

Forum: United Nations Development Programme

Issue #21-01: Measures to promote and protect the right to education for under-represented groups

Student Officer: Gabrielle Hodes

Position: Chair of United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), as of 2011, 101 million children were not in school. This number is mainly concentrated in areas with many under-represented groups. These groups include girls and women, people living with disabilities and special needs, those who are ethnically different to the majority of those living in the region, and families that simply don't have the resources to provide education to their children. This problem may be demonstrated by lower levels of enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools, less resources allocated to schools that under-represented groups attend, and segregation of these children in mainstream schools. The lack of children enrolled and present in school is due to multiple reasons, such as poverty, and other conflicts, as wars and political disputes, that use most of the government's funding. This leaves less money for the development and sustainability of education systems.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has published many reports regarding these minorities and their importance for development. These documents specifically state that both direct and indirect discrimination play a role in the lack of education for these groups. For example, there could be less schools and other educational establishments where these under-represented groups tend to live. Even though the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), effective as of 4 January 1969, requests that nations ensure equal access to education for all, eradicate and eliminate discrimination in access to education, as well as ensure that there is no discrimination regarding the quality of the education that these children receive (article 5(e)(v).) , under-represented

groups continue to be denied the right to education in many developing nations.

This issue is most relevant in developing nations, especially in Africa and the Middle East, such as Niger, Mali, and Saudi Arabia. As LEDCs, these nations have the most to lose from the lack of education, because it causes other problems to worsen. This biggest problem with the lack of education is the continuation of the poverty cycle, and the hindering of development worldwide. This is due to the fact that the undereducated people are unable to get a job or contribute to the country's economy, hence slowing the growth of the nation. As the United Nations Development Programme, the effect of the issue is particularly relevant, which is why it is crucial to come to a plausible solution as soon as possible.

Definition of Key Terms

Under-represented groups

By dictionary definition, under-represented group is a cluster of people that are provided with insufficient representation within society as a whole. In this case, these groups are often excluded from the education system in their nation(s). People who fall into these categories include: women, those with disabilities, those living in poverty, and linguistic minorities, among others.

Marginalization

Marginalization is defined as the treatment of a person or organization as unimportant or irrelevant.

Poverty Line

The poverty line is the estimated minimum income in order to meet one's basic necessities for survival.

LEDC

LEDC stands for less economically developed country, and refers to nations with lower GDPs and capitals than others.

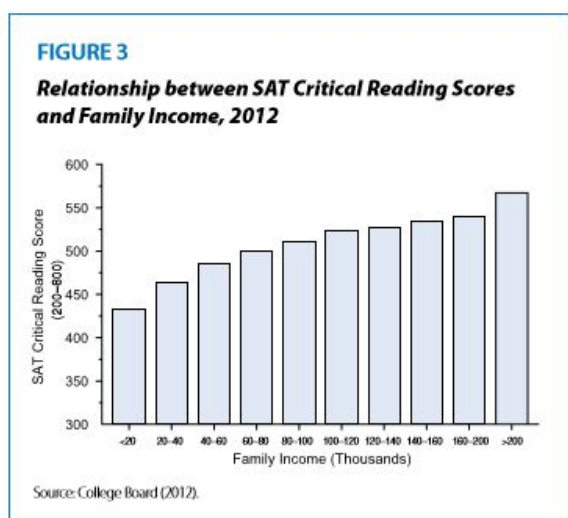
Equal opportunity

The idea of treating citizens without any discrimination and not denying them educational opportunities based on race, ethnicity, or sex.

General Overview

There are many sociopolitical factors that lead to a continued lack of education for under-represented groups. Poverty and marginalization, religious or conservative ideals, child labor, financial deficit of LEDC governments, and other conflicts within nations are just a few examples of causes of this ongoing issue. Children who live in poverty are less likely to receive

quality education, especially those who identify as part of an under-represented groups. This happens in both developed nations and LEDCs. We can see how this affects the United States through the graph provided by the College Board on the left. This examines the relationship between family income and standardized test scores. We can see that the teenagers that score the lowest come from very low-income backgrounds.



