



*Global Majority E-Journal*



Volume 11, Number 2  
(December 2020)



# *Global Majority E-Journal*

## **About the *Global Majority E-Journal***

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 Econ-110—The Global Majority, which is an elective within the New AU Core.

## **Editor**

Dr. Bernhard G. Gunter, Assistant Professor, Economics Department, American University; Washington, DC; and President, Bangladesh Development Research Center (BDRC), Falls Church, VA, United States. The editor can be reached at [gunter@american.edu](mailto:gunter@american.edu).

## **Cover Design**

Based on an animated GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) available as Wikimedia Commons, created in 1998 by Christian Janoff, showing the “Globe” demonstration as it can be found on the Commodore REU 1700/1750 test/demo disk; please see:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Globe.gif>.

**ISSN 2157-1252**

**Copyright © 2020 by the author(s) for the contents of the articles.**

**Copyright © 2020 by American University for the journal compilation.**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing from the copyright holder. American University, the editor and the authors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this journal. The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and should not be associated with American University.

# *Global Majority E-Journal*

## **Volume 11, Number 2 (December 2020)**

### **Contents**

Sip Every Drop: Inaccessible and Jeopardized Water Resources in Nigeria and Ukraine <i>John Burzawa</i>	64
Child Poverty Crisis: A Childhood Living Below the Line in Nigeria and Uganda <i>Cameron Fisher</i>	77
Distant Neighbors: Why Neighboring Countries Mozambique and South Africa Differ So Greatly in Gender Inequality <i>Patrick Ryan</i>	89
Bruised but Never Broken: The Fight for Gender Equality in Egypt and Bangladesh <i>Lily Sweeting</i>	102
Democracy: An Ultimate Remedy towards the Flawed Urbanization in Bangladesh and China <i>Ka Long Tung</i>	117

# **Sip Every Drop: Inaccessible and Jeopardized Water Resources in Nigeria and Ukraine**

John Burzawa

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines some key facts related to water scarcity in Nigeria and Ukraine. While both countries have considerable water resources, due to economic, political, and environmental factors, access to safe water and sanitation remains a problem. In addition to examining some key facts, the article reviews the issue of water scarcity from an ethical perspective, applying several lenses, including differences in the access to water and sanitation by gender and localities. It also discusses some ethical origins, current ethical structures, and ethical frameworks of water scarcity in Nigeria and Ukraine.*

## **I. Introduction**

Water is one of the most plentiful resources on our planet. Yet, over 700 million people live without consistent and safe access to water (Groenfeldt and Schmidt, 2013). Whether it be drinking, bathing, or cleaning, potable water is necessary to maintain good public health, which affects how people live and their quality of life. Water scarcity exists in all areas of the world. In the developing world, water scarcity is interdependent of many other aspects of development. Water is essential to life and lays the foundation for society.

This article evaluates water access and water safety in Nigeria and Ukraine. While both countries do not lack the water sources necessary to serve their populations, as a result of environmental, political, and economic factors, access to safe water remains a key problem. Following a review of the literature, this article provides some socioeconomic background of both Nigeria and Ukraine. Next, it provides an empirical analysis of several factors related to water scarcity in these two countries, using a comparative approach. Lastly, this article will discuss ethical perspectives, which help to understand the national and global duties to address the lack of access to safe water.

## **II. Literature Review**

There is a plethora of research available about the struggles of not having access to water and the means by which the governments of Nigeria and Ukraine aim to amend this problem. Franks, Bdliya and Mbuya (2011), Slaguhter and Odume (2017), and Hadejia and Boso (2017) discuss how Nigeria's lack of infrastructure has problematized water access and what efforts are being

made to reduce the inequality in access to safe water. Frankhauser, Rodionova and Falcetti (2008) and Vystavna and Diadin (2015) elaborate on the origins of water scarcity in Ukraine and how that scarcity coincides with poverty.

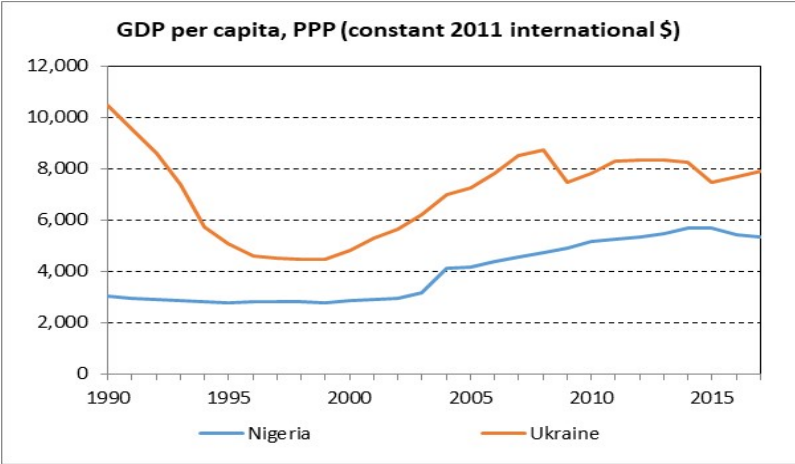
- Slaughter and Odume (2017) detail the causes and effects of water scarcity in Nigeria. Contrary to popular belief, water resources are actually plentiful in Nigeria, so much so that a majority of their states are named after rivers. However, due to weak regulatory, institutional, and bureaucratic procedures, the process of distributing water is highly uneven. Reform is limited to physical management and ignores community engagement. As a result, the effect of poor water management flows down into the social, economic, and environmental spheres. Additionally, groundwater contamination can prove detrimental to community and ecosystem health.
- Franks, Bdliya and Mbuya (2011) outline a human geographic comparison between two significant river basins in Tanzania and Nigeria. The problems and similarities between Nigerian and Tanzanian policies illustrate concepts which are crucial to understand how water governance in Nigeria has evolved. Franks, Bdliya and Mbuya (2011) also evaluate efforts made by national, international, and nongovernmental institutions, which affect how water policy is drafted and implemented in the Nigerian and Tanzanian river basins.
- Hadejia and Boso (2017) compile a comprehensive overview of sustainable water resources management in the Hadejia Jama'are Komadugu Yobe Basin (HJKYB), a resource from which four African countries (including Nigeria) draw a lot of their water. The authors analyze the wave effect of having less available water resources in an increasingly populated and poor Nigerian society. They also examine the history of problematic practices, which have caused scarce access in an otherwise plentiful area. Finally, they discuss current attempts to properly treat water insecurity through the formation of the HJKYB Trust Fund, which is based on integrated water management.
- Frankhauser, Rodionova and Falcetti (2008) report on the statistical access rates to running cold and hot water within Ukraine and analyze several aspects of affordability, subsidy, and economic regionality. They provide the foundation for understanding the disproportionate lack of affordability among poorer Ukrainians. They also identify several correlations between different kinds of access to water and sanitation, such as how access to cold water and proper sewage disposal go hand in hand. Frankhauser, Rodionova and Falcetti also touch on the Chernobyl disaster, which explains why especially the Volynskaya region has low water connection rates.
- Vystavna and Diadin (2015) analyze how Soviet planning and macroenvironmental factors affect the distribution of water in Ukraine. One of the most devastating trends in natural factors which promote water scarcity in Ukraine is the prevalence of anthropogenic factors such as pollution, flow regulation, extraction, and groundwater contamination. Vystavna and Diadin (2015) reaffirm the claim that a lack of safe water will decrease living standards, promote the spread of water-related illnesses, and have the power to spawn large economic losses.

### **III. Socioeconomic Background**

As shown in Figure 1, Ukraine's GDP per capita was more than three times that of Nigeria in 1990. However, following independence from the Soviet Union in August of 1991, GDP per capita fell

rapidly as a result of a recession that hit as soon as price controls were lifted and hyperinflation set in. It would not be until Ukraine floated their currency in 1996 that the situation would improve. Yet, many people still faced poverty in the early 2000s, and GDP per capita in 2017 (\$7,894) was still far below of what it was in 1990 (10,463). Especially the rural parts of Ukraine continue to struggle as an ongoing political hopscotch with Russia has left the economy mostly stagnant during the last decade.

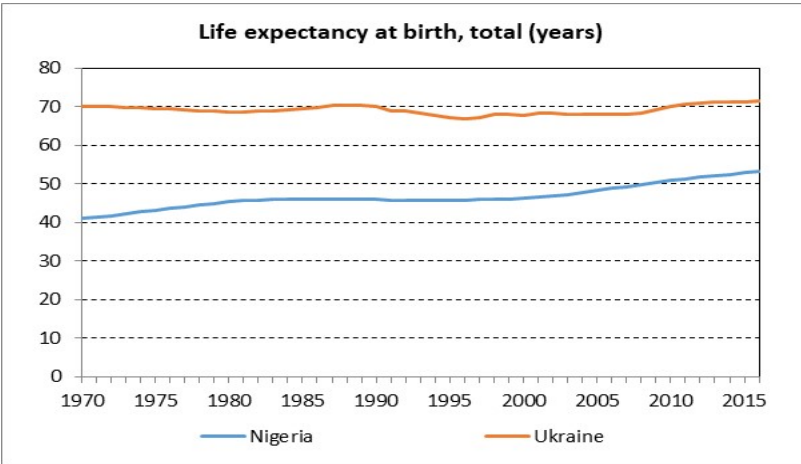
**Figure 1: PPP-adjusted GDP per capita in Nigeria and Ukraine, 1990 to 2017**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

Nigeria struggled to increase its GDP per capita until 2003, having gone through colonial status under indirect rule, several civil wars, a series of dictatorships, before becoming the Federal Republic as it exists today. Nigeria’s volatile political history, which has been partly caused by a conflict over an abundance of oil resources, explains most of Nigeria’s economic stagnation. However, Nigeria then experienced significant growth from 2004 to 2015, largely due to high oil prices. However, GDP per capita has once again stagnated, even decreased, since 2015, reaching \$5,338 in 2017, which is about two thirds of Ukraine’s GDP per capita in 2017.

**Figure 2: Life Expectancy in Nigeria and Ukraine, 1970-2016**



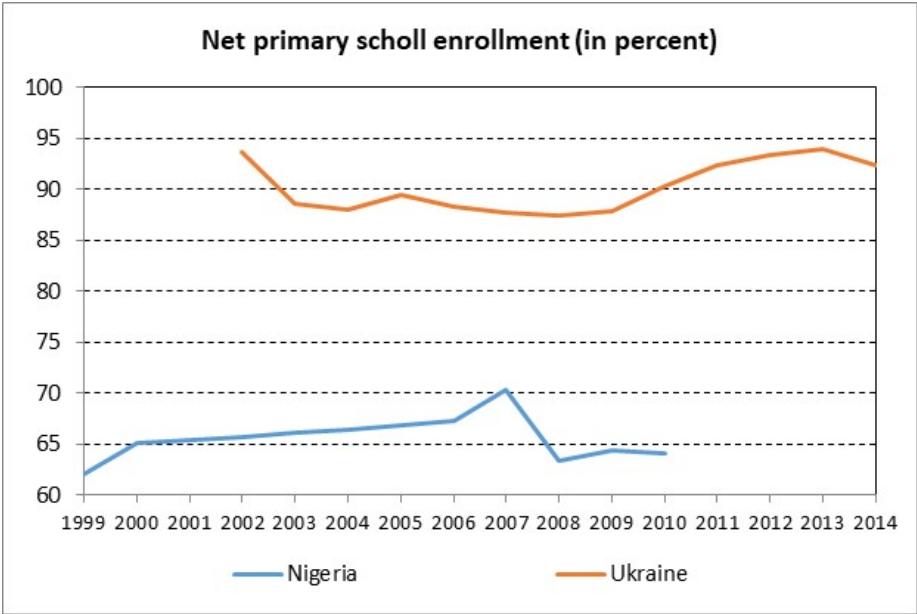
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

Due to continuous economic vulnerability (which is partly due to volatile resource prices and political instability), there is a struggle to improve the quality of life in both countries. As can be seen in Figure 2, life expectancy at birth has increased very little in Nigeria (from 41 years in 1970 to 53 years in 2016, which is an annual increase of 3.2 months) and overall stagnated in Ukraine (where life expectancy increased by only 1.3 years over the last 47 years, from 70.2 years in 1970 to 71.5 years in 2016). Low access to water has a significant impact on both countries' low progress in terms of increasing life expectancy.

Due to severe data constraints for literacy rates of Nigeria and Ukraine, Figure 3 shows the available data for net primary school enrollment for Nigeria (1999 to 2010) and Ukraine (2002 to 2014). While Ukraine has had a long history of well-funded education, with primary school enrollment close to 100 percent during the Soviet era, net primary school enrollment had dropped to 93.6 percent by 2002. Ukraine's net primary school enrollment continued to decline until 2004, when it reached 88.0 percent. The enrollment ratio then stagnated at around 88 percent for the next five years, before slowly increasing from 2009 to 2013 (reaching 93.9 percent). However, it then declined once again in 2014 to 92.4 percent.

Nigeria's school enrollment ratios are far lower than that of Ukraine, which is consistent with Nigeria's lower GDP per capita and lower life expectancy. In Nigeria, net primary school enrollment had been increasing from 1999 (62.0 percent) to 2007 (70.3 percent), but then declined drastically in 2008 to 63.4 percent, basically erasing all the progress made during the previous eight years. It then stagnated at about 64 percent in 2009 and 2010. Despite the limited data, these trends are still important for developing our understanding of the impact of not having access to water. Whereas most Ukrainian children attend primary school, many Nigerian children take on more active roles in the family, which includes walking hours and hours to retrieve water for domestic use.

**Figure 3: Net Primary School Enrollment (in percent) in Nigeria and Ukraine, 1999-2014**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

## IV. Analysis of Access to Safe Water and Sanitation

Water insecurity in Nigeria and Ukraine can be viewed from a multitude of angles, all of which help us to better understand the issue and how it impacts the population in these two countries. This section analyzes four aspects of water insecurity: access to safe water, access to sanitation, the way water is consumed, and the role of pollution and climate change.

### IV.1. Access to Safe Water

There are plenty of water resources available in both Nigeria and Ukraine. Nigeria uses a combination of mostly surface water and some groundwater sources, pooling from the River Niger, River Benue, Lake Chad and the Oguta Lake, as well as several other tributaries and rivers.<sup>1</sup> Ukraine has seven major rivers (Desna, Dnipro, Dnister, Danube, Prypiat, Siverian Donets, and Southern Buh)<sup>2</sup> and over 3,000 lakes, which have a combined surface area of more than 2,000 square kilometers, constituting nearly 3.5 percent of the country's total land area.<sup>3</sup> Like in Nigeria, most (80 percent) of Ukraine's water supply comes from surface water (rather than groundwater), with the Dnipro Basin covering about 65 percent of the country.<sup>4</sup>

Nigeria's total water withdrawals, measured as a percentage of the total available internal resources, totaled around 5.6 percent in 2014.<sup>5</sup> That year, Ukraine's water utilization was around 27 percent.<sup>6</sup> This means that far less than half of their renewable water resources were used. Still, both countries face problems with water scarcity, not in natural supply, but in terms of universal access to safe water by the people. Before discussing these statistics, it is important to understand the definitions of access to water. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), basic water supply is considered any supply of water that is less than 30 minutes away, and is either piped, or found in a borehole or well. A safely managed drinking water service, on the other hand, is considered to be an on-premise source that does not contain chemical or biological contamination.<sup>7</sup>

As shown in Figures 4 and 5, in 2015, 67 percent of Nigeria's people had access to a basic water supply, and only 19 percent of people had access to a safely managed drinking water service. By contrast, for the same year, Ukraine boasts almost 98 percent access to a basic supply, and 92 percent access to a safely managed drinking water service. Ukraine's supply, however, is contingent on both affordability and infrastructural strength. In certain oblasts, like Donetsk and Luhansk, conflict with the Russian Federation has led to the shelling of crucial systems that manage and clean water, leaving three million people thirsty.<sup>8</sup> In rural areas like Kirovogradskaya and Luganskaya, economic struggles caused by unemployment and worker strikes have also made water inaccessible. In Kirovogradskaya and Luganskaya, access to cold water was only 39 percent and 71.4 percent, respectively.<sup>9</sup> In other words, problems with access to water in Ukraine stems

---

<sup>1</sup> Hadejia and Boso (2017).

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography\\_of\\_Ukraine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Ukraine)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com/display.asp?linkpath=pages%5CL%5CA%5CLakes.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2015).

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (2019).

<sup>6</sup> World Bank (2019).

<sup>7</sup> World Bank (2019).

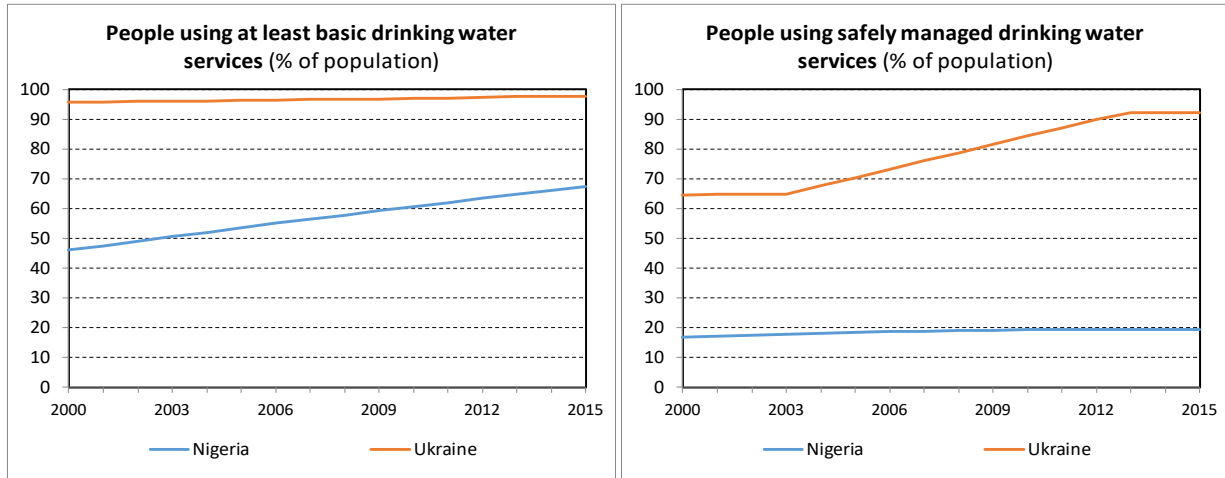
<sup>8</sup> Frankhauser, Rodionova and Falcetti (2008).

<sup>9</sup> Frankhauser, Rodionova and Falcetti (2008).



more from current struggles that damage infrastructure, whereas in Nigeria, a history of political and economic struggles have prevented the development of water infrastructure to begin with.

