

## Women Education: Another Gap to Bridge

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Education is the process of becoming critically aware of one's reality in a manner that leads to effective action upon it. An educated man/woman understands his/her world well enough to deal with it effectively. Such men/women if they existed in sufficient numbers would not leave the absurdities of the present world unchanged. In the opinion of Edukugho (2002) cited in Imogie (2002) the prosperity of a country depends not on the abundance of its revenue, nor the strength of its fortifications, but on the number of its cultivated citizens, men (and women) of education, enlightenment and character.

It can be said therefore that the main focus of government education agenda is to bring about optimal development of its human resources, which, put in another word, is a viable source of human capital. This investment however will not be complete without women education. "We know from study after study that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls and women. No other policy is as likely to raise economic productivity, lower infant and maternal mortality, improve nutrition, promote health -- including the prevention of HIV/AIDS -- and increase the chances of education for the next

generation. Let us invest in women and girls.” — UN General Secretary Kofi Annan.

It is widely accepted that investing in girls’ education has important externalities for improving general social welfare, leading them to marry later and have fewer and healthier children, thereby reducing both maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates. Nobel Prize winners Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank have demonstrated that the income of a family with an educated mother is more likely to be spent on children’s health and education than on alcohol, tobacco and gambling.

The Government of India has claimed to support girls’ education dating back to 1968, when the Ministry of Education set forth a Resolution on the National Policy on Education, which called for 6% of the national budget to be allocated to public education and highlighted a “need to focus on the education of girls.” Nearly 40 years later, under the leadership of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a vocal proponent of girls’ education, GOI has raised education allocations, and achieved that 6% -- up from 3.3% in 1995. (GOI Ministry of Education) The Ministry of Human Resource Development asserts that promotion of girls’ education is one of the cornerstones of educational policy. Prime Minister Singh announced in his 2004 Independence Day Address to the Republic, “the education of the girl-child and female literacy will be priority areas for us” and again in 2005 “it is necessary for every section of society to be literate and educated so that they can take advantage of our growth processes... we are giving special emphasis to the education of the girl-child.”

The need for women education is also informed by the fact that purposeful occupational achievement and satisfaction is ensured by deep self-awareness and understanding which can only be achieved through the provision of effective and functional education and/or guidance and counseling. This, has been noted is likely to guarantee women empowerment with its root based on women struggle to improve their status. The

empowerment suggested is such that entails the process of challenging power relations and of gaining wider control over source of power. This, however, cannot be achieved without the provision of reasonable access to formal and functional education to the women folk. This is based on the premise that education has been adjudged to be a viable instrument of change in the positive direction.

### **Barriers to Women Education**

There are many barriers to female education in the developing countries hence the low female enrollment rates. Poverty is one of the reasons fewer women enroll and attend school. In many developing countries, women from poorer families have to give up education before men do. Female education has a higher opportunity cost due to greater responsibility in the household and social norms. Girls might spend 20 percent more time taking care of the household and siblings than boys outside school (World Bank, 1997). In some parts of the developing world, early marriages as a social norm might prevent women to pursue higher education.

The plight of women, in terms of education is further compounded by the negative attitude of parents toward female education. Some parents are usually reluctant to send their girl child for formal education especially to higher levels like their male counterpart. Restricted access to education by women in this country is profoundly rooted in history, religion, culture, the psychology of self, law, political institution and social attitudes which interact in several ways to limit women's access to formal education when compared with their male counterparts.

Till the date, there are many inaccessible areas which lack a primary school in the vicinity. So, parents hesitate to send their daughters to schools taking into consideration the far off nature of the school which causes security concerns, concerns about physical exertion. There are areas where

physical barriers like streams, forests and hills also prevent parents to enrol their daughters in schools. There many schools in the country which lack adequate number of class rooms and special toilet for girls. 72.16 percent of all schools in India have girl's toilet according to DISE 2011-12 which causes inconvenience for the adolescent girls to spend lingering hours in the schools. Lack of required number of class rooms makes school education irregular and messy.

India has a patriarchal culture. Gender bias and son preference grapple the minds of parents. Boys are always preferred over girls if a choice for an opportunity has to be made. Educating a daughter, especially in a poor family, is perceived not only as an unnecessary luxury but also as a liability. Resistance to women advancement within a patriarchal system is a further manifestation of our cultural practices which overtly and covertly interact to hinder women advancement especially from educational viewpoint.

