



*Global Majority E-Journal*



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# *Global Majority E-Journal*

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The *Global Majority E-Journal* is published twice a year and freely available online at: <http://www.american.edu/cas/economics/ejournal/>. The journal publishes articles that discuss critical issues for the lives of the global majority. The global majority is defined as the more than 80 percent of the world's population living in low- and middle-income countries. The topics discussed reflect issues that characterize, determine, or influence the lives of the global majority: poverty, population growth, youth bulge, urbanization, lack of access to safe water, climate change, agricultural development, etc. The articles are based on research papers written by American University (AU) undergraduate students (mostly freshmen) as one of the course requirements for AU's General Education Course: Econ-110—The Global Majority.

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# **El Salvador's Drivers of Poverty: Low Levels of Education, Lack of Access to Water and Sanitation, and Violence and Crime**

Isabelle Bissonnette

## ***Abstract***

*This article discusses the underlying problems associated with high poverty rates in El Salvador. El Salvador has advanced access to basic public services but fails to ameliorate the threats of poverty that negatively impact social development. This article reviews explanations for why poverty has not improved more substantially and what some of the key drivers are for poverty in El Salvador, focusing on low levels of education, lack of access to water and sanitation, and high rates of violence and crime. It also discusses ethical aspects related to these three drivers of poverty. The article concludes with some brief suggestions on what El Salvador should do in the future to lower poverty rates and increase economic growth.*

## **I. Introduction**

Following the end of El Salvador's civil war in 1991, El Salvador has developed a stable democracy and experienced a major turning point in economic, political, and social growth. Other grand turning points have included major improvements in macroeconomic policies, including the dollarization of their economy and trade liberalization, which have paved El Salvador's way into a more globalized economy. Despite many accomplishments, El Salvador still suffers from high poverty rates.

While there are many dimensions and sources of poverty, this article focuses on three main drivers that not only cause but perpetuate poverty in El Salvador: low levels of education, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, and high rates of crime and violence. It applies ethical concepts related to these three key drivers and proposes solutions to address the high concentrations of poverty.

Following this introduction (Section I), the article provides a brief review of the literature (Section II), which is followed by some information on El Salvador's socioeconomic evolution during the last few decades, focusing on the evolution of PPP-adjusted GDP per capita, average life expectancy at birth, and literacy rates (Section III). Section IV examines the evolution of poverty in El Salvador, while Section V discusses three specific drivers of poverty and their related ethical aspects. Section VI provides some conclusions and recommendations.

## II. Brief Literature Review

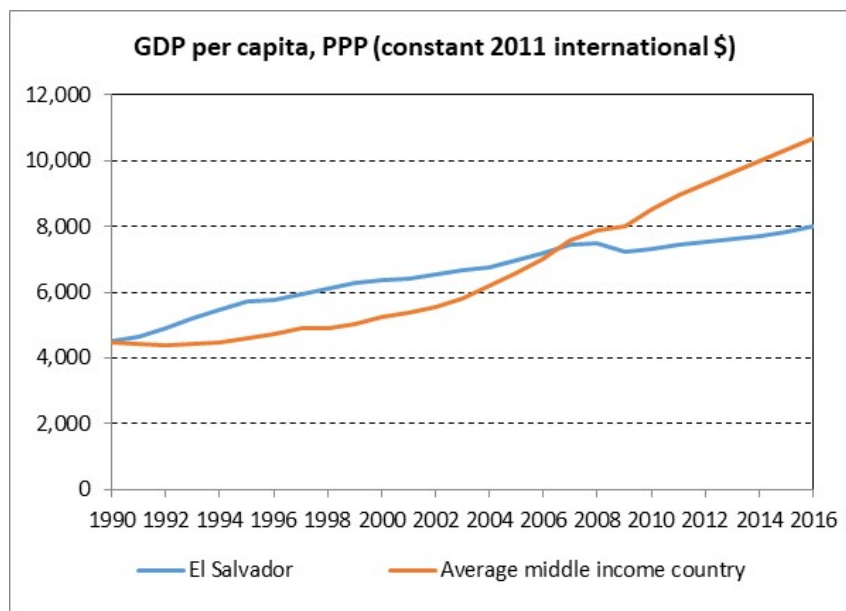
There is a solid amount of literature that covers poverty issues and social development threats within El Salvador. This brief literature review summarizes four very different publications, two of which are reports by international organizations and the other two are reports by civil society organizations. The two reports by international organizations are a very detailed analysis of poverty by the World Bank (2005) and a recent country report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2016). The two articles from civil society organizations are by Voices on the Border (2017) and Craig Frayne (2016), who is writing for a group that calls itself International Socialists.

- A World Bank (2005) poverty assessment discusses El Salvador's past political events that heightened their economic growth achievements, while also touching on areas they need to continue working on. For example, key turning points for economic growth were the culmination of the Civil War in 1991, the implementation of stable macro policies, the dollarization of their economy, and their alliance in the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). The article points out their need to ameliorate poverty rates as education rates and access to safe drinking water still pose current threats.
- A report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2016) states that El Salvador greatly differentiates itself from other Central American countries in terms of fiscal sustainability, political ideology, and economic vulnerability. It notes that El Salvador embodies the highest debt ratio, at a staggering 60 percent of their GDP, particularly due to their pension system and high public spending. The report also stresses that despite the end of the Civil War in 1992, there remains a strong divergence between the political opinion that has continued to divide the nation and create spurs of violence and crime. The two dominant political parties, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) and the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), create a heated division that prohibits society from living a peaceful life and therefore ties into hindering social development as a whole.
- Craig Frayne (2016) talks about El Salvador's crime and violence, how it relates to its continuously unequal income distribution, and hence how it inhibits improvements in reducing poverty. He stresses that despite El Salvador's increased economic growth since the Civil War, most of that growth has been compromised by capitalism, leaving little income for the poor. Frayne (2016) specifically states that modernization within the nation became an opportunity for the economic elite to spread its control to new production fields and other activities, resulting in a complete monopoly over agriculture and revenue generated from those activities. Despite that El Salvador is one of the world's largest coffee exporters, most of those revenues are generated by 15 family businesses who occupy 80 percent of the land, leaving less than 1 percent of the land available to low-income farmers.
- Voices on the Border (2017) emphasizes that El Salvador is one of the countries in the world facing a profound water crisis. More than 90 percent of their water sources are contaminated, leaving less than 10 percent safe for consumption. Capitalization leads to major businesses and the rich population occupying the majority of clean water, leaving little water for poor communities. This water issue enhances the current divide between the rich and poor within El Salvador and puts a toll on social development.

### III. Socio-economic Background

As Figure 1 shows, El Salvador's GDP per capita (in PPP-adjusted constant 2011\$) increased moderately from \$4,530 in 1990 to \$7,990 in 2016. While it was nearly exactly the same as for the average middle-income country (MIC) in 1990, it then grew faster in the first few years of the 1990s (likely due to some catch-up effect following the end of the civil war in 1991), but then grew less than the average MIC since 1995. By 2016, the gap between El Salvador's GDP per capita and that of the average MIC stood at \$2,683.

**Figure 1: GDP per capita (PPP-adjusted, constant 2011 international \$), 1990-2016**

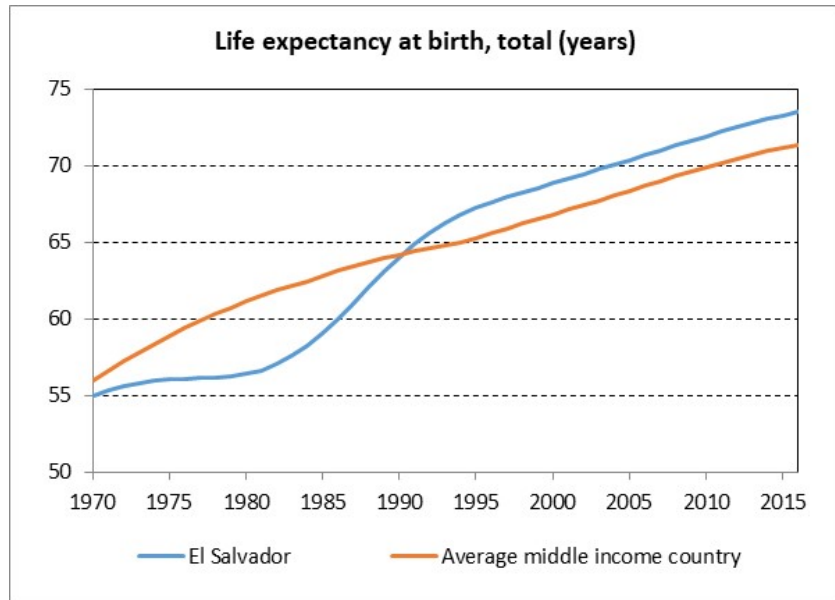


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

El Salvador's low GDP growth is associated with various internal and external factors. The coffee crisis in 2000 put a hold on growth, hindering farmers from harvesting coffee crops and dropping harvests by 65 percent compared to previous years. According to the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policies (IATP) (2002), coffee revenues dropped by \$181 million, which constituted nearly 3 percent of the nation's GDP. Earthquakes in 2001 also negatively impacted GDP growth as El Salvador remains vulnerable to shocks in the agricultural sector. The world economic crisis of 2008-2009 resulted in a negative GDP per capita growth of 3.6 percent from 2008 to 2009.

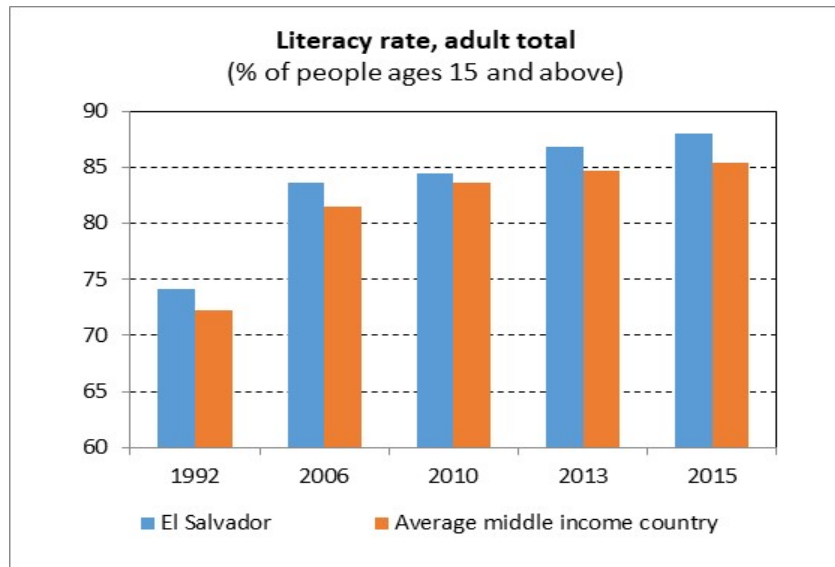
Figure 2 shows life expectancy at birth in years for El Salvador and the average MIC from 1970-2016. While El Salvador's life expectancy stagnated during most of the 1970's, it then accelerated sharply during the 1980s and early 1990s, after which it then grew at a relatively steady rate. Hence, the gap between El Salvador and the average MIC increased from one year in 1970 to nearly five years in the early 1980s. El Salvador's life expectancy caught up with the average MIC in 1991 and then remained consistently two years above the average MIC's life expectancy from 1995-2016.

**Figure 2: Life Expectancy at Birth (in years), 1970-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

**Figure 3: Total Adult Literacy (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

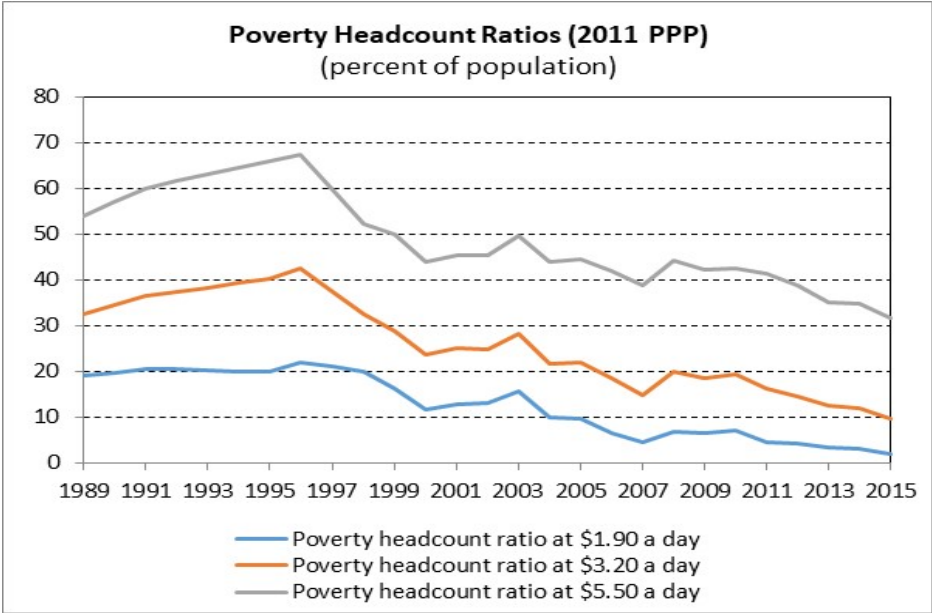
Despite a considerable gap in the availability of data, Figure 3 shows that total adult literacy rates have been above the average MIC. In 1992, which is the first year such data is available for El Salvador and the average MIC, El Salvador's literacy rate stood at 74.1 percent, while that of the average MIC was 72.3 percent (a gap of nearly two percent). While literacy rates increased in both El Salvador and the average MIC, El Salvador's lead was nearly eliminated in 2010. However, El Salvador's literacy rate grew faster in the subsequent years, exceeding that of the average MIC by

2.1 percent in 2013 and 2.6 percent in 2015 (the last year such data is available for both, El Salvador and the average MIC). Comparing the information across Figures 1 to 3, we can see that El Salvador has currently a higher life expectancy and a higher literacy rate than the average MIC, even though El Salvador’s GDP per capita remains below the average MIC.

**IV. Evolution of Poverty in El Salvador**

Though extreme poverty (defined as living below \$1.90 a day) has been nearly eliminated in El Salvador by 2015, Figure 4 shows that nearly one third (31.6 percent) of the population lived below \$5.50 a day in 2015, and 9.8 percent lived below \$3.20 a day. These are shocking numbers for a country with an average income per capita of \$21.50 in 2015. The explanation for the huge discrepancy between average income and the percentages living in poverty is of course high inequality. Fortunately, after steady increases in poverty from 1989 to 1996, poverty has fallen drastically in the late 1990s. With the exception of the early 2000s and 2008/2009, poverty has continued to decrease during the last two decades, though with very limited progress. For example, 44 percent of El Salvadorians lived below \$5.50 a day in 2000; 15 years later, 31.6 percent still lived below \$5.50 a day. That is an average reduction of slightly less than one percentage point per year.

**Figure 4: Evolution of Poverty Headcount Ratio, 1989-2015**



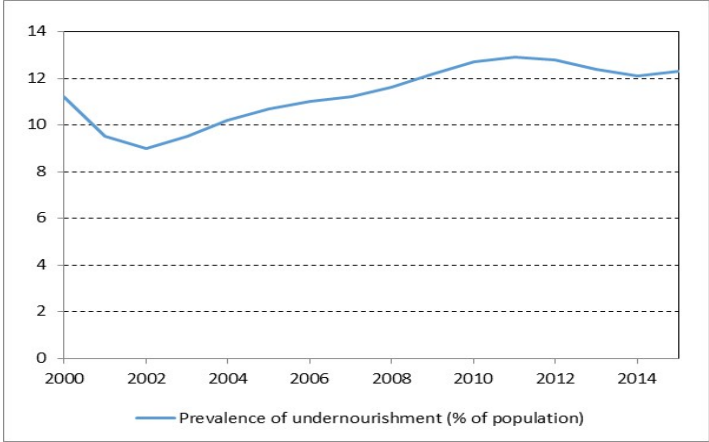
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Despite some progress with reducing poverty based on poverty headcount data at international poverty measures as was shown in Figure 4, Figure 5 shows overall no progress in the prevalence of undernourishment from 2000 to 2015, which are all the year’s such data is available. According to the World Bank (2018), undernourishment is defined as the population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption (also referred to as prevalence of undernourishment), the population whose food intake is insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements continuously. According to the World Bank (2018), the prevalence of undernourishment has decreased relatively sharply from



2000 to 2002 but then increased continuously for the next ten years. It then decreased again from 2012 to 2014 but increased again (even though marginally) in 2015.