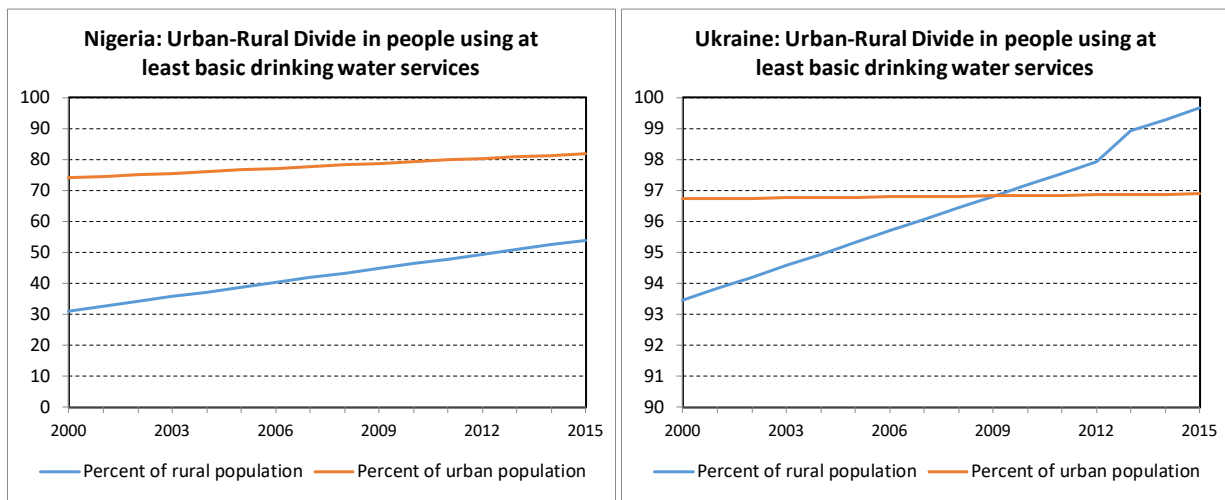
**Figures 4 and 5: People using at least basic drinking water services (% of population) and people using safely managed drinking water services (% of population), 2000-2015**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

As Figures 6 and 7 show, there is also a significant difference in water access between rural and urban communities. In the case of Nigeria (the left figure below), the percentage of the urban population has a far higher access rate to at least basic drinking water services than the rural population, though the urban-rural gap has been reduced from 43 percentage points (in 2000) to 28 percentage points (in 2015). In Ukraine (the right figure below), the urban population had a higher percentage of using at least basic drinking water than the rural population, though only from 2000 to 2008. In 2009, the urban-rural divide had disappeared, and since 2010, the rural percentage continued to increase, while the urban percentage has stagnated.

**Figures 6 and 7: Urban-Rural Divide in Nigeria and Ukraine (for people using at least basic drinking water services), 2000-2015**



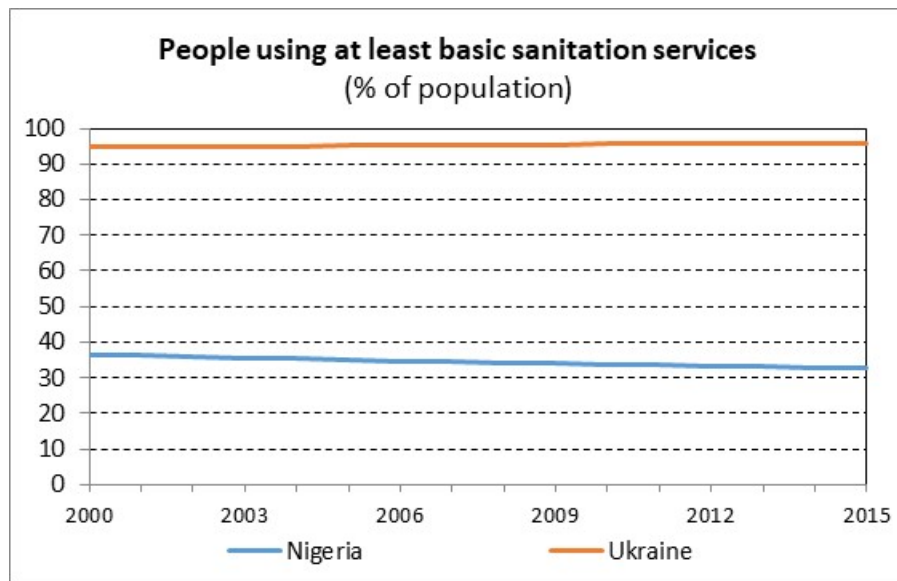
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

Furthermore, there is a divide between poorer areas and more wealthy areas. According to Frankhauser, Rodionova and Falcetti (2008, p. 8), “poorer agricultural areas in Western Ukraine such as Ivano-Frankovskaya and Zakarpatskaya oblasts tend to have low connection rates.” Specifically, Ivano-Frankovskaya and Zarkarpatskaya have access rates of 28.7 percent and 30.9 percent for cold water, respectively; and access rates of 20.6 percent and 7.1 percent for hot water, respectively for Ivano-Frankovskaya and Zarkarpatskaya.

#### IV.2. Access to Sanitation

Although the World Bank (2019) has no data on safely managed sanitation services in Nigeria and Ukraine, it has data on the percentage of people using at least basic sanitation services. As Figure 8 shows, while less than 40 percent of Nigerians use at least basic sanitation services (with access rates declining over time), nearly the whole population of Ukraine is using at least basic sanitation services (and there have been some improvements over time). Like for drinking water, there is also an urban-rural divide for using at least basic sanitation services in both countries. Though not shown here, the World Bank (2019) data show an increasing urban-rural divide over time for Nigeria and a decreasing urban-rural divide for Ukraine.

**Figure 8: People using at least basic sanitation services (% of population), 2000-2015**



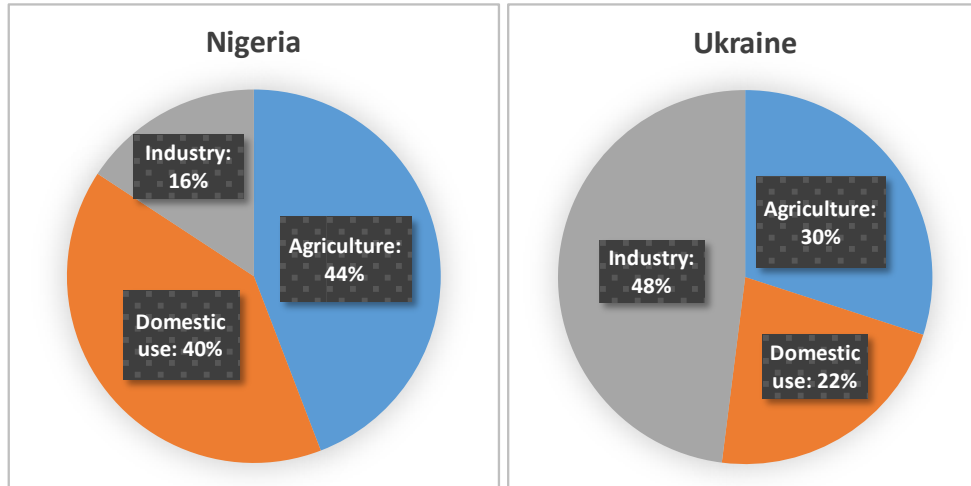
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

#### IV.3. Water Use

Nigeria and Ukraine also differ greatly in how their water withdrawals are used for agriculture, domestic use, or industry, as can be seen in Figures 9 and 10. As Ukraine is an industrialized country, water use for industry comprises a significantly higher percentage of the total, almost half. By contrast, Nigeria’s water use is primarily split between agriculture and domestic use, as the country’s agricultural sector focuses on water-intensive grain production. This difference in water use also reflects a difference in economic vulnerability. As Nigeria’s economy is predominantly reliant on oil exports and agricultural production, it may be subject to price

fluctuation and unfavorable yields, which both negatively impact economic long-term development. The more industrial-based economy of Ukraine does not have this issue.

**Figures 9 and 10: Freshwater Withdrawals by Sector in Nigeria and Ukraine in 2010**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

#### **IV.4. Role of Pollution and Climate Change**

One aspect of water scarcity that affects both Nigeria and Ukraine is the impact of pollution. Some people within both countries end up drinking water without knowing that it is contaminated, with most of the contamination being the result of anthropogenic environmental pollution. Water pollution does not only contribute to safe water scarcity, it also creates public health issues that further strain these countries' economic capacities.

According to Vystavna and Diadin (2015), there are three main environmental concerns that affect Ukraine's ability to sustain water development. First, climate change intensifies the evaporation processes and decreases water availability as a result of eutrophication and groundwater contamination, which occur because of garbage dumping and industrial agriculture respectively. Second, high levels of contamination occur as a result of trace metals and other pollutants, which are not taken seriously by the Ukrainian legislature. Lastly, climate change increases competition over water, which makes it even less accessible for the least wealthy.

In Nigeria, the pollution of certain bodies of water goes largely undetected. Broken or leaking pipes, source proximity to septic tanks, and unsafe sanitation facilities such as pit latrines contribute to pollution which jeopardizes groundwater and is responsible for straining public health systems (Abubakar, 2017). Aside from these environmental concerns, there is also the worry that children in Nigeria are not finishing school because of disease that is spread through improper sanitation and pollution. Cholera, for example, spreads through the ingestion of fecal matter, usually by means of untreated water.<sup>10</sup> As a result, symptoms like diarrhea prevent children from attending school, which makes development much harder.

<sup>10</sup> Adagbada, Adesida, Nwaokorie, Niemogha and Coker (2012).

## V. Ethical Analysis

### V.1. Ethical Origins and Current Structures

Most initiatives in Ukraine stem from independent moral entrepreneurship at the national level. Alina Bocharnikova is the Coordinator for Development of Social Entrepreneurship at the Agency for the Development of the Future, which is a nonprofit organization in Ukraine dedicated to collective management of human resources in order to increase the quality of life. In March 2020, Ms. Bocharnikova participated in a panel discussion conducted by American University about Ukrainian perspectives surrounding Corporate Social Responsibility. She explained that the culture of mobilizing collective action for change she recommends is based on a five-step process: identification of a social problem, the prioritization of said problem on institutional agendas, the redirection of institutional profits for the sake of human needs (rather than stakeholder greed), democratic management, and transparency.<sup>11</sup> According to Bocharnikova (2020), in order for any initiative aimed at solving water shortage to be successful, these requirements must be met.

These requirements build on Risse's (2014) framework in that with collective ownership, comes stakeholder responsibility, and thus communal mobilization. The philosophy of group effort to produce a socially optimal resource allocation was present in Ukraine in 2009, when 260,000 people returned to Ukraine after being displaced by the Stalin regime, and water shortages were rampant.<sup>12</sup> A particular community in Crimea pooled community resources in order to install meters, build reservoirs, and find water.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing both the need for these people to have water, and the conceptual framework of collective ownership led to the level of social mobilization and entrepreneurship that allowed this effort to prevail.

In Nigeria, on the other hand, solutions to water scarcity have long been tied to assistance from the international community. For example, WaterAid (a British non-governmental organization) advocates for sustainable sanitation practices and equally accessible water. In 2011, WaterAid led a "community-led total sanitation" campaign, which helped promote and market sanitation and hygiene facilities. Social events and other promotions were focused on sanitation and encouraging the sale of improved latrine.<sup>14</sup>

This campaign began to focus on an empowerment-based approach to solving and addressing certain issues regarding practices like open-defecation. According to the WaterAid website,<sup>15</sup> the ideas and materials were met with 100 percent excitement by the Nigerian people. However, there has been some controversy on the ethical aspects of a British NGO going to Nigeria (a former British colony) and imposing western traditions, like using toilets, on people who have their own traditional practices. While this may be unethical from a sociological standpoint, the legitimacy of these concerns is overshadowed by the improvements made based on these interventions. Without abolishing unhealthy practices of disposing human urine and feces, it would be very difficult for Nigeria to improve living standards.

One aspect of water scarcity, which particularly affects Nigeria, involves the perpetuation of traditional gender roles. Based on Nigerian gender roles, water retrieval is delegated to mostly

---

<sup>11</sup> Bocharnikova (2020).

<sup>12</sup> Video made and distributed by Infobase (2010).

<sup>13</sup> Infobase (2010) video, at 15:45.

<sup>14</sup> See: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/blog/marketing-and-pride-to-improve-sanitation-in-nigeria>.

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/blog/marketing-and-pride-to-improve-sanitation-in-nigeria>.

women and children. Olufemi and Ojo (2013) conducted a study, which interviewed 50 Nigerian women belonging to the Ibadan community about their experiences with water scarcity. According to Olufemi and Ojo (2013, p. 51), “most of these women work in the informal sector and live in a patriarchal hegemonic cultural setting.” In other words, because the task of retrieving water is so tedious, it is delegated to women. Tedious, however, might be an understatement. The study showed that when water is scarce in rural communities, 96 percent of women traveled over an hour to get the water they needed for their families.

This aspect of water insecurity is not widespread in Ukraine. The social order of Nigeria is far more traditional than that of Ukraine. Although still an underprivileged group, Ukrainian women have far more opportunities than Nigerian women. The issue of water scarcity in Ukraine is mostly relegated to particular communities that are either ignored because of their rural status or plagued with political conflict. The impact of armed conflict, in fact, lowers transportation fatigue in Ukraine since it acts preventatively rather than as a nuisance. For example, landmines and broken ceasefires deter people from leaving their homes to get water, and active fighting destroys infrastructure like pipes and pumping stations.<sup>16</sup> While Nigeria has had a long history of politically motivated armed-conflict, and terrorism continues to riddle the country, conflict is only one of many contributing factors to water insecurity.

## **V.2. Ethical Frameworks**

As detailed in Risse (2005), two major theses have emerged as to why the global south is so far behind the developed world:

- The institutional thesis proposed by Douglass North (1991) argues that the development status of a particular country is determined by the strength of their domestic institutions.
- The geography thesis, presented by Gallup, Sachs and Mellinger (1998), argues that a country’s natural resource endowment determines its path of development.

These two theses allow us to understand international development programs from an ethical perspective. In the case of Nigeria, the institutional argument is both valid and invalid. In a sense, yes, the Nigerian political institutions are quite poor, which is why they have had issues with providing safe water to everybody. However, these institutions were under indirect colonial rule until 1960, the impact of which is so significant that even Nigeria’s state borders are a colonial legacy. This is not to say that Nigerians are not to blame for the development of their own institutions, but that the infighting and instability that followed independence was in part a result of colonialism.

Risse (2005, pp. 352-353) defines “harm” as the violation of one’s rights, in other words, the revocation of an entitlement. Building on this definition, Risse (2005, p. 366) then forwards the idea that because the developed world often enjoys the benefits of natural resources (like water) at the expense of the developing world, the rights of those without the resources (for which they both share ownership and rely on for life) are being violated. This principle of “uncompensated exclusion” is based on the same idea that was mentioned earlier of collective resource ownership.

Even though Risse (2005) does not consider the principle of “uncompensated exclusion” as being one which exemplifies how the global order harms the poor, there is still an argument to be made

---

<sup>16</sup> Gates, Hegre, Nygård, and Strand (2010).

that because of the geography thesis, value is attached to a country's natural resources, the relevancy of which is best explained in how national institutions in Nigeria could not develop as a result of the resource exclusion that came alongside colonial rule. If humankind owns the earth collectively, to deprive one of these resources is unethical in the sense that their moral rights are being violated at the very least because they then become unable – as a result of the deprivation – to strengthen institutions to distribute those resources equally.<sup>17</sup>

The ethics of water is also discussed in Groenfeldt and Schmidt (2013). They analyze the ethics of water governance at large by describing four approaches to water governance, which are relevant in our current discussion: management, institutional, sustainability-based, and values-based. According to Groenfeldt and Schmidt (2013), all four of these approaches share common ideas, which ultimately depend on the values of a particular society. Specifically, the “values approach identifies the reasoning used to support laws, policies, and practices; it seeks to describe and explain those values; and it considers how alternate categories for defining the human–water relationship affect the ethic of governance.”<sup>18</sup>

This framework is very similar to the Markkula center's framework,<sup>19</sup> which lays out a foundational process for ethical decision making. Currently, institutions must undergo this process in how they tackle the current issues facing water scarcity. In empowering women and eliminating patriarchal practices surrounding domestic water retrieval (which society has now identified of being problematic), Nigeria must rework and formulate alternative frameworks and organizations. In order to develop more ethical systems, we must remove traditional stigmas surrounding sanitation and instill pride in preserving the integrity of natural resources. For addressing urban/rural inequality, it is important for the water-rich urban politicians to create programs that extent access to safe water to rural areas in a more sustainable way.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Water is imperative to development due to its interdependence to other aspects such as poverty, environmental sustainability, gender empowerment, urbanization, and public health. Ukraine still suffers frequent problems with consistent water access, especially in the rural and war-torn regions. In Nigeria, the situation should not be considered anything but dire. Until Nigeria develops specific, targeted, and integrated solutions to water access, almost all areas of development will continue to struggle. After looking at specific socioeconomic factors, not only is the link between poverty and access to sustainable water clear, but so is the setting.

Furthermore, the facts examined in this article show that in a purely empirical sense, the situation in both Nigeria and Ukraine goes beyond harm. It would be one thing if the resource allocation was at full capacity, but with water withdrawals as low as 6 percent of available resources in Nigeria, there is an inexcusable problem. The resources are there, and there needs to be a more ethical approach to respect every human's right to water and hence, life.

Social responsibility cannot be underestimated when it comes to solving the unequal water distribution. Economically speaking, entrepreneurship exists when a need is not being met and someone takes it upon herself to go the extra mile to provide that need. This entrepreneurship

---

<sup>17</sup> Risse (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Groenfeldt and Schmidt (2013), p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (2015).

based on social responsibility includes compensating the excluded for the action of those who make the problem worse. While the foundation for this kind of social entrepreneurship is set in Ukraine, the initiatives still need to get their feet wet. In Nigeria, such social entrepreneurship may not even come from within the country. Although it would be ideal if this kind of infrastructure could develop on its own, current Nigerian institutions continue to force people into water poverty.

