

## Equal Education for an Exceptional Future

Education is equal to empowerment. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a worthy global ambition, which is being targeted by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5. If I were hired by this organization to lead a project addressing gender equality by empowering women, I would strive to bring equal education opportunities for women and girls in developing countries. I would initially focus my work in the countries of Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Nigeria because here the greatest number of girls would be impacted by the opportunity for equal education. I would work towards solving the situation of gender inequality by first educating these communities on the importance of equal education, regardless of gender and race, in order to break the poverty cycle and improve lives. Next, I would work towards creatively financing the building of schools and employing interested educators where both girls and boys can have access to not only the opportunity to learn to read, write, and use technology but also an education in healthy living practices. Empowered, educated women and girls will, in turn, support the positive development of family, society, and the local economy.

The right to an equal education is one of the focuses of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 26. Though it might seem obvious that education should be a basic human right, 262 million (1 in 5) children worldwide are deprived of this opportunity. The current statistics on illiteracy and the number of girls not attending school are staggering. Globally, there are 774 million illiterate people with two-thirds of this number being women, which converts to roughly 510 million females who are unable to read or write (Gender). Out of all school-aged children, there are four million more girls who are unenrolled in school than boys (Davidson).

The deprivation of education is a cycle that binds millions of families to poverty, yet poverty is the main reason for this lack of quality education worldwide. Families in poverty often can't afford to have their children, especially girls, go to school because they are needed at home to support their family's work. This overpowering need for short-term financial stability prevents longer-term solutions. Education for both males and females can provide an avenue out of poverty for families as new pathways open for the educated, which often provide innovative job opportunities and higher pay. Unfortunately, in developing countries, this understanding isn't universal. Often it is not a priority to educate girls, because it is thought that girls are the "wrong gender" to attend school and are more useful working in the home (Phineas JFR). Girls are often forced into domestic work and early marriage without any consideration that they are worthy of an education or a choice. However, studies have shown that females who have access to gender-equal education are more likely to find employment, and less likely to marry and have children young, or to die in childbirth (Chris). Studies have also shown educated women "are more likely to invest in their family's health, education, and nutrition" (Education). It seems of key importance that if we are going to assist nations to rise out of the poverty cycle, that it is essential to the well-being of our global communities that all students have the right to a gender-inclusive education with attention to safety and equality.

The countries with the highest number of girls not in school are Pakistan, Ethiopia, and Nigeria with over one million girls not allowed to or have access to education (Gender). Because of these high statistics, it is here that I would strive to make the most impact. In these countries, equal education has been a challenge for a number of reasons. In addition to the cultural belief that a girl isn't worthy of an education, there simply aren't enough school buildings to reach all

students. Often students have to travel hours by foot to attend school. Walking long distances to school keeps students away from the needs of home and is especially risky for female students' safety. These problems are compounded by a lack of funding for resources towards adequate classroom facilities, properly trained teachers, and essential school supplies.

I would begin my project by first educating families about the importance of education, as it provides career opportunities and health benefits that, in turn, will reduce poverty and promote economic growth and well-being for their whole community. I would stress the importance of education in the academic subjects of literacy, math, and technology, but also one that coaches healthy living skills e.g., proper sanitation, prevention of illness, and general health practices. As these communities shift away from the cultural gender norms that promote discrimination and limit girls' access to education, I would begin the construction of schools by hiring local community craftsmen as builders. For educators, I would hire newly graduated college students around the globe interested in the experience of teaching and inspiring students in developing countries. In addition to having their living expenses covered, if these teachers commit to a four-year teaching position, any student debt acquired during their own education would be waived in payment for their four-year service.

Quality education opens doors. Attention to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through education will positively influence lives and raise awareness, fueling the fire to combat and burn gender inequality as a whole. Non-profit organizations like UNICEF, Save the Children, and Global Citizen are working tirelessly to raise resources to help provide education to all global students. I'm encouraged to support all students by promoting an exceptional future through equal education.

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