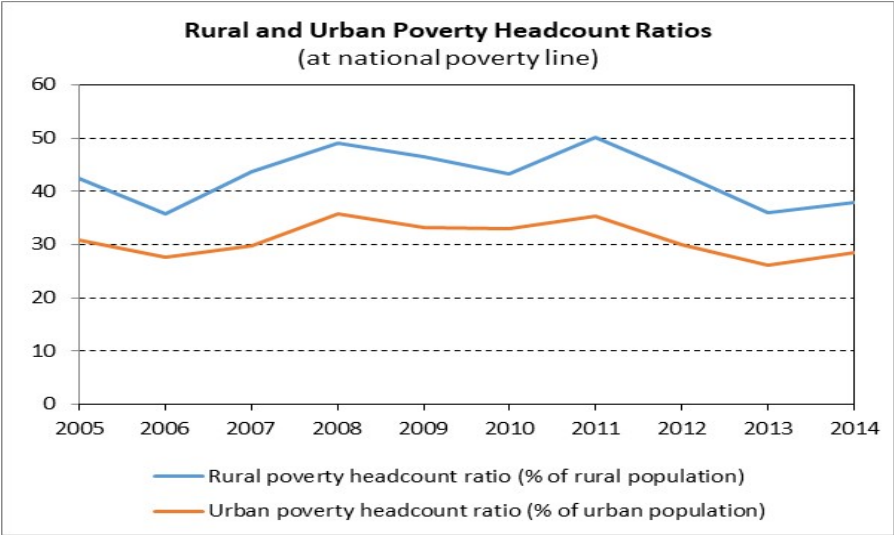
**Figure 5: Prevalence of Undernourishment (percent of population), 2000-2015**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

The overall stable level of undernourishment from 2000 to 2015 is confirmed by looking at the evolution of urban and rural poverty at national poverty lines, for which data is available from 2005 to 2014. As shown in Figure 6, despite some volatility, about 40 percent of the rural population lived below national poverty lines from 2005 to 2014, while urban poverty remained relatively stable at around 30 percent.

**Figure 6: Rural and Urban Poverty, 2005-2014**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

## V. Drivers of Poverty and Ethical Aspects

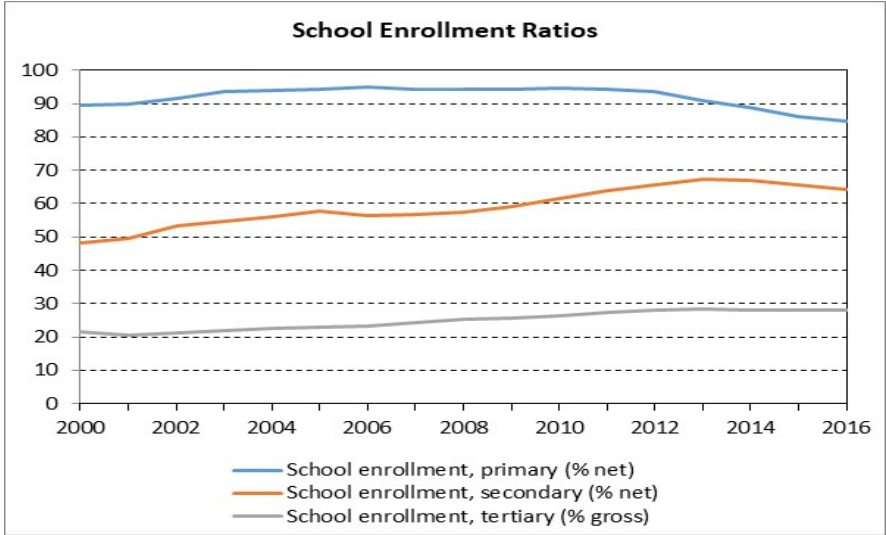
This section now reviews three key drivers of poverty in El Salvador: low levels of education, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, and high rates of crime and violence. This section also provides some ethical discussion related to these three drivers.

### V.1. Low Levels of Education

As was shown above in the socio-economic background section, even though adult literacy rates have increased in El Salvador from 74.1 percent in 1992 to 88 percent in 2015, low levels of education beyond literacy continue to contribute to poverty in El Salvador. As Figure 7 shows, as of 2016, only 64 percent of El Salvador’s children are enrolled in secondary education, and the percentage falls below 30 percent for tertiary education.

While Figure 7 shows some improvement for secondary and tertiary school enrollment ratios from 2000 to 2016, there has been a slight decrease in net secondary school enrollment from an all-time high of 67.3 percent in 2013 to 64.3 percent in 2016. With regards to primary education, the net primary school enrollment ratio has actually decreased from 89.5 percent in 2000 to 84.8 percent in 2016, with an all-time high of 94.8 percent in 2006, which is more than ten years ago. Clearly, with more than 15 percent of the children not even attending primary school, it is a kind of obvious why El Salvador has not made more progress with eliminating poverty beyond extreme poverty.

**Figure 7: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary School Enrollment Ratios, 2000-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

As stated in Lötter (2015, p. 158), in 1971, philosopher Peter Singer added a global twist to the centuries-old debate about rich and poor, when he asked: What are the moral obligations of rich people in developed countries to relieve the hardship of poor people suffering from hunger in developing countries? He proposed a principle that if it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally, to do it.

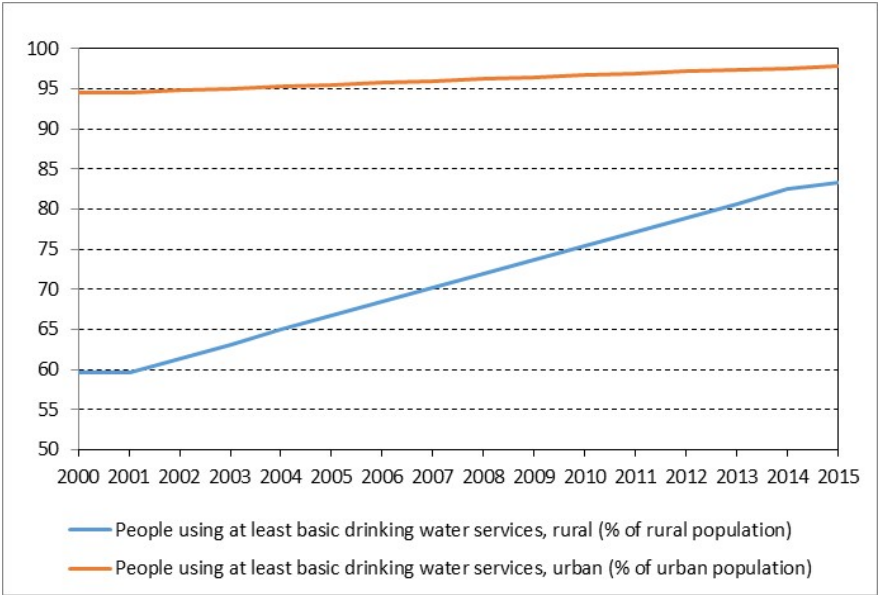
This principle can be applied to most issues that correlate to poverty in El Salvador, especially the lack of access to education. There is a huge discrepancy of education between the poor and wealthy children of the population in El Salvador. As was emphasized by the World Bank (2005, p. xii), “[a]ccess to secondary schooling remains low and the gap between poor and non-poor remains large; secondary enrollment rates are only about 20 percent among the poor (compared with 36 percent among the non-poor).”

This issue poses another ethical problem in El Salvador’s governance. The government of El Salvador prioritizes and provides higher education to the wealthier population while discriminating against poorer segments who deserve the same opportunity. The government’s failure to provide equal education distribution, therefore, makes children of poorer population segments less driven to continue attending school—which overall impedes on ameliorating future poverty rates within El Salvador. Providing primary and secondary education to all of El Salvador’s children would not imply that the government or the rich people of El Salvador would have to sacrifice something significant. To the contrary, the positive impact of an educated population on GDP growth would improve not only the situation of the poor but of the rich as well.

**V.2. Lack of Access to Safe Water and Sanitation**

Another main driver of poverty and inequality is the lack of access to safe water and sanitation (see UNDP, 2006). As Figure 8 shows, while nearly all of the urban population have access to safe water in El Salvador, less than 85 percent of the rural population use at least basic drinking water services in 2015. Fortunately, El Salvador has made considerable progress in providing access to safe water during the last 15 years. In 2000, less than 60 percent of the rural population used at least basic drinking water services. The discrepancy between rural and urban access to safe water is consistent with the discrepancy between rural and urban poverty shown in Figure 6 above.

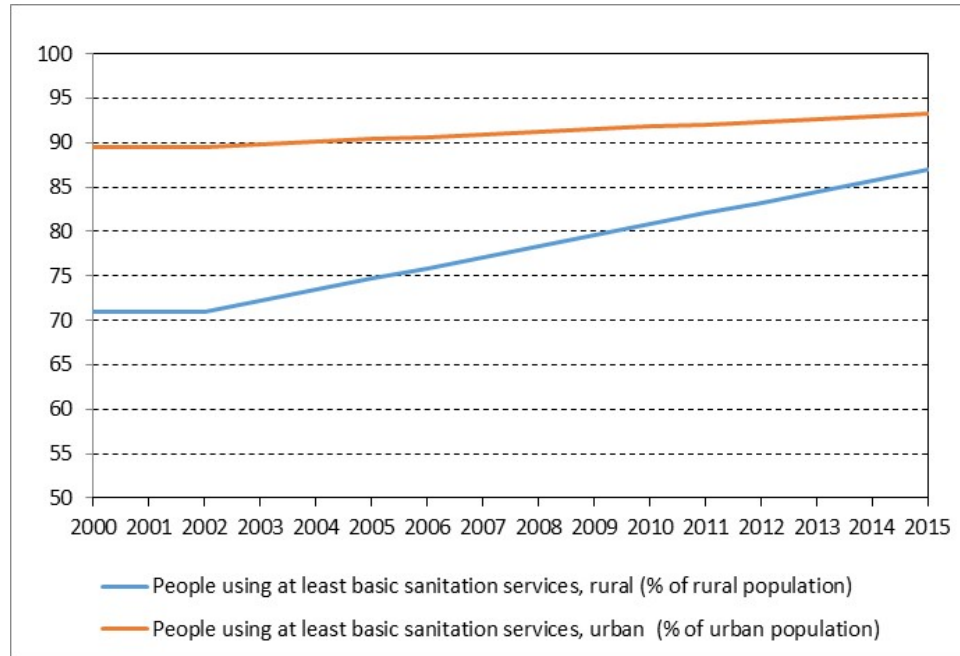
**Figure 8: Percentage of People Using at least Basic Drinking Water Services, 2000-2015**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

With regards to access to sanitation, Figure 9 shows that in 2000, only 71.0 percent of the rural population used at least basic sanitation services, while the percentage stood at 89.5 percent for the urban population. By 2015, the percentage of the population using at least basic sanitation services reached 87.0 percent in rural areas and 93.2 percent in urban areas.

**Figure 9: Percentage of People Using at least Basic Sanitation Services, 2000-2015**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Comparing Figure 8 with Figure 9 shows that access to sanitation in El Salvador has generally been lower than access to safe water, which is consistent with the experiences of other developing countries, due to a variety of barriers. However, in 2015, the percentage of the rural population using at least basic sanitation services has slightly exceeded the percentage of the rural population using at least basic drinking water services. This is likely due to rapid urbanization, with cities being unable to provide basic services to the sharply increasing population in cities, especially El Salvador’s slums.

Without the proper public investment in water and sanitation, life expectancy will continue to only slightly ameliorate. The lack of access to safe water and sanitation can be discussed based on the Fairness (or Justice) Approach of Ethics, which based on The Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (2009) implies that one should treat people the same unless there are morally relevant differences between them. More specifically, this approach implies that favoritism and discrimination are wrong and unethical. Favoritism entails giving benefits to sought-out people without a relevant reason, while discrimination hampers certain people in society who do not differ from the other people that are not discriminated against.

This approach is ignored when looking at the discrepancy of access to safe water and sanitation in El Salvador and hence contributes to El Salvador’s poverty. Unequal access to clean water forces children within poor communities to spend more time and effort finding clean water sources, which

means they spend less time in school receiving an education and less opportunity to receive a future career. Additionally, lack of clean water causes diarrhea and other diseases which lowers El Salvador's life expectancy.

Schmidt and Peppard (2014) point out that poor governance and unethical distribution perpetuates the lack of freshwater access within a nation--hence emphasizing the important role that ethics plays when determining water access. A government with morals that comply with the Fairness (or Justice) Approach would provide a more equal distribution of water than a government with a more selfish mindset. In El Salvador, following its civil war, the government prioritized water access to a small number of wealthy businesses, ignoring the needs of the people, especially the poor.

Related to poor governance not giving access to water to poor people, high water prices also create an obstacle for obtaining safe water access for the poor. As stated in the Human Development Report 2006 (UNDP, 2006, p. 7): "The poorest 20% of households in El Salvador, Jamaica and Nicaragua spend on average more than 10% of their household income on water." Furthermore, the quality of the water for which poor people spend more than 10 percent of their income is below the quality of water provided in the United States.

### **V.3. High Rates of Crime and Violence**

A detailed report by the International Crisis Group (2017) stresses that after fifteen years of failed security policies, the government of El Salvador is in the middle of an open confrontation with its violent gangs. As the report (2018, p. i) states: "The economic dead-end of El Salvador's urban outskirts (...) and stigma of gang violence combine to block off alternative ways of life for those born into these communities, cutting years of schooling for young people in areas of high gang presence and alienating potential employers. Instead of succumbing to the state's offensive, gangs set up roadblocks in their neighbourhoods and impose their own law."

A subsequent report by the International Crisis Group (2018) states that nearly 20,000 Salvadorans were killed from 2014 to 2017, which are more violent deaths than in several countries that were at war during those years, such as Libya, Somalia, and Ukraine. Even though the murder rate has consistently declined since 2015, El Salvador's murder rate was still with 60 murders per 100,000 still sky-high in 2017.

The culprit in most of these murders is the maras, the country's powerful, pervasive criminal gangs. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2016), gang violence is responsible for about 70 percent of the homicides in El Salvador--putting society at risk for early deaths.

The International Crisis Group (2018) points out that the maras, including the infamous MS-13, or Mara Salvatrucha, are active in 94 percent of El Salvador's 262 municipalities and that these gangs are not just a standing danger to public safety but also a de facto authority that exerts tremendous control over of the daily lives of people in El Salvador. The International Crisis Group (2018) also reports that gang-related murder is a topic of everyday conversation among families at home, children at school and patrons in bars and that every Salvadoran knows someone who was shot dead by gang members or someone who pulled the trigger.

The United States Department of State (2018) reported that San Salvador is a critical threat location for crime directed at or affecting official U.S. government interests. Also documenting the recent decline in murder rates, the report points out that there has been a reduction in home invasions/burglaries in 2017. On the other hand, a new phenomenon of armed robberies of

nightclubs and restaurants was reported toward the end of 2017. Furthermore, despite a significant decrease from a peak of more than 4,400 cases in 2009, extortion continues to be a common criminal enterprise in San Salvador with 1,414 cases reported in 2017. Finally, there has been a significant increase in rape cases from 1,520 cases reported nationally in 2016 to 1,850 reported rape cases in 2017.

When looking at these numbers, it is important to keep in mind that most of these crimes are severely under-reported in El Salvador. As the Report of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security states, many murder victims show signs of rape, and survivors of rape may not report the crime for fear of retaliation. Many victims of extortion opt to pay rather than risk their livelihoods or their safety to file a report.

El Salvador's high crime and gang violence is an ethical dilemma that impedes on social development. The government has tended to rely on police intervention but has also considered implementing a gang truce option in order to reduce physical violence. According to past events, the El Salvadoran government has chosen police control as it is a more simplistic option. On the other hand, this option has created a risk of putting lives in danger, for mostly three reasons. First, gang members are unlikely to call the police as it can decrease their status and expose other illegal activities to the government. Second, bystanders are reluctant to call the police as it can hinder their safety, and third, the police normally address the issue with hands-on violence that can potentially harm innocent bystanders (World Health Organization, 2017). The other option, which the government has mostly avoided, involves a more peaceful technique: verbal communication between gangs with the involvement of a neutral third party.

