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Major in Politics, Philosophy and Economics  
Chair of Political Economy of Development

## **Reducing the Gender Gap in Education as a Means for Development**

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*A Mamma e Papà, che da sempre mi spronano a dare il mio massimo, che mi accompagnano e mi supportano con amore. Vi sono grata per avermi resa la persona che oggi sono fiera di essere, per avermi regalato ogni opportunità che ho avuto e per aver reso possibile la vita felice che ho.*

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# Index

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>I. The Gender Gap in Education.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 School enrolment by regions .....	5
1.2 Elements of quality education .....	9
1.3 Challenges to girls' education in developing countries .....	11
1.3.1 Household- or community-level barriers .....	12
1.3.2 School-level barriers .....	13
1.3.3 Policy- or system-level barriers .....	15
<b>II. Girls' Impact on Development.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 Benefits of educating girls .....	18
2.1.1 Household benefits.....	20
2.1.2 Fertility and mortality benefits .....	22
2.1.3 Economic benefits.....	26
<b>III. Case Study: Rwanda .....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1 Education Policy Framework .....	32
3.1.1 Nine-year Basic Education program.....	33
3.1.2 Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies .....	34
3.1.3 Educational Sector Strategic Plans .....	36
<b>Concluding Remarks .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>44</b>

## Introduction

Although the terms *sex* and *gender* are often used interchangeably, their meanings alter slightly in a way that is important to keep in mind when discussing gender issues. Sex is a biological and anatomical concept, linked to the differences in male and female DNA, specifically chromosomes. Gender, on the other hand, is a social concept associated with sex. Gender refers to the social and cultural differences between males and females assigned by society, which emerge throughout each person's life cycle. What derives from these differences is the perception of gender roles, which are a means for defining society's expectations of people and including them in everyday life.

Gender equality refers to the enjoyment by both men and women, girls and boys, of equal rights, freedoms, socially valued goods, resources, rewards, protection, and opportunities across all sectors of society. Unfortunately, despite the global focus on gender equality in recent years, despite numerous conferences and efforts to reach gender equality, women and girls do not receive the same rights and opportunities as boys and men. The most frequent and important differences lie in girls' difficulties to reach basic health and education services, the disproportionate burden of work they must face in the household, and the social norms that limit their role (such as child marriage or son preference).

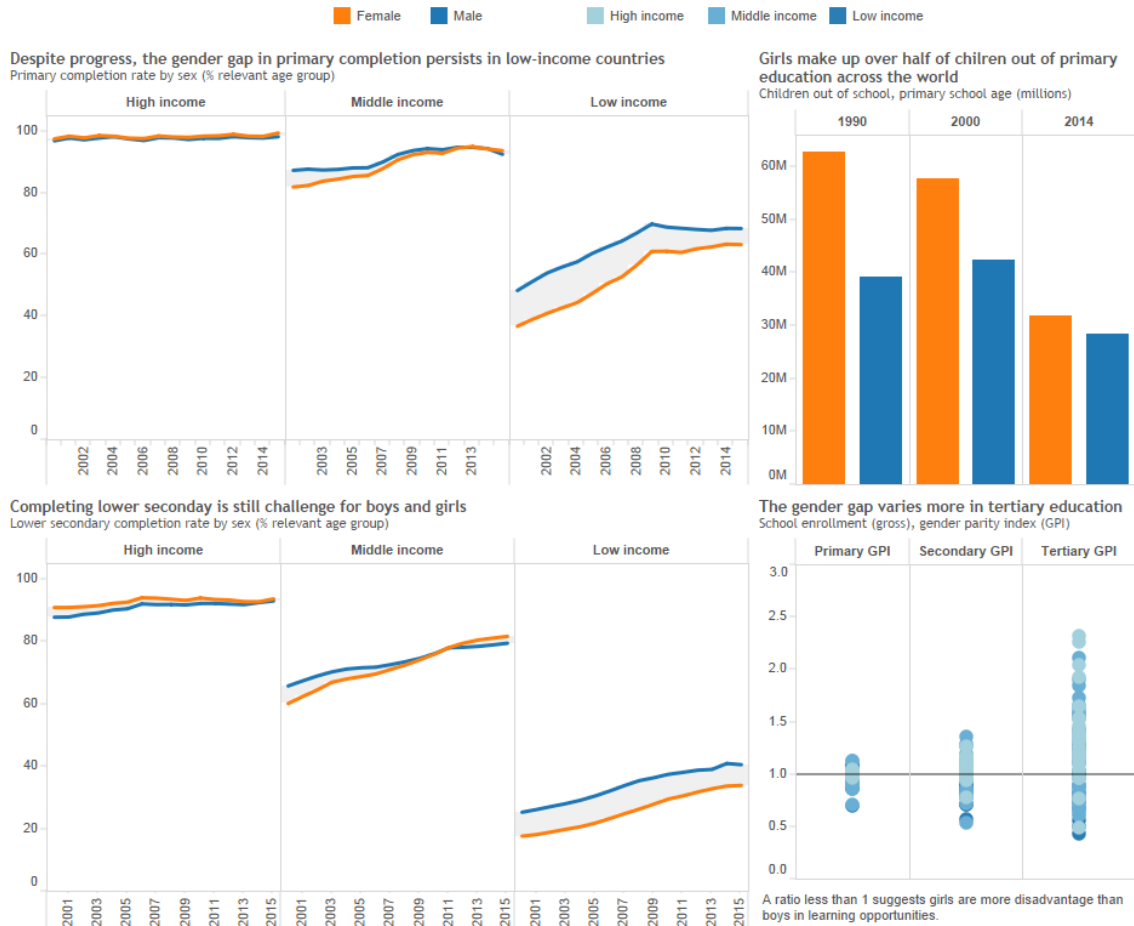
Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, has stated that: "Education is a crucial means to reduce inequalities, especially related to gender, as it gives boys and girls the possibility of working next to one another, learning the same things and therefore promoting equality between them. Education is the key element to end inequalities and to promote the sustainable development of countries. There is no more powerful transformative force than education — to promote human rights and dignity, to eradicate poverty and deepen sustainability, to build a better future for all, founded on equal rights and social justice, respect for cultural diversity, and international solidarity and shared responsibility, all of which are fundamental aspects of our common humanity."

The following pages seek to understand the causes of the gender gap and its effects on girls' and boys' opportunities. In particular, this thesis explores the differences in school enrolment by regions, the challenges girls face to receive education in developing countries, and the effects that educated girls can bring to the development of their countries.

# I. The Gender Gap in Education

## 1.1 School enrolment by regions

Figure 1.1: Gender Gap in Primary and Secondary Education

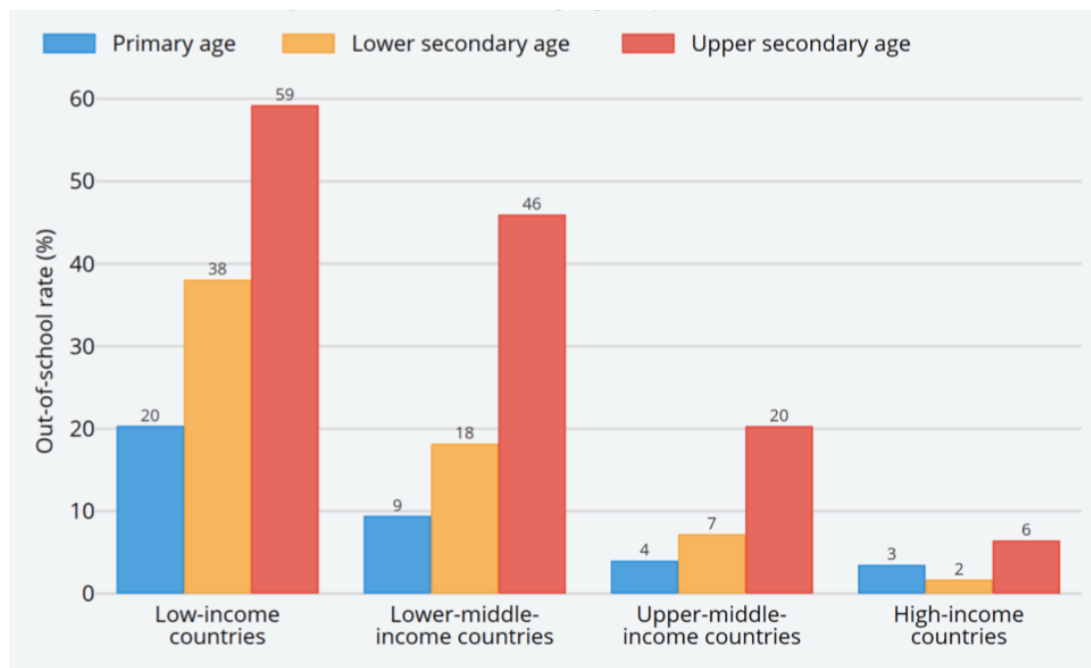


Source: the Gender Data Portal 2016

The data depicted by the above graphs show that, in high income countries, the percentage of both boys and girls who complete primary education is over 99%; 97% of females and 93% of males complete secondary schooling as well. In middle income countries, females who complete primary and secondary education are 93.7 and 81.7% respectively, in both cases surpassing males, instead reaching 92.5 and 79.5% in 2014. It is interesting to note how, both in middle and high-income countries, females seem more educated than men, with a small gap between genders. On the other hand, in low-income countries, the percentage of boys who complete primary and secondary schooling is much

higher than that of girls. In fact, girls who complete primary schooling constitute 63.2%, whereas boys reach 68.5%; in regard to secondary schooling, males and females reach 40.6 and 33.9% respectively. (World Bank Gender Data Portal)

**Figure 1.2: Out-of-school rate by Income Level and Age Group**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016

Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics show that, in 2016, the number of overall primary out of school rate is 20% in low-income countries and 3% in high-income countries. The secondary out-of-school rate is 38% and 2% for lower-secondary schooling, while it reaches 59 and 6% for upper-secondary schooling. (UNESCO Institute for Statistics database 2016)

Focusing on the number of children out of primary school, represented by the chart above, it is possible to notice how the gender gap has been greatly reduced between 1990 and 2014. In fact, the number of girls out of primary school has almost been halved, as they were 62.8 million in 1990, and 31.7 million in 2014. On the other hand, the number of boys out of school has varied much less, beginning with 39.1 million of them out of primary school in 1990, rising to 42.4 million in 2000, and reaching 28.4 million in 2014. Although the difference between boys and girls has shifted from a difference of 23.7 million children to only 3.3 million, girls constitute almost 53% of children who do not receive primary school education. (World Bank Gender Data Portal 2016)

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/8 published by UNESCO, 66% of countries have achieved gender parity in primary school enrolment, 45% in upper secondary schooling, and only 25% in tertiary education (Global Education Monitoring Report 2017/8). In 2006, the World Economic Forum began publishing a report intent on analyzing gender disparities across 144 countries; the Global Gender Gap Report concentrates on four main research areas defined as sub-indexes, one of which is precisely educational attainment. Data pertaining to this sphere show how it is often common for neighboring countries to perform quite similarly, however sometimes there are wide disparities within the same region. The Global Gender Gap Index considers seven different regions: East Asia and the Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and Northern Africa, North America, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Western Europe.

