic schooling. Only a small number of households had children who had never gone to school. Three households had no child that had completed basic schooling or had no chance to have a child complete basic schooling due to being too old.[2]

To explain inequalities in school completion outcomes and to explain intra-household differences there is a need to focus on individual aspects of stopping school, as diversity among people requires increased understanding of the individual in addition to gender and class differences (Sen 1992/2009: 12/129, Nussbaum 2000, Kabeer 2001). In the West, structures of the family and schooling, as well as the occupational system are identified as the most powerful factors shaping inequalities in schooling outcomes. School performance and results required to continue schooling are seen as affecting the motivation or ability of individual children,

reflected in how the children act and position themselves in school (Moore 2004: 111, Skinner and Holland 1996, Illich 1971, Stromquist 1990, Unterhalter 2005). Although developed in the West, these factors may be useful for understanding school completion in Yemen, taking into consideration that views on basic school completion differ between those who plan, implement and use the schooling system as discussed in Chapter 2. One aspect that has to be taken into consideration for Yemen is the occupational system, as the relationship between schooling and prospects in the labour market is weak, especially for girls.

This chapter explores inequalities in school completion with a focus on family structures including the occupational system, which refers to all future activities. The structure of schooling, which is the other important aspect in explaining inequalities in schooling outcomes, is explored in Chapter 4. This chapter starts with a discussion of gender and status inequalities in school completion, followed by an exploration of individual aspects of stopping school. The idea is to explain intra-household differences through the reasoning provided for stopping school and influences on this reasoning such as pressures to stop schooling and a lack of support to continue schooling. It further explores discrimination and the role of children themselves in shaping inequalities in schooling outcomes in relation to a rights-based approach to education development.

3.2   Inequalities in school completion by gender and status

Gender and status play an important role in shaping inequalities in school completion and also reflect inequalities in Yemeni society as a whole (Chapter 1). Yemen has rigid gender and status stratification systems. This section discusses the roles of status and gender in schooling starting with gender, in relation to school completion.

3.2.1 Gender inequalities in school completion

Although improving, national statistics as well as the results of my research show inequalities in school completion by gender with girls completing fewer grades than boys (Chapter 1). In Yemen, as elsewhere in the region, early mass schooling started with a bias towards boys' schooling aimed at developing manpower for the army and national administrative structures, initially for the occupiers[3] and later for the new regimes.

Development of schooling for girls started much later, in the 1970s, following the revolutions (Lackner 1985: 115, Dorsky et al. 1995, Boxberger 2002, Little 1968). In the mid-nineteenth century, Egypt[4] was one of the first countries in the Middle East to establish education for women through a midwifery school for young women. It was also the first country in the Middle East to establish girls' schools. The midwifery school as well as the expanding number of girls' schools were often pointed to as proof that Egypt, as well as the region, wanted to emancipate women and was moving towards modernity as advocated by the West (Fahmy 1998, Ahmed 1992, Mitchell 1992, Al Tarrah 2007). However, several critics argue that this schooling did not benefit women and girls but aimed at controlling the population to maintain the power status quo (Fahmy 1998: 36, Ahmed 1992: 137, Lackner 1985: 115, De Regt 2007: 55, Badran 2000, Boxberger 2002). Mass schooling for girls was promoted as women's liberation. It introduced a new role for women focused on improving the household management skills of women and girls, especially child rearing, to produce good future citizens (Shakry 1998: 151, Lackner 1985, Al Noban 1984, De Regt 2007: 28, Abu Lughod 1998).

It is argued that despite the two separate Yemeni states following different political directions (socialist and capitalist), similar developmental and gender policies were pursued (Hatem 1999: 75). Both states saw mass schooling as the main way to modernize and develop the country. For individual citizens, being schooled became equated with being developed (Lackner 1985, De Regt 2007: 55, Al-Iryani 1987). Schooling was seen as a gift from the revolution and the government which demanded gratitude in the form of enrolment (Dorsky et al. 1995: 309). Girls were encouraged to be schooled, but schooled for a future role as traditional women at home, as a better wife and mother, and not necessarily to join the labour market. This different aim of schooling for girls was a direct result of the need of the newly independent states to balance modernization and tradition, especially in relation to women's roles (Mitchell 1992, Haddad 1998, Wedeen 2008, Hatem 1999: 65). This dual symbolic role for women is confusing, as women were upheld as a symbol of progress of the country as well as preservers of tradition, especially in the more traditional rural areas where this latter role continues to be promoted (De Regt 2007, Hatem 1999: 79).

While the purpose of schooling was thought to be different for boys and girls, the implementation of schooling did not differ. The aim was to prepare all children to be loyal to the regimes as well as for the labour market. Although biased towards boys, over time girls' access to the labour market changed. Increased participation of women in paid employment was notable but remained limited. The 1974 census showed 4 per cent labour force participation by women, of which two-thirds were employed by the government, especially the Ministry of Education (De Regt 2007: 57). This increased to 13 per cent in the early 1990s (Lackner 1995: 88) and further to 30 per cent in 2005, of which most (88 per cent) worked in unschooled agricultural jobs (in cooperatives, state farms, etc.) (Warnken 2003, UNDP 2009, De Regt 2007: 40, Lackner 1985: 115, Molyneux 1982). However, schooling is not identified as the main reason for the increased labour market participation of women. Employed women in the Middle East cite economic necessity as their main reason for seeking employment, and they tend to hold low-paid jobs that require little schooling (Tzannatos et al. 2003, De Regt 2007). Working out of necessity or not, most women in the Middle East emphasize the disconnect between schooling and the future in terms of employment for girls (Jones 1980, Rugh 1997: 234, De Regt 2007, Dorsky et al. 1995: 230, Dorsky 1986). In addition, Davies et al. (1989) found that girls in the Middle East, as elsewhere, reach puberty on average two years before boys. As the start of adolescence plays an important role in stopping school, girls are more likely to stop school earlier than boys, completing fewer grades.

3.2.2 Status inequalities in school completion

Although less clear than gender, class plays an important role in inequalities in school completion. Children from the poorer governorates, children from rural areas (which are considered poorer than the urban areas) and children from marginalized ethnic groups are most likely not to complete basic schooling. Yemen has a complicated social stratification system.[5] Gerholm (1977: 189) argues that traditional social structures continue to play an important role in how Yemenis perceive society and social ranking. He therefore suggests a division by status rather than class. A key feature of the Yemeni stratification system is ethnicity. Two ethnic groups form the highest and the lowest groups in Yemen and distinctions can be very rigid (Gerholm 1977, Dresh 1989). The strength of

the stratification has been influenced by recent political developments. The South has made an effort to break down the system, while the North has not. Following unification of North and South (1990) and the taking of power by the North (1994), stratification was strengthened again in the South. But it is still less strong there than in the North (Swagman 1988: 96, Dresch 1884, 1989, Al Faqih 2008, Weir 2007). These developments are also influenced by the support given to the stratification system by the state administrative apparatus, in which key positions are given to people loyal to the political powers. But the candidates must also have completed certain levels of schooling. Most recently, more key positions in the South have been taken by people from the North, especially in the urban areas, strengthening the stratification system.[6]

Religious affiliation is also important, as power positions were long based on religious knowledge and therefore religious schooling. There are two major religious traditions within Islam in Yemen: *Zaydi* (a form of *Shi'ia*) and *Sha'fi* (a form of *Suni*), with a concentration of *Zaydi* in the Northern mountains and *Sha'fi* in the coastal areas and the South (Swagman 1988: 93, Gerholm 1977, Bujra 1971). The *Zaydi* tradition is closely related to the *Saa'da*, the ethnic group that ruled Yemen for more than a century based on their religious knowledge and schooling as well as their claim of being direct descendants of the Prophet (Serjeant 1992, Macintosh-Smith 1997, Al 'Amro 1985). Tracing lineage and lineage's links with education continue to be an important feature of high social status, often also connected with colour.[7] Most people of darker complexion[8] are unable to trace their lineage. They are often marginalized and have much lower school completion outcomes (De Regt 2007, SOUL 2008). The *Saa'da*, though no longer ruling the country, were the highest status group through their claim that their lineage gave them better access to religious knowledge; they used this reasoning to argue their better ability to make decisions and therefore to rule the country (Vom Bruck 2005).

Education therefore can be linked to the ruling group and to high social status, in this case based on religious schooling. People who cannot trace their lineage identify their social standing according to the profession of the head of household. These are carried on from father to son[9] through vocational education. The lowest status groups tend to be linked to professions that need no form of education (Gerholm 1977, Bujra

1971, De Regt 2007). Although less so now, links remain between men's professions and their positions in society and status group.

The introduction of the mass schooling system at first seemed to weaken status distinctions, as it was not aimed mainly at the elite like traditional religious education (Dorsky et al. 1995, Swagman 1988). But over time inequality in status remained and mass schooling alone did not seem to provide improved social or economic opportunities. It seemed that the more schooling children had, the more schooling was needed to obtain a certain position (Moore 2004: 98). Schooling continued to be promoted, however, as the gateway to a better life or for social and economic mobility. The converse was also said to be true: upward social and economic mobility was claimed to result in increased attendance at school (Meneley 1996: 12, Messick 1993: 159, Boxberger 2002, Carapico and Wuerth 2000: 270, Vom Bruck 1987).

Socio-economic changes and how status groups are now defined have been influenced by the recent revolutions, oil discoveries and migration (Halliday 2002). Yet these changes have created only limited opportunities for social mobility for a small number of the male elite, as well as for a select group of girls, especially those within the higher status groups. They did result in more emphasis on mass schooling, as it became a tool for traditional elites to maintain or even reinforce status differences, especially for boys. Through schooling, sons of powerful families and tribes from the highest status groups that had been marginalized through the revolution were able to regain positions of power (Dorsky et al. 1995: 316, Bujra 1971, Vom Bruck 2005). Following enrolment of the sons of leading families, families of merchants who had benefited from increased consumption were the next ones to enrol their sons into the new schooling system with an eye on government jobs for their sons. Farmers and landowners were the last to be interested in schooling their sons (Mundy 1995: 86). In the period following the revolution schooling for girls was also promoted, as this was identified as positive for the development of the nation. Acceptance of schooling for girls followed a different process. Girls from the highest status group did not join mass schooling immediately but continued their education through instruction at home. The girls from the middle-level status groups were more likely to enrol in school (Dorsky et al. 1995, Assad 2003). Similar patterns can still be identified, influenced by recent increases in urbanization.

A focus on girls has always been closely linked to addressing the right of education for all. Programmes addressing the gender gap can be seen as starting a trend towards more single-gender schools. Increasing gender segregation as a way to stimulate more girls to complete school is seen in other countries of the Middle East as well, especially those that have reached a plateau in girls' enrolment. Some Middle Eastern countries that did well in expanding girls' education in the 1950s and 1960s saw a reverse, explained as a result of changed attitudes towards schooling by communities in the 1980s, when the plateau was reached. Parents in Tunisia, for example, stated reasons for keeping their girls out of school as follows: need for seclusion of girls at puberty, perceived irrelevance of schooling for girls, objections to co-educational classes, concern about the long distance to school, increased need for the girl's help at home and the low quality of the schooling on offer (Jones 1980). Single-gender schools addressed many of these objections. Establishment of these schools would keep girls in school longer. In the more urban areas of Yemen they are often linked with the increase of Islamism as well (Brand 1998, Carapico 2001, Clark 2004). However, this 'new' Islamism is identified as being supportive of girls' schooling, resulting in an increase in girls schooling, especially in higher education in Yemen and elsewhere (Hessini 1994: 42, Carapico 2001, Clark 2004, Herrera 2006). Overall Yemen has not reached a plateau, but the schools in my research may have. The schools achieved a higher level of enrolment than national averages by overcoming commonly identified barriers such as distance to school, availability of female teachers and access to water. Although my research did show a trend of reduced motivation for schooling overall (starting in the urban areas), it did not highlight a demand for greater gender segregation by parents or children. Nor were gender issues said to be important among those children who had stopped school.

In the area of my in-depth research, socio-economic and political changes did not appear to have resulted in major changes in power distribution or status groupings. The following two observations illustrate how traditional social boundaries and views on schooling continue to play a role, albeit in a less clear way. The boy is from the lowest social status group and the girl is from the highest social status group.

Boy 12 years old
Abdullah is from an *Akhdam*[10] family and lives with his extended family of eight older brothers and sisters, all of whom are married, in small huts on

the outskirts of the village. Only one of Abdullah's brothers has been to
school. Two of his sisters participated in a literacy programme. There are a
number of young kids running around when we arrive in the early after-
noon, while most of the adults are sitting on bits of cloth and cardboard in
the shade of their huts. The women do not cover their faces and are sitting
with the men. The one-room huts are made either of concrete blocks cov-
ered with iron sheets or mud. Abdullah's father had died and he, as the
only unmarried child and youngest son, now lives with his mother in one
of the huts. His married brothers each have their own hut. One area be-
tween the huts is separated with a low wall and is used for cooking. The
huts are located near a valley and the main road; the valley is used to dump
rubbish from the market and the nearby neighbourhoods. We are wel-
comed and sit down in one of the newer one-room dwellings. One of Ab-
dullah's brothers lives there with his new wife and recently born first child.
There is one thin mattress on the floor. We, the visitors, sit there, and the
baby hangs in a corner of the room in a blanket. They have been chewing
qat, and *qat* leaves cover the floor. Abdullah has been absent from school
for a few months and during these months he has helped his uncle. Abdul-
lah says that soon he will return to school to re-do grade two.

Fieldwork notes: 10-12-2009
The two young girls, classmates of Abdullah, who accompanied us, explain
while we walk towards Abdullah's neighbourhood, that they do not think
that Abdullah will come back to school. They indicate that children from
the *Akhdam* families do not go to school, or if they go, they only go for a
short period of time. They say that the teacher told Abdullah that he is too
old and big for school now and that he is better off looking for a job. The
two girls were very excited to come with us. They know where Abdullah
lives, as it is well known where the *Akhdam* are congregated. But they have
never been this near. For them, the *Akhdam* are outside of their network
and they do not exchange visits. The two girls are quietly looking with big
round eyes at the things around them.

Girl 16 years old
Farida is from one of the two *Sayyid*[11] (plural of *Saa'da)* families in the dis-
trict centre. Farida lives in an old multi-story house overlooking the village.
It is one of two large houses that are identified as *Sayyid* houses. We are
met by Farida's mother who takes us to the guest room, which is upstairs
with a view of the village. As we walk upstairs I can see the kitchen, which
is inside the house. I observed too the place for baking bread outside of
the house. A woman with a darker complexion was baking bread (this was

likely a woman from the village who works for the family[12]). The guest room is covered with faded carpets and mattresses and pillows showing the more well off situation of the family. Photographs of male family members hang on the walls. Farida is the only and oldest daughter of a family of six living within the extended family. Her father is the religious leader of the district centre and is considered well educated. Farida's mother completed five years of schooling, while Farida herself completed nine grades and is adamant that this is enough for her. Farida also mentioned that it would be shameful for her to continue her schooling as she would have to be in a mixed class of boys and girls.

Fieldwork notes 05-12-2009
While we talk with Farida's mother, waiting for Farida to come (she is probably changing her clothes to be able to receive us), I could not help noticing that my companions (the research assistant and her friend) had strong opinions about the family. They showed a mix of respect and disrespect. They sometimes questioned the mother's comments regarding the family's traditions and values, seeming to perceive them as no longer true or out-dated. This impression was confirmed as we walked back from the house. My companions made fun of some of the things Farida had said. For example, they made fun of her saying that she is a *Sharifa* and that she will be a religious teacher. My companions made clear that they think that *Saa'da* are too proud of themselves, which they should not be, as times have changed. However, my companions' behaviour also showed respect for the *Saa'da* and they commented several times how well educated and important Farida's father is for the village. It is an uneasy combination of respect and disrespect. I observed the same behaviour from the head teacher when she asked curiously how the visit had gone to the house of the *Saa'da* family. She respected them for being 'well educated' in traditional terms, but disrespected them for not taking on mass schooling as equally important.

The above field observations illustrate that status hierarchies have weakened but that the social positions of the past, although officially no longer recognized, are still in place. The differing attitudes towards schooling illustrate the different roles of schooling. For Farida, schooling is important because of her status. But after she completed her schooling (as perceived by herself and her family), religious education seemed to be more relevant, as it was linked to something she wanted to do in the future. Farida even viewed continuing school as a threat to her status, as she would have to mix with boys. For Abdullah there is a sense of indif-

ference towards schooling; schooling is kind of new for his family. Few other family members are schooled, and schooling is seen primarily as a childhood activity which has little impact on Abdullah's future. These expectations of the role of schooling linked to the status groups were also reflected in the attitudes of others towards Abdullah and his family. The girls and the teacher had little expectation that Abdullah would go back to school; and the research assistants and head teachers had their own views of Farida's decision to stop school and to focus on religious schooling.

Schooling has often been identified as a way for children to develop their capabilities in order to be empowered to demand their rights. Research in various countries suggests that stopping school and school achievement involve a stronger role for children than enrolling in school. Parents generally play the important part in enrolment (Moore 2004: 111, James et al. 1998, Corsaro 2005: 18). However, children's role in stopping school/school achievement seems to reinforce their positions in structures of inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Subrahmanian 2005). In my household survey, 67 per cent of children who had stopped school reported that they had made the decision to stop themselves. Parents as well as teachers indicated a main reason for children to stop school was that the children 'did not want to continue school' (see also section on reasoning later). In addition, almost all[13] of the children who had stopped school and were interviewed in-depth indicated that it had been their own choice to stop. It is remarkable that children and others perceive children's decision to stop school as the exercising of the child's own agency. This is an unlikely proposition in a society such as patriarchal rural Yemen, where the communal good overrules individual desires. It may indicate that schooling does not play an important role in society and that children are 'allowed' to exercise their agency or be empowered in matters concerning schooling, as it does not influence their and their family's socio-economic standing. This idea is supported by classic studies on motivation for schooling and class, such as Willis (1977, as quoted in Willis 2003/2006: 515), Ogbu (1994/2003: 765) and Brown (1987).

3.3   Reasoning for stopping school

Reasoning for stopping school has often been studied based on information from the male head of household. Few studies explore the rea-

sons expressed by the children who stopped school. In Yemen, a report that uses the Household Budget Survey (HBS) to identify barriers to school completion is often drawn on for policy and programme development, but this survey does not include children's reasoning for stopping school (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). The results of this study and my own research, which includes and disaggregates both the reasoning of children (in and out of school) and that of their parents, emphasizes that reasons given for stopping school differ depending on who is asked, how they are asked and the frame of reference of those who are asking.

3.3.1 Reasoning by adults

The report using data from the 2005 HBS includes a section on why children stop school in Yemen. The Yemen HBS data were gathered from male heads of household.[14] They identified barriers to school completion that were grouped using a demand-supply analysis on school utilization[15] (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 41–2). Table 3.2 presents some results from the report.

Table 3.2
Reasons for stopping school by gender and rural/urban
(percentage share), 2005

	Urban		Rural	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Supply side issues	2%	6%	13%	32%
Demand side issues:	89%	82%	80%	62%
Economic	16%	4%	27%	10%
Attitude	72%	76%	52%	52%
Personal	1%	2%	1%	0%
Others	9%	13%	7%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Adapted by author from World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 42; data based on HBS 2005.

The data from the report indicate that demand-side issues form the main obstacles to school completion for boys as well as girls, for urban

as well as rural children. Of the demand-side issues, attitudinal factors are identified as most important for all groups. The attitudinal factors are briefly described in the report as 'no interest in schooling' and 'belief that education up to a few grades is ample' (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 42). Table 3.2 indicates that attitudes are more important as an obstacle in urban areas than rural areas, which suggests that 'attitudes' does not necessarily mean 'traditional views'. The few attitudes that are described in the report are vague and say little about whose attitudes are being referred to. Is it the child or the parent who 'has no interest in schooling', and who holds the 'belief that education up to a few grades is ample'? It is also unclear whether the results reflect the answers of all those who were interviewed (heads of household), without concern for the schooling status of their children, or whether these were answers given by those interviewees who had children who had stopped school. The data may therefore simply reflect general perceptions among heads of household on why children do not complete school, without any direct relationship to their own children.

The method used for the HBS study assumes that the head of household represents the household, and that the household represents the individual. This is challenged by Kabeer (2001), who emphasizes the importance of gender-specific considerations, as well as intra-household analysis, as the household situation may not affect all of the children in the household in the same way. This is supported by my research. It is also important to know that the HBS's specific objective was to investigate economic growth at the household level as part of the monitoring of implementation of a poverty eradication strategy (2000–10) (Government of Yemen 2002). In this case, schooling was seen as a tool for economic growth. Even though the study used a frame of reference linked to economic growth and collected data from the male heads of household, the results do reflect the importance of factors other than cost and resources. This finding was confirmed by my household survey. However, despite the results as outlined in Table 3.2, it is interesting to note that the interventions promoted by the author of the report, the World Bank, do not address the attitudinal barriers. Interventions tended instead to focus on the supply side as well as the economic part of the demand side, with programmes such as school building and conditional cash transfers (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). The assumption seems to be

that parents will change their attitudes if supply-side factors are ad-dressed along with the economic factors on the demand side.

Table 3.3
General parents' perceptions of reasons for stopping school for boys
(multiple answers)[16]

	% of Responses (N=1384)
Boy doesn't want to go to school	26%
The cost of attending school is too high	18%
The boy is not clever	16%
The boy must help his father	15%
Lack of books and supplies	7%
School is too far away	5%
Parents don't encourage child	3%
Boy doesn't learn at school	3%
Boy becomes married	3%
Lack of qualified teachers	2%
Inadequate school space	1%
Boy needs to work	1%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

Table 3.4
General parents' perceptions of reasons for stopping school for girls
(multiple answers)[17]

	% of Responses (N=1686)
Education not as important for girls	22%
Girl needs to help with household chores	14%
Girl becomes engaged/married	13%
Girl does not want to go to school	12%
Girl is not smart	8%
It is not good for a girl to attend school	6%
Girl does not learn at school	6%
School for girls is too far	6%
Cost for attending school is too high	4%
Lack of support from family	3%
Lack of female teachers	2%
Lack of separate school for girls	2%
School will make the girl difficult	1%
Culture does not approve of girls at school	1%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

My research asked questions of children as well as adults. My household survey data from the parents (65 per cent mothers[18]) show that interviewing others than the head of household, as well as separating out the responses of parents with children who had stopped school, provide different results regarding barriers to school completion. Parents of children who had stopped school did not always make a gender distinction in their answers, while parents who answered 'in general' did. Tables 3.3 and 3.4, respectively, present all parents' responses on boys and on girls.

Parents tended to view the boy's own choice as one of the main reasons for stopping school: 58 per cent of respondents mentioned this. Cost, the boy's poor school performance and the boy's responsibility to help his father at work were all seen as important reasons why boys stop school. The impression that Yemeni people do not believe that schooling is important for girls was mentioned by almost 60 per cent of the parents. Also, the need for a girl to be engaged in household duties, whether for her own family or in marriage, was often mentioned as an important perceived reason why girls stop school. While a large percentage of parents, 31 per cent, said that girls may stop school if they so decide, this is a much smaller percentage than for boys. This could indicate a greater latitude for boys to take decisions that affect their lives. These results correspond closely with the HBS survey results from heads of household and suggest that adults who answer 'in general', tend to 'blame' parents for having a 'wrong' or 'traditional' attitude towards schooling, especially for girls. This 'blaming' suggests that these adults think school completion confers a kind of positive status, or is how one should be. It may however also reflect how people thought they should answer in a survey organized by a foreigner, who is expected to be positive towards school completion.

My survey of parents of children who had stopped school, and were asked specifically about their son or daughter who had stopped school, produced different answers. First of all, many of these parents (40 per cent) said that they did not know why their child had stopped school. Secondly, when they did provide reasons, there was no difference in reasoning for boys and girls. Not knowing a reason perhaps suggests a lack of interest in the child's school completion; and the absence of a gender difference may reflect the attitudes towards school completion of parents whose children had stopped school. They may not believe that school completion contributes to the forming of gender roles and therefore see

little difference between boys and girls stopping. This absence of gender difference is surprising and contradicts the argument that in traditional patriarchal families, parents, especially fathers, are very concerned about girls' schooling, especially near the onset of puberty. The issue of the girls' honour is often highlighted as a reason for girls not to continue school after the onset of puberty, also in Yemen (Word Bank and MoP-IC 2010, Alim et al. 2007). Table 3.5 presents all of the reasons for stopping school given by parents of children who had stopped school.

