

Forum: SDC1

Issue: Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education

Student Officer: Mar Frechina

Position: Deputy President



Introduction

There is power in education: providing enhanced access to employment and literacy, developing important life skills like critical thinking, and building an understanding of the world and one's identity. Education empowers those less privileged and bridges divides. However, there remains a very prevalent difference in the access to education and the quality of such across genders, especially in low-income countries. Equality and education have a somewhat proportional relationship: increased education can lead to increased equality, and vice versa. If gender equality is achieved in the education system, allowing young girls and boys to perceive each other as equals, this change can extend to other aspects of sociocultural life where gender norms are still oppressive and seemingly stagnant. Considering the current global situation, though, some aspects must be leveled in order to achieve equal access to education for all genders alike.

Education can help reduce gender disparities in areas beyond the academic field alone, including the reduction of poverty, along with increased reproductive autonomy and political power. This is a matter that also impacts female health, particularly maternal and child death rates, which are found to decrease when mothers have better access to education.

The issue at hand remains unsolved in LEDCs more than MEDCs, not only because the education budget is slim, but rather a product of colonialism. Evidently, the problem dates back to the tumultuous transition to the postcolonial period. The rapid growth of the population, sporadic changes in economic growth, arrival of new crises, as well as massive systemic adjustments, reduced the investments in academic institutions. In many cultures the education of men will be prioritized over that of women, seeing as opportunities for employment are much more available for men than women.

Wealth disparities are not the only thing preventing proper education for most young girls in these countries, traditional values and beliefs have an immense effect on gender norms and as a result, these women's social mobility. Some of these values may link back to religion or general traditional roles, usually reducing the female role to that of housekeeping and childbearing, for which education is not essential.

In many cases where both traditional values and poverty are present, young girls' education will be sacrificed for the formation of a family, through the practice of child marriage. Creating an economic dependence on the husband is often deemed a more rational and appropriate solution to the lack of employment available for women than providing the costly yet necessary resources to allow women to

create their own life and independence. In preparation for the wedding, the young brides will stop attending school, if they did before, and once married it is almost impossible to return to the academic path, seeing as their only role will be a domestic one.

Definition of Key Terms

LEDCs

Less Economically Developed Countries. These are typically postcolonial countries that do not have the necessary resources and budgets and tend to still rely on agricultural practices to support the economy.

MEDCs

More Economically Developed Countries. Countries fall into this category if they are industrialized, have higher life expectancy and high disposable income. All European countries are considered MEDCs, along with the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, etc.

NICs

Newly industrialized countries (developing countries). "These countries have moved away from an agriculture-based economy and into a more industrialized, urban economy." (Investopedia) Some examples include but are not limited to China, India, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, South Africa, Turkey, Brazil, and Mexico.

FCV states

States affected by fragility, conflict and violence. These are states that experience humanitarian crises, protracted emergencies and armed conflicts, occasionally war, and are generally more prone to poverty, crime, and mass health issues. (WHO).

Examples of such states include but are not limited to: Mozambique, Syria, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Afghanistan, Togo, Burkina Faso, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Cameroon, Libya, and Yemen.

Social mobility

Social mobility refers to one's ability to change their socioeconomic circumstances regardless of factors beyond their control (such as their birth family's status). This then also relates to equality of opportunity, where all individuals should have access to the resources necessary to change status. In places with high social mobility, the assigning of social status will be more influenced by merit than by generational wealth or birth-given privilege

Equity vs Equality

Equality implies that everyone is treated the same regardless of their circumstances, while equity is similar to equality of opportunity, where each individual's situation is taken into account and the appropriate resources are allocated in order to level the grounds.

Public private partnerships (PPPs)

“Public-private partnerships involve collaboration between a government agency and a private-sector company that can be used to finance, build, and operate projects” (Investopedia) This is present in the academic sector through schools with a commercial purpose. When an academic institution becomes a for-profit one, education, the supposed main purpose, might be compromised.

Non-state faith-based schools

Typically private schools, which require user fees to cover the institution's expenses and are mostly managed by religious bodies independent of the state. Yet, in many cases they will be state-refinanced.

