

EDUCATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATION PARTNERS WITH ROTARY

By Quentin Wodon, District Membership Chair

Gender inequality remains massive. A study published last week by the World Bank suggests that the cost of gender inequality in earnings could be as high as \$172 trillion in terms of lost lifetime earnings for women. What should be done to achieve gender equality? While investments in education are not the sole answer, they could go a long way to improve economic opportunities for women.

Girls' education matters, clearly. Research sponsored by the Global Partnership for Education suggests large benefits from investing in girls' education. Globally, the cost of girls not completing their secondary education is estimated at up to \$30 trillion. In sub-Saharan Africa, low educational attainment for girls leads not only to earnings losses, but also to child marriage and early childbearing, lack of decision-making ability in the household, higher risks of intimate partner violence, and higher risks for children to be stunted or die before age five. These effects are pervasive, as illustrated in recent reports for Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Chad-Mali-Niger-Guinea.

Yet boys' education matters too. Higher levels of educational attainment for boys as well as for girls tend to be associated with lower levels of violence in adult life. But in addition, how boys are taught in school is essential to change social norms that are detrimental to women. As gender-based violence remains widespread in schools, it may be reproduced in adult life. Violence in school is sometimes perceived by boys as an expression of their masculinity. Instead, schools should be safe. They should promote a culture of mutual

respect, between boys, between girls, and between boys and girls.

Governments play a leading role in efforts to improve educational opportunities for boys and girls alike, but civil society can help too, including by testing innovative approaches that can later be scaled up by governments, and by holding schools accountable to parents and students at the local level. This was a key message of the event organized on March 6 ahead of International Women's Day by GPE and Rotary International at the World Bank on the theme "Education for Equality." Some 200 people attended the event in person, and many more connected online. Apart from Alice Albright, CEO of the Global Partnership for Education, speakers included Keiko Miwa (Regional Director for Human Development in the Middle East & North Africa Region at the World Bank), Geeta Manek (Incoming Trustee of the Rotary Foundation of Rotary International), Carolyn Johnson (Rotary leader for the Guatemala Literacy Project), and Brenda Erickson (Rotary leader for the Project "Sounds" in South Africa, Puerto Rico and the US). The purpose of the event was to share a successful initiative led by women to improve literacy.

- Alice Albright announced that gender inequality would be at the core of the new GPE strategy being prepared. Together with Geeta Manek, she also announced a new partnership with Rotary International to improve education and school accountability with a focus on Kenya.
- Carolyn Johnson talked about an innovative project in Guatemala to improve literacy among indigenous populations through teacher training, a low-cost textbook rental program,

literacy materials, and computer labs. Together with intensive teacher training, the textbook program has helped decrease the middle school dropout rate by almost half, and more than 80 percent of graduates use their computer skills to further their education or get higher-paying jobs.

- Brenda Erickson talked about Sounds – a Montessori-minded, early literacy program through which educators and parents acquire tools to help children build their literacy skills by introducing a concrete letter in association with its most common sound in the child's language. The child first learns individual letter sounds, then how to build words by listening to spoken sounds, and finally how to read words by sounding out the letters. Sounds is easy to implement, does not require extensive training, and utilizes durable materials. Sustainability has been the key to progress as experienced teachers train new teachers.

Our new club, the Rotary Club of Washington Global (<https://www.washingtonglobalrotary.org/>) helped in organizing the event, with Clara Montanez from the Rotary Club of Metro Bethesda in the lead. A full recording of the event is available at <https://live.worldbank.org/equality-education>. The event demonstrated how all of us, whether through our professional or volunteer work, can make a difference towards achieving SDG4, namely to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. And if you are interested in these issues, you may be interested in our upcoming seminars on conflict and development for which a flier in this issue of our district newsletter provides more details (on page 11).