Improving equal rights for women in education

CSW

Iris Hiemstra, Kira Tarasova

Main President, Deputy President

Forum: The Commission on the Status of Women

Issue: Improving equal rights for women in education

Name: Iris Hiemstra and Kira Tarasova

Position: Main President and Deputy President

Introduction

Today the number of woman going to school is higher than it has ever been before, but sadly they still face lots of limitations and barriers due to gender, age, religion, ethnicity, wealth, et cetera. There is even a ban in 2 percent of the countries globally, that restricts pregnant, married or parenting girls from getting the right education, both in regular education and university. They do this by, for example, not letting them attend classes, sit in exams or separate them from other classmates. The reasoning for this is that they could "influence" other students and set a bad example.

This problem can be seen from two perspectives. The first is economic reasons. The parents or country can simply not afford the school fees, uniforms or any other financial reasons, or the female lives kilometres away from the closest school and does not have safe transport options. This is why the rate of females that are out of school can be up to 80 percent in LEDCs. The high number of females not enrolled in schools also leads to more child marriages, while child marriages lead to girls not attending school. It is like a cycle.

The second is beliefs and opinions. Religion can be a reason why the rights of a woman are limited in terms of education. Or people clinging to old traditions and outdated laws. Lots of females grow up thinking that child marriages and working in the household are what they are supposed to do.

Girls are sometimes seen as a liability instead of an asset. They are meant to cook, clean and raise children, even though letting girls go to school can strengthen their future and help them build a stable environment for their families.

This issue is about creating an equal balance in comparison to males.

Definition of Key Terms

Child Marriage

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) defines child marriage as any marriage with at least one of the actors being under the legal age of 18. Often child marriages involve an underage bride who is most commonly being sold into marriage. Another common variation is an arranged marriage between two families - in this scenario often both parties are under the age of 18. Child marriage can also be a reason for the kidnapping and human trafficking of children. More than 650 million women alive today have been married under the age of 18 according to OHCHR. Child marriage is more common in developing nations in areas of Africa, South and Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Maternity deaths

The World Health Organisation defines Maternal death as any woman's death related to a cause of pregnancy and childbirth or within 42 days of a termination of pregnancy (abortion). In a lot of cases, maternal death is preventable in the case of the use of unsanitary products, non-medical methods and safe practices. Things like physical punishment, domestic abuse and violence of any kind directed at the woman bearing the baby are all leading factors of maternity deaths.

Sharia-based laws

Shariah laws are Muslim laws that are to be followed which explain the physical, mental and spiritual in which one should lead their life. Shariah laws are found in the Quran (the holy book of Islam), the Hadith (the sayings of Sunnah the prophet), Ijma (opinions of scholars studying Islam), and Qiyas (a comparison of various teachings of Sunnah and Quran). The following countries follow Sharia laws as a government system: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Sudan, Pakistan, Nigeria, Qatar, Islamic State of Iraq and Levant/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIL/ISIS). Sharia-based laws are utilised by countries as an excuse to deny women education.

Gang Violence

Britannica defines a gang as a group of usually youth united by a common identity commonly engaging in criminal behaviour. A gang requires an organised structure and usually

opposition in the face of another gang/gangs. Gangs typically behave in a territorial manner claiming control over certain land. Gang violence usually involves gangs engaging in violent conflict solutions. Blood revenge is also extremely common with gangs. As gangs are a structure completely separate and often opposed to the government, their behaviour is harmful to the civilians and often done at their expense.

LEDC

A Less Economically Developed Country (LEDC) is defined as a country undeveloped economy. United Nations categorises forty five countries as LEDCs, of those thirty three are in Africa, eight are in Asia, one is in the Caribbean and three are in the Pacific. The United Nations has been attempting to combat the problem of LEDCs for many years now creating organisations, funding and programs to aid countries that struggle with developing economically.

General Overview

According to UNICEF, 129 million girls worldwide are out of school. While it has been proven that education for girls lowers the chances of child marriage, maternity deaths, child stunting and child mortality, girls all around the world are being deprived of a fundamental right to education, putting them in greater danger of poverty and early death.

Each region of the world has a separate statistic regarding education for women therefore, they will be looked at separately.

