

Education: An Opportunity to Reshape the Third World

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## Abstract

The concept that education equips and enlightens people towards a brighter future is not revolutionary or unusual; applying this ideology to the Third World, however, is a more recent endeavor. Decades of study examining the effects of education on the lives of women in the Third World reveal that it has positive effects socially, culturally, politically and economically, as the single most determining factor improving the lives of women and children. This thesis researches the multi-faceted obstacles, stemming from longstanding norms, that prevent the education of women in the Third World, and it reveals the way in which overcoming those obstacles would usher in an age of progress and freedom into the lives of women in the Third World.

### Education: An Opportunity to Reshape the Third World

While educational systems change in different countries and develop over time, certain goals of education remain constant. Education exists to train individuals for competency in a field of work. In doing so, it also exists to produce knowledgeable, informed, caring and responsible citizens. The success of an educational system is measured by the caliber of individuals that it produces. In many cases, countries that suffer socially and economically are also lacking educationally. By educating its citizens, a country can greatly improve its overall well being.

The effectiveness of a country's educational system is often times an indicator of the strength and vitality of the country. Empowering the next generation with knowledge and skills to create a life of success and independence is best achieved through a strong system of education within the society.<sup>1</sup> In many Third World countries, daily living is a struggle and people are confined to their current circumstances unless they have the ability to make a significant change. Women and children in third world countries bear the brunt of the responsibilities, and many times they aren't given the opportunity to pursue a trade or skill through education.<sup>2</sup> One little girl in Northern Pakistan explained why she does not attend school: "Of course, I would like to go to school, but how can I? Every morning, I have to help my mother with the preparation and selling of chapattis; I

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<sup>1</sup> Edward L. Glaeser, Giacomo A. M. Ponzetto and Andrei Shleifer. "Why does democracy need education?" *Journal of Economic Growth* Vol. 12, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), pp. 77-99.

<sup>2</sup> Meredith Knezek. "Literacy and Women in Developing Nations." (May, 1995). Retrieved from <http://eserver.org/courses/spring95/76-100g/Meredith.html>.

have to do that, because otherwise, we would not have enough to eat”.<sup>3</sup> The concerns of this little girl represent the situation of millions of other children in Third World countries who share the responsibilities to meet the needs of the family. Additionally, many Third World countries are male-dominated societies, and women and children are not given the opportunity to choose to attend school.<sup>4</sup>

To understand the dynamic topic of education in the Third World, the realities of existing conditions must be understood. The relationship between education and the economy, the comparison of education between men and women and the lack of educational institutions available are significant factors shaping the reality of Third World education. Additionally, societal norms often times prevent women from pursuing education. Currently, however, attempts to close those gaps are being attempted through aid of both private and governmental institutions.

With a holistic understanding of the realities of current Third World education, several measurable benefits of improvement can be confidently and accurately predicted. An increase in quality education in the Third World produces political and economic prosperity. Education also leads to greater health, producing healthier fertility rates and an increase in familial well being. Education also produces young girls who are more grounded in a healthy sense of worth. Indeed, education in the Third World is multi-faceted institution that must be understood in order to be improved.

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<sup>3</sup> Renate Nestvogel, “School Education in ‘Third World’ Countries: Dream of Trauma?” University of Essence <http://www.waxmann.com/fileadmin/media/zusatztexte/postlethwaite/nestvoege.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Meredith Knezek. “Literacy and Women in Developing Nations.” (May, 1995). Retrieved from <http://eserver.org/courses/spring95/76-100g/Meredith.html>.