In the first region analyzed, New Zealand and the Philippines are among the top ten performers globally in closing the gender gap overall. In particular, the Philippines is one of the only countries globally to have closed the gender gap in the educational attainment sub-index in 2017. Other countries in this region have been making progress towards closing the gender gap in education, as Vietnam and Thailand closed the gap in tertiary education enrolment, with Japan close behind. Myanmar has closed the gender gap in secondary and tertiary enrolment, while Timor-Leste is close to achieving gender parity in those fields. (Global Gender Gap Report 2017).

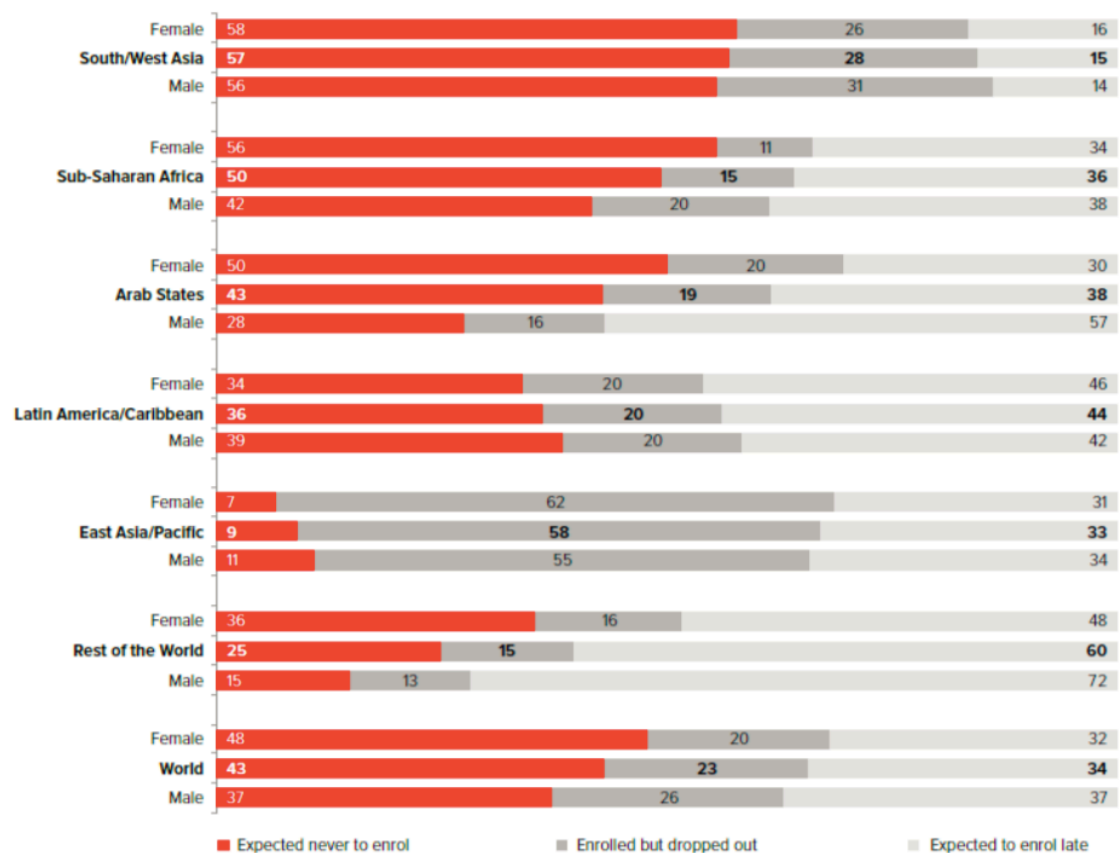
Eastern Europe and Central Asia have seen steady progress throughout 2017, as the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Latvia have fully closed the gender gap in educational attainment. In Western Europe, Germany ranks last, as the country is working towards re-closing the gender gap in tertiary enrolment. Malta, on the other hand, has fully achieved gender parity in education. In the South Asia region, the Maldives are the only country to have fully closed the gender gap in education, and India is approaching that goal by achieving gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment and almost closing the gap in tertiary enrolment. In the Middle East and Northern Africa region (MENA), there has been a steady improvement on the part of most countries, with the United Arab Emirates almost fully closing the gap, Saudi Arabia closing it in primary education, and Egypt close to closing it in tertiary enrolment. (Global Gender Gap Report 2017)

The best performance in achieving gender parity in educational attainment is shown by the North America region, which only includes two countries: Canada and the United States. In both countries, the gender gap in education has been closed for years. The second region by performance is Latin America and the Caribbean. This region is composed of 24 countries, five of which have completely closed the gap, and fifteen have a gap smaller than 1%. (Global Gender Gap Report 2017)

On the contrary, the worst performance by far is that of Sub-Saharan Africa, which has been making steady progress towards closing the gender gap in all areas of the Global Gender Gap Index, except education. More than half of the world's out-of-school children live in Sub-Saharan Africa, a macro-region where youth are the majority of the population. The United Nations estimates that, by 2030, 444 million children with ages between 3 and 15 years of age will need schooling. (Sustainable Development Goals, 2015) Out of close to forty countries, only Botswana and Lesotho have fully closed the gender gap in education. 15 other countries have closed it in primary education, 14 in secondary, and only 7 in tertiary enrolment. Several countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Chad and Burundi have widened the gap during the past year. Ethiopia widened the gap in primary education, while making progress towards closing it in secondary enrolment. Other countries, such as Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Madagascar have been making steady improvements in recent years. (Global Gender Gap Report 2017)



**Figure 1.3: Rate of Females and Males expected never to enroll, drop out, or expected to enroll late divided by Regions**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

## 1.2 Elements of quality education

Receiving a primary or secondary education is not the only crucial battle children in some developing countries have to face, as often the education they manage to receive is of very low caliber. Quality education is a key element for learning and development, and it is influenced by many components, both in and outside the school. The international community has long been addressing this issue, and many countries and multilateral organizations have been working towards achieving quality education, with a focus on gender equality in educational attainment. The United Nations have been working with a series of goals, part of which aim to achieve quality in education: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 goals set forth in 2015, which aim to end poverty and promote prosperity for all. The United Nations plans to complete these

goals by 2030, with the collaboration of all member states, governments, and NGOs. In particular, the fourth SDG recites the aim to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, and notably “ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”. The main purpose of this goal focuses on ensuring that all boys and girls, women and men, have the same opportunities and access to pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary education. The SDGs note that ensuring access to education does not represent a resolution, and show that the quality of that education goes beyond acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills. As former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon expressed, “education must fully assume its central role in helping people to form more just, peaceful, and tolerant societies”.

Based on the fourth SDG, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and Education International (EI) define quality education as follows: “a quality education is one that focuses on the whole child—the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location. It prepares the child for life, not just for testing. A quality education provides resources and directs policy to ensure that each child enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle; learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults; is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community; has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults; and is challenged academically and prepared for success in college or further study and for employment and participation in a global environment. A quality education provides the outcomes needed for individuals, communities, and societies to prosper. It allows schools to align and integrate fully with their communities and access a range of services across sectors designed to support the educational development of their students. A quality education is supported by three key pillars: ensuring access to quality teachers; providing use of quality learning tools and professional development; and the establishment of safe and supportive quality learning environments.”

Teachers are one of the most important elements in order for children to receive quality education, as they are the primary means through which students acquire knowledge. Teachers should be well-trained, professionally qualified, skilled in

communication, motivated, supported, and possess suitable teaching materials; they should be able to adapt to different situations in the classroom and move to accommodate students' needs in different circumstances. Students perform better when guided by motivated and qualified teachers; they tend to stay in school for longer periods of time if their teachers support them and are able to create personal, supportive, and encouraging relationships with them. Teachers should promote acceptance and inclusion by promoting equality in all areas, teaching about gender, human rights, and cooperation. In developing countries especially, teachers should address health, nutrition, and AIDS prevention. A quality education means children learn about basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, but also life skills related to their communities, national and domestic situation, possibilities after schooling, and more. In many developing countries, teachers are scarce, untrained, or incapable of teaching. They often do not embody some key characteristics of their figure, such as academic knowledge, proper communication skills, ability to cooperate or follow students individually, or capability to adapt to different learning situations.

In addition, quality teachers need quality tools to accompany their educational process. Teachers need to constantly assess and upgrade their professional development, curricula, teaching materials, resources, and training. These materials and resources must be flexible in order to adapt to the different schools, classrooms, situations, or students which each teacher might encounter. Schools should be within reasonable distance of students' homes, meaning they should be built on the basis of school-aged population in designated areas, and must consider the appropriate means to reach school buildings. Schools should represent a safe environment, have proper facilities for boys and girls, and produce a safe, violence-free environment both inside school walls and in the commute to reach it. Students need to be healthy and feel safe, both girls and boys should not feel the need or be obligated to fulfill household chores or contribute to the family income. Students and their families should be incentivized by societies, should have open employment options and opportunities following their educational path.

### **1.3 Challenges to girls' education in developing countries**

Gender inequalities mostly affect girls in challenging their access to basic healthcare or education. Traditional gender norms are still strong in most developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. These gender norms and social constructs result in girls

facing disproportionate burdens of work inside the household and discrimination, which devalue them and deprive them of basic opportunities. These missed opportunities thereon lead to more discrimination against women and girls, creating a vicious cycle of inequality. As is clear by the above graphs and data, inequalities in educational attainment and enrolment have been diminishing steadily across most of the world, yet differences continue to remain between boys' and girls' opportunities. Stronger differences are evident when looking at dropout rates, as girls tend to leave school much more often than boys in developing countries. The reasons behind this vary, as girls can come to face child marriage, child pregnancies, violence in and out of school, greater household responsibilities, and more. In particular, children face three types of barriers to attaining and completing primary and secondary education: household-/community-level barriers, school-level barriers, and policy-/system-level barriers. These barriers create challenges for all children, but it is not uncommon for each barrier to have added gender discriminating elements.

### **1.3.1 Household- or community-level barriers**

Household- or community-level barriers are those which concern the direct or indirect costs of education: the former encompasses school fees, clothing needed to attend school (sometimes specific uniforms), shoes, books and general schooling supplies; the latter instead concerns the so-called “opportunity cost” of sending children to school, where families consider the income or aid in the household that a child could bring, and the loss thereof if that child were to go to school. Given the contribution that girls make within each household according to traditional gender roles, it is quite common for them to stay home instead of attending school, as their participation in chores and their work in care or support of their family is deemed more important than their education. If families are forced to choose, on the basis of their income, to send only one child to school between a boy and a girl, it is more likely that the boy will receive an education, while the girl will remain at home and contribute to the household through the traditional division of labor.

One of the biggest examples of how communities shape social constructs and set girls up for a lifetime of deprivation and discrimination is child marriage. Child marriage is defined as “any formal marriage or informal union where one or both of the parties are

under 18 years of age. Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. That is 23 girls every minute.” (Girls Not Brides) Currently, 700 million women alive were married as children; UNICEF has estimated that, if trends remain steady over time, the number of child brides will reach one billion women by 2030. (UNICEF 2017) Compared to girls who complete secondary schooling, girls with no education are three times more likely to be married by the time they are 18 years old. Part of the issue with child marriage is that parents often deem marriage as the best option for their daughters, whereas education is seen as irrelevant. The reason behind this view of education is that girls do not have a wide array of opportunities after having completed primary and secondary schooling, and marrying a grown man means they no longer weigh on their family of origin, but rather are responsible for a household of their own and are provided for by their husband. There is no clear causation link between child marriage and lack of education or dropout rates, although there is clear evidence showing that these conditions are heavily correlated. In fact, child marriage is often the means to end a girl’s formal education, as they tend to drop out of school in preparation for the marriage or shortly thereafter. Once they become pregnant, girls can be automatically excluded from school, even after giving birth. In this instance, a girl’s role as wife and mother surmounts her role as student, meaning she needs to take care of the home, her children, and extended family as well.