Sub-Saharan Africa

According to a gender report created by UNESCO, no country in the Sub-Saharan region has reached equal rights for women in both primary and secondary education. According to the World Bank, the literacy level of the region averages approximately 58.8% for women while being staggering 72.5% for men. Although in the past years, there has been a significant improvement in girls' education with programs like scholarships and non-profit organisations providing education for those in need, the problem is far from being resolved as factors like poverty, child marriage and social stigmas withhold women to complete their primary and secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Middle East and North Africa

The Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) region has a great variety. Some countries have faced significant improvement while others are far from achieving equal rights for women in

education. According to the United Arab Emirates embassy in the United States of America, the UAE is number 1 in the MENA region in women's education. 77% of Emirati women are enrolled in higher education after secondary, and 64% of all university graduates in UAE are women. Such a percentage is high and considered a benchmark for any developed country. At the same time, in Sudan, 49% of girls don't attend primary or secondary education. Since Sudan follows **Sharia laws,** women's rights are limited in many aspects of life, and education happens to be one of them, surrounded by social stigma and prejudice.

South and Central Asia

After the fall of the Soviet Union, countries in Central Asia have developed a multitude of various regime structures all with different approaches to women and their education. The political regimes range from authoritarian to presidential republics. Countries with presidential or parliamentary regimes tend to have higher enrollment and opportunities for women in both primary and secondary education; countries with religious political narratives and/or authoritarian rule face bigger challenges with achieving equal rights for women in education. An extreme example of that is Afghanistan. According to UNICEF, almost 50% of all girls are deprived of their fundamental right to education due to harmful societal norms and religious prejudices. As a result, 35% of women in South Asia cannot write or understand a basic written sentence.

East & Southeast Asia

The progress in women's education can be seen in the majority of the region. However, due to the multitude of cultural and political backgrounds, the situation with improving equal rights for women in education varies from country to country and can be separated into four categories based on the level of development of education. The most developed education in the region (and arguably the world) is the education seen in Japan and Singapore. Both programs are considered highly developed with a lot of focus on preparing adolescents for the world with equal opportunities for boys and girls. The second category involves countries like China, South Korea, and Malaysia whose education systems are still considered highly progressive in terms of women's involvement and promotion of gender equality. Developing educational systems that have seen progress in Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines. Although the systems face quite a few issues with women's enrollment and gender stereotypes that prevent better education for women,the biggest challenges can be seen in Indonesia and Myanmar where women face discrimination in the name of Sharia laws or gender-based violence.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The region of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has seen significant improvement in women's education over the past few decades. The number of girls attending school has drastically increased in the majority of the countries whose societies and governments have shifted focus on women's education and how important it is to the growth of the economy. However, there are still multiple factors like teenage pregnancy, *gang violence* and economic instability that prevent more girls from attending primary and secondary education. Interestingly enough, in LAC countries there are more girls enrolled in school as boys are more likely to drop out due to gang violence and the need to earn money for the family.

Europe and North America

Gender equality is guaranteed by the laws of the European Union, and education in Europe is often characterised by high levels of availability, parity and inclusiveness. According to Eurostat, women's enrollment and graduation of primary and secondary education is close to 100% in the majority of the region. The region has put a lot of focus into developing public school education with a high level of available programs, equipment and resources for all students across the board to grow generations which are prepared for a new changing world. The United States and Canada also provide a high level of education for all regardless of gender with equal opportunities. The high school dropout rate among girls in the USA is around 5.2% according to the U.S. Department of Education or the National Center for Education Statistics.

Oceania

Oceania is a region with diverse cultural and historical contexts with a range of views on women's education and education as a whole. Australia and New Zealand have a high level of education with equal opportunities for education for both men and women. Countries like Samoa, Fiji, Tonga, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have a fairly progressive level of education with visible progress made towards better opportunities for women in education. Other oceanic nations (including Micronesia, Palau, Marshall Islands and others) are facing severe struggles with providing equal rights of education for women due to factors like economic instability, gang violence and gender-based violence. Overall, the region requires more attention to the issue of women's education.

Southern and Eastern Africa

In Eastern and Southern Africa there total of over 40 million girls are out of school with 55 million girls who have been sold into child marriages according to the World Bank. 89% of 10-year-old girls cannot read or write in Southern and Eastern Africa. Some of the biggest challenges faced by most countries are religious prejudice towards education, societal stigmas, economic instability and uncontrolled gang violence. In relation, Southern Africa with countries like Namibia, Botswana and South Africa doing much better in noticing gender disparities and attempting to combat them. However, countries in Eastern Africa like Tanzania and Ethiopia tend to have bigger issues of gender in education for women. Critical cases can be seen in countries like Somalia where only 25% of girls attend primary education.