This issue also affects young children. Infants who live in poverty are less likely to be proficient in various cognitive skills. As we can see from the Figure 1, children who live in poverty tend to have less-developed cognition than those who live at or above the poverty line (National Center for Education Statistics). The listening comprehension and expressive vocabulary levels of the low-income

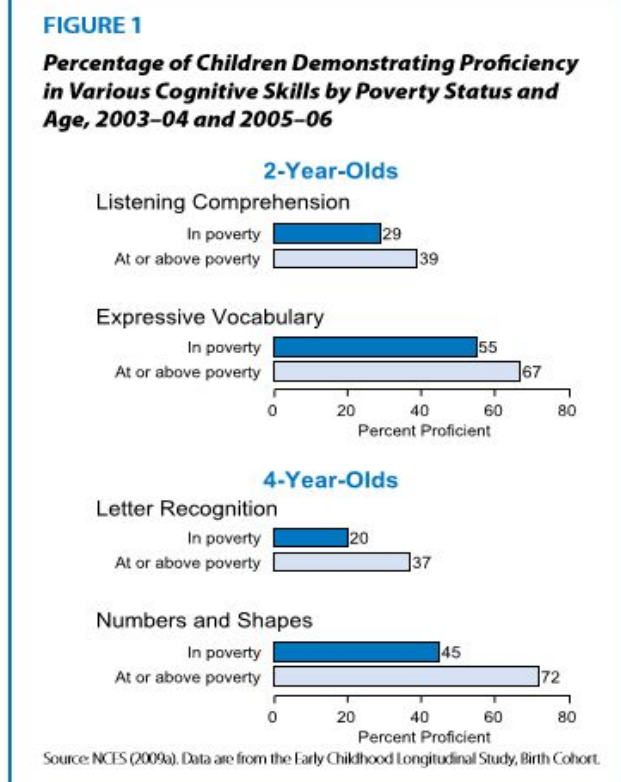


Figure 2: Half of all out-of school children and adolescents in

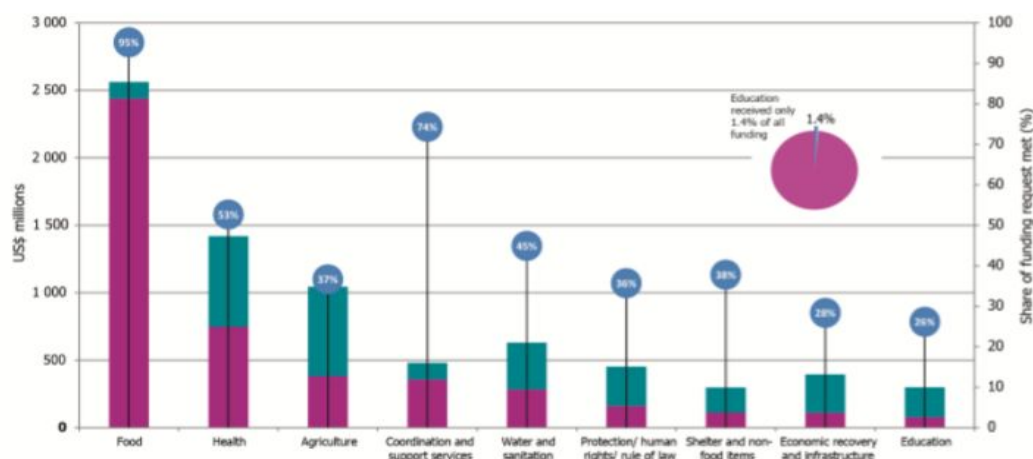
2-year-old children is much lower than that of the other children. The letter recognition and number and shape recognition of the 4-year-old children who live in poverty is much lower than the others as well. The majority of these economically-challenged families tend to be racially under-represented groups* within the population of the nation.

