

## **A Right to Education: Women vs. Men**

### **Preface:**

The purpose of this report is to compare the rights to education between men and women. In developed countries like Canada, the enrollment of children in primary education is 100% and the completion of high school is 90%.<sup>1</sup> In developing countries, enrollment varies but has generally seen an increase in the last 20 years. However, in the poorest societies, access to education continues to be low, especially for girls.<sup>2</sup> World leaders made achievement of universal primary education by 2015 one of the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>3</sup> While the fulfillment of universal education continues to be the goal, the discrepancy between access for men and women continued to prevail in the poorest countries.<sup>4</sup> In many Middle Eastern and North African countries, women do not have the right or privilege to education. In some religions, it is against their belief for women to get educated, but in some countries including Brazil, Jamaica and Canada, women have surpassed men in post-secondary education.<sup>5</sup>

### **Summary:**

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1 Statistics Canada 2010: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010004/article/11360-eng.htm>

2 Educating Women in Poor Countries by Arye L. Hillman and Eva Jenkner

3 <http://www.unicef.org/education/index.569022>

4 Statistics Canada 2010: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010004/article/11360-eng.htm>

5 Inexcusable Absence by Maureen Lewis & Marlaine Lockheed

This report will examine the research done by Marlaine Lockheed and her books *Inexcusable Absence* and *Exclusion, Gender and Education*. It will also look at case studies in the Middle East, Africa and India, studying the educational needs, policies and concerns of developing and poor nations. Various organizations including UNESCO, Unicef, Centre for Global Development and World Bank support findings of this report. The impact of war, health care and poverty are also examined.

Background information:

“The road from poverty is paved by universal education”<sup>6</sup>. Since the majority of the children absent from education in developing countries are girls, it is important that they are given the priority to be enrolled in schools. Awareness of health, nutrition and safe sex practices is the initial goal of education. Basic literacy, numeracy and science are crucial in every day life. Further education specifically trains people for a particular job.

As of 2008, close to 70% of illiterate adults are women.<sup>7</sup> In developing countries, many students barely make it through primary education, and few continue their education into secondary or tertiary education. In rural communities, the distance required to travel for education is very far. Many parents worry about their daughters travelling the long distance, and after don't send them to school because of the long distance. In these cases, the boys go to school, but the girls do

6 Quality Education in Developing Countries, 2010

7 Education Minister Commit to Achieve Education for All-  
[http://www.ungei.org/news/index\\_2794.html](http://www.ungei.org/news/index_2794.html)

not. In some religions it is believed to be dangerous to educate girls, so they only send the boys to school.

In developed countries, there is equal opportunity for girls and boys to be educated. Studies show that education favours the learning styles of girls, which have caused women to lead the enrollment in post-secondary education.

Education in developing countries is more complicated than just having an education system. Education requires school buildings and teachers to instruct the students. There are few schools in rural communities, so children are often required to walk long distances. Once they arrive at school, there are very limited supplies and the teacher-student ratio can reach as high as 100-1 in a classroom. Many students drop out of school before they finish their primary education because they have to travel such a long distance or because their families need them to work to make money to feed for their family.

Education is also affected by illnesses. Many teachers in Africa have contracted HIV/AIDS and some schools are being forced to close. Without teachers, the schools cannot operate and the students attending that school no longer have an education. Parents are also contracting HIV/AIDS and children are required to stay home to care for the sick and their young siblings.

Close to 30 million students have entered the education system in South Asia since 1999. Many of them are girls and very poor children who in the past would not have been given the same opportunity. This is thanks to the governments and committed organizations that these students can now go to school.

World leaders stated that achievement of universal primary education by 2015 would be one of the Millennium Development Goals. Unfortunately, this goal is likely unattainable for the poorest countries. Poor countries don't have the money to go towards school supplies, hiring teachers or school buildings. The few schools that the poor countries have are crowded and far away from rural communities. It is for those reasons that education should be universal and publicly funded. When a child fails to acquire the basic skills needed to be productive, responsible members of society, the whole community suffers. The children have difficulty finding well-paying jobs and escaping poverty.