## References

- Abubakar, Ismaila Rimi (2017). Access to Sanitation Facilities among Nigerian Households: Determinants and Sustainability Implications. *Sustainability*, Vol. 9, Article No. 547; available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su9040547>.
- Adagbada, Ajoke Olutola; Solayide Abosedede Adesida; Francisca Obiageri Nwaokorie; Mary-Theresa Niemogha; and Akitoye Olusegun Coker (2012). Cholera Epidemiology in Nigeria: An Overview. *The Pan African Medical Journal*, Vol. 12, Article No. 59; available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3428179/>.
- Bocharnikova, Alina (2020). Statement made at the Panel Discussion on “Corporate Social Responsibility, Perspectives from Ukraine” at American University on March 2, 2020.
- Fankhauser, Samuel; Yulia Rodionova; and Elisabetta Falchetti (2008). Utility Payments in Ukraine: Affordability, Subsidies and Arrears. London, UK: University College London (UCL), School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), Centre for the Study of Economic and Social Change in Europe (CSESCE), *Economics Working Papers*, No. 87 (February); available at: <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/17458/1/17458.pdf>.
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2015). AQUASTAT Country Profile – Ukraine. Rome, Italy: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); available at: <http://www.fao.org/aquastat/en/countries-and-basins/country-profiles/country/UKR>.
- Franks, Tom; Hassan Bdliya; and Lawrence Mbuya (2011). Water Governance and River Basin Management: Comparative Experiences from Nigeria and Tanzania. *International Journal of River Basin Management*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (June), pp. 93–101.
- Gallup, John Luke; Jeffrey D. Sachs; and Andrew D. Mellinger (1998). Geography and Economic Development. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), *NBER Working Paper* No. 6849 (December); available at: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w6849>.
- Gates, Scott; Håvard Hegre; Håvard Mokleiv Nygård; and Håvard Strand (2010). Consequences of Civil Conflict. Washington, DC: The World Bank, World Development Report 2011 *Background Papers*; available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/27502>.
- Groenfeldt, David and Jeremy J. Schmidt (2013). Ethics and Water Governance. *Ecology and Society*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Article 14; available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-04629-180114>.
- Hadejia, Isma'ila Abdullahi and Babagana Boso (2017). Local Capacity Building and Partnership Development for Sustainable Water Resources Management in the Hadejia Jama'are Komadugu Yobe Basin - Lessons from the Activities of HJKYB Trust Fund, Damaturu, Yobe State. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 4,

- pp. 1–11; available at:  
<https://www.journalarjass.com/index.php/ARJASS/article/view/11234/20336>.
- Infobase (2010). *Conflict on a Local Scale*. New York, NY: Infobase, video.
- Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at the University of Santa Clara (2015). *A Framework for Ethical Decision Making*. Santa Clara, CA: University of Santa Clara, Markkula Center for Applied Ethics; available at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/a-framework-for-ethical-decision-making/>.
- North, Douglass C. (1991). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Olufemi, Olusola and Olajide Ojo (2013). A Threat to Women’s Food Work and Livelihood. *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol. 30, Nos. 2/3, pp. 49–59.
- Risse, Mathias (2005). How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor? *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Autumn), pp. 349–376.
- Risse, Mathias (2014). The Human Right to Water and Common Ownership of the Earth: Human Right to Water. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (June), pp. 178–203.
- Slaughter, Andrew and Nelson Odume (2017). How Nigeria is Wasting its Rich Water Resources. *The Conversation*, September 5; available at: <http://theconversation.com/how-nigeria-is-wasting-its-rich-water-resources-83110>.
- Vystavna, Yuliya and Dmytro Diadin (2015). Water Scarcity and Contamination in Eastern Ukraine. *Proceedings of the International Association of Hydrological Sciences*, Vol. 366 (April), pp. 149–150; available at: <https://piahs.copernicus.org/articles/366/149/2015/>.
- World Bank (2019). *World Development Indicators / International Debt Statistics database* (Washington, DC: The World Bank); as posted on the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/> (downloaded on January 16, 2019).



# **Child Poverty Crisis: A Childhood Living Below the Line in Nigeria and Uganda**

Cameron Fisher

## ***Abstract***

*This article looks at the crisis of excluded and invisible children in Nigeria and Uganda. It examines the evolution of some key indicators, including infant mortality, under-five mortality, birth registration rates, children out of school, and the percentage of employed children at primary school age. These indicators show that both countries have made some progress in reducing multidimensional child poverty, but much more remains to be done. The article also reviews government plans and programs in Nigeria and Uganda, and then discusses some recommendations and ethical concerns.*

## **I. Introduction**

In 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention of the Rights of the Child to establish the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child, no matter their race, religion or abilities.<sup>1</sup> This Convention was a turning point in how the world was going to treat children of lesser backgrounds; establishing rights relating to disabilities, economic status and mental health; virtually stating that each child is entitled to basic needs to help them reach their fullest potential.<sup>2</sup> Though this is an acknowledged piece of international legislation, there are still many children who fall between the cracks, including in Nigeria and Uganda.

Every human on the planet is born with a name, each of them has a face, and every single one of them has a story. Whether society chooses to recognize that story is another concern. The term ‘invisible children’ refers to children who have disappeared from the view of the public. They have vanished from view of their families and communities. They also vanish from the knowledge of the government, civil society and the media, leaving these organizations unable to help the children who need their support most. Invisible children are located mostly in the world’s poorest countries, but frankly, some of them are hidden in every shadowy corner of the world: in abandoned alleys of New York City, in cut-off villages of Uganda, and the slums of Lagos (Nigeria’s largest city).

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (1990).

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch (2014).

In addition to some children being invisible, many more are excluded in terms of not getting the nutrition, education and health services they need to live a decent life.

This article analyzes multi-dimensional childhood poverty by examining the scope and magnitude of situations children face in Nigeria and Uganda. It also examines to what degree Nigeria and Uganda have ignored the issues related to excluded and invisible children. Too often children are left to fend for themselves, creating a circle of despair seen from generation to generation. This article is structured into six sections. The next section (Section II) provides a brief literature review. Following the literature review, Section III compares Nigeria and Uganda with each other with regards to the evolution of three key development indicators. Section IV examines some key facts related to children in Nigeria and Uganda, while Section V discusses some ethical issues of child poverty, before the last section provides some conclusions.

## **II. Literature Review**

There is a growing literature on the crisis of child poverty in Nigeria and Uganda. Angucia (2005) and Klein (2013) exemplify the crisis in Uganda, showing how child poverty is related to terrorism and a lack of education. Aderinto (2000), Robson (2003), and Paquette (2019) examine the situation of poor children in Nigeria, which also discuss the effects of terrorism on child poverty.

- Angucia (2005) discusses the role of children and war in Africa, specifically in Uganda. The author notes that children do not start wars, nor do children understand the complexities of how the wars they are in were started. Yet, the consequences children face includes (among many others) being orphaned, abducted, traumatized, and displaced. This destruction of children's self, their health and their world implies that the children in these situations are deprived of education and health. Angucia (2005) highlights that there are no exact figures for how many children are involved with armed groups, though there are approximations for children involved in warfare for most countries. The author also points out that in Uganda, the existence of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) depended heavily on the abduction of children to fight battles. These abductions were deliberately strategized, aimed to systematically terrorize and subjugate the population of already impoverished people, and using them as political tools.
- Klein (2013) highlights that Uganda has (after Niger) the second youngest population in the world, with 78 percent of its population under 30 years old. Klein exemplifies the problems that Uganda has faced in making primary education mandatory without having provided enough classrooms and qualified teachers. Furthermore, Klein provides extensive details on how the younger generation has been used as a political factor in Uganda. She also mentions that despite grave and desolate circumstances, younger generations no longer want to remain on the sidelines; they want to be involved in making their situation better. Klein speculates that it will only be a matter of time that the more organized and more connected youth of today will demand more changes.
- Aderinto (2000) examines the coping measures of street-children and non-street children in south western Nigeria. The main objective of Aderinto's research is to identify the social correlates that are distinct to street-children in this area of Nigeria, and further dissect the predisposing factors of their behavior. Furthermore, the research tries to uncover the survival mechanisms of these street children. Aderinto's study included 202 street-children and 201 non-street children. Aderinto explains that the street-children were mostly males,

have little education and come from families with five or more siblings. The parents of these street children also had low levels of education, had unskilled occupations and were often experiencing marital disruptions. Overall, the study found that polygyny, large families, family disruption and child labor were central issues and the major predisposing factors to the children living on the streets of south western Nigeria.

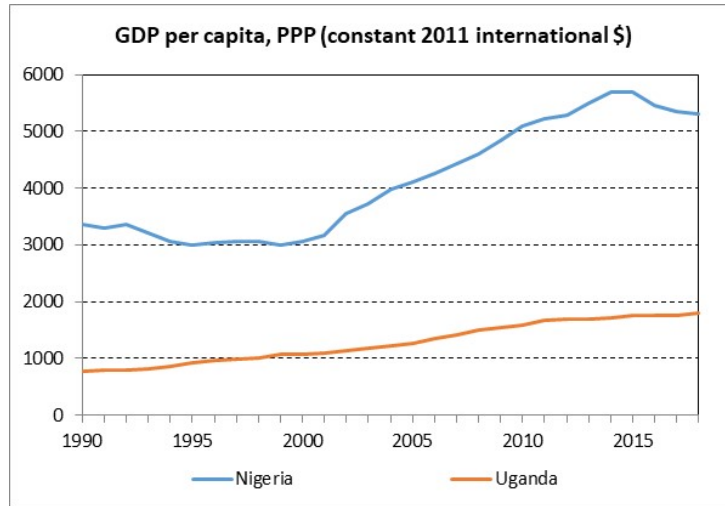
- Robson (2003) researches the use of children in the workplace in northern Nigeria. As valuable assets to the country's economic standing, children are used to perform various tasks around their homes and villages. Robson highlights how children in these arrangements work both independently and alongside adults in agriculture, domestic tasks, and within trade. Robson documents the variety of the children's work activities in order to examine the concept of childhood in northern Nigeria. She pays particular attention to the concept of gender, age and other factors that shape a child's experience in rural areas of northern Nigeria. Based on the data collected, Robson concludes that the missing formal education of children in these rural environments lead to generations of families living in poverty.
- In a Washington Post news story, Paquette (2019) reports on the treatment by the Nigerian armed forces of children who escaped the terrorist group Boko Haram. Based on interviews with such children, this news report indicates that the military detention following these children's escape was worse than how they were treated by Boko Haram. Though Nigerian defense officials deny claims of abusive confinement, various human rights advocates concluded that conditions in the holding centers are so appalling that they thwart the military's goal of protecting and deradicalizing young people.

### **III. Socioeconomic Background**

Despite a variety of misinterpretations of what income and income per capita measures, GDP per capita remains an important indicator when comparing the level of development across countries, especially if correcting for differences in prices (i.e., using purchasing power parity (PPP)-based GDP per capita). Figure 1 shows the evolution of PPP-adjusted GDP per capita in Nigeria and in Uganda from 1990 to 2018. After stagnating from 1990 to 2001, Nigeria's GDP per capita increased drastically from 2001 (\$3,170) to 2014 (\$5,688), though it then fell slightly back to \$5,316 in 2018. Uganda's GDP per capita increased consistently during the whole period, from \$773 in 1990 to \$1,808 in 2018.

While Uganda's increase in income per capita has been less than that of Nigeria's GDP per capita in absolute terms, it increased far more in relative terms. From 1990 to 2018, Uganda's GDP per capita increased by a cumulative 134 percent (i.e., it more than doubled), while Nigeria's GDP per capita increased only by a cumulative 58 percent. Hence, though the absolute difference in GDP per capita increased between Nigeria and Uganda, it decreased in relative terms: in 1990, Nigeria's GDP per capita was more than four times higher than of Uganda's; in 2018 Nigeria's GDP per capita was less than three times higher than Uganda's GDP per capita.

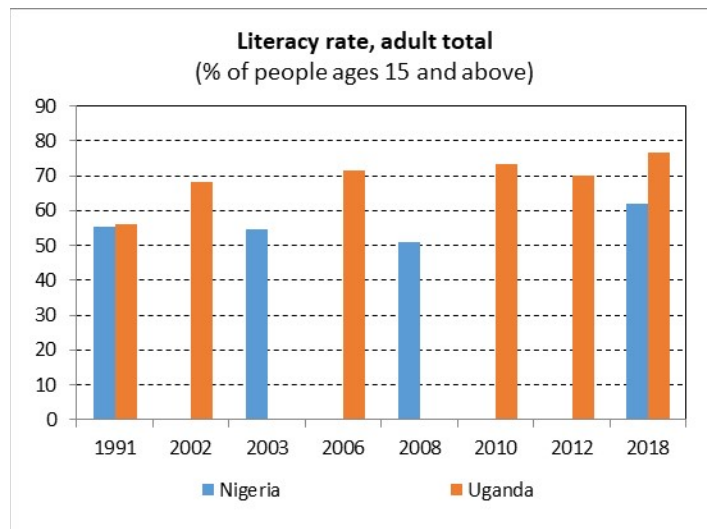
**Figure 1: PPP-adjusted GDP per capita (constant 2011 international \$), 1990-2018**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

As shown in Figure 2, Uganda’s adult literacy rate has been higher than Nigeria’s for all the years such data is available. In 1991, which is the first year such data is available, Nigeria’s literacy rate was 55.4 percent, compared to 56.1 percent for Uganda, which is a relatively small difference, which however increased over time. By 2018, which is the last year such data is available for both countries, Nigeria’s literacy rate had increased by 6.6 percentage points, while Uganda’s had increased by 20.4 percentage points, hence, making adult literacy rates very different across these two countries. Comparing Figures 1 and 2, one interesting observation is that Uganda has outperformed Nigeria in terms of literacy even though Uganda’s GDP per capita is still far below that of Nigeria.

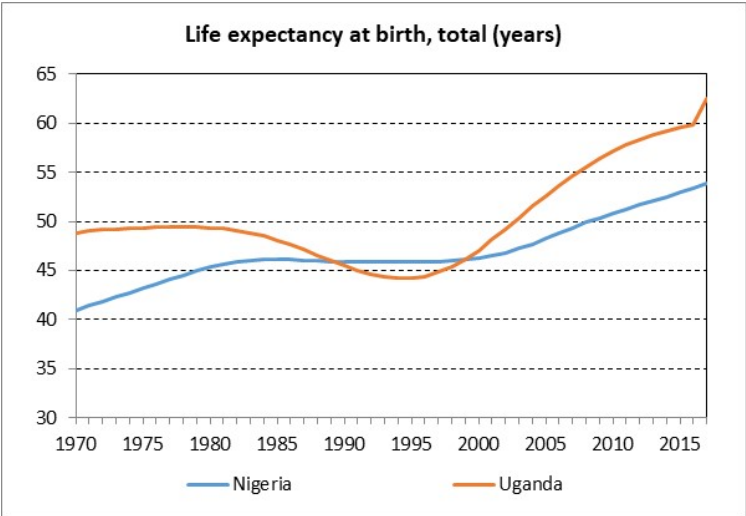
**Figure 2: Adult Literacy Rates in Nigeria and Uganda, all available years**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

Life expectancy at birth, shown in Figure 3, provides another piece of useful information when comparing socioeconomic development of Nigeria and Uganda. The evolution of these countries' life expectancy is different from what we would expect it to be based on information provided in Figure 1 (GDP per capita) and Figure 2 (literacy). Excluding the period of 1990-1998, Uganda's life expectancy has always been higher than Nigeria's. Uganda's higher life expectancy is consistent with Uganda's higher literacy, but it is surprising that Uganda's life expectancy in 2017 is 8.6 years longer than Nigeria's, even though Uganda's GDP per capita (\$1,768) was roughly only one third of Nigeria's GDP per capita (\$5,351) in the same year (2017). As will be detailed in the next section, these differences in terms of relative progress made in literacy and life expectancy help to understand the differences in progress these two countries made in improving the lives of their children.

**Figure 3: Life Expectancy at Birth (in years), 1970-2017**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

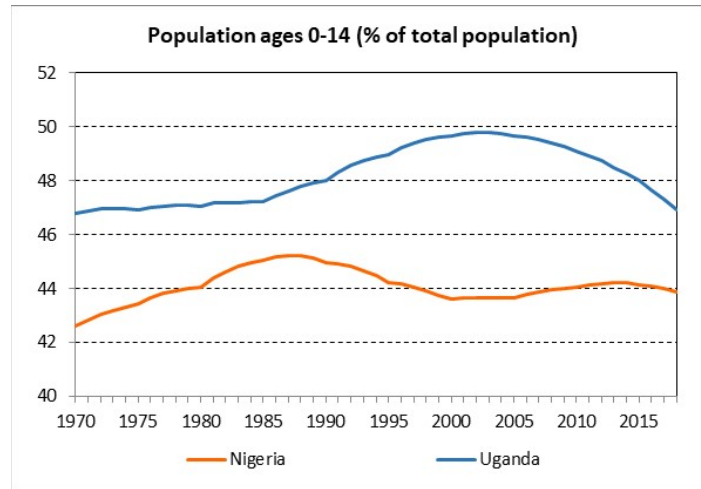
**IV. Analysis of Facts**

The foundational years of a child's life typically indicate the path of her/his subsequent life. For so many children in poverty, that path leads them to generational poverty, adding to the seemingly unbreakable cycle of a disenfranchised existence. By looking at the evolution of key indicators such as infant mortality, completeness of birth registration, children out of school, and children employed, government officials can pinpoint if their actions are making a difference or if they need to increase their efforts.

Before examining these indicators, it is useful to mention that children ages 0 to 14 constitute nearly 50 percent of the population in Nigeria and Uganda. As detailed in Figure 4, in 2018, children constituted 43.9 percent of the total population in Nigeria and 46.9 percent of the total population in Uganda. In Nigeria, the percentage of children ages 0 to 14 has been increasing from 1970 to 1987, after which is decreased until year 2000. From 2000 to 2018, it varied slightly between 43.6 percent and 44.2 percent. In Uganda, the percentage of children ages 0 to 14 increased moderately from 1970 to 1985, then grew rapidly from 1985 to 2003 (reaching a maximum of 49.8 percent in 2003), and then decreased to 46.9 percent in 2018. From a policy

perspective, the faster decline in Uganda makes the policy interventions more effective than in Nigeria. However, Uganda still has a higher percentage of children than Nigeria.

