



Ensuring Equal and Adequate Education for Women

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Introduction

The United Nations Global Forum for Women (UNGFW) is vital to women and girls' development in many different countries and nations around the world. Education is the trademark for women's success and growth in society as community leaders, consumers, and active citizens in the face of an ever changing globalized world. Partially because of the vast differences women face culturally and socially in society, opportunities for education can be limited and even nonexistent, leaving negative effects that disrupt progress.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals list quality education and gender equality as forth/fifth priority goals that need to be achieved by 2030.¹ Identifying inequality in education for women and girls is the initial step necessary to create changes in the teaching practices of various institutions aiming at these groups of people. However, one challenge will be the major structural differences that shape societies from Latin America to Southwest Asia that promote competing ideologies of women's roles in the community and the extent to which they should be educated or educators.

A girl or woman's access to an equal, adequate education is a human right that should not be at the discretion of any government or political leader(s). All women and girls need the access and implementation of an equal, adequate education, which will provide them with

agency and opportunity to be decision makers on major platforms.

As a result, women will gain more rights or have louder voices in communities and societies around the globe. It is vital as a global community of diverse citizens and leaders that education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels is managed, and sustained in ways that don't just benefit women/girls but the growth in society as a whole.

More educated women and girls equates to a more conscious, competitive society that is developed and productive globally. In order to ensuring equal, adequate education for women and girls, the involvement and cooperation of all one hundred and ninety three United Nations members and other actors like Non-Governmental-Organizations and Intergovernmental Organizations is a must moving forward.

Current Situation

According to an United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on 'Girls Education: Factsheet,' "Almost a quarter of young women aged 15-24 today (116 million) in developing countries have never completed primary school and so lack skills for work."² The causes for women and girls being neglected when it comes to receiving an equal, adequate education are endless, but there are several

¹United Nations. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

²Education for All Global Monitoring Report. (October 2013) 'Girls education- the facts' UNESCO. <http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/girls-factsheet-en.pdf>

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elements that contribute directly to inequality in education.

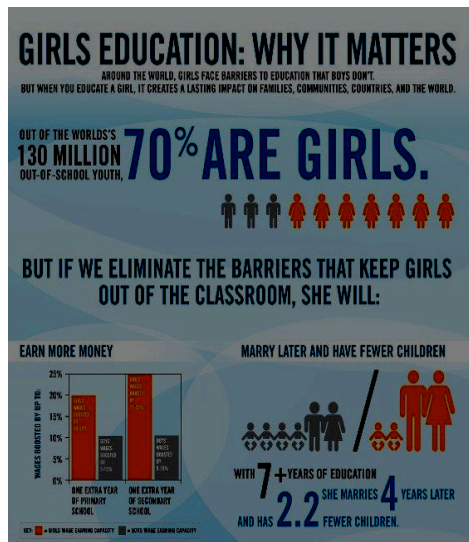


Figure 1.1

Military conflicts or terrorist acts like the Boko Haram capture of over two hundred Nigerian school girls and the war in Syria in part with ISIS occupying major cities in the surrounding area create relentless security issues for women/girls seeking an education. Women and girls also face poverty and lack of proper resources whether its uniforms, books, safe access etc. which restrains individuals from committing to school. For instance, below are more barriers women and girls currently facing while trying to obtain their education:

- Barriers to education³
- Poverty means women and girls in many parts of the world are still forced to spend hours a day doing chores, fetching water and caring for relatives, and boys sent over girls with limited funds
- Unsafe roads leading to schools
- Lack of sanitation facilities in schools
- Lack of security in schools: Dramatically

³Royal Geographical Society with IBG. Gender Equality in Education. <https://21stcenturychallenges.org/gender-equality/>

highlighted by Malala Yousafzai, shot by the Taliban on her way to school for speaking out about education rights, and the kidnapping this year of 276 school girls by the militant Islamist movement Boko Haram and the resulting Bring Back Our Girls campaign.

