

GLOBAL EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

INTRODUCTION

Why Study Girls' Education?

Women represent more than half of the world's population and half of its human potential. Educating girls is the first step in liberating that potential, but according to a 2013 UNESCO Report, a staggering two thirds of the world's 774 million illiterate people were female. Illiterate women and girls have little voice in the direction of their own lives and are often doomed to living in the shadows. They face even bleaker futures that often include outright abuse. Educating girls should be a concern for everyone who values basic human rights.

Educating girls has been called the world's best investment, and for good reason. Their education can increase a country's wealth and benefit society. Educated girls earn more in wages and produce more agriculturally for their families and their communities. According to UNICEF, for each additional year a girl is in school, her wages as an adult rise by about 15 percent. Studies link female literacy to a twofold drop in infant mortality, a reduction in AIDS/HIV and an increase in their children's childhood immunizations. Educated girls are healthier and as adults they have healthier and more educated children which empowers the girls and women of the future. Educated young women can become instruments of positive change, benefiting their communities as employees and mothers and as citizens. Evidence also shows that giving girls and women the skills to take an active role in governance increases the likelihood of a stabler and more peaceful world.

Background:

In 1990 The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) brought together global institutions, educators and representatives from 170 countries to discuss education policy. This resulted in Six Education Goals for All, including achievement of universal primary education for children and the promotion of gender equity in schooling. In the follow-up EFA conference in 2000, participants agreed on the use of standardized evidence-based metrics to assess progress toward these goals. EFA members urged global institutions to work toward completing EFA goals, which were folded into the broader UN 2000 Millennium Development Goals, by 2015.

The year 2000 was also a milestone year for girls' education, marking the beginning of a global focus on the education of girls and the unique challenges it presents. The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), an open partnership of the UN system, governments, donor countries, NGOs and the private sector, and the Partnership for Girls Education (another UN based open partnership under the aegis of the World Bank) both came into existence. These and a multitude of other organizations focusing on girls have provided significant data on the state of girls education, developed policy guidelines for what works best and made broad-based funding available to promote girls' education throughout the globe.

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Current Status of Girls' Education:

Today we can report large gains in girls' school enrollment, particularly at the primary level. In 2001, of the 115 million children worldwide between 6 and 11 who were not in school that year, 70% were girls. In 2015 at the end of the of UN's Education for All and Millennium Development Goals, only about half of those girls were out of school. The 2015 Millennial Report states that gender parity had been achieved in two thirds of countries at the primary level.

But 62 million girls of primary age are still not in school. Further, 98 million teenage girls have not made the transition to secondary school, where they can acquire the knowledge and analytic skills to better navigate life's challenges. Even though 75% of girls start school in Sub-Saharan Africa, only 8% finish at the primary level (WorldView p. 25). In 2015 the largest gender gaps in enrollment are still, as in 2000, in the poorest countries in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia.

OBSTACLES TO GIRLS' EDUCATION

Why are so many girls out of primary school and an even larger number not in secondary school? We will discuss five of the major obstacles to their education as identified by educators: economic, cultural, medical, safety and security, and rural poverty.

Economic: "When parents are deciding how to spend limited finances, societal expectations often lead them to investing in their sons." (WorldView, p. 21) As a consequence, the costs of school fees and uniforms go to the boys while girls stay home performing valuable housework and child care. Girls may bring in income for poor families from domestic help or cottage-factory work or even sex trafficking. Where there are opportunities for girls, many schools are overcrowded with inadequate funding; this is particularly true at the secondary level. There are not only fewer secondary schools, but also they are farther from home than primary schools. At the secondary level, costs for books and school supplies skyrocket. Schools often lack separate, locking latrines and water to serve the needs of menstruating adolescent girls. Many teachers are under-qualified; and there are too few women teachers to serve as role models. Countries requiring the most new teachers for growing school age populations are the ones with the least qualified pool of teachers.

Cultural: Traditionally, families in many countries prefer boys to carry on the family name. This results in girls receiving less food to eat, less health care and even physical/psychological mistreatment. They are taught to "grin and bear it" - it is their lot in life. Child marriages are common, even as young as 9 years old. Marrying their daughters young relieves the family of the need to pay their school fees and provide basic sustenance. It is also an opportunity for additional dowry income for the family. Three camels, ten cows and 20 goats were given by the groom's family in a wedding in Kenya for a child bride, for example. Although a family may feel that their daughter might have a better chance with an education, in Nigeria, only 2% of married adolescent girls are still in school (WorldView, p. 25).