**Figure 4: Percentage of Children (ages 0-14) in Total Population, 1970-2018**

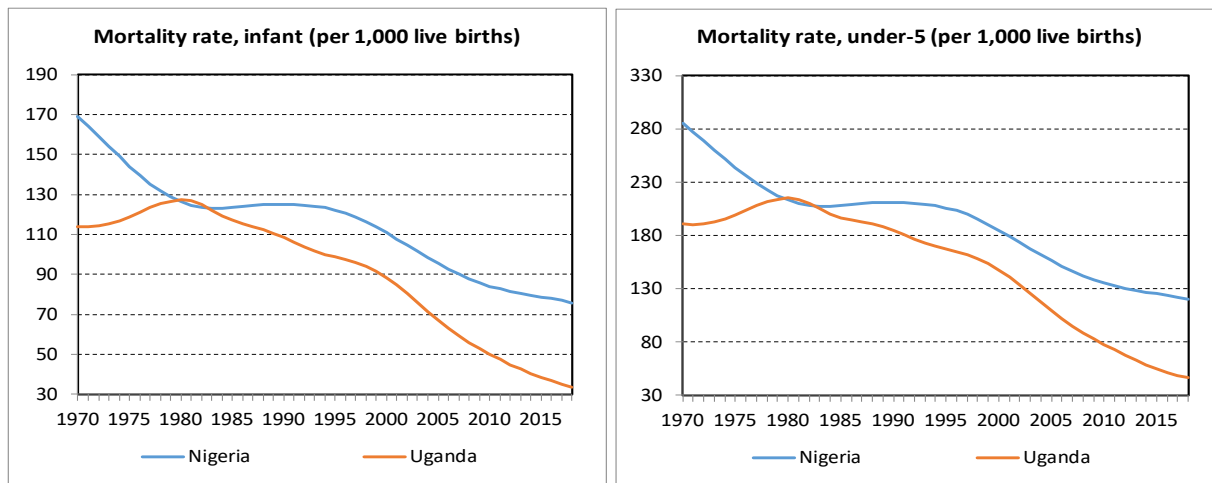


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

#### IV.1. Infant Mortality and Under-Five Mortality

Figures 5 and 6 show, respectively, infant mortality rates and under-five mortality rates, which are useful as this data is available for every year from 1970 to 2018. Though infant mortality is obviously lower than under-five mortality (as infants are a sub-group of the children under the age of five), the trends for infant mortality and under-five mortality are highly consistent. With exception of the early 1980s, Nigeria's mortality rates were always higher than Uganda's. Excluding Uganda's increase in mortality from 1970 to 1980, these mortality rates have decreased significantly in both countries. This is not only good news, it also indicates that the variety of initiatives adopted during the last few decades have been successful.

**Figures 5 and 6: Infant Mortality and Under-Five Mortality, 1970-2018**



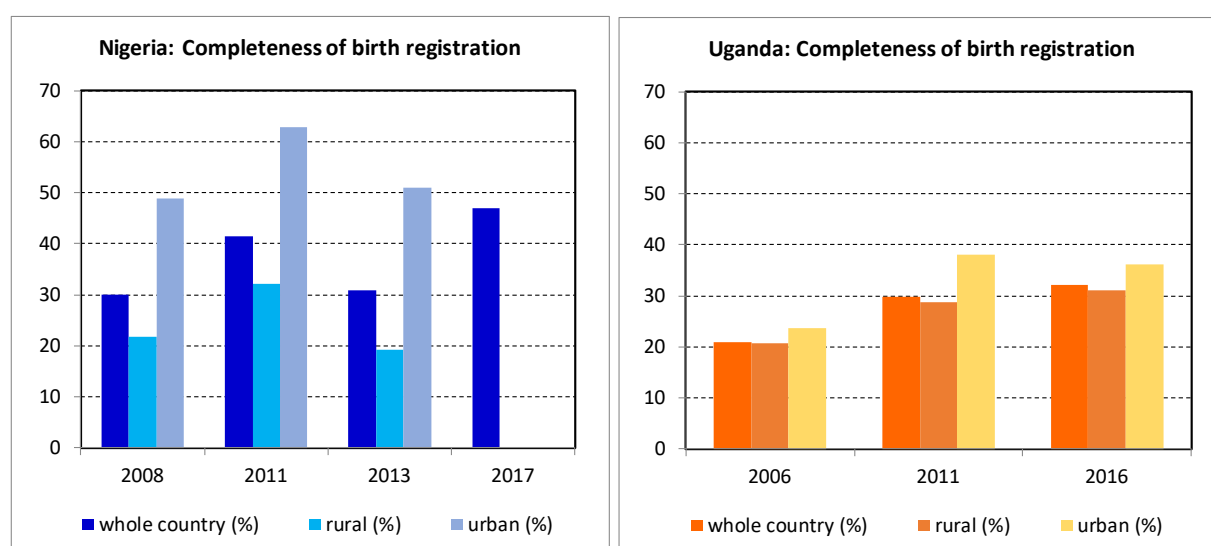
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

## IV.2. Completeness of Birth Registration

An important indicator in the conversation on invisible children is the completeness of birth registration. Figures 7 and 8 show, respectively for Nigeria and Uganda, the available data on completeness of birth registration for each country as a whole, for each country's rural population, and each country's urban population. Despite the limited data and the years with available data not matching exactly for the two countries, comparing Figure 7 with Figure 8 shows that the completeness of birth registrations is overall far higher in Nigeria than in Uganda. Looking at the last year such data is available, the completeness of birth registrations was 47.0 percent in 2017 in Nigeria, and 32.2 percent in 2016 in Uganda.

Hence, despite some progress over the last few decades, more than half of the births are still not recorded in Nigeria and Uganda. In other words, in stark difference to the progress made in terms of child mortality shown in Figures 5 and 6, these numbers indicate that children continue to “fall through the cracks” in Nigeria and Uganda. Another observation is that birth registrations are always higher in urban areas than in rural areas, as long as we compare the same year and same country. This urban-rural divide is relatively small in Uganda, but considerable in Nigeria. In any case, this invisibility of children creates a challenge to provide children the basic elements that define a safe and productive life.

**Figures 7 and 8: Completeness of Birth Registration, all available years**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

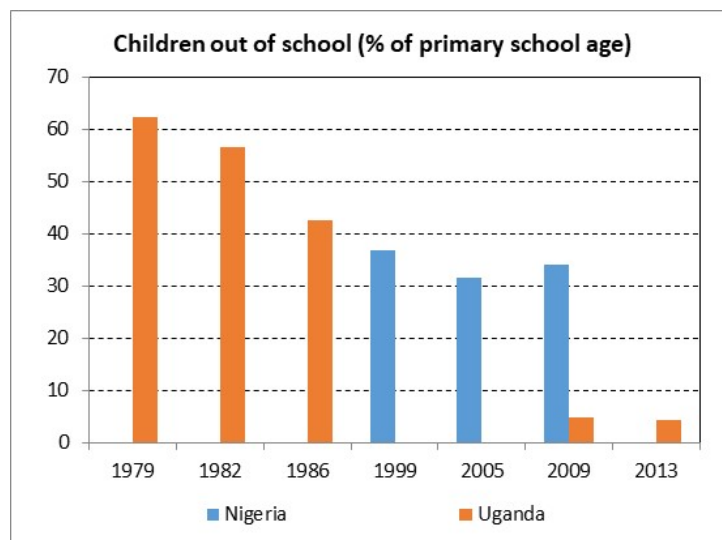
## IV.3. Primary School Children Out of School

The primary school age years (which typically range from age 6 to age 11 in Nigeria and from age 6 to age 12 in Uganda)<sup>3</sup> are critical to the foundation of a child's life. They are the building blocks in which children learn the necessary tools for later years, especially for work. Figure 9 presents the percentage of primary school children who are out of school in Nigeria and Uganda. Despite the limited data, Figure 9 shows a drastic decline (i.e., huge progress) over time in Uganda, where

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2020).

the children out of school declined from 62.4 percent in 1979 to 4.4 percent in 2013. On the other hand, Nigeria does not seem to have made much progress, with the percentage of primary school children out of school varying between 34 percent and 37 percent within 1999 to 2009. Though not shown in Figure 9, the available data in the World Bank (2020) database indicates some gender bias, with the percentage of girls out of school (among the girls at primary school age) being higher than for boys (among the boys at primary school age) for both Nigeria and Uganda, though this gender bias has been reversed in Uganda since 2009, with slightly less girls than boys being out of school.

**Figure 9: Children Out of School (percent of primary school age)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

#### IV.4. Employment of Children

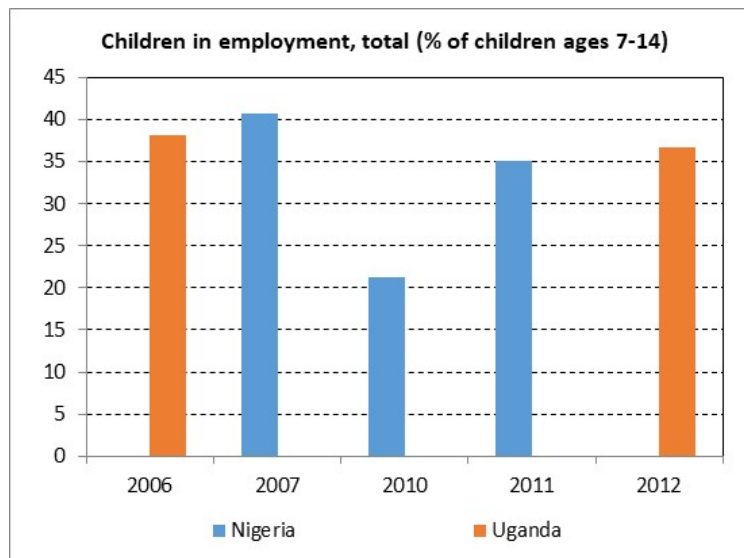
Figure 10 shows all the available data for the percentage of Nigerian and Ugandan children 7-14 years old, who are employed. In 2006, 38.2 percent of Uganda’s children were employed, which is very close to the 40.7 percent of Nigeria’s children in 2007. The data then shows a very sharp decline for Nigeria in 2010 (21.2 percent), which is however questionable as the data for the following year states that 35.1 percent of Nigeria’s children were employed. Nigeria’s data for 2011 is close to Uganda’s data for 2012, with 36.2 percent of Uganda’s children having been employed.

Based on the data available, we can conclude that both countries have made very limited progress in reducing child labor, with more than one third of children being employed in both countries. It should also be mentioned that Uganda’s data for 2012, stating that 36.7 percent of the children were employed, seems inconsistent with the only 4.4 percent of children being out of school in 2013, shown in Figure 9 above. However, given that children in employment is defined as “children involved in economic activity for at least one hour in the reference week of the survey”,<sup>4</sup> it is easily possible, actually likely, that many of the Ugandan children attending school are still employed.

<sup>4</sup> See World Bank (2020).



**Figure 10: Children in Employment (percent of children ages 7-14)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2020).

## V. Ethical Analysis

### V.1. Government Plans and Programs

The topic of children in poverty is not a new dilemma in the developing world. Unfortunately, it is something that has been highly discussed and documented, yet, for a long time little action has been taken to change it. As was shown in Figure 4 above, nearly half of Nigeria’s and Uganda’s population are children below age 15. This shows how large the child poverty crisis is in these two countries. Governments need to make public investments to safeguard the children’s future. This is important because the children growing up now will be the future adults, and they must be given a chance to succeed.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations as an international treaty just over 30 years ago. It outlines global standards to ensure the protection, survival, and development of all children, without discrimination. Countries that ratify the treaty pledge to protect children from economic and sexual exploitation, violence, and other forms of abuse and to advance the rights of children to education, health care, and a decent standard of living.

According to Human Rights Watch (2014), this convention has improved the rights of children in contributing factors that have left children much better off than they were 25 years ago. For example, kids born today are twice as likely to reach their fifth birthday and child labor rates have dropped from what they used to be. The convention also served as a valuable tool and asset for citizens and nongovernmental organizations to hold their governments accountable on ethical standards in their treatment of children. Both Uganda and Nigeria ratified this Convention.<sup>5</sup> The positives trends seen for Nigeria and Uganda can be related to the implementation of this treaty

---

<sup>5</sup> As stated in Human Rights Watch (2014), Answer to Question 1: “The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most rapidly and widely ratified human rights treaty in history—with 194 countries as ‘states parties.’ The only countries that have not ratified the treaty are Somalia, South Sudan, and the United States.”

and receiving aid from more developed countries. They had made positive strides in many aspects by following the proven milestones of pathways to address child poverty.

There also were some national laws adopted to improve the lives of children. In 1997, Uganda saw the development of the Children Act, a law created to reform and consolidate the laws relating to children, and therefore providing for the protection and care of the country's youth. In 2016, the Ugandan president signed amendments to the Children Act that included changes in guardianship and adoption laws. The aim of this was to help the children whose families are not in the picture and to help children find permanent homes. Similarly, in 2003, Nigeria adopted the Child Rights Act (CRA), which served to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This law was passed at the federal level and used to institute legal documentation and protection of children's rights in the country. Being the far most populous country in Africa and having such a large portion of its population being children, this act was critical for Nigeria and Africa. Uganda's Children Act and Nigeria's Child Rights Act have had positive effects that can now be seen as more and more children's poverty issues are being addressed, even though actual progress has been limited.

## **V.2. Recommendations and Ethical Concerns**

In order to combat invisible and excluded children, both Nigeria and Uganda have implemented plans in the effort to mitigate issues relating to the futures of their country's children. Through the planning, execution and financing of policies and ethical frameworks, change has been established over the most recent decades. However, children living in poverty and falling between the cracks of society continue to be an enormous problem in these two countries. Overall, there are proven solutions to eliminate the child poverty crisis.<sup>6</sup>

As detailed in the Report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017), one milestone that is deemed critical to abate child poverty is to put the issue on the map. This essentially is child poverty advocacy and building national pathways to end child poverty. Furthermore, there is need for policy and program change, which is, for example, what UNICEF has set out to do in their annual flagship publication, entitled "The State of the World's Children". The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted at the Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 are also relevant as they include goals like zero hunger, quality education, gender equality, peace, justice and strong institutions. While these may seem like simple goals to achieve, there are many steps and underlying factors that hamper achieving these widespread goals. Countries are working to achieve them as they know they hold tremendous value in the betterment of their country and humanity.

One of the most important resources that countries like Uganda and Nigeria are implementing into their society is the education of young girls. Historically, girls have been the most marginalized group, often expected to perform unsightly tasks or jobs to benefit their families. By investing in girls' education, there are proven economic returns and positive intergenerational impacts. Empowering young women increases productivity and has longer-term implications in terms of making better choices with regards to population growth, reproductive health, and the education of subsequent generations. It breaks the cycle of generational poverty, and can lead to a more inspired, informed, and connected life later on.

---

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017).

One of the main ethical issues that experts are battling with when dealing with child poverty is the role of terrorist groups like Boko Haram (which is active in Nigeria) and the Lord's Resistance Army (which is operating in northern Uganda and other neighboring countries). The challenges faced when dealing with these terrorist groups include maintaining human rights but not putting innocent civilians in harm's way. The problem of abductions, child soldiers and needless killings further inhibit the measures governments are trying to take to reduce child poverty. Many times, these terrorist groups target small villages, schools, busy markets and other places where people are in close quarters trying to make the best with the little they have. Civil war, conflict, and violence related to these terrorist groups make it exceedingly difficult for governments to deal with child poverty.

Furthermore, the measures taken to reduce child poverty in countries like Nigeria and Uganda are strongly linked to assistance from industrialized countries. Industrialized countries have to draw a fine line in being a resource for these countries without overstepping the assisting country's sovereignty and/or without harming local initiatives that may have different approaches and priorities.

## **VI. Conclusion**

UNICEF considers childhood to be a period when children are given an opportunity to grow and develop their fullest potential. At the period between birth and adulthood, childhood concerns itself with the quality of this period and this means that a safe space for children to grow, play and develop is necessary. Countries like Nigeria and Uganda have the majority of their population being children, hence they have huge needs, yet overall little progress has been made.

This article has shown that Nigeria continues to have an at least three times higher GDP per capita than Uganda, while Uganda continues to have higher adult literacy rates than Nigeria, with the difference between the two countries rising. Furthermore, excluding the period of 1990-1998, Uganda's life expectancy has been higher than Nigeria's life expectancy ever since 1998.

Both countries have made similar large progress in terms of decreasing infant mortality and under-five mortality rates, though Uganda's mortality rates were less than half of Nigeria's in 2018 (the last year we have such data), and hence, there is a need for Nigeria to work on. On the other hand, when looking at the completeness of birth registrations, Nigeria has higher percentages than Uganda for nearly all years such data is available. Nigeria also made overall more progress over time in increasing birth registration. Still, more than half of the children do not have a birth certificate in either country as of today (based on the latest available data).

While Uganda has made huge progress in reducing the number of children out of school (from 62.4 percent in 1979 to 4.4 percent in 2013), Uganda does not seem to have made much progress with reducing child labor. Nigeria has made very limited progress in reducing the number of children out of school and equally limited progress in reducing child labor. Based on the latest available data, about one third of children between ages 7 to 14 are still employed in each country.

Comparing these two countries helps to understand the factors that contribute to multi-dimensional child poverty. And comparing the efforts and initiatives taken by these two countries helps to understand the steps that can be taken to effectively eliminate child poverty. There are many organizations and groups that have been involved in Nigeria and Uganda, with the hope of providing ways for these countries' leaders to take action and enact legislation that will help promote and enforce change for the daily struggles of children.

Better access to education is one of the proven strategies not only to solve child poverty but overall poverty, and particularly providing education to young girls has proven to be effective. Moving forward, it is important that the general public is aware of what their resources are and how to maintain child safety in times of need and struggle. Looking back on the situation a few decades ago, Nigeria and Uganda have seen some progress on matters relating to child poverty, but there is still so much more that can and needs to be done.

## References

- Aderinto, Adeyinka (2000). Social Correlates and Coping Measures of Street-Children: A Comparative Study of Street and Non-Street Children in South-Western Nigeria. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Vol. 24, No. 9, pp. 1199–1213.
- Angucia, Margaret (2009). Children and War in Africa: The Crisis Continues in Northern Uganda. *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 77–95.
- Human Rights Watch (2014). 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Questions and Answers. Human Rights Watch, Internet Resource of November 17; available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/11/17/25th-anniversary-convention-rights-child#>.
- Klein, Angelika (2013). Uganda's Youth: Opportunities and Challenges in the Second Youngest Country in the World. In Gerhard Wahlers (ed.) *Young People and Their Political Involvement*. Berlin, Germany: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), *KAS Auslands Informationen*, No. 5/13, pp. 26–40.
- Paquette, Danielle (2019). Nigerian children who escaped Boko Haram say they faced another 'prison': Military detention. *The Washington Post*, News Article of September 14, 2019; available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/nigerian-children-who-escaped-boko-haram-say-they-faced-another-prison-military-detention/2019/09/14/e30a0da2-d40c-11e9-8924-1db7dac797fb\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/nigerian-children-who-escaped-boko-haram-say-they-faced-another-prison-military-detention/2019/09/14/e30a0da2-d40c-11e9-8924-1db7dac797fb_story.html).
- Robson, Elsbeth (2003). Children at Work in Rural Northern Nigeria: Patterns of Age, Space and Gender. *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (April), pp. 193–210.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (1990). *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. New York, NY: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); available at: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty (2017). *A World Free from Child Poverty: A Guide to the Tasks to Achieve the Vision* (New York, NY: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)); available at: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/world-free-child-poverty>.
- World Bank (2020). *World Development Indicators / International Debt Statistics database* (Washington, DC: The World Bank); as posted on the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/> (downloaded on January 30, 2020).