Table 3.5
Main reason for stopping school given by parents of children
who stopped school (unprompted, single answers)[19]

	Total (N=125)
Child wanted to stop school	25.5%
Lack of money for school costs	18.5%
School is too far	9%
Child is not clever	11%
Child was sick often	8%
Child needs to stay home and help with household duties/help father with work	5%
Child became engaged and/or married	4%
Father does not want child to attend school	4%
Child needs to earn money for the family	2%
Child had fight with teacher/staff	2%
Formal schooling is not very important	1%
Child had learned enough	1%
Other	9%
	100%

Source: Compiled by author from survey results of parents whose child had stopped school.

Of those parents who provided a reason, most said that the child wanted to stop. The next most frequently given reasons were related to the cost of schooling, followed by 'the child not being clever'. The large number of parents who indicated that they did not know, as well as the answer that it was the child who wanted to stop school, may indicate that

stopping school is not considered an important event, and that schooling does not play an important role in their lives and is not seen as contributing to social reproduction. The reason 'child is not clever' may show that the parent thinks that the child's own behaviour (not working hard enough or not being clever enough), caused him/her to stop school, or it may refer to the inability of the school to help the child, which shows more concern for the child's schooling. Direct cost is the second most commonly identified reason. But this seems to be an outlier compared to the other frequently identified reasons, as it indicates a reason outside of the child. There is a need to further unpack this reason, as poverty reflected in cost (indirect and direct costs) is often identified in the literature as an important reason to stop school, yet this was not identified as a reason by parents of children who had stopped school and were interviewed in-depth.

All of the parents in the survey were asked if schooling their child cost them anything and if yes, what this cost was. Although the question focused on cost rather than money spent, the surveyors as well as the parents often understood the question as money spent. Answers of the parents show that cost of schooling is mostly identified with direct costs (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6
All parents on school costs (unprompted, multiple answers possible)

	Total (N=702)
School uniform	22%
School supplies	19%
Money for school (fees)	18%
Books	14%
Food	10%
Certificates	7%
Transportation	4%
Water	3%
Extra-curricular activities	3%
Repairs for the school	1%
Other	2%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

The direct costs[20] most identified are often officially not required; school uniforms are not a requirement, fees for the primary grades have been abolished and many girls receive school supplies (Ministry of Education 2007). This and the fact that parents mostly identified one cost may indicate that parents are not fully aware of what schooling costs and why, which suggests that cost is not a major issue in stopping school. The absence of indirect and opportunity costs in the answers of the parents may be due to the way the question was asked as well as how it was understood. The unprompted question focused on the costs of schooling without clarifying that the different costs of schooling include opportunity costs. The answers, however, do not support a strong relationship between stopping school and poverty. Children do not seem to stop school because their family is very poor or because their time in school is seen as affecting household income. This is confirmed by another study in Yemen on working children which found no strong correlation between working children and income levels of households, or with gender (Dyer 2007: 515). My research results are also supported by extensive research by Kabeer (2001) in a number of countries (especially in South Asia). She found that especially girls challenge the direct relationship between working and schooling outcomes, as girls are generally the ones who do not go to school and are not at 'work'. If one considers 'work' to include work in the household, then the numbers of children who are found to combine work and school, often girls, also challenge this relationship. Kabeer (2001) found that families with land tend to have more working children than families without land, but families with land tend to be from higher social strata. She also found that more boys from non-poor families work than boys from moderate and very poor families due to their better access to work opportunities.

Marriage is also identified as a reason for stopping school early and is linked to cost and gender. Marriage is often seen as a way to improve the economic status of the household and for the economic betterment of the girl. My research did not show marriage as having a clear-cut relationship with poverty. Marriage is affected by schooling, but in Yemen views are ambivalent on the benefits of schooling for marriage. Schooling can raise marriage opportunities for boys and for girls, but for girls schooling also brings concerns about harm to their family reputation and loss of honour. If the family thinks that there is no reasonable chance of marrying a girl off to a higher status family with the use of schooling,

then schooling is often judged to be unnecessary for the girl (Dorsky et al. 1995, Raynor 2005). In addition, marriage of girls outside of their own status group is rare, especially for a girl to marry a man from a lower status group. The ambivalence about the impacts of schooling on marriage opportunities was illustrated in the below conversation.

> Field notes 11-12-2010
> G: My father did not stop me from getting further schooling. Quite the opposite, he supported me. But he did say before I started college, that our society does not like schooled girls and that it would be difficult to get married within our own circles.
> LM: Do you think that is correct?
> G: (Smiles sadly) Look at me, I am still not married and I am 24 years old. The men I can marry, from the extended family, think I am 'too high' for them. But I hesitate to marry a man outside of the extended family, as then I would be without support.

The area where my in-depth research took place had a number of unemployed well-schooled unmarried girls who were beyond the traditional ideal age of marriage. These girls did not provide a good role model for school completion because for them it did not result in a better social or economic status. They were unmarried and also unable to use their schooling in a paid job.

In Yemen, migration is an important way to improve socio-economic status in adulthood and is possibly a reason for leaving school early. This is especially the case for boys, which gives it a gender aspect as well. The oil boom and associated need for labour led Yemeni men to migrate to neighbouring countries and made it possible for families to move up the economic ladder. Although most of the demand was for unskilled labour,[21] migration took place among all status groups and among people with all levels of schooling. Nonetheless, migration provided especially men without much schooling the opportunity to earn financial resources, de-linking schooling and economic mobility (Swagman 1988). Most of the Yemeni men who migrated left their families in Yemen, which affected the women who stayed behind, as they had to take on men's jobs, especially in the rural areas. Decision making, however, was often entrusted to another male family member and did not seem to affect attitudes towards schooling (Myntti 1984, Lackner 1985: 130, Dresch 1989).

Improved economic status does not automatically lead to a better social status outside of one's own status group. To facilitate a change in status, returnees and migrants especially those from lower social status groups tend to settle in urban areas to avoid reverting to their previous social status. In the new place of residence they try to keep their true social status hidden. This was observed in my urban research areas. Young women from these returnee households used schooling as an indication of their status as they often had enjoyed better schooling at their place of migration (De Regt 2007: 176, 197). The communities where my in-depth research took place, located in the foothills of the southern central highlands, had a long history of migration. This started with migration of young men to Aden, for labour during the British colonial days, followed by migration of men to the United Kingdom through work on steamships in the early 1900s (Mortimer 2005, Aithie 2005). With the oil boom, most migration was to the oil-rich states, mainly Saudi Arabia.[22] None of the families of the children interviewed in-depth reported having a migrated household member now[23] or one having returned from migration. Several of the households did mention more distant, second-generation family as residing abroad.

Parents' reasons why their children stopped school were mixed, depending on who provided the reasoning. Unfortunately I was unable to determine whether the reasoning differed by parents' gender. Nonetheless, parents of children who had stopped school tended to focus their reasoning on the role of the child, without much gender differentiation. The general attitude of parents towards stopping school reflected the tendency to blame parents for their children stopping school. Overall the reasoning given lacked a link with poverty and the cost of schooling, including the indirect cost. This means that the findings of my research support the weak relationship found elsewhere between children's stopping school and work, poverty, low socio-economic status and gender (Kabeer 2001, Tillak 2002, Dyer 2007, Crawford 1998).

3.3.2 Reasoning by children

Children participating in the survey who had stopped school reasoned differently from their parents. Most of the children identified reasons such as 'needed at home' and 'school is boring', without much difference by gender. Some responses did allude to a gender difference as there was a gender aspect within some of the reasons (Table 3.7). For all of the

reasons mentioned no significant rural/urban difference was found other than 'school too far away', which was mentioned more by rural children. Table 3.7 therefore does not disaggregate responses by gender or location, but gender-specific reasons are indicated where relevant.

Table 3.7
Children who have stopped school on reasons for stopping school
(single answer, unprompted)[24]

	Total (N=69)
School too far away	10%
Lack of books and supplies	3%
Lack of female Teachers (girls only)	1.5%
School is boring	16.5%
Needed at home	19%
Prioritization of boys over girls (cost, importance) (girls only)	11.5%
Formal Education is not as important for girls (girls only)	3%
I was too old	4%
I am not clever	6%
I became engaged or married	6%
Needed to earn money	6%
No facilities for girls (girls only)	1.5%
I became sick	4%
School refused	4%
Lack of money at home	4%

Source: Compiled by author from household survey.

The reasons given for stopping school (Table 3.7) cover a wide range, including both 'push' factors (practical considerations like distance, school supplies, and the perception of school as boring) and 'pull' factors (being needed at home).

The responses of the 30 children who had stopped school and were interviewed in-depth differ from those of the children participating in the survey. Due to the method used, reasoning shared during the in-depth interviews was much richer, going beyond the single main reason identified in the survey. Children interviewed in-depth showed a range

of behaviour: (i) indifference towards their not going to school anymore; (ii) the opposite of being agitated and preoccupied with having stopped school; (iii) preoccupation with their future and the transition to adulthood, not dwelling on stopping school; (iv) a 'happy go lucky' attitude and wondering what all the fuss is about as they are having fun now. All four behaviour patterns were observed among the children interviewed. Children sometimes showed more than one of these attitudes towards their stopping school during the discussion of their timeline of stopping school. Children often started with (i) (indifference), often followed by one of the other three linked to their reasoning. We might surmise from this that children's reasoning is affected by how they feel at that point in time. Reasoning was also influenced by the age of the child, younger children tended to express their reasoning differently, less elaborately and with fewer details. They were more likely to be in the 'happy go lucky' category. The children who demonstrated agitation tended to be troubled more about the way they had stopped school than about the fact that they had stopped.

In regard to the reasoning itself, almost all children interviewed in-depth identified school-related factors as the primary reason for stopping school, often linked to school results. Most children distanced themselves from their own 'bad' study results, claiming that the teacher was responsible for the 'bad' results. However, this reasoning is very different from the reasons for stopping school obtained from the household survey. Survey respondents hardly mentioned school performance-related reasons as a factor in stopping school. In the in-depth interviews, I explored further the performance-related reasons given for stopping school. These it turned out were almost always connected to a range of other factors that can be understood as pressure to stop school and an absence of support to continue school. Analysis of these points to the importance of group and family solidarity. Pressures identified include those exercised by fathers and siblings, the child having conflicts with the school, mothers in need of (emotional) support from their daughters at home, and friends and peers who decided to stop together. The absence of support to continue school indicates that schooling is not seen as important for the group or family, and also that little support is provided by siblings in homework. Neither do parents express interest in children's school completion. Overall, there is a lack of any motivational purpose for school completion. The few children in the analysis who

were younger than the average age or had stopped school in the early grades often had stories starting with something small that became a seemingly insurmountable obstacle, like the absence of the right paperwork. Their reasons for stopping school did not centre on the child's performance in school.[25]

Table 3.8
Summary reasoning for stopping school by person who gives the reason

Who reasons	Main reason	Influencing factors
Children who stopped school interviewed in-depth	School	Pressure to show solidarity with family/group, lack of family/group support
Children in group discussions who attend school	Pressure from parents, peers (teachers)	Children are 'ready' to leave school to start their transition to childhood linked to social reproduction of society
Parents of children who stopped school in survey	Don't know/indifference	Lack of family/group support for schooling
Parents in 'general'	School is not important/attitudes	Blaming of parents for not taking schooling of their children serious/ not supporting school and showing solidarity
Children who stopped school in survey	Needed at home/own decision to stop	Children are 'ready' to stop school to start learning skills for transition at home linked to social reproduction of society

Source: Compiled by author from household survey, in-depth interviews and group discussions.

Interestingly, when the children who had stopped school were asked to identify the reasons why their siblings had stopped school, they named simple reasons similar to those identified in my survey. This absence of subtlety or detail in the reasoning for their siblings suggests that stopping school is not extensively discussed in the household or between siblings, and not of much importance. As with the reasoning expressed by the children in my survey, there was a tendency to avoid including pressure from others among the main reasons for stopping school. In the group discussions[26] children who were attending school almost al-

ways linked others' stopping school with either pressure on them to stop school or the lack of the required support to stay in school. The school children in the group discussions identified three main groups of actors that can put pressure on a child to stop school: family, peers/friends and teachers.[27] Pressure from family and peers was mostly linked to the transition to adulthood, with marriage-related issues often named for girls and helping the father at home for boys. Table 3.8 presents for all of the different groups the main reasons why children stop school, as well as influencing factors.

This summary suggests that while the main reasoning differs between the different groups, the main factors can be categorized as group/family solidarity and social reproduction. Reasoning is influenced by gender and status but this emerges only in the details, linked to the influencing factors of group/family solidarity and reproduction of society. Interestingly the reasons for stopping school most often identified in the literature – linked to poverty and the cost-benefit ratio of schooling – are distinctly absent among the reasons given by the people most directly involved in stopping school, such as children and their parents. Adults who talk 'in general' do identify costs. Overall, the reasons for stopping school identified in my research centre on children's experience at school, but are influenced by a range of factors that can be categorized as either pressure to stop school or an absence of support to continue school from within the home and society.

When children in the groups were asked (as individuals) to discuss when (in time) children decide to stop school, three time periods were identified: (i) at the start of the school year; (ii) at the end of the school year (after the exams during the school holidays); and (iii) before (i.e. the decision was made a long time in advance). The children in the group discussions said that most boys and girls stop school at the start of the school year, as well as during the summer holidays. These were also the periods most identified overall for boys. Stopping school as a result of a decision made a long time in advance was mentioned rarely, but when it was identified, it pertained more (twice as often) to girls than to boys. The in-depth interviews showed similar results on when children stopped school. Most said they stopped at the start of the school year, although thinking about stopping school often started earlier, at the end of the previous school year. The in-depth interviews showed some differences by gender but no differences by age. These findings do not

support the notion that children stop school due to certain household or community beliefs, such as reaching a certain age or due to the onset of puberty. Neither do they support the notion that parents or children identify well in advance a certain number of years or grades that they consider to be enough.

The child who stops school is the most important source for identifying the reason why he/she stops school. But their decision nonetheless has to be understood in light of the reasoning of others – those who support a child to continue or pressure them to stop for their own reasons. The absence of support and pressure to stop school may be influenced by poverty and the cost of schooling, as set out in the literature. The next sections discuss whether this was the case in my research areas.

3.4   Stopping school: pressures and the absence of support

Factors identified in the literature as predicting or explaining inequalities in the number of grades completed tend to focus on girls and the household, with little room for the role of children in constructing their own realities. However, boys also stop school, and household factors do not explain differences between individuals in school completion. Factors that explain or predict inequalities in the number of grades completed can be categorized as 'supportive' or 'unsupportive' and are mainly linked to family/group solidarity and reproduction of society. This section discusses factors derived from the literature and compares them to the factors identified in my own research looking at both boys and girls, exploring individual differences and acknowledging the child as an actor in the process.

3.4.1 Households

The in-depth study of children who stopped school included households from all status groups. This suggests that one cannot easily make generalizations about school completion by status of households. Below is an example of a household of a girl who had stopped school from the *Akhdam*[28] community. It illustrates the presence of intra-household differences in the lowest social status group.

<u>Girl 14 years old</u>
Muna and her family of seven siblings, father, mother and grandmother live in a one-room house in the middle of the district centre. All of the

children of school age are in school. They do well, with the oldest two, girls, in grades 10 and 12. The only odd one out seemed to be Muna, who does not do well at school. She repeated two grades and now has stopped school. She completed fifth grade but did not pass and can hardly read or write. Since she stopped school she got engaged and is looking forward to getting married. The reason identified by Muna for stopping school is that she is 'not clever'. She also said she was 'ready'. Her parents, too, mentioned both of these factors as reasons for Muna to stop school.

Muna's story, as well as other similar stories from my research, challenges the notion that intra-household differences between siblings can be explained by changes over time in household or community values related to schooling. These children's stories do not suggest that certain values were important earlier for the siblings who are now older and are no longer important for the younger siblings, or the other way around. Nor does the economic status of the family seem to have changed over time, with the completion of basic schooling being more likely with an increase in income. In Muna's case, there were no changes in income for her family. Muna's story highlights the role of individual performance in school as a reason to stop school. In Muna's case, the family and Muna herself identified her reason for not completing schooling as 'not being clever'. 'Not being clever' was identified as a personal attribute of Muna and not as something that 'runs in the family', as her siblings did fine. Muna's performance at school could perhaps be linked to the behaviour of the teacher; many of the children who had stopped school identified the teacher's attitude as a reason for stopping school. But Muna did not express this herself, which could be explained by her status as a member of the *Akhdam,* who are not expected to criticize people from higher status groups, such as teachers.

In the West, not being clever is not an acceptable reason to stop school. School is compulsory, and everyone is believed to have the ability to complete school. In Yemen, however, 'not being clever' is not uncommon as a stated reason for stopping school. This is confirmed by the fact that many children report having stopped school following the news that they have to repeat a grade.[29]

The story of Muna's family also reveals that despite being from the lowest socio-economic status group, it is possible to complete nine grades. Discriminatory practices in schools and classrooms therefore cannot be generalized as targeting children from the lower socio-

economic groups. Neither can discrimination be identified as the only factor causing inequalities in schooling outcomes for the lowest status groups. The story of Muna does show an absence of support from the school as well as from her family to continue her schooling. 'Not being clever' is not challenged, perhaps because of the status of the family and the low importance given to the role of schooling. 'Being ready' to move to adulthood came through as an important factor for Muna. However, it was unclear whether this was a reason why she stopped school or whether it became important because she had stopped school. The story of Muna underlines the importance of taking individual factors into consideration and challenging the assumption that within households all members have the same experiences.

The children who stopped school and were interviewed in-depth were from slightly larger households (8.5 members) than average (8.1). The boys who had stopped school, in particular, came from large households (averaging 8.9 members). This corresponds to Al Qudsi's (2003) finding that children from larger households are more likely to stop school. But it is probably not very significant here, as the households were only slightly larger than average. The children who had stopped school all lived in households with their mothers. Four (13 per cent) lived in a household where the father was absent. Two lived in a household where the mother was divorced, and two lived in a household where the father had died. Households where the father was absent were all identified as of low/average status. A number of children had stopped school while their father was in the army, meaning that he was absent for three months at a time. His absence may have influenced his interest and ability to support his children's schooling or pressure on his children to stop school. The composition of households in which children had stopped school is similar to household survey averages.[30] Thus, household characteristics of children who had stopped school do not differ much from those of children who were in school, other than that boys who stop school tend to come from larger families.

3.4.2 Mothers of children who had stopped school

Children from the in-depth interviews (all of whom had stopped school) had mothers who had married at an average age of 17.7 years (range 12–30 years). This is similar to data for Yemen as a whole (UNICEF 2004, Oxfam et al. 2005). There is an important gender difference however, as

the mothers of girls who had stopped school married much earlier than the mothers of the boys who had stopped school: 16.1 years for the mothers of girls and 20.9 years for the mothers of boys. The link between mothers marrying young and their daughter stopping school suggests that mothers who married young also expect their daughters to marry young and to stop school earlier. Nonetheless, no connection could be found between mothers marrying young and the early marriage of daughters. None of the children studied in-depth were married, though two of the girls reported being engaged. They had become engaged after stopping school, and in neither case was the engagement identified as the reason for stopping school. My research cannot conclude much about early marriage and school completion, other than that girls with mothers who married very young have a higher likelihood of stopping school.[31]

Marrying young cannot be linked to mothers' schooling, and mothers with low schooling results do not necessarily have children with lower schooling outcomes, as claimed by Stromquist (1990: 143) as a global indicator for schooling outcomes. In my in-depth sample, half of the children who had stopped school had mothers without any schooling, slightly more girls than boys. One-third of the mothers had some years of schooling (1–5 years), five mothers had completed six or seven years of primary schooling, and one of the mothers (of a girl who had stopped school) had completed 12th grade.

Regarding years of schooling and employment, no clear correlation could be found: two mothers – of a girl (Aisha) and a boy (Adam) – had a paid job. The boy's mother had three years of schooling and worked at the local health clinic. The girl's mother had 12 years of schooling and worked as a teacher in the local girls' school. The boy's mother was a divorcee and needed to work for economic reasons, while the girl's mother was from a well-off family. The stories of the two children with working mothers are below.

<u>Boy 10 years old</u>
Adam's father married three times and his mother is the second wife. His parents divorced seven years ago. His father then left to live in the centre of the governorate and married his third wife. The father's first wife and children live in the same village as Adam, close but in a separate house. In Adam's family all children went to school, except the youngest as she is still too young, and all of them stopped school before grade six. Adam said

that he stopped school after the third grade because he is 'not clever', blaming the school for his school results. In the morning his mother is at work. She locks the house while the children spend time at the neighbours or with half-brothers and sisters. Adam spends his mornings at the market. Adams's mother has three years of schooling and married at age 25. Adam's father has nine years of schooling.

The story of the girl with the working mother is almost the opposite:

Girl 8 years old
Aisha is the last girl of 13 siblings (10 girls and 3 boys). Two brothers are younger. Most of her siblings were in school. Four sisters completed the 12th grade. Two sisters stopped school, in grades four and seven. Aisha's mother completed 12 grades and married when she was 16. Her father also completed the 12th grade. Aisha started school when she was six years old, and stopped after grade one. She did not want to go to school because she developed a skin disease on her hands and was ashamed of it, as was her mother. Now it has healed but Aisha has not returned to school. Aisha's mother is not worried about Aisha not going to school. She said that the child is still young (she was eight at the time) and that she may go back to school at a later stage. Aisha echoed her mother's response and said that she did not want to go to school now as she was happy being at home.

The two mothers are very different, both in status and in their reasons for joining the labour market. But both have children who stopped school and both said that they would rather have their children attending school. The boy's mother works out of economic necessity, while the girl's mother works because she wants to work or is expected to work as she completed a high number of grades.[32]

The two stories do not indicate a link between mothers' age of marriage and years of schooling. Nor do they suggest a clear link between years of schooling and being employed. The two stories do show that a mother's income does not necessarily influence schooling in a positive way (i.e. children stop school in families with a high income as well as in families with a low income). Research from elsewhere concludes that mother's income can affect children's schooling both positively and negatively (Patrinos 2008, Filmer 1999). Unfortunately our household survey questions did not cover schooling and employment of parents and did not distinguish between mothers and fathers. So these possible links cannot be explored on a larger scale.

Aisha's mother is well schooled and has a job as a teacher, so it is unexpected for her to have a daughter who stopped school. The mother's status as a teacher could not prevent Aisha from stopping school. The head teacher of the girls' school was clearly unhappy with the situation, and blamed her staff member for not making more effort to get Aisha back in school. The mother as well as other members of Aisha's large family such as older sisters do not appear to have made an effort to help Aisha stay in school. This was perhaps because Aisha was the youngest of many girls. It may also be that Aisha's mother really does believe that Aisha will go back to school after a while. She must know though (as a teacher) that it will be late, as her daughter will then be nine years old and have to re-join the first grade (as she did not pass the first grade).

While Aisha's mother did not indicate a lack of support, Adam's mother did express a lack of support and that she was struggling on her own. Smits and Gunduz-Hosgor (2006) identified mothers' access to a support network as influencing girls' schooling in rural Turkey. That research found that the absence of a support network for the mother makes it more likely that her daughter will stop school, because the mother feels that she cannot provide support for schooling. Najwa's story below illustrates such a lack of support for Najwa's schooling from her mother, due to the mother herself lacking a support network.

<u>Girl 12 years old</u>
Najwa is the oldest girl of a small family of five. Her mother is from a big city. Her father is from the district centre and is the head of a small school just outside of the district centre. While Najwa talked about her problem with the mathematics teacher and her weak math results, her mother explained that she and Najwa's father blame the school for Najwa's failing mathematics, because of the conflict between Najwa's father and the school.[33] But while talking to Najwa and her mother another aspect came to the surface: Najwa's mother is very happy to have her oldest daughter at home. She said so several times. She explained that the conflict between Najwa's school and her husband, as well as that fact that she was not from the village and lives apart from her in-laws, makes her feel isolated and not a full participant in the social life of the village.[34] She used to be lonely but now feels that she has a friend in Najwa. Najwa is in-between. She feels that she cannot go back to school because this would mean a lack of support for her father, she also wanted to please her mother, though she would have liked a few more years of schooling. She likes being with her mother, and she feels that her mother needs her. It makes her feel 'grown

up' when she and her mother do things together. While attending school Najwa did not have to do much in the household, but now she runs the household together with her mother and she likes this. Despite the role of the mother as well as the father, Najwa still insisted (and was proud) that she herself had decided that it was time to stop school.

