

Equalising Education

Teaching Notes for Lesson One:

Why do girls and young women have unequal access to education?

Starter Activities:

Literacy Rate is defined as the number of adults aged over fifteen who are deemed able to read and write. Despite free and compulsory education up to the age of fifteen being available in almost the entire developed world, very few countries achieve the one hundred percent literate benchmark. Sometimes this is a pitfall of the manner in which the statistics are collected (for example pupils who are home-schooled are more difficult to count) and indeed the very real fact that not all children attend school despite the often legal repercussions of not doing so. The World Bank lists eight countries who claim to have a one hundred percent literacy rate. At the other end of the scale South Sudan, Mali and Afghanistan all have national literacy rates below thirty percent. Globally, two-thirds of all illiterate adults are women.

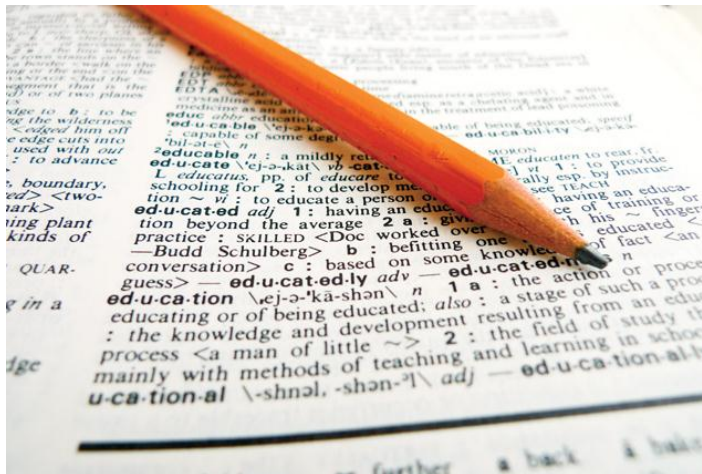


Figure 1 Literacy Standards in education are measured by a country's literacy rate or the ability of its population to read and write. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User City Year

There can be various **problems with measuring literacy**. For example not all countries take fifteen years as the benchmark age at which young people should be literate. Comparable statistics judge age seven pupils, in India with those aged twenty in Saint Helena. There are equally issues with what one means by 'being able to read and write'. Ask a child in the UK of any age if they can read and write and invariably they will say they can, but of course not to the same standard as they will in



Figure 2 Girls between classes in Laos With pressures to undertake chores at home, many girls in developing countries use their break times to study. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User London Public Library

one, two or ten years' time. Different countries also have different interpretations of what it actually means to be literate, with almost all countries applying the term fairly liberally. With its known poor levels of state funding and huge sections of its population living in poverty, one would justifiably question how North Korea have interpreted the term 'literacy' in the collection of their statistics to allow them to present a resulting one hundred percent literacy. A good standard by which to abide is that one is deemed literate if one is able to fill in a job application form or write a short, simple statement about oneself, though of course these ideas in themselves are open to much further interpretation. One should remember that 'literacy' as a phrase is generally inclusive of numeracy in such statistics too.

The link between a country's wealth and its literacy rate should be

somewhat predictable. In the most obvious sense the more money a country has, the more it can invest in the education of its citizens. Buildings, teachers, equipment, books and even transport to and from school can be provided by the state, giving few parents a reason not to send their children to school. However it is not the only factor at play and the percentage of its GDP that a country spends on education does not always match the level of literacy attained. For example the UK spends £98 billion annually (2014-15 figures) on education, or 13.4% of total government spending. Myanmar spends only 4.4% of its annual

GDP on education while Ghana eclipses most of the world by spending over a third of its annual budget on education. Yet the literacy rates of these three countries stands at 99%, 93% and 72% respectively, indicating that other factors need to be considered.

