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Get Smart: Impact and Implementation of Childhood Formal Education in Developing Countries

Education is regarded as a fundamental necessity for development and growth. Today, the most socially and economically prosperous nations in the world all share the fact they have well-established and successful education systems to guide their youth. However, in developing nations around the world, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, many children either do not or are unable to attend school and receive proper education. In the Sub-Saharan African region alone, nearly 57 million children do not attend school. Often, these children work in labor-oriented businesses and attempt to earn minimal payments of money. However, does child labor outweigh formal education in the long run? Although traditional means of labor and work at early age can provide for minimal monetary benefits, formal educational schooling at an early age aids children far more, increasing future standards of living, economic success, and a country's overall development.

While taken for granted in some regions of the world, education has the power to transform communities and advance individuals. Formal education is defined as a system of instruction that takes place in a classroom environment with oversight from a professional teacher ("Epstein"). In many developing countries, systems of formal education exist but are often neglected or ignored in favor of traditional labor. Children are sent to work instead of school, in hopes that they will be able to reap greater benefits from their labor rather than their education. At young ages, children often work on fields and farms, or factories or industrial areas. Due to their nimbleness and smaller hands, children are often delegated tasks that adults are unable to perform as effectively. While not paid in full, in comparison to adults, children are still often compensated monetarily. Even small sums of money can help these children and their families. Across the world, child laborers work an average of 12-16 hours per day, in dangerous conditions such as sweatshops with deplorable safety standards, and are often abused without

consent (“Children Pay High Price for Cheap Labour”). Despite these aspirations, child labor demands exorbitantly while yielding little results. These child laborers work in these shops and factories for the majority of their youth, and are deprived of education. As a result, they are unable to move up socially or pursue other vocations. These children are forced to become adults that have to continue working these types of jobs, becoming trapped in a cycle of traditional low paying labor. In addition, many workers in developing nations work agriculturally based jobs, and many of these include family farms. Workers on these farms then choose to keep their children at home to work on their farms, rather than send them to school. Among the wide spectrum of vocational compensation, farming and agriculture rank abysmally in comparison to others. Since 2010, the agriculture industry in developing nations has increased in labor force by 10%, but the earnings of each agricultural worker have dropped 3.4% (“Labor Part 1). Despite traditional inclination for child labor and agricultural work in developing countries, neither is economically or socially promising for children.

In contrast to the results of child labor and traditional agriculture, formal education has proved to be more effective in leading to higher economic wages and standards of living, measured through life expectancy and health. While most traditional jobs and sources of labor are invested in agriculture, an industry that has been declining in compensation, formal education allows for specialization in labor and practice (“Education and Development”). According to The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report, there was a sharp contrast in wages of young adults who received formal education and those who did not receive it. In countries such as South Africa, Morocco, Kenya, Ghana, Pakistan, and Tanzania, wages were directly correlated with test scores of students, highlighting that both education and the degree of education are equally important in determining wage. There was a range of 12% to 48% increase in wages for those young adults who received formal education, as opposed to those who did not, and received minimum wage or similar payments (“Education for All: The Quality Imperative”). As demonstrated by UNESCO’s report, the amount of formal education directly translates to future monetary compensation. This increase in wage can allow for families to either directly increase their standards of living or invest in other fields, such as education or non labor intensive work. Additionally, some fields of study, including mathematics, yielded greater monetary

compensation than fields such as reading. Even in developing countries, specialized education like mathematics can be integral, and the more developed the education system is, the greater potential for development of individuals. Furthermore, a field study conducted by UNESCO measured the prevalence of HIV/AIDs in six different developing nations, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Uganda had the highest percentage of people who knew someone with HIV/AIDs, in which 91.5% of men and 86.4% of women claimed they knew at least one person with HIV/AIDs. However, Uganda also had the lowest percentage of the population with primary or secondary education, among the six countries. In South Africa, where the average individual receives 20% more education than in Uganda, the percentage of South Africans who knew at least one person with HIV/AIDs was 15-24% lower than the percentage of Ugandans (“Education for All: The Quality Imperative”). From this report it is evident that rates of education and rates of HIV/AIDs prevalence are inversely proportional, denoting that a more educated population is less likely to contract and spread HIV/AIDs and other diseases. This sharp contrast in percentage can be attributed to the fact that most formal education systems in developing nations inform students about health, contraception, and family planning, in addition to education such as reading and writing. Childhood education in these developing countries has shown to greatly increase wages as well as increase health and safety.

Furthermore, childhood education has demonstrated to have drastic effects on not only individuals, but on entire countries, shifting their economies and standards of living measured through the Human Development Index. Created and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, the Human Development Index is used to measure quality of life through recording educational, biological, and economical data. Countries such as Canada, Australia, and Norway all have .9 or higher (out of 1.0) on the Human Development Index, due to their high birth expectancies, average years of schooling, and GDP. In contrast, a less developed country such as Kenya has a Human Development Index of .548, signaling its overall weakness in educational, health, and economic standards (Human Development Reports). When individuals of a respective country are given the opportunity to receive formal education, specialization in labor and competition arise, directly leading to increased efficiency in the workforce, greater output of labor, and creation of new innovation. For example, India is a nation that has been burdened with one of the world’s highest populations and had a history with neo-

colonialism. Since 1980, India has seen a 47% increase in literacy rate, due to the expansion of formal education and schools throughout the country. As a result, India has grown from a GDP per capita of \$271.25 in 1980, to a GDP per capita of \$1647 as of the 2014-2015 fiscal years (“GDP Per Capita of India”). As greater percentages of a population are given access to formal education and higher schooling, innovation and labor efficiency increase. Additionally, developing countries that emphasis formal education and have higher percentages of population that have been exposed to formal education have higher standards of living measured through the Human Development Index. As witnessed through countries such as South Africa and India, formal education not allows benefits the citizens and the country inherently, but also shift the culture economically, medically, and innovatively. Improvements in basic education lead to social and economic benefits that aid the individual and the respective communities.

Though success is attained through perseverance and trial, it is no longer prudent or necessary to focus on manual labor in these developing countries. Instead, more attention and focus should be given to formal education because it allows for individuals to better themselves, their communities, and their countries, creating opportunities that would not be available otherwise. It is necessary for the global community as a whole to foster the growth of formal education in these developing nations, in both its prevalence and structure, which can then lead to advancements in health, economy, and standards of living. Only by implementing these systems for education internationally, will we be able to help countries further their development and ensure equal opportunity for all.

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