Despite the potential risks, the El Salvadoran government has chosen to rely on physical police intervention, rather than gang truce implementation. This decision ignores the ethical framework of the Utilitarian Approach because the government fails to minimize the risks and maximize the benefits for the betterment of society. Despite that the more ethical solution requires more cooperation and patience, the government should instead focus on this option as it is plausible in terms of inhibiting the cycle of violence within gang culture. Lowering negative impacts on social development through adapting the Utilitarian Approach will spark improvement upon poverty rates. Gang violence perpetuates extreme poverty as it induces drug and gun activities, which prevents people from attending school and obtaining legal jobs in the future. More specifically, if the government focuses on preventing and addressing gang violence through verbal communication, more people within poor communities will have the incentive to work and attend school.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In El Salvador, poverty rates are not only driven by the economic vulnerability but mainly through the country's lack of governance and ethics. The El Salvadoran government prioritizes the rich over the poor, therefore leading to more children of the wealthy attending school and obtaining careers. Lack of verbal communication during gang violence, equal access to clean water, and equal education distribution all come hand in hand when referring to poverty in El Salvador. Each issue prevents children from attending school and obtaining jobs, leading to cycle of a crime and poverty.

In terms of solutions for El Salvador's high poverty rates, the government should implement more hands-on action when dealing with gang violence. This solution will prevent future occurrences

and allow more children, who were initially distracted by such violence, to attend school and make a future living.

To improve access to clean water, the government should distribute more clean water to poorer portions of the population, instead of prioritizing access to wealthy family businesses in the country. To do so, the government should create water wells or provide more accessible sources within poor communities. These areas should be funded through public investments, the government, and/or the United Nations. Therefore, children will not need to make long journeys to obtain water and will be able to spend more time focusing on school--leading to higher job rates and lower poverty rates.

Lastly, the government should educate more children in poor communities on the importance of staying in school and receiving an education. They should implement more public schooling and grant programs that allow children to attend school and afford college educations. This would positively influence El Salvador's future generations, to the extent that the children of these children will be more likely to receive educations and obtain jobs--creating a cycle of education and employment that will overall decrease the number of people living in poverty. Focusing on these three issues and their solutions may not immediately fix El Salvador's high poverty but will slowly improve upon it in the long-term.

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# **Growing Inequality in the People’s Republic of China: Dimensions and Solutions**

John Feher III

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines the current state of inequality in China through a variety of lenses. Following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, China reduced inequalities during the subsequent decades. However, after transitioning to a market-based economy, which started in 1978, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and subsequent very high economic growth, China has become one of the most unequal countries in the world in numerous aspects such as income, opportunities like getting higher education, and healthcare. This article looks at some of the dimensions and reasons for these inequalities and explains some possible remedies.*

## **I. Introduction**

Widespread inequality is a problem that has been affecting human society throughout history and today it continues especially in developing countries. In September 2015, all 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a set of 17 goals to end global poverty, build a life of dignity for all and leave no one behind. SDG 10, which is entitled “Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries” states that its goal is to reduce things such as income inequality, ensure people have equal opportunity, and enhance representation in decision-making processes for common citizens.<sup>1</sup> All 17 SDGs are supposed to be achieved by 2030.

As detailed in Jain-Chandra et al. (2018), the People’s Republic of China (PRC, henceforth China) has seen rapid economic growth for the last 20 years, leading to a large increase in income inequality. In addition, China has also experienced inequality in its healthcare system with a specific emphasis on disparities based on geographic location as well as the wealth of citizens seeking different types of care. Geographic inequality can also be applied to education in China, where educational systems in rural areas have less students attending college as well as less qualified teachers than their urban counterparts. Although education and healthcare in China do experience inequality, there are successes in both these areas as well, with, for example, the hospital sector showing little inequality and a nearly 100 percent primary school enrollment.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on these previously stated inequalities as well as China’s successes. Following this introduction (Section I), Section II gives an overview of the research that has been done on these topics in China. Section III provides some socio-economic background to better understand

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2018).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2018).

the changes China experienced during the last few decades in terms of GDP per capita, life expectancy, and literacy rates. Section IV offers a detailed discussion on various dimensions and evolutions of China's inequality. A brief conclusion makes some final comments and provides some possible improvements.

## II. Literature Review

There is a great amount of literature on inequalities in China, with an abundant number of sources focusing on the huge income inequality the country is facing. Xie (2016) provides an overview of inequality in China. Zhang et al. (2017) dives into the inequalities faced by health services in China while Gao (2014) discusses China's growing education gap. Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) and Li et al. (2014) discuss the growth of income inequality in the country. The following are short summaries of these publications in chronological order.

- Gao (2014) describes the growing education gap in China. Gao describes the state education system which offers nine years of schooling as well as college entry that is based on exam scores only. Although described as an example for education equity the expansion of basic education has led to discrimination against the less wealthy and well-connected members of China's society. Students in rural areas are thus at a significant disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts.
- Li et al. (2014) focuses on income inequality as well as distributional effects of inequality. The article highlights how income inequality was not caused by declining incomes of poorer populations but rather a sharp growth in incomes of the rich. It also highlights the income gap between urban and rural groups. Lie et al. (2014) also explains how income inequality derived from assets is greatly influencing the inequality gap.
- Xie (2016) begins with explaining how China is transforming socially and then describes how these aspects are affecting inequality as a whole. Xie then describes how Chinese culture sees merit-based inequality as well as inequality in general as necessary for development of the country, both economically and socially. This article highlights the deep routes that run through inequality in China all the way back to ancient times. How the poor accepted the rich acting on their behalf in order for them to benefit in different ways such as improving their performance and becoming part of the rich. Xie ends with illustrating how people have gone from relatively poor and equal to being largely unequally in terms of income as economic growth in China has prospered.
- Zhang et al. (2017) discusses the different types of health services in China such as hospitals and primary care institutions and how equal they are. The article uses Gini coefficients to survey inequality in various parts of the different health services. Their findings show a decent equality within health institutions. However, regional inequality between rural and urban health institutions was high.
- Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) explores inequality, particularly income inequality, in China. They discuss how China has become one of the most unequal countries in the world since 1990, surpassing many countries in Latin American and Sub-Saharan Africa. Although there has been a leveling off in recent years, the inequality is still immense. Inequality also exists in opportunities such as access to education, health and financial services. Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) highlights how China is still behind other major economies in the

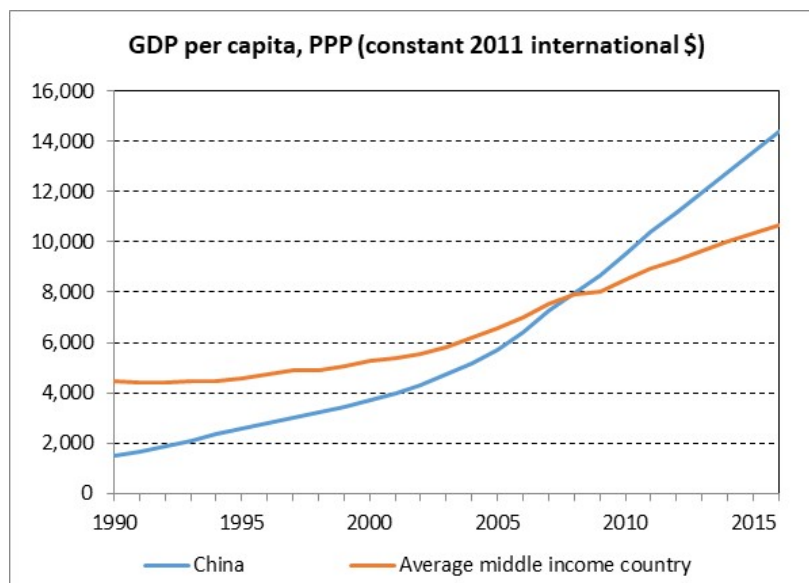
amount of borrowing and other transaction services provided by its financial sector. Jain-Chandra et al. (2018) then makes recommendations on how China can further decrease inequality, mainly through public spending and policies to reduce it.

### III. Socio-Economic Background

This section provides some socio-economic background of China by reviewing the evolution of GDP per capita, life expectancy at birth, and literacy rate, which are all also compared to the average middle-income country (MIC) in order to get a better understanding of the changes in China.

Figure 1 shows the purchasing power parity (PPP)-adjusted GDP per capita of China and the average MIC in constant 2011 international dollars from 1990-2016. In 1990, China's GDP per capita was \$1,526, which has been \$2,940 below that of the average middle-income country. However, due to China's very high growth rate, it caught up with the average MIC in 2008. In 2016, China's GDP per capita was \$14,399 (more than nine times its 1990 value) and a solid \$3,726 above that of the average MIC. However, in terms of GDP per capita, China still has a long time to go to catch up with the high-income countries (HICs), who had an average GDP per capita of \$43,351 (again PPP-adjusted and in constant 2011 dollar) in 2016.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international dollar) from 1990-2016**



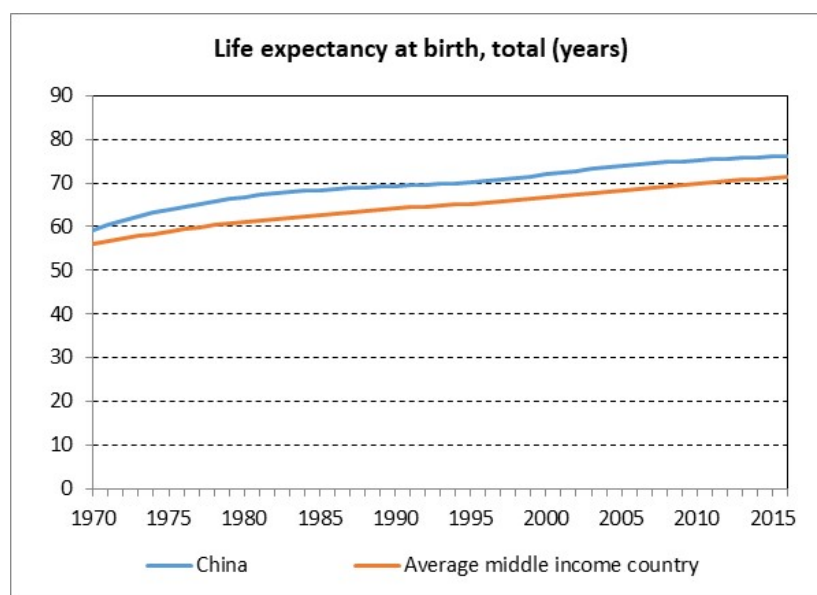
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Figure 2 shows the life expectancy at birth in years for both China and the average MIC from 1970 to 2016. Though China's GDP per capita was below that of the average MIC until 2008, China always had a higher life expectancy at birth than the average MIC. Not only was it always higher, the gap has slightly increased from 3.1 years in 1970 to 4.9 years in 2016. The biggest gap between China and the average MIC actually was in 1983, when Chinese life expectancy surpassed that of the average MIC by 5.8 years. The gap narrowed a bit from 1983 to 1997, after which it increased

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2018).

again from 1997 to 2005 (when the difference was 5.7 years). The gap then declined very moderately to 4.9 years in 2016. In any case, China and the average MIC have seen significant improvements in their life expectancy. China's life expectancy increased by 29.0 percent from 1970 to 2016, while that of the average MIC increased by 27.5 percent during the same period. Despite the progress, as it was the case for GDP per capita, China still lags considerably behind the life expectancy of the average HIC, which was at 80.5 years in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 2: Life expectancy at birth (years) from 1970-2016**



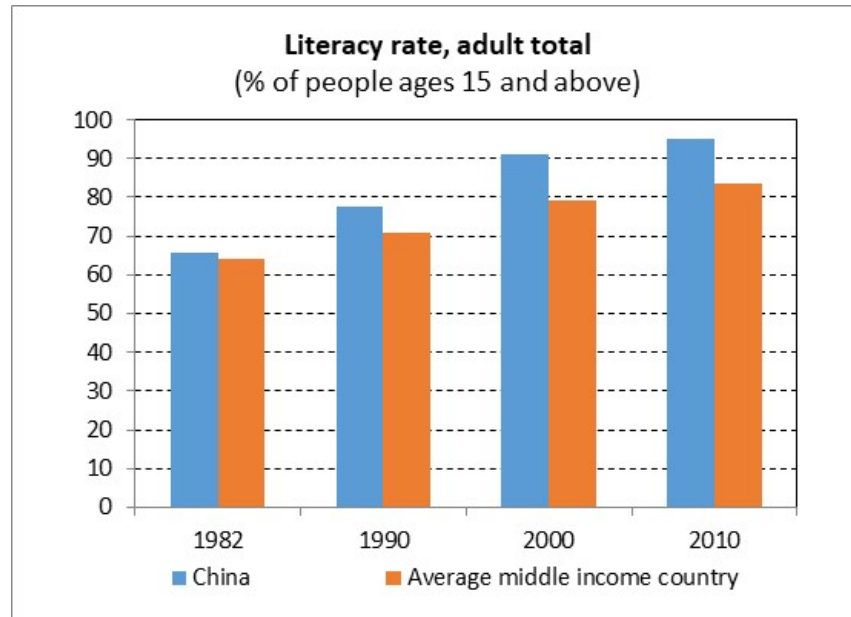
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Figure 3 shows the literacy rates for all years such data is available for China: 1982, 1990, 2000, and 2010. It shows that China's literacy rate was only marginally higher than that of the average MIC in 1982 (65.5 percent for China versus 64.3 percent for the average MIC). However, China has made more progress than the average MIC from 1982 until 2000, when China's total adult literacy rate surpassed that of the average MIC by 11.6 percentage points. From 2000 to 2010, the progress in increasing literacy rates was the same between China and the average MIC. In 2016, China's literacy rate stood at 95.1 percent, while it reached 83.6 percent in the average MIC. In terms of literacy rates for youth (those between ages 15-24 years), China has reached universal literacy, with a youth literacy rate of 99.6 percent in 2016.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2018).

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (2018).

**Figure 3: Adult Literacy Rates, all available years**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

#### **IV. Inequality in Income, Education, and Health Care**

The following discussion will identify the causes for the different inequalities China is currently experiencing as well as offer some possible solutions and consequences of changes that could occur. Given the very limited data available on China's inequality in the World Bank's World Development Indicators database (World Bank, 2018), I will rely mostly on examining graphs and tables from the literature. I will focus my discussion on a) income inequality, b) education inequality, and c) healthcare inequality.

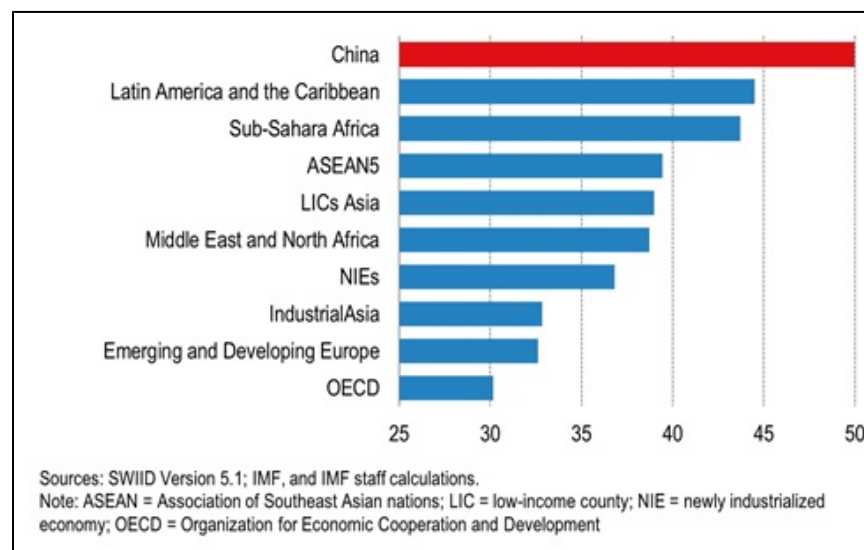
##### **IV.1. Income Inequality**

One of the most important assets in order to further one's success in life is income because having a greater income typically provides better opportunities. Income has increased massively for most people in China. However, China has also seen an extremely large gap growing in regards to income due to its explosive economic growth over the past two decades. Xie and Zhou (2014, p. 6930) state that the "parallel increasing trends in China's recent past have caused a large portion of ordinary Chinese to think that an increase in income inequality automatically accompanies economic development and thus is a necessary price for economic growth." There are ways to thrive economically though that do not involve the country growing to the most unequal it has been in years.