In countries where education relies less on state funding and more on private contributions at point of delivery (for example through the payment of school fees) there is not necessarily a drop in standards. A strong ethos of private funding, where a population is encouraged not to rely on the state to provide for it, can raise standards to a very high level. However if families



Figure 3 Women's literacy class in India Many women who were denied education in their school years seek to further their skills later in life. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User Field India

have low levels of disposable income and there is little state funding to support education then invariably attendances drop and it is more difficult to recruit teachers as their wages in the long term cannot be guaranteed. This is reflected in the pupil to teacher ratios in primary education in different countries. The UK has a national average of eighteen primary aged students to every one teacher while in the Central African Republic, this rises to eighty.

In families where there are limited funds for school fees, parents often choose to send their sons to school over their daughters. This can be down to a number of reasons. Firstly, on graduation, young men are more likely to not only find work but also to be paid more for it. This is an important consideration for large families who rely on their children to earn enough money to pay back into the family purse. Nowhere is this more important than in countries with no formal state pension provision such as Tanzania and Malawi: a parent needs to be assured that their children will be able to provide for them in their old age. Secondly, girls are often encouraged not to go to school in order to help out in the home and on family farms – work that is dominated by women in much of the developing world. For example in Pakistan, seventy-six percent of women are employed in agriculture.



Figure 4 Boys tend to dominate a lot of African classrooms With limited funds, sons are more likely to be educated than their sisters. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User Will Bryson

Of course it is not wealth that feeds high standards of education – instead

one should think of the two ideas of having a symbiotic relationship. The more educated a generation is, the more likely it is that they themselves will become good earners, able to send their own children to school. Progressive tax systems such as that in the UK, mean that those who earn the most (and whom arguably hold the higher education and skill levels) pay the most tax and are therefore making a higher percentage contribution to state education than those on lower wages.



Figure 5 Girls attending school in Afghanistan. Despite threats from Taliban fundamentalists, girls' education continues. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User NATO Training Mission

Wealth is not the only factor at play in female education. In countries such as Afghanistan, the desire for most parents is to see all their children educated equally. However political and cultural forces prevent many girls from receiving an education. Traditional male dominated patriarchal systems are difficult to challenge and many girls are denied education on a utilitarian basis: as they are highly unlikely to find or need paid employment then an education is wasted on them. Fundamentalist political groups such as the Taliban who in their various forms have been a dominant presence in Afghanistan and north west Pakistan condemn the education and employment of women; laws based on ancient Pashtunwali beliefs about living in purdah (the hiding of the female form from men), and laws which are now wrongly ascribed to the teachings

of the Qur'an. The impact of banning the employment of women has had a detrimental effect on the schooling of both boys and girls as the vast majority of Afghanistan's teachers are female, meaning hundreds of schools across the country have closed or been converted into religious centres. Violence has been threatened, and indeed carried out, against families who try to send their daughters to school and Malala Yousafzai amongst others have become prominent figures in making sure the voice of these women is starting to be heard.

Main Teaching:

Spirals of Deprivation or Poverty Cycles

show how a situation can escalate beyond the scale at which it is first conceived. They are designed in such a way that there is no real start or end point; one idea instead being the cause of another. Common factors which are linked together include private investment, personal incomes, health, education, energy and water provision, infrastructure and public services. They are useful tools for demonstrating the difficulty of managing poverty as they show the interconnectedness between different individual ideas.

