

GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH EDUCATION

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Education is one of the basic human needs and rights. It is defined as one of the necessary conditions of individual empowerment and social development. Especially in the low income countries, the returns to the investment made in women's education has proved to be greater than men's. "Education is essential for improving women's living standards and enabling women to exercise greater 'voice' in decision-making in the family, the community, the place of paid work and the public arena of politics". In addition to such improvements, increase in women's education was found to be highly related to a decrease in population growth and the child mortality rates thus helping to raise a healthier and better educated generation of children.

Gender Bias in Education

Education is widely recognized as the gateway to economic security and opportunity - particularly for girls and women. World figures in literacy relate a sorry tale. Of the 130 million 6-11 year-old children not in school - a majority - 60 percent are girls. The figures only go to show how in most regions of the world, specially the developing societies, gender bias impinges on girls' education.

The foremost factor limiting female education is poverty. Economics plays a key role when it comes to coping with direct costs such as tuition fees, cost of textbooks, uniforms, transportation and other expenses. Wherever, especially in families with many children, these costs exceed the income of the family, girls are the first to be denied schooling.

All this despite the fact that educating girls is one of the best investments a society can make. An educated woman has the skills, the self-confidence and the information she needs to become a better parent, worker and citizen.

Girls' lack of access to education is not always related to scarcity of places in schools. It also emerges from expectations, attitudes and biases in communities and families. Economic costs, social traditions, and religious and cultural beliefs limit girls' educational opportunities. Whatever the underlying reason(s), having large number of girls outside the formal schooling system brings developmental challenges to both current and future generations. Individuals, families, communities and nations are affected. Inability to read, write and calculate complicates a girl's efforts to engage in both market-focused production and household activities as effectively and efficiently possible. This affects her family's welfare and diminishes her potential contribution to the development of the household, local and national economy.

Despite reported progress, there is still a persistent gap between women and men's access to education. Combating the high rate of illiteracy among women and girls remains an urgent global need. According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, it is now estimated that two-thirds of the world's 875 million illiterate adults are women.

Women's Education in India

Women and girls receive far less education than men, due both to social norms and fears of violence. India has the largest population of non-school-going working girls. India's constitution guarantees free primary school education for both boys and girls

up to age 14. This goal has been repeatedly reconfirmed, but primary education in India is not universal. Overall, the literacy rate for women is 39 percent versus 64 percent for men.

Table 1. State-wise Percentage of Female Literacy in the Country as Per 2001 Census

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Name of the State</i>	<i>Percentage of Female Literacy</i>
1.	Andhra Pradesh	51.17
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	44.24
3.	Assam	56.03
4.	Bihar	33.57
5.	Chattisgarh	52.40
6.	Delhi	75.00
7.	Goa	75.51
8.	Gujarat	58.60
9.	Haryana	56.31
10.	Himachal Pradesh	68.08
11.	Jammu & Kashmir	41.82
12.	Jharkhand	39.38
13.	Karnataka	57.45
14.	Kerala	87.86
15.	Madhya Pradesh	50.28
16.	Maharashtra	67.51
17.	Manipur	59.70
18.	Meghalaya	60.41
19.	Mizoram	86.13
20.	Nagaland	61.92
21.	Orissa	50.97
22.	Punjab	63.55
23.	Rajasthan	44.34
24.	Sikkim	61.46
25.	Tamil Nadu	64.55
26.	Tripura	65.41
27.	Uttaranchal	60.26
28.	Uttar Pradesh	42.98
29.	West Bengal	60.22

