



Development of Women in The World through Literacy

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KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process."

—ICPD Programme of Action, paragraph 4.2

Education is important for everyone, but it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Investments in secondary school education for girls yields especially high dividends.

Girls who have been educated are likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Educated women can recognize the importance of health care and know how to seek it for themselves and their children. Education helps girls and women to know their rights and to gain confidence to claim them. However, women's literacy rates are significantly lower than men's in most developing countries.

Education has far-reaching effects

The education of parents is linked to their children's educational attainment, and the mother's education is usually more influential than the father's. An educated mother's greater influence in household negotiations may allow her to secure more resources for her children.

Educated mothers are more likely to be in the labour force, allowing them to pay some of the costs of schooling, and may be more aware of returns to schooling. And educated mothers, averaging fewer children, can concentrate more attention on each child.

Besides having fewer children, mothers with schooling are less likely to have mistimed or unintended births. This has implications for schooling, because poor parents often must choose which of their children to educate.

Closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. The 1994 Cairo Consensus recognized education, especially for women, as a force for social and economic development. Universal completion of primary education was set as a 20-year goal, as was wider access to secondary and higher education among girls and women. Closing the gender gap in education by 2015 is also one of the benchmarks for the Millennium Development Goals.

What UNFPA is doing

UNFPA advocates widely for universal education and has been instrumental in advancing legislation in many countries to reduce gender disparities in schooling. The 2003 UNFPA global survey on ICPD+10 showed that most programme countries formally recognize the importance of reducing the gender gap in education between boys and girls.

UNFPA supports a variety of educational programmes, from literacy projects to curricula development with a focus on reproductive and sexual health. Because of the sensitivity of these issues, the focus and names of the educational programmes have gone through a number of changes over the past decades.

Gender issues now receive more attention than they did in past pro-

grammes, and instruction methods have changed, from a didactic approach to one emphasizing student participation and communications skills.

In Jamaica, through an alliance with the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation and funding from the European Union, UNFPA supported a programme that enabled thousands of girls to return to school following pregnancies and to acquire technical skills.

In a UNFPA-supported project in Bolivia, women are learning to read in their indigenous language while learning about reproductive health, safe motherhood and health insurance.

In Mali, a literacy project reaches adolescents both in and out of school, with a focus on migrant girls, domestic workers, victims of violence and abuse, and those living on the margins of society.

In Mauritania, UNFPA is collaborating on an educational initiative in four of the poorest regions of the country. The initiative aims to reduce the dropout rate by half and equip at least 5,000 girls with a range of skills, from home economics and information technology to environmental preservation.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA

It has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia.[4][4] From equal status with men in ancient times[5] through the low points of the medieval period,[6] to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have held high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha and Leader of the Opposition. As of 2011, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the parliament) were women. However, women in India continue to face atrocities such as rape, acid throwing, dowry killings, and the forced prostitution of young girls.[7] [8][9] According to a global poll conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the "fourth most dangerous country" in the world for women,[10] [11] and the worst country for women among the G20 countries.[12]

LITERACY AND WOMEN IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

If everyone shared common beliefs about literacy, its purpose and its meaning, the complex problem of unequal literacy levels among genders might not exist. Unfortunately, due to prejudices and stereotypes, not all members of society have been given equal access to an education. In countries all across the world statistics show men achieve higher levels of literacy than women. These discrepancies in literacy levels directly reflect society's stereotypical perceptions of women and their role in society. In developing countries especially, the gap between gender literacy levels is extremely large. Because of the noticeable difference between literacy levels among men and women, the United Nations declared 1990 to be International Literacy Year with female illiteracy its focal point. At that time, estimates showed that one third of all women could not read nor write. UNESCO, one of literacy's leading sponsors, declared the "lack of advancement in the education of women and girls is 'the heart of the problem of illiteracy'"[UN Chronicle,]. The problem is particularly bad in developing countries. According to one United Nations report "females have higher rates of illiteracy than males in all of the developing regions...For the least developed group as a whole, female illiteracy is 73 per cent and male, 53 per cent"[UN Chronicle,]. In many developing countries the gap between male and female

literacy levels exists because women have been discouraged from receiving the same educational benefits of men. A survey of Third World countries "reveals, women in these nations face a wide range of prejudices. In work, health, education, and law, Third World women are second-class citizens"[Scholastic Update, p24]. Women also suffer from "decreased spending on education due to economic constraints"[UN Chronicle,] and "traditional attitudes about women's role in society"[UN Chronicle,]. Many cultures view the male as the authority figure and women as their inferiors. In this type of environment, women's education is viewed as a threat to the their way of life. "Parents may fear that education will harm their daughters' marriage prospects" [Scholastic Update,], or that their daughter's dowry will have to increase. Studies show that educated women marry educated men, and educated men require larger dowries for their wives[Hill and Lind,]. Even an uneducated man will demand a larger dowry for a literate women. This occurs because the men fear that an educated women might "expose their ignorance and, above all, challenge their power position within the family"[Lind,].