Another important cause of the lack of education for under-represented groups is the existence of other conflicts within the nations that these groups call home. According to UNICEF reports, half of out-of-school children live in conflict-affected countries, 22% of which are primary school age. For example, under-represented group families living in war zones have much less access to education than other families living within the area. Children belonging to these groups are losing their fleeting opportunity of education due to conflicts in their countries. For example, a Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, was shot on her way to school, and some of her other female classmates were also victimized during the same attack. Political instability in nations like Pakistan is an important reason as to why children, especially under-represented children, are failing to receive education. Other conflicts that impede education include natural disasters, refugee crises, and many more.

There is yet another issue that lies in the way of education for under-represented groups, and that is a shortage of monetary funding going towards education around the world. According to the graph, we can see that education receives a much smaller share of humanitarian aid and funding than other issues such as food, health, and agriculture. This means that less schools are built, and the pre-existing ones suffer from a lack of qualified teachers. For example, monthly salaries of teachers in Afghanistan remained at \$35 per month for more than eight years, despite promises many officials had made increase this number (Open Society Foundations). Unsatisfied

Figure 2: Education receives a small share of humanitarian aid

Funding received against amount requested per sector, 2012 consolidated appeals and flash appeals

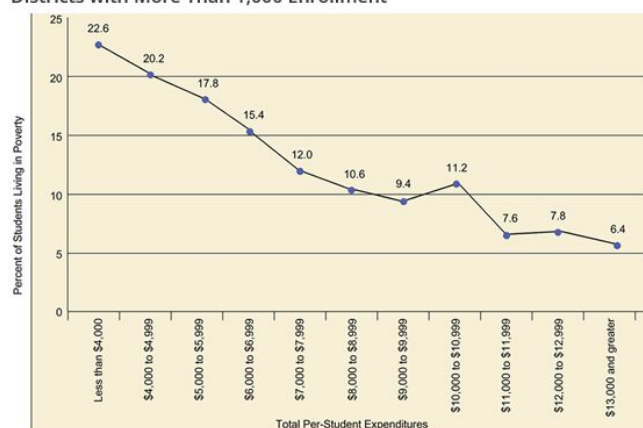


teachers lead to strikes, yet again impeding education for those in need.

Another consequence that branches from a lack of funding is little or no structure to education systems in developing nations. Referring again to the Afghan example, there was no solid curriculum for secondary school until after 2010 (Open Society Foundations). As of 2009, only 40% of the nation's schools operated in permanent buildings, other children were receiving education in UNICEF plastic shelters. The lack of permanent infrastructure continues to hinder the development of educational systems even today.

Nonetheless, the absence of well-spent capital is not only an issue in LEDCs. In the United States, a Department of Education report found that school districts are distributing their

Figure 3. Total Per-Student Expenditures Versus Student Poverty Rates for U.S. School Districts with More Than 1,000 Enrollment



Source: Prepared using information from the Common Core of Data for 1995, *School District Data Book*, National Center for Education Statistics (2000b).

already-limited funds in an inequitable way. This means that high poverty and under-represented groups level schools are receiving less than what's meant for them. However, the schools that do receive extra money are not spending less on specialized teachers and learning systems, as well as their students, than those

who don't have this extra funding.

One other problem that contributes to the lack of education for under-represented groups is child labor. Since 2000, the number of 5-17 year-olds who work has declined by 30% since 2000, a total of 168 million children continue to form a part of the labor force worldwide according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). In their 2015 report, *Child Labour and Education – Progress, challenges, and future directions*, the ILO analyzes relationship between child labor and access to good-quality education for children. They found that regions that struggle with child labor have lower primary school enrollment rates. They also found that child

labor negatively affects school attendance in general—in some countries, attendance of working children is about half of other children. Lastly, they found that these working children tend to be part of an underrepresented group.