Trafficking has a negative consequence on adolescent girl's education. It is a pan-Indian phenomenon. Trafficked girls end up being victims of sexual assault; trafficking for sex work or for employment/labor and in particular, domestic help; begging; for transfer of organs; for pornography including pornographic performances; development of pornographic material, promotion of sex tourism, and sexual exploitation under the guise of bar tending, massage parlors etc.

Migration of girls from rural to urban areas due to poverty, conflict, communal violence also has a halting effect on adolescent girls' education. Change of location casts its withdrawal impact on girls' education. Parents feel shaky to expose the adolescent girls to schools in the new locality. The temporary withdrawal results in permanent resignation from education.

## **Benefits of women education**

Education leads to greater self-esteem and self-confidence, and opens up new horizons for girls, enabling them to discover their own potential, to develop themselves fully and increase their resistance to gender discrimination. Education helps girls and women to have a positive impact on their families: better childcare (vaccination, schooling, etc.), better nutrition, decrease in child mortality, better communication with the children and other family members. A recent study shows that the decrease in child malnutrition between 1970 and 1995 is attributable to the tune of 44% to the improvement in female education.

Women education lowers the fertility rate by reducing desired family size and that this, in turn, is because education raises the value of women's economic activities by raising the labour market rewards from going out of the home for work. In other words, the opportunity-cost of staying at home for child bearing and rearing increases as women become more educated and, so, educated women desire smaller families. Education may also change women's preferences about the quantity versus the quality of children, with educated women choosing fewer children but of better "quality". Moreover, as mentioned earlier, recent research suggests that a greater proportion of women's cash income than men's is spent on child goods, so that women's education and the consequent increase in women's income would appear to have particular benefits for child quality.

When women's education is combined with an improvement in their status, they account for over 50% of the reduction of child malnutrition. An educated woman is better equipped to increase family income and resolve family problems satisfactorily. Her family's wellbeing thus gets a big boost. Education heightens women's awareness of the important role they can play in the community and society to find solutions to problems that impede development and social stability.

Survival rates, schooling and community productivity increase as a result of women's education, with a corresponding decrease in mother and infant mortality rates.

An educated woman's household is more likely to prosper as a result of a higher overall income. Just one extra year of secondary education can increase a woman's income as much as 25% a year. By participating in the labour market, an educated woman helps boost economic productivity, leading to greater wealth for her community as well. The community and society thus become more prosperous. With the awareness of her role as citizen, an educated woman can play a more dynamic role in addressing the economic challenges faced by her country, in the areas of agricultural production, food self-sufficiency, the fight against environmental degradation, the use and conservation of water and energy.

### **Interventions Needed to Improve women Education**

No doubt India has a wide range of Constitutional provisions, legal frame-works and a plethora of polices and plans and programmes reflecting the commitment of the government to provide primary/basic education to both boys and girls as well as to promote gender equality in education. Idea of setting up satellite campuses, feeder schools and recruitment of local female teachers can prove effective in arresting the problem of non enrolment, drop out, non attendance of school problems for adolescent girls to a great extent. The KGVBs are to be vitalized to bring more adolescent girls into the ambit of the system of education.

Governments and other organisations should attempt to educate people about the equity and efficiency benefits of female education and that public policy should encourage girls' access to schooling by extra subsidies in order to compensate for the asymmetry in parental incentives to educate sons and daughters in poor societies.

Community participation in projects specifically targeting girls is essential. It brings the school closer to the community, whose points of view, perceptions and practices influence women's and girls' education. When the community's viewpoint on women and their role in society changes, its attitude towards women's education also changes. When the community is confined within conservative attitudes towards women, there will be little chance of it accepting education for girls. One of the strategies for opening the community to female education and social change in general consists in involving it and/or reinforcing its participation in the implementation of educational projects.

Parents need to be sensitised about the importance of girls' education, especially when take-home rations are used to overcome obstacles to the schooling of girls. This will ensure the sustainability of the projects by inculcating new ideas into the community. There is often a concern that once the project has ended, families might tend to withdraw their daughters from school. It is to be hoped that with sensitisation accompanying the distribution of dry rations, this risk can be reduced or eliminated. Sending girls to school and seeing them attend regularly, may, in the long term become a habit, which communities will not abandon overnight. Moreover, the knowledge and attitudes acquired by girls during a project (which lasts on average four to five years) represent benefits which will last long after food aid has been withdrawn. Finally, continuous sensitisation exercises stimulate changes in behaviour and the acquisition of new attitudes and habits, which make a lasting contribution to the education of girls and women. Such schemes need to be taken up at a larger, nationwide scale to make a meaningful and long-term impact on adolescent girls' education.

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