

International Women's Day

By Christian Bryan and William Tolley

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Feminism

Feminist movements and ideologies are varied. However, some general points of focus are as follows:

- ✓ Women's rights as a specific gender focused entity.
- ✓ How women have been disempowered from socio-cultural, political, religious and economic power structures throughout history.
- ✓ Power dynamics that empower men at the expense of women.
- ✓ The socially constructed nature of some elements of gender roles and identity.
- ✓ The role of language.
- ✓ The role of culture.

There have been problems with some elements of feminism particularly regarding how it is received by wider society. For example:

- ✓ It has been interpreted as 'anti-man' with the role of boys and men in creating a fairer and freer society for women excluded or downplayed.
- ✓ It can mean equality is interpreted as 'sameness'. Individual and cultural expression of gender identity and roles are discouraged.
- ✓ It can generalize too much and assume all problems facing women are due to external patriarchal forces that exclude and disempower women.
- ✓ It has been used to create a 'one model fits all' for notions of female empowerment that undermines the role of cultural nuances and personal identities in people's lives.

However, these problems are often one of communication and interpretation rather than one of substance.

Overall, feminism and the women's rights movement aims to empower women to make the world a better place for everyone.



What can schools do?

Stage one: **Develop Foundations**

The aim to should be:

- ✓ To establish school links with local initiatives or personalities who are dedicated to female empowerment
- ✓ To empower and educate students who are interested in female empowerment.

Tasks:

- ✓ Establishing a gender equity club
 - **Example:** **We for She Club**, inspired by Emma Watson's "**He For She**" address to the United Nations on 20 September 2014.
- ✓ Taking affirmative action
 - **Example:** Establish a rule that requires a 50/50 gender split in the student council. Example: Reading and discussing the **United Nation's General recommendation No. 25**, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
 - **Example:** Host an Model United Nations simulation, and discuss if affirmative action is desirable.
- ✓ Holding regular meetings using current affairs articles and videos to discuss women's rights, feminism and intersectionality in both a local and global context.
 - **Examples include:**
 - **Unmarried at 27: Meet China's leftover Women**
 - **"It's OK to Cry"**
 - **Confessions of a Bad Feminist**
- ✓ Forming reading groups to educate members on relevant issues.
 - **Example:** **Half The Sky**, Sheryl WuDunn.
- ✓ Working with local women's empowerment or aid organization
 - **Example:** **The Starfish Project**
- ✓ Sponsor a woman in her business
 - **Example:** Ripples Foundation, or similar NGO

Issues facing women and girls



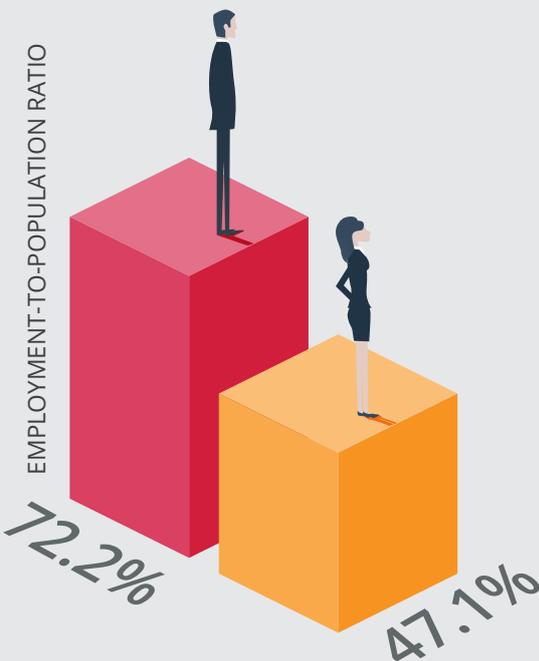
The role of women in the world is changing. This is in part due to the impact of globalization which has meant traditional gender roles are being challenged. Increasingly, the association of masculinity with privilege and power is being questioned and new norms and ideals are being promoted in literature, media, music and films. **Women are increasingly assuming positions of power in NGOs, MNCs, IGOs etc.**

However, many key aspects of the world remain fundamentally affected by gender. For example human rights and health concerns, positions of privilege and power. Issues such as literacy, migration, sexual violence and disease continue to have a different impact on men, women and children because of cultural norms associated with men and women. Women are disproportionately affected because of an imbalance in power dynamics on a local, national and international level. Therefore, the issues facing women and girls are unique to their gender and can only be addressed acknowledging the gender specific nature of the problems.

Types of work



Women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men. In 2013, the male employment-to-population ratio stood at 72.2 per cent, while the ratio for females was 47.1 per cent (International Labour Organization, 2014).



In rural areas, many women derive their livelihoods from small-scale farming, almost always informal and often unpaid (Fontana and Paciello, 2010).

Women comprise an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, varying considerably across regions from 20 per cent or less in Latin America to 50 per cent or more in parts of Asia and Africa (FAO, 2014).



Women farmers control less land than men do, and also have limited access to inputs, seeds, credits, and extension services (FAO, 2011).

Less than 20 per cent of landholders are women; gender differences in access to land and credit affect the relative ability of female and male farmers and entrepreneurs to invest, operate to scale, and benefit from new economic opportunities (World Bank, 2012).