### **1.3.2 School-level barriers**

School-level barriers refer to the fact that school buildings are generally far away from many homes, which means students must face long journeys to reach them, since the only way of reaching schools is by walking. Covering distances which can easily be three hours long to and from school can be hazardous for children who suffer from illness or malnutrition, not uncommon for girls who receive less food than boys on average. The itinerary to and from school may be dangerous, as girls may be vulnerable to violence throughout their long walks, therefore special transport or chaperoning may be needed for girls in order for them to be safe and secure through the long distances covered. This not only represents an added price for the family, but also takes time away from the household chores girls are expected to carry out before or after school hours. In some countries, boarding facilities contribute to worsen stigmas on gender inequalities, as they are available only for boys; boys are therefore incentivized to participate in school and receive education, whereas girls are discouraged from doing so.

Poor environment in schools is a further barrier for many children, girls in particular. In many cases, school infrastructure does not respect hygienic norms, doesn't have the adequate water or sanitation facilities, or may be overcrowded. It is frequent for girls to be pushed out of school in case of overcrowding or poor facilities. A common disadvantage for girls, once they reach adolescence, is represented by the lack of separate sanitation facilities. Once girls start menstruating, they may have difficulties in attending school if sanitation facilities are lacking or in bad conditions. Furthermore, while boys may experience beating or bullying, girls may be asked to carry out tasks such as cleaning or may run the risk of being sexually harassed or assaulted. Both boys and girls suffer physical and psychological violence, which may lead to them dropping out of school; since sexual harassment is more common than bullying, girls are more likely to drop out.

If girls do manage to obtain an education, and are successfully enrolled in primary or secondary school, room for inequalities is represented by the enforcement of gender stereotypes and the reinforcement of traditional gender norms. This occurs through the poor quality of learning materials, outdatedness of school curricula (or lack thereof), and biased or inappropriate content. Girls and boys are not properly trained to acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and life-skills; the lack of assessment tools entails that learning outcomes are not measured or defined in these terms. Gender-biased education means girls are not even represented in the content provided for by the teaching curriculum and are not taught the skills they need to be successful in their communities. Teachers are often poorly trained, if not untrained, and therefore are not properly equipped to educate classes with an elevated number of students. What can happen is that girls may be overlooked by teachers, may not be included in class discussions, and may be marginalized within the educational system. This may be a further encouragement for girls to drop out of school. The strong prevalence of male teachers, consequently the lack of women in positions of power and lack of female role models, discourages girls to continue with their education as they are pushed towards non-professional courses; the household role is seen as a safer and better opportunity than those which they will achieve once they have completed their studies. In the rare case of women teachers, it is possible for them to be discriminated against and have to perform domestic duties as well as teach.

If a family member succumbs to illness, girls will remain home and miss school in order to care for their siblings or parents, while boys continue to attend classes. The

incentives for girls to resume going to school after a prolonged period of absence are close to none. Poor school management, non-flexible calendars, and the lack of regulations shaping correct grade placement take no account of school absences, creating further barriers to the completion of girls' education. If the children of a household remain orphans, or if its head is too old or ill to take care of the household, it is the eldest girl's responsibility to become the main caretaker of the family. Once she becomes head of a household, it is almost impossible for a girl to continue her education.

In countries or areas affected by conflicts or instabilities, challenges in the educational sphere are many. School infrastructure may be damaged, destroyed or closed; when governments turn their attention and their financial resources to military action, they are not able to provide funds to repair faults in education. Some households, villages or communities may be displaced or moved because of conflict in their area; in this process, teachers or children may be dispersed, or schools in that area will be closed. Schools may become unsafe environments as they may be used as headquarters for certain rebel groups, they may be used as weapon or mine storage, recruitment, or may be areas in which active conflict is carried out. In case of conflict, boys are more likely to be recruited into military service, girls are denied access to any opportunities and are needed to stay home and care for the household. If they lose the head of the household during conflicts, girls tend to remain home and continue to be the primary caretaker of their home, whereas it is possible for boys to return to school after their military service is over. Furthermore, teachers may be injured, killed, unable to reach the school buildings, or unable to teach; both teachers and children may undergo traumas caused by conflict.

### **1.3.3 Policy- or system-level barriers**

Policy- or system-level barriers to children's education consist of the legal frameworks surrounding education and school systems, particularly the inadequacy they represent in areas like child labor, compulsory education, costs of education, and re-entering into school. Indeed, in many countries education is neither free nor compulsory, meaning no provisions are taken by governments or institutions if children do not want or cannot afford to go to school. Unsurprisingly, it is girls that are the most disadvantaged if one or both of these cases apply to a family due to how they reflect on family-level barriers: if a choice is to be made between sending a boy or girl to school based on income, it is the girl that will stay home and perform household chores. Similarly, if education is not

compulsory, and is seen as irrelevant by a girl's family, she will likely stay at home and fulfill the "opportunity cost" provided by caring for her siblings and contributing to the family income and caretaking.

An important bureaucratic issue that poses barriers to children's education is the lack of a birth certificate: 1.3 million births go unregistered each year, meaning these children are almost invisible to the government's eye, as well as to statistics and databases. (United Nations Statistics Division 2016) Children whose birth has not been registered do not have the right to have a name, to have a recognized citizenship, a nationality, therefore they do not have access to any service provided for by the state. If they fail to present a birth certificate when they attempt to sign up for primary education, it is possible that schools will not accept their registration and will not allow them to enroll. Only 62% of countries register over 90% of births; the remaining 38% of territories is mostly located in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. In Sub-Saharan Africa, six countries record less than 10% of births, including Somalia which only registers 3%; South Asia registers 37%, with the number dropping to 10% in Bangladesh. (*The Independent* 2013) The lack of a birth certificate is not considered a problem by some primary schools, and children are able to enroll and continue their lessons, but without any formal registration, they are not able to receive any other type of certificate, diploma, or any certificates of participation or completion in school cycles. Even if children manage to attend primary school, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to continue on to secondary school without a certificate of having completed primary schooling. Girls are somehow less likely to be registered than boys, meaning their challenges to being eligible to receive education or to attend examinations are higher. There is no clear causation relationship between the lack of a birth certificate and non-enrollment or non-continuation in school, although there is a strong correlation between the two.

Since education is a public service, its budget is dictated by the state. Unfortunately, insufficient funds determine an insufficient number of school buildings or facilities, insufficient number of classrooms, and an insufficient number of teachers, who are often underpaid, under-motivated, and undertrained as well. The consequences of low budgets and limited resources cause an increased competition to enroll in schools, as not all students are accepted once the limit for each class is reached. Often, it is girls that suffer



most from the increased competition for access, enforcing the vicious cycle of gender imbalances in education. The reason behind the limited budget designated to education is due to its role being sometimes diminished by governments, and therefore it is not looked upon as a possible tool to reduce poverty or improve national development. The role of women in development is not even addressed or contemplated: in fact most teachers in developing countries are male. Gender disparities in education continue with poor quality processes of teacher training, both pre- and in-service training; the lack of female teachers advertises gender insensitivity, even more so when it is girls who are rejected from schools. There is a lack of gender sensitivity or gender discrimination in teaching and learning processes, which then produce gender inequalities in outcomes. The message conveyed is that there is no space for female teachers or female students.

## **II. Girls' Impact on Development**

“Girls’ education lies at the heart of the striving for sustainability of human development processes.” The World Bank, United Nations Population Fund, and the UN funds for children and women, namely UNICEF and UNIFEM, see many advantageous assets associated with girls’ education. These organizations state that girls’ education produces some of the highest returns in development investments, bringing both private and social benefits to the individual girl, her family, and their societies and communities.

Part of the fourth Sustainable Development Goal aims that “all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development”. What do we mean by development? According to Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, development is defined as “the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capabilities by raising people’s levels of living, self-esteem, and freedom”. Focusing exclusively on the economic connotation of development, it can be traditionally defined as a country’s achievement of sustainable rates of income per capita growth which allow for said country to expand its output rate faster than its population expansion rate; total domestic and foreign output is then indicated by the gross national income (GNI), which is used to measure the well-being of the population. (Todaro and Smith 2012) Development is to be seen as a normative concept, it is to be considered almost a synonym of improvement. (Seers 1969) Over the years, sustainable development has come to be defined not only in terms of economic growth or improvement, but has come to encompass equity, social development, income distribution, and the elimination of discriminatory gaps related to income, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and more. The most widely used and accepted definition of sustainable development is from the Brundtland Report; it says “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations from meeting their own needs”.

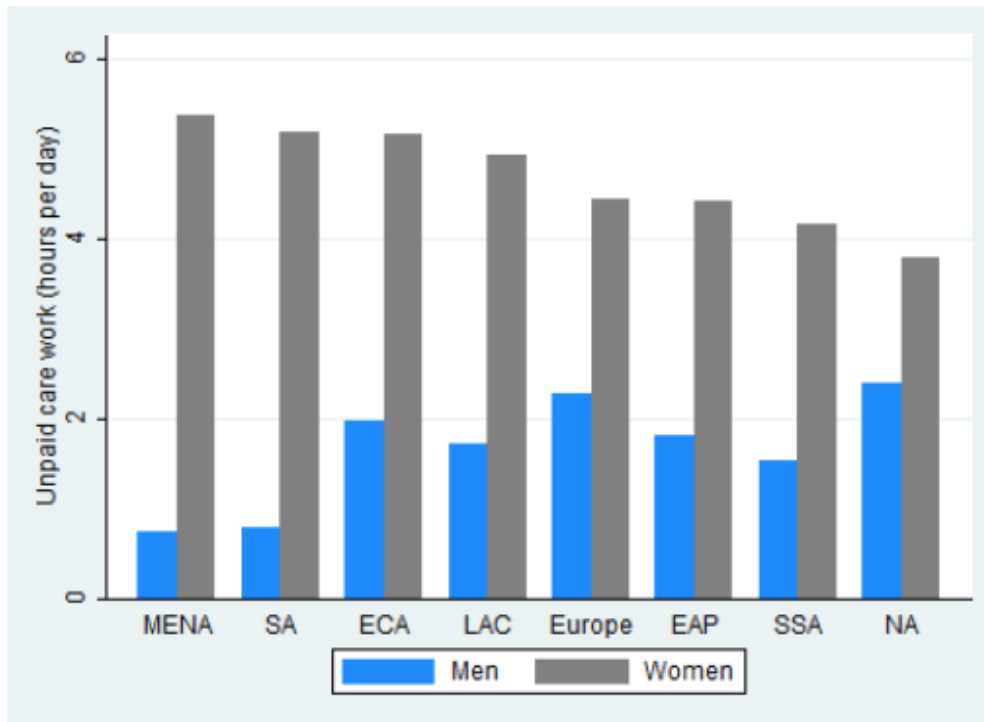
### **2.1 Benefits of educating girls**

Different studies propose evidence showing the benefits that improving and increasing girls’ education can bring to sustainable development; for this reason, the fifth SDG is to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The United

Nations believe women and girl empowerment is crucial in order to improve a country's economic growth; the full participation of women in the labor force would substantially better national growth rates. It has been proven that educating girls can contribute to reducing child mortality, improving family health, delaying the age of girls' first marriage, lowering fertility rates, enhancing women's role in political participation and within their own households, improving women's functioning in the work force, strengthening family survival strategies, and increasing economic growth. The relationship between girls' education and economic growth is a relationship of *causation*: growth is caused by girls' education, not vice-versa.

