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EDUCATING WOMEN EMPOWERS FAMILIES AND TRANSFORMS SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Women's education is a vital human right and can provide positive foundations for more than just family wellbeing. With more options to become involved in both community and domestic issues, an educated woman can also work towards equal social footing and make informed decisions on a wider array of topics. The goal of this paper is to explore how women's education can promote more equal relationships within a household, strengthen a woman's control over her family's wellbeing, and encourage community, state, and global equality. It explores education as an opportunity, both to learn as well as to grow beyond. Education includes many domains such as literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, health awareness, and vocational competence, which are valuable, particularly to help improve the position of women in society, with more women gaining access to employment, entrepreneurship, leadership, and public offices, among other domains. Family and household relationships are positively affected. However, many hurdles exist for girls, especially in poor regions, that can include early marriage, unpaid housework, the presence of harmful situations, lack of school infrastructure, lack of learning materials, discrimination, and more. Online and mobile learning offer additional options for those in rural areas or those with limited time and financial resources, with courses and training offered digitally and resources, such as those related to technology, being accessible online. It is necessary to provide safe and easy access, as well as cost efficient learning, in order to gain most benefits from digital learning. Investing in women's education requires public funding, and sustained focus rather than short-lived, piecemeal interventions. Rather than having single institutions offer learning opportunities, there should be collaboration among multiple stakeholders to ensure that women are able to continue to learn through most stages of their lives. When more women are afforded opportunities to become earners, more people are better off financially, and more resilient. Such progress creates positive social change in our society.

Keywords: women's education, women's empowerment, family well-being, gender equality, digital learning, social transformation

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of those rights everyone is guaranteed and that everyone is allowed to do something for themselves with, such as growing socially. Everyone benefits when more people can receive an education. The benefit is more pronounced for women, since having less opportunities for learning, further locks women into less jobs, and having no say in society. If more women learn, more can be done than just enrol women. Education helps a woman understand the consequences of the choices she has made and why, as well as the choices she has and can make. As Sen stated, development increases the freedom a woman has and increases her ability to fulfill her needs and goals.

The gains that the education of women brings about, go beyond the classroom. It provides more confidence and autonomy, as women have greater power over household finances, decisions regarding family, nutrition and healthcare, as well as child spacing and school choices. Women's education enables more agency against discriminatory structures, especially in relation to accessing government and non-government services. The World Bank regards women's education as a great human capital investment for productivity and welfare. For UNESCO, women's education is essential in stopping the poverty trap that occurs within some communities, as girls and women have many reasons to stay trapped in their situation (poverty, disability, and displacement).

This paper shows the value of educating women. Through a series of studies, it focuses on the importance of family, and how women are the agents of social change, especially through educational achievement. It considers digital learning as an option for furthering opportunities for women and girls, while stressing the inability of any one tool to overcome structural inequities. Education, of both boys and girls, has its greatest returns when there is gender equality of access, relevancy, and high quality of the educational curriculum, combined with real and meaningful employment and political roles.

2. CONCEPTUALISING WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Educating women means looking at it as an ongoing process. Basic literacy, as well as education on health and financial issues, as well as digital learning, along with secondary education and continuing higher education,

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and advanced vocational preparation all fit into a lifetime educational system. After the learning process is completed, the women should have the ability to think through an issue, weigh the options, express themselves, and deal with an environment of economic change. Formal education has its limits and its gaps. Women may have no access to digital resources or employment after formal schooling. Community-based adult education on the other hand is an avenue of learning, as women learn basic skills on top of those who have had no chance at schooling earlier in life.

Accessing resources is just a small portion of empowerment. According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment includes the concepts of resources, agency, and achievements. Education helps with all three aspects, providing people with resources, strengthening agency by widening choices, and encouraging achievements. However, education does not guarantee people empowerment. This is because women may not be allowed to act on their educational attainments as a result of social norms, the lack of control women have over their own money, the lack of mobility, and institutional and social oppression. Consequently, education needs to be accompanied by institutional changes.

