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# Enhancing social policies to improve women's access to education, healthcare and development opportunities

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## Introduction

Enhancing social policies to improve women's access to education, healthcare and development opportunities is a crucial issue that must be addressed immediately. This issue is extremely relevant because in various regions women's access to developmental opportunities are not being considered, and even neglected. Specifically, social policies should be improved to acknowledge gender equality. Worldwide, billions of women do not realize that basic rights have been taken away from them, and their ability to learn, gain independence, and grow using core skills is not an option. Women should have the right to have access to education, healthcare, and development opportunities just like every human should, which is why social policies concerning these matters should be enhanced. In Afghanistan, women are prohibited from pursuing development opportunities, as the political ideologies are rooted in gender roles, where only 37% of the women's population complete secondary education compared to the higher statistic of 64% of the men's population. This deep-rooted concept suppresses room for advancement and sparks tension and inequality between men and women. Promoting equity is especially important and can be done by addressing the issues at hand; political obstacles, and core issues related to gender mistreatment.

Additionally, the foundation of this issue lies within the human rights department, as enhancing social policies to improve women's access to self-development opportunities is directly related to the establishment of women's rights. That is the biggest, most vital step into taking action on this issue.

Enhancing social policies is about keeping the core ideas of the already existing policies but further developing them to correspond with the matter of women's access to development opportunities. Furthermore, enhancing social policies should be a priority; women's rights are something that have been politically addressed in numerous cases, however to this day, no solution has been fully implemented. Restricting women from access to basic education, healthcare, and development opportunities takes a backwards toll on a country's economy because of the reduction of human capital and productivity in various fields of work, also weakening work efficiency. Society should work towards integrating women in society rather than restricting their input, as that hinders economic advancement and backs away inclusivity in communities. It is certainly possible to improve women's access to education, healthcare, and development opportunities by enhancing policies – it is just a matter of how this is executed.

## Definition of key terms

*Conditional Cash Transfers, Development opportunities, Gender-based discrimination, Gender gap, Gender Parity Index, Human rights, Menstrual Health Management, Patriarchy, Reproductive health rights, Sustainable development goals, Social policy*

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) – Financial support given to families from the government or organizational programs based on certain conditions such as sending girls to school, giving vaccinations, or attending general health checkups.

Development opportunities – opportunities for people to enhance their skills and train themselves to become better at a certain task, skill, or advance in their wellbeing.

Gender-based discrimination – Discriminating people based on biological gender differences and using gender stereotypes to treat individuals unequally.

Gender gap – A measurable gap stressed between men and women regarding various fields, such as receiving education, having basic healthcare access, and employment.

Gender Parity Index (GPI) – Statistical measure to find the percentage of women against men having access to educational opportunities to ensure that equality is being promoted.

Human rights – Fundamental access to one's individual freedom and protection, striving for one's own needs.

Menstrual Health Management (MHM) – Ensuring that women feel safe and are protected in terms of their feminine hygiene, ensuring that women have access to sanitation facilities, clean water, and feminine products.

Patriarchy – The ideology that men hold the power in a society and uphold most of the roles with authority, dominance, and leadership, prioritizing them in cases of decision-making, carrying titles such as “the man of the house”.

Reproductive health rights – An individual right, especially for women, ensuring that one has individual access to obtain freedom in terms of reproductive health, such as family planning, abortion decision-making, and having the access to safe maternal care.

Sustainable development goals (SDGs) – A set of 17 goals established by the UN, aiming to address political, environmental, and social issues to promote equity and develop an inclusive society by 2030, focusing on gender equality, equal access to education, and quality education.

Social policy – laws implemented by governments to ensure that the social well-being of each individual is protected.