In developing countries, it is quite rare for a woman to receive a wage for her work, therefore it is difficult to explain to girls that they will receive an income by completing primary and secondary education. Education is not seen as a means through which girls and women can acquire a job and participate in paid work opportunities, and because of this, parents do not invest in girls' education. Parents do not believe that education will give girls the possibility to make an economic contribution to the family income, consequently they prefer investing in boys' education and maintaining girls to tend to household duties.

**Figure 2.1: Women and male unpaid care work**



Source: Our World in Data

### **2.1.1 Household benefits**

In a seminar paper, Lawrence Summers outlines two different situations which describe this vicious cycle of deprivation. He argues that a cycle of deprivation is caused by the fact that parents don't see the benefits, mainly economic, that investing in their daughters' education can bring to the household: consequently, girls are not sent to school, are not presented with opportunities to participate in the wage labor force, and cannot contribute to the family income. This cycle is both a cause and a consequence of the unequal perception of gender roles.

In the first alternative Summers describes, a poor family is made up of six children, whose mother is illiterate, married at 15, and has never attended school. Even though she works several hours in the fields each day without receiving a wage, her husband is the main breadwinner of the household, and therefore the main decision-maker as well. Since he is also responsible for supporting his parents, he sees his sons as the resources that will support him in his old age; he encourages their education, while keeping his daughters at home. When one of the girls becomes ill, he is unable to provide medical help for her, as

he cannot afford to lose two days of work to take her to the medical clinic. The daughter dies.

The second situation illustrates a family with only three children, whose mother attended school for five years and is able to read and practice mathematics enough that she teaches in the local village. She was able to adopt family planning along with her husband, so she is able to spend more resources into the family: she often visits her mother, brings her medicine, and insists that all her children go to school. When her daughter becomes ill, she is capable of taking her to the medical clinic and giving her the medicine the doctor prescribes, as well as giving some to the other two children to prevent them from becoming ill too. The daughter is cured. (Summers 1994)

These scenarios depict two different situations in which a woman's education, short as it may be, completely changes the fate of a family and saves a child's life. Women who receive a formal education are much more likely to rely on stable and positive family planning methods, and are more likely to seek medical care both for themselves and their children. Educated women have a greater knowledge of basic healthcare practices, which makes it possible for their children to have higher survival rates. The scenarios depicted by Summers are a powerful example of how education can make a strong impact in the way a household is run, in the way children's horizons are expanded, and in the quality of life both women and girls can live. When girls are educated, they marry later, tend to have fewer children and thus invest more on each child. It is often the mother who encourages children's education, and she is much more likely to do so if she herself has attended school. In this case, she is much more likely to encourage girls to go to school as well, without making a distinction between her sons and her daughters in regard to education.

Basic primary education expands a family's horizons and opportunity because it offers intellectual resources that are renewed throughout a person's and his or her family's lifetime, causing benefits in the household, in the community, thus in the country as a whole. (Kane 2004) Examples can be seen in increased farm productivity, as educated women make better farmers. They are able to better manage a farm, the work to be done in it, and the division of tasks needed. This leads to a household being managed more effectively, and its increased productivity and effective functioning causes flexible economic strategies within the household. Another example relates to cultures in which men have to pay a dowry when taking a woman's or girl's hand in marriage. In countries

where it is a tradition to pay a price for a bride, the value of a bride increases with her level of education, meaning the bride's family will receive higher monetary benefits from sending her to school.

### **2.1.2 Fertility and mortality benefits**

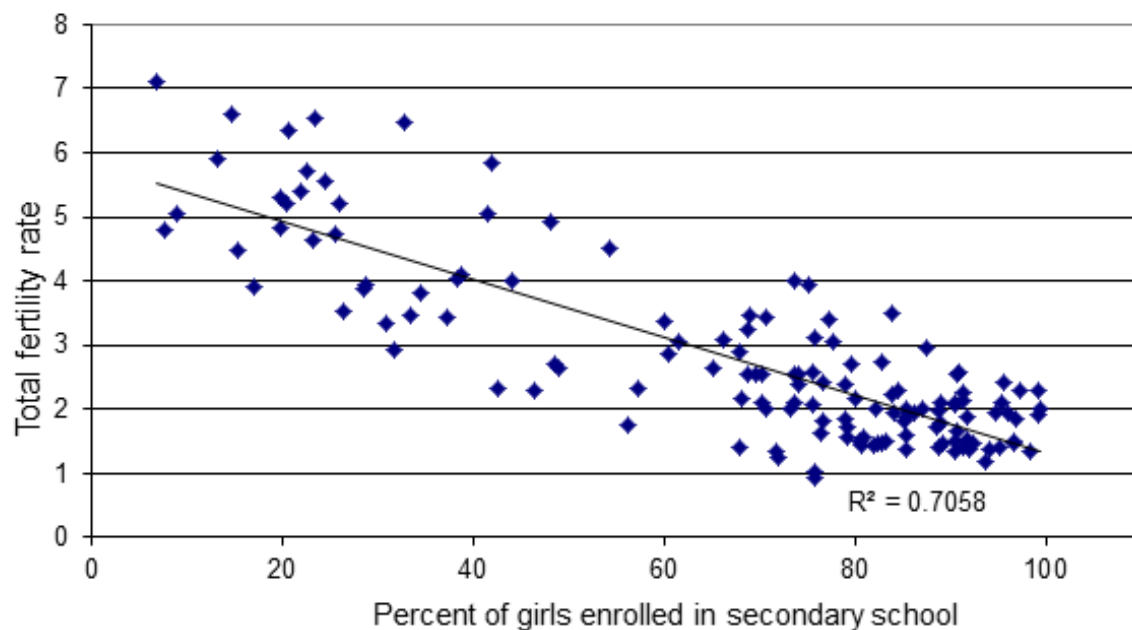
Educating girls reduces their sons' and daughters' mortality because, once educated girls become mothers, they are able to use the income they receive in more beneficial ways towards their families: they use more money to take care of their children and husbands because they are able to seek medical care for their children and are able to prevent minor diseases from growing into fatal ones. Having a basic understanding of primary medical care improves sanitation practices in the household. Children therefore can grow in a healthier environment, are treated immediately if they encounter diseases, and are much more likely to grow up in healthy conditions. Educated mothers also play a significant role in preventing malnutrition, which brings benefits to a single child and a single household. If girls' education becomes more widespread, therefore their children live healthier lives and are properly fed, positive effects can be seen in their communities and their countries as a whole.

A report by UNICEF claims that a 10% increase in girls' primary enrollment can lead to a reduction of child mortality rates by 4.1 deaths every 1000 live births, whereas a 10% increase in secondary enrollment reduces infant mortality by 5.6 deaths every 1000 births. (UNICEF 2003) In Africa, children whose mother has never been to school have a one in five chance of dying before reaching the age of five, whereas if a mother has received education, the risk of her children dying before that age is over 40% less; if a mother has attended seven or more years of school, the percentage rises to 50% less. (Summers 1994)

Educating girls also has a positive effect on fertility, because women who have gone to school tend to have fewer children. A wife's level of education has a much higher impact on fertility than does her husband's. (UNICEF 2003) In regions where the gender gap in education is lower, thus female education levels are higher, fertility levels are lower. A study conducted in 17 Sub-Saharan countries has shown that the reduction of the gender gap in schooling has led to a 17% decline in fertility, and mothers have become more preoccupied with making more resources available to the fewer children they have. (Kane

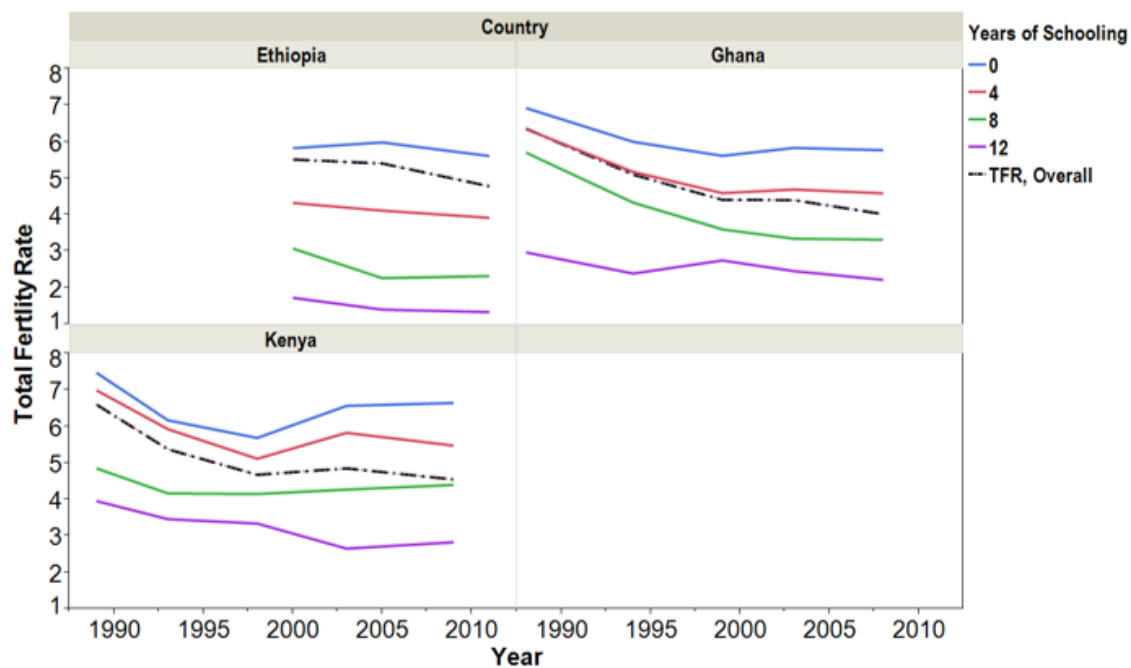
2004) Studies within individual countries have produced data showing that an extra year of female schooling reduces their fertility by between 5 and 10%. (Summers 1994) Gender equality in education can have a stronger effect on women's self-worth, consequently on their behavior towards their husbands. If a woman is educated, she is more likely to express her desire to stop having children after a certain number, and thus dedicate more time, resources, and energy to the children she already has. This provides an incentive for women to encourage their daughters to go to school as well.