Expert:

Marlaine Lockheed worked as the Education Sector manager for the World Bank in both North America and in the Middle East. She directed many studies on education including "*Primary Education in India*" and "*Education Decentralization*". In 1985, Marlaine was awarded the Willystine Goodsell Award for her research on women. Later, Marlaine became a professor and taught students about the education policy and development at Princeton, Stanford and Harvard. She has written books with a fellow CDG (Center for Global Development) member, Maureen Lewis.

"Education is a basic human right for all, including for these girls from marginalized communities. More broadly, lack of educational opportunities for these girls has severe consequences for their communities, including increased poverty and poorer health, for both males and females. We all know that women who attend school have fewer and healthier children than women with no education. By educating girls in excluded communities, donor agencies and developing countries can help to improve lives for the entire community."<sup>8</sup>

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8 Marlaine Lockheed, February 12, 2007

Marlaine was also tested the equity in education as a research scientist at ETS (Educational Testing Service)<sup>9</sup>.

Marliane believes that education is a basic human right, and women are being denied their basic human right when they are denied the right to their education. She believes that by educating girls in developing countries, poverty is decreased and health is improved in communities. Women who are educated have fewer, healthier children than those who are not educated.

Control:

The government of a country controls the finances of the nation and the funds allocated to the education system. The government also determines who has access to education. In developed countries, education is a significant factor in the country's budget and the citizens demand it to be a priority. In developing countries, the government may have other immediate concerns (i.e.: war, food, sanitation and healthcare), which inhibit the focus on education. However, it is a known fact that "education can break the poverty cycle." The government of a country controls equity to education by the amount of money put aside for education. Children living in rural areas have to travel long distances to get to school, so the enrollment number decrease. That is not the only problem. Schools in Middle East have a student- teacher ratio as high as 100-1. In some countries, including Iraq, the men control who has the right to education and who does not. For them, it is not a human right, but a man's right to get educated.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cgdev.org/content/expert/detail/5206>

### Religious and Spiritual Views:

In some developing countries women and men are not regarded as equals. Culturally, men and women have different roles in society. Men are hard working and women are there to support them. The only way to change this view is to educate the women so they become more aware of their choices. The men are skeptical because they feel women will not listen to them and will not want to support them.<sup>10</sup> In Africa, once girls enter puberty, the community teaches them how to fulfill their role of a wife and mother. Culturally, the expectation of “child brides” affects any possibility of further education. Similarly in the Middle East and India, arranged marriages and loyalty to the husband’s family makes the girl’s own family question the value of education. In some religions, girls are married very young and bear children by the time they are thirteen years old.

Nearly forty-five million girls not in enrolled in school are members of racial, ethnic, religious or language groups. These girls can be thought of as “double disadvantaged girls” because their education is not just effected because they are females; it is also affected because they are stuck in racial groups that keep them from becoming educated.<sup>11</sup> For example;

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<sup>10</sup> Issues in Basic Education in Developing Countries: by Joseph P.G. Chimombo

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.cgdev.org/content/article/detail/1423602>

7) Case Study #1: Girls in India: Poverty, location and social disparities

This article is about the education of boys and girls in India; the challenges they face in their education and the journey they have to take to get to school. It discusses the inequity of girls' and boys' education, the different levels of education and the difficulty the government has with its education system in India.

Education attendance has improved over the past decade, rising to 94% for Primary education, but lagging in Secondary education with 40%. Children living in rural areas and in tribal communities make up the small percentage not attending school, as well as children suffering from mental or physical disabilities. By the time boys reach their teens, they are needed to help out around the household and some families remove them from school. A similar thing happens with girls, only as they hit puberty, their families sometimes choose to remove them from the classroom for safety reasons. The main reason for adolescences dropping out of school in India is because the older they get, the more expensive their education becomes. Although the government covers tuition to school in India, families are still required to pay for uniforms and textbooks themselves.

