

Benefits of educating girls in third world countries



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Many children in the Global South do not have access to primary education. “ 113 million children of primary school age are still not enrolled in school, 94% of which live in developing countries,” (Glewwe 2006: 948). “ Less than one youth in two enters junior secondary school and less than one in four enters senior secondary school,” (Verspoor 2008: 2). There are currently unequal proportions of girls to boys who attend primary school in third world countries. “ In Africa, just 46 per cent of girls complete primary school,” (Levine 2006: 129). Men have more opportunities to work and contribute to the economy as they have more opportunities to attend school compared to girls. Girls often have to stay at home for domestic work, while boys are given the opportunity to become educated so they can provide for the family, (Levine 2006: 127).

I chose to explore the topic of educating girls in third world countries after my experience teaching students in South Africa. The school I taught at was sponsored by the Stephen Leacock Foundation. I was amazed to find that many of the students had great dreams and aspirations for the future. The girls especially, were very focused on their studies and seemed committed to their goals. They understood the sacrifices their families had made in order to send them to school and they worked hard to succeed. This opportunity however I discovered, is not the norm. Many students in the developing world do not have the privilege to attend schools such as this one.

Investing in primary education for young girls in third world countries has a significant impact on social and economic development. “ There is widespread agreement that the education of girls is one of the most important investments that any developing country can make in its own

future,” (Hadden 1996: 1). This paper will address the key issues regarding primary education in third world countries today and the importance of investing in primary education particularly for girls as a means to reduce poverty, improve health and promote economic development. This paper explores the obstacles and benefits to education in third world countries.

Obstacles

There are many factors that cause inequality between girls and boys in the educational system. They include gender discrimination, poverty and safety. Especially in third world countries today there are large gender gaps. Gender is socially constructed as opposed to sex, which is biological. Gender gaps have resulted in fewer opportunities for girls compared to boys. Girls face immense prejudice and a lack of opportunity. As a result of the socially constructed gender roles and gender division in the household, females are often not given the opportunity to attend school, or they are pulled out of the education system to do domestic work. The majority (70%), of the students removed from school are girls, (Modesti 2009: 24). Since household duties require little skill or knowledge, girls are not sent to school.

Poverty is another impediment to the education of girls in third world countries. For many families it is cost prohibitive to send their children to school including opportunity costs, (Bellew 1992). Many parents struggle to feed and clothe their children, let alone send them to school. Expenses to send a child to school include the costs of enrollment, uniforms, books and resources. There are also opportunity costs for the family. If a family sends their daughter to school they will no longer have the help they need to manage the household. With the expense of sending children to school,

<https://assignbuster.com/benefits-of-educating-girls-in-third-world-countries/>

many families can only afford to send one child. As a result of predetermined gender roles, the boys are often the chosen ones.

Safety and hygiene are also a major concern in the decision to send girls to school. In addition to hygienic concerns, abuse is also a factor. In developing countries where mainly boys attend school, UNICEF reported that the schools are not suitable for girls, (Anzia 2007). Typically there are no separate bathroom facilities for girls. This is an important factor as girls have more concerns about feminine hygiene and privacy, (Teicher 2005: 1)

Families also worry about the safety of their daughters at school due to violence. Stacy A. announces the threat of sexual violence in some educational institutions; " School is not necessarily an empowering institution...Being pushed to have sex with teachers is not an uncommon occurrence," (ibid: 2). The issue of sexual violence often leads to girls being infected with HIV/AIDS. There is also a high risk of violence when walking long distances to school. With a limited number of schools in developing countries many students must travel a long way by foot to get to school. Girls are very vulnerable in a patriarchal setting where the majority of students are boys and where abuse is not regulated, (Anzia 2007). Girls don't go to school because they are afraid for their safety. Because families are concerned for good reason about sending their daughters to school, girls are often left uneducated.

Benefits

Despite the obstacles, there are an infinite number of benefits to educating girls in third world countries. The best investment a country can make is that

of educating girls. The benefits include reduced poverty, economic growth, improved health, and decreased gender gaps.

Educating girls reduces poverty and improves family welfare in third world countries. The more a girl is educated, the more likely she will be able to get a job. With better job opportunities women will have the chance to make a better living for themselves so they can support their families. In a girl's lifetime her overall income can increase by 20% as a result of having a primary education. This is a greater increase than that of boys, (Levine 2006: 128). It is beneficial to invest especially in girls' education, as women are more likely to reinvest their earnings back into their family and society. The Toronto Star writes, " If they make it to the paid workforce, research shows that women send 90 per cent of their income home compared to 30-to-40 per cent for men," (Toronto Star 2009). Whether it is in the form of remittances or directly supporting their families, women tend to spend their earnings more wisely and support the family and greater community. An increase in income allows families to have more quality resources to sustain a higher standard of living.

The more educated a woman is the healthier she and her family will be. Girls' education greatly decreases fertility rates, cases of HIV/AIDS, and overall health. Sex education and family planning education is extremely beneficial to societies within the third world. Many families live in poverty and are unable to support their large families. With girls' education this can be reduced. As girls and women learn about safe sex practices and family planning women will be more aware of contraception and pregnancy prevention. In Morocco, 44% of women with no education use contraceptives
<https://assignbuster.com/benefits-of-educating-girls-in-third-world-countries/>

whereas 66% of women with secondary education or higher use contraception, (Moghadam 2003). As a result women are able to control family size. This will also help reduce the increasingly growing fertility rates and reduced levels of poverty.