To summarize, poverty, lack of funding, other conflicts, and child labor are all sociopolitical factors that contribute to the continued lack of education for under-represented groups. All of these factors tend to affect women, people living with disabilities, and those living below the poverty line consistently, and they become more of a priority than education, which means that those affected are sacrificing that limited opportunity because of their unfortunate situation. This process, repeated generation after generation, is what truly leads to the lack of education, therefore hindering development and growth overall.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States

The United States is a fairly good example to follow regarding this matter, as the Department of Education, run by the government, is consistently working to improve the quality of education for under-represented groups. These students also have the opportunity to receive grants from the government or private entities, such as the 3M Foundation and the Aga Khan Foundation, that go towards further schooling and other educational opportunities.

Mali

The West African nation of Mali has made much progress over past years regarding education, especially for women. Even though only about fifty percent of teachers have been formally trained, the average amount of years of schooling has increased from five to be about eight. Moreover, the primary enrollment rate has more than doubled, while still reducing the teacher-pupil by about 14 ratio to 41:1.

Norway

The Kingdom of Norway is placed number one on the United Nations Education Index. It's

position is partially due to its mean years of schooling being at approximately seventeen, and to its high percentage of gross enrollment, from primary to tertiary education. Regarding under-represented groups, the nation guarantees the right to education, and implements several programs specifically geared towards these groups. For example, the Minister of Education debuted a strategy-plan geared towards “equal education in practice” in 2007 (Ministry of Education and Research: Equal education in practice! 2007-2009), which aims to improve overall academics of children that are part of under-represented language groups.

Saudi Arabia

The history of education for under-represented groups, especially women, in Saudi Arabia is complex, considering the past and present religious environment. The Middle-Eastern nation is a kingdom, where Islam is the official religion, which establishes it as a very traditional and conservative society. These values often affect if/how children, especially women, receive education (if at all). Despite this, the literacy rate of the total population has been steadily growing for the last fifty years, and according to the CIA World Factbook, has reached 91.1 percent for women (2015).

Niger

The West African nation of Niger places at the very bottom of the United Nations’ Education Index, as the average amount of schooling for their 21 million citizens is only one and a half years. It is also the country with the lowest adult literacy rate worldwide, at just over 15 percent. This issue is especially bad for under-represented groups. In 2012, a mere thirty percent of girls enrolled in primary school, the other seventy percent finding it to be too much of a financial struggle.

Timeline

Date	Description of event
1817	The first school for disabled children in the Western Hemisphere, the American

School for the Deaf, is founded in Hartford, Connecticut.

1882	In the US, the second set of Jules Ferry laws established compulsory education for both sexes until age 13.
1975	The Sex Discrimination Act makes it illegal in the United Kingdom to discriminate against women in work, education and training
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later renamed Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is passed in the United States which establishes the right to public school education for those with special needs
1979-1980	United States Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF) forces states such as California to comply with Department of Education regulations regarding special needs education
1995	The United Kingdom establishes the Disability Discrimination Act gives some new rights for disabled people in employment and access to services
2000	DREDF hosts a symposium in Washington DC that includes advocates and people with disabilities from 58 different countries in order to discuss laws regarding education of those with special needs, including the entirety of the IDEA.
2006	The parliament in Ghana passes the National Disability act, to ensure the protection of rights, such as the right to education, for those with disabilities.
30 March 2007	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is signed that explicitly states the importance of education at all levels for these people

(article 8)

24 January 2014 New Tunisian constitution officially recognizes women's rights, especially to education

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations has been involved in the approach to this issue, especially since it is encompassed in Goal 4, Quality Education, of the Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically, target 4.A states that the organization is aiming to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.” This goal is meant to improve education programs overall, however, it specifically includes children that belong to under-represented groups that have not been receiving the education they are entitled to.