Figure 2.2: Relationship between fertility rates and secondary school enrolment



Source: Brookings Institution

Figure 2.3: Relationship between fertility rates and years of schooling in Ethiopia, Ghana, and Kenya

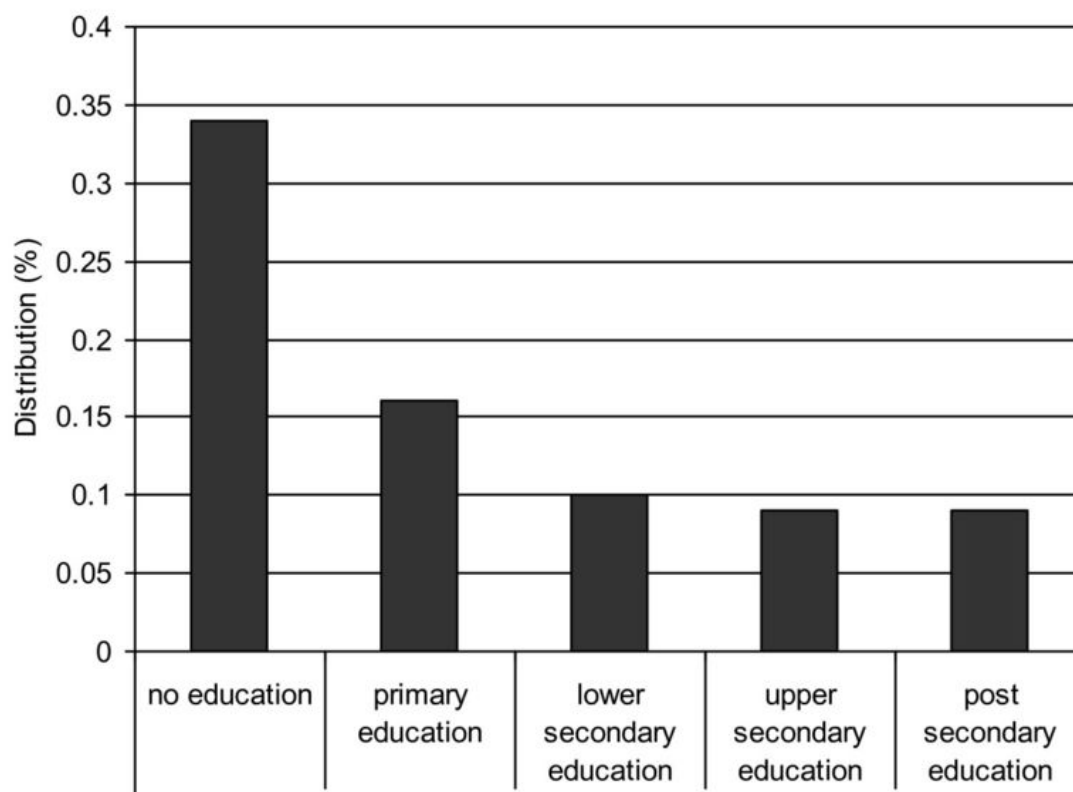


Source: Brookings Institution



The benefits of educating women and girls can not only be seen on children, but on women themselves. In addition to reducing child mortality, girls' education reduces maternal mortality as well. When women are more educated on basic healthcare and medical practices, they not only apply their knowledge towards their children's and husband's health, but to their own. This means they conduct healthier pregnancies, are more aware of their bodies' needs, and are better able to care for themselves during childbearing. By reducing the number of children they have, women also defend and protect their bodies further. Summers calculated that an additional year of schooling for 1000 women can prevent two maternal deaths.

**Figure 2.4: Distribution of maternal deaths by years of education**



Source: BMC Public Health

Another important benefit of educating women and girls is the impact their education has on reducing the spread of HIV and AIDS. In fact, when women are educated, they are much more likely to enter stable and healthy marriages, where they look after their bodies in reproductive terms and concerning intercourse. Women are less likely to become prostitutes and more likely to use precautions.

### **2.1.3 Economic benefits**

Enrollment in school is the largest possible investment in human capital. (Schultz 2002) According to Summers, “investment in girls’ education may well be the highest return investment available in the developing world”. Research shows that enrollment in schools is an investment in human capital because of the social returns that it brings once students then enter the labor force. Evidence shows that these social returns are higher for females than they are for men. (Shultz 2002) The World Bank has stated that “an exogenous increase in girls’ access to education creates a better environment for economic growth; the result is particularly strong for middle income countries.” Studies have been made across countries, studying the impact of female education on a country’s GDP, and they have shown that girls’ education has a consistently positive effect on it. Evidence shows that an increase as small as one percentage point in female education raises the national GDP by 0.3%, as well as raising annual GDP growth rates by 0.2%. (Global Partnership for Education) Educating women and girls makes them more productive, meaning they earn higher wages, and thus have a higher social return. An example of this can be seen in Pakistan, where women who had achieved high levels of literacy skills earned 95% more than women with little or no literacy skills. This differential changes considerably for men, as men with high levels of literacy skills earned only 33% more than men with lower levels of literacy. (Global Partnership for Education)

When girls receive the same level of education than boys, the outcome is obvious on income growth; research shows a relationship between higher girls’ participation in secondary education and higher income levels in middle and upper-income countries. (Kane 2004) The rise in female levels of education moving at a faster rate than male education is associated with higher growth. In communities where gender gaps in education are smaller, the levels of aggregate well-being are indirectly proportional to the educational gender gap, meaning the smaller the gender gap, the higher the well-being of a population.

Women who have received education, even at lower levels, are more likely to be employed in the wage labor force, thus earn higher incomes. A women’s wage rises by 10 to 20% with the completion of each school year. (Population Council 2001) When women receive an education, they become more productive, and their return produces higher wages than men; the reason behind this is that women use their income in a more

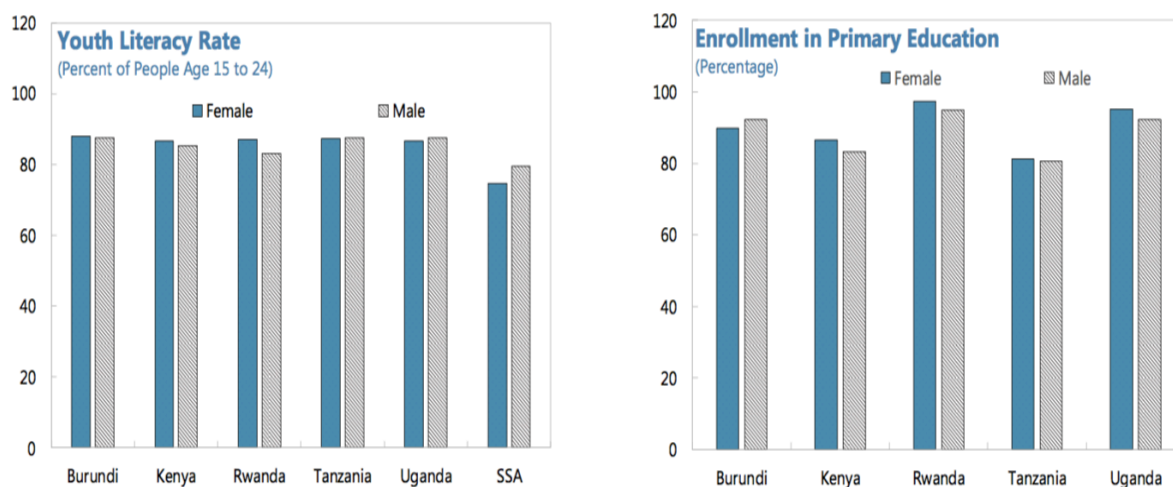
productive and beneficial way. The extra income women are able to earn after having received a formal education can be used to obtain leverage in the family. (Summers 1994) It is clear that educated women have better chances of entering the wage labor force and participating in the formal economy; when a woman receives a paid income in addition to her husband's, their family is better prepared to resist economic shocks, as they have more than one source of income. As the economic system is based on wage labor and wage distribution, families rely on wage labor for sustenance.

### **III. Case Study: Rwanda**

Educating women and girls is a necessary aspect to achieve economic development and reduce poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is a fundamental factor to promote women's rights, and it shows a crucial correlation with development indicators such as child or maternal mortality rates, the reduction of fertility and birth rates, and overall indicators of family health. Rwanda has firmly committed to advance gender parity in both the social and political spheres, commitment which can be distinctly noticed in the country's 2003 Constitution and its Vision 2020 development plan. Some of the most important policy areas to which Rwanda dedicates resources include achieving gender parity in secondary and tertiary education (having already achieved it in primary enrolment), as well as active policies to promote women's education and social advancement. It is this sort of effort that has made Rwanda a global leader in the promotion of gender parity, having acquired a 7.7% rate of growth in the past decade. (IMF 2017)

This country serves as an optimal case study because Rwanda's advancement of gender equality has been a fundamental factor in promoting the country's development. Women in Rwanda have been taking on new roles as major actors in society as well as heads of households, and they have managed to achieve the largest female proportion of representation in Parliament, at around 49%. (Huggins and Randell 2007) Furthermore, the Global Gender Gap Report 2016 ranks Rwanda as the first country among middle- and low-income ones in closing the gender gap. Concerning education in particular, Rwanda outperforms the Sub-Saharan average on equality. In fact, in 2015 the literacy rate for females was of 65% against 76% for men. Interestingly, Rwanda has one of the fastest growing economies overall among Sub-Saharan countries.

**Figure 3.1: Regional education equality**



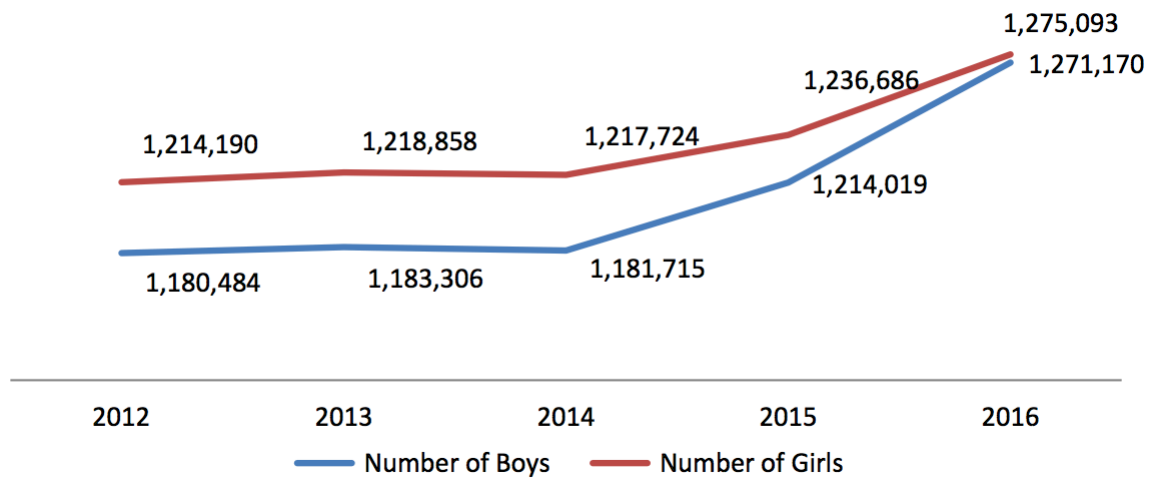
Source: IMF 2017

The Government of Rwanda focused on implementing policies to promote gender equality, specifically to improve educational opportunities for girls. The aim of these policies is the progressive elimination of all gender inequalities in education and training. Research observing the various determinant factors of growth in developing economies makes it possible to identify and dissect differences in average GDP per capita growth rates in Rwanda. Results suggest that growing gender equality has been fundamental in contributing to higher growth rates in comparison with other Sub-Saharan countries, and the gains associated with the reduction of the gender gap are of significant value. In particular, Rwanda's GDP growth rate average is 2.2% above the East African Community and Sub-Saharan Africa average between 2005 and 2014. (IMF 2017) Research results show that the elimination of gender disparities in labor market opportunities is a decisive factor, and is responsible for half the percentage points of this growth differential.

