

Education – The Key to Eliminating Poverty

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By Bill Taylor, Founder, SE Asia Foundation



Typical Village Girls. Photo Bill Taylor

Research the world over has shown how the key to eliminating poverty is education. Not just *any* education, but education for girls. So, there it is. The nexus of SDG 4 and SDG 5. Education and Gender Equality. Seems so simple and straightforward, doesn't it?

After all, when a girl growing up in a remote village gets an education through at least grade 12, and better yet through university or college (or even vocational school) her life takes on an entirely different character.

Benefits of Girls Receiving Primary Education

- **Gets married later.** Instead of being married in her mid-teens (often as young as 14 or even younger) she now marries in her early to mid-twenties.
- **Marries a “better” husband** – one that values her education and actively supports her and her abilities to be a full partner in raising their family. Respect for her skills and abilities is also far greater in her extended family and in her community.
- **Contributes meaningfully to the wellbeing of her family as an equal.** Her lifetime earning potential is multiples greater with an education than without.
- **Has fewer children.** It’s not uncommon at all for uneducated women in agrarian villages to have six or more children. After all, there is mortality to consider – along with the need for plentiful labor to help support the family and their meager standard of living. That all shifts with education. More typically she will have just one or two children.
- **Has healthier children.** Educated and understanding good hygiene practices and common-sense health care measures, her children are significantly healthier as they grow up. Their life expectancy just went up significantly.
- **Makes sure that her kids are educated.** Fully appreciating the importance of education, she will now do whatever it takes to ensure that her kids get an education the equal of hers, and in many cases even better.
- **Makes a difference in her village and her extended community.** She becomes a role model for those younger kids seeing her accomplishments. Often, she becomes a fervent advocate for education – especially educating girls – throughout her community. Beyond that, it’s not uncommon for her to start a small business, one that might create some jobs. That lifts up not just herself and her family, but her entire community.



Girl Studying. Photo PEPY-Empowering Youth, Cambodia

That's why we adopted our SE Asia Foundation tag line of: ***It Takes a Girl to Raise a Village***

Well, if all of this is so beneficial, *why isn't more of it happening?* After all, to most of us it seems like plain common sense. But the world doesn't work that way, does it? Let's consider what might be getting in the way.

Barriers of Girls Receiving A Primary Education

- **Gender norms.** Many cultures traditionally cast boys in the role of future “provider”; the “breadwinner” for the family. A leader. Girls, however, are seen as responsible for cooking, caring for the kids, and keeping the house clean. (How much education is required in preparation for that role?) Thus, if anyone in the family is going to get educated more often than not it’s the boy, not the girl.
- **Parental resistance.** Uneducated themselves, it is not uncommon for parents to see no value educating their kids – in particular the girls – especially when the need for labor in the fields is so compelling.
- **Tipping points.** Grade 6 (the conclusion of primary school) and Grade 9 (the conclusion of lower secondary school) are incredibly important tipping points. Those are vulnerable points in a girl’s life when a parent – typically her father – might decide that she’s had “enough education.” After all, from here on she is only going to ... (I’m sure you can readily fill in that blank).

That leads to the obvious question: What can be done about this? How can we positively impact the future for these girls?

SE Asia Foundation’s Approach

Our approach at the SE Asia Foundation is straightforward. We identify and support those locally-based, grassroots organizations with proven abilities to nurture and educate girls and women – and do so well beyond the opportunities provided by their government. We support those organizations financially, and we coach the leaders to run their organizations sustainably. Let’s face it. The people that are going to solve these problems are the ones who understand the history, the culture, the society, and what it will take to bring about meaningful change. It’s not “us”. It is “them”. Only *they* can make those changes happen in *their* society.



The Goal – University Education. Photo PEPY- Empowering Youth, Cambodia

We're fortunate to have more than 25 highly qualified NGO partners with which we actively work in Cambodia. Each of them, individually, is doing a marvelous job of raising the education standards in their community. Even more gratifying is to see how, with a bit of coaching, they are now banding together in a group called the Cambodian Leadership Learning Community (locally, the CLLC). In this alignment their power to bring about change is increasingly more powerful. Working together we've witnessed them supporting each other's social enterprises. We've seen them sharing curriculum materials. Now we see them teaching and coaching each other – even to the point of sharing internship opportunities. It's truly exciting to see this group living their belief that “We all get smarter, faster when we work together and share information.”

Strengthening this community-based, open system – the CLLC – is one critically important element of our work in Cambodia. After all, we, by ourselves, cannot educate one single girl. But we create enormous leverage for our mission when we are able to increase the strength of those NGOs that do the educating.

The bottom Line for us: We develop long-term partnerships with the organizations we support and provide them with the skills and resources needed to continue lifting girls and women out of poverty and into productive, self-sufficient lives.

More information about who we are and how we do our work is available at <https://seafund.org> or by contacting our Founder, Bill Taylor, at

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