

**Gender Inequality in African Education:  
How Can the Lessons of South Africa Apply to the Rest of the Continent?**

Logan Gibson

*I*t is 6:00 in the morning, and eight-year-old Hlingwe eases from under the blankets of the small bed she shares with her two siblings—careful not to disturb them. Dressing quickly, she steps out into the cold South African morning and hurries through the dirt yard to the water pump her family shares with the cluster of surrounding homes in the township. Around her, other sleepy-eyed girls are also completing morning chores and she exchanges ‘good mornings’ with her neighbor, Sisile, as she balances the brimming bowl back up the walk. Once inside, she kindles a fire to heat the water and measures out a portion of the remaining maize meal. What little is left won’t be enough to get through the week, and the money her father gave her on his last visit is dwindling. She slips back under the partition, shakes her brother awake, and scoops up the sleeping baby. After serving them breakfast, she bathes the infant with the remaining water—hushing its shivering cries in the quiet desperation that it will wake up their ailing mother. At the first sound of the playful shrieks of children heading off to school, her brother grabs his bag and clamors out the door to join them. Hlingwe scans the disarray around her; the dishes will have to wait until later. Before leaving the house, she slips into her mother’s corner and sets down a bowl of meal and a hot tea with the crushed herbs the old healer recommended. Gazing down at the sleeping figure, she reflects on how long it has been since she was awakened by her mother instead of rising herself.

Picking up the baby and her school bag, she walks next door to the Gogo’s house. The old woman opens the door, takes the child, and Hlingwe continues down the dusty road to school. She knows the dangers of walking alone, but often, her duties are simply not done in time to leave with the others. Eyes down-cast, she hurries past the men sitting idly on their front stoops. One barks at her like a dog and she quickens her pace—hoping to catch up with the other children up the road.

By the time she arrives at school, she is exhausted and struggles to stay awake during the morning lesson. The teacher is reciting a poem called “Duties At Home”, and Hlingwe obediently recites the gender-specific chores within households.

“That is not quite the way it works,” she thinks to herself.

Hlingwe’s father is a migrant miner in Johannesburg. He returns twice a year to see his family and bring them what little money he has managed to save. She doesn’t remember him ever “driving to work,” “mowing the lawn” or “paying the bills.” Her mother is sick, and though she hasn’t been tested, Hlingwe is well aware of the presence of a disease called AIDS in the township. Other mothers and even some children have similar symptoms, and though she has heard that the government has free pills for those that qualify, they don’t have the spare rands to spend on a visit to the clinic. As she recites the

*poem, Hlingwe shifts the lists around in her mind, piling most of the responsibilities under the heading of “daughter.”*

*During the math lesson, Hlingwe gets anxious. Between cooking the dinner and caring for her baby sister and sick mother, she didn’t have time to complete her homework last night. Plus, she has never been good at math. It is a boy’s subject and she would only be teased if she excelled in it. She shifts around uneasily, worried that the teacher will call on her to complete a problem. When instead, she is called upon to go fetch water for the government-supplied lunch of maize meal, she hurries outside with the other girls selected—proud to have been picked and relieved to have escaped the laughter and taunting of her peers.*

*At the end of the day, she trudges back home, kicking a pebble through the dusty road ahead of her. She feels much older than her eight years and the thought of preparing dinner for the family gives her little joy. But she knows that she is one of the lucky ones. At least she is allowed to go to school. She hasn’t given much thought to her future, but she thinks she might like to be a dress-maker like the beautifully-clothed women at the market. Thinking back to the chores that await her at home, she sighs, vowing to take life one day at a time.*

**H**lingwe is “one of the lucky ones” but her experience exemplifies the reality that gender equality in schools is much more complicated than the mere equal enrolment of girls. The gendered division of household duties, entrenched cultural norms, a ‘hidden curriculum’ encouraging girls to pursue more ‘feminine’ studies and careers, and the fear of sexual violence are all realities for young girls all across Africa. Though South Africa boasts the leading economy on the African continent and has even achieved gender parity in enrolment, the problem of gender inequality within its schools has not disappeared. The experience of Hlingwe and countless girls like her highlights a need to examine the underlying causes of gender inequality. In an era of open competition and globalization, sub-Saharan nations can learn from South Africa’s successes and mistakes. For the development of the entire society as well as the human rights of women, protectionist policies must be adopted that encourage girls to attend and *stay* in school, and efforts must be made to combat the harmful gender

attitudes that are so pervasive in African culture. In order to adequately weigh and understand gender inequality, researchers and analysts must look beyond a resource approach to measuring equality and must account for the capabilities and freedom individuals have to make good decisions and flourish in society.

### **An Overview of Gender Disparities in sub-Saharan Education**

While the world noisily ushered in a new year on January 1st, 2006, another global deadline was silently missed. Target 4 of the UN Millennium Development Goals projected the “elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.”<sup>1</sup> While numerous gains in universal primary education have been achieved worldwide, sub-Saharan Africa lags behind all of the world’s regions and a gender gap only exacerbates the problem. Progress toward gender equity in primary education has been slow. Eleven of the 14 countries of the world where less than 80 percent of school-age girls are enrolled are in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>2</sup> In Africa, girls attend school for an average of only 2.82 years before they reach the age of 16. This is less than anywhere else in the world. Only 46 percent of girls enrolled in school in sub-Saharan Africa will complete primary school.<sup>3</sup> When one compares secondary school rates the numbers are much lower. Only 17 percent of girls in Africa are enrolled in secondary school.<sup>4</sup> In addition, drop-out rates are significantly higher for girls than for boys in secondary education. In sub-Saharan Africa,

---

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Millennium Development Report

<sup>2</sup> Data is from a United Nations Development Program report entitled “Sub-Saharan Africa: The human costs of the 2015 “business-as-usual” scenario” (2005).

<sup>3</sup> OXFAM report on Girls’ Education in Africa.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO 2003 Report.

about 50 percent of women are illiterate compared to about 30 percent of men.<sup>5</sup> Gender inequality in education and in employment is estimated to have reduced sub-Saharan per capita growth in the 1960-1992 years by 0.8 percent per year.<sup>6</sup>

### **Contributing Factors to Gender Inequality in Education**

Gender inequality in sub-Saharan African education is deeply-rooted and stems from a few persistent problems confronting African society, namely—poverty, gender roles and cultural traditions, HIV/AIDS, armed conflict and other crisis, and lack of infrastructure.

