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Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Committee

Novice Committee

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Topic 1: Gender Equality within Education in MENA

Introduction

Countries in the MENA region have invested more in education than other countries at similar income levels. On average, around 5% of GDP and 20% of government budgets over the past 40 years have been spent on schooling. These nations have seen improved access to learning, with most children now having access to primary and secondary education. However, there are notable differences across many countries resulting in inequalities in enrolment between boys and girls. In Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates, differences between boys' and girls' enrolment rates are small or non-existent. In Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen, there are more boys enrolled than girls at every grade level. In Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Lebanon, and Tunisia, there are more boys enrolled than girls up to secondary education. However, the gender gap reverses in post-secondary education, with most universities having more girls than boys. In addition to impacts at the

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individual level, gender inequality can have far-reaching consequences for the economy and the future of those nations.

Definitions

MENA- Middle East and North Africa. The regions has 21 different countries making up 6% of the world's population.

Human Development Index (HDI)- Measure of a nation's development that is based on economy, education and health.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)- Measure of a nation's economic state that is based on the total value of all goods and services produced in that nation in a given time period.

History/Context

MENA has progressed towards gender equality in educational access over the last decade. Some sources argue that most countries have closed their gender gaps at least at the primary level (World Bank, 2008), while others suggest that they still have some way to go (UNESCO, 2011). There are substantial gender gaps in enrolments in Djibouti, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan and Yemen, with smaller gaps that are consistently in favour of boys during the primary

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grades in most of the other countries. In some cases, the gap diminishes or reverses in favour of girls in later grades.

There are large differences among countries in the region which can be grouped using HDI.

Group 1: Low income; very poor access to education in general; some with humanitarian crises

Group 2: Challenges in the economy, health, and education sectors. Education access is high but minorities are excluded.

Group 3: Struggles with universal access to university level. In most of these countries, there are gender gaps in favour of boys in the primary and lower secondary grades.

Group 4: Access is strong, but the quality is uneven (e.g. half of the students in Grade 8 are barely reaching international standards in math)

These barriers to access do not factor in the armed conflicts in some of these MENA states. Given the cultural norms, there are often worse outcomes for women as shown in the table below based on household survey and census data:

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Country	Year	Primary ANER (%)			Lower secondary gross attendance rate (%)		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Algeria	2012	97.8	97.8	97.8	124.8	117.9	121.4
Djibouti	2006	82.5	79.9	81.2	77.6	62.8	70.0
Egypt	2008	96.2	94.8	95.5	96.5	93.4	95.0
Iran	2006	88.9	87.9	88.4	67.5	62.0	64.8
Iraq	2011	93.2	87.2	90.3	91.5	69.4	80.9
Jordan	2012	98.0	98.1	98.0	93.0	94.5	93.7
Palestinians in Lebanon	2011	95.6	97.3	96.4	80.4	93.1	86.5
Palestine	2010	93.5	92.7	93.1	98.4	101.5	99.9
Sudan	2010	75.6	70.4	73.1	80.3	65.2	72.4
Syria	2006	96.6	96.4	96.5	86.4	83.0	84.7
Tunisia	2011	98.5	98.1	98.3	109.1	107.7	108.4
Yemen	2006	76.3	64.8	70.6	76.4	39.6	58.0

Source: Algeria MICS 2012, Djibouti MICS 2006, Egypt DHS 2014, Iraq MICS 2011, Iran (census 2006) IPUMS database, Jordan DHS 2012, Palestinians in Lebanon MICS 2011, Palestine MICS 2010, Sudan Household Health Survey 2010, Syria MICS 2006, Tunisia MICS 2011-12, Yemen MICS 2006.