Source: Census of India, 2001

Table 2. Gross Enrolment Ratio in Schools for General Education

India/State/UTs		School Enrolment Ratio 2002-2003					
		Provisional					
		Classes I-V (6-11 Years)			Classes VI-VIII (11-14 years)		
India		Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
1.	Andhra Pradesh	107.38	104.08	85.18	58.79	67.15	49.66
2.	Arunachal Pradesh	117.05	129.10	105.40	70.66	74.87	66.22
3.	Assam*	117.43	127.18	107.42	70.63	78.73	62.27
4.	Bihar*	78.70	95.45	61.19	30.07	38.22	21.07
5.	Chhattisgarh	108.24	110.71	105.70	73.88	81.76	65.59
6.	Delhi	83.81	88.92	78.74	87.35	89.45	85.07
7.	Goa	84.79	87.19	82.32	70.33	72.91	67.66
8.	Gujarat*	122.29	132.82	111.16	70.67	73.18	67.96
9.	Haryana*	76.43	76.33	76.54	65.84	68.04	63.32
10.	Himachal Pradesh	90.55	93.19	87.82	99.30	102.12	96.34
11.	Jammu & Kashmir*	89.85	102.43	78.07	74.39	84.32	64.40
12.	Jharkhand*	88.56	100.51	76.34	37.56	43.86	30.76
13.	Karnataka	111.99	113.94	109.99	76.18	80.22	72.07
14.	Kerala	87.73	87.79	87.66	94.68	97.05	92.22
15.	Madhya Pradesh	113.41	121.64	104.76	61.79	73.39	49.57
16.	Maharashtra	110.82	112.18	109.39	94.67	98.23	90.95
17.	Manipur	102.08	105.25	98.83	78.05	82.28	73.72
18.	Meghalaya*	112.42	117.79	107.50	60.83	60.16	61.49
19.	Mizoram*	119.07	132.14	106.67	79.95	81.45	78.45
20.	Nagaland*	105.70	110.70	100.75	60.26	59.15	61.43
21.	Orissa*	115.64	133.52	97.25	55.89	67.03	44.33
22.	Punjab	72.02	71.72	72.36	64.83	64.39	65.33
23.	Rajasthan	134.60	143.59	124.94	59.62	73.73	44.06
24.	Sikkim*	114.59	119.13	110.31	65.14	61.35	69.05
25.	Tamil Nadu	115.91	117.59	114.15	94.41	96.19	92.55
26.	Tripura	101.72	113.09	91.58	66.46	68.70	64.11
27.	Uttar Pradesh	75.76	88.94	61.54	42.66	54.08	29.93
28.	Uttaranchal	99.56	98.66	100.48	75.09	77.21	72.88
29.	West Bengal*	109.80	112.72	106.82	53.88	60.51	46.96
30.	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.14	89.58	82.70	82.71	82.46	92.98
31.	Chandigarh	56.54	57.86	55.06	63.65	62.69	64.76
32.	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	136.87	142.26	130.98	80.97	95.26	64.84
33.	Daman & Diu	94.58	94.54	94.61	79.65	86.08	72.88
34.	Lakshadweep	91.98	100.93	83.45	114.19	133.50	96.64
35.	Pondicherry	75.69	77.25	74.08	90.32	94.04	86.60

Source: India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Education. (2001), Annual Report 2000-2001. New Delhi. P. 218. India,

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important signs of the unequal distribution of power and resources in a society. In virtually every country where illiteracy is high, women are more likely than men to be illiterate.

Discriminatory Educational Practices

The gender equality in education is certainly not confined to enrolment. Equal number of girls and boys at all levels of education is the necessary condition but not the sufficient condition. The quality of education provided bears importance as well and this quality is determined by the organization, processes and content of education. "Any attempt to understand the full impact of schooling on gender divisions must analyze not only the distribution of forms of knowledge and qualifications on the basis of sex; it must explore also the subtle ways in which the educational process brings to life and sustains sexual divisions". Women are also under-represented in leadership and management roles in education. There are also relatively few women at the decision-making level in the Ministry of Education.

Gender Equality & the Empowerment of Women

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, identifying and redressing power imbalance and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Although women may have many interests in common with men, their lives and the choices available to them may vary widely. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian constitution in its preamble. The Constitution not only grants equality to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Education is recognized as a crucial measure: "Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process."

More than two thirds of the world's 960 million illiterates are women. In India, literacy rates are 39 per cent among women and 64 per cent among men. A recent literature review by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), entitled 'Impact of Investments in Female Education on Gender Equality,' shows that education is a necessary but not sufficient investment to achieve gender equality. For higher levels of education to have the greatest payoff, investments also are needed that address the social and economic constraints, in the form of dis-empowering roles, since most advantages of education are lost when women are relegated to traditional roles which stifle their creativity, block their progress and diminish their contribution to the society at large.

Education is significant for girls and women because it is an entry point to other opportunities and the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects not only within the family but also for many generations to come. Educated women recognize the importance of health care and know how to take care of themselves and their families. Education helps to know their rights and they get the confidence to claim them. An educated mother plays a greater role in household negotiations and she secures more resources for her children. An educated mother can pay more attention to her children. The Indian scenario has provided enough role models that **stand out as icons of gender equality**. Maharani Lakshmi Bai, **Razia Sultan**, Indira Gandhi, Kiran Bedi, Medha Patkar, Sania Mirza, **Sonia Gandhi**, Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams are **but a few names**, which highlight the heights women can achieve.