Girls are much more likely than boys to miss out on educational opportunities because of poverty. Hidden costs such as books, uniforms, food, and supplies often prohibit the education of daughters. On top of these direct expenses, the indirect or opportunity costs of lost income further decrease girls' chances of attending school. The gendered division of labor within the household results in higher opportunity costs for girls' schooling. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls spend four times as much time working on productive tasks in the household than boys.<sup>7</sup> Since girls' role in housework is so much greater, parents lose more 'free' labor by sending them to school than they do by educating boys.

National poverty rates also limit the accessibility of schooling. Countries with huge amounts of debt often have to make cuts in the educational spending. As a result, school facilities are poorly maintained, teachers are underpaid, unmotivated, and unqualified, teacher-to-pupil ratios soar, books and supplies are limited, and school fees

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Blackden and Bhanu, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> UNFPA- Gender-Responsive Program for Poverty Reduction.

rocket. Under these circumstances, families may be apprehensive about having their daughters traveling long distances on unsafe roads and they may see little value in such under-funded schools. In developing countries with poorly developed infrastructure and institutions, there may be little employment payoffs for pursuing a higher degree in education and the cost of life years invested, fees, and lost income could outweigh the marginal benefit of higher education.

Customary gender roles and traditions are another limiting factor on girls' education. Patriarchal social constructs and beliefs in male entitlement ensure that when educational opportunities are restricted, boys are given preference. Social customs concerning sibling obligations may imply that parents would ultimately benefit materially more from the education of boys than of girls, even given similar earnings.<sup>8</sup> Early marriage for girls is pervasive in many cultures, and especially where it is customary for the bride to be sent to live as part of the husband's family, parents may have little economic incentive to invest in their daughter's education. Out of wedlock pregnancy is considered a disgrace in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and the higher risk of sexual harassment and violence as well as a scarcity of birth control and family planning education contribute to the early marriage of girls and consequently, lower educational attainment.<sup>9</sup>

Too often, schools themselves contribute to the disproportionate ratio of girl/boy enrolment. There are few female teachers to serve as positive role models, and those that are teaching, are often unqualified and underpaid. In addition, teachers' attitudes often reflect, rather than question, the gendered attitudes prevalent in the wider society. A

---

<sup>8</sup> Colclough, Christopher et. al. *Achieving Schooling for All in Africa: Cost, Commitment, and Gender*. Ashgate: Burlington, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> GAP Report 2006

survey of educators in Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Senegal, Uganda, and Zambia found that their attitudes revealed distinct gender biases. The surveys revealed that these teachers believed that boys are more intelligent than girls and also that girls are naturally better at arts subjects while boys are better at science.<sup>10</sup> Outdated textbooks can reinforce these gender stereotypes, with boys depicted as active and girls as passive.<sup>11</sup> Female students are often under-encouraged in the disciplines of math, science, and technology and may not see the relevance of the learning material to future employment. Instead, women often find themselves in traditionally ‘feminine’ disciplines like nursing. This ultimately limits choice and diversification within the labor market. Countries must take measures to expand their infrastructure and economy to accommodate this level of development.

The gendered division of household chores is practiced within schools themselves—reinforcing the stereotype of women as ‘home-makers.’ In general, girls spend more time performing non-school activities during school hours, such as cleaning the classrooms, fetching water for the school, and performing tasks for the teachers.<sup>12</sup> Such expectations result in girls being timid and less self-confident of their abilities and serve to reinforce boys’ gendered perceptions. Gender sensitivity among teachers is vital for reversing the cultural norms that marginalize women into roles of domestic servitude and obedience.

The high infection rates of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa also serve as a negative force on girls’ education. The AIDS virus disproportionately affects young people, especially young women. Approximately a quarter of the 40 million people suffering from AIDS are between the ages of 15 and 24, and in sub-Saharan Africa,

---

<sup>10</sup> Colclough, 154.

<sup>11</sup> GAP Report 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Colclough, 153.

women in this age group are three times as likely to be infected as men.<sup>13</sup> Because of the entrenched gender roles in African society, women have relatively low bargaining power in negotiating relationships. In places where limited educational and economic opportunities exist for women, poverty pressures and family burdens lead women to trade sex for survival. Where women have low status, diminished financial autonomy, and are dependent upon men for support, abstaining from sex or insisting upon the use of condoms are simply not feasible options.

In addition, physical and sexual violence affect women's ability to protect themselves from infection. Refusing sex, inquiring about past partners, or demanding contraceptive use have all been described as triggers to sexual violence, and yet, these are all suggested as important behavioral guidelines in HIV prevention. While short-term remedies such as wider condom distribution and increased safe sex education should be priorities, much wider interventions such as increasing the economic and social empowerment of women must be improved to reduce women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and sexual violence.

The destructive impact of AIDS extends beyond those living with the disease—it has orphaned countless children in sub-Saharan Africa and has dramatically reduced life expectancy in many of these nations. With an average life expectancy of 46 years, many people in sub-Saharan Africa regard higher educational attainment as a poor investment compared with going directly to work. As a result of the magnitude of the pandemic, much international aid and attention is used to combat the disease, and consequently, the educational sector has suffered as resources and even teachers have been squandered to

---

<sup>13</sup> Kim, Julia. "Gaining a foothold: tackling poverty, gender inequality, and HIV in Africa." *BMJ* (2005). [www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/331/7519/769](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/331/7519/769).

the disease. A whole generation of orphans must now fend for themselves without the care and guidance of parents. Girls are regularly taken out of school to care for ailing family members or work to replace lost income, but the sad irony is that education is the best long-term way to curtail the spread of the disease.

One final factor limiting the equitable education of women in many sub-Saharan countries is the prevalence of civil conflict in the region. In the west, Liberia remains in an unstable peace, Sierra Leone continues to sink into oblivion, and Cote d'Ivoire teeters on the brink of civil war. Nigeria's fragile "democracy" seems more and more to be a misnomer. There is persistent conflict in Congo, and the genocide and displacement in Sudan show no signs of abating. Somalia has erupted in civil war once again (though one could argue it never stopped) and in the south, the once promising Zimbabwe has fallen victim to political and economic crisis. These are a few of the most glaring conflicts, and unsurprisingly, girls in these countries have precious few opportunities or capabilities to pursue their education. Famine is pervasive in many of these countries and newspaper accounts of Sudan describe the cost-benefit analysis starving families are forced to make when they decide to send their women out to collect food aid under the high probability that they could be raped in order to save the lives of the men, who would surely be killed by Janjaweed militias.