Najwa's story illustrates how the strength of a mother's support network and questions of group/family solidarity can affect stopping school. Due to the lack of a support network from either her own family or her husband's family, Najwa's mother needs to find support from within her small nuclear family. Najwa's father does not seem able to provide this support. Najwa is the only one who can. This need to emotionally support the mother was also part of the reasoning given by the other four girls for stopping school. In Yemeni society the group, be it family or tribe, have precedence over the individual. This may clash with mass schooling, which places the individual central. For Najwa, her mother and support for the family is more important for her future than her schooling outcomes. Najwa was also 'ready' to be at home and to do things in the household with her mother, as she had reached adolescence. As Najwa's story illustrates, the combination of indirect pressure and lack of support for continued schooling, together with an absence of motivation and the right timing, can make it logical and easy to stop school.

3.4.3   Fathers of children who had stopped school

Four children (out of the 30) who had stopped school had no father present: two due to divorce and two whose father had died. This is similar to the average for children participating in the household survey. Regarding fathers' schooling, five fathers had no schooling at all and six fathers had 12 grades or more. Most fathers had between one and nine grades of schooling. Some cases from our small sample suggest that schooled fathers are not necessarily more likely to keep their children in school, as identified by Filmer (1999). This is illustrated by the stories of two girls who had stopped school despite the fact that their fathers were teachers. One of the fathers was the head teacher of a nearby school and the other was the deputy head teacher of a boys' school. Both fathers had conflicts with the schools the girls were attending.[35] Jihan is one of these girls.

Girl 13 years old

Jihan lives with her parents and three siblings in a large house in the middle of the district centre. She is a strong personality and is quite adamant that she does not want to continue her schooling. She gives as reasons a fight she had at school with girls who had insulted her and an unsupportive teacher. Her father, who is a teacher at the local boys' school, tried to reason with the teacher which resulted in more tension. Jihan's father now supports his daughter in not going back to school, as the family's pride is said to be injured by the humiliation inflicted by the other girls as well as by the teacher. Jihan's mother is indifferent to whether Jihan continues her schooling. Jihan is the oldest child, with a large gap between her and the next three siblings, who are all under the age of six. She was therefore for a long time the only child in the family and is very close to her mother. She spends most of her time with her mother. Jihan also attends *Quran* lessons two afternoons a week. Jihan's father was embarrassed that he as a teacher has a child who had stopped school. He tries to shift the responsibility for Jihan stopping school to Jihan by saying that she is head strong and clever and that she feels she has learned enough.

Jihan's story is another example of how adult issues related to group/family solidarity (honour of the family and the school, as well as the mother's weak support network) can result in a child stopping school. Jihan's father, although a teacher, is not supportive of Jihan's continuing school. He actively supported her stopping school although it is difficult for him, as a teacher, to say to me that he actually pressured Jihan to stop school. Jihan's father said that he was disappointed with Jihan's teacher. He expected the teacher as a colleague to stick up for his daughter. Jihan's father was proud of his own schooling and of being a teacher. He said that he respects other teachers; he also expected other teachers to respect him. However, this pride in schooling quickly disappeared when a problem arose. The link between schooling and status/pride was not made by parents who had not been schooled, and seldom by those whose child had stopped school. Jihan's story also illustrates how a small incident – a fight with other girls – can evolve into a decision to stop school by a girl who was doing well and should have had support to complete her schooling from a father who was a teacher.

3.4.4 Siblings of children who had stopped school

The children who were interviewed in-depth had a total of 166 siblings. When looking at the sibling position, many of the children interviewed

were the oldest or the second-oldest child in the family, without much difference between boys and girls. Many youngest children in the household were among those interviewed as well. Children who are the oldest sibling in a household, especially girls, have been found more likely to stop school worldwide (Stromquist 1990). This is explained by the need for oldest girls to stay home and care for younger siblings. The argument for boys is less clear. In Yemen the oldest son has a special position in the family and may be required to stay home to help the father in family businesses. On the other hand, the oldest son may be supported to complete schooling because this, in his role as the oldest son, would reaffirm the status of the family, at least in those status groups where schooling is perceived as important. My research did identify a need for girls to stay home to provide child care. This came out mainly in the groups (with children who were still in school), but it was not borne out by data from the household survey or data from the in-depth interviews. Only one (out of 20) of the girls' timelines showed involvement in child care. This girl was the oldest sibling, the only girl in the household, and heavily involved in child care. She thus fit the stereotype of the oldest girl having to stop school in order to look after younger siblings as identified by Stromquist (1990). Jameela stopped school because she felt pressured by the teacher to stop school as described in her story below.

Girl 13 years old
Jameela is 13 years old and the oldest and only girl of four siblings. Her father is in the army and her mother is his second wife. Her mother was 17 years old when she got married and had completed seven years of education while her father had completed six years. Jameela started to look after her youngest brother Jamal after he was no longer being breast fed by her mother. Now that Jameela has stopped school she looks after Jamal full time. Jameela went to school till fifth grade, repeating third grade. When she had to repeat grade five she stopped school. Neither of her parents seemed to consider schooling to be of much use to Jameela. They did not provide any form of support for her schooling, but neither did they actively prevent her from attending, except that Jameela's mother made it almost impossible for Jameela to do her homework.[36] Jameela herself showed indifference towards school. She identified the school more than having to look after Jamal as the reason why she stopped school. Jameela said that she'd had enough of school and did not want to repeat fifth grade, blaming the teacher for making her fail. She explained that repeating the grade would make no difference as the teacher would fail her again. The teacher

knew Jameela's home situation and did not expect her to do well. She indicated that the responsibility of taking care of Jamal took too much of Jameela's time for her to do well in school.

Both of Jameela's parents had several years of schooling, and the family does not have a lack of income although they do live in very poor housing (a key informant explained that Jameela's parents spend quite a large amount of money on *qat* every day). Although identified worldwide as common, in my research Jameela was the only girl who spent time looking after younger siblings. This points out the risk of generalizing and stereotyping girls' situations, and the need to explore variations in individual cases. Jameela's story does illustrate that having to look after a younger sibling full time exerts heavy pressure to stop school. But Jameela's situation is much more complicated, involving other factors, including how the household is managed. Jameela's situation is uncommon with respect to her mother not seeming to take responsibility for the household, and it indicates a breakdown of family members' roles. Jameela's story also highlights the importance of timing; when Jameela's mother decided to stop breast feeding and handed responsibility for Jamal over to Jameela in the afternoons, it was also the time that her father was at home more often. He had retired from the army. Instead of being home a few days every three months, he was now home every day which meant that the rest of the family had to leave the house in the afternoons while he chewed *qat* there with other men. Jameela's mother went to the homes of other women in the afternoons and did not take her children along.[37] Jameela's stopping school also coincided with her reaching puberty. This too may have influenced the 'acceptability' or even desirability for Jameela to spend more time doing housework and child care to be better prepared to be married in the future.

The many siblings of the children who stopped school show a mix of schooling statuses as well as a mix of school performance (measured by repetition rates) (Table 3.9).[38]

Table 3.9
Schooling outcomes siblings of children who stopped school

Siblings (N=166) (94 brothers, 72 sisters)	Boys who stopped school (N=10)	Girls who stopped school (N=20)	Boys and girls who stopped school (N=30)
Brothers repeating grades	9	18	27
Sisters repeating grades	6	5	11
Total siblings repeating grades	15	23	38

Source: Compiled by author from in-depth interviews of children who had stopped school.

The children interviewed had 166 siblings, of which 38 siblings or 23 per cent reported having repeated a grade. Children who stop school seem to have a particularly lot of brothers who repeat grades. Girls who stopped school had more than three times as many brothers as sisters who repeated grades. Al Qudsi (2003) found for Yemen that when brothers have good schooling outcomes, girls in the family also do well (in terms of grade completion). Thus the tendency for girls who stop school to have brothers who repeat grades could correspond with a finding opposite to that of Al Qudsi (2003). This however is challenged by the stories of the boys who had stopped school, some of whom had sisters who completed many more grades than their brothers. Overall, grade repetition by 23 per cent of the siblings is somewhat higher than the results from the household survey, which found a grade repetition rate of 18 per cent for all children (including siblings). School performance in terms of repetition of one sibling therefore does not predict schooling outcomes for all children in the household. This is reflected in the story of Reem, whose siblings share responsibilities at home, and influence each other's motivation for school.

Girl 16 years old
Reem lives with her parents and her three siblings in a one-room house in a small village on the edge of the district centre. Reem's older sister completed twelve grades of schooling, her older brother completed nine years, and the youngest brother never went to school as the mother claimed that he had something wrong with his hand and could not go to school. Reem's father completed three years, while her mother had no schooling. Her father was semi-retired from the army and was called for service a few

times a year while having a small pension. When we arrived at their house, all were outside. Reem's sister was doing the washing while her mother was talking to a neighbour, with Reem sitting next to the women, talking to her sister. We talked to Reem about her schooling. Her sister slipped a comment in every now and then.

LM: Reem, can you tell us a little bit about why you stopped school?

Reem: Uhh, I had enough.

Sister: Much better! What is the point of spending twelve years going to school, like me!

Reem: (Smiling) School was easier for my sister. She is smarter than I am.

Sister: I had to struggle too! But I wasted my time!

Reem's mother and the neighbour were smiling at her while Reem's sister complained. Reem had completed six grades, repeating grades one and three. She stopped school in the second semester of grade seven. Now that she had stopped school, Reem gets up at 9.00 AM and has breakfast (prepared by her sister who gets up at 7.00 AM). Then she goes down to the valley to look for firewood and fodder for the animals that are roaming around the house – they do not herd the animals. She has lunch at 12.00 PM and then helps with the washing up. Her sister helps her mother in the morning with breakfast, clearing the house and lunch. At 4.00 PM they all go to visit other women or they receive visitors, while the men join their own gatherings. Her brothers gather in small peer groups. At night they have a light dinner at 8.00 PM, they sit together with the family and Reem goes to bed at 11.00 PM.

Reem's older brother and sister both completed basic schooling, with her sister completing twelve grades. Reem and her siblings share responsibilities at home. Although it is uncommon, Reem's story illustrates that girls who stop school can be involved in activities that are not housebound.[39] When still in school, Reem did not go with her aunt to collect firewood, but helped her mother at home before school time. Thus, stopping school may result in more 'work' activities (rather than chores), but it does not suggest that 'work'-type activities cause children to stop school. The sharing of responsibilities at home was very relaxed. Reem could stay in bed while her sister prepared breakfast. Reem's mother laughed when I asked about this and said jokingly that Reem is a little lazy. She does not like to get out of bed early and goes to bed late. Reem's story also illustrates that it is possible to have very different schooling outcomes for siblings within the same family. It further highlights that the influence of older siblings who did complete school can be

negative. Reem's sister showed frustration at having completed twelve grades of schooling without, in her eyes, any benefit. She seems to have been very motivated to complete her schooling, but whatever motivated her to complete her schooling did not materialize for her. When asked why she did complete twelve years of schooling, she shrugged and said that this was what was done and people told her that she could become a doctor, but that now things have changed. Another exceptional thing was that Reem had stopped school at the start of the second semester, while most children stop at the start of the first semester (i.e. they do not return to school following the summer break). Reem did repeat grades, but mainly early on, which may have indicated to Reem and others that she is 'not clever' and is better off not continuing her schooling. Being identified as 'not clever' and having a sister who was somewhat negative about her schooling did not seem to support Reem in trying to complete basic schooling.

3.4.5 Peer pressure

In addition to fathers, mothers and siblings, peers and friends from outside the household play a role in a child's decision to stop school. Peer pressure to stop school was particularly mentioned by children interviewed in the groups. Peer pressure was less identified by the children who had stopped school themselves, although in many of the in-depth interviews, a role for peers could be identified (such as in the earlier story of Jihan). Peer pressure to stop school appears to be important if there are other pressures as well, or an additional absence of support. Peer pressure plays a key role too at the time of transition to adulthood when friends play increasingly important roles in the lives of children.

Children interviewed in the groups said that they had also felt pressure to stop school from children who had stopped school. They said that the girls and boys who had stopped school were clever to pressure others to stop school, and that this pressure was hard to resist. At the same time, the children in the groups said that such pressure was linked to the children who had stopped school being jealous of those who continued their schooling (them). This indicates an uneasy balance of feeling threatened and feeling superior. Boys were said to give in to the pressure because they are weak and do not take their schooling seriously. Girls give in because it is time to think about marriage, which is exciting. The children who stopped school were perceived as already moving towards

adulthood while those still in school were portrayed as 'childish and not cool'. Peer pressure aims at convincing other children to 'grow up' and be part of the group that has moved on towards adulthood. Schooling is linked to prolonged childishness, not to the transition towards being an adult.

The groups also claimed that others, such as parents and siblings, were unable to provide support to counter peer pressure. Children, they said, were 'on their own' in resisting the peer pressure. The story of Ali illustrates the difficulty of resisting pressure from friends as well as that friends can be strategic in who they pressure to stop school.

> <u>Boy 15 years old</u>
> Ali was chewing *qat* with a group of friends at the market when we approached him. He agreed to leave his friends to speak with us in an empty shop nearby. In our company he was nervous, giggly and not very serious. His friends kept coming in to 'have a look'. As soon as any of his friends were there he stopped talking. His friends were making fun of him for being important and being interviewed about school. They slapped him on the back and told him that he had done the right thing. 'You see now you are even being interviewed because you left school', said one of his friends. After a while his friends left him alone and we were able to speak with him without more interruptions. Ali had completed sixth grade and tried grade seven twice. He did not even check his last exam results as he had decided over the holidays following the exams that he'd had enough. He joined his friends who had all stopped school the year before and now spent time with them at the market.
> A: I stopped school because while in school I did not spend much time in school; often my friends convinced me to join them at the market, trying to earn some qat for the afternoons. My father sells qat so I have good access to qat.
> A: I feel I wasted my time staying in school that extra year while they spent their time having fun at the market. I wish I had done the same.
> When we talked to Ali's mother, she was not aware of the peer pressure and said that her son had stopped school because he is 'not clever' and had enough of school.

Ali's story illustrates that pressure from peers can be linked to group solidarity. In Ali's case, his friends used pressure to get Ali to obtain *qat* through his father. Chewing *qat* is part of adulthood and is often started in adolescence. Most men chew *qat*. Among women, *qat* chewing is also

on the increase especially in the cities (Al Zalab 2000). Very few children who attend school also chew *qat*. This is another indicator of schooling being viewed as part of childhood; when one chews *qat* one is no longer in school and therefore no longer a child. Although he resisted pressure to stop school following his failure to pass grade seven, Ali was not motivated to make much effort in school. This was not helped by Ali's frequent absences from school, under pressure from his friends, sometimes for weeks on end as the teacher informed us. In Ali's case, pressure from peers to stop school was especially present at the time of transition to adulthood. This is the time that activities other than school become more important, including socializing with friends, which in Yemen is an important source of possible employment and thus income. A recent study showed that young men who chew *qat* with others on a regular basis are more likely to obtain employment than those who do not (Amer et al. 2008). Similarly, for girls, socializing is very important for marriage prospects, as women at social gatherings look for potential brides for their sons (Meneley 1996, Makhlouf 1979). Children do not link schooling to their future and they see schooling as something that is part of childhood. The need to socialize becomes more important than attending school when they start to seriously took towards their future. Participation in social networks and access to the opportunities they may bring for work or marriage may be only temporary. Chances may pass them by if they stay in school.[40] Pressure to stop school is most 'successful' at the time of adolescence as children become 'ready' to move towards adulthood and to stop school.

In conclusion, although factors identified in the literature were also found in my research, and at times they did indicate a higher likelihood of stopping school, they do not fully explain inequalities in stopping school. My research suggests that factors related to pressure to stop school and the absence of support to continue school play the more important role in understanding stopping school. Pressure to stop and the lack of support to continue are strongly linked with the role of group/family solidarity in social reproduction of society. But they are not the same for all children in the same family. The increased importance of social reproduction and therefore of group/family solidarity during the transition towards adulthood increases the likelihood that children will stop school during this phase. Group/family solidarity and

the social reproduction of society are important for boys as well as girls and for all status groups.

3. 5   Conclusion

This chapter discussed and explored inequalities in school completion. It showed that inequalities cannot be understood by gender and status alone, due to intra-household differences in schooling outcomes. In households from all status groups we found boys and girls who had completed school, children who had never been to school and children who had stopped school. Inequalities in school completion outcomes by status and gender reflect the rigid gender and status segregation of Yemeni society. Gender inequalities can be explained by the mismatch between what people expect from the schooling system as part of education (child rearing) and what they experience in the schooling system. Schooling is perceived as the same for boys and girls and is not viewed as providing for the learning of gender roles and the social reproduction of society. Yet these are the aspects that are especially important at the time of transition to adulthood, when children tend to stop school. Status inequalities are linked to schooling and power, with schooling seen by the higher status groups as a useful tool for staying in power. Thus, schooling is related more to the continuation of a power position than to employment. Even though the government claims, as in other countries, that it is addressing inequalities through mass schooling, in practice schooling is not perceived as being able to affect divisions in society. In fact, it is more likely to reinforce these inequalities.

   Individuals' reasons for stopping school are complex. Stopping school is influenced by a range of factors that can be identified as either pressure to stop school or an absence of support for continuing school. Both the pressure to stop and the absence of support to continue from within the household and from peers can be explained by the relationship between the household and its members and the role of family/group solidarity in reproduction of society. Group/family solidarity and the social reproduction of society cut across gender and status lines and play an important role in decisions to stop school. Within the household, two forms of social positioning can be identified: social positioning of the father *vis-à-vis* other adults in the community (public sphere) and the social positioning of the mother *vis-à-vis* other adults in the immediate community (private sphere). The structure of the school

also plays a key role in stopping school. This role is explored in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] As the sample targeted children who had stopped school, there may be an underrepresentation of households where no children are going to school (though at least the child who had stopped school had been to school). During my stay no households with children of school age were found where no children were going to school.

[2] The households show higher overall school enrolment and possibly school completion rates in comparison to national data.

[3] The North was never fully under occupation but the Ottoman Turks had control over certain areas. South Yemen was occupied till 1967 by the United Kingdom.

[4] Due to Egypt's interference especially in Northern Yemen in the 1960s, as well as the presence of large numbers of Egyptian teachers in Yemen, Yemen's schooling system shows similarities with the Egyptian system which is why it is discussed in more detail.

[5] The systems have been discussed by several writers for the Yemeni highlands (Stephenson 1985, Weir 2007, Swagman 1988, Dresch 1989, 1984, Gerholm 1977, Caton 2006), as well as for the South (Lackner 1985, Ho 2006, Bujra 1971). De Regt (2007) and Meneley (1996) describe it for the *Tehama* (Red Sea coastal area part of the North). See also Khalaf (2000) for nomadic societies.

[6] In the more rural areas supervision is done by people from the North. At present, this creates a lot of tension due to the flaring up of the call for separation of North and South.

[7] The ability to trace your family was identified as an indicator of social standing especially by those people who claim positions of power, such as the *Saa'da* based on being a descendent from the Prophet. The *Qabili* trace their linage to one of the big tribes to justify their position as arm-bearers and protectors.

[8] The *Akhdam* (servants) are often identified as descendants of Ethiopians who occupied Yemen in the past. *'Abid* (slaves) are dark-skinned people who are believed to be descendants of African slaves. Both are identified at the lowest social levels and are also unable to trace their lineage.

[9] The distinction relates less to manual or non-manual categories, but more to, for example, contact with bodily fluids, such as a butcher.

[10] *Akhdam* or servants are the lowest social status group as well as a separate ethnic group in Yemen

[11] *Saa'da* or descendants from the Prophet are the highest social status group as well as an ethnic group in Yemen

[12] In the past, *Akhdam* were commonly the servants of the richer families, such as the *Saa'da*. They lived with the employee's family, sometimes for generations.

[13] One girl, Fatima, reported that because she had no uniform she could no longer attend school, but she said that she did want to continue school.

[14] Female-headed households are very rare as a man from the extended family is often found to take on this role.

[15] This analysis is based on the assumption that demand and supply issues are weighted against each other in household decisions on school utilization. Supply-side factors are identified in the report as provision of schools, distance to school, insecurity on the way, conditions in school, arriving hungry at school, unfavourable teaching practices and availability of female teachers. Demand-side factors include the need for household labour for water collection, looking after animals and fuel collection; economic constraints due to direct and indirect costs of schooling; attitudinal reasons (no interest in schooling, a few grades is enough); age (children entering too late and completing prematurely due to safety issues in going to school). Interventions focus on both demand and supply factors to increase school enrolment and reduce drop-out rates (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 41-42).

[16] 12% of all parents either did not answer the question or answered 'I don't know' and were removed from analysis; the remaining 618 parents gave 1384 responses to the question.

[17] More parents replied for girls: 634 parents answered the question for girls with 1686 responses.

[18] Unfortunately the data could not be segregated by fathers and mothers.

[19] These parents of children who had stopped school were asked to identify the main reason for stopping school of their child. Only one answer was therefore recorded in the survey questionnaire. The possible answers of the parents in the survey question was based on questions used in earlier surveys among refugee and Yemeni children in another southern governorate of Yemen, as well as piloted before implementation of the survey.

[20] It is estimated by the World Bank (2009) that a household spent 2,600 YR (200 YR = 1$US) per year on a child who attended basic education in Yemen. This does not include the school fee of 150 YR which was abolished in 2006 for girls in the first six grades and for boys in the first three grades (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 42). Based on average household incomes of US$870 per capita (for 2007) the amount spent on basic schooling is not much. But as the majority of households earn less than this amount (35 per cent of households are estimat-

ed to be below the food poverty line) expenditure may play a role (World Bank and MoPIC 2010: 40–43).

[21] Skilled labour was often provided by better schooled Arabs, such as Palestinians.

[22] During the first Gulf War an estimated one million Yemenis returned to Yemen as Yemen supported Iraq.

[23] Key informants did say that there were several families with family members abroad and that these families tend to be the economically well off. It may be important to note that those families that had direct family members abroad may not have had children who stopped school in the last two to three years and that the extra income or the status attached to living abroad could have impacted children's school completion. The number of families abroad at present is small and they were not included in the research, so no conclusions on this can be drawn.

[24] Analysis did not include age of the child – however as the majority of children who stopped school are of the age group above ten years, one can assume that the reasons most identified are given by children over 10 years old.

[25] Children in my research did not mainly stop school in the first grades, as is the case nationally. So the reasoning used may be more relevant in explaining stopping school in the later grades.

[26] The children in the group discussions tended to focus on stopping school of other children their own age (10–16). This may be because the children who participated in the group discussions identify more easily with their own age group, but it also means that younger children were not included in their reasoning for stopping school.

[27] Pressures in relation to teachers are discussed in Chapter 4.

[28] *Akhdam* are the ethnic group that is identified as the lowest social status group.

[29] Individual performances is often identified by teachers as a reason for stopping school. This is criticized, however, due to the high number of grade repeaters in Yemen. The performance of individual children in international tests is low but the quality of the teaching is identified as the reason for low performance rather than the ability of the children.

[30] Most reported living in a house with both parents; 10 per cent of children lived in a house where the father was absent or deceased; 2.5 per cent of children lived in a household where his/her mother was absent or deceased; and 2.5 per cent of the children lived in household where both mother and father were absent or deceased, with no significant difference by gender.

[31] In the household survey, less than one per cent of the children included reported themselves to be married, an equal number of boys and girls. This does not support other findings from Yemen that indicate that at least a quarter of girls marry before the age of 15 (UNICEF 2004, 2005). This discrepancy in the findings of my research and others can be explained by the likelihood that those girls who married early and had stopped school were not included in my in-depth research or my household survey. The girls may have moved to another village upon marriage, while young newlyweds coming into the village were not included, as they are not considered daughters of the household, and are no longer girls, but women. I made an effort to find young married women in the village as especially the teachers claimed that girls in their school had stopped school because they got married. I did not succeed. The teachers and key informants were unable to identify these girls by name, though they could do so for almost all of other children who had stopped school.

