

Research Report

The Human Rights Council

Developing measures to eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education



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Forum	The Human Rights Council
Issue:	Developing measures to eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education
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Introduction

In the afternoon of Tuesday, 9 October 2012, Malala Yousafzai was riding home on a bus after taking an exam at her school. Suddenly, a masked gunman from the activist group Taliban got into the bus and asked for Malala by name. He then pointed a Colt 45 at her and fired three times. After a lot of intense medical care and revalidation, she walked out of the Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital on the fourth of January and she is now living in England. The Pakistani Malala Yousafzai is known for her activism for rights to education for women, especially in her hometown in Pakistan. She has been blogging about her experience since the Taliban set an edict that girls weren't allowed to attend school and started to blow up girls' schools in the area. She still receives threats every day because she believes in the equal rights for boys and girls to basic education.

For too many girls, the basic human right to education is denied. In countries all across the world, extreme poverty, tradition, long distances to school, and social norms promoting gender inequality prevent approximately 31 million girls from learning. Women represent almost two thirds of the world's illiterate. It is the task of the United Nations to provide universal education for all and empower women.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender disparity

Gender disparity can be defined as the different or unequal perception or treatment of an individual based on gender. Since gender disparity is only based on sex, it can be considered discrimination. In this case, gender disparity implies that only boys are receiving schooling. This is usually based on religion or tradition.

NGO

NGO is the acronym of Non-Governmental Organisation, which is a organisation that is not related to any government. This can be organised on a local, national or international level.

General Overview

Worldwide, there are approximately 123 million youth (ages 15 to 24) that lack basic writing and reading skills. 61% of this number is female. To stop this, the causes of this issue should be examined.

Parents

Many of the children concerned can understand the importance of education. However, it is the parents that will have to provide this education. There are numerous reasons why parents would not ensure that their children attend school, especially girls.

Wealth

In 1943, psychologist Abraham Maslow came up with the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This theory implies that a person or community needs to have basic needs such as food, water and air before it cares about, for instance, health. This pyramid goes on and shows that basic needs have the priority relative to gender disparity in education. This theory explains why countries such as Mali and Pakistan, who were in conflict, are now working on providing basic needs such as water instead of building new universities.

Education is an investment. If you put enough time, money and effort into it, you will earn something from it. In this case, the profit is intelligence and potential wealth. But in a lot of countries - mostly Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) - there isn't enough time and money. If a parent needs to sustain a family and there isn't enough money for food, they won't be sending their daughters to school like their sons. The girls will end up earning money for their families and their brothers' education by working in the field, or even worse, in prostitution. This problem is not necessarily one of the causes of the issue, but the belief that boys are smarter and are better to invest in than girls is definitely contributing to the conflict. The NGO World Food Program (WFP) is trying to tackle this problem by introducing the concept



of “schoolfeeding”. This implies that children get breakfast, lunch and dinner provided at their school by the organisation and they get a fair amount of rice to bring back home to their families.

Benefits

There are, of course, parents that can afford education but that simply do not understand the importance. This may be because it is a tradition, but it could also be because they are not educated enough. Parents should be aware of the fact that girls are also capable of gaining knowledge and earning money. The only way to get this fact to these parents is through awareness campaigns such as billboards, free lectures, commercials and social media.

Tradition and religion

The parents of the children concerned also grew up with certain traditions. The culture they live in taught them that girls are worth less than boys. They grew up with this, so the fact that they believe these things is not purely their fault. The only way to stop this is to break the tradition. The problems and dangers that gender disparity can cause should be explained to these parents in order to eliminate the problems. There are also several militant groups who oppose girls’ education, such as the Taliban, Nigeria’s Boko Haram and Al Qaida. These groups are usually extremely religious. This unhumane violence is not likely to end soon, since the extremists don’t often open up to collaboration with any government or organisation.

School facilities

There are a lot of cases where parents would really want their children to attend school but simply cannot let them. This may be because education is too expensive in their region, but this could also be because the way to school is too long or too dangerous. This problem is again not necessarily one of the causes of this specific issue. This does not mean that it is not relevant to the issue. If this problem were tackled, we would be one step closer to universal accessible education. UNICEF is trying to tackle this problem by, for instance, setting up a project that provides bikes for girls in rural regions in Ghana so they can attend school. This project has already helped 6,000 girls get their education.

Education at university level

Gender disparity in universities in MEDC’s does not happen more often than in normal society. Gender inequality is happening everyday, even in the most economically

developed countries in the world. Research has shown that if exactly the same paper is submitted by a woman and by a man, the man structurally gets higher grades. This issue can only be completely tackled if the tradition and the culture is changed, not just the school systems.

MEDC's

Primary and secondary education is mandatory in most MEDC's. Nevertheless, gender disparity is still taking place, albeit on a smaller scale. MEDC's are therefore not the most important parties in the matter, but they cannot be forgotten. The gender disparity that is taking place in MEDC's usually happens inside classrooms: girls get treated differently by means of grading.

There is another positive way that MEDC's are involved in this issue. The organisations and projects that have been started are often organised or funded by these countries. Most of the NGO's headquarters are also located in MEDC's.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United Nations Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI)

In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, the United Nations Girl's Education Initiative was created, a partnership of different organisations dedicated to promoting and improving girls' education and gender equality. This agency and secretariat is led by the organisation UNICEF. The goal of this initiative is to make sure that by 2015, every child has access to primary education, with boys and girls receiving equal treatment. By 2015, the probably will not have reached their ambitious goal but they will have made a big change regarding girl's education.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

UNESCO was created in 1945 and is one of the most important organisations regarding universal education, since it is the only UN agency with a mandate to cover every aspect of education. UNESCO's educational objectives are to help achieve the goals of Education for All (EFA). It also coordinates the EFA movement and raises the profile of educational needs and developments regarding education.