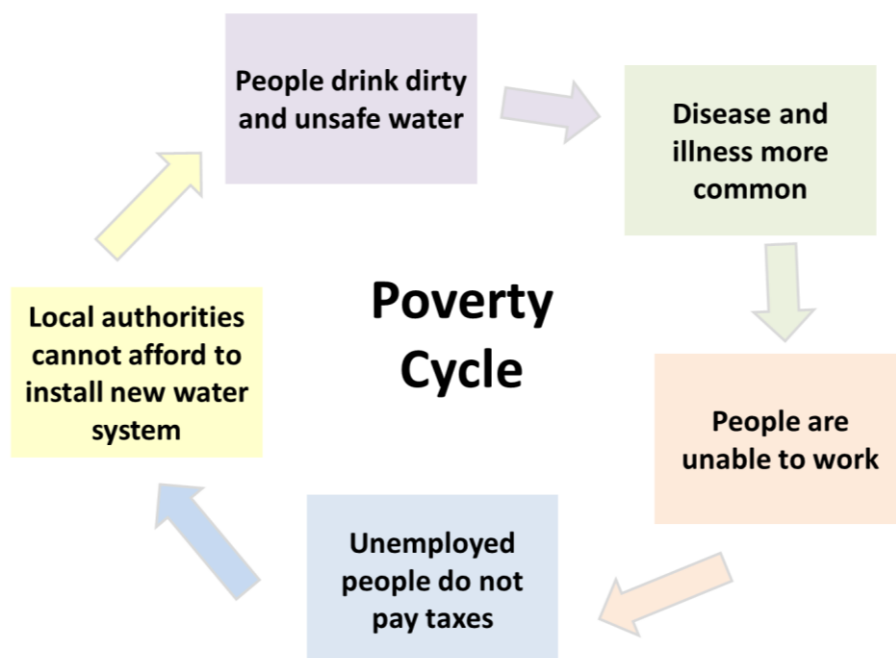


Figure 6 A simple poverty cycle. A similar design system can be used to explore education in developing countries. Source: Author's Own

If any part of the cycle is changed then depending on the scale of the change, all the subsequent factors may be affected and the real problem (in this case low female literacy rates) may be improved (or indeed worsened). For example, an increase in personal income for a family may enable them to send their only daughter to school. There she will learn about safer sexual health and if she is able to stay in school until the end of her secondary education, is likely to marry later and have fewer children herself. This may ease her own family's financial burdens and her own children may in turn have the same chance of education as she. In just a few generations, the chance of there being improvements in female literacy increase greatly, though not discounting the impact of other important factors (such as a lack of teachers) on the overall goal.

Poverty is a very complex concept and is rarely just about not having enough money in a household. Factors such as energy and improved water supplies have more of a direct impact on girls than any other household member. Before dawn, mothers and their daughters all over Africa are collecting water from wells and firewood from forests and carrying it by hand back to their homes. Liberia and Chad have only four percent of their households connected to a national electrical grid, while in the Democratic Republic of Congo only twenty nine percent of rural households have access to an improved water supply, indicating that just in order to eat and drink thousands of families have to laboriously find sources of fuel and water. For some girls this leaves little time for school or many are too tired to make a further long walk to their school. Large households, where there are babies and young children to care for, (in Niger the average woman gives birth to seven children) often require the eldest daughter to stay at home as a carer while mothers may be committed to farm work during the day. Few young women in Africa are simply students – unlike their brothers, their lives are made up of multiple roles.



Figure 7 Collecting firewood, Mali Any activity that takes girls out of school affects their literacy rates. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User United Nation Photo

Plenary Activities:



Figure 8 Free School Meals Schools with a high proportion of children eligible for free school meals are deemed to represent the poorer parts of the UK population. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User Cheshire East Council

Measuring the relative wealth of pupils within a certain school setting is frequently done by the analysis of the number of children who receive a free school meal. While being somewhat arbitrary, those that receive a free school meal are deemed to be coming from families in the lower income brackets. Students in the UK are entitled to a free school meal if one or both their parents are receiving income support benefits from the state. The number of children eligible for receiving free school meals in England in 2014 was 14.3 percent.

The Educational Divide in the UK poses quite a different set of circumstances and potential causes compared to the picture of female illiteracy in poorer nations. While poverty is clearly a common factor in both set of circumstances one must remember that in the UK education is provided by the state for free, and so the divide between children from poor and more wealthy backgrounds at secondary level should not be as large in the UK as in a developing country where school fees provide a restriction to some children.