The concept of a relationship between education and social status is an important one in discussions about literacy. Historically education has been used by the dominant group in a society as a tool to maintain their superior position. By denying women an education, men can maintain a superior position over them. Education will empower women with the ability to question authority, ask informed questions, and search for solutions. In many countries this will topple traditional gender relations; educated women will inevitably fight for their equality. "The dilemma for both men and women is how to reconcile the man's self-image as dominant authority to the women's self-image as an equal (Hill and King, Despite the threat to their gendered traditions, there has been a trend to increase the educational level of women in developing countries. "The experience of over two decades of over two decades of development efforts around the world has shown that countries which place the emphasis upon the private economic sector achieve the best development results. This means that, especially for the least developed countries, the women's path to development is the best path. Emphasis upon the problems, concerns, and capacities of women is the bright hope of the development future"[Reagan]. With increased literacy, women will be able to influence the economic, social, and human aspects of their community. Education "can enhance a society's ability to overcome poverty, increase incomes, improve health and nutrition, and reduce family size"[UNChronicle].

By making education available to all members of society, a nation can create a larger and more skilled labor force. Education endows a person with self-confidence, the ability to make educated choices, understand directions, and develop new concepts. These skills are the driving force behind technological and economic advancement. Also, by becoming part of the labor force, women will be able to add to their family's income, allowing many families to raise their standard of living. Statistics show "that in most parts of the world where the standard of living is high, literacy is equally high among men and women..On the contrary, where the standard of living is lower, fewer people - especially women - are educated"[Viedma, p20]. These facts alone are an incentive for governments to create a national policy which will overcome illiteracy.

A questionnaire distributed by the World YMCA in 1988 confirms the hypothesis that providing females with an education promotes a nation's economy. The survey shows that women who receive literary training "are better equipped to search for jobs and can therefore earn more. They realize that they can do some jobs which are traditionally considered to be for men only [, and] They are more able to run small businesses and keep records on their own"[Lind, p24]. Educating women allows a country to tap into a previously unused resource, thus heightening the level of production the country can achieve. Women's education is not based solely on the economic benefits it will provide. Many women are beginning to realize the impact education will have on their lives. Not long ago a group of newly literate women from the south coast of Kenya were explaining the advantages of their recently acquired skills in reading, writing and calculation. Now they could sign their names they had more control over money transactions. They could read medical prescriptions and instructions. "Our eyes have been opened," said one of them, expressing the new sense of pride and increased self-reliance they all felt[Lind,].

The benefits of women's education extends to all aspects of society. Besides contributing to a nation's economy, educated women are an asset to a nation's private sector. "Women's education is also associated with quantifiable increases in home output - in the form of better health and nutrition, more attention given to each child, and so on - despite the fact that better-educated women are likely to spend less time in the home"[Hill and King, p68]. Educated women tend to marry later in life and have less children. Also there is an inverse correlation between the level of education and child mortality rates. Women who have had an opportunity to educate themselves are more aware of prenatal health care, hygiene, and nutritional practices[Hill and King, p12]. "For every year of mothers' education, child mortality is reduced 7 to 9 per cent"[UN Chronicle] .

The greater amount of knowledge a women possesses, the more she can influence and contribute to her society. Through education women gain "political awareness, participation and organizational skills"[Lind, p24] which enables them to become effective community leaders. It is also proven that educated women have a profound effect on future generations. A key strategy behind continuing women's education is encouraging females in professional postitions, such as teaching. The success of these women will provide young girls with role models of their same sex who will motivate and

excite these girls to educate themselves.

Many developing nations have recognized these benefits of women's education and adopted mass literacy programs. These programs were implemented in countries "where both the state and the people concerned expected literacy to be one of many factors which would improve social, political, and economic conditions and help develop human and material resources"[Lind, p26]. Unfortunately, despite women's desire for education, these campaigns have had difficulty encouraging women to participate. Some women are "overburdened with domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, fetching water and firewood, as well as farming and earning money"[Lind,]. Others are "directly discouraged by the attitudes of men"[Lind].

Literacy campaigns, however, are beginning to have an impact on many communities. Where these programs have the full support of national and local leaders they have been effective in reducing illiteracy.

