

Forum: GA3 Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Issue: Improving Access for Girls to Technical, Vocational and Tertiary Education

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Introduction

The issue of improving access for girls to technical, vocational and tertiary education combines the two sustainable development goals, SDG 4 which aims to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' and SDG 5 which aims to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. These two goals in particular are capable, if achieved, of opening the door towards fulfilling the rest of the 2030 agenda set forth, simply because education is the key to development and to empower women is to empower the world.

Even though The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s most recent statistics evidence the fact that two thirds of the 25 Million children between the age of 6 to 17 years who do not have access to education are girls, the access to primary and secondary level education has seen a significant increase in the recent years. With countries like Nigeria, for instance, which saw an increased rate of 27 percent in Junior Secondary School completion, or Pakistan who was supported by the two Punjab Education Sector Projects and saw an increase of nine percent in girls' enrollment in secondary public schools.

The continuity of education beyond secondary and primary schooling is also of vital importance, however, currently, there seems to be little emphasis shown on the issue of the improvement in access for women and girls in technical, vocational and tertiary education. There are a number of reasons for this, for one thing it is dismissed by many societies as some young women themselves may choose not to take on that route because of societal or peer pressure; the belief that they are more valuable working at home or in agriculture. This option should not necessarily be of complete disdain, however it is important to note that young women should be able to make the choice of obtaining further education if they wanted to. Other questions such as the question of poverty will also be taken into account throughout this report.

Definition of Key Terms

Technical Education

The term is generally used when referring to educational programs and establishments that specialize in advancing technologies and applied sciences.

Vocational Education

This a more general term as vocation essentially means job or occupation, so vocational education simply means education that trains a person for a specific form of employment or trade.

Tertiary Education

This term refers to the formal form of education post-secondary. Tertiary education includes higher education which refers especially to degree level mainly obtained at universities or similar institutions. Tertiary education also includes non-degree level education which is sometimes referred to as continuing education.

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and instituted in 1981, the CEDAW calls for member states to ‘incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women, establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.

Academic Mobility

The term refers to the global exchange of higher education by allowing teachers or students to transfer to another institution in order to teach or study for a certain period of time.

Background Information

There are a number of prominent reasons why there is a lack in the improvement of access for girls to technical, vocational and tertiary education. Understanding these causes and their various

impacts will help tackle the core issues individually and simultaneously give a comprehensive overview of the issue as a whole.

Gender Stereotypes in Education

One of the main reasons that girls are less likely to continue their education are the ingrained gender stereotypes present even within school curricula. Primary and secondary education, meant to enrich the minds of the future and open them up to endless possibilities, could be the reason why many girls do not carry on to further their education post-secondary. Significant amounts of textbooks from all over the world, under content analysis, have shown a gender bias against girls; not only are girls greatly stereotyped but are also substantially underrepresented. When an evaluation of social studies texts took place in China, for instance, 100 percent of scientists portrayed were male. Moreover, when another form of evaluation, this time of mathematics textbooks in Tunisia, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon, took place, the percentage of female characters included in the content and material was found to be under 30 percent in all four countries.

Unfortunately, gender stereotyping in education goes beyond textbooks, in many secondary schools, teachers attitudes and the general implementations and stances of the school compel girls to take classes considered 'appropriate' where females are discouraged from taking science rich courses. This results in the ratio of women at the tertiary level to remain low in a number of academic fields. Additionally, the access of women to vocational training scopes are also considerably affected by the ideas on the 'appropriate work for a women' in some countries. The Pacific Islands provide such an example as their vocational education usually pertains to men whereas women are often trained in areas such as cooking or sewing. The lack of role models and the social pressures put on females in terms of gender roles results in girls having low educational aspirations themselves.

Cultural Barriers

In a great number of countries, cultural barriers such as resistance to girls education or resistance to girls leaving the house unaccompanied by a chaperone are the cause of the problem. In Nepal, for instance, a case study conducted at the Norwegian School of Theology demonstrated how the influence of the social structure negatively impacts the life of many Nepalese women and girls. Females there are restricted in terms of their roles, being solely allocated family and household responsibilities also meaning that the burden of children and home making falls disproportionately to them.

