

Forum: Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee
Issue: Gender disparities in education
Student Officer: Fay Metaxa
Position: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Fay Metaxa, I am fifteen years old and I am a student in year ten at Costeas-Geitonas School. It's a delight serving as a co-chair of the Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee in this year's PSMUN conference. It will be my tenth conference and my second time chairing.

My role in the committee is to ensure that everything runs properly and according to schedule. One of my main duties is to create a study guide on a specific topic. I will be the expert chair on the topic of gender disparities in education, meaning that in this study you can find all the useful information you will need in order to understand the topic. This study guide will take you through the main ideas of the topic so you can create your own resolution, providing solutions to this topic.

I hope that this study guide will be helpful for you and I will see you all at the conference.

Best regards,

Fay Metaxa.

INTRODUCING TOPIC

The term Gender disparities in education refers to the unequal rights that girls have in education. More precisely, for many years a common phenomenon in numerous Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs), like Kenya and Ethiopia, is that girls are obliged to work and provide for their families without getting basic education like boys do. A shocking to all fact would be that, in 2013 only, 57 million children did not attend school and a staggering 49% were girls. So, what needs to be achieved is gender equality meaning that all students, both female and male, have the right to every level of education that is provided.

This is a topic of great importance since education is a right that everybody has, regardless of their gender. Eliminating gender disparities in education will not only help us achieve social equality but it will also benefit the local economy and the establishment of democracy. To stress the importance of this topic the United Nations (UN) has set universal primary education as a Millennium Development Goal that has to be met by 2015.

Causes of gender disparities

One of the main causes of this issue is the disregard that girls have to their right of education due to several factors. For example, extreme poverty, stereotyped gender roles and regional customs like early age marriage. Another cause is also the difficult access to schooling that in a lot of rural areas can consist of a journey of 10-18 KM. Moreover, girls do not have the same right to education as boys do due to the fact that there is a lack of motivation from the parents and the community, but also, no real public awareness exists either. Without doubt, religion is one of the key changing factors of this issue. Certain beliefs support that the male gender is the dominant one, meaning that girls have limited rights that do not include education. In countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan threats to shut down girls' schools are made on a daily basis. In effect, the rate of female participation in primary education is lower than that of male participation.

Consequences

Gender inequality in education can have a tremendous effect on rural economy. Poverty is probably the most significant consequence considering that the lower the literacy rate is in an area the fewer jobs can be acquired leading to a low income. Additionally, it has been proved that in families where mothers are educated the daughters tend to be educated as well. So if the majority of girls have not been schooled then their daughters will not be either, thus creating an unbreakable cycle of illiteracy among females. The stereotypes favoring the male gender will still exist and no progress towards social equality will be made.

Importance of resolving the issue

By educating girls and providing them the appropriate knowledge we can help eradicate HIV/AIDS, improve maternal health and lower the rates of infant mortality. If a mother is taught in school that the HIV virus can be transmitted to the infant via breastfeeding then the above mentioned issues can be resolved. Agricultural economy and productivity will improve if women learn the necessary skills and are able to contribute to these sectors. Gender-based violence is a problem dominating schools in LEDCs and if we can achieve social equality we can also eradicate gender-based violence.

