



WE CANNOT ALL SUCCEED WHEN HALF OF US ARE HELD BACK

GLOBAL EDUCATION FOR GIRLS

IN CONTEXT

PRIMARY QUOTE
Malala Yousafzai, 2013

KEY FIGURE
Malala Yousafzai

BEFORE

1981 REPEM (Red de Educación Popular entre Mujeres) is set up to further education for women and girls in Latin America.

1993 The World Conference on Human Rights asserts women's right to "equal access to education at all levels."

AFTER

2030 World leaders vow in 2016 to deliver free access for all girls (and boys) to primary and secondary education by 2030, and affordable tertiary education or training.

2100 By this date, all children in low-income countries should complete primary education, based on economic trends cited by UNESCO in 2016.

The third item on the United Nations' millennial list of development goals was to promote gender equality and empower women. One specific target on the list was to have as many girls as boys enrolled in primary and secondary education by 2005. By 2006, progress had been made—more girls than boys enrolled at primary level in all developing regions—yet by 2013, 31 million girls still had no access to primary education. UN Women, which works for gender equality, reports that two thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate people are female.

Feminist advocacy groups support the UN goals, but feel they focus too narrowly on the economic benefits of learning. They emphasize that education is both a right and a means of shaping future women, building their confidence and meeting their aspirations. They suggest other issues should be questioned, such as how girls are taught, whether school curriculums

In Swaziland, two sisters walk to school. The Swazi government introduced free primary education in 2009, but many school principals require extra fees from parents.



See also: Education for Islamic women 38–39 • Intellectual freedom 106–107 • Fighting campus sexual assault 320

“
Let us pick up our books and our pens, they are the most powerful weapons.
”
Malala Yousafzai

should be more inclusive, and what forms of further education are available to meet local needs.

Local activists

In many countries, women's groups are working at local and national levels to educate girls and women—sometimes against the odds. The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), founded in 1977, ran underground schools for girls and boys during the Taliban era (1996–2001), when education for girls was banned. It was resistance to a similar ban in Pakistan's Swat Valley, occupied by the Taliban in 2009, that set Malala Yousafzai, then a schoolgirl, on the path to becoming a world-famous activist for girls' education.

Local women's groups also advocate adult education. In Mexico and Central America, for example, they are working with the global advocacy organization Women Deliver to implement Personal Advancement and Career Enhancement (PACE) programs in their communities.

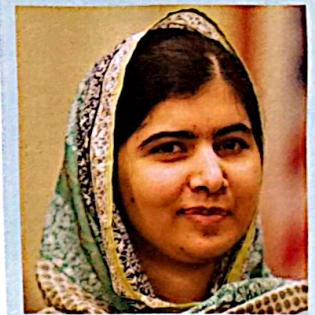
The Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) promotes female education at both child and adult levels in sub-Saharan Africa.

Founded in 1992 by five women ministers of education, FAWE now has 35 national chapters. It campaigns for policies that treat girls and boys equally and programs to help adult women return to education. Its network of mothers' clubs in Zambia, Gambia, Liberia, and Malawi offers adult literacy classes as well as activities that generate income. The mothers, in turn, raise awareness of the benefits of girls' education.

A global concern

Gender disparities in educational access are not confined to the developing world. In the US, while more women than men gained doctoral degrees in 2016 for the eighth year running, it is still clear that African American and Hispanic girls perform less well than white girls educationally, though the gap is narrowing. They are, for instance, five times more likely to be suspended. The racial education gap remains a challenge in the developed world, while global target dates for gender parity in education and lifelong learning lie well into the future. ■

“
When girls are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous.
”
Michelle Obama



Malala Yousafzai

Yousafzai was born in the Swat Valley of Pakistan in 1997. She grew up there under the Taliban occupation, which banned girls from education. Defying the ban, she attended school and wrote anti-Taliban blogs that promoted the importance of education for girls. In 2012, while returning home on a bus after taking an exam, she was shot in the head; two girls beside her were also injured. Flown to the UK for a life-saving operation, she has since campaigned tirelessly for the rights of girls' education and also campaigned against Taliban extremism. In 2014, she won the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the youngest Nobel Laureate. She set up the Malala Fund which finances various schools in war-torn areas. She is currently studying at the University of Oxford while continuing her advocacy for education.

Key works

2013 *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (co-authored with Christine Lamb)