[32] In the past, most girls who completed 12 years of schooling were expected to take one of the few respectable jobs available, becoming teachers in the newly established schools for girls.

[33] Najwa's father had a long-term conflict with the main school as his school was to have been a satellite school under the main school in the district centre. Najwa's father had decided to make it a proper school instead. This led to the conflict with the head teacher at the district centre school, as that teacher would have been supervising the satellite school.

[34] Living separately from the extended family was one of the conditions for Najwa's mother to marry her relative from the village to reinforce her status of being from the city (and therefore modern) and the demand to be the head of a nuclear family rather than joining the extended family. The mother's behaviour shows contradictory elements, which did not support her integration into the community.

[35] This mirrors research from rural Turkey that found that the presence of a conflict between the father and the school makes it likely that the girl stops school (Smits and Gunduz-Hosgor 2006).

[36] Jameela's unmarried aunt offered to look after Jamal so that Jameela could do her homework but Jameela did not want to take the offer, not explaining why.

[37] This is not uncommon. For example, at weddings women gather to chew *qat* and dance. Children other than those in the immediate family of the bride are not allowed. This is even indicated on the invitation.

[38] Repetition of children who stopped school and were interviewed in-depth is discussed in Chapter 4.

[39] They needed the wood for the traditional oven to make bread. Most people use gas or buy bread.

[40] See for more on the importance of networks in Muslim majority societies the edited volume of Cook and Lawrence (2005).

4 | Stopping school: the role of schooling

4.1   Introduction

> I like school... but the teacher doesn't want me to come to school and fails me on the exams because he does not like my family (Samia, 14 years old, field notes 2008).

In my research communities, children who had stopped school indicated that schooling and teaching practices played an important role in their decision to stop (Chapter 3). Nationwide, the lack of child-centred schooling and teaching practices was said to affect school completion rates (World Bank and MoPIC 2010). The Ministry of Education claims that it lacks the systems and resources to fully implement the child-centred curriculum that was introduced in 2000[1] (Ministry of Education 2010). Chapter 3 discussed stopping school in terms of family structures. It demonstrated that gender and status play important roles in explaining inequalities in schooling outcomes, but they did not explain intra-household differences.[2] Intra-household differences regarding schooling outcomes were associated with pressures on children to stop school linked to family/group solidarity and social positioning. Family/group solidarity for social positioning becomes more important as children grow older and is key at the time of transition to adulthood. This is also when most children stop school. In this period, the learning of the skills and behaviour needed for social reproduction is viewed as highly important, but as not being learned at school. The fact that school is not perceived as a place where children learn the skills and behaviours needed for social reproduction perhaps plays a passive role in decisions to stop school. Schooling is well known to reinforce social reproduction along gender and status lines. But could schooling also play an active role in determining schooling outcomes through discriminatory practices,

explaining intra-household differences in schooling outcomes? This chapter looks at schooling structures and their role in children's decision to stop school.

Mass schooling has been identified both as a place of discipline and a place of control (Foucault 1980). It is also a social space where children learn certain roles, such as gender roles, and learn what activities are done in which space (James et al. 1998). Schooling is often seen as a 'need' of children, but as Woodhead (1997/2004) has argued, the assumption of certain needs of children, including the need for schooling, can be challenged. Needs of children are often identified based on power relations between adults, including education experts and parents, in which children are seen as dependent and not playing a role (Woodhead 1997/2004: 77). Chapter 2 discussed the views of those who plan, implement and use the schooling system, highlighting differences between the three groups. These differences were explained more by the need of the groups to maintain their social position than by the needs of the children. In recent policy discourse, the need for schooling has been replaced by the right to education. The universal right to education however – at least as interpreted in terms of years of schooling – goes against the sociological argument that one cannot speak of one universal 'proper' childhood (James et al. 1998: 125). One universal and identical right to education for all children may therefore also be questioned, as it may not respond to multiple childhood realities. So far education development practice, using a rights-based approach, has seemed to indicate that the implementation of the right to education is no more than compulsory basic schooling based on a global model, linked to certain targets to be achieved by a certain time (Chapter 2).

This chapter explores contexts and reasons for stopping school by looking at practices at school and in the classroom. These practices are guided by what schools and teachers are required to do as identified in Ministry of Education policies. Chapter 2 discussed these policies in general, highlighting the influences of global education strategies, as well as the influential role of those who implement the policies, i.e. teachers. How teachers implement policies often depends on their views and attitudes, which in turn are influenced by the history of mass schooling and how a schooled person is defined in Yemen. The history of mass schooling in Yemen shows a range of influences including the North-South dynamic, the integration of the religious schooling system and the in-

creasingly important role of Islamists (Wedeen 2008, Starret 1998). There has also been significant donor pressure to adhere to global education strategies and an influence of international development theories, initially with a focus on economic growth and more recently centred on a rights-based approach.[3] These different influences have changed the idealistic purposes of schooling in Yemen over time. But implementation of the schooling system as a structure has stayed more or less the same. At present, a reading of official documents on the Yemeni schooling system shows that school completion has a dual idealistic purpose and sends a confusing message to those who do the implementation (Chapter 2). This chapter explores, in turn, Ministry of Education school policies and practices, as well as classroom practices, followed by a discussion of the role of both in stopping school.

4.2   School practices: including and excluding children

To understand practices within schools in Yemen, it is necessary to explore the implementation of Ministry of Education policies on school management and resource allocation. This provides insight into how teachers put the required policies into practice, besides teaching children the curriculum. In principle, school policies and resource allocation aim at the wider goals of schooling in Yemen, including school completion for all children. Though policies and resource allocation are dictated from the central level and heavily influenced by global EFA strategies, they can also be influenced at the level of the school. Most school policies and international support for Yemeni schools is similar to that found around the world as part of mass schooling systems and the global EFA strategy. Yet how these 'global' policies and resources are used at the school level is expected to reflect differences in views between those who implement and those who use the school system, as well as those who plan it at the national level, as discussed in Chapter 2.

4.2.1   School policies and their implementation

Documents on school policies are not always available or locatable in the offices of the Ministry of Education, and there is a general lack of documents in the schools. Reliance on verbal communication of policies over the years has resulted in some of the policies becoming tradition. Conversely, some traditions are believed to have become policy. This however has not resulted in wide differences between schools' implementation

of policies. Policies identified as affecting stopping school (either by my research or in the literature) are further explored here in terms of their practical implementation and their influence on children stopping school. One needs to keep in mind, however, that it is often difficult for outsiders to learn exactly how school policies are implemented and resources allocated. The school and its teachers may believe that I am checking on them, or that my observations are linked to an increase or decrease of resources. This is understandable because extra resources are often provided by international agencies.

Age of starting school

Official policy is to start school at six years of age. But due to the lack of reliable information on age in years (through, for example, birth registration), this is difficult to adhere to or to monitor. My observations suggest that teachers, like parents and children, do not consider age in years to be very important and they do not actively implement this policy. My research supports the general consensus that an early start in school results in a higher likelihood of completion. Boys start school earlier than girls, and among the children who were interviewed in-depth, boys were also more likely to re-join the school after a period of stopping school. This means that boys have more opportunities to remain in school and complete school than girls. Kareem's story illustrates that a child may be provided with several opportunities for schooling. He was 'allowed/ supported' to start late as well as 'allowed/supported' to come back to school later.

> Boy 17 years old
>
> Kareem is the oldest of a family of four boys. He started school late, at eight years of age. He attended for one year but then stopped a year later, starting again a year later in grade one, together with his younger brother. He repeated grade four and stopped school after grade six. He failed grade six and needed to repeat the grade. Kareem did not want to repeat grade six. He said he'd had enough schooling for what he wanted to do (helping his father in construction work and then trying to get into the army) and was ready to stop. Kareem's mother would like him to complete grade six, as he would receive a certificate. Kareem himself does not see the value of the certificate. Kareem stopped school last summer. At that time two of his friends were planning to stop as well. The idea was that all three of them would join the army. His two friends, however, were promoted to the next grade and did not stop school after all.

Kareem's story shows that it is possible to start late as well as to re-start and that schools can be flexible in this regard. Kareem was 17 years old and had not completed grade six when he finally stopped. There is no maximum age for re-starting school, but in practice children are unlikely to re-enter school, starting in grade one, after the onset of puberty. Kareem's family decided when Kareem would start and re-start school, with an important role played by Kareem's younger brother.[4] Teachers do not seem to play a role in starting school. They do not go around and tell parents to enrol their children because they have reached a certain age. They may say when a child enrols late that the child is late. But they do not refuse the child or explain why it is important to start early. There was no indication from Kareem that the school played any role in him stopping, other than that he would have had to repeat the grade. Kareem said that grade repetition had not affected his decision to stop school. In reality, it may have played a role as he was already the oldest in his class and repeating a grade would have put him in a class with even younger children. In addition, his two friends who had originally decided to stop school with him, did not have to repeat the grade. They changed their minds about stopping school. In my in-depth interviews there were no stories of girls who had re-started or re-joined school. There were two more stories of boys who had done so, both in the early grades, which may indicate a gender difference in which more flexibility is observed for boys in terms of age and starting and re-starting school.

School certificates

Kareem's mother was unusual in that she believed in the importance of the certificate following the sixth grade. Children receive certificates when they complete grade six and grade nine. Awarding these certificates can be identified as a school policy that is supportive of school completion, although it was not identified as a reason to stay in school by anyone other than Kareem's mother. In the past school certificates were a source of pride. They were framed and displayed in the home. Now the certificates of the parents are often found on the wall, but not certificates of the children. Kareem does not share the belief in the importance of the certificate. He thinks he has had enough schooling and that he is ready to stop school.

Grade repetition

There seems to be no official policy on grade repetition other than the automatic promotion of children in the first three grades. This was not being adhered to, as shown in Chapter 1. The unofficial policy, as explained by key informants,[5] is that teachers, in consultation with the head teacher, decide on grade promotion and grade repetition for each child individually. Exam results are important but can be overruled if the teacher thinks that they do not reflect the abilities of the child in class. There is no official maximum number of times that a grade can be repeated, and it is the teacher who decides that a child can no longer repeat a grade. Often, this is after having failed the same grade twice. At the national level, Yemen appears to have high repetition rates, with boys repeating more grades than girls, and girls performing better than boys on the international standardized tests (these realities are reflected in my field data as well, see Chapter 1). It is difficult to assess school performance as there is no system of required basic competencies by grade or standard tests. I therefore cannot draw conclusions in relation to test results or the learning of children and stopping school.

With regard to grade repetition, my research found that grade failure coincided with and played a role in the decision to stop for one-third of the children interviewed in-depth. Despite high repetition rates, repeating grades especially at a later age does not seem to be easily accepted by children. It was often identified as a reason to stop school. The unacceptability of repeating a grade seems to be closely linked to having reached adolescence. Three of the 10 children (all girls) whose stopping school coincided with grade repetition, said they did not want to repeat the grade because they were ashamed. The shameful aspect was being in a class with other, younger[6] children, not the failing itself. Most of the children who had to repeat a grade did acknowledge that they were not the best of students. But they were not ashamed of this and did not blame themselves for not having studied enough. They blamed the teacher for failing them. So it was not shameful to fail, but shameful to be put in a group in which they felt they did not belong. The story of Noura illustrates this aspect of grade repetition.

<u>Girl 14 years old</u>
Noura is the oldest at home. Her father is well schooled while her mother is not. Noura failed the grade-five exams and is quite adamant that she does not want to repeat the fifth grade. She feels that she is too old to re-

peat a grade. Other girls in her neighbourhood have also stopped school and she spends time with them – schooling is no longer part of their lives. They are doing things that are more or less linked to a future as a housewife. Her mother would like Noura to repeat the grade, as she claims that Noura can hardly read or write and is not ready to stop school. Noura does not want to repeat the grade. She says that it is embarrassing for her to be with younger girls in the class, and all her friends are in another class. Noura is part of a group of three girls who decided together that it was time to stop school. All failed the grade and had similar reasoning.

The story of Noura highlights the importance of the social aspect of school now, which was identified in the survey as well (Chapter 3). Noura and her friends are attached to the other children in their class. They do not like the idea of being in a different class. They see being in another class as socially unacceptable, partly because the others in the class are younger. Interviews with Noura's two friends showed that there was a definite pressure by the girls on each other not to give in and to stick to their decision not to go back to school, using the shame of grade repetition in their reasoning. The mothers of two of the girls would have preferred their daughters to repeat the grade, but they could not convince their daughters to do so.

It is interesting that Noura and her friends view grade repetition as shameful, because it is very common. Grade repetition in the early grades does not seem to be shameful or a reason to stop school (Noura had repeated second grade as well). But grade repetition during adolescence is linked with shame. The three girls felt shame at being with other, younger girls in a class rather than because they had failed the grade. The opposite seems to be true for stopping school, which is not seen as shameful, especially in adolescence.

There were five boys who had stopped school with reasons linked to having to repeat their grade. The boys, however, did not indicate shame as the reason for not repeating the grade. They mostly said that they were 'ready' to stop school and there was no point in repeating the grade.

Shame is very much between girls as individuals and linked to the context of the school rather than the family, unlike most other issues that are seen as shameful. This 'peer shame' for grade repetition is important to girls, perhaps due to society's expectation that girls be compliant with school rules, as they are expected to be with rules in society – all

the more so as they grow older. Girls are not expected to fail grades, as this is seen as going against the rules of the school. Stopping school may not be seen as going against the rules of the school, as the girl is no longer part of the school and therefore its rules. The school may create an environment in which it is shameful, especially for the older girls, to repeat grades. The threat of not being able to pass the grade and being 'shamed' by being put in a class with other, younger girls may then be used by teachers to 'motivate' girls to do better. I often heard this in practice. This message to the girls is that it is better to stop school than to repeat a grade. Girls' shame can therefore be explained as a result of school practices in addition to gender-based beliefs in society. Shame and gender-specific issues, such as girls' compliance, are closely linked with the process of social reproduction. The school, by using these methods of 'motivation', supports the reproduction and reinforcement of inequalities in society.

The three girls decided to stop school at the same time after failing their grade, and they supported each other in the decision. This was well known by the school, which blamed the girls. The teacher said that the girls, long-time friends, were pulling each other down in their school results as they did not pay attention in class, were often absent and were encouraging each other to stop school. The teacher gave no indication that she or other teachers had tried to prevent the girls from failing the grade or stopping school, or had made an effort to change the girls' minds when they did not return to school. The teacher's perception of repeating a grade was opposite that of the girls. She did not think that it was shameful for them to repeat the grade, but shameful for the girls to fail in school. The teacher was quite indifferent to grade repetition. She said that grade repetition was unavoidable, as the children who fail deserved to fail and needed to repeat the grade.

It is interesting to note that Noura's mother wanted Noura to continue her schooling. Her reason was that Noura did not yet know how to read and write and was not 'ready' to stop school. This indicates that Noura's mother had a certain expectation of the school and a different concept of readiness than that discussed earlier. She linked readiness to learning rather than the child as an individual. She did not seem to link a particular number of grades with being able to read and write, but did link readiness to stop school with a specific purpose or function of the school. This attitude was rare in my study. Noura just shrugged when we

asked her about her reading and writing skills. She seemed unconcerned about it. Noura's story also illustrates the role of peer pressure from children who are in school and not just from those who have already stopped school.

Teacher absenteeism

The Ministry of Education has a general policy allowing its employees to be absent for three days without a sick note. If a sick note signed by a doctor is available then teachers can be off on sick leave for one month. If the sickness is such that it is long term, then a teacher can be put on early retirement. All other days off are the schools' formal closing days, which are announced by the Ministry of Education. Teachers cannot take time off outside of the official school holidays. However, in practice there is a lot of flexibility in being present or absent. For example it is no problem to get teachers to participate in training, even on short notice, even though they would be absent from class. Our spot check in the 35 schools found only 5–6 per cent of teachers absent, which is quite low in comparison to a 2006 national spot check which found that 19 per cent of teachers were absent on a day in April, raising the issue of ghost teachers (Ministry of Education 2007a, World Bank and MoPIC 2010). One caveat is called for in relation to my finding: The schools in my in-depth study had many teachers from the local communities. It is possible that when they were found absent at the time of the spot check, they may not have been reported as absent as they were 'nearby'. In my household survey, more than half of the children reported that their teacher was 'very often'[7] absent, with similar results for parents. Absenteeism of teachers was especially identified by urban children and their parents, which suggests inequality by location.[8] In practice however, as teacher-student ratios are very low (see Chapter 1), another teacher is often available to take the class of a teacher who is absent. So teacher absenteeism does not necessarily lead to missed classes. In addition, classroom teachers[9] are not common,[10] so absenteeism of teachers does not result in no schooling for the day; it mainly affects certain lessons. I did observe that especially when the teacher for the second lesson is absent, a number of children leave the school, especially boys, and do not come back. In one of the schools studied, the head teacher was often late and most teachers did not start their lessons until the head teacher had arrived.

Absenteeism is defined in different ways at different times, and may be influenced by events. Children and teachers often see absence following a social event such as a public holiday as acceptable or legitimate. It may therefore not be identified as absenteeism. Participation in social events is an important family group requirement; it is often judged to be more important than the individual requirement to be in school. Very few children, parents or teachers think that crucial lessons are missed because of attendance at social events. My observations at a school a few days following *Eid*[11] clearly indicated that things had slowed down.

> Field notes 06-12-2009
> I arrived at the school at 7.45 AM with the head teacher. Girls were standing around but I could not see any of the other teachers.
> LM: Where are the teachers?
> HT: You know… it has been *Eid*, students and teachers will come a little later.
> LM: But wasn't the official holiday of *Eid* completed five days ago?
> HT: (Smiling) Yeah...
> By 8.30 AM more children had arrived, as well as three teachers. None of the classes had started. At 9.00 AM some children had organized the students in rows for the assembly. By now, five teachers had arrived and were sitting in the teacher's room, exchanging *Eid* stories. The assembly never took place and at 9.30 AM the head teacher told the teachers present to start their classes. The teachers went to their classes and the children were also told to go to their classes. Most classes were half full and without a teacher. The children continued their chatting. The following day the situation improved a little, with more teachers and children arriving on time, the assembly taking place and the start of the second session on time. Several of the teachers and children who did come, also left early on those days immediately following *Eid*. The situation improved over the next days with on the fourth day a situation which seemed normal.

This observation illustrates the relaxed atmosphere regarding school discipline around social events such as *Eid*. Social commitments, as part of social reproduction, seem to be considered more important than school, for teachers as well as for children.

Outside of these events, key informants explained that individual teacher absenteeism is common because male teachers have low wages and therefore need to have other jobs. They also linked low wages with low job motivation and said that teachers may prioritize other jobs over

their job as teacher. My observations, however, did not confirm that male teachers often had additional jobs, especially not in the rural areas as jobs are limited and the jobs that are available would require one's presence during school hours, in the mornings. In the urban areas, it is possible to have a part-time job in the afternoon after school, such as in a shop. However, I did not observe male teachers taking additional jobs for income. I did observe them doing additional activities, often seen as acceptable, while they were supposed to be teaching. Because teachers are among the most highly educated members of the extended family they are often required to follow up 'official' family business. Because of their high status within the family, teachers also need to be present for various social events, including family problem solving. Male teachers also have traditional household tasks such as shopping, which is best done in the mornings when the markets are open.

There seems to be less reason for female teachers to do other tasks during school time, although they do have additional household duties for special events or visitors. This reasoning does not explain the lack of gender difference in teacher absenteeism, as male teachers appeared to have more reasons to be absent than female teachers. Teachers who worked in their home village, both male and female, were more likely to be absent as their homes tended to be near the school and it was easy for them to disappear during school hours to go home to do something, and then fail to return. Officially teachers have to report when and why they are absent. This has been made possible by the spread of the mobile phone. However, in practice this seldom happens. While I was at the schools none of the absent or late teachers had informed the head teacher in advance. Rather, they explained their absence after their return to school.

Children's absenteeism

Children's persistent absenteeism can be the prelude to stopping school. A key informant told me that official policy allows a child to be absent for 15 days without any special reason. If the child is reported to be sick by a physician, the child is allowed to be absent for more time. No maximum seems to have been identified. On average about 9 per cent of students were absent during a spot check of the 35 schools included in my survey. One-third of the children in the household survey reported that they were sometimes absent. More than half said they were seldom

absent from school. Regarding their reasons for being absent, most children surveyed said that they had been sick. Less, but still almost one-quarter of respondents, reported being absent because they were needed at home, because the school was closed or because the teacher was absent. Absenteeism did precede stopping school for 4 of the 30 children I interviewed in-depth. One had joined friends, two had been sick and one did not want to go to school. My survey and in-depth interview results do not suggest any gender differentiation in absenteeism. However, Dorsky et al. (1995: 316) found girls to be absent more in Yemen, because girls tended to attend the second shift and were needed at home for afternoon visits, women's gatherings and social events. Now, second shifts are no longer seen as interfering with afternoon social activities.[12] My finding of no gender difference in absenteeism raises questions about the relevance of girls' issues in absenteeism, such as menstruation and the need for girls' latrines. This is further discussed later in relation to resources (Alim et al. 2007).

Two girls interviewed in-depth were absent for reasons related to sickness. The story of Aisha shows that illness can result in long-term absenteeism and eventually to a child stopping school.

<u>Girl 8 years old</u>
Aisha was on the list of children identified by the head teacher as having stopped school. The head teacher explained that Aisha had been absent for too long and could not come back to school. Aisha is the youngest girl in a large family. She started school when she was six years old. When she was five she developed a skin disease that produced a discolouring of the skin of her hands and feet. It healed well and she re-joined school. At the end of the first year the disease came back and caused her to be absent for several weeks. At the start of the new school year Aisha did not return to school. Aisha does not feel sick and the disease is not contagious. But Aisha says that she is embarrassed about the disease and does not want to go to school. She spends her days playing with her younger nieces and nephews who are at home. She enjoys this. Her mother, who is a teacher at the same school, did not encourage her to go to school, and said that Aisha could not go as she was sick. Aisha's mother denied that Aisha had stopped school, saying that she would return to school next year when the disease was gone. Aisha had no notion of having stopped school. She considered herself absent from school. We did not observe any skin disease on Aisha's hands or feet when talking to her.

The story of Aisha illustrates that something relatively small, such as embarrassment about a discolouration of the skin on a child's hands, can result in long-term absenteeism and, in turn, stopping school. Aisha's skin disease seemed to be a source of embarrassment more for her mother than for Aisha herself. My conversation with the teacher bears out how tensions between the mother and teacher can reinforce absenteeism and stopping school.

> Field notes 10-12-2009
> T: Aisha should be in school. There is nothing wrong with her.
> LM: Isn't she sick?
> T: Yes, she has something on her skin, but it is nothing. It is Aisha's mother who prevents her from coming to school. And she is a teacher!
> LM: Why do you think that Aisha's mother does not want Aisha to come to school?
> T: Aisha's mother is silly; she wants her daughter to be beautiful and she does not want anyone to know that she has a skin disease. She may think that Aisha will not get a husband! (laughs) The child is only in first grade!
> LM: Can Aisha come back to school later when she is better?
> T: Ask her mother! She is the one who prevents her from coming to school! But I think that Aisha should not be allowed to come back. She has missed too much and her mother should understand that she cannot just decide to keep Aisha at home for a small thing. She is a teacher! How can she be a good teacher if she does not even allow her own child to come to school?

Aisha's story and the above conversation demonstrate the teacher using Aisha to enforce social reproduction and her own social position, similar to what we saw among parents. The teacher sees Aisha's mother as failing to fulfil the expectations of teachers. The teacher expects Aisha's mother as a teacher to support schooling and to be an example for others. Absenteeism and stopping school is not a good example. The teacher seems to want to 'teach the mother a lesson' by not allowing Aisha to come back to school, bypassing the interests of the child. Aisha's mother is unconcerned about Aisha being absent, as she seems to think that it is temporary. Neither her mother nor the teacher have identified alternative ways for Aisha to continue her schooling, temporarily from home for example. Aisha's mother is not responding well to 'her lesson', as the image of the family is more important to her than her position as a

teacher. This behaviour of the mother through the child opposes and may be a threat to the teacher.

The conversation below with the teacher of Abdullah, another child who is frequently absent but not because of an illness, illustrates that teachers can take a different view of absenteeism.