Education at the primary and secondary level for all women and free opportunity for higher education, given the caliber, for all women will unlock the vast treasury of untapped talent. The door to enter and achieve excellence, the route to move and reach power, is today, barred defector when women claim offices and opportunities. The only way equal gender can be claimed as of right is through education.

No nation has a future with all the foreign investments, glamorous consumer goods, easy loans from abroad and the corruption that goes with these sources if its women are unfree. On the contrary, Operation Education is the surest process to make India great. Central to the country's progress is the woman who is the key figure in the family. The more educated she is the more revolutionary the changes in the villages. Women, when united, fight alcoholism; if enlightened, will take care of the health of children; if familiarized with appropriate technology suitable to the locality, will improve traditional techniques, invent new ones from scratch; economize on gas and eliminate food waste, improve productivity on a domestic scale and ease the burden of housework and cut living costs and safeguard the environment.

In recent years, momentum has been gathering all over the world, demanding gender equality and push for equal representation of women in all spheres of activity including political, cultural, economic and educational. In spite of conscious and repeated policy proclamations in India, female participation in education is very low and their participation in higher education is relatively still lower.

The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Equality in Education

There are four main dimensions of gender equality:

- Equality of access,
- Equality in the learning process,
- Equality of educational outcomes, and
- Equality of external results

1. Equality of Access

Equality of access means that girls and boys are offered equitable opportunities to gain admission to formal, nonformal, or alternative approaches to basic education. Actual attendance, rather than enrollment, is a better indicator of whether access has been achieved.

Interventions

- Situate schools in close proximity to students' homes.
- Form girls' advisory committees in which teachers monitor girls' participation at school and intervene when necessary.
- Raise parents' awareness of their rights and responsibilities in education and of the importance of schooling for boys and girls.
- Reintegrate ex-combatants and other youth affected by conflict by providing non-formal educational activities that emphasize self-discovery, healing, health and well-being, democracy, good governance, and conflict management in addition to basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- Provide scholarships for children at risk to encourage better attendance while simultaneously addressing the importance of education with parents and fostering more positive attitudes in teachers.
- Reach out-of-school children, such as boy herders, through radio instruction provided in distance teaching centers; include literacy and numeracy skill building and livelihoods training.
- Train communities in monitoring access and quality through parent-teacher associations and school management committees, ensuring that women are part of their management.
- Improve the ability of schools to provide educational services through education finance mechanisms that increase spending on quality inputs such as textbooks and decrease parental payments that may inhibit student attendance.

2. Equality in the Learning Process

Equality in the learning process means that girls and boys receive equitable treatment and attention and have equal opportunities to learn. This means that girls and boys are exposed to the same curricula, although the coursework may

be taught differently to accommodate the different learning styles of girls and boys. Equality in the learning process also means that all learners should be exposed to teaching methods and materials that are free of stereotypes and gender bias. In addition, it means that boys and girls should have the freedom to learn, explore, and develop skills in all academic and extracurricular offerings.

Interventions

- Train curriculum developers, textbook writers, administrators, managers, and teachers in gender awareness prior to developing new curricula. Train teachers in inclusive teaching practices to help them integrate students who have been marginalized due to poverty, ethnicity, language, or gender discrimination.
- Increase school safety and decrease violence by maintaining safe and secure latrines; protecting girls on their way to and from school; abandoning corporal punishment; training teaching staff and students to prevent violence; and enforcing teacher codes of conduct.
- Undertake annual classroom studies to monitor teachers' interactions with boys and girls to ensure equitable student treatment.
- Institute policies that encourage girls' participation in technical training.
- End academic streaming based on gender stereotypes (e.g., girls streamed into the humanities and boys into science and technology).
- Ensure that teachers working in emergency or conflict situations are equipped to help children understand their rights and to provide context-specific knowledge such as landmine safety, first aid, or peace education (INEE 2004).
- Provide accelerated learning programs to help students whose education was interrupted by war or other hardships to achieve grade level equivalencies and potentially re-enter the formal school system.