### **Why is Female Education so Important?**

Amartya Sen takes on the concept of human equality by establishing a theory that looks beyond utility or basic goods to capture the needs and capabilities of individuals. "Basic capability equality" embraces the notion that people should be able to do certain basic things such as meet their nutritional requirements, attend school, or fully participate

in society.<sup>14</sup> Sen argues that a focus on the capacity to act, rather than the bundle of goods consumed, best articulates egalitarian concerns, and he defines capabilities in terms of what a person can do or be. In the context of gender discrimination, women should be free to attend school, free to make their own sexual and reproductive choices, and free to participate fully in society. Though these measures are dependent on culture to a certain degree, restricting these basic rights is a violation of a universally accepted notion of freedom. Gender inequality is created by a system that restricts women's access to the public sphere by burdening and isolating them with private sphere responsibilities.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the moral argument for gender equality, there is a strong economic efficiency case to reduce the gender gap in education. Theodore Schultz coined the phrase *human capital* to refer to the characteristics within humans that make them productive. Using human capital theory, Schultz argues that investing in education builds human capital much like investing in machinery builds the physical capital of a firm.<sup>16</sup> This increases the productivity of the individual as well as the economy at large, and as a result of direct additions to the education stock, increases in national GDP can be expected.

There are several advantages to investing *specifically* in female human capital attainment. First, the marginal returns to schooling for women exceed those of men—especially in secondary education. Yale economist Paul Schultz found that returns to female secondary education are in the 15-25 percent range. This gender difference is

---

<sup>14</sup> Sen, Amartya. "Equality of What?" From the Tanner Lecture on Human Values, Stanford University, 1979.

<sup>15</sup> Mabokela, Obakeng. "The impact of race, gender, and culture in South African higher education." *Comparative Education Review*. 48.4 (Nov 2004): p396(21).

<sup>16</sup> Schultz, Theodore. "Capital Formation by Education." *The Journal of Political Economy*. Vol. 68, No. 6. (Dec. 1960), pp 571.

particularly present in populations where women have received significantly less education than men in the past, and consequently, in sub-Saharan Africa, the social return for female schooling is the highest in the world.<sup>17</sup> Providing girls with one extra year of education beyond the average boosts their eventual wages by 10-20 percent.<sup>18</sup> If women tend to be concentrated at lower levels of education than men, and the returns are generally higher at these lower levels, then from an economic viewpoint, closing the gender gap in years of schooling would be a more productive government initiative than increasing the overall distribution of schooling.<sup>19</sup>

A second reason investing in female education is so important is the positive externality of enhancing the productivity of future generations. Studies show that increased schooling of the mother is associated with larger improvements in child outcomes than is the increased schooling of the father. This has been proven in relation to birth outcomes and health as well and children's education. An extra year of girls' education can reduce infant mortality by 5-10 percent. This link is especially striking in lower income countries.<sup>20</sup> In Africa, children of mothers who receive five years of primary education are 40 percent more likely to live beyond age five. Multi-country data show educated mother are about 50 percent more likely to immunize their children than uneducated mothers.<sup>21</sup> In addition to promoting health, educating mothers leads to strong increases in the education of children. Children whose mothers have no education are

---

<sup>17</sup> Tackie, Nii, Meigan Fields and Arthur Siaway. "Education of Women as a Contributor to Economic Growth in Africa". In *Women in African Development*. Boko, Sylvain, ed.

<sup>18</sup> A 2002 study by Psacharopoulos and Patrinos.

<sup>19</sup> Schultz, Paul. "Why Governments Should Invest More to Educate Girls." *World Development*. Vol 30, No. 2, pp (201-225), 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Schultz, 1993.

<sup>21</sup> Gage et al. 1997.

twice as likely to be out of school than children whose mothers have some education.<sup>22</sup>

Not only are these women excluded in any meaningful way from bettering their own lives and becoming active agents in the national economy, they are crippling the chances of their children to recognize this potential.

In addition, increments to the nonearned income of mothers have been found to have a larger beneficial effect on the human capital and consumption of children than similar increases in the nonearned income of fathers.<sup>23</sup> For example, greater incomes of mothers can have up to 20 times the effect on the nutritional status of children than if the same income increment goes to fathers.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that women are more socially conscious spenders than men in general and empowering women to make more financial decisions within the household is a wise course of action.

A third benefit that increased female education can bring to society is the reduction of fertility rates. According to a 100-country World Bank study, when women gain four years more education, fertility per woman drops by roughly one birth. A 65-country analysis finds that doubling the proportion of women with a secondary education would reduce average fertility rates from 5.3 to 3.9 children per woman.<sup>25</sup> This evidence reveals that better educated women have smaller families, which in turn allows greater investments in the health and education of each child.<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, more educated women work more hours in the labor market and can have

---

<sup>22</sup> GAP Report 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Klasen, Stephan. "Bridging the gender gap to promote economic and social development." *Journal of International Affairs*. 58.2 (Spring 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Klasen, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

a large positive impact on economic growth. A better educated mother is more productive at home and in the workplace. She has fewer children and raises a healthier family.<sup>27</sup> A 100-country study by the World Bank shows that increasing the share of women with a secondary education by 1 percent boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percentage points. This is a substantial amount considering that per capita income gains in developing countries seldom exceed 3 percent a year.<sup>28</sup>

Paul Schultz examines the impact of the gender gap in schooling on the tax structure of a developing economy. The market labor supply of women is more elastic with respect to wage rates and education than that of men. This is because unlike men, family burdens ensure that women mostly work part-time in the market, and thus are able to increase their labor supply when their education and wages rise. About 66 percent of women's work in developing countries is unpaid compared to 25 percent of men's work. In addition, women are paid 30-40 percent less than men for comparable work. By redirecting human capital in the form of education for women, sub-Saharan nations could not only remedy the glaring disparities between wages rates for men and women, but they could broaden their tax base and help reduce distortions of consumption and production between market and nonmarket activities.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to these benefits, educated girls are less likely to contract HIV/AIDS. A study of Zambia finds that AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls.<sup>30</sup> Young Ugandans with secondary education are three times less likely than those with no

---

<sup>27</sup> Asiedu, Elizabeth and Donald Lien. "Women's Education, Labor Force Participation and Development in Africa." In *Women in African Development*. Boko, Sylvain, ed.

<sup>28</sup> Dollar and Gatti, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Schultz, Paul. p 215.

<sup>30</sup> Vandemoortele and Delamonica, 2000.

education to be HIV positive.<sup>31</sup> Also, a Kenyan study finds that girls who stay in school are four times more likely to be virgins than those who drop out.<sup>32</sup> For a continent that has seen its life expectancy actually decrease in recent years because of the AIDS pandemic, these positive externalities to increased schooling cannot be ignored.