With fewer children to support, women can provide more for their children, the standard of living will rise and children will have improved health. Educating women about safe sex can also help reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and the vulnerability of girls to the disease. As women learn ways to prevent disease the number of people affected will decline. Not only is the education of a girl beneficial to her own health, but also has positive consequences for her family and friends. With an increased knowledge of health, women will take better care of their children by feeding them more nutritious foods and providing them with more health care. According to the World Bank, " It is estimated that one year of female schooling reduces fertility by 10 percent," (Fort, 2008). Educated women are more likely to have healthier families as they pass on their knowledge of healthy living to their children who then pass it on to their children. With health education specifically for women, there is a positive spiral effect on health as it is passed through the generations.

Fertility rates and population growth will also decline not only as a result of health education, but education in general. If girls stay in school they are more likely to postpone marriage and starting a family. In developing countries women tend to get married at a very young age and have children soon after. As a result, women do not have the time to get an education. " A study of eight sub-Saharan countries covering the period from 1987 to 1999

<https://assignbuster.com/benefits-of-educating-girls-in-third-world-countries/>

found that girls' educational attainment was the best predictor of whether they would have their first births during adolescence," (Levine 2006). With the increase in opportunities for girls to attend school, the age at which girls get married and have children will be postponed. " Among married Egyptian women ages 25 to 29, for instance, those with no education had married at age 18, on average, and had their first child by age 20; those with a secondary or higher education married at an average age of 23 and had their first child by age 25," (Moghadam 2003). Women with higher education will have half the number of children, and at a later time in their lives.

Educating girls is the key to economic prosperity within the third world. Educating women empowers them to get involved in the economy and labour market. Women will become more empowered within society the more they are educated. There is currently a large gender gap between girls and boys who attend school in developing countries as well as in the labour force. Women often rely on the men in the family for economic support. In some regions within the global south, there are laws that require women to get permission from their husbands or fathers in order to get a job or be involved economically, (ibid). This is another reason why families do not tend to invest in female education but educating girls will overcome this gender discrimination and give women the power and opportunity to succeed.

A study illustrates that for every additional year of education the adult population has on average, a country's economic growth will increase by 3.7%, (ibid). Simply improving access to education for girls will greatly increase economic growth. By reducing gender gaps, the economy will also flourish. In numerous developing countries boys have higher rates of

enrollment in education compared to girls. In Yemen, the literacy rate of men is three times that of women, (ibid). By decreasing the gender gaps and by making education more widely accessible to girls and women there will be more equal gender representation in the labour force. With smaller gender gaps, the GNP of a nation will grow.

Solutions

These benefits will only be realized by improving the education of girls in third world countries. Access to good education in the third world is limited; with lack of resources, inadequate teachers, and poor curriculum. In order to advance education in the developing world, it is crucial that these problems are solved.

Firstly, education, especially for girls must become more affordable. It is too expensive for families to send their daughters to school. If costs were reduced there would be increased enrollment for girls in the education system. Cost and poverty is one of the biggest factors holding girls back from going to school.

Accessibility can also be improved by building more schools. This would limit the time spent walking to school every day or limit the cost of other travel. Opportunity costs would also be reduced, as students would have more time to help with household chores rather than traveling back and forth to school. Creating more schools closer to communities also improves safety, as there is less danger with a shorter walking distance to school.

Secondly, more qualified teachers and separate sanitation facilities for girls will reduce parental concerns about the welfare of their children. By

<https://assignbuster.com/benefits-of-educating-girls-in-third-world-countries/>

improving the qualifications, hiring practices and training of teachers, sexual abuse would be less prevalent. Physical abuse is one major concern parents have about sending their child to school. With outhouses, the safety and privacy for girls will be improved and there will be fewer restrictions to the education of girls and women in the third world.

Thirdly, in addition to teacher qualifications and sanitation the curriculum needs to be revamped. Curriculums are more often than not, outdated and irrelevant to the students. More attention must be paid to the specific cultural needs of female students. Students must be taught what is relevant to them and their country instead of learning what is taught in another culture.

As well, many teachers do not have the passion for teaching and are often absent from the classrooms. Better trained teachers who are passionate about teaching and making a difference for girls' education need to be recruited, (Levine 2006: 130). They must encourage gender equality and women's empowerment and provide role models for young women.

Qualified, passionate teachers are the ones who can inspire young girls to take action and become engaged learners.

Governments and international aid agencies must work together to create change, (ibid: 131). Developed countries are often the donors of development projects as the third world does not have the funds or resources to create more schools, or hire better teachers. Simply sending teachers over to third world countries to teach what they teach students in Canada is not the solution. It is imperative that the culture and community is

integrated into the curriculum to create a more relevant experience. In order for this to be achieved governments and aid organizations must collaborate to create better educational systems.

Conclusion

Oprah Winfrey once said, “ Educating girls can help change the face of a nation,” and she was right, (Anzia 2007). By educating girls in third world countries, girls themselves and their nation will grow. The benefits associated with educating girls and women are tremendous and effective in reducing fertility rates and population growth, improving the health of women and their families, decreasing poverty, and contributing to gross national product. Women are the face of future development. Closing gender gaps and creating equal opportunities for girls and boys will better position the nation for social and economic growth. Girl’s education yields some of the highest returns on development. Not only are the private benefits enormous as personal income and personal health improve, but the social and national benefits of contributing to the economy and the empowerment of women are also vast. Women’s education is the answer to development in the third world. By empowering women, their standards of living will drastically improve in all aspects of their lives.