## General Overview

### *The root of the issue*

Enhancing social policies to improve women's access to education, healthcare and development opportunities; the issue that remains unsolved, despite the numerous attempts, discussions, and goals implemented to touch on the problem. The root of the problem starts at the concept of gender mistreatment and begins with patriarchy - the ideology that men hold the power in a society and uphold most of the roles with authority, dominance, and leadership, which ultimately stems from biological differences between men and women. The key is to acknowledge these differences without using them to undermine one sex over the other and promote equality by enabling equal access to various development opportunities for both men and women. The reason to prioritize women in this case is because women are not provided with nearly as many development opportunities compared to men, as seen from statistics that have been established by the UN. This is why enhancing social policies to improve the state of this present inequality is urgent, and most certainly, necessary. From an early stage, this concept has been normalized and been developed into a social norm as well as a standard that society must uphold.

Income inequality is a corresponding issue that exemplifies how social factors can be broadened to develop the concept of social determinants, the idea where these social issues become more large-scale and affect individuals in terms of health and development outcomes. What is being failed to recognize on a widespread level is that women's contributions to society positively affect economies, endorsing inclusivity, efficiency, and stronger work foundations.

### *Women's contribution to the British war effort WW1*

A key, crucial example lies in the war efforts of WW1, a time where women and men's differences actively fed into the patriarchal standards of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women's direct contributions to the British war effort were through the number of different roles they took on; they strongly affected the WW1 circumstances in Glasgow because when their community needed them, they stood up. WW1 opened new chances for women to change their stereotype and partake in war efforts. Nationalism was widely used to convey a sense of responsibility for the women's community. This emphasized women's roles' strong effects on the WW1 circumstances in Glasgow. As the percentage of women in Glasgow working increased, (especially in munitions), British militarism was aided as they were provided with weapons and ammunition. This was crucial for the British military's development. Additionally, the economic stability of Glasgow remained sustained throughout the duration of the war. These were direct implications of women's contributions to the British war effort. "The role of women in securing victory cannot be underestimated; indeed, one of the reasons that Germany lost the war in 1918 was that she never succeeded in fully mobilizing her female population" (Castelow, 2017). This ultimately highlights women empowerment and shows women's capability in various fields of work, opposing the gender barriers and fighting the gender gap.

*Recent relevant examples*

COVID-19 – The global pandemic COVID-19 took a toll on women’s access to education, healthcare, and development opportunities. In many cases, this global crisis worsened pre-existing gender inequality issues. With educational foundations closing due to lockdown, education was on a halt, and it was difficult to do the process virtually for women in LEDCs. Additionally, the crisis weakened many countries’ economies, creating mass unemployment and job instability. This exemplifies how a major global crisis weakened the stability of social policies intending to discuss women’s developmental opportunities.

Maternal Mortality Rate – According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 800 women die every single day due to preventable causes regarding pregnancy and childbirth – the maternal mortality rate goes down, as 94% of these deaths occur in LEDCs and NICs, especially in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, the maternal mortality ratio being 533 deaths per 100000 live births. In MEDCs, the ratio is 12 deaths per 100000 live births. These statistics convey the urgency of this issue, proving that inequality contributes largely to population loss, especially in women. It does not only emphasize the fatality of this issue, but it highlights the weaknesses in social policies implemented to protect women and enable their access to healthcare. In these LEDCs, women are more likely to be denied access to safe healthcare, specifically in regard to reproductive healthcare, as low-income countries lack skilled labor and basic medical supplies. Gender biases are embedded in this issue; for example, Nigeria accounts for approximately 20% of global maternal deaths, which demonstrates the lack of healthcare for women compared to men. This directly exemplifies how a country’s social policies remain weak in terms of women’s access to healthcare, especially shown by the lack of reproductive care.

Violence and conflict impacts everyone – however, because of certain biological needs, women tend to be impacted deeply in terms of health, especially regarding feminine hygiene. For example, during the Israel-Palestine conflict, there were camps set up in the Gaza strip aiming to provide feminine products and develop small sanitation stations to aid the women and girls in Gaza. However, women and girls were not prioritized; in conflicts and humanitarian crises, aid responses frequently focus on food, shelter, and emergency medical care without fully considering gender-specific health needs. Menstrual hygiene, privacy, and reproductive health are often treated as secondary issues. This reflects gender bias, as policies and emergency planning tend to be shaped over standard needs, which are seen to be based on male experiences. Therefore, it is vital that social policies are enhanced to improve women’s access to these opportunities.