Another cultural practice that prevent girls from having the freedom of choosing their own future as it often puts a halt to their education is child or early marriage. Annually, 15 million girls below the age of 18 become wives. In the study mentioned above, there were a number of individual accounts of young

women recounting their experience, as one describes, 'My parents preferred to marry me before the first menstruation. They believed that marrying off a daughter before the first menstruation is crucial in family tradition. In our culture, it was not good to refuse parents' decision. I got married when I was 12 years old. I did not get opportunity to study'. Although, this is only the account of one woman, it is similar to a great number of cases of child marriage in Nepali society.

Gender Pay Gap

In many ways, the pay gap is an impact as well as a cause, but regardless it is often placed aside when dealing with issues such as that of the education of women and girls. In countries such as those of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the pay gap alongside other discriminatory practices by employers place further limitations on women from acquiring retraining. Also, Mongolia, a country in which women actually have higher education levels than men, the higher education does not translate into higher income. Such practices not only discourage women from obtaining further education in certain sectors but also result in a reduction in their independence which only limits their choices.

Poverty

Poverty, of course, is one of the hurdles that stands in the way of many girls from obtaining their education. Many parents, as mentioned earlier, may hold the view that providing a women with education will be of no use to her and is therefore no worth the cost as she is simply required to carry on with her domestic and maternal responsibilities. In some areas, rural ones, girls may simply be allowed to work in agriculture to bring about income to the family but would not be provided the opportunity of training. In a great number of cases, a family would have to choose between the children on who would obtain and carry on with their education and it is much more likely that the males will be provided with the opportunity over a female.

Another problem that is a result of poverty is the hygiene issue; currently 10 percent of girls in Sub Saharan Africa are compelled to miss school during their menstrual cycle due to the poor toilet facilities in their schools and the lack of sanitary products. In addition, this issue is not solely found in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) as the issue of the lack of sanitary products, known as period poverty, also affects seven percent of girls from low income families in the UK.

Case Study: Programme for basic and technical education and vocational training in Mozambique

Background

Over the last decade, the economy as well as the progress made within the education system of Mozambique has certainly seen great improvement. Numbers such those of the primary school enrollment for six year olds has seen an increase of over fifty percent from 2000 to

2015. However, even though the increase in enrollment of students demonstrates great improvement, the lack of qualified teachers still hinders the basic education system as in recent years the ratio of teachers to pupils was 1 to 62. It is therefore not of surprise that the hindrance to the basic education system also impacts the technical and vocational training negatively. Unfortunately, due to the insufficient training that is not adapted towards the labour market, seventy five percent of those who finished their vocational training were not able to acquire a job in the field that they trained in.

The Programme for basic and technical education and vocational training, aimed at tackling the problem, was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in order to be lead by the Ministry of Education and Human Development and since 2015 also the Ministry of Science, Technology, Vocational, Technical and Higher Education.

Aim

The programme has a number of aims, of the most prominent was that “children and young people, especially girls and young women, receive high-quality basic education relevant to the real world and employment-oriented vocational training”.

Approach

One of the means in which the issue was approached is by the improvement in teacher training. Teaching methods such as the learner-centred and participatory method utilized in Sofala and Inhambane by teacher trainers increased from twenty seven percent in 2013 to seventy percent in 2016. Moreover, there was also a provision of in-service courses in skill-based vocational training and education as well as technology in which 180 teachers took part in, of those 57 were certified and the number is only increasing.

In addition, the program also provided new curricula and equipment that pertain to the vocations taught and have facilitated training for use of such equipment.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The Commission on the Status of Women

The purpose of The Commission on the Status of Women is to foster gender equality and the empowerment of women which is the essence of the the fourth sustainable development goal. Of course the road towards empowerment and equality starts with education and training. In its fiftieth session in

2006, the commission adopted the goal of providing an environment for achieving gender equality through education, health and work and, therefore, began urging governments to not only secure equality in primary education- it has already made progress in ensuring that it's compulsory and accessible in some countries- but in all levels of quality education and training. It is notable for emphasizing the need for continuous education through its later session. After the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the commission took initiative in contributing to the pursuit of gender equality as to accelerate it and achieve the goal.

