

Paving A Road Of Dreams: Female Education and Empowerment

In 1962, James Watson, Francis Crick, and Maurice Wilkins won the Nobel Prize for their discovery of the double-helix structure of DNA. No mention was made of Rosalind Franklin's research, without which such discovery would have been impossible (Lawler). When Otto Hahn won a Nobel Prize for his sole discovery of nuclear fission, he was unable to explain the process in further detail. Instead, his *partner*, Lise Meitner, was the one who had discovered it on her own (Kelly). Throughout history, women and their accomplishments have been overlooked and devalued. Women are a key part of human development, making up roughly half of human population, and without them, the world would not be what it is today. Female empowerment is one of the most urgent issues of our era, one that is crucial for us to resolve. I believe that, given \$3 million from the UN, I would be able to further the cause of female empowerment through free education for Syrian girls in Lebanon, as the opportunity and encouragement to pursue major careers that comes through education will allow women to fill more prominent roles in society.

Education is the future of the world because it leads to social evolution. I believe it could also be the means to female empowerment. Today, one of the biggest reasons for the lack of gender equality in developing countries is economic dependence. The economic dependence of women is a self-reinforcing system. The cultural interpretation of gender norms in most countries is that of a breadwinner husband and an economically dependent wife, with said wife performing housework instead of being breadwinner, perhaps to compensate for exactly that. However, that very same housework prevents her from opportunities to become a breadwinner, keeping her economically dependent, and so forth (Greenstein).

Throughout history, men have been more prominent because they support their families economically, and this custom prevents women from doing the same. I believe that education would allow women to become more independent and fill greater roles in society than housewife and mother. Education opens doorways to better and more high-paying jobs. People with college degrees are 13 times more likely to make over \$200,000 per year compared to someone with just a high school diploma (Greenstone and Looney). Helping women become economically independent is a crucial step in empowerment, which is why education is so important.

There are underprivileged girls everywhere whom this program would benefit greatly. But I would focus my efforts in Lebanon, where Syrian refugees have lost everything. An opportunity such as free secondary education could turn a girl's life around, give her the freedom to pursue her dreams and have control over her life. According to the Malala Foundation, there are 4 primary obstacles to this goal: child marriage, language barriers, high fees, and lack of internet reliability.

Child marriage is one of the key issues preventing girls from completing secondary education. It was shown that, in Southern and Eastern Africa, of the girls who were married between ages 14-17, 94% of them abandoned their education (Omoeva, et al.). Marriage at an early age hinders any possibility of extended formal education due to obligations to take care of one's household and/or family, also constraining participation in school. Girls who receive more education have been shown to lead healthier and happier lives, as further education allows them to understand their rights, have more skills, economic potential, and sense of self-worth; child marriage prevents girls from having the opportunity to gain all this.

Child marriage is just the tip of the iceberg to a more dire issue. It stems from ignorance and underestimation, from the devaluation of female worth. In many cultures, higher value is

placed on boys rather than girls. Families feel it is more worthwhile to invest in a son's education. Girls are seen as financial burdens; marriage is seen as a way to transfer that burden to another family, repay a debt, or establish an alliance ("Why Does Child Marriage Happen?"). They become pawns. I believe this could be resolved by educating Syrian families on the value and benefit of female education. I would put \$2.5 million toward organizing teams of volunteers to send to Lebanon to raise awareness among families in Syrian refugee camps. In this way, we can reduce child marriage, bringing down one of the primary barriers to girls' education.

The remaining barriers to the education of displaced Syrian girls are language barriers, high fees, and internet unreliability (Malala Foundation). These obstacles can be solved with Tabshoura in a Box. Tabshoura in a Box is an educational program that can function without internet and direct electricity. It uses Raspberry Pi as a server with preloaded software that can hotspot up to 30 devices, creating an educational community without requiring internet or electricity (Fahed). With Tabshoura in a Box, young girls can rid themselves of their language barrier and dependency on internet reliability, learning in a free, virtual classroom.

Tabshoura in a Box only uses adapted educational programs, so the total cost of a server could be just \$20-30, the cost of the average Raspberry Pi if we partner with NGOs to install the needed software. There are around 600,000 Syrian girls in Lebanon ("How Does Tabshoura in a Box Fill The Education Gaps in Lebanon?"). Each server can hotspot around 30 devices, I would need a total 20,000 servers. Given a total amount of around \$500,000 from the UN, I would be able to provide free education for Syrian girls, giving them a chance to take control of their own future.

Female empowerment is one of the most pressing issues of our time, and it affects billions of women worldwide. With \$3 million from the UN, it would be possible to provide

secondary education and a brilliant future for Syrian girls in Lebanon. They are the future and giving them the chance to pilot their destiny will be a defining factor in how our world will be for generations to come.

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