Different branches of the United Nations have been collaborating with each other to effectively tackle this issue, through strategies such as targeting specific geographic areas. For example, ECOSOC has been working specifically in Central America and the Caribbean in order to “incorporate minority groups that remain excluded from the education system.” (Central Education Issues in Latin America and the Caribbean). This program is just one example of how the United Nations has taken action in order to improve the education of under-represented groups. The following is a list that elaborates further on how the UN has specifically done this:

- The General Assembly officially adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities in 1992. This document addresses rights that under-represented groups hold, including the right to enjoy their own culture without interference, and the right to participate in nationwide decisions-making, etc. Moreover, involved parties are asked to improve education for these children, especially so they can attain knowledge of the history, traditions, language and culture (Article 4.4)

- In Durban, South Africa, The United Nations held a World Conference Against Racism, that lasted from August 31st to September 7th, 2001, where the attendees discussed the protection of the rights of under-represented groups.
- The 51st session of General Assembly discussed Agenda Item 110 (b) which included a Secretary-General Report on the Effective promotion of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities
- The United Nations also helped draft constitutional bills regarding minority protection rights. For example, on December 19th, 2002, they were involved in the passing of Article 88 of the Croatian Constitution regarding the rights of national minorities in the nation
- On March 30th, 2007, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is signed. This document is a starting point for many nations in making their societies more equal, especially due to article x regarding education of these people.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

As previously explained, the United Nations has been thoroughly involved in the tackling of the issue of education for under-represented groups. Many branches of the organization have been involved in drafting important documents such as the Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. These have all been valid steps in the effort to solving this problem, however, the problem persists, even in regions whose countries signed these documents. For example, the African nation of Niger has a 1.5-year average amount of schooling per citizen, where this average is significantly brought down by children who belong to under-represented groups.

Nonetheless, that is not to say that nations haven't improved since these strategies have been put in place. For example, the literacy rate of women in Saudi Arabia has been steadily growing for the last 50 years. Also, many European nations have been an example of effectively involving under-represented in their education systems. These countries include Norway, Denmark, England, and Sweden. Overall, educational opportunity levels have been steadily

climbing over the last few decades. This can be attributed to the work of many NGOs and the United Nations, but also to the public holding governments accountable for education for the upcoming generations.

Possible Solutions

Even though education in general is often in the global spotlight, lack of education for under-represented groups is a section that isn't talked about as often. Although there are some outliers, most nations agree that education is vital for the continuation of growth, and for the furthering of development. In order to improve the inclusion rate of these groups, it is vital to raise awareness for the problem, but more importantly, to the programs that are part of the effort to tackle it. One way to support these organizations is to supply them with more funding, so they may continue and expand on existing projects, as well as branch out to create new ones. Some NGOs include: Urdu Education Society, National Education and Welfare Society, and People's Life Education Alternative. It is also crucial that these programs continue to receive support from communities, through individual volunteers and partnerships other companies and non-profit organizations in order to make their work as effective and sustainable as possible. People who play a role in legislature must step up and use their position and their medium to further the cause.

Bibliography

UNDP Marginalized Minorities. United Nations Development Programme,

www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/UNDPMarginalisedMinorities.pdf

“Human Development Reports.” | *Human Development Reports*,

hdr.undp.org/en/content/education-index

Disability Rights Timeline History Timelines,

http://www.yodisabledproud.org/organize/docs/PRIDE/5_High_School/Unit_3_High/3_1h-History_Timeline.pdf

Poverty and Education: Finding the Way Forward. Educational Training Service

https://www.ets.org/s/research/pdf/poverty_and_education_report.pdf

“Human Development Reports.” | *Human Development Reports*,

hdr.undp.org/en/content/education-index.

“Afghanistan: Education in a War Zone.” *Open Society Foundations*

www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/afghanistan-education-war-zone.

Education For All Global Monitoring Report, Children Still Battling to Go to School.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002216/221668E.pdf>

“More Than 40% of Low-Income Schools Don't Get a Fair Share of State and Local Funds, Department of Education Research Finds.” *U.S. High School Graduation Rate Hits New Record High* | *U.S. Department of Education*, 30 Nov. 2011,

www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/more-40-low-income-schools-dont-get-fair-share-state-and-local-funds-department-education-research-finds

“Press Kit: Issues - Multi-Ethnic States and the Protection of Minority Rights - World Conference Against Racism.” *United Nations*,

www.un.org/WCAR/e-kit/minority.htm.

Central Education Issues in Latin America and the Caribbean, ECOSOC

<http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/newfunct/pdf/2.central.education.issues.pdf>