<u>Field notes 24-11-2009</u>
T: Abdullah may come back to school, or he may not. He is from the *Akhdam* and you never know if they come to school or not. Anyway, it would be better for him not to continue. There is no point, and he is too old for his grade now. He is 14 and still in grade two.

The teacher seems to consider it acceptable for Abdullah, a boy from the lowest status group, to be absent for an extended period of time, but only because he expects Abdullah will not come back or stop school anyway. For the girl from the higher status group (Aisha), absenteeism is not acceptable, at least according to the teacher. These teachers demonstrate the different expectations regarding schooling for children from different status groups. Abdullah's frequent absenteeism is expected, as well as the fact that he will stop school soon. *Akhdam* children and their families are presumed not to take schooling seriously. The opposite holds for Aisha. Her mother is educated and a teacher at the school. She should know better and not allow her child to be absent. So the rules are applied more strictly to her. The teacher tried to use solidarity among the social status group of teachers to convince Aisha's mother to put her daughter back in school and therefore to strengthen her own position as a teacher. When this had no effect, the teacher 'punished' Aisha's mother by deciding that Aisha could not come back to school, thus shaming Aisha's mother as a teacher whose child has hardly been to school. In contrast, in the case of Abdullah, no efforts were made because the teacher had no social link with Abdullah's family and therefore did not need their solidarity.

Student attendance registration

Closely linked to absenteeism is student attendance registration. Although student registration data are rarely compiled, teachers are required to use the class ledger to document children's attendance in their class. The teachers' survey results found that 41 per cent of teachers registered attendance. There was variation by school type: 76 per cent of teachers

in boys-only schools registered attendance, compared to 50 per cent of teachers in the girls-only schools and 47 per cent of teachers in the co-ed schools. That student registration is more observed in boys-only schools may indicate that registration is seen as more important for boys, which could reflect gendered expectations in society. As discussed earlier, society may expect boys to need more disciplining, while girls are expected to be more compliant and follow the rules. Gendered expectations may therefore influence how policies linked to disciplining students are implemented. This does not explain the results for the co-ed school, however. Another explanation may be that numbers of children in co-ed and girls-only schools are sensitive because resources are often provided based on enrolment figures. Enrolment figures may have been inflated to obtain more resources. By not registering attendance on the day of the survey (carried out by surveyors linked to an international agency), the schools avoided their numbers being checked.

School assemblies

It is Ministry of Education policy to hold a daily school assembly following a standard format. The aim of the assembly is to organize the children at the start of the school day, but also to reinforce support for the state. My observations of school assemblies in two schools reflect the atmosphere of the events, as well as aspects of the hidden curriculum in these schools. Most of my observations confirmed earlier suggestions that schools are very laissez faire in implementing policies, and that there are gender and status differences. Nonetheless, the assemblies highlight the importance of politics in schooling.

09-12-2009 School assembly

The boys' assembly takes place in the school yard. Boys stand in rows based on their grade. Students from grade one and two are mostly there and in line while students from other grades do not seem to be all there, are not standing in line and are doing other things. A small group of boys is playing football, while others are sitting on the steps of the school selling foods that they have brought from home, surrounded by a number of boys who are buying their breakfast.

One teacher has assembly duty. He has a small stick and every now and then hits one of the boys to encourage him to join the line. Four boys – members of the student council – stand in front with a handheld (battery operated) megaphone. They start with physical exercise. One boy does a

series of exercises in standing position while the rest repeats it. The boy with the megaphone counts the number of times for each exercise. This is followed by some *Quran* verses by a boy who has the right voice for this and knows *Quranic* verses by heart (he is not a student council member). This is followed by the shouting of slogans showing alliance to the Republic and to *Allah*. By that time almost all boys have joined the assembly.

Then the boys are guided into the school building by grade, starting from the first grade. As soon as the grade group reaches the stairs the boys run up the stairs in a disorderly but fun way to their classrooms. By that time half of the teachers have arrived and sit in the teachers' room. About ten minutes later the teachers also go to the classrooms.

The girls' assembly starts at the school next door 15 minutes later. Older women from the village are selling breakfast snacks in the schoolyard. They seem very familiar with the school and are the ones who tell the girls to start the assembly. The assembly follows a similar routine as the boys', but there is much more competition about who gets to stand in front. While observing the pushing and yelling, it was unclear what system if any was followed. It seemed that in one row the girls had to be lined up in order of height, while in other rows, the girls seemed to be lined up in order of level in the class. A few assertive girls in each of the lines decided this, and led a process that was full of conflict.

Three girls from the student council stood on the steps at the school entrance and tried to organize the girls, all yelling at the same time. They had no megaphone and nobody seemed to take any notice. All of the girls were in or near the assembly, but there did not seem to be a teacher with assembly duty. While the pushing and yelling continued, one girl climbed the steps to the front of the assembly and jumped to take the first position in the line. Her jumping to the front took the others by surprise. She fell against the first girl, and the whole line of girls fell like a row of dominos. The rest of the girls laughed, including some of the girls on the ground, but not all; some girls looked angry. The assembly continued to be a fight with angry faces and quick pinches during the event.

Throughout the observation, no teachers interfered. At times one of the older women selling snacks yelled to the girls to stop. But the girls took no notice.

The above school assembly observations point to gender differences in how the assembly is organized and implemented. Apparently, orderly school assemblies are more important for boys than for girls. Girls are expected to organize the assembly themselves, as no teacher had assem-

bly duty. For boys, the rules for the assembly are enforced both by the onlooking teacher and with the megaphone. School assemblies are important to convey national messages, with a focus on national unity.[13] At the time of these observations there was a strong movement in support of separation of North and South Yemen. As the assembly is loud enough for most of the community to hear, it can also be used to send a political message from the school to the community. Doing the school assembly well sends a message of support to the state; not allowing the assembly to go well sends a message of support for separation.[14] The differences in implementation of the assembly by gender may reflect gender roles in society. Girls are expected to discipline themselves, especially as adolescents. Boys need to be disciplined by others. Or perhaps the assembly is so politicized that it is more important for them to go well with the boys, as politics is considered men's concern. Thus, both the implementation and the importance attached to the assemblies reflect aspects of social reproduction, especially in terms of gender.

There are other regulations that do not support school completion of all children, such as the praising of schools for high scores in exams rather than high enrolments or high school completion figures (see also Chapter 2). Schools often do not know the enrolment or completion rates in their school and community, because these rates are calculated at the central level. But they are required to report exam results at the school level. Overall a lack of concern and knowledge was observed about rates of school enrolment and completion.

4.2.2 Resources

Human and material resources for schooling are often used to motivate schools, and children, to improve school enrolment and school completion. However, discriminatory practices in the allocation of resources between schools or between children may cause resentment. As discussed earlier, the 35 schools in my research area were generally relatively well resourced. The schools had a high number of female teachers,[15] adequate school buildings, and textbooks and desks for most children. Some of the schools had received additional resources through projects.[16] Nationwide, student-teacher ratios are reasonable. This was reflected in the schools included in my research as well, both in terms of numbers (see Chapter 1) as well as actual presence in the classroom (see teacher absenteeism). Yet the Ministry of Education often complains

that it has insufficient human resources, especially teachers, and there are assumptions of a large number of 'ghost teachers'[17] within the Ministry of Education system.

Regarding material resources, functional hygiene facilities[18] are often identified as important for girls' schooling, especially after the onset of menstruation. All 35 schools had a lack of toilets (see Chapter 1). This corresponds to a gender inequality, as girls have more need for toilets than boys. The head teacher at the girls' school studied in-depth mentioned the lack of toilets, and I observed its impact on girls.

> Field notes 09-12-2009
> I observed a fifth grade girls' class before the break and continued to observe the same class after the break. During the break, I went up to the roof to look at the water tank, which was empty and had never worked. From the roof I looked down on the schoolyard where girls lingered in groups on the small playground. Some were sitting on stones in the shade of the old buildings, while other girls went to the playground of the boys' school next door. I could also see several girls disappearing into the distance. I asked the teacher who was with me if classes were finished or if we were in a break. The teacher answered that it was break time. I then inquired about the girls disappearing between the houses. She answered that these girls went home to use the toilet or eat. When I got back down and entered the same fifth grade, I noticed that several girls were missing, especially those who had been sitting in the back rows. The teacher, who was different from the one before the break, did not seem to notice.

Access to toilets can affect adolescent girls' school attendance, although menstruation was not identified as a reason for being absent, and boys were also observed to disappear midway through the school day. The inequality in access to hygiene facilities (facilities are equally inaccessible for boys and girls, but girls need them more) is not reflected in access to other resources within the school.

I observed the girls' schools to be the best resourced, or at least their resources were the best managed. The girls' school had student and teacher desks and blackboards[19] in all of the classrooms, as well as teaching aids displayed in the teachers' room. The co-ed school had the most outside resources, provided through education programmes, while the boys' school had the best infrastructure. The boys' school, however, did not use its better infrastructure well. It had several classes without any student desks, one classroom was not in use at all, as it was filled with

broken desks, and the assembly hall was in use as a classroom. Of the three schools, the teachers' room of the girls' school was best organized and had the most materials on display. This does not mean that the materials were used in the classroom. In none of my observation sessions did I see teachers using materials other than the standard textbook and workbooks. The co-ed school received the most external resources in support of girls' schooling, but I could not verify whether this was the case with all co-ed schools. My observations did suggest that Western representatives of international donors tend to promote co-ed rather than single-gender schools. They see this as contributing to breaking down gender barriers. International donors also tend to focus on girls' schooling. The Ministry of Education in general saw boys' schooling as more important, because boys can to do more with their schooling. The Ministry of Education often decided or approved which schools would receive resources. Because it wanted both boys and girls to benefit from the resources it was inclined to support co-ed schools. At the time of my research, co-ed schools had low enrolment of girls, as girls were more likely to attend girls-only schools. The Ministry's preference for co-ed schools may also be due to its need to show donors a significant increase in the number of girls in co-ed schools, as an indication of progress.

There were gender differences in resource availability. Some student resources (e.g. school bags) were for girls only and provided to girls in both the co-ed and girls-only schools. Resource allocation to schools was found to differ both by resource and by who provided it. The Ministry of Education tended to support boys' schools with infrastructure, while international donors supported co-ed schools with supplies, girls' schools with student supplies and all schools with technical support. Both the co-ed and girls-only schools received bags with school supplies (notebooks, pencils, pens, a pencil sharpener and an eraser) for girls in the first six grades. Abeer's story illustrates the link between provision of student resources and stopping school. Abeer said she stopped school because no school bag with supplies was provided. My observations suggested that Abeer's family had enough own resources to provide her with the supplies. Nonetheless, the supplies became a major part of her justification for stopping school.

<u>Girl 15 years old</u>
Abeer is from a family with nine children, of which the first four are girls. Abeer is the youngest of the four girls. Abeer's father is in the army and

seldom at home. Abeer's mother sat in a corner of a large room chewing *qat* with a few other women while we spoke with Abeer. When we started the conversation with Abeer's mother, she made it clear that she was angry with the school because it had not provided school supplies and did 'not do anything anyway'. While we were talking with Abeer, her mother stayed at a distance but did yell every now and then that she could not support her children to attend school. Abeer's mother claimed that in grade six the supplies required became too expensive to keep children in school without support. At the same time, she claimed that her oldest son, who was nine years old, had stopped school in grade three because she could not afford the supplies.

Abeer was of two minds about stopping school. She was happy that she did not have to study anymore and could spend time at home with her sisters and friends, but she was also quite bored staying at home. Besides her mother not providing school supplies, Abeer was part of a small group of girls who decided over the summer to stop school together because they had failed the grade (see Noura's story). Abeer struggled at school and had to repeat the third and the fourth grade. When she passed the fifth grade exams, she expected to continue to sixth grade. She decided not to go on the first day of school, as she did not have the required supplies and wanted to see what her friends were doing.

Abeer did not say that she failed fifth grade, although her teacher did. Abeer said that she did not want to continue her schooling without the required supplies. She claimed that the school did not give any supplies after grade five, although officially the scheme stopped after grade six. She also knew that many girls share resources in school, but said that she did not want to share supplies with others, especially when they were not her friends. Her mother repeated several times that sharing supplies was shameful and that she did not want her daughter to be seen as 'poor'.

Abeer's story illustrates how school supplies can motivate children to stay in school, but can also be used as a reason to stop. Although other reasons may be more important, those aspects may not be voiced directly as suggested by the contradictions in Abeer's story and her mother's behaviour. The school claimed to provide resources in grade six. If Abeer had failed grade five she would receive resources when she repeated the grade. The head teacher at the school pointed out the girls in grade six who were carrying the orange bag with supplies provided by the Ministry of Education. My observations suggested that Abeer's family could afford to buy school supplies, and therefore the cost considera-

tion is questionable as the main reason why she stopped school. Perhaps Abeer did not want to continue school (she wanted to join her three friends).[20] She may have used 'supplies' as her reason for stopping school because her mother responded well to this argument, even though money for school supplies, and the school supplies too, were available. Or perhaps the school did not provide (or was not expected to provide) the supplies for some reason of discrimination, and Abeer (and her family) used this as a reason to protest and stop school.

It is possible that Abeer's mother used the issue of school supplies and their cost to express her anger against the school. Her anger was quite extreme and seemed linked to anger with the general establishment. There were some indications that Abeer's mother felt strongly about the North-South separation issue. My research assistant confirmed this, saying that Abeer's mother's brothers were known to be politically active in the past and now. By being against the school she might have wanted to express solidarity for separation, as school is seen as an institution controlled by the North. The teachers at school (who are part of the establishment) may have known that Abeer's family is 'political', and Abeer perhaps expected the school not to provide her with school supplies to 'punish' this anti-establishment position.

In the general context of increasing tension in the South, observations and comments from some of the teachers suggested uneasiness about being in government employment in the current political climate, especially when high-level visitors arrived from the Ministry of Education. Status, in terms of political orientation, probably influences the relationship between the school and society. Furthermore, political orientations likely influence teachers' behaviour towards children. There were indications that teachers' behaviour was geared to some extent towards maintaining their own social position.

The schools managed distribution of the supplies. I observed no monitoring of whether the supplies actually reached those who were targeted, and supplies for girls often ended up with boys.[21] Even when girls were given the supplies, it was often their brothers who had actual use of them.[22] Teachers who hand out supplies may discriminate against certain children. For example, they may refrain from giving supplies to children who are absent that day or come late that day, to 'punish' them for repeating the grade or for being part of a certain family.

In conclusion one can say that in Yemen, Ministry of Education and school policies and resource allocation seem to be tools for teachers to ensure that their own goals are met, rather than to ensure that all children in their communities attend and complete basic schooling. Teachers' own goals are closely linked to social reproduction, in this case the protection or strengthening of their position in society. Most school policies, as well as the allocation of resources, reinforce inequalities in schooling outcomes as well as inequalities within society. Teachers who have control over policy implementation and resource allocation use this control to reinforce their own position and to ensure the reproduction of society, which can be discriminatory by gender as well as by status. There are, however, indications that these discriminatory practices go beyond status and gender and that teachers may use a child's schooling status to 'settle' personal issues between the teacher and the child's family.

4.3   Classroom practices: including and excluding children

In addition to school practices, discussed in the previous section, teaching practices in the classroom were explored to understand the role played by the school in children's decision to stop schooling. This section explores teachers' practices and attitudes towards schooling and their linkages with children's reasoning for stopping school.

4.3.1 Teachers' practices

Yemen claims to have introduced child- or student-centred teaching with the institution of a new curriculum in 2000. This was followed by a series of teacher trainings to introduce the use of the new curriculum (Ministry of Education 2010). Child- or student-centred approaches to teaching put the child and learning central, rather than the teacher and teaching. There are a range of criteria by which child-centred approaches can be defined. For the purposes of my survey, child-centred practices were identified in line with those presented at a recent teacher training and programmes related to child-friendly and inclusive classrooms[23] (Save the Children 2005a, UNICEF 2004a). These were all criteria that were sufficiently objective to be observed and checked by surveyors.

Teaching practices were observed in classrooms through a survey of 117 teachers using observation checklists, as well as in-depth observations by myself, of which 10 were documented in detail. The observation

checklists used by the surveyors indicated that roughly half of the teachers were judged as using child-centred practices (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1
Teachers' classroom practices[24]

	% of all teachers observed using the practice (N=117)
Class room management	
Ensures children see text book	65%
Ensures children have correct page	49%
Ensures children have pens, pencils and notebooks	35%
Student-teacher interaction	
Teacher moves in between children	63%
Teacher uses children's names	83%
Teacher gives equal attention	78%
Teacher checks children's work	69%
Use of blackboard	
Ensures all children can see the blackboard	91%
Ensures children busy while teacher at blackboard	40%
Ensures the topic and date are on the blackboard	93%
Teaching and learning materials	
Teachers uses other material for learning	43%
Ensures all children can see all materials teacher is using	36%
Ensures children also use materials	32%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

Most of the surveyors were themselves teachers and therefore probably had certain preconceptions about 'good' practice (see also Chapter 1). In addition, during the survey it was noted that surveyors had difficulties using the checklist for the whole session. As soon as they saw the teacher performing the practice once, they ticked it as 'yes'. The surveyors were not always child-centred themselves. For example, almost all of the children were judged as being able to see the blackboard, although this is unlikely as children sitting in the back desks of crowded classrooms cannot see much. The surveyors were unable to see this.[25] It is likely that the presence of the surveyors prompted teachers to use the practices that

they had learned in the teacher training, so it cannot be concluded that they used these practices regularly. Regular use of these practices was much less observed during my visits to classrooms during the in-depth study.

My observations showed that most teachers do not use child-centred methodologies. Teachers tended to focus on teaching rather than learning, sticking to a certain routine depending on the textbook, as well as their own habits. They seldom practiced two-way communication with children. From their classroom behaviour, the teachers appeared to be more concerned about finishing the textbook than ensuring that the children understood and learned the lesson. Very few teachers were observed using the teacher's guide. In addition, in all classes observed some children participated much more than others. At most, one-third of the children actively participated in the lessons, listening and being able to follow the session. The rest were busy with each other and with other things. When talking to teachers about the child-centred approach, most had heard the term and considered themselves child-centred in their teaching. My observations indicate otherwise. Teachers may have good intentions, and make real effort to do what is best for children, but fail to be child-centred.

Class observation: 09-12-2009 Girls mathematics grade 2
A female teacher (not wearing a face veil)[26] in her early 20s is teaching 36 girls second-grade mathematics. She is standing at the front of the classroom and teaching simple additions. She is using a system of counting using tallying. The teacher starts by repeating yesterday's lesson. She writes the sums (adding two single-digit numbers) on the blackboard and asks the answers of the whole class, though none have their book open. The teacher takes the lead while children call out answers. Most of the time, the children have no idea what the answer is and cleverly wait until the teacher starts with the first number of the correct answer. Then the girls take over with a yell. While this is going on, about half of the girls take no notice of the teacher or the lesson. They sit backwards in their chairs, sharpening their pencils, organizing their books and bags and fighting for a bit of space on the desk.
    The teacher goes on to the next lesson, which is more addition. She explains some of the problems on the blackboard, using the tallying approach. She asks girls to come forward to do the sum on the blackboard. She often writes the sum so high on the blackboard that the child cannot reach it to write the answer. Instead of writing the sum at the height of the

child, the teacher does the calculation herself aloud, using the tallying approach, with the child standing there. The teacher herself then writes the answer next to the sum.

She follows the book exactly, not adding any sums that are not in the book. She does not address any of the girls individually and does not correct children. When she is done with the sums in the book she stops the class and asks the children to do their workbook exercises. Most children do not work in their workbook but play with friends instead, drawing in notebooks and talking.

This teacher was probably trained to teach addition using the tallying approach. But she did not seem to be trained in teaching children to use the technique. She followed her training exactly, but this did not include the teacher being responsible for children's learning. Checking whether children had learned and making sure that all children learn was therefore not seen as part of the teacher's duties. Nor was she concerned that so few children followed the lesson, as she was busy making sure that the child doing the sum on the blackboard got the answer right. Not once did she correct any child's behaviour. The situation could be much different, as illustrated in my observation of a class that, in my view, was reasonably child-centred – due to the teacher and probably not to her training.

Class observation: 07-12-09 Girls Arabic (changed to mathematics) grade 1
After about 15 minutes of the Arabic class in grade two, the teacher who is supposed to teach turns up. She takes over the class and starts a class in math. She is very relaxed and allows children to take their time to complete the task of writing the right numbers. They are covering the number six and the girls have a workbook to copy the number. First, the teacher writes the number several times on the blackboard. She then asks several girls to come and write the number on the blackboard, including girls from the desks at the back. Then she gives the girls the task to complete their workbooks, followed by more practicing of the number in their notebooks. The teacher allows girls to move around while doing the task, not to chat, but to go to other desks and have a look at what others are doing. She makes sure that this is done in an organized and non-disruptive manner. At one point the teacher asks all children to write the number in their neighbour's notebook. The teacher walks around and is good at giving all children some attention, although the focus is on the more active children. She walks all the way to the back of the class several times to check chil-

dren's work. There is one child who is very keen to say things, she is either a repeater or is a bit older than the other children. She is given a chance but not more than anybody else. The girls appear to enjoy the class and are eager to learn the new number.

This teacher's behaviour, despite her being late, shows a concern for all children, a concern that the children do the task correctly and an understanding that children's learning can be guided and stimulated by others than just the teacher. Of all my in-depth classroom observations, in just two cases did teacher practices suggest to me that the teacher was child-centred. These teachers did not necessarily demonstrate all of the child-centred practices on the observation checklist. But they did demonstrate an attitude towards children that is difficult to define in a checklist. These teachers seemed 'naturally' good with children rather than being well trained. It seems unlikely that other teachers saw these teachers as 'good' teachers, as often 'good' teachers were identified based on their knowledge and specialization. Teachers who studied science or mathematics were often identified as 'good' teachers, because their studies were viewed as difficult, rather than because they were skilled in teaching. The two teachers who I identified as child-centred were the first-grade teacher described above and a teacher of religious studies. Both were older teachers, which meant they had more experience and possibly more confidence in their teaching. Despite being older and experienced, they would probably not be identified by other teachers as 'good' teachers, because their positions and subjects were not prestigious ones. A position as deputy or head teacher automatically makes one a 'good' teacher, as well as being a math or science teacher, especially for the higher grades. Age may play a role in teachers' practices, but it is unclear whether this is positive or negative, as some of the least inspiring teachers were also among the older ones.

Classroom practices that are seen as undermining children's learning include the use of physical and humiliating punishment for disciplinary reasons.[27] These methods are now officially identified as negative, so they have become difficult to observe in classrooms, especially by a foreigner like me.[28] Children were asked to report on these practices through the household survey. Three-quarters of the children reported the use of physical and humiliating punishments in classrooms.[29] However, my results also indicate that physical and humiliating punishment is perceived as 'necessary for learning', by children (one-fifth) as well as by their par-

ents (one-quarter). The survey results therefore did not indicate this as an important reason for stopping school. In contrast, both the group discussions and the in-depth interviews identified disciplinary methods as a reason for stopping school. The groups said that physical and humiliating punishment could be an important reason for stopping school. Children in the in-depth interviews indicated that humiliation through discriminating attitudes of the teacher particularly prompted them to stop school. Discriminatory practices are not always recognized as such, as illustrated in the below observation.

<u>07-12-2009 Girls grade 3 Arabic</u>
There are a large number of girls in the class (50) sitting in three rows of desks with two aisles. I sit at the back of the classroom at a desk with two girls – the desks are designed for two children but have up to four girls in them. In the first rows of desks two girls sit at each, the following rows of desks mostly have three girls, and the desks farthest towards the back have four girls. The teacher does not make an attempt to put an equal number of girls at the desks. Upon entering, children know at which desk to sit. When one girl who is late tries to sit at one of the front desks with two other girls, because all of the other desks are filled, the girls at the desk tell her to go to the back. The teacher did not interfere despite the fact that there is hardly any space left at the desks at the back. The girl squeezes herself into a desk at the back with three other girls. Most girls in the front wear the full uniform of a white shirt and a dark blue skirt, as well as something white in their hair or a white head cover. But not all. I observed some of the scruffiest kids at the front as well. The girls at the back look scruffier and are not always wearing the full uniform. Almost all girls at the front have backpacks for their books, while girls at the back use plastic bags to carry their books. Girls at the back shared books or had no books. Throughout the class the teacher only gave turns to the girls in the front two rows and did not check the work of any of the girls in the subsequent rows. Three girls were given two turns to read a passage in a story, while most others had none.