Eastern Europe and North Asia

Eastern Europe and Northern Asia have historically various contexts however they were mostly previously republics under the Soviet Union or the Soviet influence. Under the USSR rule, women had the same rights and responsibilities as men as the country desperately needed as much workforce as possible. Due to that, education was developing with equal opportunities for both men and women. After the fall of the Soviet Union, countries of Eastern Europe and North Asia (Russia & Mongolia) stuck to the preexisting education with little to no gender oppression present. Although countries have evolved over the last 30 years separately, all of them still fall under the category with little to no disparity for women in primary and secondary education.

Timeline of Key Events

1691	After getting criticised for reading non-religious texts, nun and writer Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz of Mexico defended girls' rights by stating: ***"One can perfectly well philosophise while cooking supper."*** Bringing attention to the issue. During this time, for every 100 boys enrolled in school, only 70 girls were enrolled.
19th and 20th of July 1848	Seneca Falls Convention was the first convention for women's rights organised by women. This convention culminated in the

signing of the *Declaration of Sentiments.*

23rd of January 1849

Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman to graduate medical school and become a doctor in the United States of America.

1925

The International Bureau of Education was founded.

16th of December 1966

The signing of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) took place, which guarantees the right to education to everyone based on equality and non-discrimination, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

23rd of June 1972

Passage of Title IX, which is part of the Educational Amendments, states to ban discrimination due to sex in any program that receives financial aid from the US government. This includes all educational institutions.

10th of August 1993

Ruth Gater Ginsburg becomes the second female, the first Jewish female, to serve in the Supreme Court. Throughout her life, she has fought for women's rights and gender equality.

1996

The Taliban takes over Afghanistan for the first time.

2012

Malala Yousafzai was shot by the Taliban in the face for promoting young females to go to school.

2019

Eight countries had restrictions on the rights of women who were pregnant, already had children or were married. In 2019 four

countries in Africa lifted this ban, leaving four countries with these restrictions.

July 2019

UNESCO launches its online monitoring tool to monitor the girls' and women's right to education: *Her Atlas.* It gets updated in the lead-up to 2030, which is the deadline for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

December 2019

A new virus has been discovered, which causes the COVID-19 pandemic. This global pandemic adds more barriers to girls' and women's educational rights.

15th of August 2021

The Taliban took over the Afghan capital for a second time, the first being in 1996. They restricted certain parts of everyday life for women, such as attending secondary school and universities and getting jobs.

Major parties involved

Afghanistan

Seeing as Afghanistan has the highest number of females out of school, it should be important to look into why. Afghanistan was taken over by the terrorist group the Taliban in 1996 and then again in 2021. This was the start of dramatic changes in the country. The Taliban is an Islamic group, which is why women are treated differently under their regime.. For example, girls are being kept home and banned from schools after the sixth grade. The UN Children's Agency estimated that over one million girls were affected by the ban. This only added up to the estimated five million girls in Afghanistan who already had to stay home from school due to a lack of facilities. the United Nations does not recognize the Taliban. This triggered the group even more, leading to women and girls being excluded from higher education, some public places such as parks and most jobs.

Equality & Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (HRC) works in the United Kingdom to make equal education a reality for everyone. The UK has set rules on this in the law, but the experience of many people in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is very different. The commission tries to achieve this by offering individual guidance to employers and organisations, reviewing the usefulness of the law and taking legal action to be able to change these laws when necessary.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

GPE is the largest global fund, only focussing on transforming the educational system in LEDCs. They have been doing this for the last two decades by supporting solutions and delivering funds to build a stronger and better education system in countries with lots of poverty or countries that are in conflict. This way children, especially girls can get the facilities they need to strive in life and not be defined by their gender. Their way of working has already helped multiple member states to make progress in better access, education, equity and creating a better outcome to help millions of boys and girls to have a better future.

International Bureau of Education (UNESCO-IBE)

Founded in 1925, this division of UNESCO strides and works to improve education systems in countries around the world. To do this they work closely with local administrations and stakeholders. They state that their goal is *"to raise the standard, effectiveness, efficiency, and accessibility of education for all."* IBE thinks that creating curricula isn't only about creating the classes but also giving youth, both girls and boys, a guiding compass to become participating citizens.

