

Committee: General Assembly 3 - Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian

Issue: Ensuring equal access to vocational and higher education in developing countries.

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Introduction

If education is the key to success, what is the key to education? More often than not, we fail to realise that education is a door with many locks. For approximately 57 million children around the world, particularly in - but not limited to - less economically developed countries (LEDCs), education is a luxury only afforded by those with the right combination of financial circumstance, geography, gender, and more. Furthermore, for those who *do* receive education, it may not be of great quality.

We already face a huge struggle when it comes to ensuring equal access to *basic* education; we face an even bigger struggle when it comes to ensuring equal access to vocational and higher education. Many LEDCs and developing countries rely on their primary, agricultural sectors due to a lack of such education, leading to a never ending cycle of reliance and inability to economically develop.

Definition of Key Terms

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, also known as Resolution 217, was adopted at the third session of the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, France. Out of the thirty articles in this document, article 26 is of particular importance to the issue of ensuring equal access to vocational and higher education in developing countries. Article 26 states:

1. 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.

2. 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.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Developing country

Also referred to as a 'less developed country' or an 'underdeveloped country,' a developing country is a poor agricultural nation seeking to become more advanced economically and socially. A developing country often has a less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index (HDI) in relation to other nations.

Human Development Index (HDI)

The HDI, according to the United Nations Development Programme, is a "summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living" (UN).

United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

The UNDP "works in about 170 countries and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion" (UNDP). Furthermore, "as the lead UN development agency, UNDP is uniquely placed to help implement the [Sustainable Development Goals]" (cite)

Vocational education

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, vocational education can be defined as "training for a specific occupation in agriculture, trade, or industry through a combination of theoretical teaching and practical experience provided by many high schools in their commercial and technical divisions, and by special institutions of collegiate standing (as a college of agriculture, a school or engineering, or a technical institute)."

Higher education

Higher education, also known as 'post-secondary education' or 'third level education,' refers to the optional stage of education beyond the secondary level, usually provided by colleges, universities, academies, seminaries, conservatories, and institutes of technology (Merriam-Webster).

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

According to the MDG Achievement Fund, an “international cooperation mechanism whose aim is to accelerate progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) worldwide”, the MDGs are “eight goals with measurable targets and clear deadlines for improving the lives of the world’s poorest people” (MDG Fund). The second of the eight goals should be taken into consideration, which is “to achieve universal primary education” by 2015 (WHO).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs, also known as the ‘Global Goals,’ are a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity” (UNDP). Goal number 4 is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN) with many subgoals. The subgoals that directly pertain to this issue are:

- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adult who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- By 2030, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrollment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in least developed countries and other developing countries (UN).

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

UNESCO is a specialised agency of the United Nations system with the main objective to “contribute to peace and security in the world by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science, culture, and communication in order to further universal respect for justice and the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the people of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion” (UNESCO).

Background Information

General overview

Before moving forward with the issue of ensuring equal access to vocational and higher education in developing countries, we must first understand the climate, or general situation, of basic education in these countries:

- In 2014, 61 million children of primary school age were not enrolled in school; 53% of these children are girls. (UNESCO)
- 11.07 million children leave school before completing their primary education in the sub-Saharan, whilst it is 13.54 million children in South and West Asia. (UNESCO)
- In developing countries, every additional year of education “can increase a person’s future income by an average of 10%” (Center for Global Development)
- The illiteracy rates for youth in South America and Europe are among the lowest, while Africa is home to areas where 50% of children ages 18 and under are illiterate. (UNESCO)
- A sample of 31 low and lower middle income African and South Asian countries showed that on average, an urban child is almost five times more likely to complete secondary education than a rural child. (World Bank Group)

“Even when children complete school,” says the World Bank, “they often do so without acquiring basic skills necessary for work and life. Education is a powerful driver of development and one of the strongest instruments for improving health, gender equality, peace, and stability.”

There are many factors that limit the development of developing countries and accessibility of education, whether it is basic, higher, or vocational. The factors include, but are not limited to: geography, gender, financial situation, quality, and political stability.

Geography

In many developing countries, it is extremely difficult for children, teens, and young adults to attend school due to the physical circumstances of where their schools are located versus where they live. For many, distance may be the problem; many rural villages do not have their own schools, so those who can afford education must take long journeys or live away from their families in order to attend school. Many people must bike or walk several hours in order to get to school. For others, the problem is safety; some must cross sloppily built bridges or wade through dangerous rivers in order to get to school. However, more often than not, those who must travel long, difficult hours in order to get themselves into a classroom choose not to go to school at all and opt to, instead, help support their families through jobs that require low level of skills..

Gender

The issue of gender is one that pertains mostly to basic education, which is carried on to secondary, higher, as well as vocational education. Gender inequality is very apparent in education in developing countries, most significantly in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, as shown in annually published Gender Gap Reports. In a poor family that can only afford for one child to go to school, it is much more likely that they would send their son than their daughter, regardless of age or potential. Sometimes, even if the family can afford to send more than one child, they choose to keep their daughters at home in order to ‘train’ them to become good housewives, then marry them off at a young age. These girls do not even have the chance to go to primary school to receive basic education, which means they have even smaller chance of receiving higher and vocational education. As a result, they lack skills and knowledge needed to find and keep a well-paid job or improve their own living conditions. Furthermore, due to their lack of education and vocational training, they must rely on their male counterparts, resulting in power imbalance and increased gender inequality.

Financial situation

As mentioned before, many families struggle to send all or any of their children to school due to the financial costs. This may be due to the financial cost of going to school itself such as paying for tuition, uniforms, books, travel expenses, or the opportunity costs of sending a child to school when they can ‘skip’ school entirely and stay home to work and provide for the family.

Quality

“Quality over quantity,” the saying goes. Unfortunately, many developing countries lack both quality *and* quantity when it comes to providing education. While striving towards providing free education to all in order to improve the accessibility, the physical quality of facilities tend to decrease including the quality of what is being taught itself. Some institutions, due to its low costs, do the bare minimum rather than really focus on providing people with the best means, skills, and knowledge to prepare them for a future.

Political stability

A very obvious limiting factor to access to and quality of education is a country’s political stability. Many of the least developed countries are politically unstable and/or facing civil war or unrest. As a result, many cannot attend school and must focus on staying safe and surviving. Education isn’t a priority when there is havoc within the country.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1948	The United Nations General Assembly adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
2000	The Millennium Development Goals are set
2015	The Millennium Development Goals deadline expires and the Sustainable Development Goals are set
2030	The Sustainable Development Goals deadline expires

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The following are United Nations resolutions that pertain to this issue:

- United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, 19 December 2011 (A/RES/66/137)
- United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all, 21 December 2010 (A/RES/65/183)
- United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), 20 December 2010 (A/RES/65/163)
- The right to education in emergency situations, 9 July 2010 (A/RES/64/290)

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