Figures 4 and 5 compare the income inequality in China to major geographical regions and country groups of the world. Figure 4 shows the levels of income inequality across regions in 2015, Figure 5 shows the changes in the Gini Index across regions since 1990. As can be seen from Figure 4, in 2015, China had a Gini coefficient of 50 points, which is higher than any of the world's regions

(though some countries within those regions still have higher levels of inequality).<sup>6</sup> Comparing it to Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Sub-Saharan Africa, two places which have a long history of inequality, it can be seen that China has surpassed both of these regional averages in income inequality, hence showing the degree of income inequality China has been reaching.

**Figure 4: Comparison of Income Inequality Levels**



(Net Gini Index; in Gini points; year of 2015 (or latest available); average across the region)

Source: Jain-Chandra et al. (2018), p. 4, Figure 1.

Figure 5 depicts the change in Gini coefficient since 1990 for China and other places around the world. Income inequality has increased in China and many regions/country groups, though not in three developing regions: Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North Africa. China's coefficient increased by a total of 15 points, double that of emerging and developing Europe, as well as tripled compared to Asia's low-income countries (LICs). Although the income gap has expanded in China, income across the board has been increasing in China and "even the bottom 10 percent incomes rose by as much as 63 percent."<sup>7</sup> Using this statistic, it can be inferred that more people are earning livable incomes, however, the income gap has grown enormously since the richest 10 percent have also had their incomes more than double.<sup>8</sup>

Another point of concern is the gap between urban and rural income in China. Li and Sicular (2014) use data from China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) to calculate the ratio of average urban income per capita to average rural income per capita. They found that the urban-rural gap increased from urban per capita income being less than 3.0 times rural per capita income in the late 1990s to more than 3.3 times around 2007-2009.<sup>9</sup> This is important because it shows that the

<sup>6</sup> For comparison, based on World Bank (2018), Brazil's Gini Index stood at 51.3 points in 2015, while that of South Africa was 63.4 points in 2011 (the last year such data is available for South Africa).

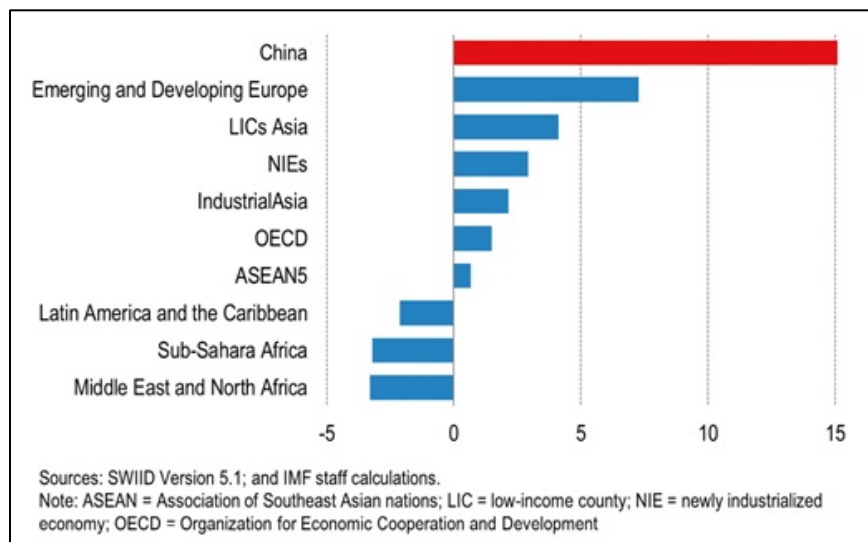
<sup>7</sup> Jain-Chandra et al. (2018), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Jain-Chandra et al. (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Li and Sicular (2014), p. 10.

degree of income inequality in China is also based on where someone is living. Being in an urban environment compared to rural leads to better opportunities for jobs and thus income as well.

**Figure 5: Comparison of Changes in Income Inequality since 1990**



(Net Gini Index; in Gini points; change since 1990, average across the region)

Source: Jain-Chandra et al. (2018), p. 4, Figure 2.

It should be clarified that rural incomes have been growing in China; they are just not growing at the same rate as urban incomes. One of the reasons for this is due to differences in non-employment income, which makes up 40 percent of urban income but only 15 percent of rural income, leading to a disparity in total earnings between the two.<sup>10</sup> A way to solve this would be to change government policies that have historically benefitted urban environments, to also support rural areas since, from an ethical point of view, both are equally important to the country. These gaps could be reduced if the government stepped in by creating policies that, for example, reduced urban-rural disparities in the near future. Overall, understanding income inequality first is important to furthering discussion on other inequality issues in China, especially as higher incomes typically lead to greater access to education and healthcare.

## IV.2. Education Inequality

Education is an aspect of life that everyone should have access to in order to further their development and to have a better basis for future success. China’s public education system is “often hailed abroad as a paradigm for educational equity.”<sup>11</sup> Equity in this case meaning everyone has equal access to the nine years of compulsory schooling that the government provides and that students are admitted to colleges based solely on exam scores. However, China’s education is not as perfect as the international community makes it out to be.

Figure 6 expands on the literacy rates shown in the socio-economic background section of this article, now depicting the literacy rate by gender. As can be seen in Figure 6, China’s literacy rates

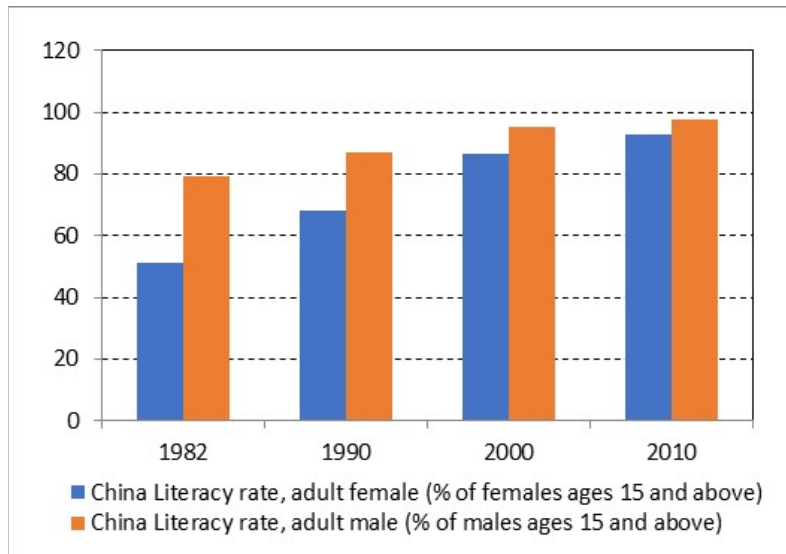
<sup>10</sup> Li and Sicular (2014), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Gao (2014), third paragraph.



have not always been equal with regards to gender. In 1982, males had a literacy rate of 79.2 percent whereas females only had a rate of 51.1 percent of the total population. Although by 2010 this gap had decreased to only 4.8 percentage points (males having a literacy rate of 97.5 percent and females having a rate of 92.7 percent) it still shows that females are being unfairly discriminated against in terms of literacy. Though there is still a significant gender gap in China for adult literacy, China had eliminated the gender gap for youth literacy by 2010.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, though strides have been made in literacy rates, there is still the underlying belief that a man's life will be more productive than a woman's life.

**Figure 6: Literacy Rate by Gender**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Figure 7 depicts the education gap by location by examining the percent of people enrolled in a tertiary institution out of the whole population who are of college age. From this graph it can be seen that Shanghai and Beijing (two of the largest urban centers in China) have enrollments of 70 percent and 60 percent, respectively as compared to places such as Gansu and Yunnan, which have 22 percent and 20 percent, respectively. This difference in enrollment is shocking, especially given China's dedication to having an educated population. Furthermore, given that the universities in Beijing and Shanghai are typically more prestigious, this also means that college-age kids in the rural provinces of China will not receive the same opportunities after college as the ones graduating from urban areas. This idea is furthered with government-issued hukous (an inheritance-based household registration system), which prevent people from having access to public services like specific schools unless their household is registered in that city or region. As more people move to the urban cities, hukous are increasingly a restrictive factor, preventing migrant children from accessing useful life necessities particularly education.<sup>13</sup> Students who hold hukous in urban areas have an average of 10.3 years of schooling, while those in rural areas have an average of only 6 years of schooling.<sup>14</sup> This is a problem because it means that students in rural areas are not meeting

<sup>12</sup> World Bank (2018).

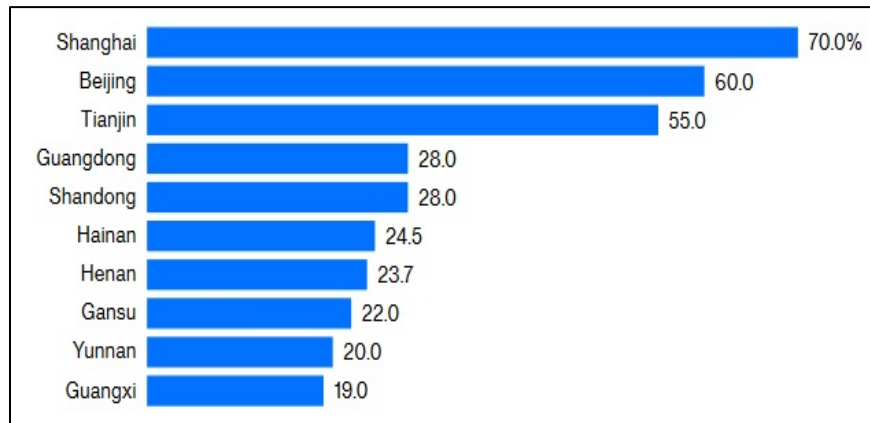
<sup>13</sup> Choi (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Choi (2012).



the previously mentioned mandatory nine years of schooling that the government requires. Therefore, the government is being discriminatory against their rural population even though it is stated by law that education is mandatory.

**Figure 7: Percentage of People Enrolled in Tertiary Institutions by Location**



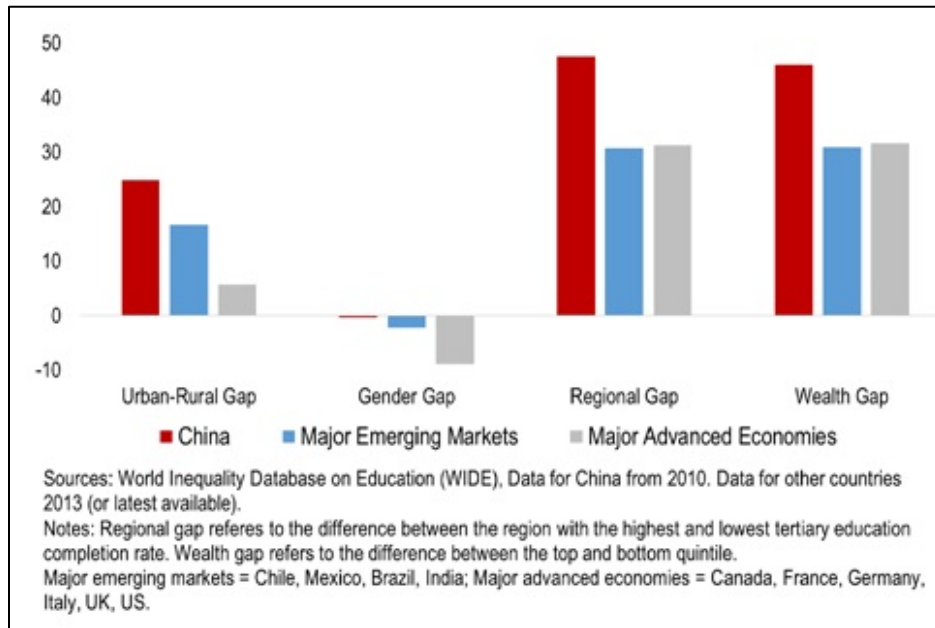
(out of the whole college-age population)

Source: Trivedi (2018), based on information provided by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, China Power Project.

Figure 8 adds to the discussion by showing the previously mentioned reasons for tertiary education completion gaps while also adding regional and wealth gaps as reasons. Although previously mentioned, this graph compares China to major emerging markets and major advanced economies. It can be seen that China has a regional gap of almost 50 percent compared to 30 percent in the other categories. This shows that China is well “ahead” of other countries such as Chile, Mexico, Canada, and France in terms of the gap between the region with the highest tertiary education completion and the one with the lowest.

In addition, the wealth gap follows along the same lines with China showing a 50 percent difference between the top and bottom quintile compared to the 30 percent of the major emerging markets and major advanced economies. Once again, this shows the drastic difference that China has when it comes to an education gap as well as showing again that income is a serious factor when it comes to access to opportunities. In order to change these things, China needs to commit to maintaining its promise for nine years of mandatory education across the entire country and attempt to control the wealth gap that occurs in large urban areas where people have better access to schooling. The government can also help with improving the quality of rural education at all levels.

**Figure 8: Gaps in Tertiary Education Completion**



(age 25-29, difference in percentage points)

Source: Jain-Chandra et al. (2018), Figure 7, p. 6.

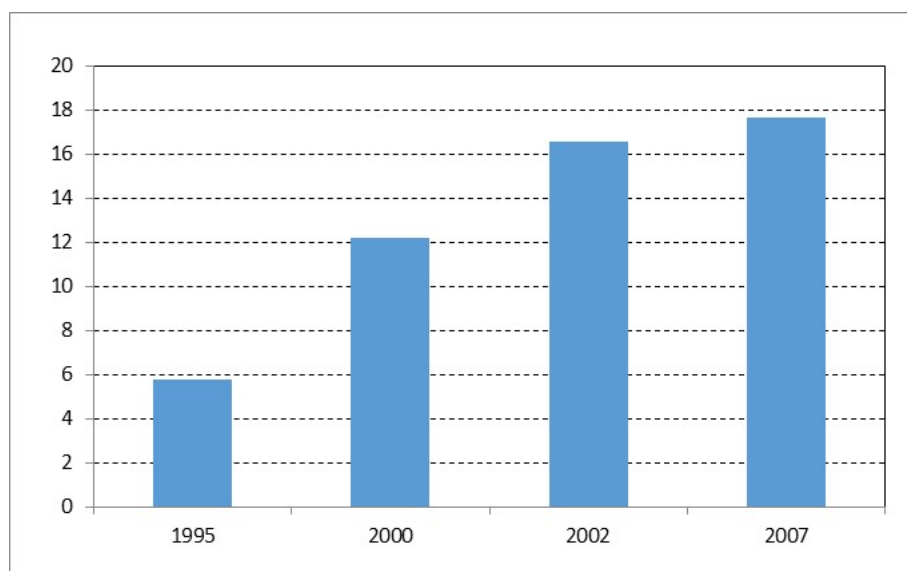
### IV.3. Healthcare Inequality

Healthcare is an essential service to human survival, providing for treatments of illness all the way to routine checkups. It is a human right that every government around the world needs to honor. China is relatively successful in achieving this idea with the majority of the population having “legal health care coverage, which is largely on account of the success of the New Rural Cooperative Medicare.”<sup>15</sup> However, while coverage may be guaranteed by the law there are inequalities that still exist in regards to access to healthcare and how much money has to be spent on it in order to receive necessary care.

Figure 9 depicts the percentage of people who are having to spend 10 percent or more of their household income on out of pocket healthcare expenditures. As can be seen from the graph, this percentage has risen drastically from 1995 to 2007 (the first and last year such data is available). In 1995, 5.8 percent of the population spent 10 percent or more of their household income on out of pocket healthcare expenditures. However, only five years later (in 2000), the percentage has more than doubled to 12.2 percent. Another two years later, the percentage has increased even more in terms of absolute annual increases, with 16.6 percent of China’s population having to spend 10 percent or more of their household income on out of pocket healthcare expenditures. While the percentage continued to increase to 17.7 percent in 2017, at least the growth rate has declined. Still, in some cases, such as rural households, which have much lower incomes than their urban counterparts, this more than 10 percent of out-of-pocket payments for health care is a significant burden to bear.

<sup>15</sup> Jain-Chandra et al. (2018), p. 7.

**Figure 9: Percentage of people spending more than 10 percent of household consumption or income on out-of-pocket health care expenditure**



Source: Calculated by author based on data for total population and the number of people spending more than 10 percent of household consumption or income on out-of-pocket health care expenditure as provided by World Bank (2018).

**Table 1: Comparison of Eastern and Western Provinces Healthcare Resources**

	<b>11 Eastern Provinces or Municipalities</b>	<b>12 Western Provinces or Municipalities</b>
Health-care organizations	343,064	300,255
Public hospitals	4,904	4,023
Medical and health-care workers	3,950,917	2,374,321
Health-care workers per 1000 people	5.33	4.71
Workers in maternal and child-care services	115,842	78,311
Beds in health-care organizations	2,323,857	1,609,610
Annual expenditure on health-care per person	¥1,063.7 (£106.37)	¥513.8 (£51.38)

Source: Created by author based on Table 1 of Wang and Zeng (2015), who refer to Government of the People’s Republic of China (2013).