UN Women

UN Women is an organisation part of the UN that delivers policies, programmes and standards that focus on and protect women's rights so that current and future generations of women and girls can live up to their full potential. Doing this helps them make the sustainability goals of the UN a reality for women and girls in all member states.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Seeing as this issue has been a problem for many years, there have been several conferences and amendments signed to try to solve it. One way countries have tried to limit the restrictions for women in education is by raising the legal marriage age to 18. This prevents child marriages, which is

a big problem in some countries and a big reason why some girls don't go to school. Right now, around 17 percent of countries worldwide still allow marriages with people under the age of 18. Today, multiple volunteer groups in LEDCs promote going to school and help in the schools. There are also groups such as UNICEF that build schools in these areas so that going to school is a more accessible thing.

Possible solutions

To solve this problem there are multiple aspects to look at, such as funds, geographical placement and gender stereotypes.

One of the biggest problems is money. Lots of families, mostly in LEDCs, can not afford to send all their kids to school, which is why they tend to send their male children to school instead of the females. This way the girls can help in the household. Starting with discussing ways to reduce this problem could be a good start.

Geographical placement, sometimes families live in rural areas where they have to walk miles to get to the school and the option of safe transportation is not there. Girls are sometimes seen as too weak to walk these dangerous routes and therefore are being kept at home, safely.

The last big problem that is being discussed right now is gender stereotypes. Lots of books, religions and other sources portray women as less than men. Being able to work smaller jobs, less dangerous ones and lesser paying ones. This is why some girls don't go to school; because they think that is not what they are supposed to do with their lives.

Bibliography

Women and girls. (n.d.). Right to Education Initiative. https://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen

Key data on girls and women's right to education. (2023, October 4). UNESCO. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/key-data-girls-and-womens-right-education

BBC News. (2017, November 29). *Educating girls - BBC News* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8sCADS5wKg

Peace Corps. (2015, June 15). *Every girl deserves an education* [Video]. YouTube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zhWU64TFk8

Zazzara, L. (2022, March 3). *7 Milestone moments in the fight for women's rights*.

HeinOnline Blog. https://home.heinonline.org/blog/2022/03/7-milestone-moments-in-the-fight-for-womens-rights/

Timeline: Women's footprint in history. (n.d.).

https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/timeline/womensfootprintinhistory/en/index.html#section03

Women's History Milestones: A Timeline. (2019, February 26). *HISTORY*.

https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/womens-history-us-timeline

Intern, S. S. P. (2019b, September 5). *Gender Inequality in Education — P4H Global*. P4H

Global. https://p4hglobal.org/p4h-blog/2019/4/12/gender-inequality-in-education

Bergsten, S. S. (2023, March 8). The global backlash against women's rights. *Human Rights

Watch*. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/07/global-backlash-against-womens-rights

*Transforming Curriculum Today, to Build the Education of Tomorrow | International Bureau

of Education*. (n.d.). https://www.ibe.unesco.org/en

Homepage | EHRC. (n.d.). https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/

About UN women. (n.d.). UN Women – Headquarters. https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women

Global Partnership for Education. (n.d.). *Global Partnership for Education*.

https://www.globalpartnership.org/

Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia (AGES) - Somalia. (2022, September 9).

ReliefWeb. https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/adolescent-girls-education-somalia-ages

Castelán, P. B. V. L. C. R., Castelán, P. B. V. L. C. R., & Castelán, P. B. V. L. C. R.

(2023, October 2). Can we achieve gender parity in education while leaving boys out

of school? *World Bank Blogs*. https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/can-we-

achieve-gender-parity-education-while-leaving-boys-out-

school#:~:text=In%20the%20last%20two%20decades,the%20overall%20net%20enro

llment%20in

Comprehensive Programmes of Action for LDCs | LDC Portal - International Support

Measures for least developed countries. (n.d.).

https://www.un.org/ldcportal/content/comprehensive-programmes-action-ldcs

Crouch, M. (2015a). Constructing religion by law in Myanmar. *The Review of Faith*

& International Affairs, *13*(4), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2015.1104961

Crouch, M. (2015b). Constructing religion by law in Myanmar. *The Review of Faith*

& International Affairs, *13*(4), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2015.1104961