Children who were better dressed and cleaner tended to sit at the front of the class. They had more space and access to resources and opportunities. It was not observed or stated that the teacher assigned seating for each child at the start of the school year. But there seemed to be an unspoken rule determining who sits where. Children sitting at the front were better able to hear the teacher and see the blackboard. They

were more likely to be asked to come to the blackboard and be corrected by the teacher. The girls 'allowed' to sit in the front rows were likely from a better social status family, judging from what they wore. But this is not necessarily so, as increased status does not always mean higher economic levels; and a high economic level does not always mean that resources are spent on school. The teacher enforced this form of discrimination, which meant reinforcing socio-economic differences in society, through her practices, both active and passive. The teacher's practices also suggest that she did not consider it her task to try to involve all children in the lesson, as she showed no concern for the girls at the back. It is unclear whether the hierarchal structure in the classroom was the same as the status structure in the community, but is likely to reflect this.

I observed several co-ed classes (grades two, four and seven) where girls in the lower grades (grades two and four) tended to sit on one side of the classroom. As there were usually three rows of desks in classrooms, two rows were occupied by the boys and one row, with more crowding, by the girls. Teachers demonstrated similar practices to those observed in the girls' class described above, but they provided boys in the front desks with more opportunities for learning than girls. Older girls (grade seven) tended to sit at the back of the co-ed class. When I asked the teacher why these older girls were sitting at the back, the teacher explained that it did not matter to him where they sat. They themselves chose to sit there. One observation clearly showed that the girls had little choice as the boys immediately laid claim to the front when they came in, 'respecting' the space of the girls in the back. Girls went along with this saying that it was 'better' for them to sit at the back of the class because the boys then could not see them.[30] This reinforces gender inequalities, though the teachers would not see it this way. They explained that the children themselves decide to sit at the back and those children who are not interested in schooling sit farther back and do not ask for turns.

4.3.2 Teachers' attitudes

Teachers' attitudes can reflect their practices, but also mask their practices, as it is not uncommon for people not to practice what they preach. The teachers surveyed were asked why children stop school (no specific ages were given). They answered that children who stop school probably have a problem or their parents have the wrong attitude (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Teachers' reasoning on why children do not complete basic education
by gender (N=117) (unprompted, multiple answers possible)

Response	For Girls	For Boys
It was enough – learned enough	7%	17%
Need to stay at home and help with chores when they get older	26%	46%
Costs for completing school too high	25%	23%
Does not want to complete school	31%	36%
Getting engaged/married	55%	7%
Not clever enough to complete	13%	18%
Not good for reputation to complete school	12%	0%
Other[31]	32%	35%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

Regarding boys, almost half of the reasons provided by teachers referred to 'the boy needs to help at home', followed by 'the boy does not want to complete his schooling'. Less common, but still often mentioned reasons were 'the boy is not clever enough to complete school' and 'the cost of schooling'. The reason 'not clever' suggests that teachers do not see themselves as responsible for children learning in school. It also points to a belief that not all children can learn and a child has to be clever to stay in school. With regard to girls, more than half of the reasons given for girls to stop school relate to 'the girl gets married or engaged', followed by 'the girl is not interested in completing her schooling', 'the cost of schooling' and 'the girl needs to stay at home to help'. The reason 'needs to stay at home to help' is identified more in relation to boys than to girls. This is unexpected, as girls are often perceived to be required at home to help with special events or care for younger siblings. Boys may be required to help at home during seasonal agricultural activities. However, in my research areas the children's daily timelines indicated that boys were seldom involved in agricultural work and girls did little child care (chapters 2 and 3). The teachers' pointing to 'early marriage' as a reason for girls to stop school does not correspond with the answers given by the other groups (children and parents), which did not identify early marriage as an important reason for stopping school. For boys, teachers have a wider range of reasons for stopping school

while for girls they mainly mentioned the traditional reasoning with emphasis on early marriage.

Table 4.3 presents teachers' responses when asked why children attend school.

Table 4.3
Teachers' reasoning on why children go to school by gender (N=117)
(unprompted, multiple answers possible)

Response	For Girls	For Boys
Like to go to school	66%	40%
Learn important skills at school	37%	20%
Learn important values at school	15%	13%
Attending school become better mothers/fathers	22%	26%
Attending school can get a job/earn an income	56%	66%
Children have to go to school – it is the law	3%	5%
It makes parents proud/modern when their daughter/son attends school	22%	13%
Attending school make better marriage partners	3%	5%
Children look after their siblings on the way to school and at school	11%	0%
Other	6%	15%

Source: Compiled by author from teachers' survey.

Teachers said that the most important reason for children to attend school was because they like to go to school. This reflects the social importance of school as also identified by children and their parents (Chapter 2). It is interesting to note teachers' belief that schooling can help improve a child's economic status, as well as make the child a better father or mother. But they did not see schooling as contributing to social status improvements, largely regardless of the children's gender. Teachers often perceived themselves as of a higher social status than others within their status group because of being a teacher (i.e. they considered their own status higher than that of their brother who was not a teacher, despite maybe having a lower salary). Teachers do seem to think that their practices influence children's school attendance, as indicated in the high scores for the responses 'the child likes school' and 'learns important

things at school'. This contrasts with the view of one teacher who said that children did not in fact learn much at school. That teacher's response, however, was directly linked to his own experience, while the teachers in the survey answered 'in general'. The latter is probably closer to how teachers think schools should be. This may mean that teachers think that school and therefore teachers should provide for children to learn skills as well as values. Interestingly, pride was mentioned, especially for girls, as an important reason for attending school. Again, however, teachers' survey responses appear to reflect an ideal or what they had been told in the past, as they did not seem to reflect the reality at present or what children themselves thought.

Teachers' explanations of why children stop school or attend school are gendered as well as closely linked to the process of transition from childhood to adulthood. Many teachers believed that children were especially likely to stop school at puberty, which corresponds with my survey results. Overall, teachers' reasoning is similar to that of parents speaking 'in general' about stopping school (Chapter 3). Further, teachers tended to blame parents for having traditional attitudes. Their reasoning in relation to stopping school was all focused on the context outside of the school, suggesting that teachers may not think that their teaching contributes to children stopping school, or that it is their role to prevent children from stopping.

In contrast, children who participated in the group discussions identified reasons for stopping school as mostly within the school, with teachers playing an important role. The teacher's role differed for boys and for girls. The boys' groups said that 'the organization of school' was a main reason for stopping school. The girls' groups identified 'disciplinary actions'. Both the boys' and the girls' groups identified these as legitimate reasons for stopping school. The boys' blaming the school for not being organized enough highlights again the expectation that boys need rules and organization more than girls. The girls' groups identified teachers' use of physical and humiliating punishment, as girls are unable to 'take' this. The importance of this reasoning for girls may reflect gendered expectations in society; this kind of punishment should be unnecessary for girls, as they are expected to conform to the rules in school.

Both boys' and girls' groups showed an understanding for the constraints under which the teachers work. In the 'but why' exercise, the girls in the groups said that the teachers did not have the necessary skills

and that teachers were disappointed in their work and did not feel appreciated, which were reasons why they used physical and humiliating punishment. This sympathy with the teachers was also found in the boys' groups. They commented that teachers did not have the skills to deal with children. They also highlighted the links between teachers and parents, identifying parents' lack of support for schooling as affecting the teachers' behaviour at school.

Children participating in the groups were those who did well in school and were supportive of schooling. They probably included sons and daughters of teachers, which may have provided for a certain amount of sympathy towards the teachers. The sympathy for the teacher among the children in the groups contrasts with the reasoning given by some of the children who had stopped school and were interviewed in-depth, as illustrated by the story of Abu Bakr.

> <u>Boy 14 years old</u>
> Abu Bakr is a 14-year-old boy with two older sisters and five brothers. All of his brothers have stopped school, but his two sisters have almost completed their secondary schooling. Neither of his parents went to school. His oldest two brothers are in the army, like his father, and Abu Bakr wants to join the army too. His brother Adel as well as Abu Bakr mentioned problems with the teacher or, in Abu Bakr's case, the head teacher, as the reason for stopping school. Abu Bakr claimed that the school was prejudiced against him, as his brothers had not done well in school. All of the teachers know of his brother Adel who had a physical fight with a teacher the previous year and stopped school. Adel hit the teacher because he felt that the teacher had hit him a few times too many. Adel was not expelled[32] but Abu Bakr indicated that the teacher as well as the other teachers had made it so difficult for Adel that he could not stay in school.
>
> Abu Bakr said that the teachers did not want to give him a chance. They were always picking on him, blaming and punishing him for any disruption in the class, and they did not check and correct his work as the teacher did not expect him to do well. Abu Bakr said that the teachers were doing this to punish him for Adel's bad behaviour. Abu Bakr said that he may well stop school earlier rather than later as he did not like school and saw no benefit in staying in school any longer.

When we talked to the teacher later, he acknowledged that Adel had been impolite at school and that Abu Bakr was even worse, as he had been impolite towards the head teacher. The teacher also said that Abu

Bakr's family was unsupportive of school, because his parents are from the village and therefore illiterate and ignorant. There was no hope for Abu Bakr, according to the teacher. When I replied that Abu Bakr's sisters were doing well in grades ten and eleven, he said that girls are different from boys and polite. This story illustrates that a teacher's behaviour and attitudes may be linked to the social status of a student's family. Abu Bakr's family is well off, but their economic status perhaps contributed to tensions between the teachers and family. The teacher indicated that the family did not know 'their place' in society, because they allowed their sons to be disrespectful of the teachers, even though the teachers are from a higher social class. The teacher was a little surprized to hear that Abu Bakr's sisters were doing well in school, despite having 'ignorant and illiterate' parents. But he quickly dismissed this as a gender difference and because girls are more polite than boys.

Teachers' attitudes and practices do not suggest that they think gender and status inequality is something that schools need to address. By allowing girls and children from lower status groups to come to school they feel that they have addressed these inequalities. The teachers tended to blame parents for obstructing their work by reinforcing traditions that schooling is supposed to redress. This is reflected in teachers' high score for marriage as a reason for stopping school.[33] When children perform poorly in school, teachers tend to blame tradition and parents for not being modern, rather than addressing the problem. Some would argue that social attitudes towards girls' schooling are moving backwards and have become more traditional, but my results do not fully support this. Girls' schooling and women's employment is still acceptable, but popular support for it has changed. Parents and children, unlike teachers, do not use traditions to justify stopping school. Instead, they point to the failings of the school system. The nature of this change in popular support for schooling, rather than 'reverting' to tradition, was illustrated by a conversation that I had with a number of well-schooled girls living in one of the communities where the in-depth research took place.

Fieldwork notes 12-12-09

The girls' teacher is an energetic woman who lives nearby. Before she became a teacher in the district centre, she spent two years in the centre of the governorate. She and her children, as well as her mother, moved to the governorate centre to enable her sister to complete a degree in science (the teacher herself had completed a teacher training college which did not re-

quire a move to the governorate centre). While the teacher was living in the centre of the governorate, her sister studied and the teacher was transferred to work in a primary school. Her mother looked after the children.

Her sister completed her degree in science and was now at home without a job. She often met with friends, several of whom had a similar story; they completed their studies with the support of their families, who moved with them.

I attended a gathering of six of these girls and got the impression that most of them were proud that they had continued their studies, although none of them had a job. Reactions were mixed regarding their unemployment. Most of the girls said that they would like to work for a bit, but they were not keen to become a teacher. Others were indifferent and said that there was no need to get a job now, maybe later, when their children were older. These were the married girls. They said that their first reason for studying was not to get a job, but because they liked to study and it was good to study. They were aware of what their families had done for them, but explained their reasons with the slogan-like statement: 'the state expects families to make sacrifices for the development of the country'. The girls also said that things are different now (it was often claimed that things were much better before the unification).

G1: There is much less motivation and support for girls to complete their schooling.
G2: Yeah, before the state was always advocating for girls to study and help the country develop. These days things are different. The state does nothing for the people.
G4: They [the government in the North] do not care about us… they want us to be traditional like their tribal people!

The large number of female teachers in the schools involved in my study, and the large number of schooled girls in the village indicate that girls' schooling is not a novelty in the research area.[34] The commitment to schooling girls now appears to be waning, as the benefits promised have not materialized. Schooling has not resulted in development of the country in terms of better economic conditions for the country or for the individual. The girls' disappointment with the system and the state, shown in their responses, is real as well as political. It is aimed at the northern influence on the present system which is seen as negative.

4.4   Explaining school and teacher practices and attitudes

The previous sections demonstrated that most school and classroom practices reinforce inequalities in school completion by status and gender, as well as individual inequalities that cut across status levels and gender lines. Practices within schools and classrooms are mutually reinforcing. Children who stop school identify school and classroom practices as their main reason for stopping. The teachers surveyed and interviewed did believe that all children should complete basic schooling. But they did not see it as their responsibility to try to have all children complete their schooling. Neither did they consider it possible for all children to complete or want to complete basic schooling. Teachers may in fact think that it would be bad for society if all children completed basic schooling. They may be trying to preserve the status quo of society, so that their own position will not change.

Teachers did not see themselves as having an important role in stopping school. Supporting school completion and preventing stopping school were largely viewed as the preserve of parents. Teachers' believed that without family support a child would not be able to complete basic schooling. Teachers tended to link an absence of support to parents' ignorance and to parents' holding on to tradition. This is illustrated in a conversation I had with a teacher about homework.

> Field Notes 20 -12-2009
> T: You know, the parents do not care. Children have to do their homework themselves, without any help from the parents. I myself always help my children with their homework. If you do not, they learn nothing.
> LM: How much do you think children learn at home and how much at school?
> T: Teachers are really bad. You know, my son, he does not learn anything at school. If I do not repeat the classes with him at home, he will not learn anything.
> LM: Isn't your son one of the best in his class? That must be because of all your support! Maybe the average students learn enough at school to get by, and help with homework is not that important.
> T: Are you kidding? Classes are full, teachers do not care, children are lazy… Nothing is learned. Homework is essential.

In the conversation the teacher distinguished between teaching and learning, with learning seen as the responsibility not of the teacher but of

the parents. Parents are identified as more or less capable of supporting their child's learning, depending on their social status group. The teacher expected learning to take place at home, while the school provided the information and tools to make this possible (the teaching). The teacher, however, also indicated that this is not a good practice of the school (also blaming teachers for not caring), but said that there was no other option. Although this teacher may take an extreme position in regard to the role of homework, teachers do tend to distance themselves from responsibility for children's school results. By putting the focus on learning at home, parents are made responsible for school lessons. As mothers play an important role in the education of their children in the home, school-related learning likely falls on their shoulders (Chapter 3). This means that if school-related learning does not take place, parents, particularly the mother, are blamed. The teachers seemed to blame parents especially for being 'illiterate' and 'ignorant' and therefore unable to help their children with schooling. With this, they distance themselves, as literate and modern teachers, from these parents. This also suggests that teachers consider children unable to learn on their own. Teachers put the reason for stopping school outside of the school and therefore outside the influence of their own behaviour and practices. This is not how children viewed the situation.

Teachers' practices reflect their expectations of which parents are able to support their child and which parents are not (often linked to status group). Underlying these practices is a promotion of gender and status inequalities, as well as individual factors that cut across gender and status lines. Using all stories of children who had stopped school, three types of teacher responses can be identified in relation to which children the teachers expect not to complete their schooling. One group are children from the lowest and highest socio-economic status levels of society; they were not expected to complete school because of their traditions (i.e. Abdullah, Jameela, Farida, Adam). The second group includes those children who should be able to complete school but do not show the required behaviour and are somehow challenging for the teacher (i.e. Abu Bakr, Samia, Ali, Noura). The third group includes those children who were expected to complete school but whose parents challenged the teacher; teachers then put pressure on the child to stop school in order to 'punish' the parent or put the parent 'in place' (Aisha, Najwa, Jihan, Abeer). All three types include boys and girls and children from all status

groups, thus contributing to explain intra-household differences in school completion.

Teachers' beliefs, which are reflected in their practices, are shaped by the importance that they attach to social reproduction of their position's status. Teachers have control over school policy implementation and resource allocation as well as what happens in the classroom. They use this control to reinforce or strengthen their position in society, thereby helping to ensure the reproduction of society as a whole. Teachers are important community members and close to their communities, as demonstrated, for example, by them knowing the names of most of the children who had stopped school. But they also keep a distance linked to their status as a teacher, often identifying community members as ignorant and they themselves as modern. Teachers use the school, through their practices, to reinforce their own status position in society, 'keeping or putting families in their place' through the child.

Teachers' preoccupation with their position in society may be influenced by the overall state of schooling in the country, as children's enrolment and school completion are stagnating (World Bank and MoPIC 2010; see also Chapter 2). The lagging or even diminishing numbers reflect a reversal of the earlier enthusiasm and motivation for schooling, which has not fulfilled the promises made. This has also undermined respect for the teaching profession. I observed varying degrees of enthusiasm and motivation for schooling, depending on location. In the district centre (semi-rural), teachers, and to a lesser degree parents and children, were almost cynical about the usefulness of schooling. Such cynicism was even more marked in the urban areas, while I observed it less in the more rural areas. Finding children who had stopped school to include in my in-depth research was also easier in the more urban/semi-rural areas than in the more rural areas because of the way the residents viewed schooling. In the rural areas, schooling still seemed to be held as important and there was a stronger conviction that all children should go to school. The people there were less forthcoming with children who had stopped school, because having children in their community who did not attend school was perceived as 'bad' and 'backwards', especially when a foreigner asked. In the more urban areas, motivation for schooling was on the decline. People expressed disillusionment with the benefits of school and complained about the quality of schooling. When I asked about children who stopped school, teachers and other adults said

there were many. Stopping school here did not appear to be something to be ashamed off.

Motivation for the new mass schooling started in the urban areas, with teachers as its main advocates. It then spread to the rural communities. Now the de-motivation for schooling seems to have started in urban areas, it has reached the semi-rural areas to some degree and is on its way to the more rural areas. The political rhetoric of the past still lingers in the rural areas, but in the towns and cities it has been replaced with disillusionment and cynicism, among teachers as well as parents and children.

Cynicism is often linked to a perceived absence of 'development' of the country and any indicator that progress has had benefits for them. This perception corresponds with economic figures which show that some macro-economic growth has taken place, but poverty levels at the individual and household level have not changed (UN 2005). The absence of development and disillusion with the government, including schooling, is very likely also connected to the present situation of political unrest. Most people in the South support more independence from the North, and schooling is perceived as a northern-controlled government institution (see also Abeer's story and the comments from the unemployed well-schooled girls).

Disillusionment with schooling has affected the status of the teacher. Teachers' status was almost sacred at the start of the mass schooling system. Teachers were seen to be at the forefront of the revolution and the development of the country. Now that the school system is no longer seen as able to contribute to development, schooling has become less important, and with it the position of the teacher. There is therefore increasing uncertainty linked to the position of the teacher in society. Teachers actively seek ways to maintain or strengthen their position. They seem to be doing this in part through their behaviour towards the children in their schools.

4.5   Conclusion

The findings in this chapter confirm that schooling and teaching practices affect school completion. Many of the children who had stopped school named such practices as their main reason for stopping. Schools and teachers do not aim at maximum grade completion for all children or even to prevent children from stopping school. Rather, their practices

reflect preconceptions about children's chances of doing well and completing schooling. Schools and teachers often discriminate in their practices according to children's gender and the socio-economic status of their family. But individual factors also play a role, and intra-household differences are important as well.

Teachers' practices are influenced by their expectations of which parents are able to support their child and which parents are not. In addition, teachers seem to target individual children and actively de-motivate these children to make them stop school. Children who feel targeted may be from lower status groups and judged as better off stopping school because they lack a support mechanism at home. Children from other status groups can feel targeted as well, for example, because teachers perceive them as a threat to their status. This is explained by the relationship between the school/teacher and society in which social positioning plays an important role. Teachers use schooling and classroom practices to reinforce existing socio-economic differences in society, with a priority for maintaining and strengthening their own threatened position as a teacher. Chapter 3 found that parents used children and children's schooling to reinforce their own social status. So too, this chapter finds that teachers use children and their schooling to reinforce their own social status in society.

Teachers, furthermore, may use school policies and other initiatives aimed at enabling all children to complete more grades, in such a way that the opposite result is produced. Teachers support the need for nine grades of schooling for the development of society. However, they do not seem to support the overall strategy of school completion for all. They do not think that it is possible in practice or even needed for all children, especially in cases when a child's schooling status can be used to strengthen the teacher's own social position. Teachers see completion of nine grades as possible and necessary only for those children who have a supportive household environment (in the teachers' eyes) or are sufficiently motivated. Whether these conditions are seen to be met is often linked to expectations related to gender and status groups, alongside individual factors linked to social positioning.

The absence of teacher support for EFA and associated policies and initiatives, such as resource allocation and teacher training, is not what education development agencies envision when they fund these policies

and initiatives. What this means for education development practice is
discussed in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] Teachers are not trained in the student-centred methodology. Textbooks and
teachers' guides that reflect the new approach are not available in schools, and the
textbooks and teacher's guides have a large number of mistakes, including inaccu-
rate and inappropriate practical exercises. There is a mismatch between text-
books, teacher's guides and student workbooks as well. Most students do not
have access to teaching and learning materials, libraries or reference materials (at
home or elsewhere), making the element of self-learning ineffective for most
children (World Bank and MoPIC 2010).

[2] Boys and girls from the same family from all status groups showing different
schooling outcomes.

[3] A rights-based approach is also linked to the use of child-centred methodolo-
gies.

[4] This brother died three years ago and may have contributed to a reduced moti-
vation to continue school.

[5] The head teachers of the schools which were studied in-depth.

[6] As ages in years differ, the girls in the lower class were not necessarily younger
in terms of age, but are 'younger' in terms of grade.

[7] 'Very often' was not defined in time but was based on perceptions; never, some-
times, often, very often were the possible choices.

[8] 54 per cent, of those who said that their teacher was 'very often' absent were
from urban Aden; the other 46 per cent were spread out equally over Abyan and
Lahej. Within Aden, the percentages were similar across the different schools.

[9] Classroom teachers refer to those teachers who are allocated to a grade rather
than a subject, meaning that all children in that grade have the same teacher
throughout the day. This teacher teaches all the subjects. The first three grades
are supposed to have classroom teachers.

[10] The first three grades are supposed to have classroom teachers but this has not
always been the practice.

[11] *Eid* is a religious holiday. There are two major *Eid*-s in Yemen which last three
days officially but are usually extended to at least one week.

[12] Most schools with two shifts do not show more absenteeism, as the second
shift is from 11.00 AM to 14.00 PM, early enough for the 4.00 PM afternoon
visiting. The visits, especially with *qat*, do not require preparation of food, as food
cannot be eaten during *qat* chewing. Major social events, such as weddings, often

include lunch and require more work but are less frequent. In these cases girls are often required to help. Meneley (1996) observed that with the start of schooling in communities, major events, such as weddings, were shifted to the summer school holidays to avoid disruptions of schooling. In the community where my in-depth research took place, weddings also tended to take place in the summer holidays.

[13] During a visit to the area in late February 2010, a Deputy Minister of Education from Sana'a was most interested in observing school assemblies and making sure that they used the correct language in support of a unified Yemen.

[14] There have been recent incidents in which schools are politicized in the conflict between North and South. At the time, a person had been shot a few days previously because he took down the Yemeni flag at a school. Schools were also the focus of civil disobedience, especially in the South, where students were either pushed by teachers to join the pro-government demonstrations, or pushed by older male youths to leave schools and join the anti-government civil disobedience.

[15] The schools in my research had a high number of female teachers in the 2009/10 school year; the three schools studied in depth had 59 female teachers out of a total of 113. This large share of female teachers is unusual in Yemen. Especially in the very rural schools there is a lack of female teachers, with only 9 per cent of female teachers recorded as rural. In urban areas there are slightly more female than male teachers (World Bank and MoPIC 2010, Alim et al. 2007).

