

## Girl's Education- a Strategic Tool to Enhance the Role of Women in Society(Part I)

Written by By Assefaw Ghebrezghiabiher

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Universally speaking, women have been deprived of their rights for quite a long time due to erroneous beliefs, age-old social prejudices, misguided judgments and various misconceptions. As a result, fate has been ruling their lives. Against all the odds and undeterred by pervasive problems, girls have managed to overcome all the problems and come to the fore and make miracles on all fronts. What seemed impossible and unthinkable in the distant past has now become possible and they had proved that they could perform what the other sex could.

Many have already played or are still playing pivotal roles as presidents, prime ministers, chancellors or as competitive political leaders, ministers, community elders, consultants, researchers, managers, etc in various countries. The number of influential women in international positions is also not deniable. As leaders and managers, they have attested their trustworthiness and still are doing many valuable activities in stepping up productions and had contributed their part in national development. This has been possible thanks to their perseverant and emancipator struggle for disentangling themselves from all forms of prejudices. Education has served women as a tower of strength in their aspirations. Majority of the outcomes are achieved through education and a look at the following can illuminate the dire need of education for citizens in general and women particular:

The platform for action adopted in Beijing in the year 1995 underlines: "Education is a human right and is an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys, and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and empowers women in decision making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for women, has an exceptional high social and economic return, and has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth".

Despite the aforementioned fact, it is a common experience to see women in general and female children in particular being subjected to a multiple of traps set in society since long. Justice didn't serve them right during this centuries-old oppression. As a reaction to such

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maladjustment in society, resolute women activists and suffragettes have raised their voice and spoke their minds to get women's rights in society. The role and advocacy of various international partners is also something that can't be passed unnoticed.

International forums, like Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and other organizations, national union of students, women and youth in different countries have played a crucial role to echo the grievances of such occasions. However, the results shown so far are not as satisfactory as anticipated, especially in some underdeveloped countries of the world. To view what went wrong; and what mechanisms should be adopted to bring change to the world, education has to be viewed not as a special privilege but as fundamental human right. As a right, it is to be exercised by everyone regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, economic disparity, nationality or geographical differences, and health barriers. As a life-long process, it should be accessible anywhere, anytime and under any circumstance. Such right has been ratified by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (of 1948); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (of 1966); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women(CEDAW); Convention on the Rights of the Child(CRC) and by many others. But international instruments per se are not enough nor can the education of the girl child be accomplished by mere wishes and whims. It needs the concerted efforts of many partners mainly that of the parents, the school and the social milieu at large.



The school is the point of fortification to what has started to send roots at home, in this multi-faceted role of women in the heartbeat of any society. Education is the locus of lasting socialization for the youth of a country. It systematically and gradually moulds the child and equips him/her with life-long values, systems, norms, or new technological innovations that pass on from generation to generation.

Nonetheless, education is not and cannot be an answer to all questions nor can it be a panacea to any social maladies but what is certain is education is a potent force for social development and is an entity in shaping one's future. As a result educating women who compose half of the society becomes an obligation in attaining social development.

In order to launch this lofty mission, objectives need to be identified; policies need to be drafted and ratified; strategies to be devised.

As stated earlier women, as key social figures in community management educating a girl child means educating the whole family. The educated girl child of today is the potential, effective

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mother and social manager of tomorrow and shall be the forerunner of a family upon whose womanhood vested more responsibility; whereas the uneducated girl will remain dependant and docile in her life.

According to recent studies, an educated woman also plays a crucial role in preventing HIV/AIDS. In a recent research by the UNICEF's transition to post-primary education study, "Simply keeping girls in school longer is an effective defense against HIV, the study shows that in Uganda and Zimbabwe girls who received primary and some secondary education had lower HIV infection rates than those who did not attend school."

In another study published in November 2007, by Save the Children, this selfsame fact has been reinforced by Herz and Sperling in 2004: "An increasing body of research shows that more educated people, especially youth, are less likely to engage in risky behavior and contract HIV."

There is high correlation between education and health. Educated woman will have a wide horizon and opportunities and also improves the life style of her family and society in addition to many other advantages that the educated woman will implement in her society. UNICEF also emphasizes that couples with fewer number of children will invest more in health and education of their offspring.

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