## **Realities of Third World Education**

### **Education and the Economy**

In not attending school, women are also deprived of economic independence. In Third World countries, many women are not given the opportunity of becoming educated, and they are therefore dependent on men economically. When they do have economic freedom, the function of male-dominated society leads to lower wages and fewer economic possibilities for women, making a life of low wages and little freedom nearly automatic. However, some women and children have been able to experience education, and the results have been notable. Research proves that the entrepreneurship among women in impoverished countries is immeasurably valuable for the country's improvement.<sup>5</sup>

The success of a country's economy is tied to the success of the education system. In Russia, the competitive level of education played a role in developing the competitive economy. An educated society is a society invested in the country's market, community, economy and government. In underdeveloped countries, the small group with centralized power dominates the country, and many are denied the ability to be educated. While education is not an inherent right, it is a necessary means to achieving independence and the ability to break out of the mold of monotony. There is much support for the claim that higher education leads to greater and more supported democracy. Developed societies

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<sup>5</sup> "Improving the Health of the World's Poorest People." *Population Reference Bureau*, 2004. [http://www.prb.org/pdf04/improvingtheHealthbrief\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf04/improvingtheHealthbrief_Eng.pdf) (accessed January 24, 2013).

have a balanced population of active citizens, while underdeveloped societies lack active and educated citizens to represent the average person.<sup>6</sup>

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire wrote about the unmitigated importance of freedom in every society. "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea, which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion".<sup>7</sup> Freedom is not simply political. Freedom for individuals in Third World countries can be made possible by enlarging opportunities through education. Particularly for women and children, education provides a road to freedom that is otherwise hidden. Education equips women and children to pursue freedom for themselves emotionally, physically and economically.

Research among many different scholars in many different spheres of study have written about the relationship between education and the economic vitality of a country, specifically focusing on the independence that it brings to women and children.<sup>8</sup> To understand the true importance of education, one should direct attention to the change that education has brought about in third world countries. Education has brought hope to women in impoverished states, as well as unparalleled mobility to people in stratified societies. Unfortunately, education is often times tied to colonialism in the minds of some

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<sup>6</sup> Edward L. Glaeser, Giacomo A. M. Ponzetto and Andrei Shleifer. Why does democracy need education? *Journal of Economic Growth* Vol. 12, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), pp. 77-99.

<sup>7</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Donaldo Macedo (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Zernov, V. A. The Competitive Level of Education as a Condition Necessary for the Development of a Competitive Economy. *Russian Education and Society* (2009 July). Issue 7, p. 73-85.

of those in the third world. Therefore, supporters of available education are viewed as imperialists seeking to indoctrinate people. However, research highlighting the positive effects of education in Third World countries reveals that such concerns are misguided and the benefits of education far outweigh possible harms. “Most of the Third World countries that gained their independence during the decades of the 1950's and 1960's placed much of their faith for improving living conditions on the expansion of education”.<sup>9</sup> Of course, paving the road to education in societies not built around that structure is not a simple task. In the last decade, many third world countries have taken steps towards available public education, but their efforts are discouraged because of economic recessions. While some children are able to begin their education, they often times have to leave and return home in order to contribute to the income of the family.

### **Comparing Education Among the Sexes**

Women in many developing nations are not educated to the same extent that men are, and the effects are detrimental in more than one area. A study conducted in 1995 by Kenneth Hadden, an associate professor of agricultural and resource economics and Bruce London, a sociologist at Clark University in Massachusetts revealed several relationships between third world society and the education of women.<sup>10</sup> The Hadden and London international study took data from roughly eighty Third World countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. That data showed that girls in those countries

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<sup>9</sup> Marjorie Jones, “Education for What and for Whom: A Third World Perspective,” <http://www.lesley.edu/journals/jppp/1/jp3ii6.html>

<sup>10</sup> Usha R. Palaniswamy, “Educating Girls in Third World Brings Return on Investment,” *University of Connecticut Advance* (accessed November 20, 2012).



who had been educated in the 1960s had less births in the 1980's.<sup>11</sup> One indication of a healthier and more stable society is lower birth rates among young girls, as countries with the highest levels of gender equality in schooling likewise had the lowest numbers in infant and child mortality rates, as well as the biggest decline in fertility rates.<sup>12</sup> The study related the education of women not only to the effects on the population, but it also clearly linked the education of women to a higher growth in the country's economy. "Countries that provided education for girls as well as boys experienced higher economic growth rates than those that did not. Gender inequality in education also produced a moderate negative effect on economic growth and provision for basic needs".<sup>13</sup>

Of course, many factors contribute to the lack of education for women in Third World countries. Hadden explained that one significant factor is the lack of luxuries in the Third World, which keeps parents from spending time and money on pursuing education. Accordingly, the education of the boys is weighed against the education of the girls, and the cost involved in educating boys is seen as an investment. They believe that the boys will care for the parents in their old age, and they find it more important to establish their sons in stable situations, because girls inherit the benefits of their husbands' families.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Palaniswamy, "Educating Girls in Third World Brings Return on Investment".