The Ministry of Education is strongly concerned with girls' education, and makes sure to implement gender-based policies into their educational goals, advancing plans to promote gender equality in education. Permanent Secretary at the Ministry, Dr. Celestin Ntivuguruzwa, said: "We have a department in charge of education at the ministry; obviously we try to see that in all the plans, girls are not left out. The target is to see that many of them have an equal opportunity of accessing school just like their male counterparts."

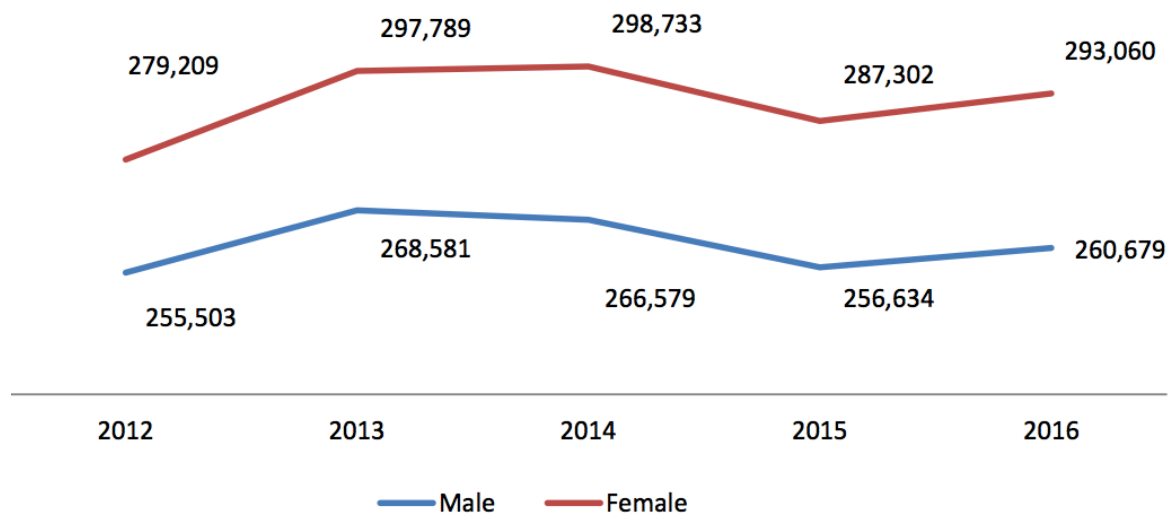
In 2012, Rwanda managed to achieve a 98% primary enrolment rate for girls, surpassing the 97% rate for boys. (New Times 2015) In order to support free access to education for all school-age children, the government enacted the 9 Year Basic Education program, which was followed by the 12 Year Basic Education Program after the former's success. The aim of both these programs is to ensure equitable access to nine-year (primary to lower secondary) or twelve-year (primary to upper secondary) education, providing children with quality education skills necessary to achieve their full development potential, while at the same time reducing repetition and drop-out rates.

Figure 3.2: Primary education enrolment



Source: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda 2017

Figure 3.3: Secondary education enrolment



Source: National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda 2017

### **3.1 Education Policy Framework**

Rwanda's 2003 Constitution includes an article which clearly states that "primary education is compulsory and free in public schools." The educational system in Rwanda is organized according to certain laws, namely the Organic Education Law and the Higher Education Law. In addition to the country's personal development objectives, the government set up the Vision 2020 development plan to achieve the 2015 Millennium Development Goals set forth by the United Nations. The Vision 2020 development plan created between 1998 and 1999 set out as an ambitious plan made up of six different pillars for the country to move out of poverty and reach the status of middle-income country. Gender equality represents the first of three cross-cutting issues of Vision 2020, meaning that it plays an important role with all six pillars in achieving all development goals. Among its various goals, in the education sector Rwanda is committed to achieving "Universal Education for All", in accordance with the 2015 MDGs and 2030 SDGs. In order to comply with the country's goal to become an industry-based, knowledge economy, education will primarily focus on achieving gender parity and develop strong vocational and technical skills in scientific and technology areas, with particular emphasis on women and girls. (Vision 2020, 1999) The Vision 2020 plan included smaller, short-term plans such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy. In particular, part of Rwanda's goals(?) concerned gender equality, and making sure that girls' education became a priority, and their completion rates increased. Accomplishing these goals meant increasing the number of female teachers and female role models present in schools; spreading awareness about the importance of girls' education and girls' opportunities following education throughout local families and communities; increasing teachers' understanding of gender disparities in education in order to make the physical learning environment more sustainable for girls by improving dormitories and sanitary facilities especially. (Huggins and Randell 2007)

An innovative aspect set forth by the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper focused on the importance of gender-specific research and data collection to analyze both quantitative and qualitative aspects of girls' education. The policy strategies undertaken following this paper have represented a substantial effort, however, a low budget execution dedicated to gender plans prevented the full achievement of Rwanda's goals under this plan.



### **3.1.1 Nine-year Basic Education program**

The Nine-year Basic Education program has worked as the foundation for human resource development in Rwanda, making sure school-aged children receive primary and lower secondary education. The plan has contributed to raise completion rates and lower drop-out rates. The program covers a variety of issues crucial to economic development and poverty reduction. These include: reduction of population growth rate through the teaching of life skills; application of information and communication technology; development of entrepreneurship skills; sensitization towards HIV/AIDS; promotion of peace, utility, and reconciliation; promotion of Rwandan culture, social inclusion, and gender equality. (ESSP 2008) The Nine-year program aims to raise general literacy levels in the country, and improve knowledge and skills within the population.

A core element of this program consists in the rapid construction of both classrooms and latrines. The construction was put in place involving local communities through monthly activities which were conducted in villages throughout the country. Local communities therefore provided labor, resources, and available materials such as stones, water, wood, and sand. Involving local communities produced a range of benefits. Primarily, the community's larger ownership and control over school programs allowed for a larger participation in school affairs and management. Another benefit of involving local communities granted an element of cost-effectiveness to the program. In fact, the community approach made it possible for the Ministry to save around USD49 million in only one financial year. Moreover, the design, standards, and approach used for the construction of these facilities created a platform to ensure durable and sustainable infrastructure. (Commonwealth Education Hub)

The program organized strategies for the flexibility and adaptation of the school system to guarantee the quality of education. The plan included the extension of double-shifts for the duration of the cycle of primary education, constant teacher specialization to improve their skills and their use, and the reorganization of school curricula and course content in order for students to acquire stronger foundations of core literacy and numeracy skills. Some of the advantages of this program resulted in an increase in enrolment, retention, and completion rates for both primary and secondary education. The overall net enrolment rate increased from 91.2% in 2003 to 95.9% in 2011, with 97.5% for girls in primary schools. Transition rates from primary to secondary school also increased,

reaching 94% in 2010 and 96% in 2011. Furthermore, primary repetition rates fell from 15.3% in 2008 to 13% in 2010. Drop-out rates fell from 15.2% in 2008 to 11.4% in 2010. (Commonwealth Education Hub) Based on the successes encountered, by 2012 the Rwandan government prolonged the plan to a 12-year program.

### **3.1.2 Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies**

The first Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) was set to work between 2008 and 2012, and acted as a medium-term framework within the broader Vision 2020 development plan in the educational sphere. The EDPRS promotes and emphasizes the 9 Year Basic Education program, and commits itself to increase the program's coverage and its quality by strengthening the teaching force and increasing the quality of tertiary education as well.

Rwanda set itself the objective of promoting economic development through a shift from an agriculturally-based economic system to one dependent on services and industries. This ambitious goal entails the development of the scientific and technological industries in the areas of information and communication technologies (ICT). (EDPRS 2008) In order to promote the development of the ICT sphere, Rwanda must adapt its educational strategy to meet its new goals. The strategy to achieve these objectives is laid out in the Education Sector Strategic Plans (ESSPs), the first of which was active from 2004 to 2008, the second from 2008 to 2012, and the third is ongoing from 2013 until the end of 2018. The ESSP is considered to represent a complete and comprehensive plan, one which adheres to government policies and is consistent with the country's priorities. The EDPRS upholds these intentions and outlines Rwanda's wish to commit to the creation of a scientific and technological strength to build a culture of innovation and knowledge through scientific research.

In terms of economic progress, Rwanda's strategy in the educational sphere concerned the development of accurate and appropriate curricula aiming to convey basic literacy and numeracy skills in traditional subjects, in addition to promoting social cohesion. The expansion of school curricula also includes new subjects at secondary level, such as entrepreneurial skill development and gender sensitive teachings. Further, the ICT component is addressed by adding closer links between the subjects taught in schools and the new needs emerging in the labor market. In addition to the Nine-year Basic Education program, specific indications have been given to communities and schools to involve girls'

education within all new development plans. Projects for encouraging girls to study scientific and technological subjects are in place.

Since Rwanda has made consistent progress towards gender parity in net enrolment rates, and has achieved it in primary education, the country's main gender-oriented focus has been veered towards increasing girls' completion rates and performance in exams. Some of the efforts set out by the government and the EDPRS concerning girls' exam scores include policies promoting campaigns to encourage girls' participation and achievement during the school year. An idea thought to be functional to improve girls' completion rates included adding remedial classes to be held during school vacations; this way, girls who had to leave school for a period of time due to a variety of reasons can recuperate the lost time and continue their education on track. An important effort has also been made in addressing the issue of high drop-out rates for girls by intensifying research to determine trends and understanding the causes of these drop-outs in order to tackle them at their root.

The second EDPRS, addressing the years from late 2013 to 2018, takes into account the increased savings made possible by financial literacy and women's inclusion. Researchers observed that over 89% of the population were using some sort of financial service in 2016, surpassing the government's 2017 goal of reaching 80%. (The New Times 2016) Rwanda ranks second to Mauritius in Sub-Saharan countries in terms of financial inclusion; only 700,000 people in the country abstain from using financial services. (The New Times 2016) The major progress made shows that the government's gender and rural population based efforts are successful, and have allowed the economy to become increasingly monetized. By increasing its savings and entering both regional and global markets, it becomes possible for Rwanda to break the vicious cycle of poverty and strive towards its developmental goals. Consequently, the country is able to fuel investments in education and create a new, virtuous cycle of education and development. "The Rwanda economy will be more productive when all women and men are full participants." The second EDPRS takes into account that women make up more than half of Rwanda's population, specifically 52%, and therefore has targeted women's needs in socio-economic and political spheres. Strategies concern education, family planning, and reduced gender violence in order to further promote women's inclusion and fuel the developmental cycle.

### **3.1.3 Educational Sector Strategic Plans**

The first Educational Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) in 2004 began by setting the goal of providing equitable access to universal basic primary education by increasing places in primary schools, improving management of schools at an institutional level, and providing opportunities for those children who face challenges to obtain an education. The Plan aims to improve access to education as well as the quality of it, and eliminate gender disparities and inequalities. Regarding basic education strategies, ESSP 2004 Priorities include:

- Search for children out of school and reintegrate them into primary education, offering flexible solutions for children in “hard-to-reach” areas;
- Build more classrooms and schools in order to accommodate more children;
- Improve the quality of education at all levels through curricula updates and the equipment of adequate learning materials;
- Train a number of primary education teachers, improving conditions of teacher training centers and through the establishment of distance education programs;
- Increment expenditures concerning scientific, technological, mathematical and ICT teachings;
- Improve and increase school completion and learning achievement for girls;
- Strengthen monitoring procedures and evaluation methods.

