Lack of education making women 'powerless'

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Lack of education is robbing women worldwide of their full potential, argues Barbara Matera.

Every year, international women’s day (IWD) is celebrated on 8 March to honour women all around the world for their exceptional achievements to combat the oppression of their gender. This celebration has been held since 1911 and continues to be a momentous day in the lives of millions of people around the world.

Various organisations designate their own theme for IWD but this year the overarching theme will be, 'make it happen'. Parliament's gender equality and women's rights committee has decided to look at the importance of education for women.

In many developed countries, the number of educated women across all levels has risen considerably, but a large amount of underdeveloped nations suffer from a lack of women in education.

As a result, these countries and people cannot be as productive as they could be, and are not only harming themselves, but also the world as a whole.
"Only around 30 per cent of all girls worldwide have made it to secondary education and more than 66 per cent of all university students are male"

Only around 30 per cent of all girls worldwide have made it to secondary education and more than 66 per cent of all university students are male [1]. In sub-Saharan Africa for example, most girls only receive two years of education and do not learn to read or write, nor are they able to perform basic arithmetic.

In some African countries, fewer than one out of 200 women attend university. In addition, over two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women.

The gender gap in education in developing nations is extremely problematic. Without education, these women are powerless, and in many places, governments are fully aware that education is power, and this is why they suppress women's right to education.

We recognise that education is power, and hope that the rest of the world can too. Education can help millions of women all around the world realise their potential and empower them to change the world for the better. It can boost their confidence in their own bodies, health and minds, helping them to feel more empowered to stand up for themselves.

On average, a girl who completes seven years of education will have 2.2 fewer children. A woman who completes even just basic education can reduce her chances of contracting HIV threefold.

Children who are born to mothers who have at least completed secondary education are twice as likely to live past the age of five.

Education for women is on the rise, but a lot of work remains. By giving women proper education on par with that of their male counterparts, we can empower them to change the world for the better by living longer, healthier lives and contributing to the great social human capital.

We celebrate the great progress that has been made over the last century, and look forward to working towards equality across the board. By not educating women and suppressing their skills and talents, it is not just them we are robbing of what they could be - it is the world.

About the author

Barbara Matera (EPP, IT) is a vice-chair of parliament's women's rights and gender equality committee

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