Table 1 compares the healthcare resources between eastern and western China through a variety of different data points. First it is important to point out that the eastern provinces house the larger urban centers, such as Beijing and Shanghai, compared to the western provinces, which are relatively rural. At first sight it is easy to see that western provinces are severely lacking in terms

of almost every category although this could be because of the population difference that may not be due to the recurring trend of rural being prioritized less than urban. Hence, annual expenditures on healthcare per person is a good way to see if there is equality in both geographic areas. The average expenditure in eastern provinces is 1063.7 yuan, whereas in western provinces it is only 513.8 yuan, showing a huge disparity.

This once again shows that the government is spending less on its rural citizens than its urban citizens, this time in terms of healthcare. Zhang et al. (2017, p. 16) further explains this by stating that “the Gini coefficients exceeded 0.7 in the geographic distributions of institutions, health workers and beds in both the hospital and the primary care sectors, indicating high levels of inequality.” A Gini coefficient this high explains how the eastern provinces are having a higher number of health institutions, health workers, as well as beds for treatment than their western counterparts, showing the increasing regional disparities that are occurring despite healthcare once again being guaranteed to all citizens.

Changes can come in a variety of different ways but the first needs to be in spending per person. China will always have disparities in healthcare so long as their western citizens do not have the same amount of money spent on them as their eastern counterparts. By leveling spending so that all people are getting the same amount, it will help to also reform the other aspects so that everyone is receiving closer to equal care.

## **V. Conclusion**

Although the task of fighting inequality in a country so large and expansive such as China may seem like a daunting task, it needs to be dealt with because people should not be living at such a huge disadvantage. If not necessarily in terms of income, the Chinese people deserve at least an equal opportunity to healthcare and education. Furthermore, the income gap needs to be reduced.

Xie (2016, p. 345) concluded that “many Chinese today find inequality acceptable” because they think it will further the country as a whole. However, an Oxfam (2014) report has shown that the extreme inequality China is facing today is rather hurting than supporting economic growth. There are ways for a country’s citizens to be more equal while still having a booming economy.

China first needs to lower the income gap by creating policies that will further the rural population while slowing the upper ten percent’s explosive income. Second, it needs to guarantee its commitment to giving nine years of education and not discriminate based on where someone was born or lived their life. Finally, a person’s healthcare access, an essential human right, should not be discriminated against based on their location and needs to be guaranteed for all through policy. By doing these things, China can commit to becoming once again a more equal society. Furthermore, it can show the world that it does care for all its citizens.

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# **Women's Rights Gone Missing: Gender Inequality and HIV Prevalence in Malawi**

Dezimey Kum

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines the socio-demographic and behavioral characteristics underlying gender inequalities and how it is related to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic in Malawi. Malawi is one of the countries that has made unsatisfactory progress in reducing the HIV prevalence rate, especially among women. Some of the main reasons for Malawi's little progress is due to gender inequality, specifically in the areas of violence, education, empowerment, and healthcare. This article examines these four areas and how much progress has been made in reducing the gender gap in these areas in the interest of controlling the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Malawi.*

## **I. Introduction**

In Malawi, the first case of AIDS was diagnosed in 1985.<sup>1</sup> The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate then increased continuously until reaching a peak of 16.4 percent in 1999 among persons aged 15-49, after which the prevalence has been declining steadily, reaching 12.0 percent in 2004, 10.6 percent in 2010, and 9.2 percent in 2016.<sup>2</sup> However, the HIV prevalence rate for women between ages 15-49 years is currently about 50 percent higher than for men between ages 14-29, and HIV/AIDS has remained the leading cause of death in women in Malawi.<sup>3</sup>

Women in Malawi are generally more vulnerable to getting infected with HIV/AIDS than men, due to women's rights being neglected by social and cultural norms of Malawian society. This article sheds light on understanding the complex threats to poorly addressed gender rights discourse that has first of all increased the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Malawian women and second, prevented that more progress has been made in reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS in women. Following this introduction, the next section (Section II) provides a brief review of the literature. Section III presents some socio-economic background for Malawi before Section IV examines the HIV/AIDS epidemic in women in the light of gender-based human rights violations within four areas: violence, education, empowerment, and health care. The last section provides some conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Malawi (2014), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Malawi (2014), p. 6 and World Bank (2018a).

<sup>3</sup> Government of Malawi (2014), p. 6.

## II. Brief Literature Review

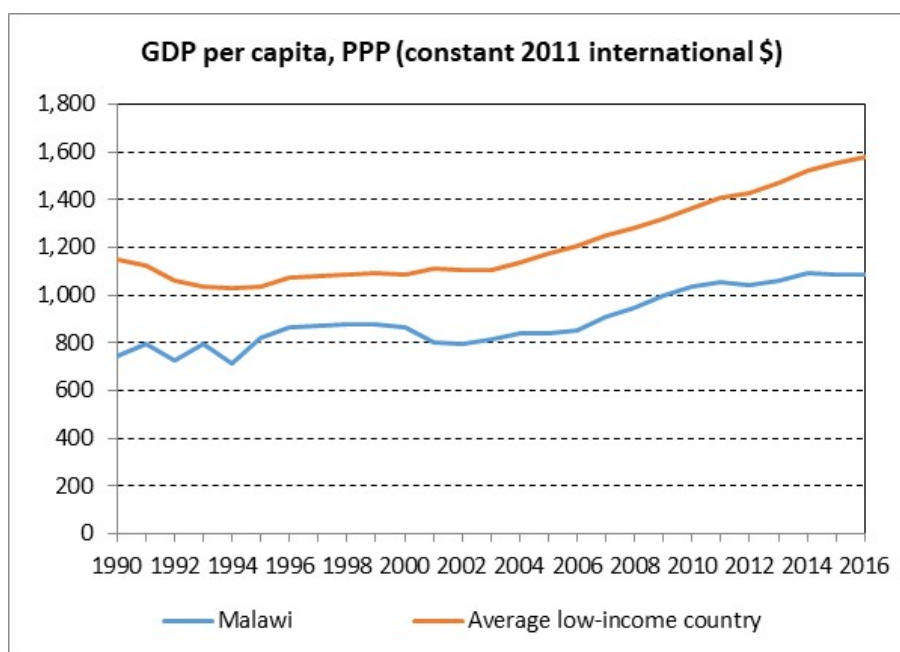
While there is a wide range of literature addressing how gender inequality affects the incidence of HIV in women in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are relatively few publications that focus on Malawi. In one of the earliest contributions, Marcus (1993) discusses how gender norms have contributed to women's HIV in Malawi and Uganda. The same issue has been reexamined more recently by Watkins (2010), covering the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, and then also by Sia, Onadja, Nandi, Foro and Brewer (2013), focusing mostly on evidence from Kenya, Lesotho and Tanzania. Hayes (2013) explores how gender norms have increased the vulnerability of Malawian women to HIV. Reviewing a variety of HIV/AIDS programs in various African countries, Tallis (2000) focuses on the integration of structured and equal gender policies to address HIV. In each of these publications, the authors recognize that tackling gender inequality is vital to ending the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. The following summaries cover each of these contributions in chronological order.

- Marcus (1993) discusses the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS in Malawi and Uganda. The primary focus of this report is the transmission of HIV and its prevention, raising issues of gender and sexuality. In particular, Marcus explains the extent to which HIV/AIDS education materials reassert traditional gender inequalities instead of presenting empowering alternatives, which would induce behavioral change and therefore increase protection against HIV infection.
- Tallis (2000) focuses on the need to incorporate gender inequality issues in HIV/AIDS programs in a structured way and suggests that gender inequality is an obstacle to HIV/AIDS prevention. Tallis explains how people need to understand the nature of power and inequality and ensure that government can implement better policies in HIV prevention and make more efforts to consider women's rights.
- Based on case studies from many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Watkins (2010) examines how women are vulnerable to HIV infections due to social and cultural norms that disadvantage women. She investigates the gender differences in the HIV prevalence and how these gender differences are related to the inefficiency of programs that are meant to either empower women economically or are aimed at changing social norms.
- Hayes (2013) explores how the proliferation of poorly translated human rights has increased the vulnerability of Malawian women and girls to HIV. The author shows how the collision between culture and gender roles has led to Malawi's sorrowing sexual behaviors based on gendered ideas. Hayes reveals that these ideas have had consequences for both, HIV rates in Malawi and the empowerment of Malawian women and girls.
- Sia, Onadja, Nandi, Foro and Brewer (2013) examine whether gender inequalities in HIV prevalence in Sub-Saharan Africa are explained by differences in the distributions of HIV risk factors, differences in the effects of these risk factors, or some combination of both. They highlight how investigating the differences in the distribution of HIV risk factors between men and women contributed to inequalities. They stress that HIV/AIDS programs that focus solely on equalizing resources may not achieve their objectives and may even exacerbate HIV differences by gender.

### III. Socio-economic Background

As Figure 1 shows, Malawi has made little progress with increasing its GDP per capita during the last 26 years. In 1990, Malawi's average GDP per capita (PPP-adjusted and in constant 2011\$) stood at \$744; in 2016 it was \$1,084, which implies a cumulative increase of only \$340 or 45.6 percent over a period of 26 years. For the average low-income country (LIC), GDP per capita increased from \$1,149 in 1990 to \$1,578 in 2016, which implies a cumulative increase of \$429 or 37.3 percent. Hence, while Malawi's GDP per capita increased less than that of the average LIC in dollar terms, it increased slightly more in relative terms. Still, as Figure 1 shows, the recent trend in GDP per capita growth is far more optimistic in LICs than in Malawi.

**Figure 1: PPP-adjusted GDP per capita in Malawi and the average LIC, 1990-2016**

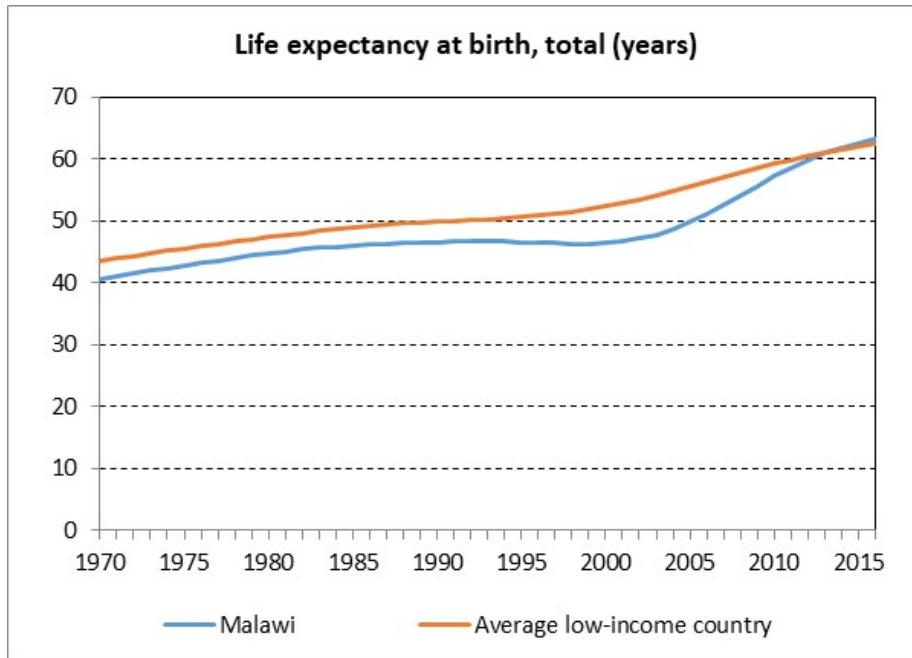


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

The second broad development indicator we review to determine Malawi's progress is life expectancy. Life expectancy is determined by many factors, like access to health care, food, water, etc., some of which are not necessarily based on income. Hence, life expectancy is an alternative informative indicator to GDP per capita. As shown in Figure 2, Malawi's progress in improving life expectancy was slow during the 1970s and 1980s, then stagnated during most of the 1990s (mostly due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic), but then accelerated since the early 2000s. Hence, as Figure 2 shows, Malawi has recently surpassed the average LIC in terms of life expectancy at birth, after having been about three years below the average LIC in the 1970s and about six years below the average LIC in the early 2000s. Malawi is now doing better than the average LIC in terms of life expectancy even though its GDP per capita remains more than 25 percent below that of the average LIC. Dossani (2012) suggested that Malawi's progress in life expectancy can be attributed mostly to investments in immunizations of children and increases in access to safe water and sanitation.

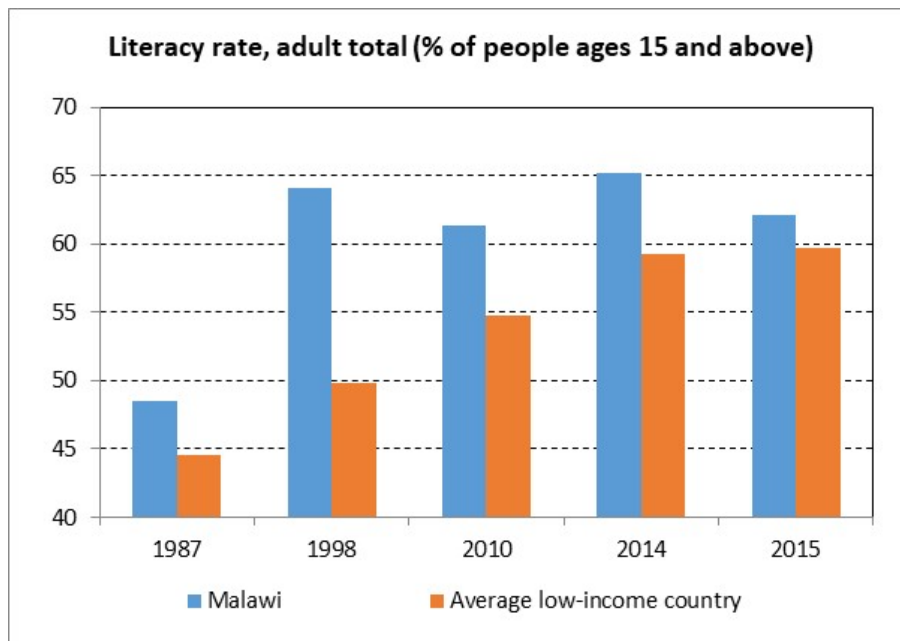


**Figure 2: Life Expectancy at Birth in Malawi and the average LIC, 1970-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

**Figure 3: Literacy Rates in Malawi and the average LIC, 1990-2015**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

Figure 3 indicates that another factor for Malawi's relatively high life expectancy has been Malawi's relatively high levels of literacy. Even though Malawi's GDP per capita continues to be more than one quarter below that of the average LIC literacy rates have always been higher in

Malawi than in the average LIC for the years such data is available. The biggest increase in Malawi's literacy rates had been achieved from 1987 (when it was 48.5 percent) to 1998 (when it was 64.1 percent). Unfortunately, literacy rates decreased from 1998 to 2010, and then again from 2014 to 2015. Hence, compared to the average LIC, Malawi's previous lead in literacy rates has nearly been eliminated by 2015. As of 2015, literacy rates were 62.1 percent in Malawi and 59.8 percent in the average LIC.

## **IV. Violence, Education, Empowerment, and Health**

The challenge of protecting women and girls from HIV/AIDS is closely related to human rights abuses. The protection of women's rights is a key to turning around the HIV/AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. This section reviews the progress Malawi has made in four areas that drive the HIV/AIDS epidemic in women: (a) gender-based violence and intimate partner violence, (b) a lack of education, (c) a lack of empowerment, and (d) a lack of access to healthcare.

### **IV.1. Gender-based Violence and Intimate Partner Violence**

Gender-based violence is a consequence of gender power inequities, at both a societal and individual level. Although some women might resist male power, most Malawian women largely accept these practices. Based on the Violence Against Children and Young Women Survey (VACS) undertaken in 2013, 42 percent of young women believed it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife under certain circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

Based on a study by the Malawian National Statistical Office (NSO) et al. (2012), Figure 4 shows that women in Malawi experience more physical, sexual and psychosocial (emotional) violence than men. Based on the study, 29.8 percent of males have reported to have experienced sexual violence, however, the percentage for women is with 40.3 percent much higher. Similarly, 29.5 percent of women have reported to have experienced physical violence, compared to 18.8 percent of men. With regards to psychosocial violence, the gender gap is relatively small, with 43.6 percent of women and 42.0 percent of men having reported to having ever experienced psychosocial violence.