These high returns to education for women can be universally applied throughout Africa, and many modern theorists subscribe to the belief that globalization will only further increase the gains that have been made in achieving gender equality in schools. But if South Africa is a lesson to the rest of the continent, than a considerable danger lies in the adoption of neoliberal policies without considerable social welfare spending. Economic progress without adequate attention to the underlying socioeconomic problems does not represent progress in every sense of the word. South Africa may have achieved gender parity in school enrolment, but prevailing demeaning cultural attitudes toward women and the persistent poverty problems betray a need for substantially more attention.

### **South Africa: A Case Study**

I chose to specifically focus my research on South Africa because of my personal experience in the country as well as the nation's prominent position as the leading economy and most stable democracy on the African continent.<sup>33</sup> At first glance, gender equity appears to be achieved in South African education. The enrolment ratio of girls to boys is almost equal in primary education and there are actually *more* female students in secondary and tertiary education than male students. Inversely proportional to the

---

<sup>31</sup> De Walque, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF Report, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> I spent the summer of 2006 completing my Shepherd Alliance internship as a volunteer teacher in the Mpumapanga province of South Africa in a town called Barberton. Mhola Primary, where I helped to teach a class of 60 form three students, was located in a poor district in the Barberton township.

increases in female education, fertility rates have fallen from 5.4 births per woman in 1975 to a rate of 2.6 per woman in 2000. The rate for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa is 5.3 births.<sup>34</sup> Despite these accolades, however, South Africa has a deeply engrained problem of gender inequality that stems from entrenched cultural beliefs and practices. These attitudes translate to the educational sector and exacerbate the problem of gender discrimination in education within the greater context of gender inequality in society at large. Ironically, schools have become both a source of this gender discrimination as well as a solution. A more in-depth analysis of gender inequality must be made that looks past the statistical gains the country has made and examines the structural causes as well as the human capabilities approach.

In light of South Africa's heavy history of segregation and racism, it is difficult to differentiate between the gender inequality experienced by white South African women and the inequality felt by black South African women. Almost all of the data is from post-apartheid South Africa and the first-hand accounts of gender discrimination in educational institutions that I have come across have all been written by black authors. Although the country is ethnically diverse, with large European and Indian demographics, 80 percent of the population is black African. For the purpose of this paper and its examination of the indigenous and entrenched gendered attitudes of the South African people and how their progress can inform the future development of sub-Saharan Africa, I will focus on the experience of the black woman in South Africa.

### **A Brief History of South Africa**

---

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Development Program, 2003 *Human Development Report*.

South Africa is celebrated as one of the greatest success stories in Africa's history. Following three hundred years of white oppression and 46 years of institutionalized racial segregation or *apartheid* by the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, the country underwent a peaceful transition to democracy under the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994. Thirteen years after the freely elected black-majority government came to power, South Africa is enjoying steady economic growth with a GDP that is nearly as big as those of the 47 sub-Saharan nations combined.<sup>35</sup> In 2001, GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP) in US dollars was \$11,290 compared to a regional level of just \$2,100 for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>36</sup> However, if this GDP is split according to estimated gender differentials, the female estimated earned income in 2001 would be \$7,047 which is less than half of the male estimate of \$15,721.

Much of South Africa's success can be attributed to its charismatic leaders. Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu facilitated the end of white rule without reprisals and the ruinous flight of whites through a highly public reconciliation process under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Thabo Mbeki, the current president, has received much international acclaim for his efforts to spur economic growth by abandoning the Marxist redistributive model that the ANC had promoted while in exile and embracing policies of good governance and liberal economics. However, it is important to note that Mbeki's free-market policies have been the topic of much controversy within South Africa itself because of the country's rampant poverty and the

---

<sup>35</sup> From *The Economist*, March 3, 2007 U.S edition, "Just lighten up a little; South Africa". The World Bank's 2005 Country Report for South Africa reports GDP at \$240.2 billion (current US\$). This represents an annual growth rate of 4.9 percent.

<sup>36</sup> UNDP, 2003 *HDR*. Without adjusting for PPP, these rates would be \$3,670 for SA and \$607 for SSA.

focus on economic development has arguably reduced the state's ability to fund education adequately.

Despite the successes and the relative prosperity that South Africans enjoy, there is a near-pandemic of poverty, inequality, and unemployment in the country. The Human Development Index has worsened from 0.73 in 1994 to 0.67 in 2003 and poverty still engulfs 48.5 percent of the population (21.9 million in 2002).<sup>37</sup> Income inequality has actually *increased* after the fall of the Apartheid government from 0.60 in 1995 to 0.63 in 2001.<sup>38</sup> The richest 20 percent of South African society enjoy 64.8 percent of the country's consumption while the poorest 20 percent share only 2.9 percent.<sup>39</sup> The unemployment rate stands at 25.6 percent in a country with a population of 45.3 million.<sup>40</sup> On top of these statistics, South Africa has one of the highest crime rates in the world<sup>41</sup> and the country hosts the largest number of citizens suffering from HIV/AIDS than any other country.<sup>42</sup> Without such a high prevalence of AIDS, South Africa's life expectancy would increase by 19 years.<sup>43</sup>

These statistics are particularly daunting for a number of reasons. At face value, South Africa has bounced back from years under an oppressive and authoritarian regime with astounding resolve. It has enhanced its position as the leading economy in Africa

---

<sup>37</sup> These statistics were obtained from the United Nations Development Program's 2003 South Africa Human Development Report. <http://www.undp.org/za/NHDR2003.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> This data is from the General Social Data Profile and was collected in 2003 by the African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development (CAFRAD) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

<sup>40</sup> This statistic was compiled by South Africa's Labour Force Survey and was published in the *Business Day* article, "Measuring Poverty in South Africa Not As Easy As Drawing a Straight Line".

<sup>41</sup> More than 18,000 people were murdered last year according to the March 3, 2007 *Economist* article, "Just lighten up a little"

<sup>42</sup> The World Bank Millennium Development Report publishes an HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in South Africa of 18.8 percent in the population ages 15-49. For women only, the rate in the age group of 15-24 is 25.6 percent—illustrating the 'female face' of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>43</sup> UNDP, 2002 Report. <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2002/en/pdf/charts-graphs.pdf>

and has become a solid beacon of democracy and human rights on a continent where genocide has a sad and lingering presence. However, a more critical analysis reveals the disturbing paradoxes of our globalized twenty-first century. Despite high global growth rates, African economies are actually declining economically. More than half (23 of 45) of African countries have experienced negative growth during the period 1975-2000.<sup>44</sup> Only six experienced growth over 2 percent a year. Just under half of sub-Saharan Africa's population—some 313 million people, survive on less than \$1 per day. There is considerable evidence that the demand for schooling has declined, as the quality and returns to schooling decline with the poor overall levels of economic growth. At the nexus between the First and the Third world, South Africa has seen the benefits of an exciting surge of technological innovations and global communications capabilities coupled with the despair of grinding poverty and swelling inequalities. At the present rate of progress, a globalized future holds little promise for the marginalized poor population and the benefits of equitable female education cannot be realized without increased attention.