State Capacity

“Capacity is understood as the ability of a state government to carry out its preferred policies. Low capacity may arise as a result of either low bureaucratic quality, limited financial resources, or high costs, or the combination of the three, making it difficult for states to achieve desired policy outcomes” (Østby, Urdal, and Rudolfson).

Dowry

A payment made by a bride's family to the groom's family in order to establish an agreement. The same concept applies in reverse to bride prices (where the groom's family pays). This is typically the case in arranged marriages and has multiple purposes, one of them is simply being a cultural custom, while others are serving as a sort of insurance in the case of divorce, among others.

Background Information in

Ensuring the accessibility of primary and secondary education regardless of socioeconomic barriers

Lower income countries with lower state capacity are more prone to gender disparity in education, and FCV contexts further enhance these inequalities, even forcing the women that gain an education into poverty later on. “Girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than those in non-FCV contexts, and are 90% more likely to be out of secondary school than in non-FCV contexts” (World Bank Blogs). Some states are less capable of expanding their budget in education and provide enough opportunities for all, prioritizing male education based on the labor opportunities and the economic benefits this investment would supposedly provide once they enter the labor force. This is especially the case in FCV countries, where ongoing time-sensitive crises divert the governmental attention to their resolution instead of allowing space to focus on background concerns like education. “In addition, underdevelopment, poor infrastructure, and low government spending on education typically correlate with poor quality education” (Østby, Urdal, and Rudolfson). Studies have shown that the dropout rate for girls attending lower quality schools is much greater than those that are sufficiently funded and appropriate conditions for learning.

“Economists and international development agencies believe that educating girls is beneficial not only due to their own improved vocational opportunities, living conditions, and social status, but also because it promotes economic growth and social development of the entire nation, not least due to the positive influence of educated mothers on the human capital and health of their children” (Østby, Urdal, and Rudolfson). Despite the large-scale changes governments might put into action, poverty may still influence the decisions of individual parents on their daughters’ education.

In order to achieve goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals — Gender Equality — foreign aid have been provided to low capacity states in the form of monetary donations. There is literature debating opposing stances on the helpfulness of foreign aid in ensuring long lasting economic development and gender equality in recipient countries. It has been found that in some cases domestic expenditure did not improve primary education enrollment rates as much as external donations did, because of the higher budget dedicated strictly to education these provided, which also reduced internal cost and increased the state capacity of the LEDCs that receive it. “Also, whereas domestic expenditure on education is sometimes biased against the poor, donor strategies usually emphasize poor and disadvantaged target groups, in particular girls for whom school attendance is often lower than for boys” (Østby, Urdal, and Rudolfson).

Even in countries where gender parity has been achieved to some extent, imbalances exist between urban and rural areas. This is mainly the case in NICs, where substantial enrollment disadvantages associated with rural residence and with both household and community poverty have been found, since not all areas of the country have been industrialized. Children in rural areas, mainly those in remote communities and mountainous territory, if provided with schooling, will lack basic infrastructure and have less-than-qualified teachers (Hannum and Adams). Rural location relates to other socioeconomic factors of concern, such as low parental literacy rates and economic disadvantage. Students in rural areas are additionally forced into traveling longer distances to school compared to those in urban areas. “These economic challenges and infrastructural shortcomings impact girls most severely” (Kelly and Bhabha). This is due to the everpresent prioritization of male education over female. If the infrastructure has limited space for a limited number of students, these students are more likely to be boys.

Addressing cultural norms and discriminatory practices

Once education supply for all can be ensured by the state, it becomes a matter of demand, whether families are willing to send their daughters to school. It also siezes to be a matter of state capacity and becomes a matter of state willingness. This concerns the state’s ideological desires to enforce gender parity in education, either working towards this goal or making an active effort to systematically discriminate against women and continue to stunt their academic careers. This discrimination can take place on a large scale level or within educational institutions, both continue to reinforce stereotypes and limit girls' educational opportunities. However, the latter is harder to track and

in turn, harder to stop. These discriminations might be manifested in gender-biased curricula, as well as classroom interactions. It is essential to create inclusive learning environments in order to promote equal treatment and opportunities for all students (GGI Insights). While non-state faith-based schools have had very positive impacts on female attendance rates and providing education in LEDCs, they have also been found to perpetuate gender norms through the curricula (UNESCO). There also appeared to be a more tolerance for gender-based violence in these institutions, further permitting the discrimination and mistreatment of young girls (UNESCO).