United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Founded in 1946, UNICEF is probably the most influential organisation involved in women's education and gender equality in education. UNICEF creates several initiatives and is trying to tackle discrimination, violence and the exclusion of girls from education. For instance, UNICEF coordinates school feeding programmes, which provides meals for children that attend school and their families. UNICEF also tries to raise awareness for inequalities regarding women.

Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment (WEAVE)

WEAVE was founded in 1990 and is specialized in providing basic human needs for women, especially refugees from conflicted areas, mostly in Asia. These basic human rights include education. WEAVE provides over 4,500 pre-school children in over 50 nursery schools with financial and technical support. Their main focus is providing primary education and creating sustainable projects that can run on their own without further help from this NGO.

UN Women

The United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the empowerment of Women, in July 2010. This NGO is part of the UN reform agenda, which merges several different NGO's, resources and mandates in order to work more efficiently. This means that UN Women came from four different NGO's that were all specialized in gender equality and women's empowerment. UN Women has three main focus points: supporting inter-governmental organisations in their formulation of global standards, helping countries to implement these standards, and holding the UN accountable for its own commitment to gender equality.

Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali

At the beginning of this year, the UNESCO's Educational Development Index (EDI) published a list with the ten countries that scored the lowest on their tests. Number one is Niger, with an extremely low adult literacy rate (ALR) of 28.7%. Furthermore, a shocking 5.1% of all Nigerians have received secondary education. Even though there is no war, this country is suffering from a lot of refugees from neighboring countries, as well as economical problems. Niger is followed by Burkina Faso with the lowest ALR worldwide of 27.7%. This is presumable due to national conflicts. Mali is in third place. This is due to the massive amounts of international violence within the country, for example in 2012, when the Tuareg tribe took control over the northern part of the country.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1945	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation founded
December, 1946	United Nations Children’s Fund founded
September 3 th , 1953	Millennium Development Goals founded
March 9 th , 1990	Education for All goals were founded
1990	Women’s Education for Advancement and Empowerment founded
September, 1990	General Assembly Draft Resolution on Education for All signed
2000	World Education Forum takes place and results in the founding of the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative
July 26 th , 2001	Economic and Social Committee Resolution on Human Rights Education signed
2002	Global Partnership for Education founded
June 18 th , 2008	Human Rights Council Resolution on The Rights to Education signed
July, 2010	United Nations Women founded

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Millennium Development Goal 2, “achieve universal primary education” (MDG’s), 3 September 1953
- Millennium Development Goal 3, “promote gender equality and empower women” (MDG’s), 3 September 1953
- Education for All Goal 3, “promote learning and life skills for young people and adults” (EFA), 9 March 1990
- Education for All Goal 5, “achieve gender parity” (EFA), 9 March 1990
- General Assembly Draft Resolution on Education for All, October 1999
(A/RES/54/595)
- Human Rights Council Resolution on The Rights to Education, 18 June 2008
(A/RES/8/4)



- Economic and Social Committee Resolution on Human Rights Education, 26 July 2001 (**A/RES/55/360**)

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Let Me Learn has a research agenda that has resulted in the development regarding different aspects of education. LML was created in 1994 and is still operating today. LML offers several different programs and events. These include workshops, conferences, online courses and tutoring for people all over the world. It is also trying to raise awareness on the importance of girl's education through billboards, posters and even text messages in order to change cultural perspectives. One of the main priorities on the agenda of LML is making education for everybody part of long-existing traditions. This is a difficult task but they are slowly succeeding.

GPE is a partnership that works in order to ensure that education aid is more effective. This partnership was established in 2002 and is made up of developing countries, bilateral, regional, and international agencies, development banks, teachers, local and global civil society groups in the private sector. Since 2002, GPE has helped 19 million children enrol in school, 10 million of them being girls. 21 GPE partner countries now have as many girls as boys completing primary school.

The resolutions that have been written and the NGO's that have been established have all resulted in very positive changes. The three initiatives listed above are just examples of the numerous actions that have been taken by organizations and governments.

Possible Solutions

Education

One of the ways to establish universal education for every child is by educating the parents. The parents should be aware of all the advantages of education. The children should also be made aware of these facts. If every parent is aware of the capability of women, we are once again one step closer to universal accessible education.

Improvements regarding school facilities

As stated in the general overview, there are parents that would like to send their child to school but are unable to do so. The school might be too far away, but the road to the school can also be too dangerous. If there are more schools built, if the fees are lowered, or

if the schools could provide school-feeding and boarding facilities, this problem would be tackled quickly. The nature of the solution depends on the specific situation in each individual country.

NGO's

Since there are already several different NGO's that specialize in gender equality and women empowerment, creating a new NGO will not be very efficient. However, improving already existing NGO's could be a good solution.

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Appendix

- I. <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instree/b1udhr.htm>.
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a key document for this issue
- II. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/unesco-world-atlas-gender-education-2012.pdf>
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- III. http://www.uis.unesco.org/StatisticalCapacityBuilding/Workshop%20Documents/Education%20workshop%20dox/2011%20Kingston/7_GED_2010_gender_disparity.pdf
UNESCO's statistics on gender disparity
- IV. http://ap.ohchr.org/Documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_8_4.pdf
A UN resolution on the Rights to Education
- V. <http://www.unesco.org/education/wef/en-conf/UN%20Draft-Literacy.shtm>
Another resolution, entitled 'Education for All'