Medical: Pregnancy deaths are the leading cause of mortality for girls between the ages of 15 and 19, due in large part to the practice of child marriage - 15 million girls in 100 countries marry before they are 18 and have multiple births before their bodies are ready. In Southeast Asia this accounts for 48% of school age girls and 42% in Africa. These girls are more likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS and are more susceptible to developing fistulas as a result of multiple pregnancies. The custom of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) also produces health problems. Domestic violence, often unreported, adds to the list of physical and emotional ills. Poorly trained (or non-existent) health personnel, and lack of prenatal care for young mothers result in additional barriers that keep girls out of school.

Safety and Security: Even though there are laws against human trafficking, sexual assault and underage marriage, the laws are not often enforced by the police or political leaders in developing countries. Girls may be victims of sexual harassment and abuse at school with little legal punishment or consequence for the perpetrators. In Uganda, 78% of primary and 82% of secondary school students report having experienced sexual abuse at school. The rates are higher in areas affected by armed conflict. (WorldView p. 21)

Ongoing armed conflicts, such as areas in Pakistan under Taliban control or Nigeria in Boko Haram areas, can prevent girls from arriving at school safely, especially if the distance to school is great and there is a known possibility of attacks and gender-based violence. School-aged girls in conflict zones are two-and-a-half times more likely to be out of school than boys.

Rural Poverty: Rural poverty keeps girls out of school even in countries where middle and upper class girls and boys have access to good schooling in towns and cities. Complete facilities and qualified teachers are hard to fund and cultural norms often weigh against having girls share in whatever scant resources are available. Often, the poorest girls living in rural areas are the farthest behind and they are more than three times as likely to be out of school. The following rings true for many: “A poor girl from an ethnic minority living in a rural area is unlikely to ever set foot in a classroom.” (WorldView, p. 20)

Hotspots: There are 80 countries mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and South West Asia where progress in girls’ education has stalled due to various combinations of the above obstacles. Even countries in the Western Hemisphere, such as Haiti, continue to be hot spots. Additional reasons for hot spots include 1) political violence and/or civil war outbreaks; 2) natural disasters like earthquakes or floods; 3) humanitarian crises resulting in refugees and internally displaced families.

INITIATIVES THAT ADDRESS THE OBSTACLES TO GIRLS EDUCATION

Numerous organizations have sought to address the obstacles to girls’ education through nationwide, area-wide or localized interventions. Some are funded by the World Bank or by UNICEF or other large multi-national partnerships in collaboration with state and/or local governments. Others are initiated at the community level and sustained with the aid of consulting NGOs and inter-partner collaboration. The majority are short term projects targeting a particular problem. Other more complex projects with a variety of interconnected goals might require decades before the results can be evaluated.

It will be most illustrative to take one defined barrier to education and show what our research has revealed about initiatives to address it.

Obstacle - Child Marriage

Early marriage, related to traditional beliefs and practices, entwined with various manifestations of poverty, stands out among the obstacles to achieving goals.

The Population Council reports that each year, more than 14 million girls around the world get married before the age of 18. In the developing world, 1 in 7 girls is married before her 15th birthday, with some brides as young as 8 or 9. When girls are married as children, their educational opportunities and future prosperity are limited. Despite laws against it and growing negative public opinion, child marriage remains prevalent, perpetuated by cultural norms, poverty and lack of access to education.

Berhane Hewan (Light of Eve):

The Ethiopian government, Population Council, United Nations Fund For Population Act (UNFPA), the UN Foundation and the Nike Foundation collaborated on this 2-year (2004-2006) pilot program in Ethiopia's Amhara region to prevent child marriage targeting girls ages 10-19 years.

The multi-faceted strategies to delay child marriage involved engaging the girls' families and religious leaders, as well as the broader community. They were provided with information about the dangers of child marriage at community meetings. To help overcome the economic barriers of sending girls to school, the program provided schools with materials and uniforms. Adult mentors to support girls were enlisted. Conditional economic incentives to families for keeping girls unmarried were provided. Such incentives involved girls receiving chickens or a goat if they remained unmarried and in school for the two-year duration of the project.

In communities where these strategies were implemented, girls aged 12-14 years were 94% less likely to be married at the end of the program than were girls in that age range at its inception. Girls aged 15 to 17 years who were awarded chickens for every year they remained unmarried and in school were half as likely to be married at the end of the program than were girls in that age range at its inception. Two thirds of 12 to 14 year old girls were less likely to be married at the end of the program than were girls of the same age range at its inception. This program is ongoing and is being carried out in other parts of Ethiopia. It was also implemented in Burkina Faso (2010-2015) where USAID provided funding.

Wedding Busters and Child Marriage Free Zones:

This is a collaborative project between youth groups, local government, NGOs and others in Bangladesh to create and maintain a Child Marriage Free Zone by preventing child marriage.