In traditional gender role expectations, men are expected to pursue academic careers and provide for their families, while women perform domestic tasks. According to gender socialization theories, adolescents internalize these gender role expectations in order to validate their identity, and therefore tend to be the demographic most influenced by these norms (Van der Vleuten, Jaspers, Maas and Van der Lippe). Even in developed countries, where gender parity in education has been achieved, differences remain in the students' preferred fields of study based on gender. This seems to be especially relevant when considering female participation in STEM subjects, which is significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. "Girls outperform boys in science in secondary school in middle- and high-income countries. Boys perform better than girls in mathematics in early grades, but do not have an advantage later, on average. Yet boys are far more likely to be over-represented among the highest performers in mathematics. Girls perform better in mathematics in more gender-equal societies" (UNESCO). This aids the theory that gender norms and gender-equal representation will improve female confidence and ambition and thereby academic performance.

Ending child marriage

The practice of child marriage, a heavily gendered practice which majoritarily affects girls, has decreased substantially in the XXIst century. However it continues to be a ubiquitous problem in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Parts of Latin America and Eastern Europe also report rates of child marriage around 10–20%, and even MEDCs see occasional cases of child marriage. "Studies consistently show that marriage of minor age girls is more likely to occur in rural and impoverished areas with low access to healthcare, regional conflict and instability further exacerbate these vulnerabilities" (Raj). It is believed that the most impoverished girls are at higher risk of falling victim to early marriage. These girls are also often uneducated and if they are, said education will be seized upon marriage, at which point they are also more vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse at the hands of husbands and in-laws. After marriage most control of the young bride's life lies at the hands of the husband and his family, seeing as they commonly move into the marital family's house. Daughters may be considered financial burdens in some cultures with the only solution being marriage. Further, delaying said marriage can be frowned upon because of the risk of premarital sex, whether consensual or due to assault, either would potentially damage the girls' honor and mark her unmarriageable.

In the marital market, more educated boys and men will be of higher value, meaning the bride's

family will have to pay a higher amount of dowry, making families more inclined to support their sons in their studies because they will be reimbursed through dowry later down the line. Marrying a highly educated man is beneficial to the bride's family as a strategy to climb the social ladder, so these grooms are considered higher quality. The inverse is true for girls, whose dowry price decreases with years of schooling. "The joint effect of husband-and-wife education on dowry is negative, implying that though dowry rises with groom's education, the rate of increase is smaller the more educated the bride is" (Goel). Therefore, the system of dowry payment discourages female education and encourages male education, establishing the most financially useful route that of child marriage. "The study of Chowdhury (2004) indicates that in Bangladesh the groom's family demands a lower level of dowry if the bride is underage, as a result of that child marriage is the best solution for the bride's family" (Khan and Mahata).

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

India

India has reported achieving near-universal primary education enrolment through massive infrastructural development, teacher training and community mobilization. However there is a constant contrast between urban and rural secondary school participation rates. Which is especially alarming since about 70% of India's population resides in rural areas (Kelly and Bhabha).

Girl marriage remains a common practice in India, despite the laws forbidding marriage before the age of 18, and the marital market based on the aforementioned dowry supply and demand based on the educational level of brides and grooms (Lal).

China

"In China, poverty remains heavily concentrated in rural areas and disproportionately affects the interior and western regions" (Hannum and Adams). Girls in these regions are less likely to receive quality education. Generally, there remains a common belief of male heir superiority, which also influences educational choices, as boys are considered to have higher capacity for understanding of academics, prioritizing their education over that of girls, which is again, mainly prevalent in rural areas where the true divide occurs (Li).

"Child marriage is driven by gender inequality and the belief that women and girls are somehow inferior to men and boys" (Girls Not Brides). The Chinese legal age for marriage is 18, however as of now China does not have any sort of plan or strategy to combat child marriage

UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)

UNICEF plays a crucial role in advocating children's rights on a global scale, including the universal right to quality education for all, without facing gender discrimination. They have also incited countless initiatives (some of which will be listed below), in order to close the education gender gap on an international scale. UNICEF also performs periodic evaluations of the progress done and the situation

in each country in order to identify next steps to further approach the goal of gender parity.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization)

UNESCO is responsible for the development of global educational policies and always strives for inclusive non-discriminatory practices in these, they also aid in the application of these policies by collaborating with policy-makers and educators, as well as international entities to maximize the impact of their campaigns. Just like UNICEF they also are involved in advocacy and monitoring, along with collecting data on statistics of female enrollment and retention in school that can be used to identify trends and better approach the problem. UNESCO is also equipped to respond to educational crises and provide the necessary resources to ensure the necessary conditions for quality equal education.