# **Distant Neighbors: Why Neighboring Countries Mozambique and South Africa Differ So Greatly in Gender Inequality**

Patrick Ryan

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines gender inequality in Mozambique and South Africa. These two countries share a common border, yet they are very different in terms of economic development and gender inequality. After examining the different degrees of gender inequality with regards to literacy, tertiary school enrollment and salaried employment, the article examines some of the ethical origins and existing ethical structures, including these two countries' level of child marriages, views on domestic violence, and access to modern contraceptives. All these examinations tend to support the hypothesis that gender equality improves not only the lives of women, but the lives of all people.*

## **I. Introduction**

When you think about the richest countries in the world, one underrated factor contributing to their economic success is relatively low gender inequality and relatively high observance of basic human rights. Differences in these social and legal issues go a long way when analyzing differences in basic economic measures, like income per capita.

This article examines gender inequality in literacy, education and salaried employment in Mozambique and South Africa, who currently rank, respectively 180<sup>th</sup> and 113<sup>th</sup> in the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI).<sup>1</sup> It also examines the two countries' different ethical origins and structures, which are illustrated by different levels of child marriages, different views on domestic violence, and different access rates to modern contraceptives. These differences in approaches to women's rights and basic human rights help explain the disparity in the level of development, given that the similar location generally point in the direction of small disparities between Mozambique and South Africa.

This article is structured into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides a brief literature review. The third section offers some socioeconomic background information

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2019), Table 1.

about Mozambique and South Africa. The fourth section examines some major differences in gender inequality, while the fifth section analyzes ethical origins and existing ethical structures in Mozambique and South Africa, which are illustrated by examining gender inequality and social norms. The sixth section wraps the key issues together in a conclusive manner.

## **II. Brief Literature Review**

There is a growing amount of literature regarding the issue of gender inequality within education and employment in Mozambique and South Africa, with issues of empowerment coming to the forefront within the last decade. As the following paragraphs detail, Deutsch and Silber (2019), Gradin and Tarp (2019a and 2019b) focus on Mozambique, while Tripp (2001), MacDonald (2006) and Espi, Francis and Valodia (2019) focus on South Africa.

- Deutsch and Silber (2019) explain how the level of women empowerment in Mozambique affects the level of nutrition in children. By analyzing five key factors of empowerment (decision making, use of violence by husband/partner, attitude of the woman towards this use of violence, available information, material resources), the authors explain that the nutritional health of the child could be regressed and negatively impacted. Deutsch et al end up concluding that education of the mother most certainly effects the nutritional levels of the child, in turn displaying the need for empowerment of the women of Mozambique.
- Gradin and Tarp (2019a) detail how sustainable development goals and poverty reduction has been curbed by a raising wealth gap between the rich and the poor. Through the reinforcement of the idea of educating the household head (always male), Mozambique has made its economy more vulnerable by reducing the number of workers in the public and subsistence sectors. By analyzing rising consumption inequality, the authors detail a disproportionate growth path which disproportionately benefits males.
- Gradin and Tarp (2019b) discuss the gender employment gap in Mozambique with the shrinking of the country's agricultural sector and the expanding of the non-subsistence sector. The authors attribute this rising gender gap to two factors. The first factor they discuss is the low level of female human capital which is a result of the low educational attainment of females along with low literacy and Portuguese proficiency rates. The second factor is the reinforcement the head of the household (typically men) being employed in the more formal working sector and a low availability of female labor.
- Tripp (2001) details the role of South African women's groups in the early 1990s, which was a period of political reform processes and a period during which women become politically active and even running for president. Tripp discusses how this marked the beginning of new era for not only women empowerment in South Africa but other countries like Kenya and Libya, who all together are trying to change the fact that many African countries are among the lowest countries in the world in terms of female representation in government and parliament.
- MacDonald (2006) examines how policy regarding race and gender has changed in South Africa from making it a very patriarchal country to a country pushing for equal rights. The book discusses the history of South Africa's ranking on the HDI scale and how this change has been a reflection of revolving policies that have allowed for the expansion of education

among young females and also the expansion of the number of women in the work force instead of at home on a daily basis.

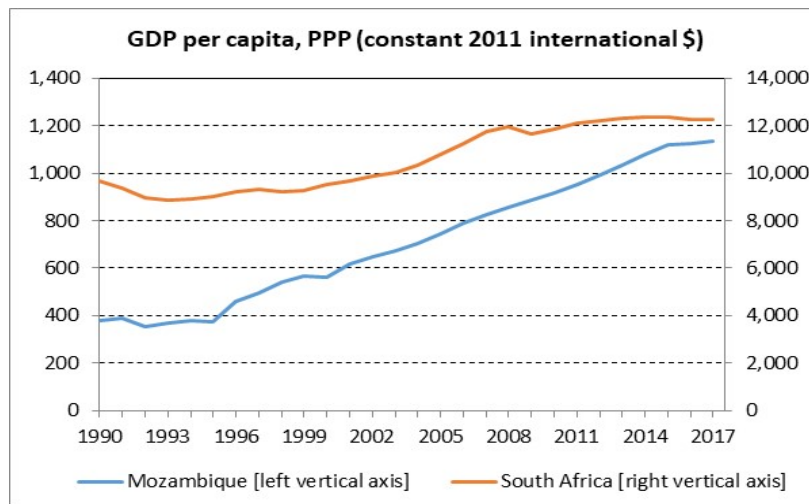
- Examining the data provided via South Africa’s Employment Equity Act (which was adopted in the years following the end of Apartheid), Espi, Francis and Valodia (2019) find that that women (and especially black and colored women) continue to be under-represented in high-skilled and management positions. They also find substantial gender pay gaps, though they questioned the reliability of these estimates due to a high number of apparent errors and inconsistencies in the remuneration data. They stress that more needs to be done to ensure that this data is appropriately processed and distributed, so that it can shed light on the state of women in the South African labor market and be used to effectively address inequalities in pay and representation.

### III. Socioeconomic Background

Figure 1 displays the evolution of GDP per capita (adjusted for purchasing power parity) for Mozambique and South Africa, using the left scale for Mozambique and the right scale for South Africa. In 1990, South Africa had a GDP per capita of \$9,378, which dwarfed Mozambique’s figure of \$378. Following years of economic stagnation and even declines in GDP per capita during apartheid, South Africa’s democratic transition in 1994 created expectations of a dramatic turnaround in the economic performance.<sup>2</sup> However, while South Africa saw an overall increase in its GDP per capita from \$8,945 in 1994 to \$11,990 in 2006, this increase was far below expectations. Furthermore, South Africa’s GDP per capita then stagnated during the subsequent nine years, reaching \$12,295 in 2017.

Mozambique also saw some stagnation during the early 1990s, but its income per capita then rose drastically (in relative terms) from \$373 in 1995 to \$1,136 in 2017, which is slightly more than a three-fold increase during a period of 22 years (1995-2017). Despite Mozambique’s much higher growth rates, Mozambique’s GDP per capita is still less than one tenth of South Africa’s in 2017.

**Figure 1: GDP per capita PPP (constant international \$), 1990-2017**



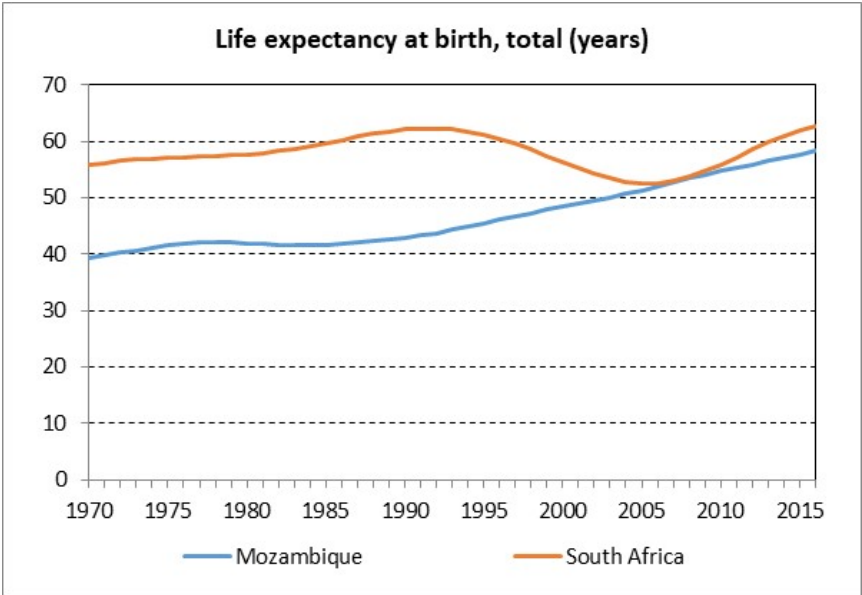
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

<sup>2</sup> Du Plessis and Smit (2006), p. 2.

As Figure 2 shows, with exception of 2007, South Africa has traditionally dominated Mozambique in terms of life expectancy. In 1970, the life expectancy of Mozambique was just 39.3 years, making it one of the lowest in the world.<sup>3</sup> Mozambique’s life expectancy then increased relatively steadily over the next few decades, reaching 58.3 years in 2016. This is a significant improvement, but still low compared to the world average of 72.4 years in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

South Africa’s life expectancy figure was a modest 55.9 years in 1970, which increased to 62.8 years in 2016. South Africa’s modest increase in life expectancy over the last five decades is largely due to the decline in life expectancy South Africa experienced during 1992 to 2005, due to sharply increasing HIV/AIDS prevalence rates. Mozambique also experienced sharp increases in HIV/AIDS prevalence rates during the early 1980s, but was then able to decrease new infections,<sup>5</sup> resulting (together with many other factors) in continued increases in life expectancy.

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



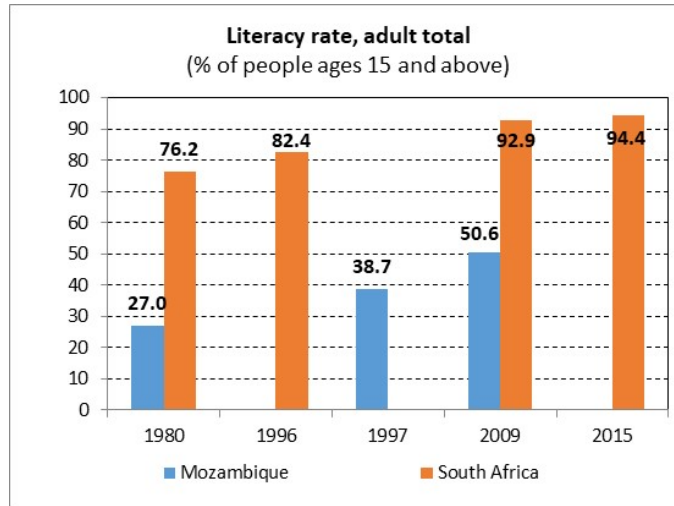
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

Another indicator, where South Africa and Mozambique differ greatly, and possibly the most in relative terms, is adult literacy. As displayed in Figure 3, in 1980, South Africa had a literacy rate of 76.2 percent, while Mozambique had a literacy rate of 27 percent. Though data is scarce for both countries, especially for Mozambique, Figure 3 shows that South Africa is relatively close to having all of its population ages 15 and above to be literate (the literacy rate was 94.4 percent in 2015), while only half (50.6 percent) of Mozambique’s population above age 15 has been literate in 2009, which is the last year such data is available for Mozambique.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2019).  
<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2019).  
<sup>5</sup> Tripp (2001).



**Figure 3: Adult Literacy Rates in Mozambique and South Africa**



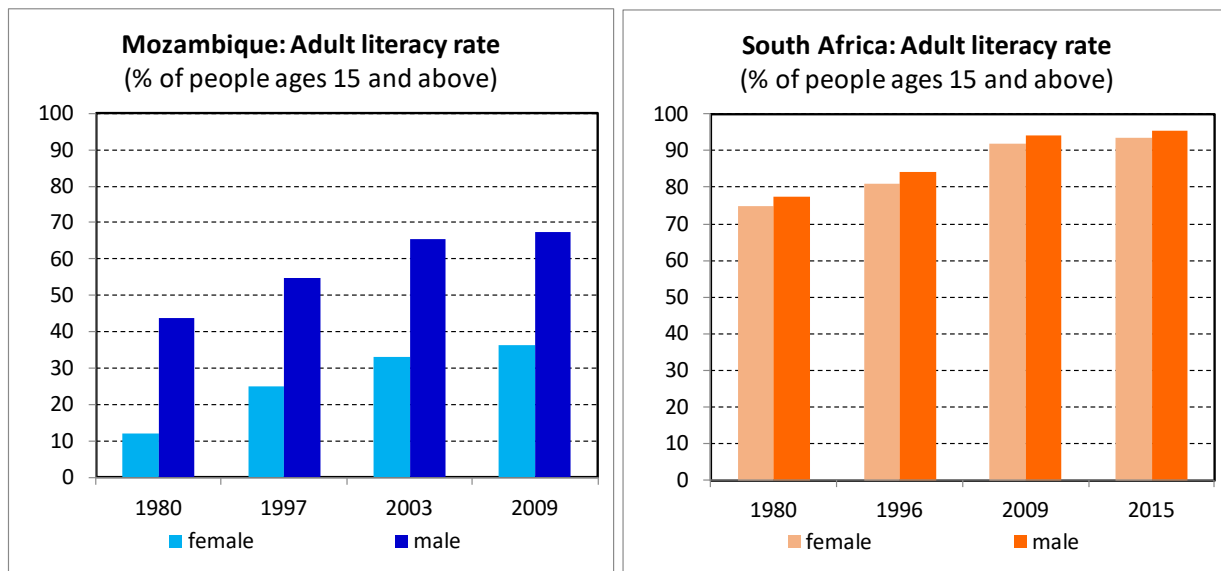
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

#### IV. Evolution of Gender Disparity in Education and Labor

##### IV.1. Gender Differences in Literacy and Tertiary School Enrollment

Perhaps one of the most important areas causing gender inequality is the difference in education provided to boys and girls. Mozambique and South Africa are opposites when it comes to gender equality of education. As was shown in Figure 3 above, in 1980, Mozambique had a much smaller overall literacy rate than South Africa, but what stands out even more is the gender disparity in literacy rates. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, the difference of adult literacy rates in Mozambique continues to be massive, while it is minimal in South Africa.

**Figures 4 and 5: Literacy Rates by Gender in Mozambique and South Africa**



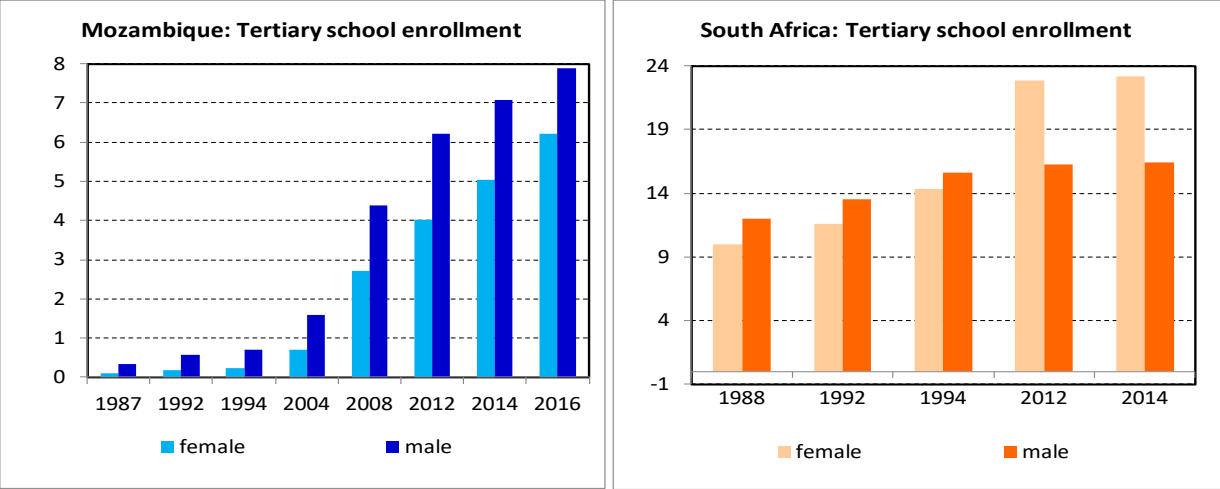
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

In 1980, 43.7 percent of Mozambique’s men were literate, compared to only 12 percent of Mozambique’s women, making them some of the most uneducated women at the country-level in the world. By world standards,<sup>6</sup> South Africa had a high overall literacy rate of 75.7 percent in 1980, but the important difference to Mozambique is the minimal gap between men’s and women’s literacy rates: male literacy rate was 77.5 percent while female literacy rate was right behind this figure at 74.8 percent.

In 2003, the number of literate men in Mozambique had jumped to 65.6 percent, however the female literacy rate only increased to 33.2 percent, which implies that the disparity grew in absolute terms since 1980, though it decreased in relative terms. The percentage difference of literate males to literate females remained about the same between 2003 and 2009, which is the last year such data is available for Mozambique. One of many reasons for this disparity in literacy among adults in Mozambique is that many girls were pulled out of school, often before they even began primary school.<sup>7</sup> While more and more girls have been enrolled in school, differences still existed in 2015 (which is the last year such data is available for Mozambique): net primary school enrollment was 87.3 percent for girls, while it was 91.9 percent for boys.

As Figures 6 and 7 show, there are also large differences between Mozambique and South Africa with regards to tertiary school enrollment. Though tertiary school enrollment increased during the last three decades for both males and females in Mozambique, the gender gap continues to exist, though it got smaller in relative terms. In 1987, only 0.09 percent of females were enrolled in tertiary education, compared to 0.33 percent of males, which is a ratio of 3.7 males per females. Nearly 30 years later, in 2016, 6.2 percent of females were enrolled in tertiary education, compared to 7.9 percent of males, which is a ratio of 1.3 males per females. On the other hand, though South Africa also had less females than males enrolled in tertiary education in 1988, 1992 and 1994, since at least 2012, female tertiary education has been considerably higher than male tertiary education. In 2014 (which is the last year such data is available for South Africa), 23.2 percent of females and 16.4 percent of males were enrolled in tertiary education.