Qualitative research has shown that HIV/AIDS, gender inequity, and gender-based violence are closely linked to the patriarchal nature of Malawi's society and ideals of masculinity that are based on controlling women. These ideals readily translate into risky sexual behaviors and acts of violence against women.<sup>5</sup> Violence prevents women from influencing the circumstances of sex, resulting in more frequent sex and less condom use, thus increasing their chances of encountering HIV. In Malawi, violence increases the risk of HIV infection in women as a result of community acceptance of norms of masculine behavior and men's use of power over women, promoting inequality between the genders.<sup>6</sup> Women who fear violence are less able to protect themselves from infection. They do not have the power to negotiate for safe sex or to refuse unwanted sex, nor do they have the power to get tested for HIV and to seek treatment after infection.

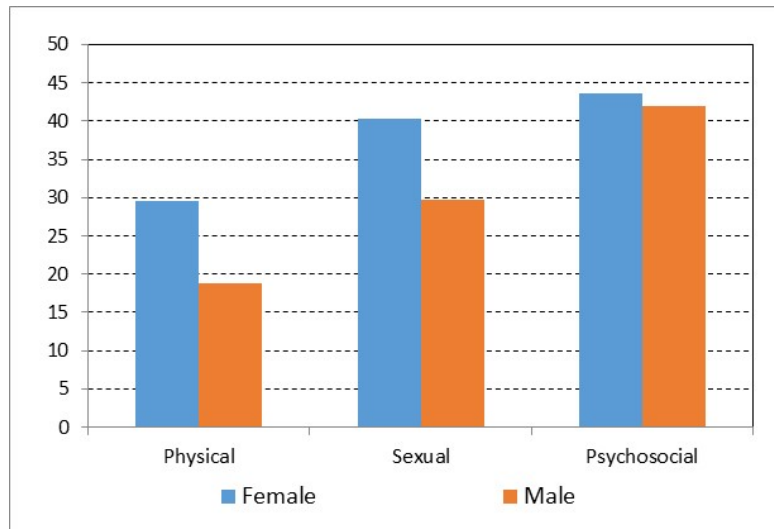
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<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Republic of Malawi (2014). For similar results from a previous study, see Pelser et al. (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Conroy (2014), pp. 873-874.

<sup>6</sup> Watkins (2010), p. 155.

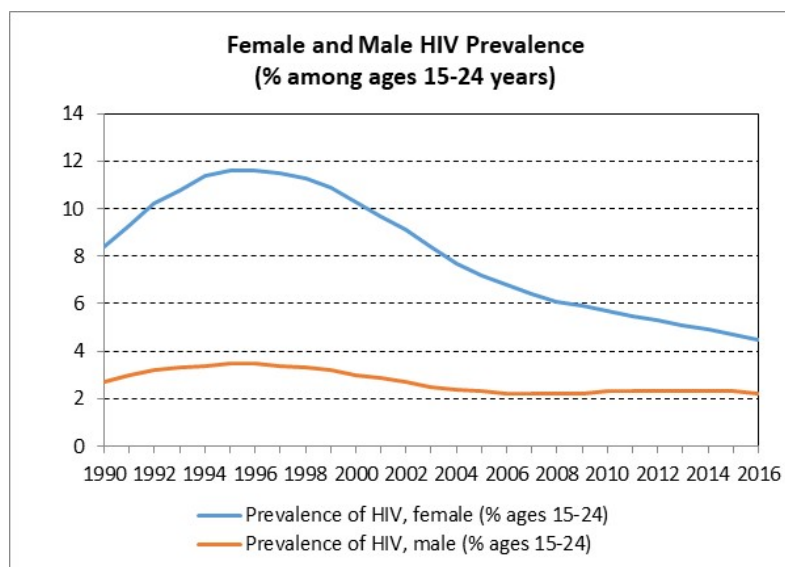
**Figure 4: Percentage of Females and Males Reporting to Having Ever Experienced One or More Types of Violence**



Source: Created by author based on Mellish, Settergren and Sapuwa (2015), Table 14, p. 14, referring to National Statistical Office (NSO) et al. (2012).

When comparing the HIV prevalence in Malawi between females and males, women suffer far more from HIV than men. Figure 5 shows the huge gender gap among young people, those between 15 and 24 years. For young men, the HIV prevalence stayed between two and four percent during 1990 to 2016. For young women, the HIV prevalence reached a maximum of 11.6 percent in 1995 (more than three times that of young men), and despite the relative sharp decline during the early 2000s, the prevalence rate among young women was still more than twice that of young men in 2016.

**Figure 5: HIV Prevalence in Malawi by Gender, 1990-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a specific manifestation of gender inequality which has been shown to be an important risk factor for HIV/AIDS. IPV results in women less likely to report the abuse, and in many cases, results in more sexual activity with less consistent condom use. In many African countries, including in Malawi, woman getting married is seen as the “riskiest” behavior for women, where they can potentially be exposed to a) unprotected sex with a husband who has multiple sexual partners and b) power dynamics between men and women that prevent women being protected by condoms.<sup>7</sup>

There is a growing agreement about the nature of IPV. IPV is not seen as an isolated act or physical aggression, but rather a pattern of abuse and controlling. Heise et al. (1999, p. 5) state: “Intimate partner abuse can take a variety of forms including physical assault such as hits, slaps, kicks, and beatings; psychological abuse, such as constant belittling, intimidation, and humiliation; and coercive sex. It frequently includes controlling behaviors such as isolating a woman from family and friends, monitoring her movements, and restricting her access to resources.”

## **IV.2. Women’s Education Status**

The World Bank (2002, p. xvii) states that “education is a proven means to prevent HIV/AIDS.” Education protects against HIV infection through information and knowledge that may affect long-term behavioral change, particularly for women by “reducing the social and economic vulnerability that exposes women to a higher risk of HIV/AIDS than men”, including prostitution and other forms of economic dependence on men.<sup>8</sup> As documented in World Bank (2002), many studies have shown that women’s education levels positively correlate with HIV prevalence and prevention practices.

The World Bank’s Girls’ Education Program is a strategic development priority, based on the fact that “better educated women tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and enable better health care and education for their children, should they choose to become mothers. All these factors combined can help lift households, communities, and nations out of poverty.”<sup>9</sup> However, though the gender gap has been eliminated in Malawi for primary education in the early 2000s,<sup>10</sup> female youth literacy rates (defined as literacy rates for people between 15 and 24 years of age) have only caught up with male youth literacy rates in 2015, and only because youth male literacy rates suddenly dropped from 78.8 percent in 2014 to 72.5 percent in 2015.<sup>11</sup> With regards to adult literacy rates, there still was a huge gender gap in 2015 as 69.8 percent of males were literate while only 55.2 percent of females were literate.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 6 shows that girls still have less access to secondary education than boys in Malawi. Though the gender gap narrowed over time and was nearly eliminated in 2015, it increased significantly in 2016. There also is a relatively large gender gap for tertiary education, though gross tertiary school enrollment ratios are extremely low for both boys and girls. In 2011, which is the last year such

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<sup>7</sup> Hayes (2013).

<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2002), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> World Bank (2018b), Context, p. 1.

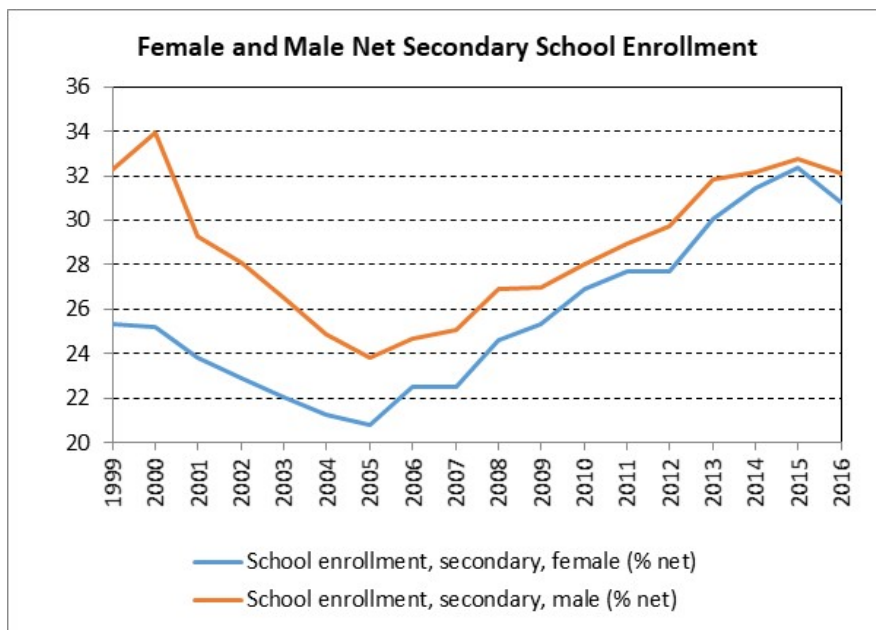
<sup>10</sup> Based on data for net primary school enrollment provided in World Bank (2018a).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2018a).

<sup>12</sup> World Bank (2018a).

data is available, only 0.60 percent of females attended tertiary education, while 0.95 percent of the males attended tertiary education.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 6: Net Secondary School Enrollment Rate by Gender**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

In the Global Gender Gap Report 2017, Malawi was ranked 126<sup>th</sup> among a total of 144 nations within the Global Gender Gap's sub-index on Educational Attainment, which is based on four indicators: the ratio of female to male literacy and the ratios of female to male school enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary schools.<sup>14</sup> The report supports the vital importance of girls having access to education, as well as boys, to inform and protect themselves against contracting the virus. Watkins (2010) states that when a family has limited resources and must choose between educating the boy or the girl, most parents choose the boy. Girls are likely to be pulled out of school to care for sick family members or to have to provide financial support for their families. The reasoning behind preferring to send a boy to school also comes from the thinking that a girl does not need education since she is supposed to get married.<sup>15</sup>

### IV.3. Women Empowerment

In Malawi, the male societal role makes men feel empowered and makes the woman feel subordinated. Many Malawian women feel pressured to have unsafe sex, leading them to contract sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS. UNAIDS (2019) reported that 60 percent of sex workers in Malawi are living with HIV. Condoms have been identified as an effective tool in the fights against HIV. Medical researchers Pinkerton and Abramson (1997) reported that condoms, if used correctly and consistently, prevent transmission of HIV by 90-95 percent. However, Malawi's women continue to struggle to obtain condoms for their reproductive needs, due to

<sup>13</sup> World Bank (2018a).

<sup>14</sup> World Economic Forum (2017).

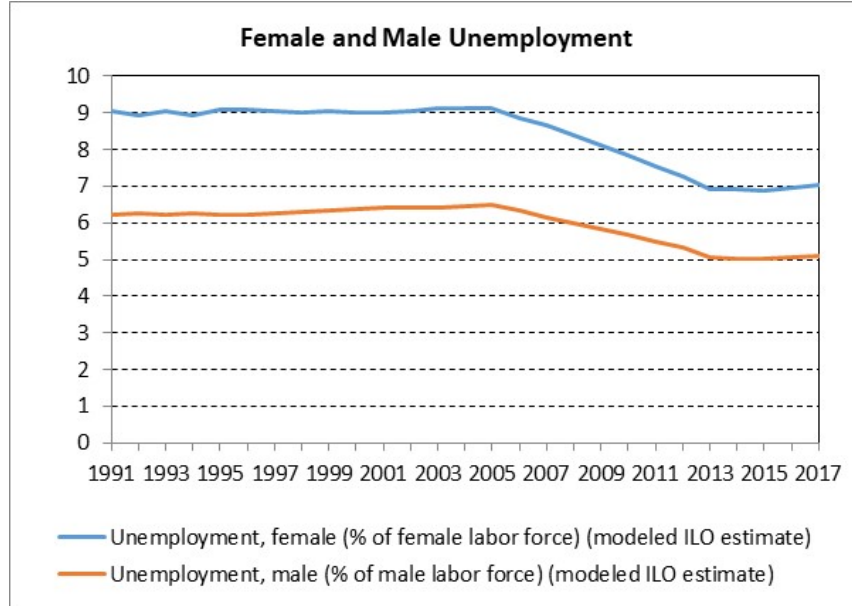
<sup>15</sup> Watkins (2010), p. 158.

policymakers in Malawi arguing that condoms are ineffective for the prevention of HIV. A qualitative study of condom use conducted by Muula (2006) of members in the Malawi National Assembly (which is composed of mostly men), suggests that condoms are yet to be accepted universally by the country's political leadership. The common discourse on the possibility of failure to protect infection by condoms, as well as the reduced pleasure that condoms are perceived to cause, were noted by the parliamentarians.

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world. As of 2010, which is the latest year the World Bank (2018a) has such data, 70.9 percent of the population lived below \$1.90-a-day (i.e., in extreme poverty), 88.4 percent lived below \$3.20-a-day, and 95.9 percent lived below \$5.50-a-day (all in 2011 PPP\$).<sup>16</sup> As is typical in many poor countries, most Malawi women are generally conditioned to believe that violence against them is normal. A Report by Malawi's Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare (2014, p. 30) stated that "nine out of ten females and eight out of ten males aged 18 to 24 years endorsed one of the following gender biases: that men should decide when to have sex, that men need more sex than women, that men need other women, that women who carry condoms are "loose", and that women should tolerate violence in order to keep their family together."

There is a strong link between poverty and HIV/AIDS in Malawi. AIDS affected families suffer harsh economic problems due to illness and death. Women in Malawi often struggle to secure employment in the formal sector due to a lack of education because of gender bias, which leads them to seek employment as unskilled workers, including sex work.

**Figure 7: Female and Male Unemployment Rate in Malawi**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

A major issue that women in Malawi face, and to which women around the world may relate to, is inequality in the workplace. As shown by Sia et al. (2010), one issue that many women in

<sup>16</sup> World Bank (2018a).

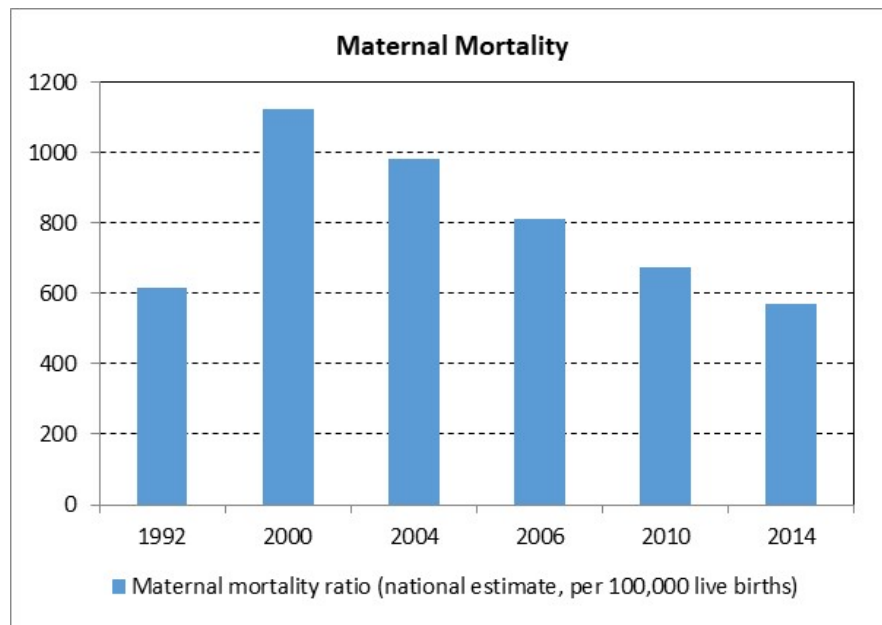
Malawi face is not having the knowledge or resources to obtain a higher-skilled and better paying job due to lack of education. Low levels of education and illiteracy has reduced women's capacity to gain formal employment in Malawi. Figure 7 clearly illustrates that women have consistently a higher unemployment rate than men, though the gender gap reduced a bit from about 3 percentage points in the 1990s to about 2 percentage points in the last few years. While economic factors and poverty play a central role in constraining women's choices and opportunities, long-held and deeply-embedded cultural practices continue to prescribe and proscribe roles and behaviors of women, limiting their access to key resources and perpetuating gender-based inequalities in employment.