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

**Data Reveals Unequal Opportunities**

Data was collected in the 1980s to measure the enrollment rates of men and women in First World and Third World countries. The data reveals that in First World countries, the disparities between male and female enrollment rates are minor. In European countries, males have an enrollment rate seven percent higher than females, and a six percent advance in North America.<sup>15</sup> In the Third World, the disparity is more than doubled. Males between the ages of 12-17 have a 16 percent enrollment rate higher than females in Asia and a 15 percent rate higher in Africa.<sup>16</sup>

In Muslim societies in the Middle East and Africa, segregated education is preferred over unsegregated education; women are not to be educated alongside men. Yet, this preference is not unique to Muslim societies only. Another aspect of schooling in Muslim countries is the need of women teachers to educate the girls. In Muslim countries, even more so than in Latin American countries, the systemized control of women based on societal norms dating back generations is so strong, that women face deep hindrances towards education than non-Muslim women in other Third World countries. Interestingly, data regarding the school enrollment of women between the ages of 20 and 24 in three Middle East countries reflected more female enrollment than in five Latin American countries.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the opposite was true in regards to secondary and lower level schooling. For women below in young adolescent and teenage years, less Middle

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<sup>15</sup> Palaniswamy, "Educating Girls in Third World Brings Return on Investment", 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 21.

Eastern girls were enrolled in school; “Perhaps it is the strength of tradition where poverty is endemic that most discourages schooling of Muslim girls. As has been said with respect to the Sudan and Northern Nigeria, girls handicaps may be due less to conflict between Western and Muslim schooling than to situations ‘inherent in any confrontation between conservative and radical functions of education’”.<sup>18</sup> The number of girls enrolled in school varies greatly from province to province, even more than it does among an entire country.

In Sierra Leone, 11 percent of girls attend primary schooling in the north, while 29 percent attend in the south and 77 percent attend in eastern provinces.<sup>19</sup> In a specific province in Morocco, girls represented 6 percent of the students, while they represented more than 40 percent in Rabat and Casablanca. Data from many researchers and writers on education reveal that literacy reaches its peak in coastal zones or in areas containing major waterways where the Western world first touched the region and where its impact first began.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, there is a risk in educating girls: “For instance, in some societies (most often cited are those in West Africa) women have traditionally been independent and have encountered a high risk of divorce. Their means to independence is in subsistence farming and petty trade learned at the mother’s side. When they try to combine schooling

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.

with home apprenticeship, the choice between work time and study time may lead to family tensions, poor lessons, and dropouts.”<sup>21</sup>

Data from Iran revealed several truths about education in the Third World. Literacy was lower, particularly for girls, in areas lacking male teachers. Secondly, when fertility was lower, school enrollments were higher for both males and females. Thirdly, villages that contained a mosque had lower literacy for both males and females, and non-Muslims were enrolled in school at a higher rate. Fourthly, enrollment was higher in villages with baths and clinics, and clearly lower in villages lacking schools.<sup>22</sup> Urbanized districts had higher literacy rates, as did areas that contained more professional and technical jobs. The last correlation was interesting. An increase in literacy of adult males resulted in higher literacy of young boys, while higher literacy for adult women led to higher literacy for young boys and girls. While this data was collected in Iran and represents the situation there, it is true for many Third World nations.