Curry, G. D., & Decker, S. H. (2023, December 8). *Gang | Definition, History, &*

Facts. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/gang-crime

Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female education in the Middle East and

North Africa. (n.d.). PRB. https://www.prb.org/resources/empowering-women-

developing-society-female-education-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/

Freedom House. (n.d.). Turkmenistan. In *Freedom House*.

https://freedomhouse.org/country/turkmenistan/nations-transit/2023

Gender equality. (n.d.). UNICEF South Asia. https://www.unicef.org/rosa/gender-

equality

Gender gap persists in eastern Europe, new EBRD survey shows. (n.d.).

https://www.ebrd.com/news/2016/gender-gap-persists-in-eastern-europe-new-ebrd-

survey-shows-.html#

Girls' education. (n.d.). UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education

Indicator Metadata Registry details. (n.d.-a). https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-

metadata-registry/imr-details/4622

Indicator Metadata Registry details. (n.d.-b). https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/4622

National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Fast Facts: Dropout rates (16)*. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16

No country in sub-Saharan Africa has achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education. (2020). *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/default/files/SSA_Press_Release_English_Gender_Report2015.pdf

Primary Education Statistics. (2023, July). EuroStat. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Primary_education_statistics

Project, B. (2019a, September 12). *Top 10 Facts about girls' education in Sudan*. The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/facts-about-girls-education-in-sudan/

Project, B. (2019b, September 25). *Girls' education in Kazakhstan*. The Borgen Project. https://borgenproject.org/girls-education-in-kazakhstan/

RA3: Oceania. (n.d.). https://worlds-women-2020-data-undesa.hub.arcgis.com/pages/Oceania

Ratliff, P. M. (1991). Women's education in the U.S.S.R.: 1950–1985. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 17–30). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-011-3816-1_2

Statista. (2022, May 23). *Share of female teachers East and Southeast Asia 2020, by education level*. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1309731/east-southeast-asia-share-of-female-teachers-by-education-level/

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF WOMEN. (2021). *National Center for Education Statistics*, 5. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/96768.pdf

TilakJandhyala, B. G. (n.d.). *Female schooling in East Asia : a review of growth, problems and possible determinants*. World Bank.

https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/754371468770639737/female-schooling-in-east-asia-a-review-of-growth-problems-and-possible-determinants

UN list of least developed countries. (n.d.). UNCTAD. https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list

Women and education in the EU. (2012, March). *European Parlament*. Retrieved December 28, 2023, from

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/551301/EPRS_ATA(2015)551301_EN.pdf

Women, Education and Empowerment in South Asia. (2021). *Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée*. https://theses.hal.science/tel-03544132v1/file/TH2021UEFL2009.pdf

Women in Southeast Asia. (n.d.). Asia Society.

https://asiasociety.org/education/women-southeast-asia

Women in the UAE | UAE Embassy in Washington, DC. (n.d.). Women in the UAE | UAE Embassy in Washington, DC. https://www.uae-embassy.org/discover-uae/society/women-in-the-uae

Women's education in Central Asia: a forgotten crisis. (n.d.). openDemocracy.

https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/a_crisis_of_womens_education_in_central_asia/

Women's rights in Qatar: laws, attitudes, and practices | Expatica. (2023, December 15). Expatica Qatar. https://www.expatica.com/qa/living/gov-law-admin/womens-rights-in-qatar-70967/

World Bank Group. (2023, October 11). World Bank to strengthen economic

empowerment for millions of girls and women across East and Southern Africa.

World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2023/10/10/world-

bank-to-strengthen-economic-empowerment-for-millions-of-girls-and-women-across-

afe-east-and-southern-

africa#:~:text=In%20Eastern%20and%20Southern%20Africa,before%20the%20age%

20of%2018.

World Health Organization: WHO. (2023, February 22). *Maternal mortality*.

https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality

Yamel Rincon. (2023, November 10).

https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2023/11/10/report-explores-womens-participation-

in-higher-education-in-eastern-africa/

Zoe Talent Solutions. (2023, September 19). Female Education Statistics in Africa

[100% updated]. *Zoe Talent Solutions*. https://zoetalentsolutions.com/female-

education-statistics-in-

africa/#:~:text=According%20to%20The%20World%20Bank,Sub%2DSaharan%20re

gion%20of%20Africa.