#### IV.4. Women's Lack of Access to Health Care

One of the biggest issues with gender inequalities in healthcare in Malawi is women picking up infections and diseases such as HIV and leaving them untreated. As a joint World Bank and Asian Development Bank (2006, p. 23) report for China stated, and this also applies to Malawi: "If women fall ill, they usually delay seeking medical treatment (due to lack of money and time), and also because their health is ignored and not prioritized by the family."

In Malawi, sex workers face high levels of discrimination when seeking HIV services, which further increases their vulnerability to HIV. The gender inequalities in Malawi impact and affect women's access to health services in many ways. While there is no solid data on women's access to health care in Malawi, the high rate of maternal mortality (shown in Figure 8) is indicative on how much Malawi cares about women's health.

**Figure 8: Maternal mortality ratio (national estimate, per 100,000 live births)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018a).

## V. Conclusion

Many societies attribute the low status of women to the social roles women are required to perform. This degradation of women often leads to a denial of rights such as access to healthcare. As a result, in countries like Malawi, where women who are infected with HIV/AIDS are not able to get treatment, become vulnerable to death.

An effective response to HIV/AIDS among women in Malawi requires the active involvement of all sectors of society. Thus, a multisectoral approach is required that includes partnerships, consultations and coordination with all stakeholders, in the implementation, review, monitoring and evaluation of the national response to HIV/AIDS. Research should continue to explore power dynamics among couples and IPV victimization to better inform couples-based approaches for domestic violence prevention in Malawi.

Regarding the inequalities in women's education, more efforts need to be made in reducing gender gaps at higher education levels. Women need to be motivated and provided with more resources to receive a better education. Until the gender gap in education has been eliminated, specific actions must also be taken to lower the high unemployment rate of women, in order to prevent that they end up as sex workers, which increases their risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

If more women can be given the opportunity to get an education equal to that of men, there would be more opportunities for higher-paying jobs and better lifestyles for themselves. The topic of equal employment for women may take longest until we see results since it ties in closely with societal roles and habits. However, as was shown in this article, investing in female workers' skills and promoting education and empowerment can be one big step into making a change. Finally, though gender inequality is common throughout the world, the more people become aware, informed, and educated, the more likely will we be able to see a world in which a man and woman are treated the same.

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# **Gender Inequality in Guatemala: Why Girls Receive Less Education Than Boys**

Lizzy Tarallo

## ***Abstract***

*This article focuses on gender-based educational inequality in Guatemala, which despite some recent progress is still pervasive. Especially indigenous girls often receive little to no education. This article examines the evolution of gender-based educational inequality in terms of adult and youth literacy rates and primary, secondary and tertiary school enrollment. It then discusses ethical and political aspects of gender inequality in Guatemala, including how educational inequality is related to a societal dependency on girls and women for the collection of drinking water. The article concludes with some basic recommendations.*

## **I. Introduction**

Gender-based educational inequality is a worldwide epidemic. In the country of Guatemala, the problem of educational inequality based on gender remains prevalent today. The Global Education Fund (2018, p. 1) explains that “over half of the Guatemalan population is indigenous and less than 30 percent of poor, rural indigenous girls are enrolled in secondary school. Indigenous girls in Guatemala are among the country’s most disadvantaged group with limited schooling, early marriage, frequent childbearing, and chronic poverty.”<sup>1</sup>

When girls are not given the chance to go to school, this leads them into making decisions that are not the best for themselves. They feel hopeless and think that the only way out of this feeling is to get married and have children instead of living life for themselves. However, an early marriage means not only that a Guatemalan girl is not completing her education, it also means that she is unqualified for a good job and thus remains dependent on her husband.

This article discusses the different aspects of why girls and women in Guatemala do not have adequate access to education. Following this introduction, the next section provides a brief review of the literature. Section III provides some socio-economic background for Guatemala, before Section IV provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of gender-based discrimination in

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<sup>1</sup> The Global Education Fund is a civil society organization based in Boulder, Colorado, that is committed to helping children in poverty to receive a proper education. For further information, see: [www.globaleducationfund.org/](http://www.globaleducationfund.org/).

Guatemala's education system. Section V then reviews some ethical approaches to Guatemala's gender bias, and the last section provides some conclusions.

## II. Literature Review

There are existing articles that show how women in Guatemala are mistreated in a variety of ways due to their gender. Additionally, many articles show how Guatemala's instability contributes to societal issues and gender discrimination. For example, economic instability in Guatemala gives women less of a chance to expand their role in society. Political instability makes it hard for women to have a political voice. All the different ways women are mistreated as well as Guatemala's larger societal problems add to why women receive less education than men.

- Vásquez (2011) focuses on the very little education indigenous Guatemalan women receive. According to Vásquez (2011, p. 110), indigenous women in Guatemala receive only 1.8 years of schooling on average. Vásquez explains that indigenous people's lack of education corresponds directly with how indigenous people make less money than non-indigenous people. Women face the worst when it comes to this, since around the world women make less money than men on average. The wage gap between indigenous people and non-indigenous people in Guatemala is already high, and if you are a female, the gap widens even further. Vásquez, includes a table that shows how indigenous people are given less of a chance to work in the formal public sector. He states (p. 118) that "the hourly wage is also higher in the public sector for all groups except indigenous females from minor groups."
- Menjívar (2008) discusses how women face violence in their everyday lives. The article explains that Guatemala is a country that has faced instability for years. Based on interviews with twenty-nine non-indigenous women in an Eastern Guatemalan town called San Alejo, it becomes apparent that women face great amounts of violence in their lives that significantly impair their ability to live productive lives. In one of her interviews, a 34-year-old woman explained that she never went to school as a child because she had to take care of her mother. The woman, named Hortencia, explained that her father was a drunkard and that she stayed home from school to protect her mother from his violent actions. While Hortencia said she was adamant about sending her five children to school in order to give them a better life than she had, other women in Guatemala have the potential to fall into the same patterns of being mistreated instead of receiving a proper education. Education can relieve girls and women of this vicious cycle.
- Ogrodnik and Borzutzky (2011) discuss women's lack of political power and their lack of access to proper schooling. They explain that Guatemalan women are also not active in the economy in their country, meaning that they have less opportunities to work than men. Ogrodnik and Borzutzky also describe how violence affects women's ability to progress in society. They note that crimes against women are on the rise, which points to the ineffective nature of existing polices. They emphasize the need to make a larger investment in antipoverty and other socioeconomic policies geared to increase women's economic self-sufficiency.
- Guinan (2015) documents in a CNN report how women in Guatemala's patriarchal society are trapped in a cycle of violence. The report details how prevailing culture of machismo and an institutionalized acceptance of brutality against women leads to high rates of

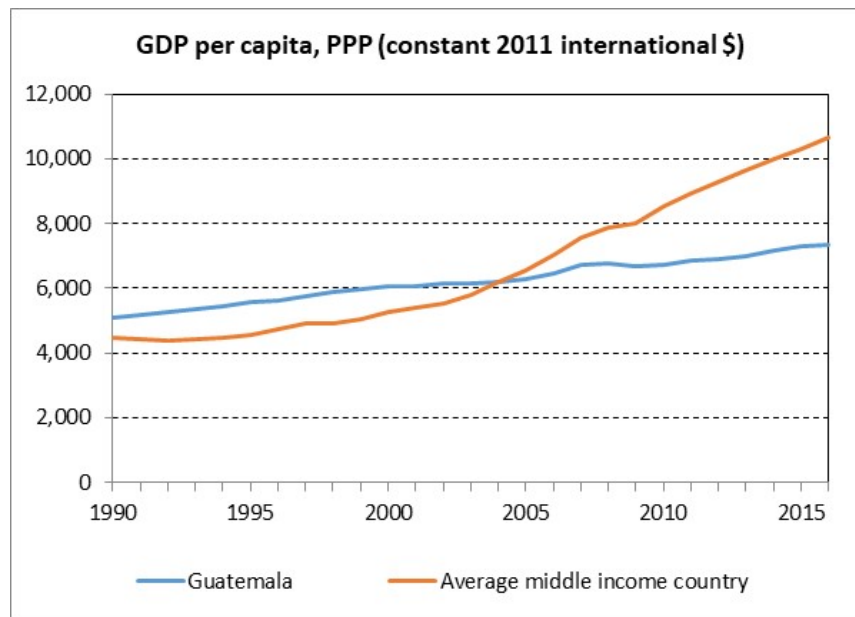
violence. According to rights groups that were consulted, machismo not only condones violence, it places the blame on the victim. Fortunately, Guinan finds signs that the culture of discrimination may be slowly changing.

### III. Socio-Economic Background

Guatemala is a country that has gone through major changes since its declaration of independence from Spain in 1821. Initially, Guatemala was mostly under authoritarian rule. In 1954, a coup d'état carried out by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) deposed the democratically elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz. The coup ended the Guatemalan Revolution of 1944–1954 by installing the military dictatorship of Carlos Castillo Armas, which led to the Guatemalan Civil War until a peace accord between the guerrillas and the government ended it in 1996.<sup>2</sup>

Following the end of the civil war, the “government has attempted to revitalize the economy by fostering the diversification and expansion of nontraditional exports such as cut flowers and snow peas, and free trade zones and assembly plants have been established to encourage the expansion and decentralization of manufacturing.”<sup>3</sup> However, as Figure 1 shows, Guatemala’s PPP-adjusted GDP per capita has grown at a fairly slow rate between 1990 and 2016. In 1990, Guatemala’s GDP per capita stood at \$5,101, while that of the average middle-income country (MIC) was \$4,466 (more than \$600 below that of Guatemala). However, in 2016, Guatemala’s GDP per capita had increased to only \$7,367, while that of the average MIC reached \$10,673, leaving Guatemala’s GDP per capita \$3,306 below that of the average MIC.

**Figure 1: GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international \$), 1990-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

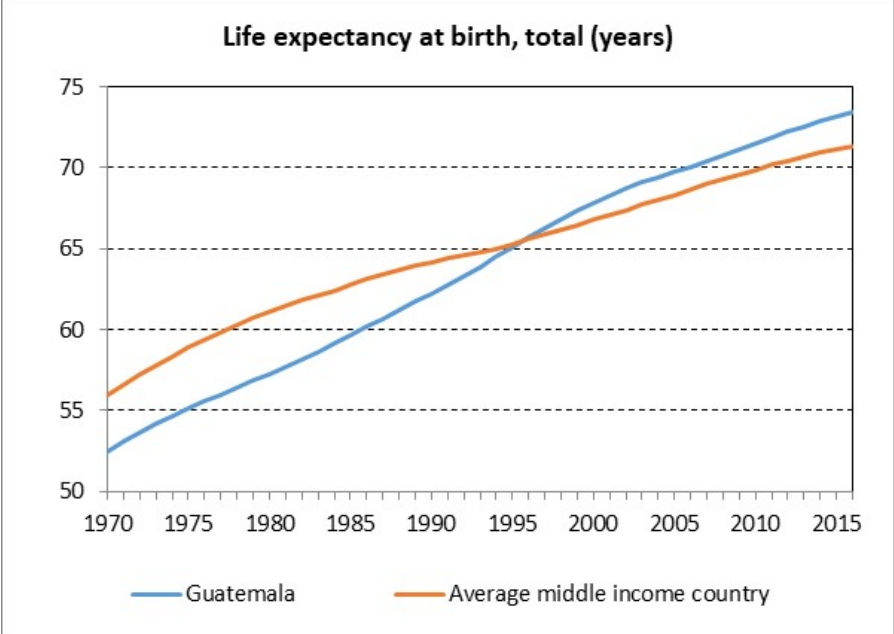
<sup>2</sup> Summarized based on information provided by Anderson et al. (2018) and Wikipedia.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson et al. (2018), p. 2.

Furthermore, Menjívar (2008, p. 115) pointed out that “Guatemala has consistently ranked among the most unequal, even by Latin American standards.” Hence, the current average income per capita of \$7,367 per year, which is the same as a daily average income per capita of \$20.18, is highly distorted by the rich. Indeed, based on the World Bank’s (2018) latest poverty incidence data of 2014, 50.1 percent the population live below \$5.50 a day, 25.3 percent live below \$3.20 a day, and 9.5 percent still live in extreme poverty (i.e., below \$1.90 a day).

On the positive side, as Figure 2 shows, life expectancy in Guatemala has increased steadily over the last five decades, and more so than in the average MIC. In 1970, average life expectancy was 52.5 years in Guatemala and 56.0 years for the average MIC. However, Guatemala caught up with the average MIC in 1995, and in 2016, Guatemala’s average life expectancy (73.4 years) exceeded that of the average MIC (71.3 years) by 2.1 years.

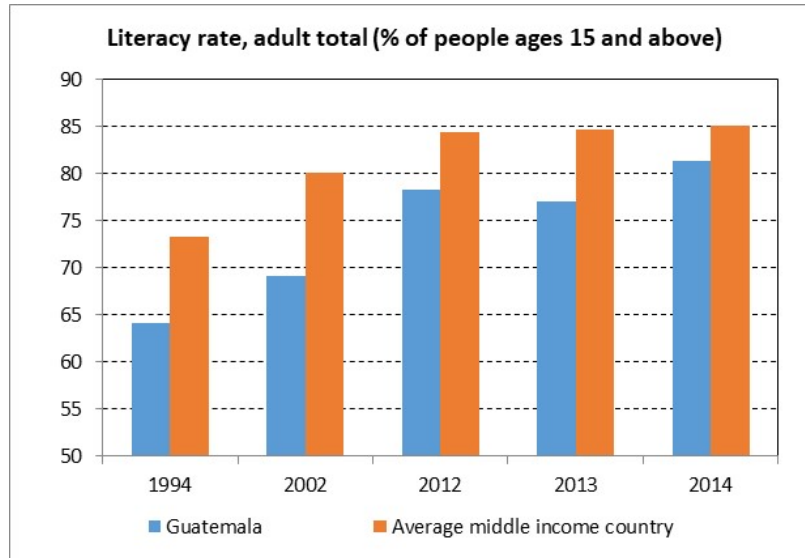
**Figure 2: Life Expectancy at Birth (in years), 1970-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

While Guatemala currently has a higher life expectancy than the average MIC, its adult literacy rate has always been below that of the average MIC, despite that the gap has narrowed in relative terms. As shown in Figure 3, in 1994 (which is the first year such data is available for Guatemala), Guatemala’s adult literacy rate was 64.2 percent, compared to 73.4 percent in the average MIC, which is a gap of 9.2 percentage points. In 2014, the adult literacy rate was 81.3 percent in Guatemala and 85.1 percent in the average MIC. Hence, while Guatemala has reduced the gap, Guatemala’s adult literacy rate is still 3.8 percentage points below that of the average MIC. It is also noteworthy that Guatemala’s adult literacy rate decreased from 78.3 percent in 2012 to 77.0 percent in 2013, though it increased again from 2013 to 2014, the last year such data is available.

**Figure 3: Total Adult Literacy (in percent); all available years**

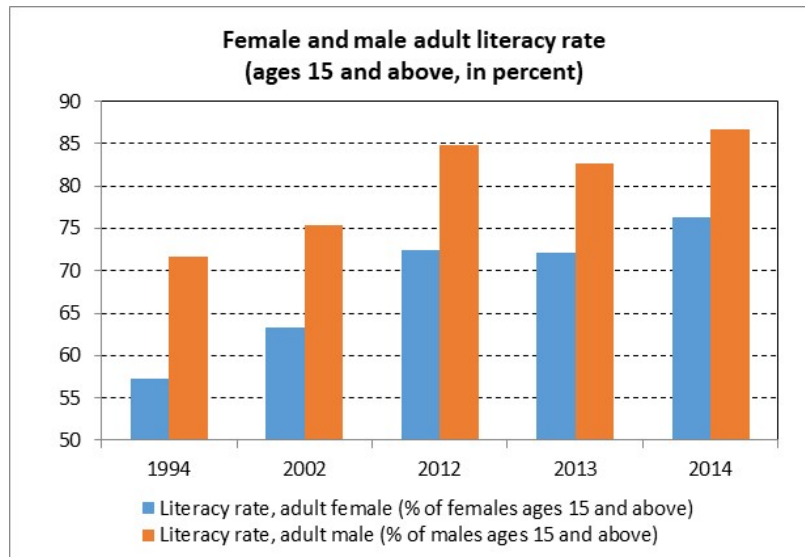


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

#### IV. Evolution of Gender Inequality in the Education Sector

While Figure 3 has shown that the people of Guatemala are less literate than the average person of MICs, Figure 4 shows that female adult literacy rates are considerably below those of males in Guatemala. Even though the gender gap has decreased over time, females had a slightly more than 10 percentage points lower adult literacy than males in 2014. Male adult literacy stood at 86.8 percent in 2014, while that of females was only 76.3 percent.

