



PUBLIC POLICY BLOG

Social and cultural barriers must be addressed to support girls' rights to education in Papua New Guinea

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Education plays a significant role in nation building and it has the potential to lift people out of poverty especially in developing countries. Papua New Guinea (PNG) Constitution supports gender equality in education. It also supports the opportunities for all Papua New Guineans to to achieve their full potential but these privileges irrespective of gender has been compromised. Gender inequality in education places a major challenge for girl's rights to education. Gender inequality limit girls' rights to education. Since the Tuition Fee Free (TFF) education policy was introduced in 2012, the enrolment of girls in primary schools has improved. However, social and cultural barriers remain problematic in PNG.

Cultural barriers

In a cultural perspective, boys are seen as change makers, leaders, financial supporters, defenders, problem solvers and intelligent. This is why education of a boy is often fully supported by families, friends, and relatives.

Most parents are reluctant in supporting girls in education, they are [more likely to send boys than girls to school](#). Priorities are always given to the boys neglecting the girls' rights to education. Girls

receive little or [no assistance on education](#) because they are considered as care givers of their siblings and house managers. Culturally, boys gain all trust, respect and confident to do extremely well in education and girls are considered incompetent in education and powerless in decision making. Cultural belief in PNG is a barrier for girls' rights to education and to participate equally in development issues affecting women and girls.

Social barriers

Poverty in some areas of PNG compel underage girls to get married. Child marriage, gender discrimination/harassment, gender-based violence in school and no proper toilets and sanitations to manage menstruation are main contributing factors to poor enrollment of girls in education.

Way forward

- Parents should enroll their children in schools regardless of gender of a child. Gender differentiation must not be used to undermine the children's ability in learning.
- Cultural beliefs and mindset should be addressed to change attitudes, change mindsets and cultural barriers to encourage

gender equality in education and in decision-making.

- Gender-based units should be established in all schools to protect girls from harassment, rape, and discriminations. Gender-based friendly schools should be encouraged.
- Gender equality should be introduced as a teaching curriculum in all levels of school.
- Parents should enroll girls at the early age to boost their interest in education and to protect them from early marriage.
- To contribute effectively towards developments of PNG, both boys and girls should have equal access to education and other public services equally.
- All schools should have proper toilets, sanitations, and proper waste disposal area.

Conclusion

Girl's rights to education plays an important role in the development of PNG. However, social and cultural barriers to girl's education should be addressed to promote gender equality in access to

education and other services. TFF has improved girl's access to education but more effort is needed for girls to achieve their full potential. Education department should develop more innovative strategy to promote gender equality in all spheres of education in the country.

About the Author

Ms Julian Melpa is a Research Intern under the Economic Policy Research Program at the Papua New Guinea National Research Institute (PNG NRI). She has a Bachelor's Degree in Sustainable Development from the University of Papua New Guinea and a Diploma in Economic Policy Analysis from PNG NRI. Her research interests include economic and human development issues especially those related to sustainability in service delivery.