In addition to correcting gendered educational resources and methods, an education system should challenge and question traditional stereotypes, particularly as they relate to career opportunities and school subjects. All women should be given the chance to develop in these areas, rather than restricted because of stereotyped ideas of what women are capable of. Nussbaum (2000) contends that everyone should be given the opportunity to explore, develop and apply skills that will empower women. Therefore, we should provide an education system that enables women to develop practical skills, gain confidence, and have the freedom to think for themselves.

3. EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S ROLE IN FAMILY WELL-BEING

Education improves a woman's contribution to the health of her family in multiple, interconnected ways. The first way education helps is by enabling access to reliable information and evaluating information once received. An illiterate woman with minimal knowledge of health might find it difficult to understand health care, take precautions, notice potential signs of sickness, and make informed choices with regards to care and feeding. These should not be viewed as burdens of the health of the family only on women. Instead, education provides the chance to women to join other decision makers and partners to distribute health responsibilities to people, relatives and institutions.

The second reason is that an educated woman is a better care giver because of the possibility to support the children in a better way, particularly by making the child a part of an environment of rich and structured communication and assisting the child to appreciate school. There are other reasons. The positive impact of women is visible across several roles, in several cases as a parent or care giver. All others being equal, in cases when the opportunity to women to get educated is closed, their chance to access information and better still the chances to speak for their child/children's school interests is lessened, says UNESCO (2020) which adds that parents' level of education has been a factor that can positively and even more frequently can negatively, and also in many cases and most particularly for the rest of their children's lives, influence the children's chances for education.

The third reason is education. It increases the ability of the women to take household decisions, the women get acquainted with simple accounting, saving plans, financial products, household budgeting, credit decision making, more so when there is access to income. However, family structure determines the influence of education on the decision making ability. This suggests that interventions and programmes should foster gender balanced family structures and respectful partnerships in contrast to a model of education that assumes positive outcomes automatically, as most programmes and intervention currently do.

4. ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, EMPLOYMENT, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

For women, education increases career options and possibilities for income-generating work. Basic education is key to participating in paid work, while tertiary education, which includes technical courses, equips women for professions, and can also lead to career options in the public sector. Additionally, vocational training, including skills such as carpentry, plumbing, or masonry, provides the foundation for work in various industries, including healthcare, education, manufacturing, agriculture, hospitality, and IT. According to a World Bank (2018) publication, stopping education for girls is expensive because it has negative effects on potential future earnings and productivity.

The ability to start and grow a business also benefits from education. Practical business literacy, communication, digital marketing, accounting, and financial planning, combined with market insight, aid women to recognize business potential and run smaller ventures. To effectively provide such courses, it helps to focus on local markets and to combine such courses with other supportive programs. An important issue to note is that such

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courses often do not produce desired results in terms of starting and growing a sustainable business unless supported with additional resources, such as access to credit, mentorship, child care, and safe transport.

Simply participating in paid employment may not necessarily provide the expected empowerment for women, especially if women face gender-based unequal pay, insecurity at work, workplace harassment, or the unequal distribution of family responsibilities. Educational systems should emphasize both good employment with equal pay and good, safe workplaces with good possibilities for promotion. There is a lot of scope for positive initiatives by employers such as encouraging people returning to employment after career breaks and allowing part-time learning and opportunities for women's progression within the employment. To sum up, the idea is not simply to increase women's economic activity, but to promote women's opportunities for decent employment.

5. EDUCATION, SOCIAL EQUALITY, AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

At the local level, women with an education can get involved in their community's organizations, such as parent associations, trade associations, and public institutions, such as coops. Women who are educated are able to read between the lines when it comes to understanding laws, can eloquently voice the community's needs, can be a valuable liaison with community services, and can help to hold the people in charge accountable. Issues such as community safety, public cleanliness, school quality, access to care, and the prevention of violent crimes can often be better addressed through women's involvement, which also promotes policies designed and put in place through community member participation.