On the other hand, in upper class cities in India, parents do not want their children being educated in crowded, rundown school buildings, so they choose to pay for private education. This also leads to a gender inequality issue with education. Boys are believed to be more deserving of better education and are taught how to speak English in private schools. Often girls of the same family will remain in the government provided schools because families do not want to pay extra money for their daughters to get a better education, only to move in with her

husbands' family. In the government schools, girls learn about the cultures and native language spoken by the people in the region where they are living.

In 1993, the DPEP (District Primary Education Program) got involved in schools in India who fell under the female literacy rate. They implemented teacher training and provided the classroom with more supplies. The National Program for Universal Education has increased its financial support to India by providing funds to repair school buildings, increase teacher salaries and purchase school supplies.

Midday meals in Indian schools have had a direct correlation with increase in girls' enrollment in schools. Schools are starting to provide meals in the middle of the day for students so they will not have to bring their own, or go hungry. By providing meals, teachers hope that it will attract more students to school, especially girls.

#### Case Study #2: Burkina Faso:

Located north of Ghana, Burkina Faso is a small country located in western Africa. The country has the second highest illiteracy rate on the planet. Only 29% of girls attend primary schools in Burkina Faso, compared to 42% of boys. The African Girls Education Initiative (AGEI) focuses on increasing equality and participation of women in education in Africa. AGEI's main goal is to increase female primary enrollment and lower gender inequity in education in Burkina Faso. It consists of two phases; Phase I consists of convincing or motivating the girl's family to allow her to attend school, while Phase II educates communities on the importance of girls' education and encourages them to support those girls in the

community in school. In order to promote gender equality in education, the Initiative must provide families in Burkina Faso with motivation to send their daughters to school.

The African Girls Education Initiative promotes female enrollment in education by providing take home rations and school supplies which are awarded for their attendance and the level of academic achievement they reach in school. The Girls Basic Education Program in Burkina Faso is effective in 11 provinces which are greatly impacted by poverty and a weak education system, specifically girl's education.

Management Committees provide meetings and discussions to inform communities in Burkina Faso about the importance of girls' education and respect of school schedules and the consequences of forced marriage. The food rations handed out in school helps to retain female's enrollment in education. Girl's mothers are more likely to allow them to go to school because they are still helping the family by providing them with food rations.

Despite enrollment increases in primary education in Burkina Faso, a significant gender gap is still apparent, with girls lagging behind. Cultural traditions such as child arranged marriages, household chores and taking care of younger siblings are all causes of girls' absence from school. As girls grow older and graduate from primary school (gr.3), they are forced to travel farther away from home in order to receive their education. Parents often do not allow their daughters to go to these schools because they fear that once they become educated, their daughters

will leave the village to go and work somewhere else and not for them. They also do not think it is safe for girls to walk so far.

A solution to this problem is to offer schools within the community of in Burkina Faso. Childcare is also offered in schools so that young women can drop off their children or younger siblings and attend classes during the day so that they do not have to stay home and take care of the smaller children.

### Case Study #3: Girls' Education in Afghanistan:

When the Taliban were in power, women were banned from education in Afghanistan. After they were eliminated from power in 2001, the government's number one priority was education, especially at the primary entry level. With assistance from the United Nations, the government developed a Back to School Campaign that was committed getting children back into education. The campaign was designed to build new school buildings, improve the curriculum and train teachers in Afghanistan. Today nearly 2.4 million girls are currently enrolled in primary education in Afghanistan, just a decade after the Taliban government was eliminated from power. As the violence in Afghanistan continues, the attendance of girls in schools is starting to drop because parents are not allowing their children to attend school because the journey to school is too dangerous.