- Sexual violence and discrimination and are not allowed to continue school if they become pregnant or forced into child marriage.
- Lack of female role models
- A tradition and culture of not valuing girls' education

Laying the foundation for women's and girls' education, has begun in nations and civil societies that organize around education barriers that are unique to women in their community. As mentioned above, Bring Back Our Girls was a global campaign that called for all the Nigerian school girls to be returned back to where they reside, with hopes of being unharmed so they can continue their education. With terrorism on the rise, women and girls in particular are more vulnerable than most, resulting in their education being compromised with no consequences for many of the perpetrators.

Advocates for women's and girls' education are collaborating more in an effort to campaign/build programs that restore hope in receiving a quality education. For instance as of October 2016, "the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), together with the Iraqi Ministry of Education, launched a nationwide 'Back to School' campaign in 10 governorates."⁴ Global campaigns are becoming more popular forms of outreach in an effort to inform the public about the importance of educating children, women, and girls. Campaigns make individuals aware of the risks for those who lack the opportunity at an education and how that affects others in society.

⁴United Nations News Centre. (September 30th, 2016) "Iraq:UNICEF launches back to school campaign to help millions missing out on education." http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55179#_V_vXu4WcGP8

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Similar to Iraq's campaign to inform about the value of education, Malala Yousafzai's organization The Malala Fund is making strides for legitimizing women and girls education at a grassroots level. The Malala Fund's goal corresponds directly with the vision of The Global Forum on Women and UN Women stance on ensuring an equal and adequate education for women and girls: "to enable girls to complete 12 years of safe, quality education so that they can achieve their potential and be positive change-makers in their families and communities."⁵



Figure 1.2.

Campaigns and organizations are important incentives to the community aiming at bringing awareness to society, but attitudes must change in order for strong decision making to prevail in instituting women and girls into school. Funding and infrastructure are also vital components of ensuring quality education which many third world countries lack and have known urgency in changing. Minimizing the barriers to an education that hinder females of every ethnicity and age while structurally reinvigorating these educational institutions will require prioritization beyond 2030 in order to be maintained.

⁵Yousafzai, Malala. The Malala Foundation: About the Fund. (2012). <https://www.malala.org/>

United Nations Actions, Roles, and Resolutions

Under former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Anan, the United Nations created an organization focused on creating a platform advocating for girls proper education. At the turn of the century, "The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) was launched in 2000 to assist national governments as they fulfill their responsibilities towards ensuring the right to education and gender equality for all children, girls and boys alike."⁶

Looking back from 2000 to now 2016, it's important to continuously reiterate how valuable education is to progress, modernism and how women/ girls are infiltrated into mainstream society. Accountability on the side of governments has been lacking domestically and internally in terms of co-opting women/girls into the education system which is destined to worsen with advances in technology. Rights to an education not being upheld is not to be disciplined by the United Nations in which many of its members violate these implications in order to fulfill other interests.

However, one of the most recognized actions taken by the United Nations towards women/girls education is the work under the **United Nations Declaration for Human Rights**. Article 26 of the Declaration states:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.⁷

⁶United Nations Girls' Education Initiative. Vision & Mission.

http://www.ungei.org/whatisungei/index_211.html

⁷Universal Declaration of Human Rights. "Preamble". http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Tr

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The United Nations with the help of policy professionals, educators, and experts or NGOs have the potential to collectively activate a broader coalition of 'actors' that will provide a framework for change. Solutions are applicable when there is cooperation and intent, which was addressed in part at the 59th **Commission on the Status of Women**. An untitled new programme was established “to eliminate the gender gap in education and accelerate development.”⁸

The programme will be rolled out gradually “in 20 nations where the education gender gap is most critical, starting with Mali, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania.”⁹ Joint projects, campaigns and investments for securing women's/girls education provide the example globally, that it takes actors from every continent to create a standard by which countries should aim to uphold. Partnerships will be the means to successfully ensuring an equal adequate education system.

