



**Forum:** Sustainable Development Goals 4

**Issue:** Addressing the issue of lack of education for women and girls

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## Introduction

According to UNICEF, 132 million females worldwide are restricted from attending school, including 67.4 million of upper-secondary age, 30 million of lower-secondary school age and 34.3 million of primary school age. Approximately, 781 million adults who are over the age of 15 are illiterate and 496 million of those are female, a report in 2015 stated. This gender gap in education is evident that in many societies, women generally have lower social status than men and are given fewer opportunities compared to men. The common unfortunate reasons as to why this occurs are due to child marriage, gender-based violence and poverty.

Girls who receive an education are less likely to marry at a young age and more likely to lead a much healthier and productive life. Women's education strengthens economies and reduces inequality in many ways. Investing in their education child marriage rates to decline, child mortality rates to fall, the lifetime earnings of girls dramatically increase, rises the national growth rate, decreases the maternal mortality rates and cause a drop in child stunting. Despite evidence showing how education benefits women and the country, gender inequality in education persists. Hence, in the last decade, there has been an increase of non-profitable organisations and advocates around the world fighting to gain rights for women and young girls to receive a quality education.

Women's right for education goes beyond women's being able to get into school; it ensures that they feel comfortable and safe while at school. It also ensures completing all levels of education with the skill to be able to effectively compete in the labour market, learn the life and socio-emotional skills necessary to guide them and help them adapt to the continually changing world, make independent decisions about their own life choices and contribute to their communities and the world.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Gender gap



The gender gap is the difference between men and women in political, social, cultural, intellectual or economic attainments or attitudes.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is a state in which a community or person faces the lack of financial resources and access to essentials such as food, water, job, housing etc.

### **Child Labour**

Work that deprives children typically under the age of 14 (depending on the country) that takes away the time in their childhood, dignity and potential which affects their mental and physical development.

### **Less economically developed countries (LEDC)**

These are developing countries that are relatively poor facing issues such as high birth rates, high death rates, high infant mortality, low life expectancy, low literacy rate etc.

### **Abduction**

An illegal act when a person unknowingly is taken away by someone either by physical force, threatening comments and by persuasion.

### **Domestic violence**

An Aggressive behaviour or violence a person face at home typically by family members or partner which involves physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse or harassment.

## **Background Information**

Education is the basics of human rights which ensures a better life for many. Depriving women from this fundamental right is either because families can not afford to invest in their education or that they are focused into unwanted things or harassed. Globally only three out of four girls complete their lower secondary education, in many ways, this affects the future generation to come as these women later who have children would have limitations in educating them and would not be able to make the best life decisions for them such as the marriageable age. Education is the key to ending many global issues, by providing education to girls and exposing them to the outside world for the sack of education is allowing them to make right decisions in life based on the general knowledge they have learned in school and from society, it also helps them become confident which can help prevent male guidance and other family members from overpowering them.

### **Reasons why women's face the lack of educational opportunities**

#### ***Child marriage***



Child marriage is the marriage of a child under the age of 18; this is a widespread practice in many less economically developed countries (LEDC). According to UNICEF, there were 700 million women globally who were married as young girls. Parents let their young and vulnerable daughters get married at such a young age for reasons such as protecting them from harm or stigma associated with having a relationship outside marriage. Due to this, young girls miss out on education and experience such problems as early pregnancy, domestic violence, malnourishment and pregnancy complications. For many families in LEDC's child marriage reduces economic burden as it may be financially difficult for them to afford education for their daughter, hence why child marriage is a common occurrence in families who are not financially stable.

### **Poverty**

Poverty is one of the main obstacles why many young women do not get to attend school. Since many families in LEDC's are not financially stable to spend hundreds or thousands of their income in providing education to girls, many parents living in poverty conditions invest in boy's education rather than girl's as they believe (especially in LEDC's) that boys are the future earner of the family. In contrast, girls are meant to help out in household work. Many countries give the least amount of priority to women's education who are not able to afford it which causes them to lose \$1 billion annually on economic growth by failing to educate girls like the same level as boys.

### **Child (domestic) labour**

In many LEDC's and rural areas in the world, women are forced to do domestic work instead of attending school. Globally, girls spend approximately 40% more time performing chores they are unpaid for such as cooking, collecting water, cleaning etc. than boys. Young women are also exposed to harsh conditions daily while working domestically, putting their lives in danger. Many girls as young as the age of 5, are trained to do household work which is generally forced upon them, this takes away their right for education at a very young age. A report by the International Labour Organisation stated that 65.1% of all child domestic workers are under the age of 14 and of those 67.1% of all child domestic workers are female.