47% of schools in Afghanistan do not have buildings in which to conduct daily lessons.<sup>12</sup> Poverty is the leading cause of absence of students, especially girls in Afghanistan, with child marriage and the long distance to travel also as the major

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12 Girls' Education in Afghanistan article- <http://ccoportal.org/file/2232>

reasons. Only 6% of Afghan women over the age of 25 have received any education and only 12% of women 15 and older are literate. As women become more educated, infant mortality and domestic violence decreases because they can better understand the risks and the effects of them.

Ultimately, the decision to send a girl to school or not is completely up to the girl's family. The family must decide if it is safe for their daughter to attend school, if they can financially afford for the girl to leave the household and if the distance travelled to receive an education is reasonable or not. The highest enrollment rate in female education is around the age of 11 at 50%<sup>13</sup>, but then the enrollment rate steadily declines as girls get older.

Only 10% of girls not currently in schools want to be educated, 16% do not and 74% are unsure if they do, mostly because their families need them to be home, looking after children or working around the house.<sup>14</sup> Of the girls already in primary schools, 85% of them want to continue their studies and remain in school and 94% of females in high school wish to further their education.<sup>15</sup> As girls get older, their desire to receive further their education increases because they are beginning to realize their potential and love of learning. Often girls have the desire to continue their education, but can not because of their family's poverty and the far distance they would have to travel in order to get further educated.

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Poverty is the leading cause of girls' absence in education in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> Some children are needed to stay home and help out on the farm, or around the house, or help in skilled work such as carpet weaving or by working for someone else. Parents have to pay for their children's school supplies, transportation and uniforms for school, and sometimes it comes down to sending a child to school, or having dinner for a week. In 2002, as part of the Back to School campaign, the World Food Program started to provide "take home rations", so that students would receive these rations depending on their work ethic and attendance. The World Food Program (WFP) hopes to encourage students, especially girls to go to school. The problem becomes that girls only attend on days when take home rations are being dispersed. According to a female high school student in Badakhshan, "WFP programs are good. They get parents to send their daughters to school, especially in poorer families. But when I'm a mother, we won't need them anymore. We will know the value of education because we have been to school, and we will send our children without anyone offering us things."<sup>17</sup>

The "Bride Price" in Afghanistan provides a household with income when a daughter is married off at a young age. The problem is that when girls are married off young, very few continue their education, especially when they bear children.<sup>18</sup> Many men believe that girls should go to school to learn how to read and write and

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16 Girls' Education in Afghanistan article (pg11)

17 Girls' Education in Afghanistan article (pg12)

18 Girls' Education in Afghanistan article (pg 13)

then should be removed from the education system because there is “nothing more” for them to learn.<sup>19</sup>

Violence and war has a huge impact on the attendance of girls in Afghanistan. In 2009, nearly 50 attacks occurred in schools but rose to 250 during the election because schools were used as election poles.<sup>20</sup> These incidences cause schools to close altogether in Afghanistan until the uprisings cool off.<sup>21</sup>

Some girls in Daikundi, Afghanistan admit to walking as long as three hours to and from school every day. 83% of schools in Afghanistan are in rural areas and require students to travel long distances to attend them.<sup>22</sup> This becomes a major issue for young women travelling to school because their families worry that travelling for hours on end is harmful and an embarrassment for their culture.<sup>23</sup> As girl get older, the schools become farther away. Girls are often withdrawn from education because the distances required traveling for education become too large for girls to walk.

Some schools have too many students to carry out a full day of class; so instead, a student’s learning time is limited to 2 hours every day.<sup>24</sup> More schools are

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19 Girls’ Education in Afghanistan article (pg 13)

20 Girls’ Education in Afghanistan article (pg 14)

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needed to be available for student learning because the class size is too crowded for students to get the education they need.

## **8) Non-Governmental Organizations**

### **United Nations:**

Nearly two thirds of the illiterate population is female.<sup>25</sup> As female education enrollment in developing countries increases, the quality of education still remains weak. *The United Nations Entity of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women* is designed to inform the world about a women's right to education. Their goal is to educate women so they will be more involved in leadership, ending women's violence, give them more job opportunities and giving women a more powerful voice.