### **Measuring Gender Inequality: From Resources to Capabilities**

The hidden nature of South Africa's gender inequity problem highlights the need for scholars and analysts to adopt a more comprehensive approach for measuring gender discrimination. There is no overt evidence common to the rest of Africa such as an unjust constitution or a glaring absence of girls in the classroom. South Africa has made great strides by encouraging and requiring her daughters to attend school, and these

---

<sup>44</sup> Kevane, Michael. *Women and Development in Africa: How Gender Works*. Lynne Rienner Publishers: Boulder, 2004. (Pg. 11).

achievements cannot be overlooked—but the discourse on gender equality cannot end there. These statistical gains have been stunted by the prevailing cultural attitudes of the people which still primarily view women as homemakers and possessions. If South Africa is to serve as a model or lesson for her less-developed neighbors, then the importance of measuring and confronting these attitudes must be realized. Adopting an analytical approach to understanding human equality that considers the capabilities and freedoms of individuals is vital to redressing the entrenched and hidden forms of gender inequality.

The prevailing method for measuring and understanding gender discrimination thus far has been the resource approach, whereby progress is measured by the funds and materials used to achieve gender equality.<sup>45</sup> Examples of resource measurements include the number and capacity of schools, student/teacher ratios, and the quantitative learning required to pass tests. Equality under this approach is understood in terms of the opportunities and outcomes available to students.

Compared to most sub-Saharan countries, South Africa scores remarkably high under resource criteria for measuring gender equality in education. In 2001, the female primary net enrolment ratio was 88 percent, which was 98 percent of the male enrollment ratio. Surprisingly, although the female secondary net enrolment rate was only 60 percent in 2001, this was 112 percent of the rate of male secondary enrolment. Similarly, female tertiary gross enrolment is merely 17 percent in South Africa, but this is 123 percent of the male rate.<sup>46</sup> According to the United Nations 2003 *Human Development Report*, the female adult literacy rate in 2001 was 85 percent, which as a percentage of the male rate

---

<sup>45</sup> Chisholm, L. and Jean September, Ed. Gender Equity in South African Education 1994-2004. HSRC: Cape Town, 2005, p 78.

<sup>46</sup> 2003 United Nations Human Development Report

is 98 percent. For youth ages 15-24, the literacy rate was higher, at 91.5 percent, which equaled the male rate for the same age group.

These findings show most acutely that enrolment rates for both boys and girls are severely diminished at higher levels of education, but also that gender parity in school enrolment has nearly been reached in primary schooling and that female enrolment has even surpassed male rates in both secondary and tertiary education. From a purely resource-based perspective, South Africa appears to have little problem with gender inequality within its schools, but a closer examination of the educational experience uncovers some lingering problems that must be addressed. The resource approach is the most mainstream in data analysis because it is the easiest to quantify; however, it does not account for important factors such as discriminatory cultural norms or the capabilities of individuals.

## Washington and Lee University

Amartya Sen devised a more subjective approach to measuring gender equality that looks beyond disparities in income or resources to examine the systematic differences in the freedoms that men and women enjoy in different societies. For instance, a young girl's aspiration to education and her capability to pursue that aspiration would be considered as well as her scores on standardized tests. Thus, the measurement of basic goods is sensitive to the differing specific needs and endowments of a person. While differences in wages constitute an important part of gender inequality in most societies, there are other differentials such as the division of labor within the household, the extent of care or education received, and the liberties that different members are permitted to

enjoy.<sup>47</sup> This approach tackles the root of the problem in South Africa where prevailing cultural attitudes about gender roles are inculcated at very young ages.

Unlike certain countries in Asia and North Africa where anti-female bias in nutrition or mortality frequently reflect differential female deprivation, sub-Saharan women are more likely to experience differences in other capabilities such as the freedom to pursue independent careers, the freedom to read and write, or the freedom to hold positions of leadership. South Africa has made considerable progress in these freedoms—indeed, 30 percent of seats in the South African parliament are held by women compared to a rate of just 3 percent in 1990.<sup>48</sup> The functionings at stake here, however, are much more complex and include such freedoms as having self-confidence within all academic disciplines, self-efficacy, and freedom from fear of sexual assault.

## Washington and Lee University

### The Hidden Nature of Gender Inequality in South African Education

The complexity of gender inequality in South Africa stems from its deep interconnection with other problems the country faces including racism, poverty, and disease. One cannot divorce gender analysis from these factors. Educational equality must be understood by a wider set of relationships influencing education and by the nature of power, discrimination, exclusion from decision-making, and denigrating portrayals.<sup>49</sup> The intersection of formal schooling with class, status, access to labor markets, and political and cultural processes helps to determine the level of equality.

The high levels of sexual violence in schools illustrate one way in which educational participation is not a simple function of enrolment and retention. A 2001

---

<sup>47</sup> Sen, Amartya. *Inequality Reexamined*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1992. (p. 122).

<sup>48</sup> UNDP, 2003 *HDR*.

<sup>49</sup> Elaine Unterhalter, ed. Chisholm, (p 78)

report by Human Rights Watch warned that sexual violence and abuse is hampering girls' access to education. The 138-page report, "Scared at School: Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools," documents how girls are raped, sexually abused, and assaulted at school by their male classmates and even by their teachers.<sup>50</sup> While it is mandatory to report child abuse in South Africa, the report describes how girls seeking help for their abuse generally received hostile or indifferent responses from school authorities. Schools would promise to handle the incidents internally and would urge girls' families not to contact police or publicize the problems.<sup>51</sup>

Sexual violence in schools is perpetuated by a high level of sexual violence in South African society. A study of gender attitudes and sexual violence-supportive beliefs (rape myths) in Cape Town, South Africa, revealed that over 40 percent of women had been sexually assaulted. More than one in five men openly admitted to having perpetuated sexual assault.<sup>52</sup> Cross-cultural research suggests that South African men often hold string traditional gender beliefs.<sup>53</sup> A study conducted by the International Center for Research on Women found that South African women do not initiate discussions about safer sex or tell their partners to use condoms because it is culturally inappropriate and also because it brings their own sexual behavior into question.<sup>54</sup> The Cape Town study also found that both men and women endorsed gender attitudes that represent traditional, submissive, and passive roles of women, with nearly all men and women stating that women should obey their husbands. Two out of three men and

---

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch, [www.hrw.org/english/docs/2001/03/27/safri324.htm](http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2001/03/27/safri324.htm)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Kalichman, Seth et. al. "Gender attitudes, sexual violence, and HIV/AIDS risks among men and women in Cape Town, South Africa." *The Journal of Sex Research*. 42.4 (Nov 2005): p299(7).