### **Gender-based violence**

Gender-based violence that women's face takes place in forms such as sexual abuse, physical and mental abuse, harassment and bullying. Many women who have overcome or are facing gender-based violence are survivors of abusive harassments such as discriminatory acts, coercion, rape and more, in many cases when these women attend school, they participate less and achieve below expectations causing an increase of dropout of school rates. These abuses and harassment that women's face at their own houses or school causes parents to remove their daughters from school, enabling them to complete school.



## Safety issues

Women in crisis-affected areas are less likely to have access to quality education, ensuring their safety at the same time. Worldwide, girls schools are faced with three times as many attacks as compared to boys schools. When these education institutions are ambushed, it causes a fracture in the education system for girls in the community. Also, it increases fear in sending girls to schools that could be a possible terrorist target. Another safety issue that women face attending school is trafficking; women are abducted in vulnerable places such as on the way to school. This abduction ends in tragedy for many women as they face sexual, mental, and physical violence which in many cases leads to their death.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Somalia

Only 30% of the Somalian population is educated, and 40% of those children are female. Overall, the literacy rate in the country shows the inequality in education between men and women in Somalia, 49.7% is the literacy rate of men, and alarmingly 25.8% is the literacy rate of women in the country. This difference is because of the lack of resources Somalia has to provide quality education to women, the daily conflicts and high abduction rates, child marriage, domestic labour etc. Majority of female jobs in the country do not require education such as milking animals, home caring, farming and tending to livestock. Organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have worked with the Somaliland Ministry of Education in improving access to education for girls by educating and training female teachers to teach. In July of 2019, the Somaliland government, alongside UNICEF, launched a multi-year programme to increase access to quality education for children in the country in an effort to increase the number of female enrolments.

### South Sudan

The inequality of education between men and women in South Sudan is one of the worst worldwide. In 2013, in the entire country, only 500 girls graduated from secondary school. More shockingly only 12% of the country's teaching population is female; this is a direct consequence of the lack of education provided to young girls in the country. The future of empowering women to be part of the teaching population should start with increasing the access to education for girls at an early age. This also means to stop barriers to education for women such as child marriage, gender-based violence, domestic labour etc. One of the ways to increase access to education for women is to increase the number of schools per community. In South Sudan, the average educational institution provided in the country is approximately one in 10 communities. As a direct consequence of this, men are encouraged to attend school rather than women. In 2008, in an effort to improve women's right for education, the Child Act and Transitional Constitution was passed, providing the right to compulsory and free education to



children. This Act explicitly stated that no girl would be expelled from school because of pregnancy. The Act also allowed young mothers to continue their education.

## Afghanistan

For the past three decades, Afghanistan's education system has had a devastating effect due to conflicts. An estimated 3.7 million in the country are out-of-school, and 60% of them are women. The lack of female teachers in Afghanistan is due to the lack of girls enrolled in school because of this overall in the country, 48% of teachers have a minimum academic qualification that allows them to teach. One of the main reasons for the lack of education for women is the geographical barrier, because of the mountainous landscape of some parts of Afghanistan, travelling for girls may not be suitable. Not only does the country have a lack of schools but also the landscape of some parts of the country causes schools to be far away from many communities which force women to walk long distances to reach school and because of the fear of abduction, many parents do not prefer to send their daughters to school. Only 16% of schools in the country are only for women, and many schools do not have proper sanitation facilities making it an obstacle for women to receive a quality education.

## Bolivia

In Bolivia, based on region, gender and socioeconomic status, the years of education are determined. An Amazonian girl would generally receive two years of schooling, whereas a boy living in an urban area is likely to receive 14 years of education. Of the small population of the women in Bolivia who receive education, 20% of these women's face a form of discrimination mostly based on race, language, clothing and economic circumstances. This leads to many young women to drop out of school, and many end up doing domestic labour work and face child abuse and sexual exploitation. Many women who attend school are not given enough support in a very stigmatic environment where they are confronted by misconceptions about menstruation and other female bodily functions. Organisations and programs such as UNICEF have developed new strategies in order to tackle ethnic division issues in the country that prevents women from receiving equal rights to education.