Current Situation/ Discussion

Educational inequalities continue to appear in different forms, including disparate access patterns for early years, uneven progress through primary and secondary school, gender and location, and varying levels of achievement and attainment linked to social groups. The MENA region is very diverse in terms of income levels, patterns of economic activity, demography, geography, and culture. In 2011, primary enrolment rates (measured as the adjusted net

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enrolment ratio) varied from 52 per cent in Djibouti to nearly 100 per cent in Iran and Tunisia.

There are several reasons for the inequalities in educational access in MENA. First, public spending per student in the region is highest at the tertiary level and lowest at the primary level.

In some parts of MENA, secondary schooling has been expanding rapidly for children who completed primary education. This pattern of educational funding supports children from richer households progressing further through the system and occupying a disproportionate number of places in higher education, much of which is publicly financed (World Bank, 2008). Second, cultural norms enforce the roles of women as obedient daughters, wives, teachers, or nurses.

Because of these expectations, formal schooling for women can seem culturally unnecessary due to the homemaking education that women receive in the family environment. Women's participation in the labor force in the Middle East remains low due to discriminatory hiring practices. When women do overcome obstacles to obtain their degree, it can become essentially useless professionally due to the prejudices held by employers.

Women in almost every country in the world are paid less than men for the same work (CIA World Factbook). Wage inequality, combined with discriminatory social security systems, limit the economic viability for women's education in the household.

Questions to consider:

- 1) What is the impact of gender discrimination in education?

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- 2) What are unique characteristics of the MENA region that affect women's access to education?
- 3) How could relationships with more developed nations impact this issue?
- 4) What are the long terms solutions that can address these challenges?

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Topic 2: Preservation of Historical Monuments

Introduction

Historical monuments connect us to our past, document our history and call our attention to important people or events. They are tools to create identity and to educate the public. In some ways, they also contribute to employment. One must commission an artist to make a monument and a maintenance team to preserve it. However, social movements in the 21st century and ever-changing moral standards raise an important question: Should one still preserve a historical monument, even if it goes against contemporary societal beliefs?

History/Context

Monuments come from powerful bodies that have the resources and want to celebrate or recognize a specific individual or event. These could be governments, rulers, and organizations. They are meant to evoke emotions, give people something to reflect on and admire. The preservation of monuments was often done by those who created them, passing the duty on to future generations.

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Should every community keep all historical monuments regardless of any other factors, or should a monument's value and message continue to be judged through the lens of modern society? There are arguments for both sides. On one hand, historical building and monuments can get in the way of rapid growth and development of various cities. It is also cheaper to pay for a one-time demolition rather than to continue to fund maintenance or renovations. If the monument was honouring a person who made a massive innovation in science, but then it was discovered that this person was racist or sexist, would we still want them to be celebrated? On the other hand, it is also important to recognize the artistic intention of the monument, and the historical nature of it. If every historical artifact was judged on modern standards, few would be left standing.

Current Situation/Discussion

After the George Floyd demonstrations, several confederate and slavery-linked statues around the world were toppled by activists. Not everyone agreed with this response. Some saw it as vandalism and questioned the actions taken: "Moving this statue will not change the past." (Mayor Sandy Stimpson).

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The statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston falls into the water after protesters pulled it down and pushed into the docks, in Bristol, Britain, on June 7, 2020. Keir Gravil via Reuters

Here is another example. There were many statues to commemorate Hitler in WW2. After the war, Germany removed all statues in relation to Hitler. Unsurprisingly, the overwhelming majority is comfortable with how Germany handled the monuments.

However, many groups argue that statues of soldiers should be preserved to honor their

bravery. (Neiman, 2019).

Questions to Consider

- 1) Does the monument recognize the notable contribution only or does it represent everything about the individual?
- 2) Is it better to keep or take down a monument with a person who committed various violations of human rights but made a breakthrough in certain fields?
- 3) Who gets to decide if a monument stays or is too offensive to be preserved?

Key Terms

George Floyd: An African American whose videotaped death under the knee of a white police officer sparked protests in 2020, including some of the largest street demonstrations in U.S. history.

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