*The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative* 's principle is to narrow the gap between girls and boys in primary and secondary education. UNGEI is determined that by 2015, all children globally will have the equal opportunity to the access of primary education.<sup>26</sup>

### **UNICEF (United Nations International Child Emergency Fund):**

"UNICEF Burkina Faso has played a strong role in advocating for girls' education".<sup>27</sup> UNICEF wants to help in areas of their choice and independently help

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25 Focus on Education as UN Women's Commission Begins Annual Session-  
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=37591&Cr=gender+equality&Cr1=>

26 <http://globalcrisis.info/womened.html#4>

27 Burkina Faso case study (pg 27)

promote girls' education in countries like Burkina Faso. They provide money to put towards buying new school supplies, building schools and educating teachers to be better equipped for their classrooms in developing nations.

*The Global Girls Education Program* along with the *African Girl's Education Initiative* want to allow women to further their talents and abilities by becoming more educated. They work side by side working for women's rights to education in countries such as India and Afghanistan.

### The Global Fund for Women

The organization advocates for women and defends their rights in the Middle East, Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa just to name a few. They award money to projects promoting women's rights. For the past 25 years, the Fund has been investigating women's right to education and the movements taking place globally to reduce discrimination against women. They have witnessed the positive effects of education such as lower HIV/AIDS contraction, low child mortality and increase of women in the work force. *The Global Fund for Women* is present in countries such as Brazil and Morocco.

### UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization):

UNESCO objective is to contribute to peace in the world by promoting a global oneness through education. They hope that by educating people about one another's religion and culture, they can acquire peace and equality in the world. The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network is designed to educate people about gender and cultural equality. UNESCO is used throughout the world, including in India, where they are involved in creating a safe environment in schools. UNESCO

hopes that when it has a positive effect on one country or region, it has a positive on the countries surrounding that region.<sup>28</sup>

### 9) Equity Education in Canada:

In Canada, females have equal access to education as males. According to Statistics Canada, females achieve better than males on standardized reading and writing tests. Women and men achieve equal success in math and science. In fact, research is currently being done into equity for boys learning in Canadian schools and other developed countries.

High school education is the minimum requirement for Canadians to get a decent paying job in Canada. Without education, we are at risk of falling into the poverty cycle and unable to get a decent job. Males have a higher high school drop out rate than girls in Canadian schools. This is thought to be a result of a better female attitude and academic work style, which is expected in the education approach used in today's schools. Unlike in India, Burkina Faso and Afghanistan, Canadian women outnumber men in college (54% women) and university (58%).

In Canada, more young men than women are experiencing difficulty in school because they are less engaged and less interested in the way the curriculum is presented. This causes more male high school dropouts. According to Statistics Canada, females are more suited for academic engagement in the Canadian education system than males.

One in nine children in Canada are impoverished. 50% of Aboriginal children and 50% of new immigrant children live in poverty in Canada. Studies show that

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28 UNESCO: [www.unesco.org/education/asp/pdf//wunesco.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/asp/pdf//wunesco.pdf)

children in low-income families have less desire to succeed in school and are not eager to participate in school activities.<sup>29</sup> Impoverished children are at a higher risk of dropping out of school and becoming illiterate.

In Canada, the right to education for females is protected under the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) in the Canadian Charter of Rights.<sup>30</sup> We are considered to be equal to men in our society and have the equal opportunity to education. In the Canadian education system, girls are out numbering boys and out smarting them in the literacy courses.<sup>31</sup>

#### **10) Solutions:**

The flowing solutions are a common theme in all case studies, including Canada; feed students, ensure access to school is safe, provide appropriate school materials, provide in school child care for small children, provide instruction in home communities and provide incentives for staying in school.

