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Statement submitted by Sambhali Trust, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being
circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council
resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Full access to public education is a fundamental human right that is as yet unrealized in Rajasthan for girl children. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, enacted in 2009, guarantees that a free public education is available to all children in India until the eighth year of schooling. Today in Rajasthan, a range of challenges prevent girl children from taking advantage of this right. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act has seen success in alleviating some barriers to public education such as increasing the number of government schools and eliminating tuition fees for impoverished students. However, female enrolment rates remain low and female dropout rates remain high. These discouraging trends in female education persist largely due to socio-cultural customs and beliefs which impede the right of girls to attend school.

Objective and Purpose of Statement

Research shows that education is directly correlated with increased women's empowerment. Women with more education have lower infant mortality rates, marry later, and have more power in their household. Educated women are more likely to find employment after marriage and to educate their children. Women's education is also directly linked to the development of a nation's economy as a larger number of educated women leads to a more skilled labour force and opportunities for employment. Denying women access to public education is an obstacle to human rights and the betterment of a nation.

Girls in Rajasthan are denied access to public education due to various factors. Schools are often far away, especially in rural areas, and concerns about safety both traveling to school and at school deter parents from sending their daughters. Lack of financial resources to send children to school leads to parents keeping girls out of school as well. In addition, socio-cultural barriers to female education are enormous and almost exclusively affect girl children. In the patriarchal society of Rajasthan, girls are considered to be lesser than boys. Their access to public education is prevented both directly by parents who believe a girl does not need an education and by cultural practices that prevent girls from attending school.

In this statement, Sambhali Trust wishes to highlight three of the social and cultural obstacles that impede girls' access to public education and emphasize the urgent need to eliminate them. These obstacles are: child marriage, the perpetuation of traditional gender roles, and male preference.

Overview

Child marriage in Rajasthan is a main factor that prevents girls from accessing to public education. According to Rajasthani tradition, when young girls marry, they are expected to drop out of school in order to fulfil their duties as a wife, and it is highly stigmatized for women to pursue education after marriage. Thus, child marriage effectively obstructs the access of these child brides to education. This custom is a significant impediment to female access to education in Rajasthan, where child marriage is widespread and deeply ingrained.

Child marriage, a prevalent practice in all of India, is especially prominent in the state of Rajasthan. In 2015, more girls were married before the legal age of 18 in Rajasthan than in any other state in India. Furthermore, the perpetuation of child marriage disproportionately affects girl children. According to the 2011 Census of India, 88 per cent of the 7.4 million persons married before age 18 from 2007–2011

were girls. The correlation between child marriage and low access of girls to public education is abundantly clear in Rajasthan, where the nation's highest child marriage rate is coupled with some of the highest dropout rates for girls in the country, at 12 per cent for primary school and 72 per cent for secondary school.

The persistence of traditional gender roles in Rajasthan also contributes to the prevention of girls' access to public education. Rajasthani society is based on deep-seated patriarchal norms that exclude women from many aspects of life, including their access to public education. After marriage, women are expected to become housewives and occupy all of their time raising children, cooking, and performing all other household duties. The responsibilities of women in the traditional role of housewife means that they have neither the time nor the need for an education. Female education is therefore either given a low priority or blatantly discouraged by Rajasthani men. The pervasiveness of such gender roles results in men across the state withholding their daughters from attending school because it is a 'waste of time'.

Lastly, male preference significantly obstructs female access to public education in Rajasthan. Male preference refers to the cultural favouritism of sons and consequent disdain for daughters in a society, present in Rajasthani society and many societies around the world. The result of male preference is that sons are prioritized over daughters in every aspect of life. The extent to which male preference manifests varies between households, but often is expressed through sons receiving better or more food, better medical care, and overall better treatment in the household than daughters. Education, as well, is commonly an issue of male preference in Rajasthani households. Because boys are considered superior to girls, fathers customarily send their sons to a higher level of schooling than their daughters. Male preference in education is even further exacerbated when financial pressures are a factor; if a family cannot afford to send all of its children to public school, it will prioritize sending the sons to receive an education, while daughters receive no education at all. Consequently, many women across Rajasthan are denied their access to public education in favour of their brothers.

Specific examples of accomplishments by Sambhali Trust

Sambhali Trust fills the gap created by girls' low access to public education in the city of Jodhpur, Rajasthan. Most girls in Sambhali Trust's Empowerment Centres do not attend public school due to one or more of the aforementioned factors. Sambhali Trust is more accessible to them than public school for a variety of reasons. Sambhali Trust's Empowerment Centres are located in the middle of the communities where the girls live, so distance and travel are not large concerns. Sambhali Trust's classes take up only half the day, so girls are still able to spend the majority of their time performing their required household duties at home. Finally, vocational training in sewing is an important part of Sambhali Trust's programs in addition to academic classes. The girls' families are supportive of them learning to sew to increase their family's income. In this way, Sambhali Trust helps many girls receive an education who would otherwise have no opportunity to continue their schooling. However, there are still far too many girls in Rajasthan who have no access to any form of education.

A way forward:

The current efforts of the Indian and Rajasthani governments to increase access to public education through the provisions of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act are admirable, but insufficient. Girls' access to public education still lags behind that of boys due to insurmountable socio-cultural barriers. Sambhali Trust fervently believes that these socio-cultural barriers must be a focus of any efforts to increase female access to public education. We at Sambhali Trust

therefore urge the Indian and Rajasthani governments to take greater action to support the empowerment of women and dismantling of patriarchal oppression in Rajasthani society, particularly in the implementation of policies and passage of laws to eliminate child marriage, perpetuation of traditional gender roles, and male preference. In pursuit of these goals, Sambhali Trust recommends state and local government increase enforcement of laws prohibiting child marriage and gender discrimination in addition, Sambhali Trust urges state and local government to take affirmative actions to increase societal awareness of women's rights and equality in Rajasthani society. The Rajasthan Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Rules, written in 2010 to assist the implementation of The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, states: "The State Government/Local Authority shall ensure that access of children to the School is not hindered by social and cultural factors." Sambhali Trust is deeply supportive of the intent behind this policy, however this intent must be coupled with effective enforcement and implementation in order to attain full access to public education for girls in Rajasthan.

Sambhali Trust advocates for a multi-faceted approach to securing girls' full access to public education. The elimination of the aforementioned social and cultural barriers is the only way to truly achieve full female access to public education in Rajasthan.