Instead one might see that poorly state funded schools and those that receive the lowest levels of central investment would produce the worst results, but even that does not hold true in the UK. Social aspiration can be found however to have an impact: in developing countries, education is seen by many families as the single most effective route out of poverty and to be able to attend school regularly is a privilege. In the UK poor examination results



Figure 9 The rise of female graduates A third more women than men are now entering tertiary education in the UK. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User UNE



Figure 10 Jobless Households Sometimes there is little incentive for children in poorer households to complete education. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User Andrew_Writer

are due to a number of factors but social commentators have many times looked towards the socio-economic structure of households in trying to explain the situation. Children who grow up in a household where no one has ever worked may lack employment role models and it is easy to understand why some children see little point in education when they can see it has done little for their own parents.

The gender divide at university is less easy to explain and as it is such a recent phenomenon and there is insufficient evidence to suggest why more young women are graduating from university than their male peers. Some social commentators have indicated that this may be due to women being more attracted to service industry jobs that require higher level qualifications than ever before, while men leave school earlier and enter the job market with fewer skills.

Rostow's Stages of Growth Model focusses on the idea that countries go through a number of stages prior to becoming a more economically stable nation. It suggests that poorer nations will follow the same path as that undertaken by developed nations, be this economically or in social capital such as education.

The model suggests all nations start in a traditional society where economic development is simply in the form of subsistence agriculture and primary employment with little access to formal education in schools. Very few countries today theoretically appear in this stage, but elements of life in Kazakhstan and Lesotho could be said to reflect this. The second stage describes an era when agriculture becomes more commercialised and some manipulation of these resources is taking place in low levels of secondary employment. Schooling here would be minimal and reserved only for the leaders in this secondary industry. Cambodia and Rwanda are two examples of countries that might be seen to fit into this stage. The third stage, known as 'take-off', sees the rise of manufacturing as the main form of income generation. This modern society sees education being provided for a wider section of society but with the poorest children still unable to access it, such as in the UAE and Vietnam.