Women and children bear the main negative impacts of fuel and water collection and transport, with women in many developing countries spending from 1 to 4 hours a day collecting biomass for fuel (World Bank, 2011). A study of time and water poverty in 25 sub-Saharan African countries estimated that women spend at least 16 million hours a day collecting drinking water; men spend 6 million hours; and children, 4 million hours (WHO, 2012).



According to the World Bank, globally, **women are paid less than men.**

Women in most countries earn on average only 60 to 75 per cent of men's wages.





Women bear disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work. Women devote 1 to 3 hours more a day to housework than men; 2 to 10 times the amount of time a day to care (for children, elderly, and the sick), and 1 to 4 hours less a day to market activities (World Bank, 2012).

Men spend more time on leisure each day while women spend more time doing unpaid housework (OECD Gender Data). Women are more likely than men to work in informal employment.



Women are responsible for household food preparation in 85-90 per cent of cases surveyed in a wide range of countries (WHO, 2014).



Gender gaps in domestic and household work, including time spent obtaining water and fuel and processing food, are intensified in contexts of economic crisis, environmental degradation, natural disasters, and inadequate infrastructure and services (UN, 2010).

↑ Types of work

What can schools do?

Stage two: Awareness Events

The aim to should be:

- ✓ To educate students and raise awareness among the wider school community about female empowerment.
- ✓ To establish school definitive school fundraising goals for local initiatives.

Tasks:

- ✓ Skype meetings and talks with local or international academics, e.g.:
 - Dr. Kathy Jones, Professor at UC Davis, feminist and Hannah Arendt specialist
 - Two female law students at Columbia University to discuss campus reactions to Emma Sulkowicz's **"Carry That Weight"** project
 - A mixed panel of male and female celebrities from the online gaming community to discuss **Gamergate** and its repercussions
- ✓ School meeting to discuss the school sponsoring of women in NGOs
 - Ripple Foundation.

Wider benefits

The economic and cultural empowerment of women:

- ✔ When more women work, economies grow. An increase in female labour force participation—or a reduction in the gap between women’s and men’s labour force participation—results in faster economic growth (OECD, 2012).
- ✔ Evidence from a range of countries shows that increasing the share of household income controlled by women, either through their own earnings or cash transfers, changes spending in ways that benefit children (World Bank 2012)
- ✔ Increasing women and girls’ education contributes to higher economic growth. Increased educational attainment accounts for about 50 per cent of the economic growth in OECD countries over the past 50 years (OECD, 2012), of which over half is due to girls having had access to higher levels of education and achieving greater equality in the number of years spent in education between men and women. But, for the majority of women, significant gains in education have not translated into better labour market outcomes (UN, 2016).
- ✔ Gakidou, et al., (2010) used data from 219 countries from 1970 to 2009 found that, for every one additional year of education for women of reproductive age, child mortality decreased by 9.5 per cent.

The empowerment of women has a significant effect on social sustainability. Empowering women leads to:

- ✔ a higher proportion of earnings reinvested in the family (OECD, 2012);
- ✔ a 20 per cent increase in children’s survival rate when the mother controls household income (Zoellick, 2010);
- ✔ less corruption;
- ✔ women taking control of their bodies which:
 - reduces the birth rate;
 - reduces the early marriage rate;
 - reduces the HIV infection rate (as women insist on more use of contraception);
 - results in more girls finishing school and becoming economically and culturally active, rather than becoming young mothers (OECD, 2012).

What can schools do?

Stage three: **Have fun, educate and fundraise**

The aim to should be:

- ✔ To establish school social events where students have fun while in the context of the issues
- ✔ To raise funds from the wider school community and donate to a specific cause.
- ✔ Movie nights with the following recommendations

- ✔ **Iron Jawed Angels**

- ✔ **Legally Blonde**

- ✔ **The Stoning of Soraya M** (trigger warnings and parental permission recommended)

- ✔ **Han Gong-Ju** (trigger warnings and parental permission recommended)

- ✔ School-Based Activities

- ✔ "Wage Gap Bake Sale"

Cookies and other baked treats are sold at a 30% mark-up for boys in order to draw attention to disparities in salaries between men and women. This will cause debate among the students.

- ✔ "Playing House" in the elementary school

We for She members use dolls to play "house" with students in 1st through 3rd grade in order to explore the difference between what young students aspire to do in their future, and what they already know society expects of them. Students are encouraged to consider options that defy received knowledge and play as they like.

- ✔ Mother's Day panel of guest speakers who are mothers in the community.

A mixed panel of homemakers, self-employed entrepreneurs, CEOs, diplomats, teachers and other professionals who discussed the value of all roles. A precise focus on the importance of timing arose from the discussion: a woman in today's job and multicultural environment is likely to assume different and multiple roles over the course of her career and lifetime. The aim is to explore different cultural approaches to female identity and the challenges facing women.

Five key lessons learned from developing and managing female empowerment initiatives in schools:



Be current: the most engaging stories are happening now.



Be cognizant of the student and community population.



Be aware that “feminism” and female empowerment means different things to different people. We should avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach to female empowerment.



Be prepared for pushback from your school’s constituencies.



Be ready to educate your members and your community.

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