### **Lack of Educational Institutions**

Other problems cause the lack of education for citizens of Third World countries. A study conducted by the NAPA foundation in 2011 revealed that a huge reason for the lack of higher education in Africa, specifically, is due to a lack of opportunity.<sup>23</sup> As of

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<sup>21</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women's Education in the Third World*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Peter C. Okantey, “The Neglected Factor: Redirecting Investments to Higher Education in Africa for Leadership Development,” *NAA Amerley Palm Education Foundation* (Jun., 2011), <http://www.napefoundation.org/> (accessed January 18, 2013).

2011, less than three percent of Africans across the continent had access to higher education:<sup>24</sup>

Case in point; Ghana has a population of over 24 million people with six public universities, one major private university and seventeen university colleges. The percent of Ghanaians enrolled in higher education is less than 3%, while it is Malawi 0.5% and in Tanzania it's as low as 0.3%. In Ghana, The University of Science and Technology was able to accommodate only 6,868 applicants out of the 17,438 representing 39.38% of the applicants received in 2007.<sup>25</sup>

In Africa, as the data from Ghana reveals, even if cultural and societal barriers are breached and young people are eager to be educated, the simple lack of institutions prevents it. Millions of young men and women are not given the opportunity to fulfill their potential and nurture talents and gifts with a promising future in sight because the educational system in their country doesn't make it possible. Not only are the individual lives of each Ghanaian adversely affected by that lack, but the future of their country, which will be handed off to them, will surely suffer because they did not receive higher education.<sup>26</sup> African countries, like any other, cannot improve economically, politically and socially until the huge need for higher education is met.<sup>27</sup>

### **Societal Hindrances Towards Education**

Female education in the Third World is majorly impacted by the cultural, ethical and social beliefs of that society. Women living in societies that do not value education for girls, believing that it does not improve their lives, are unlikely to buck society's

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<sup>24</sup> Okantey, "The Neglected Factor."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

standards and seek education. Furthermore, “how ethnicity, social class, and rural/urban factors interact to predict females’ responses to schooling-either in the form of their school attendance, their retention rates in school, their acceptance of school-legitimated knowledge, or the uses to which women who get an education put their schooling, both as a result of, and despite, sex-gender systems” are all factors which contribute to understanding the success of education.<sup>28</sup>

While each of these barriers is deeply ingrained into many Third World nations, dating back centuries, the benefits of education in the lives of women in the First World predict that similar impacts have potential for all women. To understand how education practically changes the lives of women in the Third World, many factors must be measured, and several questions must be asked. Research must address if education would improve women’s lives within their household, as well as better equipping them for their role as mothers. The effects of education outside of the home must be measured as well. If education also increases the ability of women to participate in society, economically and politically, as it improves overall quality of life compared to uneducated women, then education must be pursued, as the success of education would therefore be unmistakable.<sup>29</sup> Parents of school-age girls are unlikely to send them to school if they do not anticipate a notable improvement in the girl’s personality

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<sup>28</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

development, opportunity to acquire a more suitable husband and quality of life in the home.<sup>30</sup>

If the answers to those questions suggest that education has the potential to better the lives of women in any society, overcoming national and cultural barriers must not prevent embracing education for women. For many young girls, the problems of education are two-fold. First of all, girls do not have equal opportunities to be educated, because they are not viewed by society as equal. Children are under the wing of their parents or caretakers, and the decision regarding how the time of their young girl is to be spent is up to them. Parents in socially conservative societies resist sending their daughters to a classroom, where they will constantly interact with young boys. Countries who believe that such interaction is inappropriate likewise keep their young girls from attending school. Even though the school may be free, it is still not a viable option for many families.<sup>31</sup>

If that barrier does not stand in the way between a young girl and schooling, often times the cost of education is enough to blockade progress. Schools in the Third World that are free to families have to be subsidized completely, which is not always the case. Therefore, extra cash that is possibly available in those homes is not likely to be spent on the education of girls, who are trained to serve in the home.