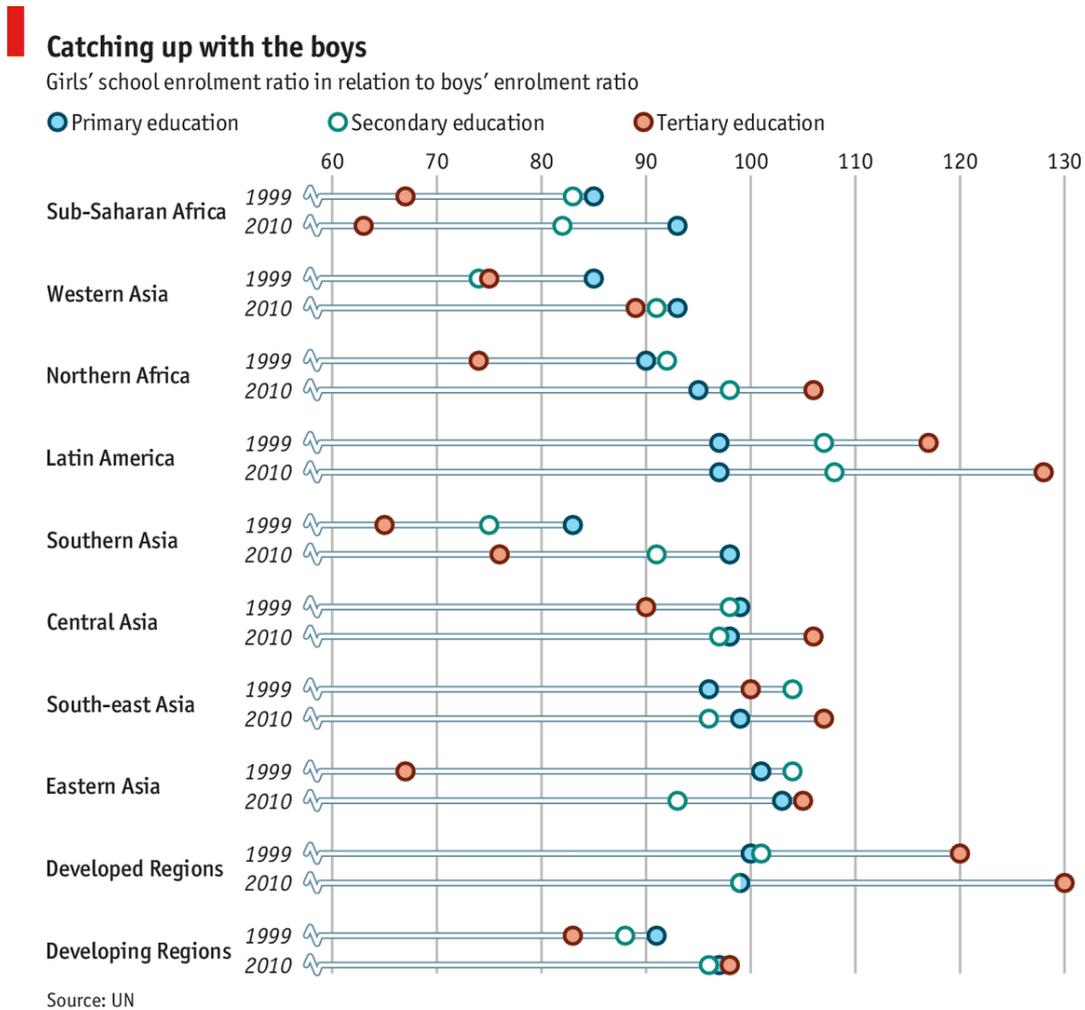


Image 1: Girls' school enrolment ratio compared to boys' ratio
<http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2013/11/gender-inequality>

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Gender Equality

The situation during which women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured.¹

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

The number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for the same level of education.²

Gender Parity Index (GPI)

An index dedicated to comparing the access that females have to education compared to the access that men have.

Basic Education

Basic education prepares the learner for further education, for an active life and citizenship. It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacies, and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life.³

Gender Parity

Gender parity is the state during which both genders, female and male, are equal.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In 2000, eight goals were set by world leaders focusing on the most pressing issues that ought to be resolved. These goals were addressed to all nations and are set to be met by the year 2015.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

¹ <http://www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/WhatisGE>

² <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Metadata.aspx?IndicatorId=9>

³ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001802/180253e.pdf>

According to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, is any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. ⁴

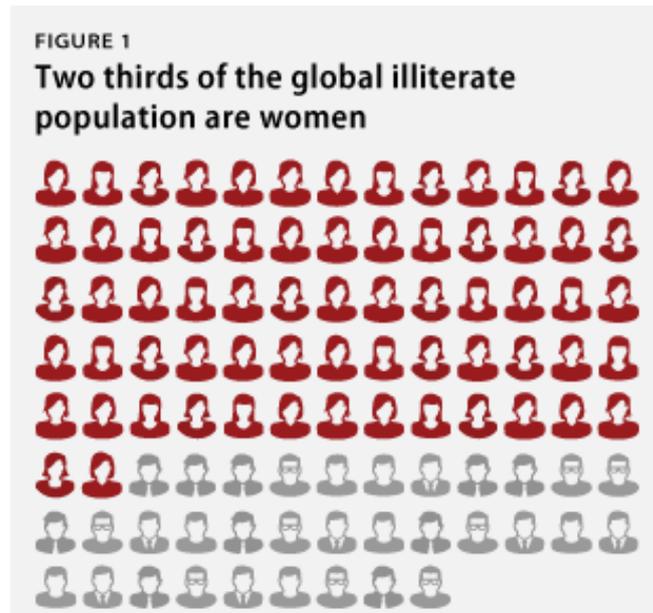


Image 2 <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2013/03/11/56097/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-are-key-to-addressing-global-poverty/>

⁴ <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

After the Second World War the movements of feminism and women's liberation were introduced. Having great success these movements brought forth the current topic of gender equality, where women and men share the exact same rights in all sectors of society.

In the past the issue was more crucial than it is today. Organisations were setup and initiatives had started. Examples of major organisations involved for many years are the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). In 2000 while Kofi Annan was the Secretary-General of the UN a program called the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) was launched aiming to promote the education of girls and narrowing the gender gap in the levels of primary and secondary education.

In 1995 during the fiftieth anniversary of the UN, governments from around the world met in Beijing for the Fourth World Conference on Women. Having acknowledged that although in the last ten years the status of women has improved in many aspects, inequalities still exist, thus creating obstacles for social advance and development. All the nations expressed their commitment to finding a solution for the issue and presented certain propositions. For example, promoting female empowerment for employment and ensuring that no laws concerning the topic are broken.