<sup>53</sup> Glick et.al. 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Kalichman, 300.

women agreed that there are many jobs that men can do much better than women, and one in three participants stated that women should not talk to men about sex.<sup>55</sup>

The subtle repression of women is demonstrated in one capacity by the lack of public voice women are granted in society. A recent study of the media revealed that black women are the subject of less than 5 percent of the stories reported over the past year.<sup>56</sup> Another example is the lack of female students in the disciplines of math, science, engineering, medicine, law, and commerce. Textbooks can often express gender biases. For example, pictures in senior secondary science textbooks found in southern Africa reinforce the image that natural science careers such as medicine, engineering, and geology are for men.<sup>57</sup>

Levels of employment are often used as indicators of the outcomes of education. Race and gender analysis of occupations in 2000 reveal South African women as significantly underrepresented in senior managerial positions, but nearly equally represented in the markets of services and sales. There are important racial dynamics at play, however, and further analysis reveals that it is largely white women achieving entry to the top professional occupations.<sup>58</sup>

A study by the National Commission of Higher Education found that in the nineties, women occupied 32 percent of the total research and teaching positions. However, the report further noted that although women comprised 89 percent of the

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Chisholm, L. and Jean September, Ed. Gender Equity in South African Education 1994-2004. HSRC: Cape Town, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Mannathoko, 449.

<sup>58</sup> Elaine Unterhalter, ed. Chisholm, (p 86)

junior lecturers, less than 3 percent of professors were female.<sup>59</sup> In addition, academic women published less often than men.<sup>60</sup> These disparities no doubt have profound implications for female students in higher education. Not only is there a substantial lack of female role models and professors, but the female voice is glaringly absent from academic discourse.

There is substantial research on the tendency for South African women to give priority to the apartheid struggle before taking action against gender violence and inequalities. Anecdotal and historical evidence shows how some freedom fighters were sexually harassed and abused by their fellow male freedom fighters, but they suffered in silence because they believed in the priority of political liberation and gender issues could come after the country was liberated.<sup>61</sup>

Using the more comprehensive “basic human capabilities” approach coined by Sen and Nussbaum, it is apparent that despite the achievement of gender parity in South African enrolment, there is still substantial inequity and discrimination within the school system. If girls are in a constant state of fear of sexual violence or self-doubt over subjects that are considered to be gender-specific, than they’re aspirations and capabilities will certainly be shaped by these insecurities. Establishing an educational environment where girls are allowed to flourish is critical to redressing the history of inequality in the country.

### **A History of the Structural Influences on South African Education**

---

<sup>59</sup> Mabokela, Obakeng. “The impact of race, gender, and culture in South African higher education.” *Comparative Education Review*. 48.4 (Nov 2004): p396(21).

<sup>60</sup> Mannathoko, Changu. “Theoretical Perspectives on Gender in Education: The Case of Eastern and Southern Africa.” *International Review of Education*. Vol. 45. No. 5/6. pp. 445-460.

<sup>61</sup> Mannathoko, 451.

From indigenous education to colonization to globalization, South Africa has seen a diverse interweaving of influences on its educational system. Long before the imposition of the Western education system by Europeans, South Africans had a quasi-formal traditional indigenous form of education. An example from the Xhosa people demonstrates the accepted practice of gendered education: “girls of the same age were formally taught a curriculum that included child care, household management, moral behavior, motherhood, and hygiene by selected, experienced, respected, and community-approved women, women who were morally beyond reproach.”<sup>62</sup> Boys were similarly isolated in initiation schools where they were taught “hunting, farming, manhood, virtues and moral behavior, and bravery under the tutelage of specially trained and experienced teachers.”<sup>63</sup> At these earliest glimpses of educational history, schooling was strictly gendered. Boys were taught by their elders to fulfill the role of protector and provider and girls were raised to be homemakers—obedient and respectful of the opposite sex.

With Dutch colonization in 1652, the future trajectories of South African education were changed forever. With the implicit notions of “superior” and “inferior” cultures, the colonizers took on a mission to “civilize” the African people. The result became a deeply racially segregated educational system, which remains a lingering aspect of the apartheid legacy. The 1979 Education and Training Act, which replaced the Bantu Education Act, perpetuated the hegemony of whites by giving them complete government control of a separate and inferior black educational system.<sup>64</sup> Issues of racism and sexism were ubiquitous in South African society, and black women faced the double hardship of

---

<sup>62</sup> Mkosi, Nkosinathi. “International Financial Institutions and Education in South Africa: A Critical Discussion.” *African Education and Globalization: Critical Perspectives*. Lexington Books, 2006. (pg. 152).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Mkosi, 153.

fighting racial injustice as well as gender-based injustice. There was no educational stability during this period of unrest and what education women did receive was of little value in a market and labor force from which they were largely excluded.

When the ANC-led coalition government came to power in the democratic transition of 1994, they revoked the racist and inferior apartheid educational system and replaced it with a multicultural system based on democratic values and social justice. Nkosinathi Mkosi argues, however, that by adopting neoliberal policies, the government has lost the autonomy and power it needs to combat the lingering legacies of segregation and poverty.<sup>65</sup> The country is guided by a new global paradigm. In exchange for promises of development and entry into the booming global market, South Africa must contend with international institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and their standard policy prescriptions of reduced government intervention and market competition. Though South Africa can now tout itself as the most developed nation on the continent, the social problems of inequality, unemployment, and poverty have only deepened as a result of this liberalization. The impact of these imposed institutional policies have been a reduction in the state's ability to fund education and other social services. For a country dealing with centuries of official segregation, the damage can be seen in the high drop out rate of students and problems with access to adequate education.<sup>66</sup>

### **The Globalization Paradigm and Institutional Harm**

---

<sup>65</sup> Mkosi, 154.