**Figures 6 and 7: Tertiary School Enrollment by Gender in Mozambique and South Africa**



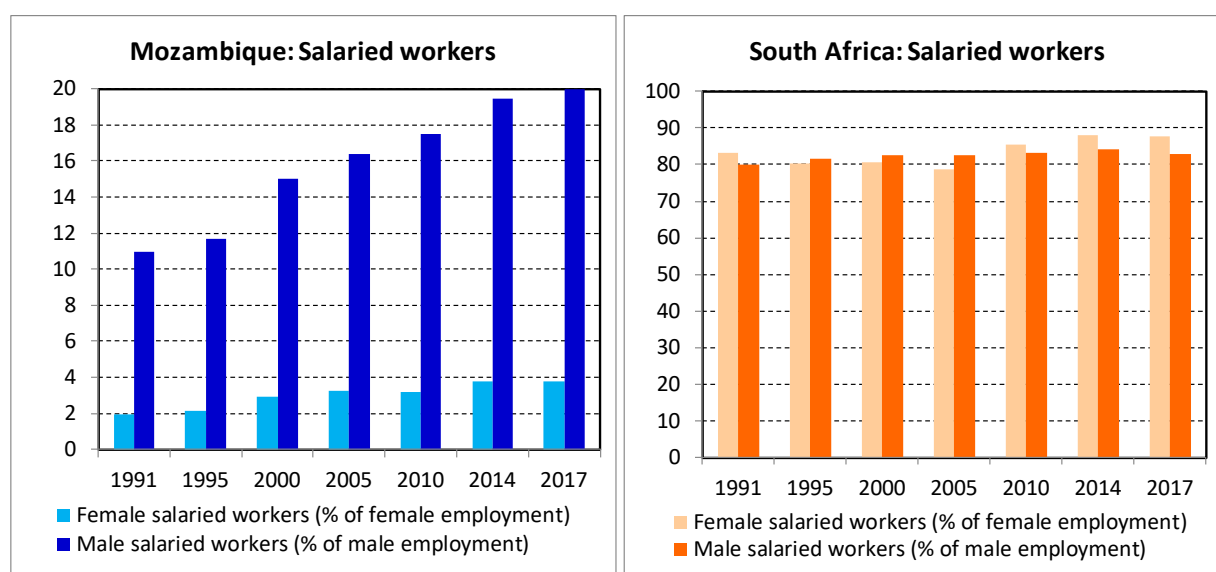
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

<sup>6</sup> Based on World Bank (2019), the world average literacy rate was 67.1 percent in 1980.  
<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2016).

## IV.2. Gender Differences in Salaried Employment

These gender differences in literacy rates and tertiary school enrollment have huge impacts on gender differences in employment, especially salaried employment. As shown in Figure 8, in 1991 (which is the first year such data is available), 10.9 percent of the employed Mozambican men had salary-based jobs, compared to only 1.9 percent of employed Mozambican women. Nearly three decades later, in 2017 (which is the last year such data is available), 20.0 percent of the employed Mozambican men had salary-based jobs, compared to only 3.8 percent of employed Mozambican women. In other words, while the percentage of salaried jobs increased for both men and women, the gender difference is basically the same in relative terms, which implies that Mozambique has made no progress with regards to this gender difference during the last three decades.

**Figures 8 and 9: Salaried Employment by Gender in Mozambique and South Africa**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

On the other side of the border in South Africa (shown in Figure 9), in 1991, 80.0 percent of employed men had a salary-based job, while 83.3 percent of employed women had a salary-based job. That is, in South Africa, the percentage of women with a salary among the employed women is marginally higher than the percentage of men with a salary among the employed men. This marginal gender difference then flips in 1995 (i.e., the percentage of women with a salary among the employed women is marginally lower than the percentage of men with a salary among the employed men), but then switches back in 2010 and remains slightly higher for women by 2017. However, considering the marginal and time-varying differences in South Africa, the conclusion is that there is overall no significant gender difference for this indicator in South Africa.

In 2017, among the employed Mozambican women, 84.8 percent worked in agriculture, compared to 60.1 percent of the employed Mozambican men.<sup>8</sup> This sectoral gender difference is one of the sources for the gender difference in salaried employment as people working in agriculture do

<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2019).

typically not have a salary in Mozambique.<sup>9</sup> In South Africa, the sectoral gender difference was reverse in 2017 to that of Mozambique, with 3.8 percent of the employed women working in agriculture, while 6.9 percent of the employed men working in agriculture.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Mozambique's gender inequality in literacy, tertiary education and salaried employment (shown in Figures 4, 6 and 8 above) have not improved significantly (if at all) during the last few decades indicates that Mozambique has not addressed deeper-rooted gender inequality in their society and culture. We will now review some more ethical issues related to the existing gender inequalities in Mozambique and South Africa.

## **V. Ethical Analysis of Gender Inequality**

This section will be broken up into two subsections. The first subsection will be looking at ethical origins and existing ethical structures related to gender inequality in Mozambique and South Africa. The second subsection will look at specific aspects of gender inequality, which include societal norms held up through child marriages, domestic violence, the lack of modern contraceptives in these two countries.

### **V.1. Ethical Origins and Existing Ethical Structures**

Rousseau (1751) describes an origin of ethics that upholds gender inequality. This important principle describes people as having interest in their own wellbeing and safekeeping. In Africa, this origin has been upheld through years of gender based discriminatory practices, with those having most of the wealth and power wanting everything to stay the way it is.

As it pertains to Mozambique and South Africa, Rousseau's principle tells two very different stories. South Africa's transition to a democratic state, especially the abolition of apartheid, South Africa become a more ethical country then they were just 30 years ago. Citizens have yielded great benefits during a time of greater gender equality so they would like to keep it that way and improve on issues regarding women.

In Mozambique Rousseau's principle is exemplified by the very few rich elites. Specifically, the top 10 percent who hold more than 50 percent of all wealth in the country.<sup>11</sup> These are the people who have helped keep ethical structures in place that allow girls to be pulled out of school and allows women to be beaten by their husbands. Given the lack of democracy and poor governance in Mozambique, this top 10 percent of the country are those who often make policy decisions regarding gender inequality producing ethical structures.

One of the hardest things to do when attempting to empower women in developing countries is to be able to help them take control of their lives. Buvinic (1983) and Moser (1989) have detailed five different policy approaches that could help reverse long upheld ethical structures that are out of line. They are the welfare approach, efficiency approach, anti-poverty approach, equity approach and empowerment approach.

Buvinic (1983) and Moser (1989) would most likely argue for the equity approach regarding Mozambique, as the equity approach is defined as attacking social, political and economic norms that are negative for women. A policy example of this would be the provision of mandatory and

---

<sup>9</sup> Navarra (2019).

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (2019).

<sup>11</sup> World Bank (2019).

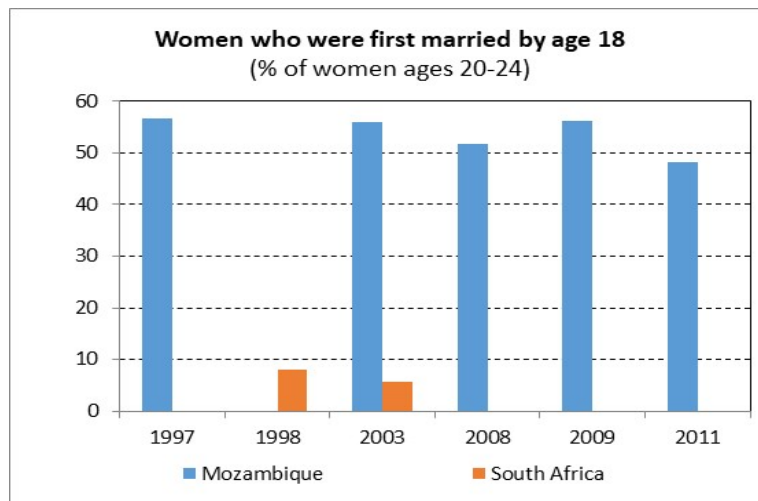
free school enrollment for every child. Similarly, the empowerment approach, which recognizes the need for women to gain power over their lives through changing unjust practices, which work to oppress women in a structural sense, would also be useful in Mozambique. An example of an oppressive cultural norm that the empowerment approach would look to reverse is that in 2005, over 50 percent of women believed their husband was justified in beating them.<sup>12</sup> In a country like South Africa, the efficiency approach might be more effective as South Africa is economically a much more advanced country. This approach suggests that women will become more productive and enhance economic output if more money is invested in them. This might include more money to educate women or employment programs for women.<sup>13</sup>

While it is hard to reverse the norms and cultural constraints of a country, it is possible to help empower women by giving them more individual opportunity through economic strength. Using the right development methods suggested by Buvinic (1983) and Moser (1989) can help achieve this. Buvinic and Moser might argue for the equity approach in attacking social, political and economic norms that are negative for women. A policy that is in line with this approach, like mandatory universal primary education, would ensure greater economic development and freedom for women down the line in Mozambique. For South Africa, the more appropriate way to advance women economically would be using the efficiency approach, which implies to invest more money and capital in women.

## V.2. Child Marriage, Domestic Violence and a Lack of Contraceptives

When a young woman is uneducated, she often faces zero possibility of finding a good job, and hence, in many developing countries, she ends up marrying young, usually before age 18. This is especially prevalent in Mozambique, where long-standing cultural norms support and arrange adolescent marriages. As shown in Figure 10, Mozambique and South Africa tell very different stories on the percentage of women ages 20-24, who get were married by age 18.

**Figure 10: Women who were first married by age 18 (% of women ages 20-24)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

<sup>12</sup> World Bank (2019).

<sup>13</sup> Moser (1989).

The earliest available data for Mozambique is 1997, when 56.6 percent of the women ages 20-24 got married by age 18. The data then shows some decreases but also an increase from 2008 to 2009, with another decrease in 2011 (the last year such data is available for Mozambique), when the a marginal decrease for 2003, a some decrease for volatility, yet by 2011, when the percentage of women ages 20-24, who get were married by age 18 was 48.2 percent. In other words, nearly half of the women ages 20-24 get married by age 18 in Mozambique. In South Africa, even though such data is only available for 1998 (7.9 percent) and 2003 (5.6 percent), these far lower percentages indicate a stark difference in child marriages between Mozambique and South Africa.

Government laws and policies can only go so far in protecting women if there still exists an overall cultural norm that drives gender inequality. Reversing these norms requires a mentality shift of both men and women. As seen in Figure 11, there is a huge disparity in the number of women in Mozambique and South Africa who believe their husband is justified to beat his wife under certain circumstances. In the data provided by the World Bank (2019), there were five such reasons a husband might beat his wife: if the wife argues with him, if she burns the food, if she neglects the children, if she goes out without telling him, or if she refuses to have sex with him.<sup>14</sup>

In Mozambique, an astonishing 54.1 percent of women believed that their husband was justified to beat them for any one of these five reason in 2003. This percentage then fell to 30.3 in 2007, and to 21.0 in 2011. In South Africa, the percentages for this indicator decreased from 11.4 percent in 2003, to 7.3 percent in 2007, and 3.0 percent in 2011.

**Figure 11: Women who believe their husband is justified in beating them**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

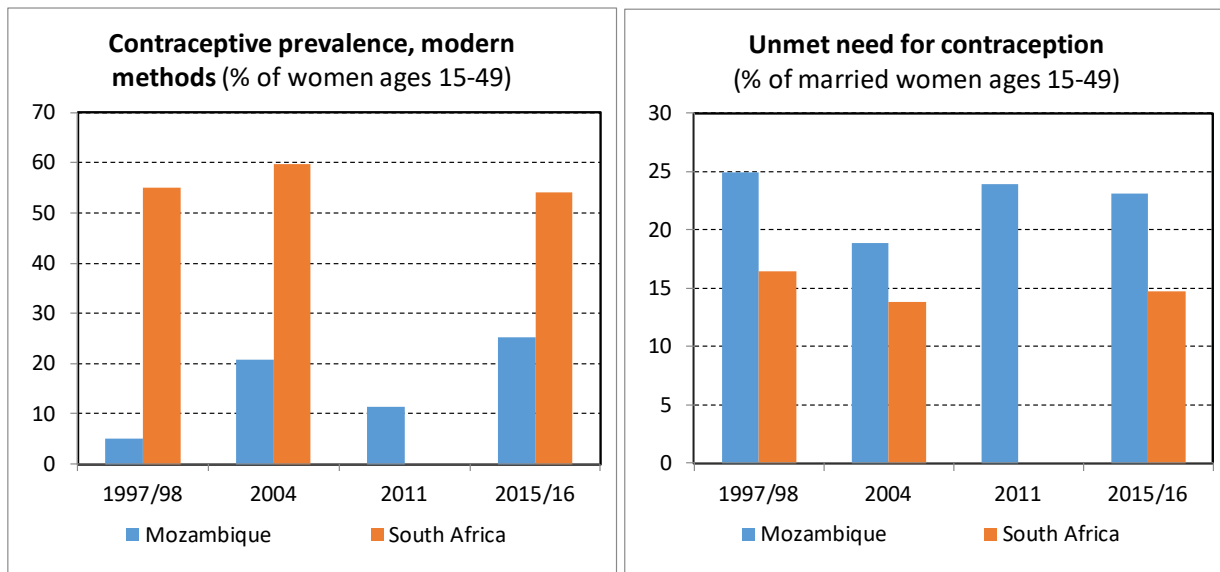
Another issue that holds back women is the limited availability of modern contraceptives. As seen in Figure 12, in South Africa the prevalence of modern contraceptive has remained relatively stable, which was 55.1 percent in 1988, then rose to 59.8 percent in 2004, before dropping to 54 percent in 2016. Mozambique tells a very different story. In 1997, just 5.1 percent of women were using modern methods of birth control. This number climbed to 20.8 percent in 2004, before seeing

<sup>14</sup> World Bank (2019).

a regression back down to 11 percent in 2011, again proving Mozambique’s lack of commitment towards pursuing gender equality. This figure would eventually rise back up to 25.8 percent in 2015, which is however still far below the contraceptive use of South African women ages 15 to 49.

Beyond the contraceptive prevalence, Figure 13 shows the unmet need for contraception (as a percentage of married women ages 15-49). This data on the unmet need for contraception is largely consistent with the relatively low contraceptive prevalence in Mozambique and the relatively high contraceptive prevalence in South Africa. Mozambique’s unmet need for contraceptives (as a percent of married women ages 15 to 49) has varied between a minimum of 18.9 percent and a maximum of 24.9 percent, while South Africa’s percentage varied between 13.8 percent and 16.5 percent.

**Figure 12 and 13: Contraceptive Prevalence and Unmet Need for Contraceptives**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019).

## VI. Conclusion

The source of economic disparity and life expectancy in South Africa and Mozambique has a lot to do with the oppression of many peoples, but specifically gender inequality. Through analyzing gender disparity in literacy, tertiary education, and salaried employment, it becomes clear that Mozambique is discriminating far more against women than South Africa. Our subsequent analysis of ethical origins and structures, which were illustrated by examining the level of child marriages, views on the acceptance of domestic violence, and access to modern contraceptives further supported that Mozambique’s lower level of development is caused by a high level of gender inequality.

There are solutions, but they will require shifts in thinking about the seriousness and consequences of gender inequality. how to treat and respect women. Still, the most important factor to helping women is peace within the country and the absence of armed conflict. Currently, Mozambique is in the middle of a continuing political crisis, amidst allegations that there was vote rigging in the

most recent election.<sup>15</sup> This political tension and potential for another civil war undermine ethical structures that promote gender equality and basic human rights.

After having a stable political society, it is up to governments and civil society to set policies and standards that will ensure the equal treatments of all its citizens. This could include a mandatory primary education for all children and adult literacy education, regardless of gender. Beyond education, there must be opportunities for women in the workplace. As Mozambique and especially South African become increasingly dominated by industrial work, these opportunities will be there, it is just about putting women in the right positions.

## References

- Berenger, Valerie (2016). The counting approach to multidimensional poverty. *South African Journal of Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (June), pp. 200–227; available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/saje.12217>.
- Buvinić, Mayra (1986). Projects for Women in the Third World: Explaining Their Misbehavior. *World Development*, Vol. 14, No. 5, pp. 653–664.
- Chankseliani, Maia (2008). Gender inequality in Mozambican primary education: problems, barriers and recommendations. *Political Perspectives*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 1–31; available at: <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:c6e997d7-2494-4b9c-b853-717e626bc02f>.
- Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (2016). Mozambique. Internet Resource, Project on GIRLS Inspire, available at: <https://girlsinspire.col.org/mozambique/>.
- D’Arcangues, Catherine (2007). Worldwide use of intrauterine devices for contraception. *Contraception*, Vol. 75, No. 6, Supplement, pp. S2–S7.
- Deutsch, Joseph and Jacques Silber (2019). Women’s Empowerment and Child Malnutrition: The Case of Mozambique. *South African Journal of Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (June), pp. 139–179; available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/saje.12223>.
- Du Plessis, Stan and Ben Smit (2006). Economic Growth in South Africa since 1994. *Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers*, No. 1/2006; available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24134153\\_Economic\\_Growth\\_in\\_South\\_Africa\\_since\\_1994](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24134153_Economic_Growth_in_South_Africa_since_1994).
- Espi, Gabriel; David Francis; and Imraan Valodia (2019). Gender inequality in the South African labour market: Insights from the Employment Equity Act data. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 44–61.
- Gradin, Carlos and Finn Tarp (2019a). Investigating Growing Inequality in Mozambique. *South African Journal of Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (June), pp. 110–138; available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/saje.12215>.
- Gradin, Carlos and Finn Tarp (2019b). Gender Inequality in Employment in Mozambique. *South African Journal of Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (June), pp. 180–199; available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/saje.12220>.

---

<sup>15</sup> Sinclair, Smith and Tucker (2018).



- Moser, Caroline O. N. (1989). Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs. *World Development*, Vol. 17, No. 11, pp. 1799–1825.
- Navarra, Cecilia (2019). Contract Farming in Mozambique: Implications for Gender Inequalities Within and Across Rural Households. *South African Journal of Economics*, Vol. 87, No. 2 (June), pp. 228–252; available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/saje.12222>.
- Sinclair, Betsy; Steven S. Smith; and Patrick D. Tucker (2018). “It’s Largely a Rigged System”: Voter Confidence and the Winner Effect in 2016. *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 71, No. 4, pp. 854–868.
- Stewart, Francis and Emma Samman (2014). Inequality and Development: An Overview. In: Currie-Alder, Kanbur, Malone and Medhora (eds.) *International Development: Ideas, Experience, and Prospects* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press); pp. 98–115.
- Tripp, Aili Mari (2001). Women and Democracy: The New Political Activism in Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 141–155.
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2019). Human Development Report 2019: Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century. New York, NY: United Nations Development Program; available at: <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>.
- World Bank (2019). *World Development Indicators / International Debt Statistics database* (Washington, DC: The World Bank); as posted on the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/> (downloaded on January 16, 2019).