By offering food at school, parents are more willing to send their child to school because then they do not have to worry about feeding them. They can also bring food home from school that they do not eat. Food at school doesn't just mean midday meals; it also includes take home rations. A child's attendance and their level of achievement determines on the amount of rations each student gets to take

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29 Supporting Education- Building Canada- Child Poverty and Schools  
([http://www.ctf-fce.ca/publications/Briefs/FINAL\\_Hilldayleavebehind\\_eng.pdf](http://www.ctf-fce.ca/publications/Briefs/FINAL_Hilldayleavebehind_eng.pdf))

30 Women's Legal and Action Fund- <http://leaf.ca>

31 <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/200410/7423-eng.htm>

home. Attendance on the days that take home rations are offered in school often spikes, especially on days when valuable food like vegetable oil is being handed out.<sup>32</sup> This shows how important the rations really are to the students and their families. For example, in Kenya, the government offers food rations at the end of the day for the children attending school that day. This not only increases female population in schools, but also reduces the child hunger in Kenya.

Having school in a safe environment is crucial in order to maintain attendance, especially for girls. Girls' families will not allow them to go to school if they are going to be in danger. A possible solution to ensuring a safe school environment is to hold school outside of the areas of chaos and violence. This is especially important in Afghanistan because schools have to close for weeks when the violence is too out of control for children to be walk to school.

Some children cannot afford to go to school because their parents have to pay for their books, school supplies and uniforms. If the government or other organizations could incorporate those costs into the education budget, it would allow many other children the opportunity to go to school, especially girls. Often if a family can only afford to have one child go to school, they will send their son. If these additional costs do not exist, then the girls will be allowed to go to school as well. This creates an equal opportunity for boys and girls to be educated.

Sometimes girls in developing countries cannot go to school because they have to stay home and take care of their younger siblings. By offering in school child

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32 Girls' Education in Afghanistan article

care for younger siblings or babies, girls can fulfill their potential and get an education, despite family obligations.

The decision to educate a girl falls on her parents. By educating them of the importance of their daughter's education, they can make an informed decision on whether or not to let her attend school. If the community is informed and supports girls pursuing their education, then it is more likely that more girls from the community will attend school regularly. People do not know what they are missing out on until someone tells them. Perhaps parents are keeping their kids at home because they don't understand the importance of their child's education. When girls become educated, they can make logical decisions about their health, lives and family. There is a direct correlation between girls' education and decreased infant mortality rate as well as HIV/AIDS. Educating girls provides them with the basic understanding of their rights and safety. Education empowers women to make informed choices about their own lives and allows women to be contributing members of society.

Countries have responded to the demand of girls' education by providing more communities with alternative schools in smaller communities to reduce the amount of distance girls are required to travel to get to school.<sup>33</sup>

Schools could encourage girls to enroll in school by providing scholarships that could be earned by girls to help to pay for uniforms, textbooks and transportation. This is the case in Bangladesh.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.cgdev.org/content/article/detail/1423602/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.cgdev.org/content/article/detail/1423602/>

Canada has an overload of teachers here in Canada. A solution for the lack of teachers available in developing countries would be to send trained teachers from Canada to those developing nations in need. Teachers could travel to teach English and health especially to girls. English is crucial in order to be able to communicate with the teachers if Canada sends them over. It is also useful if the girls in developing countries ever want to leave their country to seek a profession elsewhere. By teaching the girls about health and safety, it would help to lower birth rates and control overpopulation. When women understand safe-sex practices, they can not only protect themselves from infections and

FACTS:

- Between 1996 and 2001, female education was banned in Afghanistan
- A decade later, nearly 1 million girls are now enrolled in schools in Afghanistan
- \*\*\*Accelerated Girls' Education Initiative
- Connect Breakfast for Learning Program in Canada and take home rations in Burkina Faso and Afghanistan
- Obstacles in Girl's education include: poverty, early childhood marriage, poor family support, long distance and non-female schools