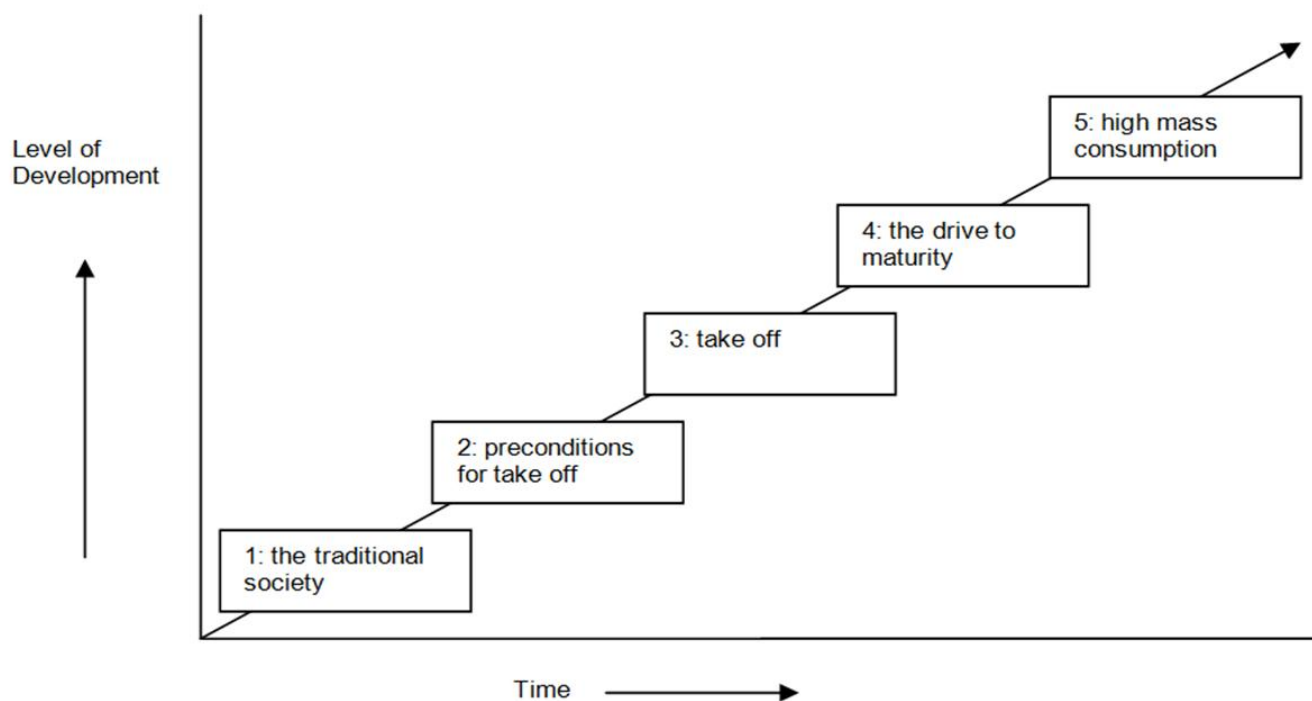


Figure 11 Rostow's Stages of Growth Model While it can be viewed as a sensible model to determine future development patterns, many geographers identify how modern development theories are more focussed on relationships between nations. Source: Author's Own

The fourth stage sees the rise of middle income living with some of the educated class of the previous stage becoming the leaders in industry and tertiary employment in this one. Education is seen as essential for successful engagement in the world of work as almost all jobs require a degree of skill and literacy. Countries which may be included in this stage are numerous, but most recent additions are China, Brazil and India, at least in their urban populations. The final stage: 'the age of mass consumption', sees almost everyone employed in the tertiary sector and education becoming available to all as the state controls its access. Literacy rates are at their highest in this stage, with almost no one not receiving some form of education, but indeed the majority acquiring extra skills and qualifications after their compulsory schooling has been completed. The UK and the USA are firmly within this category but are rapidly being joined by other quickly developing nations.

While Rostow's model appears to offer a sensible pattern for developing countries to follow it fails to take into account the dynamic nature of rapidly developing countries. Rostow based his model on the countries he knew well – those in the now developed world – and makes quite a conjecture to assume that developing nations will follow the same path. In fact no two countries in theory should necessarily follow the same path of development. Countries may 'skip' a stage or indeed remain at one stage for a long time, unable to move up the development scale as a result of their dependence on more developed nations for aid and (albeit unfair) trade. The model also assumes that there is an end point to development and that all countries can reach it. For an overview of a number of different models that have sought to explain the development process, including the Rostow model see the **Links** section.

Teaching Notes for Lesson Two:

What strategies are there for improving female access to education?

Starter Activities:

A **Spiral of Affluence** works much in the same way as a spiral of deprivation, though in such a way that an improvement at any stage of the spiral sees a positive knock-on effect for the subsequent stages. For example, in a very simple sense, if a village were to have a new water pump installed, it may negate the need for girls to get up early to fetch water from a great distance. This may leave them more time to attend school and still help out in the family home. Clean water being closer to their home, may mean the family's overall health improves and less money out of the family budget would need to be spent on medical bills. In time, this may mean that school fees can be sought and put to good use. Often in a spiral of affluence, improvements need to happen in a number of areas before real change is witnessed. For example a whole generation of young women would have to go through school and enter the job market before they were able to contribute (via donation and taxation) to state funded education for other younger girls.