Priorities for the strategic framework concerning secondary and tertiary education include:

- Expanding lower secondary schooling by constructing new structures in accordance with the expansion of primary arrangements;
- Reducing the need to attend boarding schools by building more structures in populated areas;
- Seeking means to decrease or eliminate the costs of secondary schooling;
- Maintaining the participation of girls at both levels of secondary education and improving their academic performance;
- Increasing access to tertiary education, including greater representation of females at all levels;
- Educating up to 600 graduates to higher-degree level, with a positive bias towards female graduates.

The 2008 ESSP promotes the Nine-year Basic Education program and strongly focuses on science and technology, which represents a key policy priority. At primary level, the second ESSP intends to cultivate students' interest in the scientific and technological fields by creating stimulating and participative learning environments. This goal necessitates a review and improvement of science and technology curricula, and an improvement of science and technology teachings through appropriate research kits and primary science books. At secondary level, the plan provides schools with adequate materials and resources to promote such learnings, providing sufficient text books and adding laboratories for practical teachings of chemistry, biology, and physics. Furthermore, the plan focuses on ICT and its fundamental role to boost access to information and communication. Expanding ICT requires an expansion of general science and technology resource centers which allow students access to other sources of information.

The 2008 ESSP includes an important component for the advancement of gender equality in education, as the Ministry for Education created strategies specifically veered towards girls' benefits. The plan includes a Girls' Education Policy aimed at improving girls' enrolment, retention, completion, and transition to higher levels of education, protecting girls and allowing them to participate in environments free from violence and abuse. Other actions concerning girls include the access to adequate sanitation facilities, which often mean creating separate toilets for boys and girls. (ESSP 2008)

“The mission of the Ministry of Education is to transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for the socio-economic development of the country by ensuring equitable access to quality education focusing on combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking, and positive values.” The third ESSP has three goals, similar to the ones underlined in the first two: expanding access to education at all levels, improving the quality of education and training; strengthening the relevance of education and training to meet labor market demands. (ESSP 2013) The concept of equity in education is integrated in all three goals, in order to promote the greater objective of ensuring access to quality, demand-driven learning for all students, with a focus on ensuring equity for disadvantaged students, including girls. A specific focus on girls in economic terms has been made through the creation of an *ad hoc* budget line to support initiatives tackling gender barriers.

It is easy to notice a special emphasis on girls in all programs undertaken for Rwanda's education, making it impossible not to join efforts of girls' advancement to the consequences of Rwanda's development. Women and girls are a central component of all strategies, as the government wishes to ensure inclusive education for all, and beyond to ensure that women are appropriately skilled to contribute to the economic development of their country. The 2013 program recognizes the need to create national sensitization programs to not only encourage girls themselves to participate in education, but to encourage their families and their communities to send girls to school and keep them there. The 2013 ESSP promotes strategies to support girls' education and training by:

- Strengthening gender-sensitive and learner-centered methodologies;
- Training of educationists, trainers, and education planners in gender issues;
- Regular view of education curricula and learning materials from a gender perspective;
- Sensitizing families and local communities about the importance of girls completing and improving achievement in formal education;
- Promoting affirmative action policies, where appropriate, to ensure equal opportunities for girls;
- Strengthening integration of girls' education into plans and budgets at all levels.

## Concluding Remarks

Education is the most powerful tool humanity can offer and can use. Education is a key element to reducing disparities worldwide, to enhancing the development and improvement of countries and of people's daily lives. Education is our tool towards achieving well-being and happiness. The research discussed in this thesis outlines the importance of a quality education, and shines a light on gender disparities in receiving an education, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and developing countries. Girls' education is not seen nearly enough as the extremely powerful tool it is for the development of a country. Girls' education is too often devalued, ignored, underestimated, and underappreciated. In some countries, it is the definition of gender roles which does not allow girls to participate in community life on the same level as boys. In these countries, the opportunities which girls are presented with are not affected by their education levels in the slightest, as they are more often than not seen as beneficial only in reproductive and maternal terms. It is necessary to change the perception of girls' roles and girls' importance in societies. It is necessary to start a path of development through equal opportunities for boys and girls, beginning with access to education.

Education has been recognized as a fundamental human right by the United Nations, and described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as compulsory and free at least at primary level. The Declaration states: "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace." Education is the tool through which we shape our children, our people, and therefore our future. Education is the path through which children acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, but more importantly they develop the skills and abilities which teach them how to conduct their lives, how to better their prospects, how to act towards others, how to become citizens of their lives and of our world. Education is the means through which our world is

constantly created, and it is a tool which is not being used at its fullest potential. By creating gender disparities, by failing to address them sufficiently, we fail to provide a sustainable, happy future for our world. By impeding girls' education, we prevent a fraction of our population from living to their full potential, from achieving healthy and happy lives, and from developing into the women they can become. Thus, their children will suffer from the same causes, and we are creating a cycle of deprivation for future generations.

On the contrary, by promoting girls' education, by addressing the gender gap in education especially in developing countries, we are creating a virtuous cycle in which girls become independent women; a cycle in which girls have power over their own lives and over those of their children, in which girls become useful elements of their societies and communities, in which girls and women contribute to the well-being of their families, of their children and of their countries. Tangibly, girls' education creates a cycle of lowered mortality rates, of a smaller population growth, of lower levels of violence and abuse, lower levels of sexual assault, lower levels of exploitation. Girls' education brings higher levels of education for their children as well, healthier lives for themselves, their children, and their communities, raised productivity levels for their communities and countries, higher levels of general well-being and happiness in their families and countries.

If, as defined at the beginning of the second chapter, development is to be seen as "the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capabilities by raising people's levels of living, self-esteem, and freedom", reducing and thereon eliminating the gender gap in education is the strongest tool available to achieve sustainable development.



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## Abstract

Per *gender gap* si intende il divario che si crea tra il genere maschile e quello femminile nel ricevere opportunità, mentre per *gender equality* si intende l'uguaglianza tra i due generi. Nonostante importanti avanzamenti e notevole impegno da parte della comunità internazionale e da molti paesi, notiamo che spesso il genere femminile riceve ancora un certo livello di discriminazione in alcuni ambiti. In particolare, questa tesi si concentra sulle difficoltà che incontrano circa 65 milioni di bambine in tutto il mondo nel ricevere un'istruzione di qualità.

Tra di 17 obiettivi dell'Agenda 2030 delle Nazioni Unite, ce ne sono due che riguardano la prosperità delle bambine e della loro istruzione. In particolare, parliamo degli obiettivi 4 e 5, che si concentrano rispettivamente sull'istruzione di qualità e sulla parità di genere. Il primo vede nell'istruzione di qualità un elemento di base per migliorare gli standard di vita della popolazione mondiale e per promuovere lo sviluppo sostenibile di tutti i paesi. Questo obiettivo tiene presente le disuguaglianze presenti tra bambine e bambini, e per questo esplicitamente si chiede di garantire ad ogni ragazzo e ragazza la libertà, l'equità, e qualità nel completamento dell'istruzione primaria e secondaria. L'obiettivo numero cinque si unisce al quarto nel garantire la parità di genere nell'istruzione, come in tutti gli ambiti. Si chiede di eliminare ogni forma di discriminazione nei confronti di bambine, ragazze e donne, di porre fine alla violenza nei loro confronti, e di garantire a donne e bambine pari opportunità e partecipazione ad ogni livello di istruzione, di lavoro e di vita pubblica. Come scritto nella Dichiarazione Universale dei Diritti Umani, la parità di genere è un diritto fondamentale e condizione necessaria per garantire pace, sviluppo e prosperità.

Parte del primo capitolo si basa su alcune ricerche condotte ogni anno dalla Banca Mondiale, che si impegna per analizzare diversi indicatori di disuguaglianze di genere. Uno di questi indicatori riguarda l'istruzione, e osserva la partecipazione a scuola di bambini e bambine in ogni paese membro delle Nazioni Unite. Dalle ricerche emerge che gran parte del mondo sta chiudendo il divario tra maschi e femmine, ma la disuguaglianza rimane fortissima in quasi tutti i paesi dell'Africa Sub-Sahariana. Notiamo che, generalmente, nei paesi ad alto reddito il divario tra maschi e femmine nell'istruzione è quasi inesistente, e

laddove è presente è spesso a favore delle ultime; la percentuale di maschi e femmine che ricevono un'istruzione primaria è maggiore al 99%, mentre è pari al 97% per le ragazze e 93% per i ragazzi nella scuola secondaria. Nei paesi a basso reddito, invece, la differenza di opportunità rimane larga, intorno al 10%.

Purtroppo, riuscire a ricevere un'istruzione spesso non è abbastanza per i bambini e le bambine dei paesi in via di sviluppo, è bensì necessario assicurarsi che ricevano un'istruzione di qualità. Per istruzione di qualità si intende un'istruzione che riguardi non solo gli insegnamenti accademici, ma che si concentri anche sulla sfera emotiva, sociale, fisica e mentale di ogni bambino o bambina. L'istruzione si pone l'obiettivo di formare uomini e donne integri e sani, si pone l'obiettivo di sviluppare in ognuno di loro le capacità cognitive di cui hanno bisogno per affrontare la loro vita. Un'istruzione di qualità provvede ai risultati necessari affinché individui, comunità e società possano prosperare. Essa permette alle scuole di allinearsi e integrarsi completamente con le comunità alle quali appartengono, e quindi di avere accesso ai servizi ideati per supportare lo sviluppo educativo dei suoi studenti. Un'istruzione di qualità è supportata da tre pilastri: accesso a insegnanti di qualità, accesso a strumenti per l'apprendimento e lo sviluppo professionale, istituzione di ambienti sicuri e stimolanti all'apprendimento.

Il primo pilastro elencato, gli insegnanti, è fondamentale per lo sviluppo dei bambini e della loro istruzione, poiché sono il mezzo principale attraverso il quale i bambini acquisiscono informazioni. Gli insegnanti devono essere professionalmente qualificati, abili nella comunicazione, motivati, supportati, e devono avere a disposizione materiali didattici idonei; devono essere in grado di adattarsi alle diverse situazioni che possono presentarsi all'interno della classe, e di soddisfare le esigenze degli studenti a seconda delle circostanze. Un'istruzione di qualità prevede che gli studenti acquisiscano sia le fondamentali competenze alfabetiche, letterarie, e numeriche, sia quelle caratteristiche e abilità che li preparano ad affrontare la vita quotidiana, la situazione domestica, le possibilità che hanno dopo la scuola, e molto altro.

Nei paesi in via di sviluppo, particolarmente in quelli dell'Africa Sub-Sahariana, le disuguaglianze di genere hanno effetti importanti sulle bambine nell'accesso all'istruzione e ai servizi sanitari. Ciò che causa queste disuguaglianze sono le forti norme comportamentali che ancora accompagnano la figura di uomo e di donna, bambino e bambina. Il risultato è che le bambine affrontano maggiori responsabilità all'interno dell'ambiente domestico, che

le privano di molte opportunità. Di conseguenza, le mancate opportunità portano ad un'ulteriore discriminazione e creano un circolo vizioso di disuguaglianza.