Social change starts with questioning social structures and practices. With the inclusion of critical thinking and examination, there are opportunities to question gendered stereotypes and their causes, specifically the historical and literary causes, civics, and legal education. In order to fulfill the potential of education and provide learners with critical thinking opportunities, educational institutions need to maintain safe spaces and offer counseling and fair reporting avenues for people who experience discrimination. Furthermore, according to Stromquist, empowering individuals and understanding the structural context is a major goal for both educational institutions and the empowerment of women.

While it is necessary for social change to be inclusive of all groups, inclusion goes far beyond groups. For women especially, multiple facets can come together to block certain opportunities. For instance, being poor and living in a rural area makes it especially difficult for women. Having the flexibility of time and space, providing localized support for women in remote areas, offering financial aid and language learning opportunities to individuals and communities can facilitate the inclusion of women from all walks of life. Rather than offering everyone the exact same, we must provide services that cater to people from different starting positions.

6. TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED EDUCATION AND NEW PATHWAYS

The positive impacts of digital technology for women are that there are so many ways women can now gain education. Mobile applications, online courses, digital classrooms and libraries can reduce the need to travel to a traditional university. Learning can occur with more flexibility, making it possible for those who are employed or provide child or elder care to go to school. Remote learning can even bridge some barriers such as being located far away from educational opportunities and those who want to get back into schooling but need flexibility. Finally, technology has given more ways for women to engage with potential mentors and gain a variety of business-oriented networking possibilities, including learning how to navigate professional platforms.

Digital education is crucial for being competitive in today's workforce. There is a pressing need for girls to learn practical skills that go beyond knowing how to operate digital technologies. Some skills that girls should develop include navigating educational websites, assessing information, engaging in online banking, managing personal and digital information, and communicating in a safe and private manner. Technology, as described in the 2024 UNESCO GEM report, can enhance education, but there are certain disadvantages when women do not have digital skills, devices, or access to the Internet. The UNESCO GEM report highlights several issues with technological innovations in education, such as safe, and even sexist, spaces.

Any educational intervention using technology should be designed specifically around women's needs and circumstance. Such solutions might include digital technology interventions (with the provision of hardware, software, electricity and Internet connectivity as appropriate) as well as more traditional low-tech educational approaches where women's connectivity is unreliable, and especially where women and girls do not have control over the use of a family smartphone. Approaches that facilitate private access to a smartphone or offer some flexible, safe option should be used. This may even involve providing downloading and storage solutions as well as low-tech educational methods (printed materials, community support, etc.) when the technology cannot provide continuous, reliable access.

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The digital learning environment needs to be a safe one, as harassment, bullying, and loss of privacy, as well as being subject to fraud and abuse, can easily turn a digital space into an unsafe one for women. Educators should provide learners with instructions on privacy protection, communication with other digital learners, how to evaluate online resources, and what to do if there is abuse. Although digital technology is powerful, it can only support and should never replace human-centered mentoring, student-to-student interaction, practical and learning tasks, and real-life services. This is especially true of any blended educational programs where a student must use digital learning, combined with learning in a face-to-face manner.

7. PERSISTENT BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Progress in girls' enrollment and completion in school has still not solved the problem of some women and girls facing barriers during different periods of their school years. Poverty could be a factor in requiring young girls to have paid employment, or more often, domestic chores. School related costs like transportation expenses, and distance to school could be another factor in interrupting a young girl's educational progression. Some reasons girls can't go to school could be child marriage, pregnancy during early school age, fear of school and other safe school issues, disability based school exclusion, conflict, and displacement. There is an exclusion based on poverty, multiple reasons, and many reasons other than those based on gender (UNESCO, 2020). Focusing only on girls' overall enrollment can hide other causes for more disadvantaged girls.