The Commission on the Status of Women has also projected beliefs and ideas on women's education or access to specific resources from a resolution 2008/29 of July 2008 in correlation to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). For example, the following excerpt illustrate principles carried out by the United Nations as a collective security international organization:

... stresses that education is a human right, and that equal access to education, and expresses deep concern about all legal, economic, social and cultural barriers that prevent women and girls from having equal access to education and training¹⁰

Individual, sovereign states have to adopt similar

[anslations/eng.pdf](#)

⁸UN Women. (10 March 2015). “Press Release: Closing the gender gap in education.”

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/3/press-release-closing-gender-gap-in-education>

⁹Ibid. (8)

¹⁰http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw55/agreed_conclusions/AC_CSW55_E.pdf

principles and action in an effort to extend the rights of women/girls pursuing an education. Cultural hegemonic ideals and law that eliminates a woman's access to education must be ratified because the human right to an education trumps subjectivity. It's not an easy, feasible task to undue socio-cultural norms, but it may be necessary to some extent in terms of providing women and girls an equal adequate education, with no exceptions.

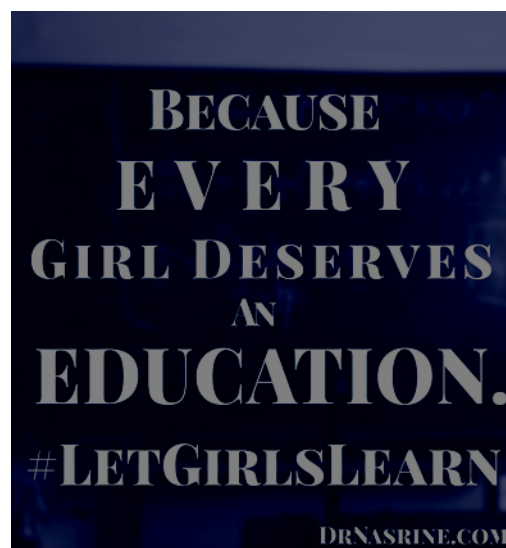


Figure 1.3

Country and Bloc Positions¹¹

Arab League: As one of the most tumultuous regions in the world, many states in the Middle East lack a concern for women's educational rights or freedoms. Any access women and girls have to an equal, adequate education is very sectional and limited, if at all. Conflict is prevalent in at least half Middle Eastern countries which creates more oppression and less priority on civil rights. Security and displacement equating to poverty are major components to a women's lack of education. ISIS and its counterparts also infiltrate cities and rape and sexually assault women and girls, which is an

¹¹United Nations Girls' Education Initiative.<http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/>

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obvious deterrence from moving forward to pursue their rights.

Things are not all distraught in every country of North Africa and the Middle East, but the negativity that overpowers any progress in the region makes change hard. Religious and cultural ideologies also are perhaps the biggest barriers women face pursuing their education, which is viewed to some as insignificant to a woman's rights and responsibilities in society. Education reform in this region will be the most challenging because altering conservative cultural/religious views is not in the interest of most because it's disruptive and threatening. It's vital to focus and analyze regional countries that seem more open to the equal education conversation or that have made strides to minimize religious/cultural imposition.

Brazil: According to statistics, “girls in Brazil have edged ahead of where they were in terms of literacy and education collectively, especially in comparison to boys. Brazil has prioritized its fast growing success and position in the international arena around girls/women being educated productive citizens in society.”¹² However, older women face more difficulty receiving an education or the benefits of an education because childcare and domestic responsibilities halt them from applying their skills. Education in terms of youth development is heading in a great direction but the decision making generation that determines laws and policies today may not see the true success of women/girls exercising their rights to an education. With a more technologically advanced world and Brazil's growing presence in global affairs, women and girls have to meet the standards of progress in order for society to maintain an increase in status.

China: As a major international actor not just in the United Nations but globally, China has strong educational systems for children in more urban than rural areas. To maintain its competitiveness with the United States, China is looking to sustain aspects of

education that promote their children as gifted, advanced scholars in the making. An educated youth leads to educated and professional active adults in the public and private sector which promotes success economically, and socially.