UN WOMEN (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women)

Because this is a matter pertaining to gender equality, UN Women also is relevant because of their specialization in empowering women by implementing and supporting programs specifically designed to promote girls' education. UN Women is also noteworthy for its recognition of intersectionality and how the nuances of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background and more can determine a girl's access to education. They have also worked hard to end the legalization of child marriage and continue to work towards reducing and eventually stopping it entirely.

Timeline of Events

Date (start - end)	Name	Description
September, 28 th , 1929	Child Marriage Restraint Act	Also known as the Sarda Act, it was passed in India and is considered the first legislative act aiming to end child marriage. Here, the legal marriage age for girls was established as 14 years old and 18 years old for boys.
December, 14 th , 1960	The adoption by the U.N. General Assembly of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples	This resolution revolutionized the United Nations approach to decolonization and incited a variety of future resolutions and conferences to accelerate the process of decolonization. Which in turn facilitated the admission of emerging states to the UN along with aid programs to support these states into the postcolonial period, including future education reforms.
March, 9 th and	World Conference on	This conference, held in Jomtien, Thailand, was

10 th , 1990	Education for All (EFA)	where the World Declaration on Education for All and the Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs were adopted. These proved to be “useful guides for governments, international organizations, educators and development professionals in designing and carrying out policies and strategies to improve basic education services” (UNESCO). The goal was to achieve primary school enrollment for all children by the year 2000.
September, 6 th to 8 th 2000	Millennium Summit	At the turn of the century, world leaders met at the UN headquarters in New York, to develop the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Goal 2 aimed to achieve universal primary education by 2015, and goal 3 intended to promote gender equality and empower women
April, 26 th to 28 th , 2000	World Education Forum in Dakar	Following the Millennium Development Goals, the Dakar Framework for Action was adopted, in which the EFA goals and their impacts were evaluated and renewed postponing the deadline to 2015
June, 20 th to 22 nd , 2012	The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD)	The UNCSD conference, held in Rio de Janeiro, was where the Sustainable Development Goals were born and where the previous gender parity in education goals were extended yet again to be completed by 2030
December 2019	Start of the COVID-19 pandemic	The COVID-19 pandemic halted all programs attempting to end child marriage and with the vulnerable state of the world, the practice increased. Education entirely seized in many areas of the world with no proper access to technology. The effects were devastating
September, 16 th to 19 th , 2022	Transforming Education Summit	This conference held in the UN base in New York served as a response to a global education crisis. The purpose was to search for “solutions to recover

		<p>pandemic-related learning losses and sow the seeds to transform education in a rapidly changing world”(UN.org). Bringing the importance of education and the SDG goals back to the forefront of international politics.</p>
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Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- United Nations. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 1948.
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
- Education for All, 30 January 1998 **(A/RES/52/84)**.
- The Girl Child, 17 December 2015 **(A/RES/70/138)**.
- Realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl, 14 July 2017 **(A/HRC/RES/35/22)**.
- Child, early and forced marriage in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic, 14 October 2021 **(A/HRC/RES/48/6)**.
- World Declaration of Education for All (1990)
- Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs (1990)
- Global education monitoring report 2022: gender report, deepening the debate on those still left behind (UNESCO)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Conferences have been held and global goals have been set at various points in the past 30 years to attempt to solve the issue.

Education For All foundation

The EFA foundation was formed in 1990 and since then has gone through three major faces of strategies to ensure universal education. Initially the goal was to close the education gender gap by 2000, when this was not met, the goal was included again in the MDGs for 2015. Progress has been made since then, and universal education is more or less a reality at least at the primary level. “Nevertheless, at current rates, it could be another 100 years before all girls in sub-Saharan Africa have the opportunity to complete a full 12 years of education, which is a commitment in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)” (Oxfam).

The Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education program in Ghana

On a national level, individual states have attempted to solve the issue internally by initiating a variety of programs, such as Ghana's FCUBE (The Free and Compulsory Universal

Basic Education) in 1995. India is also a country that has put forward many schemes to address academic inequalities for women, as well as issues in rural areas, like the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act . These countries among others have also been working with international partnerships to receive aid and make the change more effective.

Other attempts can be seen in the timeline of events

Possible Solutions

Ensuring the accessibility of primary and secondary education regardless of socioeconomic barriers:

Increase education budget and state capacity in LEDCs, potentially through foreign aid

“On the one hand, in poor countries where the number of children exceeds the capacity of schools, an increase of public education expenditures can expand the capacity of schools by providing more classrooms and teachers. With added capacity in schools, more children will be able to enroll in education.” (Østby, Urdal, and Rudolfson) Given the very likely case that the majority of the already enrolled students are boys, and therefore most boys in the region are already enrolled, incoming students will inevitably be girls, evening out the gender ratio and ensuring equality.

Support the most vulnerable and prone to illiteracy

Supporting those included but not limited to: those in rural areas, ethnic minorities, those affected by poverty, and those with disabilities, is an effective way to ensure all girls receive quality education, and should be done in a preferably fee-free way. It is important to build strong foundations for public schools to be adequately financed “do not direct public funds to commercial or for-profit private schools, or market-oriented PPPs. Avoid diverting scarce public resources and attention away from the essential task of building good-quality, inclusive public schools that are free and accessible for all students” (Oxfam).

Establish an effective and transparent feedback system

By establishing monitoring systems to gather data on the progress made in achieving the issue on a smaller scale and strengthening the already existing evaluative systems, strategies can be applied more effectively and in real-time. Data can be used to assess the impact of interventions, identify challenges, and make realistic decisions for improvement.

Addressing cultural norms and discriminatory practices:

Apply non-discriminatory education

Supply textbooks and curricula that challenge patriarchal norms and empower women instead of perpetuating harmful stereotypes, investing in relevant and non-discriminatory content. As well as

training teaching staff to approach students and teaching material with impartiality and respect for all genders. “Develop local accountability mechanisms between schools and their communities, parents and children; build better safeguarding and accountability mechanisms from national to local levels, including ensuring budgets and other information is available publicly and transparently for citizen scrutiny” (Oxfam). Allow for local feedback from students, parents, and staff to comment on the quality of the education, focusing on the impact on the students’ formation, not just based on performance.

Initiate media campaigns

Means of communication can be used to promote ideas of equality and reduce discrimination. Media may include but is not limited to: radio, television, books, social media, and other news outlets. Female achievements can be celebrated through these and generally provide more gendered representation in the academic field along with others as well.

Reevaluate existing policies and laws to reduce discrimination

Illegalizing discriminatory practices and potentially categorizing them as hate crimes will reduce the tolerance around discrimination and encourage more respectful treatment of women and girls. Even in more progressive states, laws are yet to be renewed and adapted to gender equality goals, this is a good first step towards parity.

Ending child marriage:

Incentivize change in families inclined to the practice

This may be done through economic incentives or by promoting the academic route above that of marriage. Cultural and religious traditions play a great role in the persistence of child marriage, so promoting campaigns focused on gender equality and female independence, as well as their potential contribution to the work force and national economy, may be a way to decrease the effect of gender norms in the families’ minds. Furthermore, representing the importance of education and its benefits is important to create a sense of priority before domestic chores.

Increase penalties against the illegal act of child marriage

If criminal charges are more severe and have more destructive economic impacts on all those involved in the arrangement of child marriages, the practice may be discouraged, since the risks are greater than the benefits. This also has to be followed by increased law enforcement intervention on a local and a global scale to ensure that this crime does not go unnoticed.

Provide health and counseling services to victims

A more retroactive solution that is important nonetheless, children that have been or continue to be victims of child marriage have the right to access health services, potentially because of early pregnancy and other sexual health concerns. Counseling is also crucial considering the increased mental health problems associated with child marriage, healing mentally is a key step to eventually reintegrating victims into the academic realm. If victims have children of their own, health services should

also be provided to these to ensure the cycle ends and they can be provided education.

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