Many social expectations still negatively influence girls' choices for different studies and different professions. Parents and the community might prevent women from leaving home, from having some technologies, from traveling, or from some employment types they might feel is bad for women. Within educational establishments there can be bias shown in classrooms, there could be unequal distribution of grades, bias on access to laboratories, there could be fewer roles for women in educational leading positions and there could be no gender inclusion on educational books. Dealing with these biases is going to take more than several discussions with parents, school principals, the village head and employers.

Inequities of any sort may lead to digital exclusion. A student may have registered, but will have some other reason for her inability to attend some of her online learning such as she may not have the right gadget or she may have an internet connectivity problem or some softwares or her online study place may not have privacy. Technology doesn't offer more inclusion by design but may exacerbate the already marginalized groups because technology may have some designs based on social inequities. Hence policy must go hand in hand with digital access plus skills building plus safe learning environments plus policy interventions that target specific demographics.

8. POLICY DIRECTIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments need to consider education a public good, which includes providing adult and continuing education, as well as affordable education for everyone, including those from poor backgrounds. For people with disabilities, and for others excluded due to gender and social reasons, government-sponsored programs need to be made more affordable through social benefits such as discounts and vouchers, scholarships, transport facilities, better menstrual hygiene facilities, and programs that offer opportunities for students to resume interrupted education. For proper planning and effective use of limited resources, gender-disaggregated statistics need to be used so that those most excluded from education are targeted first.

In addition to that, learning centers of all types need to address the obstacles that inhibit participation in, and successful completion of, programs of study and training for all women. Educational institutions, starting from primary schools to universities, and training centers need to have learning environments that do not discriminate against anyone because of gender. For educational centers, this involves addressing harassment through prevention, and effective measures to prevent its occurrence. Women need to be given opportunities to study STEM and more particularly have access to training in science subjects and technology laboratories. Women should also be provided equal access to leadership training, counseling services, and more especially counseling regarding jobs and professions. In respect of adult learning, adult education centers should have flexible timetables to offer vocational courses of various lengths. Courses offered should align with the students' aims and purposes, especially with respect to the mastery of numeracy and basic financial skills, literacy, and especially technology-related vocational skills and the mastery of basic computer literacy.

Third, learning plans and programs for use of technologies in education should be guided by principles of inclusion. Access to affordable hardware and infrastructure and internet connectivity can be increased through cooperation with the private sector. At the same time, governments need to provide safety and oversight over the provision of digital resources. Also, policies must address safety, equality, quality, and support of use of digital learning programs. Additionally, different technologies used in education should be monitored for different student groups to observe their effectiveness in the teaching of learners. Policies regarding different learning

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technologies and programs that are relevant to women and girls should be determined after their engagement with the target groups.

Lastly, education needs to be integrated with some of the larger issues facing society. Career coaching, internships, child care, safe travel, business funding, and partnerships with employers help women turn learning into practical work. Engagement of the community as well as families in encouraging the education of girls and caring responsibilities is essential. It is more appropriate to measure educational progress using the rates of completion and quality of education as well as safety and leadership opportunities as compared to enrolment rates.

9. CONCLUSION

An educated female populace means more educated households and healthier communities, through increased participation, choice, knowledge, and capabilities. There are countless positive effects that this phenomenon can cause on households, through the increased likelihood of a female to help run household budgeting and health and education related decisions. In economic sectors, more access to women with education will result in an increase of good opportunities such as more chances for business owners and the flexibility of employment. This also increases community involvement in decision-making and other areas, leading to more inclusive institutions.

Learning becomes easier for women with technology, because there are more pathways and choices. However, for a digital future to positively impact the lives of women, there are still too many barriers that need to be dismantled first, including costly internet and devices, the lack of digital skills, unsafe digital environments, and a general lack of digital literacy. Furthermore, education can only do so much to change a systemically unequal world, as barriers such as unequal access to opportunities and unequal division of unpaid care still exist, and must be eliminated in order to maximize education. Lastly, education should not only help to further someone's individual achievements, but rather should be considered a life-long endeavor to advance human dignity, sustainable development, and social equality, for the good of all citizens.

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