The reason why this support [is] so important was explained by one woman who was asked what her husband thought about her participation in literacy classes. "Yes, he grumbles a bit, as men do," she said. "Some men are very worried, and they don't let their wives attend classes. But it's too late, I think. When the Area Commissioner held a meeting here both men and women were asked to come. We didn't dare, in the beginning. But the cell leader had brought his wife, and she came back to fetch us. The Area Commissioner had complained that so few women were present and said that he would not start the meeting until everyone had met up[Lind, p26]. These mass literacy campaigns, supported by the government officials and local leaders, have had excellent success in reaching out and educating thousands of illiterate women. Expanding women's education has become an important objective for developing countries. The benefits are undeniable, educated women contribute positively to every aspect of society. Within the community they add to the labor force, increasing GNP, and ultimately increasing a country's level of income. In the home they promote health care, and education, creating a standard for the future. For developing nations to continue to grow it is crucial that they provide education to the entire population.

EDUCATION : A SOCIAL RIGHT AND A DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE

Education's importance has been emphasized by a number of international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.² The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, recognized that women's literacy is key to empowering women's participation in decisionmaking in society and to improving families' well-being.³ In addition, the United Nations has articulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include goals for improved education, gender equality, and women's empowerment (see Box 1 at end of article). The MDGs emphasize education's essential role in building democratic societies and

creating a foundation for sustained economic growth.

Education contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the productive capacities of the labor force. A recent study of 19 developing countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, concluded that a country's long-term economic growth increases by 3.7 percent for every year the adult population's average level of schooling rises.⁵ Thus, education is a key strategy for reducing poverty, especially in the MENA region, where poverty is not as deep as in other developing regions.⁶ According to the United Nations Population Fund, countries that have made social investments in health, family planning, and education have slower population growth and faster economic growth than countries that have not made such investments.⁷

In the increasingly open global economy, countries with high rates of illiteracy and gender gaps in educational attainment tend to be less competitive, because foreign investors seek labor that is skilled as well as inexpensive. Various global trends pose special challenges to women who are illiterate or have limited education. Economies' export orientation and the growing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises create opportunities for women, but women need the appropriate education and training to take full advantage of these opportunities.

In addition, the benefits of female education for women's empowerment and gender equality are broadly recognized:

As female education rises, fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves.

Increases in girls' secondary school enrollment are associated with increases in women's participation in the labor force and their contributions to household and national income.

Women's increased earning capacity, in turn, has a positive effect on child nutrition.

Children — especially daughters — of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment.

Educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

EDUCATION A WEAPON FOR WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

Female education is a catch-all term for a complex set of issues and debates surrounding education (primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, and health education in particular) for girls and women. It includes areas of gender equality and access to education, and its connection to the alleviation of poverty. Also involved are the issues of single-sex education and religious education in that the division of education along gender lines as well as religious teachings on education have been traditionally dominant and are still highly relevant in contemporary discussions of educating

Females as a global consideration.

While the feminist movement has certainly promoted the importance of the issues attached to female education, the discussion is wide-ranging and by no means narrowly defined. It may include, for example, AIDS education.^[1] Universal education, meaning state-provided primary and secondary education independent of gender is not yet a global norm, even if it is assumed in most developed countries. In some Western countries, women have surpassed men at many levels of education. For example, in the United States in 2005/2006, women earned 62% of associate's degrees, 58% of bachelor's degrees, 60% of master's degrees, and 50% of doctorates.^[2] Education for women with handicaps has also improved. In 2011, Giusi Spagnolo became the first woman with Down Syndrome to graduate college in Europe (she graduated from the University of Palermo in Italy.)^{[3][4]} Improving girls' educational levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women, which in turn improves the prospects of their entire community.^[5] In the poorest countries of the world, 50% of girls do not attend secondary school. Yet, research shows that every extra year of school for girls

increases their lifetime income by 15%. Improving female education, and thus the earning potential of women, improves the standard of living for their own children, as women invest more of their income in their families than men do.^[6] Yet, many barriers to education for girls remain. In some African countries, such as Burkina Faso, girls are unlikely to attend school for such basic reasons as a lack of private latrine facilities for girls.

Higher attendance rates of high schools and university education among women, particularly in developing countries, have helped them make inroads to professional careers with better-paying salaries and wages. Education increases a woman's (and her partner and the family's) level of health and health awareness. Furthering women's levels of education and advanced training also tends to lead to later ages of initiation of sexual activity and first intercourse, later age at first marriage, and later age at first childbirth, as well as an increased likelihood to remain single, have no children, or have no formal marriage and alternatively, have increasing levels of long-term partnerships. It can lead to higher rates of barrier and chemical contraceptive use (and a lower level of sexually transmitted infections among women and their partners and children), and can increase the level of resources available to women who divorce or are in a situation of domestic violence. It has been shown, in addition, to increase women's communication with their partners and their employers, and to improve rates of civic participation such as voting or the holding of office.