## The World Bank

The World Bank (WBG) works closely with governments all around the world. The WBG is also a member of the United Nations Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI) which includes more than 20 partners representing bilateral, multilateral, civil society and non-organisations. WBG aims to help countries achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5: gender equality. WBG along with the combined effort by governments and non-organisation focuses on providing scholarships and conditional cash transfers for female education, shortening the distances to education institutions, openly discussing cultural and societal practices specifically targeting boys and men to understand female rights, including gender-sensitive pedagogies and curricula, training and hiring qualified female teachers, eradicating



child marriage, supporting clean hygiene environment for women, addressing the violence women and girls face and building an inclusive and safe educational environment for young women.

### United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

In 2019, UNESCO published a strategy for gender equality in and through education (2019-2025). This guild mainly highlighted two objectives: Strengthening the educational system to be gender-transformative and promoting gender equality, empowering women and girls through education for a better life and future. These objectives are aimed towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 and 5. The strategies by UNESCO are based on the recognition of other characteristics such as ethnicity, wealth, age, ability, status, sexual orientation and geographical location. UNESCO hopes for the strategies to work effectively with the help of partnership from organisations, strong educational institutions and by leadership and advocacy. UNESCO prioritises three fundamental techniques to achieve the strategies: collecting data to inform better actions, focusing on better policy, planning and legal framework to advance female rights and better learning and teaching practice to encourage further and empower women.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
2008	The Child Act and Transitional Constitution was passed in South Sudan providing women free and compulsory primary education.
2014	Tanzania implemented free primary education in order to increase the number of female students in the country.
13th July 2019	The Somaliland Government along with UNICEF launched a multi-year programme in effort to increase the number of female enrollment in school.

### Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- The Girl Child, 29th February 2016 (**A/RES/70/138**)
- The Girl Child, 4th February 2014 (**A/RES/68/146**)
- The Girl Child, 27th March 2012 (**A/RES/66/140**)

### Previous Attempts to solve the Issue



United Nations organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) have provided information and strategies to increase the access for female education and rights for decades. These strategies in guides give present world statistics to understand the magnitude of the issue in order for the government to take necessary steps to encourage and provide education for women. These UN organisations have worked alongside governments to support and promote schooling for females. UN organisations have also held campaigns, especially in LEDC, to raise awareness of the lack of education. UNESCO and UNICEF have also prompted the importance of female teachers in order to reduce the gender gap in teaching systems.

Countries such as Tanzania in 2014, have implemented laws to provide free primary education for women as a step to increase the number of female students. Other countries, such as Namibia and Malawi, have also taken steps to promote female education by providing financial resources and establishing policies to encourage women to attend school. The Namibian First Lady Penehupifo Pohamba, a politician and an educator discussed who Namibia is working towards abolishing all discriminatory laws and policies that affect women and organising the Ministry of Equality and Child Welfare in order to help address the problem of the access and inequality to education. The Malawi First Lady Gertrude Mutharika, a politician and trained nurse, also spoke out about her country's constant effort to help women gain a quality education. However, both women mentioned and further emphasised the role of government that must be supported by the private sector in order for it to be successful.

## Possible Solutions

Child marriage for women is one of the biggest obstacles in achieving secondary education. Government laws and policies could help prevent women from getting married at a very young age which takes away their opportunity to study. This will also help reduce domestic violence which is another obstacle women face to receive a quality education. Maintaining these new laws and policies is very important, for example: inspecting rural areas where child marriages usually occur in order to save a young woman's lives and offer the opportunity to attend school instead.

In many LEDC's, educational institutions are significantly far away from communities because women have to walk long distances to attend school. This puts their lives at risk every day. By increasing the number of education institutions and building it close to communities may help women access education better. Hostels could also be built, specifically for women to allow them to live on campus or close to the school to receive their education. However, these hostels must be inspected and monitored regularly to eliminate issues such as discriminatory acts by other students and possibly teachers as this could be another barrier for young women to receive a quality education.



## Guiding Questions

1. Would eradicating child/domestic labour potential increase female enrollment in school?
2. Would solutions for increasing women's right for education in urban areas also help as much in rural areas?
3. Would reducing the level of poverty help increase the access for women to education?
4. Would removing or decreasing social stigma of women attending school help increase the enrollment of girls in school?
5. Would improving hygiene in schools encourage women to attend school?

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