<sup>66</sup> Abdi, Ali A. et. al. *African Education and Globalization: Critical Perspectives*. Lexington Books: Oxford, 2006.

Mkosi argues that by adopting aspects of structural adjustment programs, the World Bank and the IMF are able to influence and direct the policy framework, nature, and practice of education in South Africa. Where gender roles are entrenched and harmful, this influence can be a positive force of change, but Mkosi acknowledges that the intensification of globalization has created educational programs whose primary goal is to produce a multi-skilled workforce that services the market productivity.<sup>67</sup> The introduction of the outcomes-based education (OBE) paradigm in post-apartheid South Africa is partly a response to the need for a more productive work force.<sup>68</sup> Most importantly, Mkosi argues that the pressure of international institutions on borrowing nation-states to perform economically results in detrimental cuts in education and social spending. Indeed, along with his initial failure to acknowledge the link between HIV and AIDS, the main critique of Thabo Mbeki's administration has been the lack of wealth redistribution to provide basic services for the country's poorest population.

Without additional focused state action, growth-oriented policies do not improve the quality of education—especially for women.<sup>69</sup> Martha Nussbaum extensively studied the effect of global forces on female education: “Our world is increasingly dominated by the profit motive, as multinational corporations and global markets increasingly leach sovereignty away from national governments. The dominant economic paradigm encourages continued insensitivity to the situation of the world's poorest people and to the special disadvantages suffered by women.”<sup>70</sup> Education is vital to the development of

---

<sup>67</sup> Mkosi, 157.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> This conclusion was drawn by comparative field studies of the Indian states by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen.

<sup>70</sup> Nussbaum, Martha. “Women's education: a global challenge.” *Signs* 29.2 (Winter 2004): p325.

central human capabilities such as bargaining power within a household or sexual relationship, access to the political process, and access to the legal process. Even to bring a charge against someone who has raped you, you have to file a complaint—an impossibility for an illiterate woman.<sup>71</sup>

My own experience confirms the inattention and ambivalence that is given to many of the public schools in poor areas. When I arrived in the Barberton township for an 8-week volunteer teaching experience at a local primary school, I was virtually handed a class of 60 from three students. I had no teaching experience or grasp of the siSwati language. The Swazi teacher I was shadowing suffered from AIDS and was frequently absent. When she did show up, she was weak and unable to sustain the energy to teach for very long. Though she was always kind to me, her moods were irritable with the children and she was intolerant of any form of noise or excitement in the large class.

The school's resources were stretched very thin. We taught on a black board with chalk. There was no copy machine and a shortage of exercise books, so the children took turns painstakingly copying the worksheets into their notebooks before completing them—making each lesson a long and inefficient undertaking. Of the 1000 children at Mhola Primary, all were black and all were desperately poor. From my observation, I doubt more than a handful of them will graduate to secondary school with any fluency in the English language—a skill essential to pursuing better employment in South Africa.

The South African public school system suffers from a serious lack of resources and by not training the teachers to have gender sensitivity instead of reflecting the attitudes of mainstream society, female students are not provided with a suitable environment to develop their capabilities. Teachers (like everyone else) represent their

---

<sup>71</sup> Nussbaum, 8.

own class, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, and as such, will translate their views, prejudices, values, and standards to the class unwittingly. The content of what is taught is equally as important as the gendered attitudes that teachers project. Curriculums require interpretation, and it is imperative that teachers be savvy and reflect upon and include the promotion of gender equality in their lessons.

### **Academic Freedom and Pogge's 'Do No Harm' Philosophy**

Important questions about the academic freedom of teachers to teach however they wish arise from this discussion. To what extent (if any) should the government intervene with teaching methods and styles? Similarly, what right do I have as a foreigner to impose my moral prescriptions of justice on a culture I am not a part of and know very little about? If one subscribes to Thomas Pogge's philosophy of moral universalism and global economic justice, such examination on my part is not merely an act of interest or solidarity, it's a *duty*—and a negative duty to be exact.

Pogge's philosophy can be troubling to the altruistic soul. He makes an important distinction between negative duties and positive duties. Instead of suggesting that the rich citizens of the world have a positive duty to give aid to the poor, he argues that every global citizen has a *negative* duty to reform the institutions that do harm to the poor but benefit the rich. Thus, one has a simple obligation to 'do no harm.' If the global pressures of capitalism and free trade have indeed resulted in educational cut-backs and inattention, then according to Pogge, the citizens of affluent countries have a negative duty to reform these institutions. Many people would argue that such a drastic overhaul is not practical and may not even be possible.

In reference to the question of deference to foreign cultures, Martha Nussbaum makes two crackling retorts: “First, cultures are not museum pieces to be contemplated; they are lives of human beings to be lived. So it is inappropriate to romanticize any aspect of culture that is either misery and injustice or linked to misery and injustice. Second, cultures are not monoliths. They do not contain a single set of norms and a single normative tradition. They contain real people jockeying for power and opportunity.” I was confronted with smaller-scale dilemmas over whether or not to take some sort of action against norms I found disturbing several times during my volunteer teaching experience. One episode stands out in particular.

For hygiene purposes, both the boys and the girls at Mhola Primary were required to crop their hair short. For the first week, it was nearly impossible for me to differentiate gender without glancing under the tables to see whether the student was wearing the uniformed pants or skirt. In my third week there, the Swazi teacher I was partnered with dragged a small boy to the front of the room and beat the child repeatedly on the skull with a stick while the rest of the class roared with laughter. In shock, I asked the teacher what he had done and she replied that the boy was actually a little girl who had worn her brother’s pants to school because she was cold. She told me that this was a serious embarrassment to her family and needed to be punished.

My inner turmoil at witnessing this event was three-fold. First, it was one of the many instances of corporal punishment I observed and I never acclimatized to the severity and harshness of physical reprimand. Most often, the teacher would patrol the tables while the children were working and rap those who were slacking off or those who were “being untidy” (in her words) on the head with a ruler or a stick. But occasionally,

she would single out a child for reprehensible behavior and beat him or her at the front of the class for all to see. From my observation, she was not discriminating about gender when punishing the children, and as a result of the beatings, the class was the most obedient group of eight-year-olds I have ever seen in my life. This could be a severe impediment to learning, however, as they were most likely too intimidated by the fear of punishment to question learning material and lessons with care and natural curiosity. And much of what was being taught was simply wrong!