According to the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, China has noticeable barriers in education due to geographical differences or discrepancies that alter access. In the more rural, Western parts of China girls are isolated on single property or small villages that don't prioritize education as much as agriculture for instance. Affordability is another constraint for women and girls seeking an education. If a family has both a son and daughter, it's often times essential that at least the boy attends school over the girl. Moving towards 2030, China has to create better subsidies or incentives that accommodate exclusive populations, particularly in Western China. Girls/women's education looks to be a priority on the national agenda within the next five years.

European Union: Very democratic in their practices, most of the 28 Member States of the European Union (EU) support very strong educational beliefs an opportunities for women and girls in achieving an equal, adequate education. Whether public or private, educational institutions in Europe are prized possessions to society because they shape the generations to come. Similar to the United States, Europe has some of the most world renowned post-secondary institutions that exemplify the value of education regardless of gender. “In the EU the right to education has been anchored in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which states that: "Everyone has the right to education and to have access to continuing and vocational training".”¹³

The European Union often leads the United Nations in its attitude toward ensuring an equal and adequate education for women and girls at every

¹²Osavo, Mario. (24 March). “Girls Move to Head of the Class in Brazil”. Inter Press Service. http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/know_sharing/grass_roots_stories/brazil.shtml

¹³European Parliament, EU. (3 June 2015). “Every girl and woman has a right to education. No matter where she lives.” <https://europa.eu/eyd2015/en/eu-european-parliament/posts/every-girl-and-woman-has-right-education>

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level. One pending complication of the EU's education system could be the conflict of catering to refugees and providing them a just education.

Nigeria: As a one of the most ethnically diverse places in the world, Nigeria faces many problems educating women and girls across the country. It also is a good example of the difficulties facing the 48 African Member States of the UN on these issues.

In much of Africa and Nigeria as well, poverty is a major burden that eliminates a girl's hope for an education at a young age. Some of the poorest villages are fighting starvation and the lack of sanitation or clean drinking waters. Education could become a major strength to women in the country allowing them to apply their knowledge in an effort to provide for their communities. These populations need to see an increase in access to education because they have more riding on higher literacy rates, a larger working class, an educated youth. Nigeria will most likely need the assistance of the World Bank and NGOs that focus on funding and building schools or infrastructure that provides women/girls an opportunity to advance in society. Much progress needs to be made in many parts of the country, across diverse ethnic lines.

Non-Aligned Movement: The 120 Member States of the UN's largest voting bloc are far from unified on issues focusing on the needs of women and girls. They generally favor assistance programs instead of simple demands. But they also are jealous of national sovereignty and resist measures that reduce national freedom of action. They also are divided between governments determined to stress better inclusion of women in all aspects of social life, and those favoring protection and preservation of traditional social order.

Russia: Women in Russia face minimal restraints when seeking an education at the primary, and secondary levels at least in terms of lacking sanitation facilities, safe roads, and access. For instance, "more Russian women than men have university degrees,"¹⁴ Russia must maintain this

progress and not fall behind in ensuring women have an equal education. In terms of helping its neighbors achieve policy or programs to implement success in women's/girls education, Russia plays a pivotal role in exemplifying the benefits of having an educated female population.

United States: The US has made women's rights the center of its foreign policy for over twenty years, encouraging all countries it has good relations with to work aggressively to support the interests of women and girls, convinced there cannot be national progress on most basic issues without including progress for women and girls. Their needs and inclusion in educational and political processes were a primary goal of US war aims in Afghanistan and Iraq. Whether or not these goals remain so high under President Trump is not clear. In any case, expect the US to forcefully push its position.

Questions To Consider

- Who are the actors?
- Who is funding the educational projects?
- How do countries act inclusively?
- How does one maintain successful educational institutions?
- How does one eliminate the barriers to girls' education in relation to domestic or world conflicts that may or may not take precedence?
- How will women and girls be active in this process of ensuring their equal and adequate education at every level on every continent by 2030?
- Can aid donor states make aid dependent on progress in the condition of women and girls?
- How to balance global policy with the sovereignty of Member States?

equal, but only on the surface".
http://rbth.com/articles/2011/07/27/russian_women_equal_but_only_on_the_surface_13191.html

¹⁴Darmaros, Marina. (July 27, 2011). "Russian women

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