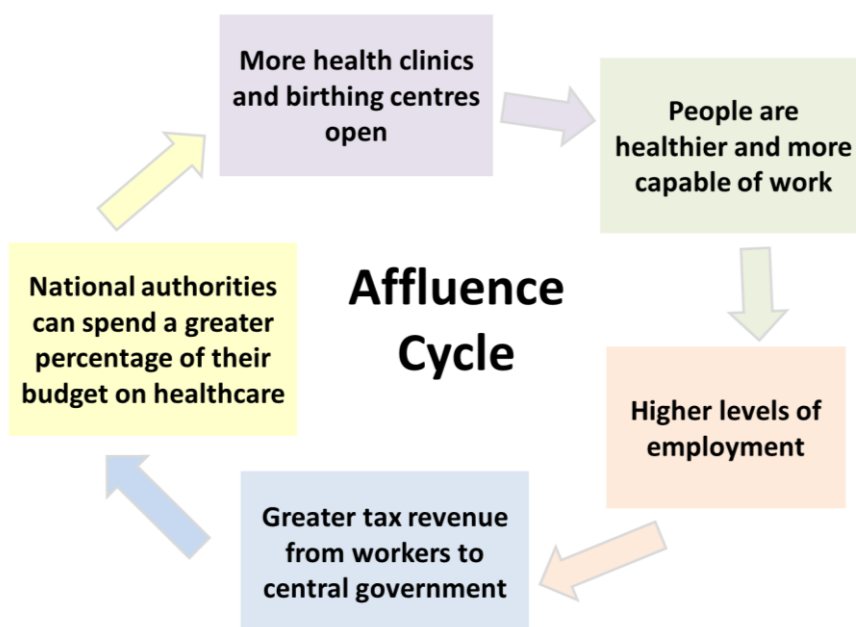


Figure 1 A Cycle of Affluence Improving one part of the cycle can create a trickle-down effect for other processes. Source: Author's Own



Figure 2 Female doctors are in high demand in some countries However many move to countries where their wages reflect the level of skill they possess. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User DFID

The **Brain Drain** effect (or more formally, Human Capital Flight) is a common side effect of increased education levels and skills in any gender. Once young men and women become well skilled they realise that in order to earn from their new skills they will invariably have to migrate to where there is paid work that matches their ability. This may involve migration to the nearest city but it is also the case that the most skilled people travel the greatest distances. This is of particular concern in the field of health as doctors leave their home countries, not only for the better wages paid overseas, but also to avoid the poor and sometimes unhygienic conditions they may work in in their home cities and towns. While remittances (money

sent back to the family home) help ease the problems that can occur from the most skilled people leaving a community it does little to hinder the process as young people growing up are attracted to the money they see being sent back home and encouraged to pursue work elsewhere like their peers before them. The value of remittances moved globally each year is estimated to around US\$ 510 billion, so it is an important aspect of the brain drain effect. Some countries actively budget for remittances as part of their state income and see the training of skilled workers as an investment in their future financial affairs. For example, Mexico loses 14.3% of its professionals each year, yet their remittances account for US\$22.6 billion of the Mexican national budget.

Main Teaching:

There is **no one 'fix' for female illiteracy**. In some circumstances countries and regions will wish to focus on capacity building. This involves the literal building of schools, the provision of desks and books and the employment of more teachers so more girls (and boys) simply have access to education. These initiatives are best seen as 'quick fixes' and suggest that girls would attend school if only there was the school there for them. Sadly few girls in the least developed countries would benefit from such initiatives as deeper causes of poverty are the barriers to their literacy. Even if states were able to reconfigure their budgets with the help of financial aid from developed nations and provide long term investment and free schooling for children, other areas of poverty may still constrict access. For example, to commemorate the *International Day of the Girl* USAID launched a US\$29 million project across eight nations in Africa and Asia. Yet at best this level of funding is sadly only likely to enhance movements that are already happening and with so many girls facing the levels of poverty USAID are targeting, the final result in 2019 may fall short of expectations.



Figure 3 School building in Tanzania Providing the right built environment for learning can provide a short term solution to poor literacy in an area. Source: Author's own



Figure 4 Malala Yousafzai Campaigning for change in female education is only one part of the process towards higher literacy rates. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User World Bank

Provision of sustainable energy and water supplies to all households reduces the stress on the time and economic budget of homes, freeing up girls to attend classes. Countries that have recently been affected by conflict such as Afghanistan and Sudan face greater challenges. In these countries girls may not have attended school for some years, placing them far behind the standard of their peers and they may still be nervous about travelling to school, especially in cities that experienced bloodshed on the streets.

It is important to realise that **providing infrastructure** is only a small part of tackling the problem of female access to education. In fact

while it appears in the public sphere to be the most common form of management it is actually the most straight forward and financially simple method to use. A far greater challenge is changing a strong cultural system in communities and families that favours boys over girls. Female infanticide in India is estimated to have been prominent for many centuries and in 2009 it was estimated that there were fifty million fewer Indian women alive as a result of the practice.