Tutti i bambini affrontano tre tipi di barriere per accedere e completare un'istruzione primaria e secondaria, e in ognuna di queste si trovano alcune componenti che creano maggior ostacolo alle femmine. Le barriere sono di tipo domestico, scolastico, e politico. Le barriere domestiche sono quelle che riguardano i costi diretti e indiretti dell'istruzione. I costi diretti comprendono i costi legati ai libri, le tasse scolastiche, il materiale scolastico, e i vestiti necessari per andare a scuola (talvolta uniforme specifiche). I costi indiretti, invece, si riferiscono al costo-opportunità, ovvero alle possibilità e ai profitti che possono derivare dall'istruzione di un bambino. Dal punto di vista della famiglia, educare una bambina ha un costo molto alto e produce opportunità molto basse. Infatti, in comunità dove il ruolo della donna è visto puramente in termini riproduttivi, la loro istruzione ha un valore bassissimo. Per questo motivo, è molto più produttivo che le bambine rimangano a casa e si occupino delle loro responsabilità domestiche, dell'ordine e della pulizia della casa, della cena, dei fratelli piccoli e dei nonni anziani.

Uno degli esempi più eclatanti di discriminazione contro le bambine che le preparano ad una vita di privazione è il matrimonio infantile. Sono infatti 12 milioni l'anno le bambine e ragazze sposate prima di raggiungere i diciotto anni. Rispetto alle ragazze che riescono ad ottenere un'istruzione secondaria, per le bambine che non vanno a scuola la probabilità di sposarsi prima di raggiungere la maggiore età è tre volte tanto. Spesso, i genitori di queste bambine vedono il matrimonio come l'opzione migliore per loro e per le loro figlie, in quanto dopo il matrimonio esse non gravano più sulle tasche della propria famiglia, ma sono mantenute dal proprio marito. Infatti, non avendo possibilità diverse al termine della loro istruzione, il matrimonio rappresenta comunque la loro unica scelta.

Le barriere scolastiche si riferiscono al fatto che di frequente le strutture scolastiche sono lontane da molte case, quindi gli studenti devono affrontare lunghi viaggi a piedi per raggiungerle. Questi viaggi potrebbero essere pericolosi per le femmine, che potrebbero subire violenze durante il tragitto, o potrebbero essere troppo deboli per affrontarli essendo spesso nutrite meno rispetto ai loro coetanei maschi. Inoltre, la notevole quantità di tempo dedicata a raggiungere la scuola e tornare a casa toglie molto tempo ai doveri domestici, ponendo un ulteriore inconveniente alle bambine. Il problema della lontananza delle scuole viene risolto con la costruzione di dormitori, che però sono quasi sempre

dedicate solamente al genere maschile. È chiaro come i maschi siano spronati ad andare a scuola, mentre le femmine ne sono costantemente disincentivate. Una seconda barriera scolastica consiste nella povera qualità degli ambienti e nelle strutture delle scuole stesse, in quanto in molti casi le infrastrutture scolastiche non rispettano le norme igieniche, non hanno risorse adeguate di acqua o servizi igienici. Un motivo comune per l'abbandono scolastico da parte delle ragazze adolescenti, una volta raggiunta la pubertà, è proprio la mancanza di appositi e separati servizi igienici.

Se, invece, le bambine e ragazze riescono ad ottenere un'istruzione, lo spazio per le disuguaglianze è rappresentato dal rafforzamento degli stereotipi di genere e le tradizionali norme comportamentali che accompagnano il ruolo di uomo e donna. Ciò avviene attraverso l'utilizzo di materiale non obiettivo e inappropriato. Spesso, le bambine non vengono rappresentate nel materiale didattico fornito a scuola, e non vengono istruite sulle abilità necessarie per il loro successo all'interno delle comunità. La mancanza di insegnanti donne contribuisce a rafforzare l'idea che non ci siano prospettive per le bambine una volta terminata la loro istruzione.

Le barriere politiche sono quelle barriere che riguardano la struttura legale che circonda il sistema scolastico ed educativo, in particolare l'inadeguatezza delle norme in campo di sfruttamento minorile, scuola dell'obbligo, costi dell'istruzione. Infatti, in molti paesi in via di sviluppo l'istruzione non è gratuita né obbligatoria. Questo comporta che il governo di questi paesi non si preoccupa di agire se un bambino ha difficoltà economiche o di altro tipo. Prevedibilmente, sono le bambine a soffrire maggiormente di queste politiche, in quanto queste barriere si riflettono sulle barriere domestiche. Se una famiglia è costretta a scegliere, sulla base del proprio salario, se mandare a scuola un solo figlio tra un maschio e una femmina, sarà la bambina a rimanere a casa. Allo stesso modo, se l'istruzione non è obbligatoria, le bambine rimangono a casa per adempiere al costo-opportunità dato dalle funzioni domestiche e la cura della famiglia.

Il rapporto tra l'istruzione femminile e la crescita economica è un rapporto di *causazione*. Infatti, la crescita è dovuta all'istruzione delle bambine, non viceversa. Come ci sono tre tipi di barriere, ci sono tre categorie di benefici dovuti all'istruzione femminile: i benefici domestici, benefici sulla fertilità e la mortalità, benefici economici. I primi hanno a

che fare con la migliore gestione della casa e della famiglia. Infatti, in un nucleo familiare dove sia la madre che il padre hanno ricevuto un livello anche basilare di istruzione, notiamo che il livello di benessere generale della famiglia è più alto rispetto a quello delle famiglie in cui la mamma non ha mai ricevuto un'educazione formale. Infatti, anche un minimo livello di istruzione permette alle donne di avere competenze linguistiche e sanitarie basilari per gestire al meglio la salute e la nutrizione dei suoi figli. Inoltre, le mamme che sono andate a scuola sono più propense a spronare i propri figli ad andare a scuola e concentrarsi a loro volta sulla propria istruzione. In questo caso, è probabile anche che non faccia distinzione tra figli maschi e figlie femmine, e sproni quindi entrambi a ricevere un'istruzione. L'istruzione primaria di base amplia gli orizzonti e le opportunità di una famiglia poiché le offre risorse intellettuali che si rinnovano nella persona durante la sua vita e quella della sua famiglia, portando così benefici alla sua casa, alla sua comunità, e di conseguenza al suo paese.

L'istruzione femminile ha anche provato di avere effetti positivi sulla mortalità infantile, poiché le mamme istruite sono in grado di utilizzare lo stipendio familiare in maniera più produttiva per la famiglia, e lo utilizzano per occuparsi in maniera migliore dei propri figli e della propria casa. Sono in grado di cercare aiuto medico per i loro figli, e di conseguenza possono prevenire che piccole malattie diventino fatali. In questo modo, i bambini possono crescere in ambienti più sani e vivere più a lungo, raggiungendo l'età adulta con maggiori probabilità. Madri istruite sono anche in grado di prevenire la malnutrizione o denutrizione dei loro figli, poiché sono in grado di assicurarsi che mangino adeguatamente. L'UNICEF riporta che una crescita del 10% nell'accesso femminile all'istruzione primaria può causare una diminuzione del tasso di mortalità infantile di circa 4.1 morti per 1000 nascite, mentre un aumento della stessa percentuale per la scuola secondaria può ridurre il livello di mortalità di 5.6 morti ogni 1000 nascite. In Africa, i bambini la cui madre non è mai andata a scuola hanno una possibilità su cinque di morire prima di raggiungere i cinque anni, mentre se la mamma ha ricevuto un'istruzione di base il rischio diminuisce di oltre il 40%. Inoltre, le donne istruite non solo sono maggiormente in grado di salvaguardare la salute dei propri figli, ma sono anche capaci di gestire meglio la propria salute durante la gravidanza e dopo il parto. Di conseguenza, si abbassano anche i livelli di mortalità materna.



Educare le bambine ha anche importanti effetti sulla fertilità, poiché le donne che sono andate a scuola tendono ad avere meno figli. Riescono a ritardare l'età in cui danno alla luce il primo figlio, e sono in grado di esprimere il loro desiderio di smettere di avere figli al proprio marito. Le donne istruite sono in grado di costruire rapporti migliori con il proprio marito, di gestire la casa in maniera migliore, e di dedicare maggiori risorse per ogni bambino. In questo modo si crea anche l'incentivo perché anche le bambine vadano a scuola.

Secondo lo studioso Lawrence Summers, investire nell'istruzione delle bambine porta al ritorno sugli investimenti più alto in assoluto del mondo sviluppato. Infatti, investire nell'istruzione porta a ritorni sociali poiché, una volta usciti da scuola, i ragazzi e le ragazze entrano a far parte della forza lavoro. Alcuni studi mostrano che questi ritorni sociali sono più alti per le femmine che per i maschi. Infatti, in diversi paesi è stato osservato che l'istruzione delle bambine ha portato effetti positivi sul PIL. Istruire bambine e ragazze le rende donne più produttive, di conseguenza guadagnano stipendi più alti, e quindi hanno alti ritorni sociali. Quando le femmine ricevono lo stesso livello di istruzione rispetto ai maschi, il risultato è chiaramente mostrato nella crescita del reddito. Esiste un rapporto tra l'alta partecipazione delle ragazze nella scuola secondaria e l'aumento dei livelli di reddito in paesi dal reddito medio e alto. Talvolta, nelle comunità dove il divario di genere è minore, è maggiore il livello di benessere pubblico.

Una volta entrate nella forza lavoro, le donne utilizzano il loro stipendio in maniera più produttiva rispetto agli uomini, di conseguenza stimolano il mercato e il benessere delle loro famiglie. Inoltre, se le famiglie hanno due fonti diverse di reddito, sono meglio preparati ad affrontare shock economici.

È chiaro che promuovere i diritti di donne e bambine sia un fattore fondamentale per lo sviluppo dei paesi, in quanto riduce il livello di fertilità, mortalità infantile e materna, mentre aumenta il livello di benessere e di produttività di una famiglia e di un paese. Un paese che ha notato questa correlazione, e che agisce costantemente per promuovere l'istruzione di bambine e ragazze si trova proprio nella zona in cui il divario tra maschi e femmine è più pronunciato; il Rwanda si trova infatti al centro dell'Africa Sub-Sahariana. Questo paese si è impegnato e si sta impegnando per avanzare la parità di genere nelle sfere

politiche e sociali. L'avanzamento del suo obiettivo è chiaramente espresso sia nella sua costituzione, sia nel suo piano per lo sviluppo Vision 2020. Il governo del Rwanda si concentra sull'eseguire una politica di promozione dell'uguaglianza di genere, in particolare di migliorare le opportunità educative per le bambine e le ragazze e di promuovere l'avanzamento sociale delle donne. Per quanto riguarda l'istruzione primaria, il Rwanda ha già raggiunto la parità di genere, e si sta ora impegnando per ottenerla anche a livello secondario e terziario. Proprio grazie a questi sforzi, il Rwanda è un esempio globale nella promozione della parità di genere, in quanto ha raggiunto un tasso di crescita del 7.7% negli ultimi dieci anni.

La scelta di questo stato rappresenta un ottimo case study poiché gli sforzi da parte del Rwanda per l'avanzamento dell'uguaglianza di genere sono stati un fattore fondamentale per la promozione dello sviluppo del paese. Infatti, le donne hanno iniziato a ricoprire ruoli maggiori all'interno delle società, come all'interno dell'ambiente domestico. Nel 2007, hanno raggiunto la proporzione più alta di donne in parlamento, raggiungendo circa il 49% della rappresentanza. Nel 2015, il tasso di alfabetizzazione era del 65% per le donne, e il 76% per gli uomini, un numero più alto della media regionale. È curioso notare come l'economia del Rwanda sia quella con il tasso di crescita maggiore tra tutti i paesi dell'Africa Sub-Sahariana.