# **Bruised but Never Broken: The Fight for Gender Equality in Egypt and Bangladesh**

Lily Sweeting

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines issues of gender inequality and women’s rights in Bangladesh and Egypt. Both countries have high levels of gender inequality that have resulted in widespread discrimination and violence towards women. Additionally, religious and cultural norms and a profound patriarchal view of women as being inferior to men have led to the extensive exclusion of women from the workforce and political participation. Failure to adequately enforce legal practices and protections has further encouraged discrimination and violence against women and will continue to do so without governmental action. Social, political, and economic empowerment is needed for the women of Bangladesh and Egypt, but such empowerment is not happening due to the current societal norms in these two countries.*

## **I. Introduction**

According to a report by the World Bank (2019a), only six countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Latvia, Luxembourg and Sweden) give women equal legal work rights as men; a typical country only gives women three-quarters the rights of men. Issues of gender inequality are continually pervasive throughout most of the developing world. Women are often subject to violence and discrimination, lack equal access to basic systems such as health care and education, and face fewer opportunities in the workforce. Cultural, societal, and religious norms, as well as governmental failures to provide adequate protections have allowed these issues of inequality to continue for generations at the expense of millions of women around the world.

Both Egypt and Bangladesh are examples of countries where the inherent sexism and inequality have continued to thrive, leaving women and girls vulnerable and excluded from decision making regarding their own quality of life. This article will examine the rife gender inequality that has enabled discrimination and violence against women to prevail in Bangladesh and Egypt. This will be achieved by first attempting to understand the cultural and religious norms, as well as the legal structures and political conditions that are responsible for much of the inequality, and then examining the efforts to increase equality in both countries and the obstacles blocking significant progress from being made.

Following this introduction, this article begins with a brief literature review of some of the publications on gender inequality and women’s rights in each of these two countries. Section III

will provide some socioeconomic background on Bangladesh and Egypt, and Section IV will analyze relevant facts on gender inequality for both countries. Section V will offer an ethical analysis of the existing framework to combat inequality and the results of said framework. Section VI will offer final points and conclude the article.

## **II. Literature Review**

There has been a substantial amount of literature produced in recent years regarding gender inequality and women's rights in developing countries, due to an increase in global understanding of the necessity of equality. This brief literature review will summarize a few of the significant literary contributions focusing on gender inequality and women's rights in Bangladesh and Egypt. Anju (2011) and Panday (2008) focus on Bangladesh, while Coleman (2011), Megahed and Lack (2011) and Vericat (2017) focus on Egypt.

- Anju (2011) studies positive discrimination of women in Bangladesh through a primarily legal lens. Positive discrimination, or as it is known in the United States, affirmative action, is a right granted to women in the Bangladeshi constitution, as well as in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In addition, the government of Bangladesh has instituted several laws to help drive the advancement of women's rights within the country. Despite this, women in Bangladesh still face high levels of inequality and discrimination. The author credits this to insufficient implementation efforts by the government, a strong patriarchal mindset within society, and adherence to traditional gender roles. According to Anju, equality between men and women is a distant goal that will only be achieved through societal shifts and stronger government action.
- Coleman (2011) discusses the struggles faced by Egyptian women following the Arab Spring and the fall of the Mubarak regime. The increasingly conservative Islamist society has made gender equality a much less attainable goal. There are deep divisions within the Muslim Brotherhood, which holds considerable power in the country, with respects to women's rights, and it remains a strongly debated issue. Coleman also highlights Egypt's Salafi movement as a major barrier to gender equality, as well as their exclusion from the political process and lack of representation in parliament. Coleman concludes that women's rights in Egypt will remain a highly contentious issue for years to come, and that a broad coalition of civil leaders is necessary for progress.
- Megahed and Lack (2011) evaluate the colonial legacy that remains in Egypt and how it has impacted women's rights and gender-educational inequality. According to the authors, the state of women's rights and gender inequality are heavily influenced by three factors: "Islamic" teachings and traditions regarding the roles of women, a Western European colonial perception of women's rights, and national gender-related policy reforms. The article examines the conflicting factors and opinions that have stalled the progression of gender equality and led to an increased hostility towards women's rights within society. Megahed and Lack conclude that the Egyptian government needs to promote genuine gender-oriented educational reforms, and that religious and non-religious interest groups need to shift their efforts towards obtaining equal rights and freedom for all.
- Panday (2008) discusses women's political participation in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi government has instituted several quotas for women in Parliament to increase female political participation and expand women's rights within the country. At present, 50 out of

345 seats in Parliament are reserved for women. Despite these measures to increase representation of women in politics, actual participation by women remains a significant issue. According to Panday, women's participation in politics is hindered by the following factors: educational backwardness, lack of economic resources, inadequate mobility, structural deficiencies, religion, culture and patriarchy. In order to increase women's political participation, educational reforms and policies to empower women should be enacted by the Bangladeshi government.

- Vericat (2017) examines Egypt's women's movements and organizations that emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings and the obstacles they faced in regard to women's rights and gender equality. Lack of equal job access, wage disparities, higher rates of illiteracy, and lack of representation in parliament are some of the primary factors that have obstructed progress for women in Egypt. These factors have persisted due to a culture of discrimination towards women that is deeply engrained in society, as well as governmental actions that have upended equality efforts. Vericat concludes that policy reforms and increased protections for women are necessary to secure gender equality in Egypt.

### III. Socioeconomic Background

Egypt is an Arabic-speaking nation located in Northern Africa, with approximately 90 percent of the population being Sunni Muslim. Egypt is an extremely homogenous country, with over 99 percent of the population being of Egyptian ethnicity. Egypt gained full independence from the British in 1952 and is currently a presidential republic. In January of 2011, a revolution erupted within the country as part of the Arab Spring uprisings. The revolution resulted in the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, and the military was given power over the country. Six months later, the Muslim Brotherhood assumed power, and Islamist Mohamed Morsi was elected president of Egypt in June 2012. Mass protests broke out once again in June 2013, this time against the Morsi presidency. Morsi was removed from office by a coup led by General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who was then elected president in 2014. Currently, Egypt has an estimated population of 99.4 million people, with an estimated population growth of 2.38 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Bangladesh is a small country in terms of land area, located on the Bay of Bengal, bordering India and Myanmar. Approximately 90 percent of the population are Muslim, and nearly 99 percent of the population speak the official language, Bangla. Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971 and is a parliamentary democracy. In August 1975, Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated by the military, which triggered a series of coups that led to many changes in power until the country returned to full democratic rules in 2008. In 2014, the World Bank reclassified Bangladesh from a low-income country to a lower-middle income country. Currently, Bangladesh has an estimated population of 159.5 million people, of which over 98 percent are of Bengali ethnicity. The estimated population growth of the country is 1.1 percent.<sup>2</sup>

As shown in Figure 1, both countries experienced a steady growth in GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), from 1990 to 2017. In 1990, Bangladesh's GDP per capita (shown on the left vertical axis) was \$1,288. By 2006, it had reached \$2,031, and continued to increase at a higher rate than Egypt, reaching \$3,524 in 2017. Egypt (shown on the right vertical axis) had a

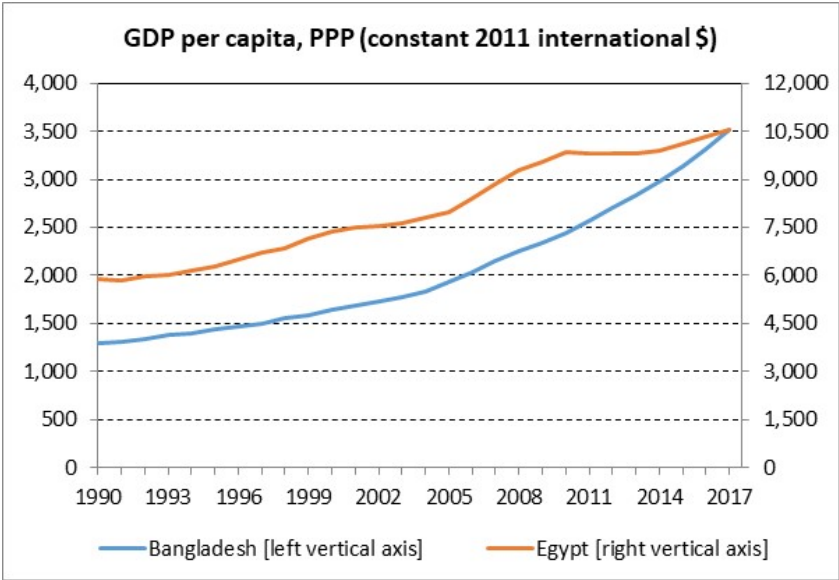
---

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is based on information provided in the CIA World Factbook section on Egypt.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is based on information provided in the CIA World Factbook section on Bangladesh.

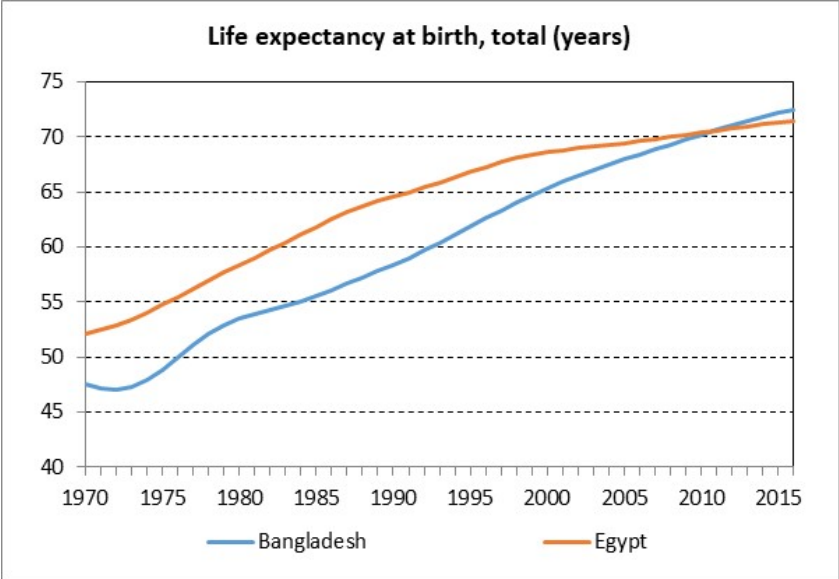
significantly higher GDP per capita than Bangladesh during the whole period for which we have data. In 1990, Egypt's GDP per capita was \$5,909, which is more than four times that of Bangladesh. It increased at a fairly steady rate until 1999, when the growth rate slowed down. From 2000 to 2006, Egypt's GDP per capita increased by less than \$200 annually. It suffered a slight decline from 2010 to 2013 but began increasing again in 2014. In 2017, Egypt's GDP per capita was \$10,550, nearly exactly three times that of Bangladesh.

**Figure 1: GDP per capita (PPP-adjusted, constant 2011\$) 1990-2017**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019b).

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

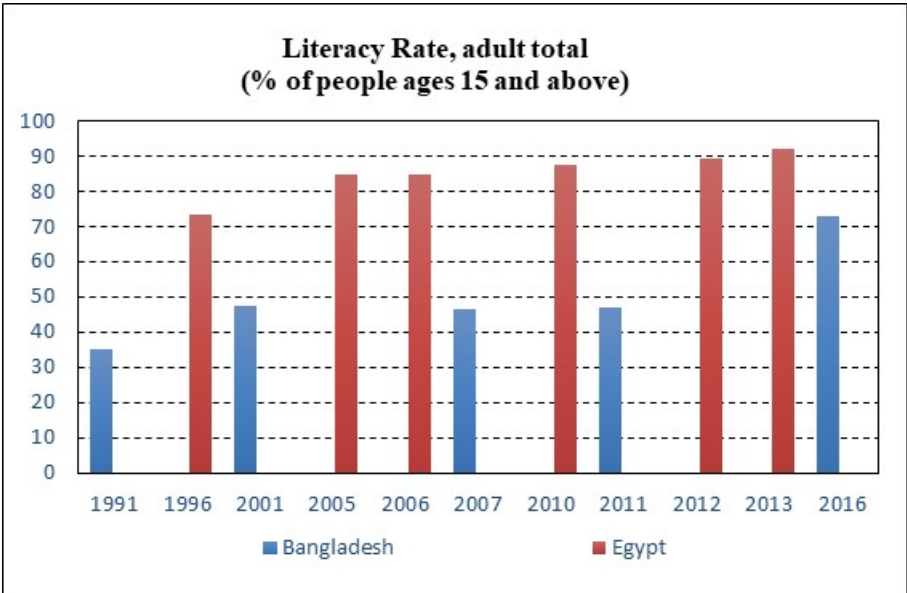


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019b).

Figure 2 shows life expectancy at birth in years for Bangladesh and Egypt from 1970 to 2016. With the exception of Bangladesh during the early 1970s, both countries experienced steady increases in life expectancy. Egypt’s life expectancy has increased from 52 years in 1970 to 71.5 years in 2016, which is in line with the world average life expectancy, which increased from 65 years in 1990 to 72 years in 2016.<sup>3</sup> After the decline from 1970 to 1972, Bangladesh’s life expectancy increased at a slightly higher rate than both Egypt and the world average. In 1972, Bangladesh’s life expectancy was with 47 years far lower than the world average. However, by 2016 Bangladesh’s life expectancy reached 72.5 years, surpassing Egypt slightly and meeting the world average.<sup>4</sup>

While data surrounding adult literacy in Egypt and Bangladesh is sparse and sporadic, a difference between the two countries is still visible, as shown in Figure 3. There was no year in which data was provided for both countries, so an exact comparison is not possible. From 1991 to 2016, five years’ worth of data is available for Bangladesh, which shows that adult literacy doubled from 35 percent in 1991 to 73 percent in 2016. For Egypt, data is available for six years, showing an increase in adult literacy from 73 percent in 1996 to 92 percent in 2013.

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



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019b).

**IV. Analysis of Facts**

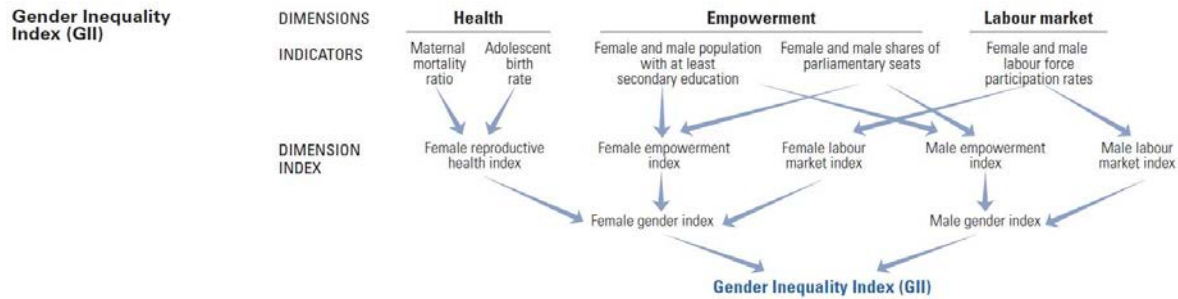
**IV.1. Overall Analysis of Gender Inequality**

The 2019 UN Human Development Report’s Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures gender inequality in three important aspects of human development: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status. Using these factors, each country is assigned a GII value between 0 and 1.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2019b).  
<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2019b).

The GII is used to measure the human development costs of gender inequality, meaning that a higher GII value indicates more disparities between men and women, and thus a greater loss to human development. Figure 4 shows the three main dimensions and the five indicators, which are used to calculate the dimensions index of the GII.

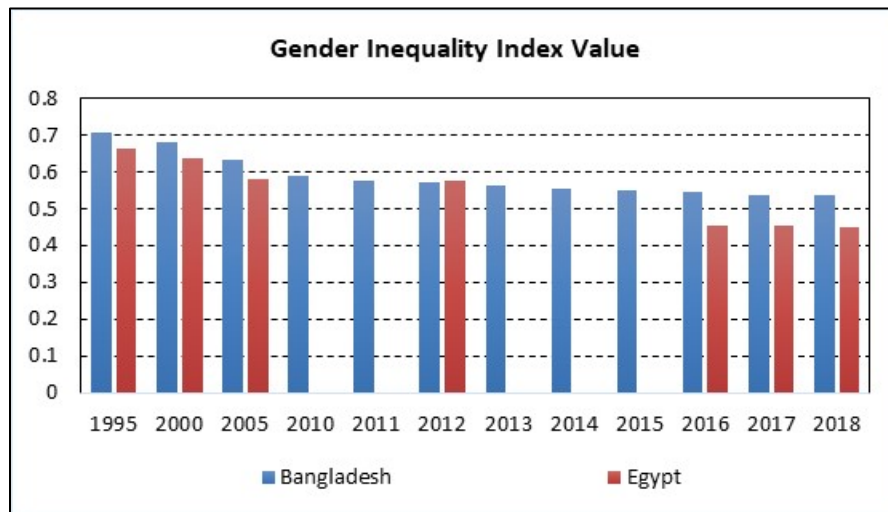
**Figure 4: Indicators of the Gender Inequality Index**



Source: The United Nations (UN) Human Development Report (2019).

According to the UN Human Development Report (2019), Bangladesh had a GII of 0.536 in 2018, while Egypt had a GII of 0.450 in 2018. For reference, the highest-ranking country for gender equality in 2018 was Norway, which had a GII of 0.044. Of the 162 countries for which the GII had been calculated, Egypt was ranked at 102, while Bangladesh ranked 129<sup>th</sup>.

**Figure 5: Gender Inequality Index Values for Bangladesh and Egypt (1995-2018)**



Source: Created by author based on the Human Development Report's GII (2019).

Figure 5 shows the evolution of GII values for each country from 1995-2018. Bangladesh's GII value decreased from 0.708 in 1995 to 0.536 in 2018, and Egypt's GII value decreased from 0.665 in 1995 to 0.450 in 2018. While the overall decrease for both countries shows significant improvement in reducing disparities between men and women, this should not be taken as a sign that either Bangladesh or Egypt is remotely close to reaching gender equality. Both countries still

have high 2018 GII values and ranked very poorly among the 162 countries for which the GII had been calculated.

## IV.2. Contributing Factors to Persistent Inequality

There are many factors that contribute to this persistent gender inequality. This sub-section examines the ways in which different dimensions have halted progress towards equality in Bangladesh and Egypt, focusing on a) the lack of adequate safety and protections from violence for women and b) female exclusion from the workforce and political participation. Though not examined in detail, forced and early marriages also play a major role in preventing women from achieving equality in Bangladesh and Egypt.