## Major parties involved

*Afghanistan, CARE International, UNICEF, World Bank, World Health Organization*

### Afghanistan

Afghanistan is an example of a major party involved, demonstrating the weaknesses in social policies. Girls' access to schooling has been increasingly restricted, both at secondary and university levels. This provides an example of why social policies need to be improved and implemented if not already done. Healthcare is not prioritized for women in Afghanistan, as there is underinvestment and lack of interest to facilitate essential healthcare services for women. Gender roles and inequality play a role in poor health outcomes for women due to cultural and societal norms, women tend to be restricted from participating in various activities. This hinders their development opportunities. Gender-based violence also places fear on women from executing daily tasks freely such as shopping, using public transportation, and participating in community events. Afghanistan remains one of the most extreme examples of regression towards women and emphasises the need for improved social policies.

### CARE International

This is a global organization that focuses on humanitarian development and the social well-being of each individual, specifically focusing on women and girls. This organization is an NGO (non-governmental organization) that addresses issues regarding inequality, promoting gender equality and equal access to quality education for girls and boys. Additionally, it prioritizes women empowerment and works forward to ensure that women have access to educational programs, healthcare, and development opportunities where they are able to develop their skills and thrive in the workfare. By providing girls with school supplies and extra support, this organization has reduced drop-out rates by a number. It works to challenge societal norms and gender-based expectations. CARE recognizes that women empowerment can strengthen diversity, foster inclusivity, and enhance economies by increasing workflow while simultaneously diversifying the job market. By focusing on the root causes of gender-based inequality, CARE International strives to combat gender gaps and gender-based discrimination.

### UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) prioritizes children's education, ensuring that girls are able to go to school. The organization manages various things, such as MHM, clean water, and available healthcare and nutrition. By working towards helping girls attend school, UNICEF begins to break systemic gender barriers and protects girls from facing gender-based discrimination. This organization helps prevent inequality through a long-term perspective.

### World Bank

The World Bank is a global international organization that provides financial support to organizations in need, funding LEDCs and providing social protection and security. This organization funds projects related to gender equality, healthcare, and social protection. The World Bank has funded various girls' education programs and have published research conducted on the matter of the gender gap. They have provided a skill developing sector where women can develop their skills through training programs. By conducting research on gender gap, analyzing the statistics comparing men and women, helping them to understand the issues and turn the policies that are implemented into real-life working projects.

### World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the body of the UN that stands as a global representation for health and works towards ensuring that each individual has access to healthcare to their own needs. It strives to ensure that all countries, especially LEDCs have access to good healthcare. The WHO also sets international health guides and boundaries, allowing people to understand health standards. WHO plays a crucial role in monitoring the healthcare worldwide, and without this organization, it would be difficult to ensure that policies would be enhanced to allow women to have the access to healthcare. WHO prioritizes safety, especially for women's hygiene.

## Timeline of events

- 1848 July** First women's rights movement at the Seneca Falls Convention in the U.S., marking the first active protest done to advocate for women's rights.
- 1948 December 10<sup>th</sup>** Human Rights Foundation establishment adopted by the United Nations.
- 1979 December 18<sup>th</sup>** The UN adopts the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- 2015 September 25<sup>th</sup>** The UN adopts the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2020 March 11<sup>th</sup>** The WHO declares COVID-19 as a global pandemic; worsens job market and gender-based discrimination.
- 2021** UN, World Bank, and NGOs begin promoting gender-sensitive recovery policies.
- 2023 May 5<sup>th</sup>** The WHO officially declares COVID-19 to no longer be a global health crisis.
- 2024** UNICEF and the World Bank expand girls' education recovery programs.
- 2025** Governments and international organizations accelerate action toward the 2030 SDG deadline.