When a youth group hears of a child who is going to be married or when a girl approaches it about her impending marriage, its leaders talk with the parents, explain the harm it will do to the child and request that they stop the marriage. If the parents don't listen, the group tells the adult community leaders. Working with local authorities, these leaders intervene.

The result of such strategy shows that while the average age of marriage in Bangladesh is 15 years, the average age of marriage in Child Marriage Free Zones is 17 years.

Tackling Child Marriage:

This project in Kebumen, a rural part of Java province in Indonesia, was a collaboration between a local youth group and a local radio station. Its goal was to combat child marriage by raising awareness of the detrimental effects of child marriage on young people. Its strategy involved a radio station dedicated to programs run by youth leaders, giving young people a chance to influence decision making.

As a result, Kebumen families are now starting to work together to prevent early and forced marriages in the community. Ensuring that girls complete their education is becoming a priority and more girls are now being encouraged to wait until they are older before getting married.

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT):

Sponsored by the World Bank in Malawi, this project's aim was to boost school enrollment and keep girls in school. To overcome high drop-out rates in school among teenage girls due to high cost of

secondary school, this two year (2007-2009) cash transfer program targeted girls 13-22 years old. It involved providing cash stipends to girls and parents ranging from \$1 to \$5 a month for adolescent girls in addition to payments to parents from \$4 to \$10. The program resulted in reducing drop-out rates by approximately 40%. The World Bank supports CCT programs in 13 countries.

SAMATA - Keeping Girls in Secondary School:

This ambitious project aims to transform the lives of a select group of girls in N. Karnataka, Bangalore, India, by attacking overlapping barriers to their getting a secondary school education and thereby improving their health outcomes. STRIVE, a research consortium, has partnered with the Karnataka Health Promotion Trust (KHPT), the government of Karnataka, the World Bank and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to assess obstacles, formulate the project, and evaluate its progress.

The girls, some 3,600, are marginalized by their caste, geography, and local traditions. While the Indian government has recognized that, as members of lower castes and tribes, they deserve special attention, these girls continue to lack social mobility, complicated by the fact that they live in remote villages where by tradition girls are undervalued and where poor families struggle just to stay afloat doing agricultural work. Proportionate to other populations of adolescent girls in the area, these girls are more likely to be removed from school by their parents to marry early or to be sent out as Devadasi sex workers, both of which increase the likelihood of their contracting HIV. The first phase of the project, begun in 2012, assessed the obstacles to keeping girls in school, as follows:

Current gender norms allow boys to be disrespectful, and often violent, to girls;

the schools lack infrastructure suitable for girls and they are not safe;

community groups and schools fail to protect girls and enforce their right to an education;

the girls themselves lack role models, incentives to aspire to careers, and solidarity with other girls.

The project has fashioned separate interventions with each of these groups, seeking to change boys' attitudes through special curriculums, involving families and teachers in the School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMCs,) which are already in existence, and educating and engaging community leaders and educators through media and community meetings. Study groups and counselling, as well as initiatives like girls sports teams, are aimed at allowing girls the opportunity to voice their concerns, gain solidarity with other girls, and begin to recognize their own potential. Project leaders emphasize that teachers, educators and local leaders have not been suitably accountable to gender issues, failing to keep gender-sensitive data and to make better use of organizations like the SDMCs to make parents aware of existing incentives that can defray the costs of education.

The goal of this project, which enters final evaluation in June of 2017, is to improve the subject girls' chances of: 1) entering formal secondary education, 7th to 8th standard (the "standard" designation in the Indian school system is the equivalent of a US school "grade."); 2) completing the 10th standard; 3) delaying marriage to the 10th standard; 4) delaying sexual debut to the 10th standard, thereby reducing the likelihood of their contracting HIV. SAMATA project leaders are hopeful the schools, communities and the N. Karnataka government will, over time, normalize the processes they have put in place, keeping these girls in school and allowing them to lead more expansive lives.

Summary

Examination of efforts to overcome the obstacle of child marriage reveals that no single strategy will offer an antidote to them. Rather, a combination of strategies designed to fit the local context will likely be most successful in transforming behaviors, attitudes, and social norms. Sustainability is always a concern. If project funding and manpower have been supplied from outside the community, the community must be able to continue the initiative using its own resources.

UNITED STATES PROGRAMS FOCUSING ON INTERNATIONAL GIRLS' EDUCATION

The Agency for International Development (AID) is responsible for US foreign aid efforts targeting girls' education. Their latest initiative, the Let Girls Learn program, was launched in 2015 by President Obama and the First Lady after a meeting with Malala Yousafzai, the young Pakistani Nobel laureate who was shot by the Taliban because she wanted to attend school.