[16] Projects implemented in the 35 schools included the following: an 'inclusive education' (IE) programme with funding from Dubai Cares, implemented by Save the Children (teacher training, libraries, non-formal education activities, etc.); the Child-Friendly Schools Programme implemented with funding from UNICEF (similar to the IE programme); a conditional cash transfer (CCT) project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID); other programmes providing school bags and supplies for girls with funding from the World Bank and others.

[17] Ghost teachers are teachers who are on the payroll of the Ministry of Education but do not turn up for work.

[18] Standard Ministry of Education design of schools includes water and flush toilets. Most toilets were not working, however, due to inappropriate design. Water is often unavailable due to a lack of electricity to pump the water into a reservoir. In the three schools where the in-depth research took place, none of the toilets were functional. Though an above-ground water pipe was near all three schools, there were no water points at the schools. In the district centre, children filled their water bottles from a nearby leak in the pipe.

[19] Blackboards are often painted on the wall with blackboard paint so cannot disappear.

[20] It is interesting to note that shame at being in a class with younger children, as mentioned by the other girls, was not prominent in Abeer's reasoning.

[21] Although all resources are centrally controlled, the district managers as well as the head teachers influence access to resources based on their relationships with those who control the resources.

[22] This is probably especially the case with the better off girls. The bag is flimsy, most girls have better bags and probably want better bags. It may be that the orange bag is stigmatizing as it shows that you cannot 'afford' your own bag. If so, this is especially an issue for girls as their brothers seem to be OK with the bags.

[23] Child-friendly and inclusive classrooms are strategies identified by international agencies, such as UNICEF and Save the Children to improve the quality of education.

[24] Children seeing the textbook says something about children following the lesson, having textbooks and using them; being at the right page is similar as having a textbook but requires more input from the teacher and shows that he/she has eye for each of the children; the teacher moving and checking children's work shows also that teachers are concerned of all children and not just those in the front of the class; teacher using materials other than the book and the blackboard relates to trying to support his teaching for children's learning as well as that they are trained to do this in teacher training; all children being able to see the materials relates to how the teacher is using the materials.

[25] Not shown in the table, the results of the observation checklists show some differences by school type, as well as location: Regarding ensuring use of the textbook and supplies: 47 per cent of teachers in boys-only schools did ensure all students could see the textbook, compared to 69 per cent of teachers in girls-only schools and 85 per cent of teachers in co-ed schools. That in co-ed and girls' schools teachers were observed to use this practice more may be explained by the extra attention co-ed schools receive from donors, as discussed before. This includes teacher training and supervision in child-centred methodologies. This difference by type of school was not found in regard to the teacher ensuring that the students were looking at the correct page. There was an urban/rural difference in regard to checking the correct page with 30 per cent of teachers in rural schools doing this, compared to 61 per cent of teachers in urban schools. There was also a difference by location in teachers moving among the children with 49 per cent of teachers in rural schools compared to 71 per cent of teachers in urban schools. Teachers using other materials than the textbook and blackboard showed a difference between the three governorates; 27 per cent of teachers in rural Abyan used other materials compared to 50 per cent of teachers in rural Lahej and 77

per cent of teachers in urban Aden. Differences in urban and rural teaching practices are often claimed to be due to urban teachers having more access to teacher training, as well as supervision by head teachers and inspectors (World Bank and MoPIC 2010).

26 A number of female teachers kept the face veil on in class; some at the girls' school and all at the co-ed and the boys school.

27 A recent policy of the Ministry of Education bans the use of physical and humiliating punishment in class. The ban, as well as the training of teachers in alternatives, has not resulted in much behaviour change so far (Saeed and Maas 2009).

28 7 per cent of all teachers observed in my teachers' survey used physical punishment, and 7 per cent was observed using humiliating punishment.

29 The survey asked about the use of disciplinary measures by teachers in the previous month. Almost half of the cases reported included teachers hitting children with an object (ruler, stick, etc.) on the hands, arms or legs. One-quarter of cases reported by children was humiliating punishment, such as standing in class, or kneeling in class for long periods of time.

30 This is also a practice while praying, for example. For more discussion on male-female dynamics see Fatima Mernissi (1985, 1992).

31 Other included things like distance to school, lack of supplies, lack of qualified teachers, having conflicts with the school, being sick etc.

32 I did not observe or hear of any child being dismissed from school. There seems to be an unwritten rule that children cannot be dismissed from school due to bad behaviour. To punish bad behaviour, teachers use the different disciplinary methods (such as physical and humiliating punishments) or they may use these methods to try to get the child to stop school, as was the case with Mahmoud. Children can also be made to leave school by ensuring bad marks or a dislike for school. Teachers' discriminatory behaviour can therefore actively influence children's decision to stop school.

33 Teachers perceive uneducated and traditional families to marry off their daughters early. The issue of marriage and schooling indicates a clear discrepancy in thinking between teachers, children and their parents. My survey indicates that teachers think that marriage is the most important barrier for completing schooling for girls, as well as that two-thirds of the teachers are very much against a married child continuing schooling. Children and parents think very differently about this. They seldom identify marriage as a reason for stopping school. Two-thirds of children, and a few more parents, think that children should be able to continue school after marriage (more boys than girls). It seems that the teachers want to portray themselves as 'modern'. Early marriage is not 'modern' and is therefore incompatible with another 'modern' phenomena: schooling.

[34] Mass schooling, including girls', stems from the previous generation. Families moved in order for girls to study; families were expected to do this (boys could move to another place for study without being accompanied by family members). This support for girls' schooling indicates that the revolution and the subsequent governmental motivation for girls schooling had a wide reach, even in the rural areas. Politics still penetrates rural societies, as confirmed by the girls' references to the present tensions between North and South.

5 | Conclusion – Stopping school: So what?

5.1 Introduction

Universal school completion seems to be far away in Yemen with half of the children who start school not completing nine grades. My research found that children, their parents, and even teachers do not share the global goal of universal school completion. Education development agencies consider children stopping school prematurely to be undesirable. But Yemeni children, parents and teachers see this differently. Their response can be summed up as 'so what?'

This study sought to understand this response and explored various aspects of stopping school in Yemen. The children in the study had access to schools and other resources that the literature frequently mentions as reasons for stopping school early. My research examined (i) what stopping school and school completion means for the different actors involved, especially children; (ii) who are the children who do not complete their basic education while having access to schools and resources; and (iii) what is the role of the school in children's stopping school. I asked a fourth question as well, related to the implications of my results for education development practice. The answer to this fourth question is discussed in this chapter in light of the findings on the first three research questions.

As explained in Chapter 1, the analytical framework of my study is based on the sociology of childhood and education, in which education and childhood are seen as social constructs. In terms of education development I focused on the rights-based approach. Views of children play an important role in all three. My research, therefore, concentrated on collecting and analysing data from children who had stopped school, as

well as from their peers who still attended school. As children do not act in isolation, I also gathered data from parents, teachers and other adults.

In the school catchment areas studied, households had access to schools, female teachers and resources such as water, which are the most frequently identified barriers to school completion. In these catchment areas a large number of children still stop school before completing their nine grades (although the numbers are less than the national average). Children here especially tend to stop school around puberty. But due to high repetition rates and lateness in starting school, the number of grades completed remains low. Boys complete more grades than girls, even though they repeat more grades. All of the status groups represented in the study had children who had stopped school. Furthermore, my in-depth research revealed that children from the same household often have different schooling outcomes, boys as well as girls and again in all status groups.

This concluding chapter provides some general conclusions on my research questions. These conclusions are summarized through the story of Fatima, followed by a discussion of what the findings mean for education development practice (research question four), also in light of the present civil unrest in Yemen. The discussion on education development practice emphasizes practices and programmes of education development agencies that are said to be child-focused and using a child rights-based approach to development. This is the latest and now most accepted approach in international development aid. Because my last research question requires a detailed study in itself and is not the main focus of this research, I do not explore it in-depth. However, some interesting points for education development practice emerge from my research that I think are worth raising in the concluding section of this chapter.

5.2   Findings of the research: Fatima's story

5.2.1 Stopping school for Fatima

The literature often mentions cost as the main reason why children stop school. Reducing the cost of education is therefore the basis of many education development programmes to counter stopping school, addressing the supply side of schooling. Fatima's story is the only one in my research in which cost emerged as the child's primary reason for stopping school. A deeper analysis of Fatima's story, based on education

and childhood as social constructs, demonstrates the findings of my overall research while providing insights on the story of Fatima.

<u>Girl 17 years old</u>
Fatima is the second of seven children and lives with her family in the district centre, where the family moved two years ago after several years in a neighbouring governorate (both parents are from the governorate where they now reside). In the neighbouring governorate, Fatima's father, who has four years of schooling, had no income. But now he has found work in a small business. Fatima's mother, who has seven years of schooling, is a housewife. While living in the previous village, Fatima did well in school and she progressed to the sixth grade with relative ease. The head teacher at the school then demanded that the girls in the sixth grade dress 'properly', including the *abbaya[1]*, veil, as well as a certain colour shoes. Fatima's father refused to buy these items. He said that the items were not needed and that he could not afford it. Fatima continued in school for two more months and then stopped, as the head teacher told her that she could not continue if she was not dressed properly. Fatima saw other girls allowed to attend without a full uniform. She said the teacher was extra strict with her because her family had become impoverished due to her father not having work.

Fatima felt sad to leave her school friends behind but stayed at home to help her mother with the younger children. Her brothers continued their schooling. Fatima's mother would have liked Fatima to continue her schooling but also welcomed Fatima's help and company at home. Fatima's mother felt isolated in the previous governorate, as it was not her home governorate. Since moving to the district centre, the family is doing better financially and socially. Fatima got engaged to a cousin a few weeks ago and will likely be married in a year or two.

When I spoke with Fatima, she was motivated to go back to school. We talked to the head teacher, and Fatima was allowed to come to school. Fatima however never went. Later she explained that it was too late for her to go back to school. Fatima does enthusiastically participate as a volunteer in one of the informal education programmes facilitated by a development agency.[2]

For a long time, I thought that Fatima's story was typical for a rural patriarchal society like that of Yemen. Due to a lack of resources, girls' fathers decide that their daughters can no longer attend school, as the cost of school is too high, girls schooling is not seen as important, and schools increase the cost by demanding uniforms. Girls' mothers sup-

port the idea of stopping school, especially when the girl is the eldest daughter, as they can help care for younger siblings at home. As a development worker I thought that by providing girls with uniforms, or by convincing a teacher or father, all would be well and girls would complete their schooling. My thoughts were based on the assumption that girls stopped school because the teacher insisted on a uniform, but also because fathers did not want to spend the little money they had on a uniform for a girl, because girls' schooling is not a priority. I saw schooling as a basic need for girls and boys and attributed girls' decision to stop school to poverty and the direct and indirect costs of schooling, as part of a cost-benefit analysis. My work in programming therefore focused on trying to reduce the cost and increase the benefits of schooling, often with an emphasis on changing perceptions of the costs. Through my research I realized that this is not enough.

Other than Fatima, none of the children who had stopped school and were studied in-depth identified high cost or low benefit as a reason to stop school. In fact, even Fatima no longer uses this reasoning for not completing more grades. Fatima was also the only child who said that it was not her own decision to stop school. Fatima's reasoning now has moved away from the cost issue to become more similar to the other children who had stopped school. She had the opportunity to go back to school but did not take it, although the initial barrier (a uniform and its associated costs) is no longer a problem. Fatima now seems to think that she is the one who decides whether she continues her schooling.

For me, the implications of my research findings for education development practice at the level of the child are best reflected by the responses of most of the children who had stopped school, including Fatima. They wondered, 'so what if I stop school and do not complete nine grades?' This was echoed by their parents, their peers and their teachers, suggesting that school completion is not a priority in their lives, whatever their reasons for stopping. Those who promote mass schooling are mistaken if they think that everyone who makes use of, or implements, the schooling system readily buys into and agrees with the global priority of universal school completion. Wondering 'so what?' does not mean that schooling is viewed negatively. Fatima and most other children, despite having stopped school, are positive about school, especially in terms of the social aspects while in school. Fatima really seemed to want to return to school to complete more grades when we spoke to her, but she did

not. Like most children, parents and teachers, Fatima agrees that schooling is good. But she tends to focus on why school is good for her now, not seeing it as a process that ought to span a certain number of grades.

I did not have an answer to the question 'so what?'. I myself wondered the same. There are reasons why schooling is supposed to be important for society and the individual. Yet these ideas are seldom shared by children, parents and at times even teachers. Certainly, it is rare in Yemen to hear an explanation of why the nine grades are important and what exactly should be achieved in those nine grades. Although global basic competencies by grade have been identified, it seems difficult to explain why completing nine grades is important in Yemen and what one can expect upon completing them. It is therefore no surprise that many children and their parents see a role for schooling that is focused more on social than academic benefits. Fatima is proud to have completed five grades and is able to read and write. Many children who complete five grades feel proud, but often cannot read or write. Yet they still consider themselves to be ready to stop. Having been in school long enough and being ready to stop therefore is not always linked to the schooling system itself, neither to grades nor to what has been learned.

Fatima is the only child participating in my in-depth research who did not report feeling that she had played a large part in her stopping school. Most of the other children reported that they had made the decision to stop school. Their parents and teachers also often saw the decision to stop school as having been made by the child. A role for Fatima in decision making is better identified when Fatima is given the option of returning to school. She said that she herself decided not to go back. Her mother confirmed this, but it is difficult to know what role her recent engagement played, or her father, for example.

None of the children who had stopped school reported having resisted stopping school or found other ways to continue schooling. Overall, stopping school does not appear to be a major event in their lives. Fatima, like many other children, came to view schooling as less important when she reached adolescence. When she was younger she was upset that she had to stop school, but the opportunity to re-join school now is no longer attractive. Things have changed, she has become 'too old'. It can be argued that the role of schooling becomes less important over time, both for children and for society as a whole. This could be why children are 'allowed' by adults to play such a large role in decision mak-

ing – the issue is not very important. This may explain why Fatima seems to be able to play a role in the decision making now, though earlier this was not the case.

Children's participation is an important aspect of today's education development practice, which is grounded on a rights-based approach. Education development agencies identify children as rights-holders. But what if the children themselves decide that they want to stop school? How does education development practice deal with 'the right to compulsory education' (ignoring for the moment the contradictory terms)?

5.2.2   Fatima and views on stopping school

As discussed in Chapter 2, the introduction of mass schooling put an emphasis on numbers in childhood development; numbers of grades, years of age and grades by age. In rural Yemen, numbers did not play an important role before the introduction of mass schooling. In rural Yemen, childhood development has traditionally been associated with the ability to do tasks and to show certain behaviour. This is especially important in relation to early adolescence, in other words, the transition to adulthood, which is the time children are most likely to stop school. Age in years has little meaning, and high repetition rates means that there is no fixed correspondence between the number of years in school and the number of grades completed. When asked, children tend to mention the number of years they have been in school rather than the number of grades they have completed. Because of the high repetition rates, years in school also sounds better than the grades completed.

Fatima said that she had stopped school because of the uniform issue. At that time, she wanted to continue her schooling, as she did not feel that she had enough schooling. Now, three years later, she seems to feel that she has had enough schooling and that there is no longer a need to go to school. For Fatima, it is 'too late' to go back to school; she is, like many other children who stop school, 'ready' to move on towards adulthood. Fatima is in the phase of transition to adulthood. Like many children who stop school, she does not think that schooling can help her with this. Fatima considers schooling to be part of her childhood. She sees it as providing social contact with other children outside of the family, rather than as a place to learn skills that will be useful for her future. Fatima has no aspiration to join the labour market; she does not feel that schooling will provide her with skills to get a paid job, or that

employment is even for her. Fatima, like most girls, is expected to fulfil her role in the household as a housewife and mother. Boys are generally expected to contribute to the family business. Fatima, as well as others, think that these expected roles are better learned within the household, especially from the parents, rather than at school. The time to learn these skills is during the transition towards adulthood.

Fatima views schooling as a right, but the completion of nine grades is not a right that she wants to be fulfilled. She does think that more schooling can provide for a better job and therefore a better income, but not for her. She does not think that completing school can alleviate her own poverty or that of her family. This reflects the current reality in Yemen. In contrast, Fatima is very motivated to be involved in another learning opportunity, a life skills programme. This activity may be more relevant to her at this stage of her life, and may also have reduced the need for her to continue her schooling as a social activity, reinforcing the idea that education is viewed locally as more than school.

5.2.3 Fatima and inequalities in schooling outcomes

As discussed in Chapter 3, Fatima is part of a society with rigid segregation by social status and gender. Despite political changes, inequalities by gender and status remain, both in society and in school completion outcomes. Schooling does not seem able to influence these inequalities. In fact, this study found that school is often used as a tool to reinforce inequalities. My study found intra-household differences in children's schooling outcomes in most families with children who had stopped school, including Fatima's. This indicates that stopping school affects boys as well as girls and all status levels. In other words, individual issues play a role in stopping school. These may in part reflect adult tendencies to use the schooling of each particular child to reinforce their own and their family's position in society at a specific point in time.

Gender and status certainly play a role in stopping school, but girls and children from lower status groups are not always the ones who stop school. Schooling is not perceived as a place where children can learn gender roles, so children often stop school once they are ready and required to learn these roles – to make the transition towards adulthood. In terms of status, Fatima reported that her family had been poor at the time she stopped school. But this had changed by the time of the research. Her father had found a source of income and the family was back

to an average economic level (identified using the survey guidelines). Their social status had not changed. It remained in the middle range during the hard economic times and continued at that same level during better times, due to the social status of the extended family. Fatima's status depends on her group, not on her as an individual or her achievements in school. In the future it will also depend on her husband and his group. Fatima had known for some time that she was going to marry her cousin, who is of similar social and economic status.[3]

The head teacher's strictness towards Fatima may reflect disapproval of Fatima's family's failure to maintain their economic status in line with their social status. Their drop in economic status perhaps needed to be 'punished' by excluding Fatima from schooling, as people with low social status are less likely to have their children complete school. Fatima's father did not want to give in to the teacher's demand, which he saw as targeting and humiliating the family. Influenced by family/group solidarity, he felt that he had to show that they still had their pride, despite their poverty. Fatima's father's conflict with the school threatened his social position (and his family's position).

The role of the father as head of household is important in children's decision to stop school. But the mother and her social position also play a key role, especially in relation to girls. Like several other girls who had stopped school, Fatima's mother was socially isolated at the time Fatima stopped school. The family lived away from the extended family in a neighbouring governorate and was known to be impoverished. A socially isolated position of the mother often results in the mother turning to her daughter for social support at home. The mother liked having Fatima at home, so she did not encourage her daughter to complete more grades. My research suggests that the need for social support from daughters plays a more important role than the need for daughters to work in child care or housekeeping. Whatever the case, the behaviour of both parents can be construed as using the child's schooling to strengthen the parents' own position and therefore the politico-socio-economic status of the household.

In the story of Fatima, the teacher was seen as actively discouraging Fatima to make her stop school. This role of teachers was identified in many of the stories. Expectations of which parents are able to support their child and which parents are not influence teachers' practices. However, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4, teachers may also obstruct a

child's continued schooling to 'correct' parents who are judged as not supporting the reproduction of certain positions and relationships in society (often the teachers own position vis-à-vis the parents' position). This perceived lack of support for the reproduction of social positions does not always follow lines of gender or status group. It may depend on the situation of the individual child, resulting in intra-household differences in schooling outcomes.

5.2.4 Fatima and schooling practices

Fatima said that she stopped school because she did not have the required uniform; she did not return to school because it was 'too late now'. As discussed in Chapter 4, practices within schools play an important role in children's decision to stop school. Almost all of the children who had stopped school, like Fatima, had reasons focused on the role of the school, especially in relation to teachers' behaviour towards the child. Teachers' behaviour was identified as encouraging children to stop school rather than seeking ways to keep them in school. Like other children who had stopped school, Fatima was not expelled from school. But she was given the impression that the school wanted her to stop. That perception was confirmed by this study. Many observations of a range of schooling practices – implementation of school policies, dissemination of resources and various classroom practices – appeared to actively stimulate certain children to stop school. Overall, schooling practices tend to be discriminatory. They do not aim at maximum grade completion for all children. Neither did schools actively try to prevent individual children from stopping school, for example, by addressing the problems that these children faced.

Although children identify the behaviour of teachers as an important reason for stopping school, further analysis of their reasoning shows that this is not a stand-alone reason. Stopping school is influenced by a range of factors in the child's out-of-school environment. These amount to either pressure to stop school or an absence of support to continue school. Both are closely linked to group/family solidarity and the dynamics of social reproduction. I was unable to observe Fatima's previous school, but from my school and classroom observations it is reasonable to expect that Fatima's teacher's discriminatory behaviour extended beyond the uniform into the classroom. The message to Fatima was that she was not welcome in school.

5.3   Research findings beyond Fatima

My research findings suggest that stopping school is closely linked to the social positioning of adults. Stopping school is therefore more than a simple issue of cost (direct and indirect), though this is the dominant reason for stopping school found in the literature. Views on stopping school differed between those who use and implement the system and the education development agencies that are often involved in designing the system and disseminating this design. Education development agencies view schooling as a right of all children and see stopping school before competing nine grades as undesirable. Teachers as well as children and parents do not view school completion (in the sense of finishing nine grades) as needed for all. They are therefore less concerned about children stopping school before reaching this point.

Children and their parents perceive schooling as an activity limited to the time of childhood with little relation to the future in social or financial terms. They do not see stopping school before reaching grade nine as 'dropping out', as they do not see schooling as a process with a specified end measured in terms of a number of completed grades. My research found a strong link between adolescence and stopping school in terms of learning. Skills required for the transition to adulthood need to be learned in adolescence, but they are not taught at school.

Children perceive the decision to stop school as up to them, supported by their parents and teachers. This demonstrates the low priority given to school completion. Adults 'allow' children to make the decision to stop school, indicating that adults consider schooling as not important enough to impose a decision. Looking more closely at the reasoning of children who had stopped school, children's roles in decision making are likely smaller than they imagine. Indeed, this study identified an important role of adults. Both parents and teachers use the child's schooling, and its continuation or stopping, as a tool to strengthen their own position in society. By stopping school (or not) children support family and group solidarity rather than prioritize the individual goal of school completion.

Children often said it was teachers' behaviour that led them to decide to stop school. The behaviour observed in this study supports the idea that teachers actively discourage certain children from completing more grades. Yet, teachers' discriminatory behaviour was observed towards

children from different status groups and towards boys as well as girls, thus cutting across lines of gender and status. Teachers' behaviour is explained by their need to safeguard their position in society against people from higher, lower and even the same status group. Teachers' behaviour is linked to the desire to reproduce society, especially in the face of the recent threat to their position due to disillusionment with the early promises of schooling. The reproduction of society in terms of social positioning of adults and family is therefore more important than children completing more grades at school.

The lack of concern for school completion may be even more evident in the present turbulent climate in Yemen. Since February 2011, the country has experienced growing civil unrest, especially in the urban areas. Schools are used as political tools by both sides. Schools are seen as an embodiment of the regime, in either a negative or positive sense. Protesters have forcibly closed schools and urged students to join the anti-regime protests; while schools and teachers have encouraged students to join pro-regime demonstrations. Beyond the protests too, children, parents and teachers are obliged to show where they stand. Depending on who they support, they either boycott the school or insist on going to school. School premises have become engulfed in the protests, with children exposed to teargas and stray bullets; and the way to and from school often unsafe. Many teachers, parents and children feel that it is no longer safe to attend school.

In response to questions about the dysfunction of a large number of schools, especially those in the urban areas, the Ministry of Education announced early end-of-year exams and moved up the closing of the school year for the summer holidays of 2011. Education development agencies responded with an advocacy campaign to ensure that all students were able to sit for the exams so that they could progress to the next grade. Education development agencies also campaigned to ensure schools are safe places for children and provided protective measures and advice for students and teachers who found themselves in a situation of risk. In short, with many children caught up in the civil unrest and many schools having become dysfunctional, especially in the cities, there are currently many extra reasons for stopping school.

Seventy schools in Lahej and Aden are being occupied by internally displaced people (IDP) from Abyan governorate, where heavy fighting continues between Islamist rebels and the government. The IDPs are

unwilling to leave for the start of the upcoming school year, as they have
nowhere else to go. In terms of the schools included in the sample, most
schools in the governorate of Abyan have been closed since March, with
many people from the school catchment areas displaced to Aden and
Lahej. In Aden and Lahej, several schools in the sample are among those
now occupied by displaced people, and several schools have been dam-
aged, closed or have not functioned since February 2011. A 'back to
school campaign' centrally organized by the Ministry of Education was
cancelled when the situation worsened in late September. As of late 2011
schools had not yet started, partly because the Ministry of Education is
against setting up tent schools and insists that the IDPs leave the school
premises.

