CREATING AND IMPLEMENTING A REALISTIC SOLUTION TO EDUCATE WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

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Dear Editor of intWOJDE

Education is the most critical means of improving the welfare of women in the developing world. It is a most prerequisite in order to improve both social justice and economic productivity. Education, also, however, is inextricably linked to the overall health and wellbeing of women. It is evident that social inequality can only be overcome by empowering women through education.

It is also true that health literacy is part and partial of a healthy generation. Basic literacy skills could be a powerful tool to prevent diseases in the developing world. Similarly, it can effectively be used to enhance overall healthy lifestyles of vulnerable women in these societies.

My article aims to highlight some of the major barriers women face when obtaining an education, and also a potential solution to this problem.

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Tough Expectations
By Nilanga Aki Ediriweera Bandara

A little girl no more than five, a father she loved a mother

She never got the chance to know.

Her father loved her, gave her everything he had.

Her new mother did not.

She was expected to: cook, clean, stay at home……

Be a girl

Her brothers went to school and explored the realms of chakkare[*1].

While, she stayed at home.

Her brothers went out to play cricket with their friends on the field.

While, she stayed at home.

Her brothers went out to watch movies at the theatre.

While, she stayed at home.

Her brothers went to university.

While, she stayed at home.

Her brothers went on to become: doctors, engineers, teachers and dentists.

While, she stayed at home.

She stayed at home until she was married off at the age of Nineteen.

Her husband went to work.

While, she stayed at home.

Her children went to school.

While, she stayed at home.

Her children got married and left home.
While, she stayed at home.

She was my grandmother and she did not have the opportunity to get educated, hence I would like to dedicate this article to promote the education of women in the developing world

How can we create an education system that everyone can benefit from? How can we

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construct a system that does not discriminate and promote education as a privilege and not a fundamental human right? I believe that educating all human beings can make a true difference in the world. I would like to refer to a famous quote by Helen Keller: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Basically, Keller's point is that we as human beings can achieve much more if we work collaboratively, rather than working individually. Perhaps, this will light some fire underneath our feet and push us to think how we could effectively find ways to educate women in third world countries. It is imperative that we prioritize the education of women in the developing world because there is a direct correlation that shows increased female education rates are proportionate to the increasing success of such nation (Gakidou, Cowling, Lozano, & Murray, 2010 and also Summers, L. H., & World Bank e-Library. (n.d.).

With this in mind, why are we not taking the stance to educate women more proactively? Why are we not all out on the streets with a two by four that reads: "Educate women!"? It is evident that educating women has not been a top priority of governments in the recent years. Sure we have made progress but the situation has not really changed dramatically (Summers, L. H., & World Bank e-Library. (n.d.)). We must take proactive measures to ensure that females who are living in the developing world have the ability to educate themselves without being harassed by those claiming "Women should stay at home." How can we change these traditional beliefs? After my research, I came across four common obstacles women living in the developing world face when attempting to obtain an education- family, discrimination, distance and poverty. These four forces do not work independently, rather they are intertwined in society and therefore solving this problem has become even more arduous.

 Taking into consideration the family aspect of educating women seems to be one of the most tedious obstacles. Therefore, changes in the attitudes of family members can make a woman's life significantly better. Moreover, members of the family have many ways to influence and force women to do things that they would not normally agree to (Grewal, 2003 and also Alers, et al., 2014). For example, child marriage has often been cited as a primary reason why women in the developing world are unable to be educated appropriately as they are required to spend time as wives and not students (Wodon, Minh, & Clarence, 2016). Unfortunately, this fate is fairly common for girls [6] ; because of their family commitments, they do not have the time to engage in education. Another lingering issue, in terms of the family dynamic, is that there is a certain cultural stigma that is spread across the majority of households in the developing world; this is called the "women viewed as less than" stigma , in which women are labelled as "less than" men. This notion is very evident in Sharia Law- where women have little to no rights and freedoms in public when compared to the likes of men (Kooria, 2016).

Hence, it is evident that family members have a major impact on whether or not women in the developing world are able to obtain an education.

Distance to an institution that delivers education is another reason why women in the developing world are unable to educate themselves. In many cases, the distance to schools are very far, and the cost of public transit to these institutions are often unfeasible even if the service is available. Further, there have been many accounts by women that they have been abused (Leach, & Shashikala, 2007).) while heading to school and that these unsafe long walking to school journeys also contribute to their dropping out prior to receiving a basic education. Many would argue that we could have hostels for students, but I argue that their proposition is simply not realistic; there are many things that need to go into a proper run hostel and because of the myriad of stipulations- such as financing, liabilities and so on- we would not be able to provide adequate living

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conditions. **(Wasnik, V., Rao and Rao, 2012). So, this is not a feasible option or a flexible solution for this problem.**

Poverty can be considered the most predominant deciding factor that influences who can get access to an education in the developing world, simply put, education almost always requires a financial element as well. Poverty is widespread in the third world and the effect of poverty is known to the majority of those living in the third world; take for example subsidence farmers -they farm to provide the bare minimum for themselves- they can not afford anything more than the bare minimums.

So, how can they afford to educate their children if they have barely enough to get by? Further, if these farmers resort to using their own children as farmers, how can these children find enough time for their education? Therefore, when finding a practical solution, we must be aware that there are families those who can not afford to send their children to school and depend heavily on their children's support to run family ventures.

I believe that if we are to create a sustainable education system for anyone in the developing world, it is important that we ensure that their education is free. Thus, we, living in the developed world have an obligation to create a solution that will be funded externally.