The Let Girls Learn Initiative seeks to reinforce the urgency, especially in underdeveloped countries, of creating and enhancing educational opportunities for teenage girls. It employs three strategies: increasing access to quality education, reducing barriers and empowering adolescent girls by elevating existing programs, building public-private partnerships and cooperating with other nations to join in the effort. The Let Girls Learn initiative involves governments and corporations in raising money for, and building awareness of, increasing educational training for adolescent girls.

In June, 2016 USAID announced a commitment of \$27 million to support the Let Girls Learn project in Liberia with Peace Corps providing around 75 new trainees for the project. In July of 2016, USAID in conjunction with the Girls' Education Forum in London announced a commitment of \$25 million to help sustain a teacher apprenticeship program in Afghanistan for adolescent girls. USAID also announced in July, 2016, a commitment of \$27 million for a Let Girls Learn Program in Libya.

As part of the initiative, the Peace Corps' Let Girls Learn Program encourages community-led solutions by empowering local leaders to put lasting solutions in place. Peace Corps Volunteers who live and work at the grassroots level serve as catalysts of change by creating the conditions for girls to succeed and encouraging local initiative. Since the launch of the Let Girls Learn program, with the help of corporate partners and individual donors from all over the U.S., Peace Corps has funded projects in more than 38 countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Central America and deployed some 2,800 volunteers.

Since Let Girls Learn is a comparatively new initiative there is not yet much significant evaluation for the project.

Other programs sponsored by USAID: In Liberia, the USAID Education Equality and Access Program is encouraging PTAs, school principals and community leaders to provide a safe, friendly environment, and gender equality for adolescent girls. Ten safe school initiatives will be piloted across Liberia. Also in Liberia, The Department of Agriculture has a McGovern-Dole International Food and Child Nutrition Program that operates a grant program in Liberian Counties that provides a monthly take-home ration for girls in grades 4-6 if they maintain an 80% or higher attendance rate.

Less than 1% of the US Federal Budget goes to the State Department, which funds foreign aid efforts. The amount allotted for programs like Let Girls Learn is only a fraction of that. One could argue that as the world's leading democracy, the US has a moral obligation to support such programs. US foreign policy experts also contend that educating girls is among the most strategic investments the US can make to achieve its foreign policy platform and sustainability goals.

CONCLUSION

Improving and expanding girls' education is a collective effort and it does not take place in a vacuum. If an educated girl lives in a society with few job opportunities and where women are not organized to protect their rights, she may still face a bleak adulthood. Local and International women's groups must work with proponents of girls' education to ensure that society affords women opportunities. Civil rights organizations must continue to report abuses of girls and women, and governments need to be willing to prioritize investing their dollars in teachers and school infrastructure. Getting more girls access to education goes hand in hand with reducing poverty.

Growing enrollment numbers also do not tell the whole story. Watchdog organizations continue to voice concerns over the quality of education provided to both girls and boys, who in many areas of the world (including some areas of the US) may graduate at level but still lack basic literacy skills. Data gaps can also make it difficult to assess progress for girls, particularly in the world's poorest countries. According to Data 2X, an initiative of the UN Foundation that aims to close gender data gaps, over 20% of countries fail to disaggregate by gender national statistics on mortality, labor force participation, education and some health outcomes. A total of 70% of countries do not disaggregate statistics by gender related to informal employment, business ownership, unpaid work or domestic violence. Women remain invisible in many ways. Data on women and girls are critical to ensure that policy approaches are evidence-based and strategic.

The EFA and UN Millennium Project have been instrumental in keeping the issue of girls' education on everyone's radar, but experts suggest we should be cautious. One of the UN's Sustainability Goals, replacing and expanding the Millennium Goals, is the universal completion of both primary and secondary school, with a target date of 2030. Contributors to the 2016 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) suggest it will be many decades before this could be a reality, especially for girls.

This Fact Sheet was prepared by members of the International Relations Committee of the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County, MD: Judy Whiton, Chair, Elaine Apter, Mary Burnet, Nancy Bliss, Diane Hibino, Elissa Kramer, Judy Newman, Connie Tonat and Linda Yangas.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we support an organization or two? What do you look for when you support an organization?
- 2) What can be done to help make sure educated girls obtain jobs to support their families and/or careers?
- 3) What can NGOs do to help make initiatives sustainable?
- 4) Getting girls into secondary school is the new focus for world education leaders. Why? What do you see as the biggest benefit?
- 5) What is gender data? Why is it so important to have it when we consider the issue of girls' education?
- 6) How do you see the role of the US in supporting and promoting girls' education?

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