## Relevant UN treaties and events

**CSW68; UN commission on the status of women:** International meeting to address gender gaps primarily caused and influenced by COVID-19, urging post-pandemic recovery, 11 March 2024

**A/RES/70/1; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** General Assembly resolution affirming 17 new SDGs, supporting women's development opportunities, 25 September 2015

**CSW69; UN commission on the status of women:** General Assembly resolution affirming progress that has been made on the status of women, reviewing updated social policies, March 2025

**CEDAW; Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women:** Legally binding treaty establishing the direct elimination of any form of discrimination against women in various fields such as healthcare, education, and areas of work, 18 December 1979

**Beijing declaration and platform for action:** the acknowledgement and addressing of the concern of women's development opportunities, identifying health and education as primary areas to advance women's rights, 15 September 1995

**A/RES/74/235; Women in development:** The General Assembly calls for strengthened national policy systems to ensure improvement of women's access to education, healthcare, and developmental opportunities, 19 December 2019

**UN women global gender equality accelerator:** The UN leads initiatives supporting governments to help expand women's access to public services, education, and healthcare by changing established social policies, 2021

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

### *CARE International attempts to remove financial and social barriers to girls' education*

This organization worked with governments to remove financial barriers restricting girls from being able to attend school. They funded various schools, both primary and secondary, ensuring that school equipment was present, and the students were able to go through their education safely. However, this is just a small step taken to solve the issue, which has not yet succeeded on a large-scale basis.

### *WHO strengthens health standards to meet women's needs and provides healthcare access to struggling women*

This organization aims to strengthen health standards and meet women's needs. WHO prioritizes health, especially women's menstrual management, and provides women with feminine hygiene products. Additionally, they work on this by training midwives to ensure that reproductive care is handled safely and women are protected. This helps women proceed in tasks such as going to school, feeling comfortable and safer in their bodies. This places a core focus on feminine hygiene which is a strong way to ensure that a major part of women's well-being is being supported and protected.

### *The World Bank supports women financially*

This organization supports women financially by increasing their financial independence. This works well to combat gender-based discrimination as typically handling finances is stereotypically considered to be a job designated for men in patriarchal societies. The World Bank supports women-owned businesses, and they implement CCTs. This allowed women to invest in education and development opportunities. However, with financial independence, training facilities must be present to ensure that women can grow their skills to thrive in the developing world and the opportunities provided.

### *The UN attempts to enhance political and social policies concerning women's rights*

The UN worked together with women's rights organizations to implement legal protections and develop a framework that women's needs and rights were not only recognized and acknowledged but enforced. However, making this a more widespread movement would ensure that more women are protected. Enhancing policies is a thoughtful step forward to acknowledge the difficulties that women face, however the implementation of these policies must be seen in action to truly understand whether progress is being made or if it is on a linear scale.

## Possible solutions

1. Pre-existing organizations (such as WHO and CARE International etc.) can work together to fund large-scale projects that affect larger regions to ensure that women all over can be provided with healthcare and educational supplies.
2. Offer therapy to girls who have been attacked in a nonconsensual sexual way (women's mental health strand – healthcare).
3. Implement training programs for women for them to develop certain skills to push themselves in the job market, increasing development opportunities. This will ensure that women will be able to qualify for various jobs in the market and be open/suited for a larger range of development opportunities.
4. Balance fundings according to needs of both genders – discuss this with the UN and consider WHO health standards for women. This will promote equal access to the job market, healthcare, and general developmental opportunities.
5. Spread the information; start community awareness programs to educate communities about the value of women's education and healthcare and women's valuable input on societies. This will promote the idea of equality and women empowerment.
6. Teach historical examples of women's contributions to major historical events, such as the woman's contribution to the British War Effort, to promote understanding of women's role in society and to encourage equality in schools. This will promote the idea of equality in individuals from an early age, developing young minds - this does not solve the issue immediately, however it sparks the key concepts of equity in education in young minds, eventually leading to better understanding of this issue in a larger context and bettering the state of this issue in a long-term sense.
7. Implementation of government-based funding will help each country consider women's needs. This will stay on a national level, ensuring that each country protects their female population. This way, women's needs will not be (as) overlooked, and the governments will report how the money is being handled/used.