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<sup>30</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women's Education in the Third World*, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

### **Minimizing Hindrances Towards Education**

**Aid through the church.** On both a global and local scale, the church must assume its role in helping these developing countries achieve higher education goals. A lack of funds is not necessarily the roadblock in preventing educational improvements; instead, the misuse of existing funds by corrupt governments is to blame.<sup>32</sup> Nearly every African nation is somewhat corrupted by crooked governmental officials who misappropriate funds intended for education. Therefore, the church must help develop and instill leaders who are committed to moral use of funds to help the citizens of their country. One non-profit organization that works to accomplish that goal is Samaritan's Purse, based in Boone, North Carolina. Based off of charitable donations, it exists to provide disaster relief in needy countries, as well as accomplishing projects to provide food, homes, medical attention and education to people in developing countries.<sup>33</sup> Samaritan's Purse has employees living in many African, Asian, Latin American and Middle Eastern countries to improve the lives of vulnerable people in needy situations, including those living in poverty without access to education.

One specific impact of a private institution intervening in the cause for education in the third world is seen in Romania. In Romania, Samaritan's Purse has demonstrated that providing education to women opens them to life changing opportunities. Arriving in Romania, Samaritan's Purse saw the dire situation of the gypsy children who were uneducated. "The same picture is painted throughout much of Romania. An eighteen-

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<sup>32</sup> Okantey, "The Neglected Factor."

<sup>33</sup> "Children's Programs," [http://www.samaritanpurse.org/index.php/Relief\\_and\\_Development/Childrens\\_Programs/](http://www.samaritanpurse.org/index.php/Relief_and_Development/Childrens_Programs/) Samaritan's Purse (accessed November 20, 2012).



year-old Gypsy girl has three children and no way to take care of them. She abandons them with hopes that someone else will feed and clothe them. But often these children fall into the exact same cycle. They are sold into marriage while young. With no education or skills, they have no way to provide for their families. The sequence continues for generations.”<sup>34</sup> A social worker for Samaritan’s Purse, Michelle Sims, explained the goal of the organization. They were there to take care of pregnant women, meeting their physical and spiritual needs, as well as their educational needs. They not only encourage education, but they pay for the women’s education and board Romanian boys so that they could attend high school. The Romanian women who were being helped by Samaritan’s Purse were being taught to work hard and effectively so that their family would have provision. She explained that in a village that had a zero percent literacy, they were seeing the children under their care learn to read and write.<sup>35</sup>

This faith-based organization saw success, because they recognized that changing poverty-stricken situations requires a changed approach. The approach taken by Samaritan’s Purse is to help society improve by educating women in order to equip them to live healthily. The aim of the organization and their work in places like Romania is that women all find employment, as their standard of living is raised from an illiterate situation to a literate one, in order to abolish unsanitary living conditions and

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<sup>34</sup> “Raising the Standard,” Samaritan’s Purse. [http://www.samaritanspurse.org/index.php/articles/raising\\_the\\_standard/](http://www.samaritanspurse.org/index.php/articles/raising_the_standard/) (accessed November 20, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

malnourishment.<sup>36</sup> The progress seen in Romania foreshadows the progress needed in Africa, where women face similar struggles.

**Aid through the United Nations.** Fortunately, the educational situation in the Third World has not only caught the eye of private organizations such as Samaritan's Purse. At the United Nations, representatives from 147 nations met together and agreed upon the 2012 Millennium Development Goals to address needs around the world.<sup>37</sup> Goal one is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and goal two is to achieve universal primary education.<sup>38</sup> Goal three is to promote gender equality and empower women. Realizing that gender equality and empowerment for women is essential in helping a third world country progress, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) laid out several plans of action.<sup>39</sup> It became dedicated to an increased investment in education and training, as well as leading women to professional help and addressing retirement. The inherent understanding that providing women with education and training is necessary in accomplishing these goals predicts success. While the UN Security General remains optimistic regarding the goals, Goal three has been called the goal that has the largest margin for progress:

The Gender Chart 2012 shows that although there has been some progress in a number of the gender dimensions of the MDGs, such as in education and economic gains, more needs to be done — in every country and at every level.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> UN Women. "How Women and Girls are Faring: Charting Progress on the Millennium Development Goals" (Dec. 21, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

This is particularly true when it comes to achieving the pivotal third MDG and to reducing persisting levels of inequality. Women and girls from less affluent countries, communities and families are still consistently left behind.<sup>40</sup>

Achieving equality among women and men in Third World countries is goal that requires the most attention, because women and girls in poor, developing countries consistently live without equal rights and opportunities.