In addition, several bilateral donors closed their offices, either with-
drawing their funding or freezing promised funding for the Ministry of
Education. Several education development agencies followed suit, clos-
ing their offices or reducing their international staffing. The coordinating
group of education development partners has not been able to meet due
to the absence of key personnel among the development partners. Most
education work has gone into emergency mode, using emergency fund-
ing dispersed via international NGOs rather than the Ministry of Educa-
tion. An emergency education cluster[4] is at present the coordinating
body for education. It is working with an emergency education unit that
was established within the Ministry of Education following the conflict
in North Yemen between the government and local rebels.

The fact that schools, as well as children, are being used as political
tools during this civil unrest reinforces this study's finding that children's
schooling status plays an important role in the positioning of adults in
society. It also confirms the finding that people do not all share the same
view of schooling. In fact, views can change rapidly. This study found
widely differing views on schooling among the people who use and im-
plement the schooling system. This continues today. Regime supporters,
including the staff of the central Ministry of Education, have shown their
priority to be keeping everything appearing as normal as possible. They
admit that some children have lost days of school, but say this will be
easily overcome. Anti-government protesters, including teachers (several
of the teachers' unions are on strike), emphasize the problem, demon-
strating this by making sure that schools are not functional. Education
development agencies, trying not to take sides, continue to advocate the

importance of schooling, both as a right and as a protected space for children. The agencies insist that children must attend school, saying that the right to education is also a right in times of conflict. This clashes with anti-government protesters, who have tried to close schools, as well as with parents, who say that the schools are no longer safe. The agencies seem to promote schooling even when the schools are not safe places for children to be. Their response is that they will ensure that the schools are safe, which in all honesty they cannot always do. Their insistence on continued schooling highlights the narrow focus of education development agencies on schooling rather than education and their lack of concern for the social positioning needs of adults. Informal education outside of schools in the form of protective life skills may be more relevant and safer at this point in time, and this takes into consideration the role of schooling in the social positioning of adults. Stopping school altogether is not a solution, however. Education development actors need to balance and focus on both, keeping in mind the goal of fulfilling the right to education as well as other rights, such as the right to be protected from harm.

During periods of civil unrest, reproduction of a range of people's social positions is threatened. Schooling is often one of the first institutions used to make this threat as well as to counteract it. Teachers, parents and children, as well as development agencies, all play a role in this process. Adults use schooling and children's schooling status to make their point in the conflict, on the pro-regime or anti-regime side. Situations of conflict can strengthen as well as weaken gender and status inequalities. Women and girls play an important role in the protests in Yemen, on both sides. Girls are expected to take part in protests by attending or not attending school. But the insecure situation also reduces the mobility of women and girls, as they must be 'protected'. The result is that girls may not be allowed to attend school, though boys may still go. During periods of civil unrest, status distinctions may be blurred among protesters and of less importance during demonstrations. Or status may be reinforced, for example, when a status group identifies with a certain side in the conflict and makes a call to show solidarity with the group, for example, either by going to school or not.

The insecure situation in Yemen strengthens the 'so what?' response of children, parents and teachers regarding completion of the nine grades. For me, as an education development worker, the 'so what?'

question is important to consider, as I play a role in education development practice aiming to get all school-age children to complete nine grades of schooling, civil unrest or not. I had to think about this question and realized that I had no satisfying answer, not in times of peace and even less so in a situation of civil unrest.

5.4   Education development aid efforts in Yemen

What do the findings of my research mean for education development practice in relation to stopping school in Yemen? Education development agencies influence basic education in Yemen through their resources and technical support. They guide the strategies of the Ministry of Education and provide programmes to support these strategies. All of this is done within the basic schooling structure that is in place. Education development agencies, despite their claiming to use a rights-based approach (see chapters 1 and 2), often continue to use the explanations for stopping school found in the literature, such as cost, traditional attitudes towards girls, and parents' need for children to help at home. These explanations form the basis of much of the work done in the field to promote school completion. The idea is that school attendance is an issue of demand and supply.

My research findings, however, suggest that social positioning now plays a more important role in children's stopping school (social positioning now is different from the idea of schooling as social capital later). Group and family solidarity is the basis on which adults, including teachers, reproduce their positions in society. Social reproduction also explains the discriminatory practices of teachers. These findings shed new light on stopping school that will be of interest to those who work towards universal school completion, such as education development agencies.

The contradiction found between education development agencies' approach (rights-based) and their practice in the field (demand-supply) is explained by the disconnect between those who design and plan programmes and those who implement them. Those on the implementation side (agency staff and partner staff) face realities that may not be understood by those who designed the programmes.[5] The result is a different implementation than was envisioned at the design stage. Agencies also differ in how they work. Some authors (see Lansdown 2005) argue that

these differences can be attributed to agencies being at different stages in the transition towards the new rights-based approach. The new approach, they argue, has not 'trickled down' or the transition has been partial because the organizational change needed for adoption of the new approach takes time (Lansdown 2005). Agencies are influenced by their histories, as well as politics, economics and culture. They too must balance competing pressures, such as the demand to adopt the new approach and donor requirements, which may be driven by a different philosophy.

To illustrate education development practice in my research areas, I describe two programmes. One of these is vertical and targeted, while the other is horizontal and broad. Several schools and their catchment areas benefit from the vertical[6] programmes, which included a conditional cash transfer (CCT)[7] scheme and a project providing school supplies to girls. The CCT project was implemented through the Ministry of Education. Ministry staff distributed cash incentives[8] for girls through the school system. The parents of the girls received the cash at a parent council meeting at the end of each semester. The incentive was paid if the girl had achieved 80 per cent attendance and had passed the grade. Parents received an extra bonus if the girl earned a grade of 70 per cent on the final exam of grade six and grade nine. The CCT project addressed the demand side of schooling. The assumption was that cash incentives would stimulate parents to send their girls to school. But it addressed only one aspect of stopping school. It did not build the capacity of the rights-holders or duty-bearers, and it did not question the school system as it is. Rather, the problem was seen as the attitude of the parents towards spending money on girls' schooling. The CCT project cannot be considered rights-based, although it may claim to address the right to education.

The catchment areas also had programmes implemented by child-focused agencies using a rights-based approach. These comprehensive or horizontal programmes included the 'child-friendly schools project' supported by UNICEF and the 'inclusive education project' supported by Save the Children. Both of these were in place at the time of my research. The horizontal programmes tended to include a series of activities addressing, in particular, the behaviour of teachers and parents. The idea was to create a school environment that was inclusive and child

friendly for all children, improving the quality of schooling and therefore increasing the demand for schooling.

Fatima's story again can be drawn upon to look critically at both types of programmes. At the time Fatima stopped school, she did not have access to any programmes by education development agencies. Others in the sample group did. Fatima's story identified the lack of a uniform (which can be equated with a supply issue). Programming that addresses lack of supply would be expected to work well in her case. But is that so? Can supply-oriented programming address issues involving the social positioning of adults? If Fatima had been exposed to a vertical programme, such as the CCT project, would she have stayed in school? Her story seems to indicate that the extra money could have provided an incentive to buy a uniform. But the money is handed out at the end of the school year, while the uniform was needed at the start of the school year. Fatima has now decided that she will not continue her schooling, although money no longer seems to be the issue. What does this mean? What about all of the other children who did not identify cost as a reason for stopping school? None of the parents would refuse the money. But what happens when the money stops (see also the school supplies example in Chapter 4)? What message is being sent about boys' and girls' education? Does the extra money reinforce the idea that schooling is less important for girls and that without the extra support girls are justified in not completing nine grades?

Programmes such as the CCT scheme are very dependent on the decision making of the teacher and can therefore be usurped for social positioning of adults. These programmes increase the power of the teacher, as teachers often control the resources. If the teacher were convinced that it would be better for Fatima to stop school, then the teacher could use the CCT project to make that happen. The teacher decides whether the conditions are fulfilled and can choose to support or obstruct the child in meeting the conditions. As teachers' practices are so dominant in children's reasons for stopping school, it is likely that a programme that is controlled by teachers would result in what the teacher judges is best. My research suggests that this may be more closely related to what is best for the teacher's position in society than what is best for the children. The teacher may think that Fatima does not deserve the extra money, that her father is lazy and that he should find a job. Most programmes that provide resources to families and children do not address

the problems in the schooling system. Often they strengthen them by giving teachers control over resources, increasing their power, assuming that schooling is good for all children and that stopping school is anchored in out-of-date attitudes of parents towards schooling.

But would a more horizontal or comprehensive programme as used by Save the Children (2008a) and UNICEF (2004a, 2008) have kept Fatima in school longer? A comprehensive programme would not have provided Fatima with extra money but would have focused on behaviour change, addressing the attitude of the teacher and maybe also the attitude of her father. These kinds of programmes often address schooling and classroom practices, but here again, schooling as such is not questioned. The programme could have put pressure on the teacher through advocacy and training to accept Fatima in school without a uniform. But if the teacher had identified Fatima as a girl who was unlikely to do well in school because of her family situation, she would probably have found other ways to push her out of school. This was the experience of many of the children in this study who had stopped school. The teachers are unaware of their behaviour as promoting stopping school; certainly they do not see their actions as discriminatory. Rather, they perceive their behaviour as serving the best interest of society and therefore of the child, meanwhile reinforcing socio-economic divisions in society. Outputs of behaviour change programmes are long term. Teachers' behaviour is not only part of school but also part of society, so more fundamental societal changes need to be considered – something which does not combine easily with short-term funding cycles.

Behaviour change, as part of a rights-based approach, is often attempted by building the capacity of rights-holders and duty-bearers to claim rights and to fulfil obligations. Both agencies using this comprehensive approach are active in the research area. They claim to be using a child rights-based approach there. Fatima needs support in claiming her right to education, while duty-bearers (the government among others[9]) need support in meeting their obligation to fulfil her right. In regard to Fatima, both the teacher and her father can be seen as duty-bearers who have not met their obligation to fulfil Fatima's right to basic schooling. In practice though, Fatima's teacher probably thinks that she has fulfilled her obligation by accepting Fatima up to grade five, as well as by offering her access until grade nine, though on the condition that she wear the uniform. The same can be argued for Fatima's father. He sent her to

school up to grade five, while the rest of her right is covered by what she learns at home. For Fatima, and the other children who had stopped school in my research, the state too could be seen as having fulfilled its obligation because it provided physical access to schooling. But its fulfilment of the obligation to keep children in school is questionable and needs to be addressed through programming. At first glance, a horizontal approach seems better for addressing the implications of my research in terms of the role of social positioning of adults and achieving long-term behaviour change. Yet it too fails to pose fundamental questions about the schooling system itself.

5.5   Points of interest for education development practice in Yemen

The practices of education development agencies in Yemen are a research topic in their own right and are too complex to be explored indepth in this study. My findings do suggest some points of interest for education development practice, including my own practice. The findings outlined in previous chapters suggest to me as an education development worker the need to raise questions about the relevance of universal basic school completion. Why is universal basic school completion important and for whom? Universal basic school completion is an important goal for education development agencies. But children who stop school, as well as many others, question the usefulness of school completion. This is illustrated by the 'so what?' response. 'So what?' highlights doubt on two aspects of schooling: the purpose of basic school completion and the number of completed grades needed to achieve this purpose.

To help education development practice respond to the 'so what?', three points of interest emerge from my study. The three points are discussed below under three headings linked to the results as discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4: (i) views on stopping school, (ii) social positioning of adults, and (iii) schooling and teaching practices.

5.5.1 Views on stopping school

My research found that views differ between those who plan, those who implement and those who use the schooling system. So everyone cannot be assumed to agree with education development agencies in considering

'schooling' the equivalent of 'education'. Neither do all consider nine years of schooling as fulfilment of the right to education. Education is viewed as good for all children in Yemen. The differences in how children, parents and teachers look at schooling relate to numbers (years of age and grades completed) and the role of schooling in childhood development. This needs to be recognized in education development practice.

A rights-based approach to education development criticizes a narrow vision of education that sets targets in terms of number of years of schooling rather than in terms of the original goal of basic education as a right and a lifelong process. Education targets set in terms of goals rather than rights are easily deferred until a later date. As a result, education goals (like the MDGs) are never reached, and the right to education remains unaddressed (Tomasevski 2003, Unterhalter 2007, Colclough 2006, Torres 2000). The focus on quantitative programme goals has also been criticized, as it is often impossible to define what will work and for whom. For example, schemes that increase the numbers of girls in school may not work for boys (see Kim et al. 1998 for research in Pakistan).

Numbers, however, continue to play the primary role in analyses of schooling policy and performance. Statistics collected in education development focus on numbers of children, numbers by gender, and numbers attending and completing school. The assumption is that if enrolment and completion rates improve, education development programmes are successful. Programmes that succeed in terms of numbers are rarely criticized, and they are difficult to counterbalance by research on programmes that work in terms of a rights-based frame of reference. Agencies that claim to be using a rights-based approach need to think through how schooling can (better) fulfil the right to education, as schooling, a narrowly and rigidly conceived global institution, opposes several principles of rights-based programming.

5.5.2 Social positioning of adults

In Yemen enrolling in school has become an expectation in childhood education, but basic school completion has not. The introduction of mass schooling in Yemen was relatively recent, and two forms of childhood education are still identified in the country. One is more informal, traditional and takes place outside of school. The other takes place through the formal mass schooling system. The two forms of childhood

education together seem to come closer to the original UNESCO definition of basic education as well as the underlying principles of the right to education (see Chapter 2). This does not seem to be acknowledged by education development agencies, which tend to promote mass schooling as the way to reach EFA and fulfil the right to education. Education outside of school is much less emphasized. It is, however, education outside of school that competes with schooling and is often judged as more relevant than schooling for the reproduction of society, particularly at the start of adolescence. This often results in children stopping school. Schooling is not seen as supporting reproduction of gender roles in society, or as a tool for improving the child's socio-economic position.

My research suggests, however, that stopping school does play a role in social reproduction, especially social positioning at that time; stopping school is used as a tool to safeguard adults' positions in Yemeni society. Adults who use children's stopping school to strengthen their own social position include mothers, fathers and teachers, based on group and family solidarity. In addition, the growing disappointment with the promises made by schooling affects the position of teachers in Yemeni communities. Their need to strengthen their threatened position is therefore all the more urgent. Among parents, disappointment in schooling has resulted in less motivation to keep children in school, allowing the role of social reproduction and solidarity of the group to gain ground over schooling of the individual.

Findings of my research suggest the need for education development agencies to question established views on stopping schooling. These typically view stopping school as supporting the reproduction of inequalities in society, as well as reducing opportunities for individuals to improve their social and economic position. Education development practice first of all needs to acknowledge that schooling is not always perceived as providing for a 'better' future in terms of improved social or economic status. 'Human capital'-based prospects for socio-economic improvement cannot be used to motivate children and their parents to complete schooling in a context where these prospects are seldom achieved in practice.

5.5.3 Schooling and teaching practices

A fundamental issue in Yemen today is the practical difficulty that children experience in completing nine grades of schooling by an acceptable

age. If a child starts school at seven years old, and repeats a grade twice, then he/she is 18 years old in grade nine. This is well into the transition towards adulthood in Yemeni society. Education development agencies could probably do more to promote starting school at the appropriate age, but stopping school and grade repetition are more difficult to address. Children link stopping school and grade repetition to discriminatory practices in school. This was confirmed by my study's observations of teachers in the classroom. This finding is not new. A dimension added by this research is that discriminatory practices go beyond the 'usual' discrimination by gender and status. Discriminatory practices are also linked to teachers' desire to reproduce their position in society. The child's (continued or ended) schooling serves to strengthen the teachers' position vis-à-vis the adult caregiver of the child. Discriminatory practices towards individual children are often based on the conviction that it is in the best interest of the child and that school completion is not possible or needed for all. The teacher believes that the child is better off stopping school and that the class is better off without the child.

Traditional education development theory views discriminatory practices in classrooms as mainly related to gender and status. These are addressed by teacher training. Discriminatory practices arising from a perceived need to safeguard one's threatened position in society are not addressed. Education development agencies need to acknowledge the role of teachers in children stopping school, going beyond the traditional gender and status aspects.

5.6   Issues for education development policy

The previous section discussed the implications of my findings for education development practice, which is important to me as an education development practitioner. However, practices are closely linked to policies. A number of implications for policy can also be highlighted. My findings suggest that the main problem lies both in the policies as such, and in the way they are implemented. For example, policies designed to address stopping school are implemented in such a way that they may at times support stopping school. This gap between policy and practice should be addressed, though this does not mean changing only the practices, as practices often reflect the policies.

A major implication for policy concerns the assumption that education equals schooling. Policy tends to brush over education and move into schooling in one smooth sentence. This is confusing for practitioners, as they need to have a good understanding of education before they can address schooling. This also requires an answer to the question of how schooling contributes to empowerment and demanding rights, supporting a focus on capabilities within a rights-based approach, as argued by Unterhalter (2005, 2007, 2008) and others.

A second implication for policy relates to rights-based approaches. Agencies that claim to be using a rights-based approach need a deeper understanding of what a rights-based approach means for policy as well as practice. For policy it is more than a matter of the words and language in documents. As the rights-based approach is still at an early stage of adoption, deep thinking and discussions are needed to ensure that it is linked with practice. For example, the MDGs are often said to embody a rights-based approach as they cover several of the human rights articles. However, the way the MDGs are presented conveys the opposite. There is a need to reconsider what we claim we are doing and how we go about doing it.

A third implication concerns the underlying assumption that school is good, which is linked to the assumption that development is good. A rights-based approach and education are both believed to support development or change in societies. But what is good change? Is it good to have girls go to school and join the labour market? The most important question is then 'for whom is this change good?' Who decides that this change is good? Where are the responsibilities of education development? Is education development required to address all aspects of change? For example, is ensuring that girls can participate in the labour market better achieved by education, or by supporting the development of the labour market and developing education using a rights-based approach? In principle a rights-based approach is suitable for addressing these issues, as it aims to address inequalities as the root cause of development problems. But there is a strong need to consider context, which can only be done by including the different views, especially those of rights-holders. Ultimately, the rights-holders must decide what is best for them. To do so, they need capabilities to make informed choices. This suggests the need to balance the universal and relative understandings of human rights. Exactly where this balance lies will depend on the rights-

holders – in my study, children – and take into consideration all rights, including 'the best interest of the child' in which a key role is reserved for caregivers.

5.7   The effect of the research findings on my own views

This research profoundly affected the way that I look at education and therefore my own education development practice. Although many of my findings suggest that children who stop school are not concerned about school completion, I do not support a position against universal school completion altogether. I still believe that basic school completion is an important part of a child's education. Schooling can prepare children to be productive members of their communities (not necessarily in purely economic terms). It offers competencies, such as literacy, with which people can make more informed choices and be participatory citizens. The problem arises when school completion, defined as finishing nine grades, is equated with the fulfilment of the right to education. At present, education development practice, including my own, is too focused on getting more children to complete basic schooling, rather than looking at schooling as one part of fulfilment of a universal right to education, which includes education outside of schooling. Education development agencies are in a good position, and indeed have an obligation, to influence and challenge narrow views of schooling, because they have access to schools and communities as well as to ministries of education.

Being an education development worker who has struggled with the rights-based approach, I am now more convinced that in theory and practice, a rights-based approach offers the best potential to address the issues raised by my research. To do this, the practical implementation of a rights-based approach in education development must be shifted from the current narrow focus on schooling and education legislation to a broader focus on education and the development of children's capabilities. A rights-based approach requires consideration of the views of rights-holders. This includes acknowledgment that views may differ among the different people involved in schooling, especially with regard to the purpose of school completion. Education development practice and policy need to consider how the views of rights-holders can be included and how the capabilities of rights-holders can be strengthened. Doing so will enable them to take part (with agencies) in raising issues of concern and making the needed changes together. This research re-

emphasized the need for research to include the views of rights-holders, in this case, children, as a key part of this process.

Education development encompasses a variety of purposes. Education development practice and policy need to accept and take account of this. This means that the right to education can be considered universal, and the basic contours of schooling systems can be derived from global norms, but implementation of these rights and norms must allow for context. Allowing a role for context requires that schooling systems incorporate and address different purposes of schooling. In principle, the right to education enables this. When agencies, as duty-bearers, use a rights-based approach they should be aware of the different purposes of schooling and find ways to address the purposes and goals of the rights-holders. This does not mean that other purposes need to be ignored. Fulfilment of the right to education is more than schooling; furthermore education has different purposes. Agencies that recognize this will find it easier to identify and incorporate appropriate content. Expectations of school completion may then also be easier to identify and incorporate into education development practice. The globalization of approaches in education development aid and national education development may work against context-specific and flexible schooling systems. But they do not rule out flexibility in the way these systems are implemented.

I am not convinced that it will be possible to identify a fixed number of grades needed for school completion and fulfilment of the right to basic education. This will likely be different for different children and in different contexts. 'Basic school completion' is therefore not a relevant concept as it is defined now in Yemen, as the completion of nine grades. The challenge and danger here is that acceptance of different standards and goals for different contexts and different children might make inequalities acceptable, which would not be permissible. As long as the purpose of school completion remains unclear, and children and their parents see little advantage in completion of the nine grades, it is likely that we will continue to hear the question 'so what?'

Notes

[1] A thin black long dress worn by women and older girls over other clothes.

2 This is a child-focused health education programme in which older children, such as Fatima, are trained to work with younger children in the promotion of healthy behaviours, such as hand washing and first aid.

3 Cousin marriage is common and is argued to be connected to the desire to keep land in the family (see for more information on cousin marriages in the Middle East, Tillion 1966/2007).

4 The cluster approach is an emergency response coordinated by the United Nations. Save the Children and UNICEF are joint lead agencies for the emergency education cluster.

5 Information in these paragraphs is based on the following sources: three key informants, all education specialists who worked or had worked in Yemen (UNICEF, World Bank and the Netherlands Embassy, the last of whom was also coordinator of the education development partners group). They were interviewed at length. For other information, I had to rely on my experience over the years working with different specialists, including (previous) education specialists from the World Bank, UNICEF, GTZ and the German Embassy, DFID, USAID and JICA. During my time in Yemen I also worked in close coordination with the education specialists of international NGOs, such as CARE, CHF and Save the Children, and I have represented Save the Children in education in Yemen for several years.

6 Vertical programming can be defined as programming with a focus on one issue, stopping school for example. A vertical programme tends to be managed from the centre and implemented at a school level, providing a vertical line of management from top to bottom.

7 The donors identified the governorate where the project (in its pilot stage) should take place, while the schools were to be located in those districts where there was a large gender gap in school enrolment and school completion, as well as a lack of access to water and fuel for cooking. It is assumed that more girls stop school in these districts because girls are 'needed to work at home'. The schools that are eligible for the CCT project had to be housed in a building and have classes with furniture and enough qualified teachers till at least grade eight. The CCT pilot project was implemented in the co-ed school where my in-depth research took place, which was said to fulfil the conditions, although my research showed that girls were seldom involved in water and fuel collection.

8 The project provided girls in grades four through six a cash incentive of US$35, and girls in grades seven through nine $40. Each girl also received $15 at the start of each school year for school supplies.

[9] Education development actors are also identified as duty-bearers, but it is less clear how they can fulfil their obligations other than by using the rights-based approach.

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Curriculum Vitae
Lucienne Maas

I am a development professional from the Netherlands with more than 20 years' experience in the development, management and implementation of development programmes, mainly with the different Save the Children organizations. I have worked since 2007 in Yemen. Before Yemen I worked for eight years in Afghanistan and for 13 years in the Middle East (Egypt and the Palestinian territories). I have worked in functions such as community-based physiotherapist, lecturer and course leader for a BSc course, programme manager, programme advisor, and deputy programme director. At present I am director of programs for Save the Children in Yemen. In 2010 I received the Royal Netherlands honour of Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau for my activities abroad.

I have a MA in children's rights from the University of Freibourg (Switzerland, 2006), a diploma and MA in medical education from the University of Dundee (UK, 1992, 1997) and a BSc in physiotherapy from Instituut Leffelaar (Netherlands, 1984).