Egypt

Egypt is currently working towards extending and developing further opportunities for women in vocational training. A number of its ministries, notably the ministries of Planning, Labor Force and Immigration, Culture, Housing, Health and Population, and Local Development have been heavily involved in this expansion. The Ministry of Local Development has already held a considerable number of workshops, seminars and training programs in addition to supporting the opening of various centres specialized in vocational training. Another great example is the work of the Ministry of Planning in a program called Shorouk which reached out to women residing in rural areas in order to provide them with vocational training courses. Further work was also done by the government directly in collaboration with the general foundation of NGOs, all with the goal of awarding women better access to technical and vocational training.

Austria

Austria's technical sectors, in comparison with the rest of the European Union, was notably low in terms of the percentage of women in it. Therefore, to improve these statistics and forward the advance of women in the technical and scientific fields, four Austrian ministries created the initiative FORTE (Women in Research and Technology) which was launched back in 2002. This initiative had a number of objectives, one of which was to for The Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology to fund research centres and companies that provide opportunities for more female technicians and scientists. The ministry also had the goal of supporting universities and companies working in collaboration with one another that encourage young female scientists and even award grants for projects circulating on gender issues. Austria provides a distinguished example and a path that many countries can follow in order to improve the access of women in technical fields.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The UNESCO has always strived to contribute to initiatives such as the Education 2030 Agenda and has given particular attention to higher education through providing a platform for discussion on the advancement in academic mobility and the recognition of higher education qualifications globally.

Therefore, as part of their continued support to the issue, the UNESCO is working on a Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. The aim of such projects which increase academic mobility is to allow education to be more globalized and in turn provide greater opportunities to those living in areas where quality education is less accessible.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Women in Development, 22 December 2015 (**A/RES/70/219**)
- The Girl Child, 17 December 2015 (**A/RES/70/138**)
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 25 September 2015 (**A/RES/70/1**)
- Work of the Statistical Commission pertaining to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 6 July 2017 (**A/RES/71/313**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Raising awareness through education and ensuring that the education provided was free of stereotypes were two of the most effective ways in which this issue was tackled previously. Luxembourg, for instance, took the initiative by commissioning studies on gender discrimination and integrating it within the school system. Colombia managed to target specific groups such as educators, editors and communication professional through its established committees and held sessions on gender and non-sexist themes. Similarly in Kenya, workshops on gender sensitisation and discrimination were put forward, all of which resulted in better awareness of such issues on the part of people working in the field of education. Furthermore, in order to tackle the issue of gender stereotypes in textbooks, Italy constructed a code of conduct for self-regulation for textbook publishers.

In terms of the previous efforts taken by the international community to improve on this issue, The Fourth World Conference on Women was of significance. As well as aiming to eliminate illiteracy among women, it also took focus on the aspect of lifelong education and training of females through the increased access to vocational training in specifically the scientific and technical fields. It also paid particular attention to ensuring the development of education and training free of discrimination. The development of programs that that encouraged girls to follow a career-oriented education was promoted heavily as well. The next number of conferences built on these goals and continued on the long path of achieving them.

Possible Solutions

One of the issues that was came about a number of times was the discouragement of girls from studying in male dominated fields. The lack of female academic staff in certain areas, such as engineering or information technology in universities and also research facilities, only further impedes the issue. Therefore, one of the solutions proposed is the employment of more females in those technical fields and allowing them to acquire senior levels, especially as professors and researchers. Women reportedly make up just slightly more than twenty five percent of the researchers of the world.

As for the issue of poverty, of course we must start from the very basis of education. The first step that should be taken is the provision of primary schooling universally and then secondary and tertiary education can follow suit. This is fortunately a priority for most governments. Other forms can include assistance by providing scholarships or grants, but that is currently more beneficial on an individual basis. One solution that would be effective on a more general level, especially when it comes to obtaining tertiary education, is to allow individuals to study for free with a condition that they must serve the country they studied in or the country that paid for their education for the same number of years thereafter. The enforcement of the widely used system of student loans in which students continue to set aside part of their income in order to pay back for their years of higher education. As well as providing an opportunity for youth living in poverty, this solution can also benefit the economy and reduce unemployment in developing countries where there is a need for more workers in the technical and scientific fields.

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