Laws that reduce the pay gap in the workplace, allow maternity rights and criminalise gender discrimination at work can help this process. With perseverance, patience and strong female role models, many countries with very few female scholars are moving towards this end goal. For example, in countries such as India, the rise in single sex schooling has had an extremely positive impact on literacy among young women.

Plenary Activities:

There are **many players** involved in the decision making over access to female education. Firstly there is the student themselves and their motivation for being in education. The student's parents and the consideration of their socio-economic background have the strongest influence on the educational chances open to the student. The importance given to education by government ministers and the proportion of the state budget assigned to it has an equally important role. Another key set of



Figure 5 A teacher in the DR Congo Unless teachers are able to work with financial security, many struggle to cope with conflicting pressures on their lives. Source: Flickr Creative Commons User Julien Harnels

players is the teachers themselves and how they deal with boys and girls differently in the classroom, the encouragement they can give to girls and the support they can provide as they leave school and possibly move into careers. Employers need to provide equal opportunities for women to work in their industries and provide remuneration deals that take into account the needs of being a mother as well as an employee. Doctors and medical health workers, especially female ones, can provide stronger guidance to women about their sexual health and encourage them to have smaller, and healthier, families.

Non-government organisations frequently target education in their aims and objectives, setting up collectives and educating other players about the value of education. Equally, foreign governments may offer aid to countries struggling to raise their literacy rates. Religious leaders and, depending on the nature of the state governance, the socio-political standpoint of the ruling party may place restrictions on the access girls have to education or the nature of the curriculum they are allowed to study.

Easy to recognise **conflicts exist** between teachers and the state that employs them. Too often teachers in developing countries are poorly qualified, underpaid and are expected to provide teaching resources, and even uniforms for poor children out of their own personal budgets. Many children in African countries experience their teachers going on strike and receive no education despite having paid their school fees. School budgets can be misallocated or defrauded. Health workers and religious leaders can have conflicting views about the role of women in society and whether sexual health education is a matter with which the state should be concerned.

Key Terms

Absolute Poverty A state of living in poverty such that one's basic human needs are not being met.

Affluence Cycle A model to show how once the processes for poverty alleviation are in place people living in poverty start to benefit due to their interconnectedness and the effect of trickle down.

Brain Drain A large emigration of individuals with technical skills or knowledge, normally due to conflict, lack of opportunity, political instability, or health risks. Brain drain is usually regarded as an economic cost, since emigrants usually take with them the fraction of value of their training sponsored by the government.

Literacy Rate The percentage of the population aged over fifteen years old who are deemed able to read and write.

Non-Government Organisation An organisation or body that operates in a not-for-profit and apolitical fashion.

Patriarchal System A social viewpoint in which the lives of men are placed above that of women.

Player Someone who has a role to play in the decision making process surrounding an issue.

Poverty Cycle A model to show how once the factors for poverty are in place it can be difficult to move out of that sphere due to their interconnectedness.

Progressive taxation A system of taxation where those who earn and own the most wealth pay the most in tax.

Relative Poverty A state of living in poverty compared others within a community, region or country.

Remittances Money paid by migrants to their families and friends who remain in their home country.

Rostow's Model A 1960s model for economic development in which it is proposed that all developing countries must pass through five successive stages of growth.

Links and References

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UNESCO 2014 Education for all Global Monitoring Report <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002256/225660e.pdf>

World We Want 2015 Survey <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/>

Resources

Lesson One

Handout Educational Factors PDF | Word

Handout World Map PDF | Word

Presentation Female Literacy Statistics PowerPoint

Presentation UK Educational Divides PowerPoint

Lesson Two

Handout Educational Factors PDF | Word

Handout Strategies for Managing Female Illiteracy PDF | Word

Presentation Managing Female Illiteracy PowerPoint

Handout Female Education Conflict Matrix PDF | Word