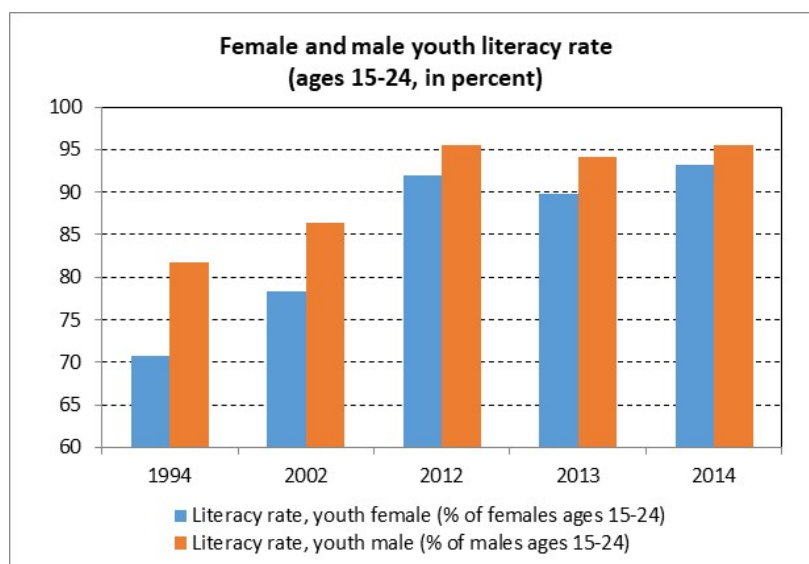
**Figure 4: Female and Male Adult Literacy (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

The picture looks slightly better when comparing youth unemployment, which is shown in Figure 5. Not only is youth literacy much higher than adult literacy, the gender gap is also smaller in absolute and relative terms. Female youth literacy rates have increased from 70.7 percent in 1994 to 93.3 percent in 2014; while male youth literacy rates have increased from 81.7 percent to 95.5 percent during the same period. Hence, the gender gap in youth literacy has decreased from 11.0 percentage points in 1994 to 2.2 percentage points in 2014.

**Figure 5: Youth Literacy (in percent)**



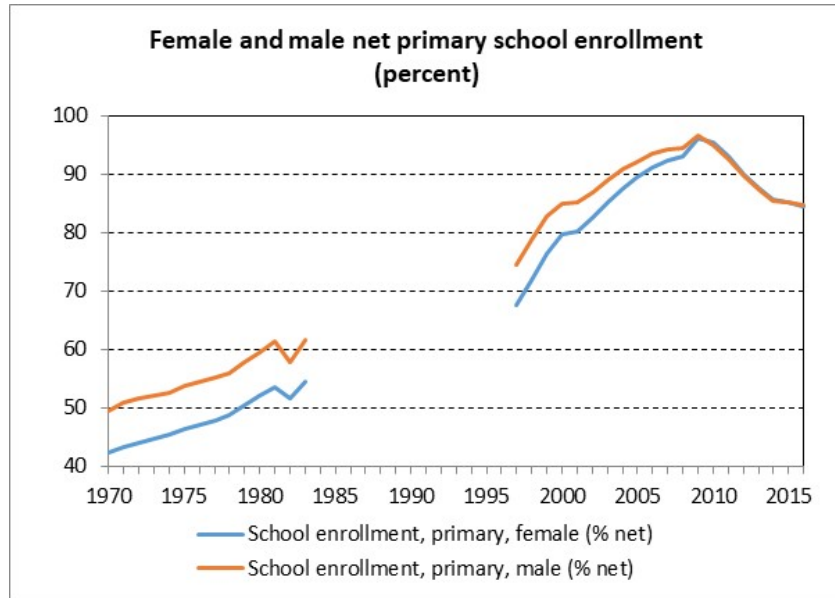
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

The reason for this relatively sharp decrease in the gender gap of youth literacy can be contributed to the elimination of the gender gap in net primary school enrollment. As shown in Figure 6, in 1970, net primary school enrollment was only 42.2 percent for girls while it was 49.5 percent for boys. It then increased relatively sharply during the late 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium, with net primary school enrollment increasing from 67.4 percent in 1997 to 96.0 percent in 2009 for girls, and from 74.5 percent to 96.5 percent during the same period for boys. Though net primary school enrollment has decreased since its all-time high of 2009, the gender gap has been eliminated since 2010. As of 2016, Guatemala's net primary school enrollment stood at 84.6 percent, for both, boys and girls.

Despite the elimination of the gender gap in primary education since 2010, Figure 7 shows that there is a relative consistent gender gap of about 2 percentage points in net primary school enrollment. In 2000, net secondary school enrollment was 24.3 percent for females and 26.7 percent for males, which implies a gender gap of 2.4 percentage points. Sixteen years later, net secondary school enrollment reached 46.1 percent for females and 48.0 percent for males, hence still having a gender gap of 1.9 percentage points, compared to 2.4 percentage points in 2000. The gender gap actually increased slightly to 2.6 percentage points in 2010 and 2011, before declining gradually to 1.9 percentage points in 2016.

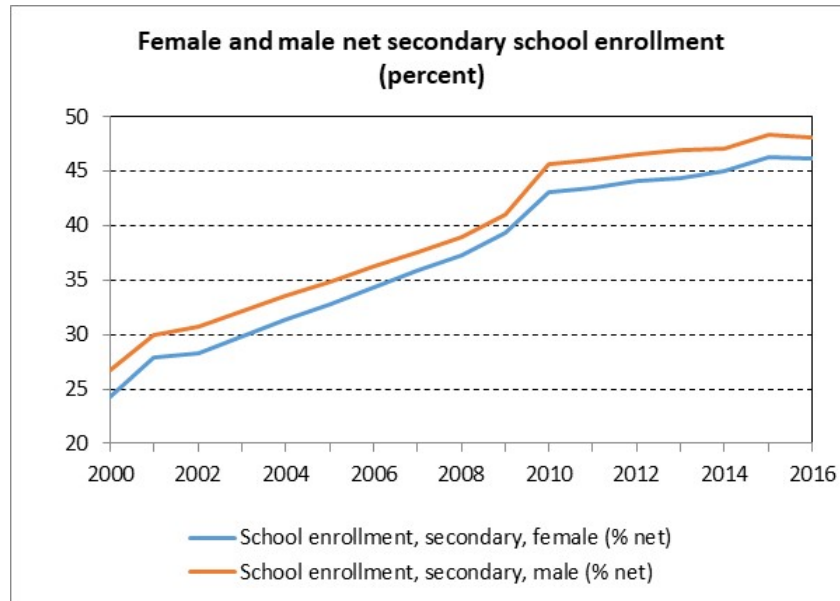


**Figure 6: Female and Male Net Primary School Enrollment (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

**Figure 7: Female and Male Net Secondary School Enrollment (in percent)**

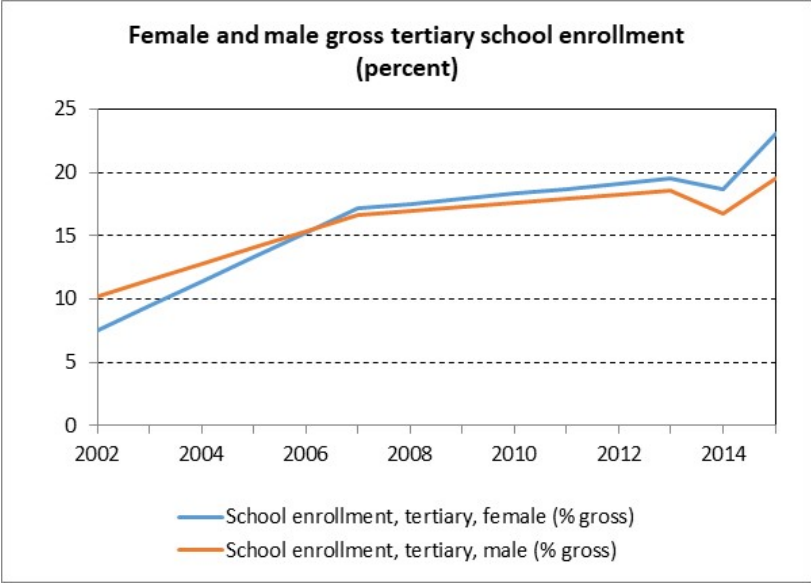


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Finally, looking at female and male gross tertiary school enrollments, Figure 8 shows that the initial gender gap was eliminated between 2006 and 2007, with female gross tertiary school enrollment slightly exceeding that of males ever since, reaching a negative gender gap of 3.5 percentage points in 2015 (the last year such data is available). The explanation for the higher female tertiary school enrollment is mostly due to the continued discrimination against women in

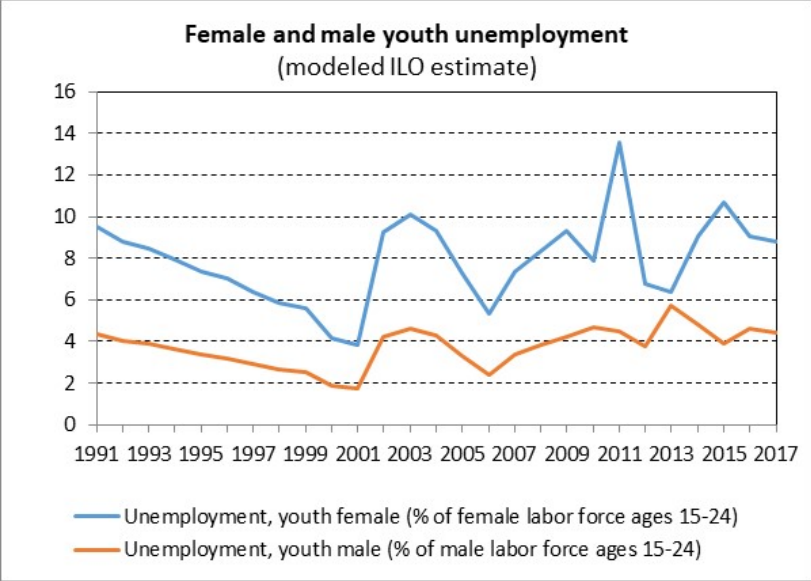
the workplace, especially young women. As Figure 9 shows, female youth unemployment has been and remains about twice that of male youth unemployment. Based on ILO modeling, male youth unemployment was 4.4 percent in 2017, while it was 8.8 percent for females, exactly twice that of males. Hence, it is not surprising that without getting a job, young females, especially from the wealthier families, decide to enroll in tertiary education instead of being unemployed.

**Figure 8: Female and Male Gross Tertiary School Enrollment (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

**Figure 9: Female and Male Youth Unemployment (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

## V. Ethical and Political Aspects

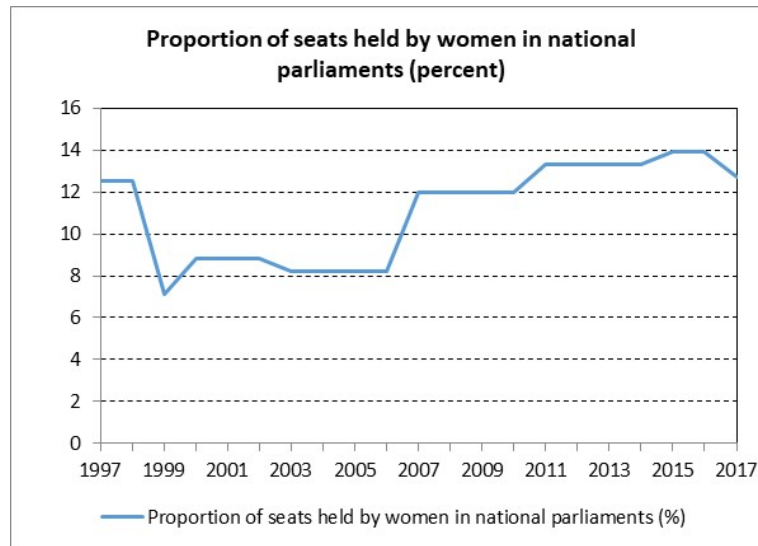
Among the various approaches of ethical reasoning, the educational gender gap can be examined via three approaches: the fairness or justice approach, the rights approach, and the common goods approach.<sup>4</sup> This section also reviews power issues between genders and outlines political explanations for Guatemala’s gender bias. Finally, it illustrates these power issues by linking the gender bias in education to the lack of access to safe water.

According to the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (2009, p. 2), the fairness or justice approach implies “that ethical actions treat all human beings equally – or if unequally, then fairly based on some standard that is defensible.” Given that there is no defensible standard to provide less education to girls than to boys, Guatemala’s gender bias is unethical.

The gender bias is also unethical based on the rights approach as Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 states that everyone has the right to education. Article 26 also states that education “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

It is true that when people are educated, they are able to live in a more harmonious world. They are able to better address concerns they or their community faces. They have a better understanding of political affairs, and they are also able to be better members of the global society. When women are given a proper education, they are also able to progress further economically. Educating women benefits the whole society. Looking at the gender bias from this perspective, it is also unethical under the so-called common good approach of ethical decision making.

**Figure 10: Female and Male Youth Unemployment (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

<sup>4</sup> This article follows the description of these approaches as defined in the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (2009) at Santa Clara University.

Due to Guatemala's political instability, it is hard for both men and women to have a voice in politics. However, it is even harder for women to have a political voice. Ogrodnik and Borzutzky (2011) talk about political challenges women face. They explain (p. 58) that "women with the ability to read and write obtained the right to vote in 1945. This right was expanded to all women in 1966." Yet, not many women are elected into public office. As Figure 10 shows, despite that women constitute now about half of the voters, the proportion of seats held by women in Guatemala's national parliament varied during the last 20 years between a low of 7.1 percent in 1999 and a high of 13.9 percent in 2015 and 2016. Ogrodnik and Borzutzky (2011, p. 58) also emphasize that women's under-representation is also a reality in high-level appointed positions. For example, there is only one woman in the ten-member Constitutional Court.

When women are underrepresented in politics, this reinforces economic gender inequality. For example, in 2006, women represented only 38.3 percent of the economically active population in Guatemala.<sup>5</sup> This shows that most women in Guatemala are not given the opportunity to make a living, since they make up less than two-fifths of the economically active population. When women are not in positions of power to make choices for women as a group, this causes women to remain inferior to men in all aspects of their lives.

Another major reason for why gender-based educational inequality exists is a lack of access to clean water. In many developing countries, women and girls are the ones who are forced to make the long journey from their villages to the nearest water source, which is often many miles away. Because of this, women and young girls spend their day doing these types of household chores instead of going to school. Based on the survey undertaken by Hajny (2015), this also applies to women and girls in Guatemala.<sup>6</sup> This division of labor in terms of fetching water is not only ethically unjustified but it reinforces the ethically unacceptable gender gap in education.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Overall, gender disparities within Guatemala's education still exist today and are long overdue to be fixed. Fixing the extreme gender inequalities in the Guatemalan educational system needs to start with empowering women. Without a voice, young women are unable to advocate for themselves. Once given this voice, women will be able to prove that they are capable of receiving an education and using it for the greater good of the world. Giving women a voice also allows them to run for more positions of power within the government. Right now, there are not enough women in the government to influence policy decisions. Once more women are involved, more decisions that help women will be made.

Additionally, water needs to be made more easily accessible to all. Right now, water collection depends largely on women, which causes them to be unable to unlock their full potential. Water collection is a chore that has been given to women, but if the whole community is able to be involved in water collection, this will allow women to have more time to go to school. Women are caught in a cycle of being made responsible for water collection, which then keeps them out of school.

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<sup>5</sup> Ogrodnik and Borzutzky (2011), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Hajny (2015) shares the results of a case study he conducted in San Lucas Toliman, Solola, Guatemala. Out of the 160 families living in the area, Hajny surveyed 40 of these families about their attitudes towards paying for more advanced, community-based management water systems, coming to the conclusion that women and children in Guatemala currently play a large role in the collection of water.

Finally, though not addressed in this article, “parents and girls need to know that there are options in addition to or outside of marriage and motherhood.”<sup>7</sup> Many young Guatemalan girls get trapped in the idea of having to get married at an early age in order to live a fulfilling life, but this is not true. By encouraging young girls and their parents that young girls can grow up and live independently, many gender-based issues could be resolved.

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<sup>7</sup> Nierenberg (2002) p. 38.