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NEWS

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# International Day Of The Girl Child: Investing In The Girl Child Can Unlock The Potential Of A Nation



**Rajesh Bhatia**  
 Updated on Oct 11, 2022, 11:12 IST



Education activist and the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Malala Yousafzai, once said, "No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a third power stronger than both, that of women." But as the United Nations (U.N.) noted in a 2019 post, "Women and girls represent half of the world's population, and yet, not one country has achieved gender equality." This despite the fact that without empowering women and girls, #GlobalGoals are impossible to achieve.



BCCI/Representational Image

On International Day of the Girl Child, a UN-designated international observance day, we must resolve to amplify the voice of girls and to begin with, address why it is so hard for them to access educational parity, and subsequently, economic and social parity.

- Jump To**
- [Absence of Choice:](#)
  - [Poverty and Social Norms:](#)
  - [Digital Disparity:](#)



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nder 18 get married in India,  
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it comes to issues like early marriage. As the UNICEF report points out, not one of the top five countries for child marriage has a secondary completion rate for girls above 15 percent.

## Poverty and Social Norms:



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In marginalised geographies and milieus, social norms dictate whether girls need education at all and if it is worthwhile to send them to school considering there are not enough employment opportunities available to them. Poor households with limited spending power prefer to send boys rather than girls to school and concerns about their safety in areas where schools are far-flung, have inadequate infrastructure and sometimes, no toilets also discourage parents from educating girls. Forced domestic work and early marriage seem to be the only two options available to them.

## Digital Disparity:



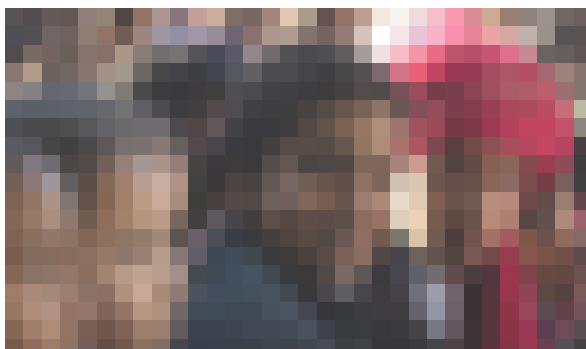
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Investing in the girl child's future is tantamount to building a gender-equal and inclusive society but this seems easier said than done as in the post-pandemic years, education disparity has worsened. A 2021 policy brief issued by the Right to Education Forum signaled that 10 million girls in India could drop out of secondary school due to COVID-19. In an official statement, the UN has also expressed concern about the irrefutable reality of the gender digital divide in connectivity, devices, skills and jobs. So how do we bridge this gap?

## Public-Private Partnerships:

One way we could achieve educational parity is via structured, well-ideated and implementable Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Citizens, socially responsible businesses, government bodies, and civil society organizations could work together to collectively create networks of support in areas where girls are traditionally either denied education or cannot easily access it. A multi-pronged approach could offer social outreach at the grassroots level, scholarships, incentives, and fully-funded seats to help underprivileged girls to join the academic stream.

## Changing Mindsets:



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consider the girl child to be a the macro and micro al Insights team said that \$2.80 return - equivalent to f eight developing nations for a 'holistic' approach came to empowering girls. This

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is why it is important to mainstream the message that educating a girl not only positively impacts all aspects of her life but uplifts the generations coming after her.

## Making Society Safer for Girls:



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A recently released report by National Crime Record Bureau, states that crimes against women in India increased by 15.3 percent in 2021. Whether they are on their way to schools, colleges, or places of work, using public transport, or walking alone, they are vulnerable to violence. How can we expect women and girls to contribute equally to our society when we cannot make them feel safe? Adequate funding for creating safe urban and rural public spaces for women and girls, affordable legal aid and support, and engaging boys and men in the struggle to end gender violence are a few steps that must be taken.

UN's 'Education Cannot Wait', is the world's first fund dedicated to promoting safe learning environments and supporting gender-responsive education programs and we need to work on similar lines to increase female literacy in India. As Michelle Obama put it, "No country can ever truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens."

*About the author: Rajesh Bhatia is an educationist, entrepreneur, and founder of TreeHouse Education. All views/opinions expressed in the article are of the author.*






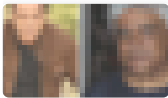

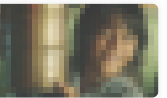
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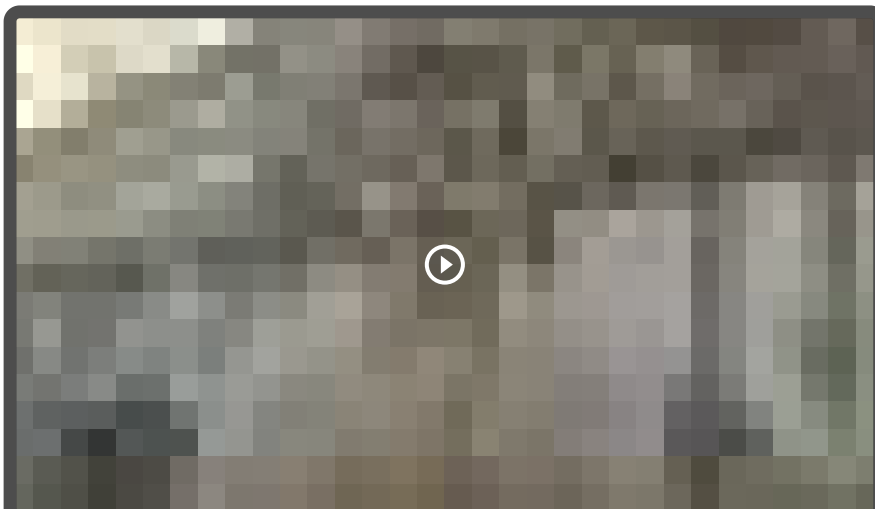
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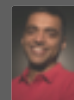
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