Discrimination is yet another barrier that prevents women opportunities for knowledge, basic literacy skills and ultimately an education As I mentioned earlier there is indeed a lurking stigma in the developing world that directly places women as "less than" men. This stigma is not only found in the homes of those living in the developing world but within the hinges of society. Take for example the gender-segregated private schools in the developing world, in which boys have predominant access.

There is research that shows that there are more private schools for boys in the developing world than schools for both genders (Ashley, L.& et al., n.d.). Hence, it is evident that this stigma plagues not only individual households but society as well.

Obviously, any solution that is suggested must be unanimously supported and accepted by the likes of governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities and local leaders. How are we to unify all these different social forces together? I believe we need to first find a fundamental goal; this goal should set a target for all of our work and what we believe in: "To provide an unbiased education, that anyone who wishes to can join, regardless of age, gender or culture." I believe that through this collective objective we can collectively build a successful education system in the developing world for not only women but for all members of society. I believe that if we follow the core message of this goal we can, indeed, help educate those that have been discriminated, marginalised and oppressed get a true education.

Nonetheless, the current approach to solving the general problem of education in the developing world has been through the system of setting up local schools in various areas of the developing world (Houghton and Tregear, 1960).) I believe a benefit of this approach is that students can work within their community and help solve local problems, which is fairly beneficial.

On the other hand, some of the problems this solution encounters are that there is simply not a standard definition or set guidelines for where these schools should be placed. For example, there is no guideline to say if a school should be placed every 100 km^2 or a school for where there are 100,000 inhabitants, thus this is a major setback and why I think this current system is failing. Further, we run into a situation of staffing, how can we provide staff for these schools? I believe this is a critical downfall of the current

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system, as for how are we going to deliver a strong education system without a dedicated and qualified workforce? Based on personal experience, I know I would not be able to be where I am today without the unconditional support my teachers have given me throughout my educational journey.

I also wonder if these schools promote gender discrimination and view women as less than men. Is there a better solution that can help educate women in the developing world?

I believe a solution to this problem can be found through the open learning distance education model. I believe that this model is efficient, relatively cost-effective and can easily be personalized. There is growing criticism of a one-size-fits-all approach to education and knowledge transfer. To move beyond this traditional system of teaching and learning a new approach is urgently needed. There is a huge need to adapt "personalization" of education to our current learning environment both in the developed and developing world. It is efficient because this will help many of those who have other commitments, such as the children of subsidence farmers, obtain an education.

Nonetheless, it is also more cost-effective and reasonable than setting up a local school every "x kilometers" as everyone will have an equal chance to be educated.

Ultimately, I believe that distance education can be considered a genuine solution towards educating women in the developing world, however, it does come with its own challenges such as no face to face education -which is disadvantageous to those who learn kinesthetically and those who are auditory learners- and the cost of setting up a reliable access point will definitely be expensive and cumbersome. Additionally, how will this learning point be delivered?

As I mentioned before, the solution to the problem of educating women in the developing world is, indeed, a complex problem and requires the cooperation and collaboration between multiple parties. The solution is not a simple cheque, nor can it be achieved overnight; it will require years of hard work and dedication between the likes of thousands of people- especially local leaders, Government officials non-governmental organisations, and charities. I have a plan and believe before proceeding with the entire developing world as a whole, we should focus on a single country in the developing world and have a pilot project within this country to see how successful this proposed program could be.

Through pilot testing, we will be able to find out more about our demographic group - women- and see how they learn and what are the most effective ways of setting up a program that caters to their needs and learning style.

Further, we can test a variety of devices- such as laptops and tablets- and even apply for a discounted/donated rate from the likes of companies such as Microsoft which has it's own donation program called the Microsoft Citizen NGO Support Programme.

Therefore, this preliminary research and groundwork process is extremely crucial and requires patience and perseverance, as expected of any project of this caliber. Once we obtain some solid data, we will have to extrapolate it and try to create some best-fit measures that can be carried onto other countries in the developing world. I believe that this will be the best way to build our project.

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Ultimately, I believe a realistic solution to the problem of educating women in the developing world is through distance education as, to date , this is the most sustainable and practical form of delivering education in the developing world, where students are often separated by hundreds if not thousands of kilometers to their "nearest schools". In addition, it is not only the distance to these schools, but the cost of attendance can certainly add up; for example, it is not uncommon for students to pay an annual tuition and many also pay for transportation services to their school.

Furthermore, family commitments are taken exceptionally seriously in the developing world and it is important that these women have the opportunity to balance school with their family.

Hence, the solution to this problem lies in the realms of an innovative distance education system. How can we make this a reality?

I am happy to outline a potential policy proposal as a solution to this problem. I believe social entrepreneurs should step in and support this idea in order to make it a reality. Social entrepreneurs, indeed, could make a tremendous contribution to increase easy access to educational opportunities for these vulnerable women.

Moreover, social entrepreneurs could offer education and literacy training for many women in the third world by embracing an open learning model. They even can partner with international charities in order to successfully launch this education model for the benefit of women in the third world. I was reading a recent interesting and related article in the Huffington post (Kielburger, C. and Kielburger, 2014).

According to this interesting report, providing start-up capital to household based business could enhance women's access to education and literacy training.

The purpose of this start-up was to allow mothers to invest in school fees and materials for their daughters. The champion of this startup was a 21 year old Ugandan woman.

Through this socially responsible start-up, she was able to empower 400 mothers and helped advance women's education on a continent where 30 million women don't have an opportunity to go to school (Kielburger, C. and Kielburger, 2014).

*1 Chakkare, sinhalese for mathematics

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