Another initiative approved by the UN is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It was the subject of resolution 34/180 that was passed by the General Assembly on December 18 1979. Article 10 of the specific convention refers to the topic of female discrimination in the educational sector. Commitments that are mentioned in this sector include equality of curriculum, guidance, examination and standards during both female and male education.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation of Development (OECD) consists of another organization that also focuses on gender equality in education, entrepreneurship and society. Its main priorities on the topic are funding gender equality, promoting female empowerment and developing effective strategies.

Since UNESCO is one of the greatest organizations involved it has proved for more than 40 years its commitment and will to aid. Starting on 14th December 1960 the Convention against Discrimination in Education was adopted in Paris. This treaty holds the aim of combating and eradicating any disparities in the educational systems in nations around the world.

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT INCIDENTS

The table below lists the most significant events that have happened during history.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Event</i>
1819	United States of America	The Plan for Improving Female Education is approved and an educational institute for females opens in New York.
1872	Japan	Primary education for both males and females is required by law.
1908	Iran	Specific initiatives to improve female literacy level are proposed by the government.
1933	Portugal	The new constitution does not grant women equal rights as men.
2001		The UN General Assembly approved the resolution numbered 56/116 addressed solely to the topic of education.
2003		The UN Literacy Decade officially began.
2004	China	The Gender Equity Education Act is created with the aim of combating gender disparities in education.
2009	Germany	The Bonn Declaration is proposed by UNESCO in order to encourage a better quality and standard of education.

MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED IN THE ISSUE

Kenya

Kenya still remains a country with inequality between women and men not only in the educational sector but in all aspects of society. There is no representation of women's voice and rights throughout the country. Although after Kenya gained independence from Great Britain in 1963 the government has made great efforts in improving national education, for example creating more schools and increasing the enrollment of children in schools, gender disparities still exist. According to the Ministry of Education in 2007, 68% of all children do not have access to primary education and many of those children are girls.

India

Even though in the past few years India has become one of the world's strongest developing nations the educational system remains stricken by gender disparities. According to official UN statistics a staggering three out of five women in India can neither read nor write. Many families discourage their daughters out of an education and perpetuate a social stereotype that girls only have responsibilities at home, especially in rural areas.

Pakistan

The main reasons for gender inequality in Pakistan are extreme poverty, cultural norms and shortage of equipment. Up until March 2004 primary education was at a cost. That meant that parents who sent their children to schools had to spend a great amount of money. In such situations, where the educational costs are high and boys are the «favored» gender in the family, girls do not have the opportunity to attend school. In a society where females have to ask permission to leave the house and have to always be accompanied outside their home by a male, the situation of educating a young girl is very difficult. Apart from those reasons, political conflict is almost always an obstacle for education. Girls' schools are deliberately bombed and access to any school is very difficult.

Turkey

In Turkey boys' attendance in primary education is higher than that of girls', so the levels of illiteracy among women are much higher to the levels among men. Among the Turkish society women hold a lower status thus having less rights and freedom. Just like in the countries mentioned previously the situation is addressed mainly to rural areas where girls are more likely to drop out of school. Efforts have been made to overcome gender disparities in more disadvantaged areas and have actually been successful since an increase of enrollment in primary school has been noted.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There are some possible solutions that you could bear in mind while creating your resolution. Firstly in nations where education is not free for all then what needs to be done is to lower the fees and provide all the necessities, like meals and uniforms, but also making access to schools much easier and safer. Also, many organisations propose the creation of a scholarship fund so children, especially girls, from lower income backgrounds can have equal opportunities in education. Finally, the recruitment of female educators can prove helpful for the enrollment of girls in schools since no real role models exist that can help, inspire and guide female students.



Image 2 <http://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/how-much-have-global-problems-cost-world/research>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

http://www.uis.unesco.org/StatisticalCapacityBuilding/Workshop%20Documents/Education%20workshop%20dox/2011%20Kingston/7_GED_2010_gender_disparity.pdf

<http://ahero.uwc.ac.za/index.php?module=cshe&action=downloadfile&fileid=54008271312247165425512>

http://www.unicef.org/esaro/5481_girls_education.html

[http://www.eif.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/genderequality.nsf/0/12D2A22FAC60DA74C22579A6002D950A/\\$file/pakistan.pdf](http://www.eif.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/genderequality.nsf/0/12D2A22FAC60DA74C22579A6002D950A/$file/pakistan.pdf)

http://www.unicef.org/education/bege_70640.html

<http://unchronicle.un.org/article/education-pathway-towards-gender-equality/>

<http://www.socialwatch.org/node/13425>

<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=52237&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

<http://www.bloomu.edu/wrc/timeline>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_Equity_Education_Act_%28Taiwan%29

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001887/188799e.pdf>

http://archive.aacu.org/ocww/volume38_2/global.cfm

<http://www.un.org/works/goingon/india/girlseducation.html>

<http://unesco.org.pk/education/documents/publications/Why%20Gender%20Equality%20in%20Basic%20Education%20in%20Pakistan.pdfv>

http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Eliminating_Gender_Disparity_in_Primary_Education_Turkey%281%29.pdf