Secondly, I was shaken at the reaction of the class. The Swazi teacher 'kept such a tight ship' that the only two times the children were really allowed to act like children were at lunch (when they would go absolutely wild from being suppressed all day) and these small allowances of open-forum taunting of their peers. Instead of empathizing with the poor girl, the class erupted in screams and laughter at her misery. It was such a cruel reaction that I placed more blame on the insensitivity and irresponsibility of the teacher than the students themselves.

My third objection was with the nature of the charge. It was a cold morning and the girl had followed her natural instinct and put on pants instead of the knee-length skirt girls were required to wear to school. Most of South Africa (and especially the younger generation) is fairly progressive in their choice of dress, and outside of the school setting, pants such as jeans would have been quite acceptable. I thought the punishment was unfair, embarrassing, and that it perpetuated the notion of gender inequality within the school instead of promoting unity and acceptance. Those were just my internalized reactions, however. I did not stop the beating or confront the teacher about my feelings. I only asked questions later so I could better understand what had happened.

I believe that the teacher's actions were morally reprehensible and they damaged not only the self-esteem of that little girl, but the self-efficacy of other girls in the room. In addition, I believe it reinforced the boys' acceptance of traditional gender roles (e.g. she was wrong to wear pants and the appropriate punishment is to beat her.) Although I disagreed with the teacher's actions, I did not believe I had the right or the authority to intervene and stop them. I do, however, think that they are harmful and should be corrected.

### **Conclusions and Policy Prescriptions**

South Africa highly values the education of its daughters. Primary schooling is compulsory and enrolment is nearly at one hundred percent of the school-age population. As we have examined earlier, this does not ensure, however, that schools are productive and hidden forms of gender discrimination are not present. The problem of gender inequality in South African education is most thoroughly perpetuated at the crucial impasse of cultural attitudes. As African women struggle to support their families and pursue an education, these social norms threaten to unravel their progress. The emphasis on expanding access cannot be divorced from the importance of redressing the cultural marginalization and subordination women are subjected to. Sen's capability approach to understanding human equality places vital importance on the subjective feelings of inadequacy or insecurity in order to determine the freedoms individuals are allowed to live their lives to the fullest.

Though girls are now attending school as much as boys, the real problem with enrolment lies in the high drop-out rates at the secondary level and the dismally low rates

of tertiary school enrolment. Poverty is the biggest factor in a child's decision to drop out of school. According to the GHS 2005, half of the non-attendance rate in South Africa is attributed to financial or opportunity costs. The cost of schooling accounts for 37 percent of drop-outs, and another 13 percent of children leave school to earn money or work at home.<sup>72</sup> To encourage female enrolment and discourage high drop out rates, governments should reduce the cost of schooling to parents with daughters. This can be achieved with a variety of policies. Building more schools that are closer to the communities they serve, reducing tuition for females, providing girls with subsidies for specific supplies such as books and uniform costs, and extending fellowships for girls to attend private boarding schools where local secondary schools are not available are all different options.<sup>73</sup>

Enrolment rates in Uganda jumped 70 percent after fees were cut as part of major school reforms. Total girls' enrolment went from 63 percent to 83 percent, while enrolment among the poorest fifth of girls went from 46 percent to 82 percent.<sup>74</sup> Also, in Tanzania, attendance doubled after eliminating fees.

In addition to eliminating direct costs of schooling, governments must compensate for opportunity costs such as household work and labor that poor families must forgo by sending their daughters to school. Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) are one such initiative that has been hugely successful in Latin American and Caribbean countries. By making the receipt of the money conditional on school attendance and health-care checkups, these programs link safety-nets directly to human capital

---

<sup>72</sup> "Help for Poor Children Ends Too Early, Says Review." Article from Feb. 5, 2007; [www.allafrica.com](http://www.allafrica.com).

<sup>73</sup> Schultz, Paul, 217.

<sup>74</sup> Bruns and Deininger, 2003.

development.<sup>75</sup> In most cases, CCTs are provided directly to the mothers under the assumption that they are more likely to spend the money to benefit their children. Most CCT programs have the dual objectives of short-term poverty alleviation and long-term human capital development. One major benefit of the programs is that they provide a certain amount of disposable income to poor families. One could argue that in-kind benefits or free universal schooling would target spending more specifically on the objectives, but the freedom of choice (however small) that comes along with these cash transfers is an important component of household empowerment, and by giving the discretionary power to the woman, it is more likely that the welfare of the family will be considered. In my research, I haven't come across any CCT programs that target female enrollment in sub-Saharan Africa specifically, and I would like to see experiments that examine the affects of conditional cash transfers on the human capital accumulation of African women.

It is easy to examine and blame a country's domestic institutional order for injustices present within the nation, but in an age of globalization with rapid-firing synapses of institutional interconnections, it is no longer feasible to lay the blame for poverty or even gender inequalities on purely internal choices. Pogge argues that for such an advanced global civilization to be sustained, all must aspire to a single, universal concept of justice, which must be respectful of a certain degree of diversity within institutional schemes in order to be universally accepted.<sup>76</sup>

Pogge's philosophy of moral universalism extends the obligation to take action to all levels of society. In our global age, it is the collective responsibility of the world's

---

<sup>75</sup> Davis, Benjamin and Sudhanshu Handa. "The Experience of Conditional Cash Transfers in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Development Policy Review*, 2006. 24 (5): 513-536.

<sup>76</sup> Pogge, 33.

people to structure a system where all participants have secure access to the objects of their human rights. While the government may be the prime benefactor of human rights and the prime measure of official disrespect, the crucial guardian of these fundamental rights is the people. Thus, respect for human rights is sustained most deeply, not through the actions of politicians or policemen, but through the attitudes of the people and is shaped by the system of education and the economic distribution.<sup>77</sup> A Zambian girl's educational deprivation or inequitable schooling is of moral concern to all citizens of the world.

The worldwide problem of unequal female education cannot be solved by domestic policies alone, and the global institutional order must bend to the necessity of human rights and equality. Promoting growth is not a sufficient way to promote education for women, and indeed, development theorists that focus solely on maximizing economic growth are likely to shortchange female education.<sup>78</sup> Additional focused state action must be applied to specifically target and empower women.

South Africa's position as the leading economy on the African continent ensures its importance as a model for many African countries as they struggle to break free from corrupt practices and embrace the economic growth and human rights reform that result from democratization. But as these African nations struggle to break into the global market, they must be mindful of the importance of equitably educating their women both from a moral perspective and an economic efficiency perspective.

---

<sup>77</sup> Pogge, 63.

<sup>78</sup> Nussbaum, Martha. "Women's education: a global challenge." *Signs* 29.2 (Winter 2004): p325.

Washington and Lee University