In Third World African, Asian and Southern Pacific countries, women work 12 or 13 hours each week more than men, on average.<sup>41</sup> Women are responsible for farming and raising the children, and they have fewer opportunities to increase their skills in order to earn more income. For poor communities to grow, the paradox of rights for women compared to men needs to be addressed. Women are deprived of education because of barriers such as unequal property rights and their limited control over the resources.<sup>42</sup>

Yet, grand leaps of progress have been made in the past generation. Since the 1960's, the number of women in Third World countries enrolled in education has more than doubled.<sup>43</sup> With that improvement, while it is notable and significant, a large gap still remains between the educational opportunities of men compared to women in Third World countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Women are consistently under-represented in vocational and technical training, and they are

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations, "Rural Poverty," <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/ruralpov/developingworld.shtml> (accessed January 18, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Gail Kelly and Carolyn Elliot, *Women's Education in the Third World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 1.

disproportionally enrolled in postsecondary education.<sup>44</sup> Volumes of data exist about the impact of education on the lives of women in Western Europe and America. There is a clear relationship between education and future success. Of course, the Third World is different socially, culturally, politically and economically, and existing data about the first world cannot, as a whole, predict outcomes in the Third World. Therefore, research targeted in Third World nations is sensitive to the context of those countries, and the implications of that data are more narrowly focused.<sup>45</sup>

### **Measurable Benefits of Third World Education**

#### **Prosperity**

There are multiple benefits of education, and they affect all areas of life. The first area of life improved by education is economic and political prosperity. The link between higher wages and education is irrevocable. With every year of schooling in poor countries, that person earns a 10% increase in wages.<sup>46</sup> Even in countries that depend on farming and agriculture, education yields worthwhile results. Women in developing countries maintain the majority of the farms; “Greater female education leads to more productive farming and accounts for over 40% of the decline in malnutrition achieved since 1970”.<sup>47</sup> Yet, the benefits are not only seen on an individual scale. Every single country that has continually and rapidly grown has had an adult population with at least a

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<sup>44</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*, 1.

<sup>45</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

40% literacy rate.<sup>48</sup> Research conducted by the Center for Global Development in 2004 indicated that education produces societies that are not only more stable financially, but also politically. Education naturally fosters a society that is politically stable and democratic that allows people to live in a civil society that encourages people to learn and exercise their rights.<sup>49</sup> People deprived of education in the third world are unknowingly deprived of their rights.

### **Health**

Not only does education contribute to higher prosperity in the Third World, but it also leads increased overall health. Education produces people who are healthier overall, and it creates opportunities for healthy living for individuals who would otherwise be ignorant of the possibilities. For example, people who have completed primary education contract HIV less than half of the time compared to those who have not.<sup>50</sup> Primary education alone leads to higher healthiness of a people group because it equips pupils to obtain safer and better jobs. Educated people in the Third World also understand how to live healthily by taking preventative measures, avoiding unhealthy behaviors and knowing how and why to obtain quality health services.<sup>51</sup>

Specifically, the education of girls yields significant improvements in health.

Women who have received education have a 50% greater likelihood of immunizing their

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<sup>48</sup> “Improving the Health of the World’s Poorest People.” *Population Reference Bureau*, 2004.

<sup>49</sup> “Improving the Health of the World’s Poorest People.” *Population Reference Bureau*, 2004.

<sup>50</sup> “Education and the Developing World,” *Center for Global Development*, 2002, [http://www.cgdev.org/files/2844\\_file\\_EDUCATON1.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/2844_file_EDUCATON1.pdf) (accessed January 24, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> “Improving the Health of the World’s Poorest People.” *Population Reference Bureau*, 2004.

children than those who have not been educated.<sup>52</sup> Every year of education contributes to a greater chance of health in poor nations. Accordingly, a women who has been educated at least six years has a greater likelihood of obtaining both prenatal and postnatal care, as well as assisted childbirth. Seeking medical assistance in these areas greatly reduces the risk of both illness and maternal and infant mortality. Without education, women in poor countries are not aware of the available help they could receive, which could potentially save both their life and the life of their baby.