3. Equality of Educational Outcomes

Equality of educational outcomes means that girls and boys enjoy equal opportunities to achieve and outcomes are based on their individual talents and efforts. To ensure fair chances for achievement, the length of school careers, academic qualifications, and diplomas should not differ based on a person's sex. Mechanisms for evaluating individual achievement should also be free of any gender bias. What tests, examinations, and assessments measure tells students what matters and to the extent that these mechanisms reflect a gender bias; they transmit messages to students that can discourage their interest in school or in particular subjects. Results from classroom tests, national examinations, and international assessments can influence boys' and girls' confidence levels and their perceptions of their abilities and what is expected of them.

They can also impact what is taught in the classroom and how content is delivered. Where tests or examinations are used to determine promotion into future grades, or other types of educational opportunities, the extent to which there may be bias in these mechanisms is an important consideration when trying to ensure equality of access and equality of outcomes.

The results from the 2006 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) illustrate the complexities and the attention required for achieving gender equality. The scores in mathematics indicated that attitudinal differences between girls and boys were far more pronounced than performance differences. Girls reported much lower interest in mathematics, less confidence as mathematics learners, less motivation to use mathematics in the future, and much greater anxiety when learning mathematics.

Boys performed slightly better than girls, but were much more confident and less anxious learning mathematics (Schleicher 2007). Attitudinal patterns of school children are closely matched with current study and career choices. Test scores alone do not indicate whether the playing field has been

leveled and whether girls and boys have equitable opportunities to achieve. Even when girls and boys are performing at the same rates, this can still mask inequitable treatment. These findings reinforce the importance of understanding the dynamics in the classroom and what knowledge, skills, and attitudes are being transferred to students and how this can limit children's future possibilities in career choice and future earnings.

Interventions

- Train teachers to understand how their perceptions or expectations of male and female students may influence how they assess students' progress, mark examinations, and provide feedback.
- Include an assortment of question types (prose, diagrams, charts, pictures, tables, etc.) when developing test, examination, or assessment questions to respond to the diversity in students' learning styles.
- Use various question types (multiple choice, essay, short answer, etc.) and weigh the test items to ensure that students with different learning styles have equal opportunities to succeed.
- Balance classroom assessment methods to evaluate group and individual work using verbal and written evaluation tools.
- Review existing tests, examinations, and assessments to determine whether the examples and language used are free of gender bias and stereotypes. Remove any gender-specific content and ensure that examples reflect a balance in girls' and boys' experiences.

4. Equality of External Results

Equality of external results occurs when the status of men and women, their access to goods and resources, and their ability to contribute to, participate in, and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political activities are equal. This implies that career opportunities, the time needed to secure employment after

leaving full-time education, and the earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience are equal.

The four dimensions of gender equality are related, but that relationship is complex and not necessarily linear. Parity in enrollment and greater gender equality in schooling can, and often do, coexist with inequalities outside of education. In fact, several studies have demonstrated that educational success for girls does not automatically translate into higher economic status or greater political participation as adults (Pande, R, 2005). At the same time, improving opportunities for women in the labor market can give them the economic means to send their children to school. Achieving equality after learners finish their studies and enter the labor market requires interventions that go beyond the education sector.

Interventions

- Enact and enforce labor laws that ensure equal opportunity and pay equity.
- Conduct social mobilization campaigns aimed at increasing women's and girls' status and value in society.
- Promote legal reforms that ensure women and girls have equal protections and rights with regards to family law, citizenship, property ownership, political participation, inheritance, and the financial sector.
- Provide leadership training for women.
- Promote infrastructure enhancements that encourage economic growth, reduce poverty, improve families' health and well being, and ease the burden on women and girls.
- Develop programs to remove implicit or explicit barriers to women's participation in nontraditional sectors, including targeted recruitment, training, and support initiatives for women.

Viewing programming options through the multiple dimensions of gender equality can generate new ways of thinking about education for all children. A perspective that considers the dynamics between males and females and their

respective socioeconomic and political roles will produce better results in women and girls' education. Such a perspective is also useful for understanding the dynamics that have a positive or negative impact on the education of boys.

The four dimensions of gender equality in education demonstrate that gender parity is not the only milestone against which success should be measured. Educators must understand how stereotypes limit the choices and opportunities for boys and girls and obscure their needs and differences. This understanding will help educators create learning opportunities that will enable all children to flourish and reach their full potential.

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