**Fertility rates.** One specific and life-altering way in which education improves health is based on the impact that education has on fertility in the Third World. First of all, women who receive education begin having children later in life. This result does not suggest a change in attitude regarding families, but simply a delay in beginning one because of other responsibilities. Secondly, women who have been educated to a higher degree often times seek employment that would hinder their ability to have children immediately. Schooling may have less of an affect on reducing jobs when the labor market does not produce jobs, however.<sup>53</sup>

A 1973 study was conducted in western Nigeria, analyzing the health of children born to women, both educated and uneducated. Data revealed that there is a direct correlation between education and longevity, and the data is conclusive as education was the only factor not consistent for each woman: “The life expectancy of a child whose mother had some secondary education was between 10 and 17 years greater than a child

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women's Education in the Third World*, 287.

whose mother did not go to school, depending on the age cohort of the mother.”<sup>54</sup>

Children born to all women between the ages of 45-49 years died at a rate of 27.6 percent. However, 29.6 percent of children born to unschooled women of the same age bracket died, and 24.8 percent of children died to women who had received primary schooling. The lowest rate of child mortality belonged to women who had received secondary schooling, at a percent of 11.8. As the data shows, children born to unschooled women died at a rate of 17.8 percent more than children born to women with secondary schooling.<sup>55</sup>

**Familial well-being.** As fertility rates are stabilized through education, familial health is also improved. Interestingly, in the study of women and children in western Nigeria, the relationship between women education and child mortality remained strong even in cases where the father had secondary education and was employed in a white-collar job. The study even revealed that the mother’s education was a bigger factor than the environment and availability of health facilities. Children had a better rate of survival if their mother had received education, even more so than if they lived within close proximity to health facilities. Maternal education was proven to be the single most significant factor in the health and survival of the child.

More studies were conducted to reveal that these findings were not isolated to Nigeria. Data was collected from other countries including parts of West Africa, India, Indonesia, the Philippines and Chile, all pointing to the same conclusion. The United

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>55</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*.

Nations conducted a study examining 115 countries, and their findings were conclusive and note-worthy: “Maternal literacy showed a higher correlations with life expectancy at birth than any other factor, adding support to the hypothesis that schooling has an effect on mothering that does not simply reflect material affluence.”<sup>56</sup> The way in which mothers are able to better care for their children as a result of education has not been specifically identified, but several reasonable hypotheses suggest answers. Women who have been educated feel a stronger responsibility to care for their children using all means necessary, which includes employing the father and relatives to help and seeing that the child is given more responsibilities to individually grow instead of taking on the burden of working for the family from a young age.<sup>57</sup>

There are several reasons why education is proposed to affect the maternal behaviors of women in a positive way. The first reason is that a mother who has received education may be more able to recognize and adopt strategies in parenting that maximize the good opportunities for the child, including “their probability of survival, health, and economic success, under the new conditions of life brought about by urbanization, economic development, and the introduction of Western schools and medical services.”<sup>58</sup> The second reason pertains not only to the women’s ability to provide opportunities, but also to her likely involvement in the ongoing education of her own child. In the Third World nations in which studies were conducted, it was proposed that those women were

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<sup>56</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*, 290.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.



more likely to monitor their child's school attendance, as well as being involved in obtaining tutors if necessary or moving the child to a better school more suitable for the child's needs.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the education of the mother affects the life of the child in the way she prepares for the child's future. More educated women are more inclined to choose a husband who is in a better financial position to care for a wife and a potential family. "The more educated mother might provide her child with more useful forms of instruction, encouragement, interaction, and exposure, transmitting skills and shaping his or her psychological development in distinctive, perhaps adaptive ways. The permanence of such influence is a major question in developmental psychology."<sup>60</sup>

After reviewing the research and theories concerning education and the effect it has on women in the Third World living healthier lives and raising healthier children, several questions are raised. The first and hardest question to answer asks why this correlation exists. It also asks how education has the power to equip women with maternal behaviors and attitudes that are more progressed than their uneducated counterparts. There are three plausible ways in which these questions can be answered. First of all, education clearly increases the cognitive growth of the pupil. For women in the Third World particularly, education informs them of cause-effect and means-ends relationships in the environment: "Thus the woman with more education is more likely to see births in relation to future expenditures, diet in relation to health and growth, the

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<sup>59</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women's Education in the Third World*, 284-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

speech of infants and young children in relation to school performance, than her unschooled sister”.<sup>61</sup> This also explains how women who are schooled have children with more advanced verbal skills, as well as a lower rate of infant mortality, even though schooling doesn’t explicitly address either of these factors in the education of women. Simply by attending school and receiving well-rounded education, women are able to see the way in which their decisions have consequences.

In Third World countries, education exists to train and equip children and young adults to succeed in life, not in the attempt to rip them from their responsibilities, but to enable them to thrive where they are placed. For young girls, this is especially important. “According to this model, participation in school bolsters the self-esteem, sense of personal efficacy, and belief in internal control of a girl whose home environment had cast her into a position of subordination and compliance.”<sup>62</sup>

### **Individual Sense of Worth**

Education not only improves the outward factors of prosperity and health, but it also gives young girls an inner sense of worth. Being in a classroom puts girls in a relationship with an adult, and provides them with opportunities to have interactions with peers and the adult. The students are able to answer questions and declare what they know, receiving praises and instruction that helps them to grow. Research in tropical Africa, which is reminiscent of other Third World areas, showed that little girls are not

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<sup>61</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women’s Education in the Third World*, 309.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

engaged in conversations and asked to answer questions outside of the classroom, in most circumstances.<sup>63</sup> They are not valued in that way in most homes, and the praise they receive in school supplements for needed encouragement, and it also is a way of discourse that they learn to imitate. It impacts them in such a way that enables them to imitate and identify with that in their roles as students and daughters, and in the future as mothers. “When they become mothers, according to this hypothesis, they take the role of teacher with their infants and engage in reciprocal vocalization, questioning, and praise as their teachers did to them.”<sup>64</sup> The inverse is also true for unschooled women, who do not have the same tendency with their children because they are not able to imitate the adult-child interaction.

### Conclusion

Clearly, the fight to education women and children in the Third World is neither a problem easily explained nor a war quickly won. Many cultural, social, political, religious and economic situations have for centuries deterred women from receiving education. Identifying those problems is the first step to attacking the situation in hopes of creating a new norm in the Third World. As educational opportunities become more available in less affluent countries, it is imperative that people become aware of the benefits of pursuing education to the fullest extent possible.

Evidently, the benefits of educating women in the Third World are far reaching and deep-seated. Education has been proven to dramatically improve the lives of many in

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<sup>63</sup> Kelly and Elliot, *Women's Education in the Third World*, 309.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

the Third World, ranging from the pupil to her family to the community and country as a whole. It is the single most important factor in preventing child mortality, and it has been proven to increase the productivity of the labor force and boost the economy. The education of women improves the health of the family unit as a whole, as children are subsequently given additional opportunities and young girls learn their respectable place in society.

With the overwhelming evidence that supports the expansion of education to women and children in the Third World, the lack of significant progress in many places is astounding. Countless women and children exist in the monotony of lives enclosed by the four walls of tradition. For many, the chance to become educated is withheld because of societal biases against educated women, or because of economic limitations that do not permit the seemingly frivolous pursuit of education. Yet, for others the situation is almost worse, as women in some Third World countries do have the personal and financial support to take the controversial leap into the field of education, but they cannot because institutions in their village or town are not available. Indeed, much ground has yet to be conquered for those women. Education has the power to bridge that gap between what has been and what could be in the lives of women in the Third World. With education, society's "least of these" can be empowered to choose a path and pursue it with dignity.

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