### IV.2.a. Violence Against Women

Incidents of violence against women are extremely common in both Bangladesh and Egypt. However, women experience different types of violence in each country. In Bangladesh, the most common type of violence experienced by women is intimate partner violence. In 2015, 54.2 percent of Bangladeshi women reported experiencing some form of physical or sexual violence by their husbands in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> Table 1 shows various incidents of violence towards women in Bangladesh by age group and locality.

**Table 1: Proportion of Ever-Married Women Experiencing Partner Physical and/or Sexual Violence During Lifetime and In Last 12 Months, by Age-Group and Locality**

Background characteristics	Physical violence (%)		Sexual violence (%)		Physical or Sexual (%)		Total Ever married women interviewed
	Life time	Last 12 months	Life time	Last 12 months	Life time	Last 12 months	
<b>Age group (years)</b>							
15-19	37.5	23.8	21.9	15.1	42.8	28.4	542
20-24	48.4	28.1	29.3	18.3	54.4	35.4	2449
25-29	51.1	24.5	26.6	16.6	55.6	32.2	3263
30-34	50.7	23.4	28.3	15.4	55.5	30.8	3475
35-39	49.3	20.8	26.1	12.8	53.4	27.1	2969
40-44	49.4	16.5	26.9	11.0	54.0	21.6	2232
45-49	50.2	15.5	28.1	8.2	53.8	19.7	1489
50-54	50.4	17.0	26.3	9.7	54.3	21.2	1239
55-59	47.8	13.7	23.5	5.9	50.3	16.0	849
60+	50.5	13.2	29.4	9.8	56.1	18.2	1480
<b>Locality</b>							
Rural	51.8	21.5	28.4	13.7	56.6	27.8	10691
Urban	42.2	18.5	23.5	12.2	46.5	24.2	9296
City corporation	29.4	13.0	14.4	7.6	33.3	17.2	4509
Other than city corporation	48.5	21.2	27.9	14.4	52.9	27.7	4787
<b>Total</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>13.3</b>	<b>54.2</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>19987</b>

Source: Gender Statistics of Bangladesh 2018 (BBS 2018).

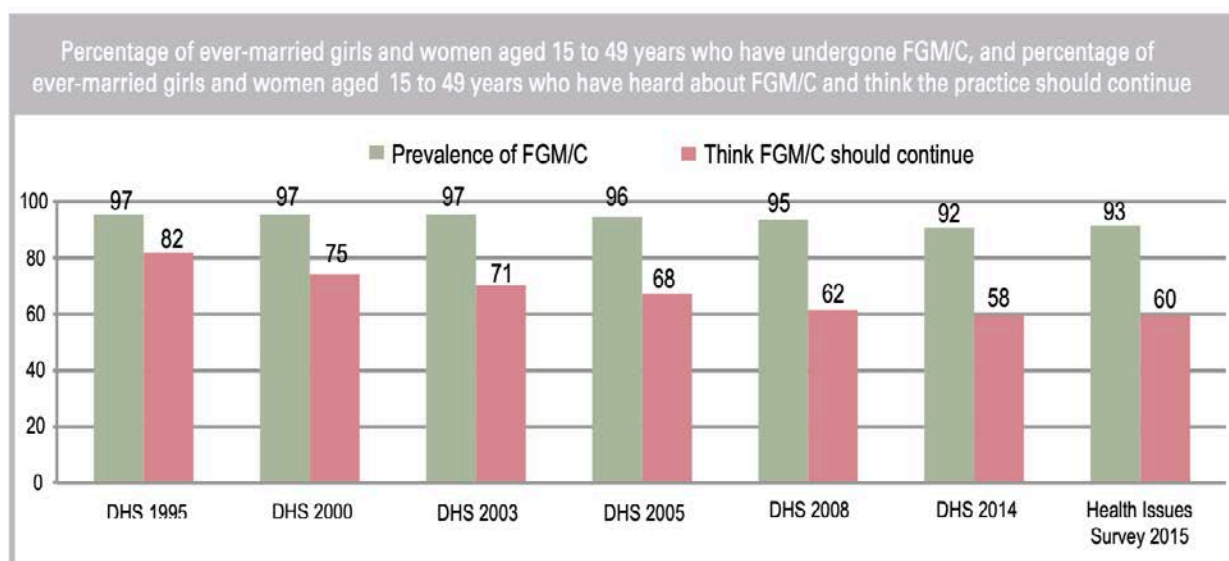
While intimate partner violence is a problem in Egypt, the most frequent type of violence experienced by Egyptian women is female genital mutilation (FGM). In 2015, an astonishing 93

<sup>5</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2018).



percent of women aged 15-49 had undergone some form of genital mutilation.<sup>6</sup> FGM is still widely practiced in many African and Middle Eastern countries, despite the fact that it has no proven medical benefits to women, can lead to serious health complications (such as severe bleeding, infection, infertility, and increased newborn deaths), and is a violation of the human rights of girls and women.<sup>7</sup> Figure 6 shows how widespread the practice of FGM still is in Egypt, as well as opinions on if the practice should continue.

**Figure 6: Percentage of Women and Girls Ages 15-49 Who Have Undergone FGM and Percentage of Women and Girls Ages 15-49 Who Support the Continuation of the Practice (1995–2015)**



Source: UNICEF Statistical Profile on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting – Egypt (2016).

As evidenced by the statistics shown in Table 1 and Figure 6, violence towards women continues to be a significant issue in both Egypt and Bangladesh. It is absolutely critical that measures are taken in both countries to provide protections for women against violence. Violence increases the power imbalance between men and women by instilling fear and psychological harm, which in turn hinders gender equality.<sup>8</sup>

#### *IV.2.b. Exclusion from the Labor Force and Political Participation*

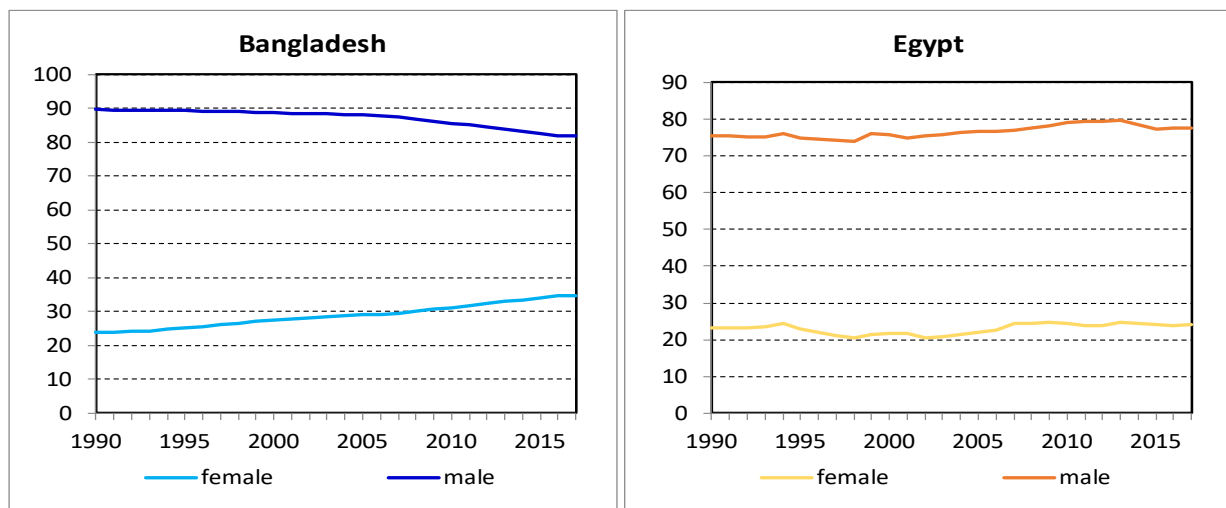
All over the world, women suffer from high rates of discrimination in the workforce, such as sexual harassment and assault, unequal pay, bias impacting hiring and promotions, and lack of equal access to job opportunities. While these are certainly global issues that need to be addressed, incidents of discrimination and exclusion from the labor force are more pervasive for women in developing countries than in industrialized countries. Egypt and Bangladesh are no exception to this fact.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF (2016).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Egypt.

<sup>8</sup> World Health Organization (2009).

**Figures 7 and 8: Female and Male Labor Force Participation Rate (% of each gender's population between ages 15-64) (modeled ILO estimate), respectively in Bangladesh and Egypt (1990-2017)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019b).

As shown in Figures 7 and 8, there are serious disparities between female and male labor force participation rates in Bangladesh and Egypt. While Bangladesh's numbers are certainly inadequate, the data does show an upward trend in female labor force participation, increasing from 20.5 percent of the workforce being female in 1990 to 34.8 percent in 2017. As shown in Figure 8, Egypt, on the other hand, has struggled to make progress in labor force equality. In 1990, 23.2 percent of the Egyptian women between ages 15 to 64 were part of the labor force. The female labor force participation rate increased marginally to 24.4 percent in 1994, before beginning to drop, reaching its lowest point in 2002, with just 20.5 percent of women participating in the labor force. In 2017, the ILO model estimated that 24.1 percent of Egypt's women between ages 15 to 64 participated in the labor force.

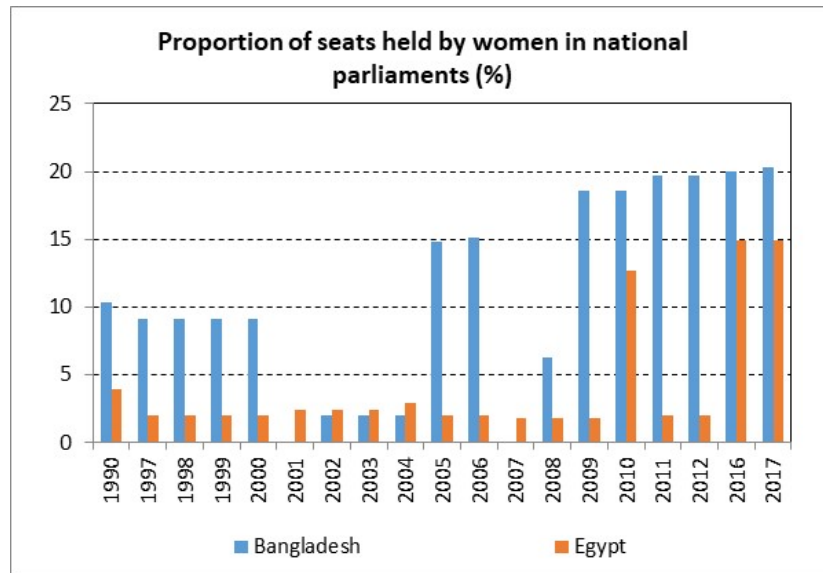
The widespread exclusion of women from the labor force in Bangladesh and Egypt is largely due to socially assigned gender roles being institutionally enforced. In cases where gender roles are not enforced by institutions, societal perceptions and expectations of women, as well as pressure from family and spouses, are also largely responsible for the lack of women in the workforce. When women cannot work, they lack economic empowerment. Lacking economic empowerment prevents women from a) having control over their own lives and bodies, b) being able to access sufficient necessities and care, and c) having an increased voice and agency in economic matters.<sup>9</sup> Exclusion from the workforce severely inhibits economic empowerment for women, which is essential to achieving gender equality.

In addition to exclusion from the workforce, Figure 9 shows that women also face extensive exclusion from political participation in Bangladesh and Egypt. While both countries have made significant improvements over the years, the numbers shown are still abysmal. From 1990 to 2000, only about 9.3 percent of parliamentary seats were held by women in Bangladesh. By 2002, the

<sup>9</sup> UN Women (2018).

number had dropped to just 2 percent of seats being held by women. A sharp increase of 12.8 percent occurred from 2004 to 2005, but by 2008 women held just 6.3 percent of seats. In 2009, there was another sharp increase, as 18.6 percent of seats in parliament were held by women. This upward trend continued for the next 10 years, with the 2017 data showing 20.3 percent of seats going to women. Egypt has also shown a general trend of increase in the number of women in parliament. From 1997 to 2009 parliamentary seats held by women remained below 3 percent. A rapid increase to 12.7 percent can be seen in 2010, but it dropped back down to 2 percent for 2011 and 2012. Data is missing for 2013-2015, but in 2016 and 2017 slightly less than 15 percent of seats were held by women.

**Figure 9: Proportion of Parliamentary Seats Held by Women (1997-2017)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2019b).

As women make up approximately half of the population in each country, Figure 9 shows very clearly that women are being excluded from participating in politics. Similar to the exclusion women face from the workforce, exclusion from political participation can largely be attributed to socially assigned gender roles and attitudes toward women in positions of leadership. For example, a 2013 survey found that an astonishing 83 percent of Egyptians agreed with the statement “men make better political leaders than women.”<sup>10</sup> Social and economic empowerment for women, which are necessary for gender equality, depend on women’s ability to participate in the political system. The incorporation and active participation of women at all levels of the political sphere is vital to reducing gender inequality in Bangladesh and Egypt.<sup>11</sup>

## V. Ethical Analysis

This section analyzes the existing ethical framework put in place by the governments of Bangladesh and Egypt and the work done by NGOs to reduce gender inequality. It will also

<sup>10</sup> Moghadam (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Panday (2008), p. 1.

examine the effectiveness and success of said framework with respect to the contributing factors discussed in the previous section.

### **V.1. Existing Ethical Frameworks**

As recognition for the global issue of gender inequality has grown, so have efforts by governments and NGOs to reduce said inequality. Additionally, analysis into the implementation and effectiveness of these efforts has also increased significantly. A prominent example of action taken to reduce gender inequality is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and ratified by Egypt and Bangladesh in 1981 and 1984, respectively.<sup>12</sup>

According to the United Nations, states that adopt the convention commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including: a) to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women; b) to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination; and c) to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to ratifying the CEDAW, the Bangladeshi constitution features many provisions specifically designed to help women. The constitution of Bangladesh ensures equality of opportunity and equal protection of law for all. In 1979, a provision was made in article 65 of the constitution that reserved 30 seats in parliament for women. In 2004, this was increased to reserve 45 out of 345 parliamentary seats for women, and in 2011, it was increased to 50.<sup>14</sup> Efforts have also been made by the government to increase spending on women's education and health and uphold the legal rights of women. Many additional laws have been created to provide protections for women and improve women's overall status within the country. According to Panday (2008, p. 498) "the government of Bangladesh has set up a comprehensive network of mechanisms and institutions for the advancement of women."

Similarly to Bangladesh, Egypt's constitution also features provisions designed to help women. The 2014 constitution includes over 20 articles specifically addressing the rights of women within the country. Some examples of these include the right to equal pay for equal work between the sexes, prohibition of dismissal by an employer due to pregnancy, and comprehensive measures to address human trafficking. In March 2017, the Egyptian president adopted the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, which consists of the following 4 components: political empowerment and leadership, social empowerment, economic empowerment, and protection.<sup>15</sup>

Equally important to the measures taken by governments is the work of international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting gender equality in Bangladesh and Egypt. An example of this in Bangladesh is UN Women Bangladesh. UN Women Bangladesh has been working with the government and other women's organizations in the country in the following areas: a) income security, decent work, and economic autonomy for women b) women

---

<sup>12</sup> UN Women (undated).

<sup>13</sup> UN Women (undated).

<sup>14</sup> Parvin (2016), p. 815.

<sup>15</sup> This paragraph is based on information from the UN Development Programme (2018) Report on Egypt.

live a life free of violence c) governance, national planning and budgeting for gender equality and d) women and girls contribute to and benefit equally from sustainable peace and resilience, prevention of natural disasters and conflicts, and humanitarian action.<sup>16</sup>

In Egypt, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) works to advance women's rights by urging legislative action that promotes equality, increasing awareness among women of their rights, helping women register to vote, and recruiting and advising female political candidates throughout the election process.<sup>17</sup> Both UN Women Bangladesh and ECWR have had significant impacts on the gender equality movements in Bangladesh and Egypt.

## **V.2. Implementation and Realities of Ethical Frameworks**

It is important to note the difference between de jure gender equality and de facto gender equality in Bangladesh and Egypt. While the measures taken by their respective governments have certainly helped to advance gender equality in each country, societal and religious norms that define gender roles and a lack of enforcement of these measures continues to prevent significant progress from being made.

In regard to the CEDAW, though Bangladesh and Egypt ratified the convention nearly 40 years ago, both countries continue to hold reservations towards specific aspects of the document. The government of Bangladesh currently holds reservation towards articles 2 and 16(1)(c), while the Egyptian government holds reservation towards articles 2, 16, and 29 paragraph 2.<sup>18</sup> Broadly put, Article 2 of the CEDAW articulates that all parties to the Convention take appropriate legislative action to combat all forms of discrimination against women. Article 16 of the Convention concerns combatting discrimination against women in regard to marriage and family relations. More specifically, it states that men and women shall be equal in rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution.<sup>19</sup> Basically, Bangladesh and Egypt hold reservations towards defining aspects of the Convention, and such reservations undermine its fundamental purpose.

Bangladesh and Egypt are both Muslim-majority countries and have secular constitutions which state that all laws relating to personal status (i.e. marriage, divorce, child custody) shall be governed by Islamic law (Sharia). Because of this, both countries' reservations exempt them from abiding by any obligations of Article 2 that contradict Sharia. Additionally, both countries have stated that equality between men and women in marriage and divorce does not comply with Islamic law, and they are therefore exempt from the obligations of Article 16 of the CEDAW.<sup>20</sup>

As discussed in the previous subsection, Egypt and Bangladesh have both enacted provisions and strategies that serve to promote gender equality within each country. Unfortunately, lack of sufficient enforcement and societal opposition have rendered many of these provisions futile.

In Bangladesh, quotas have been included in the constitution that reserve 50 parliamentary seats for women in order to increase women's participation in the political process. While women do hold the reserved seats, they are often undervalued and criticized by men who disagree with the

---

<sup>16</sup> UN Women Bangladesh (undated).

<sup>17</sup> UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (undated).

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection (undated), Chapter 4.

<sup>19</sup> UN Women (undated).

<sup>20</sup> Brandt and Kaplan (1995), pp. 118-126.

quota system, sexually harassed by male counterparts, and prevented from contributing to political discussions.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, deeply engrained patriarchal mindset places significant restraints on many women trying to have careers. In many cases, women are forced to leave their jobs by their husbands and other family members. Women are generally regarded as inferior, and as is the case in most Muslim-majority countries, women are expected to be mothers and homemakers, and it is the responsibility of the husband to provide for the family. This system bars women from reaching any kind of economic empowerment and makes women completely reliant on their husbands. This reliance often leads to women being viewed as property, rather than people, which further perpetuates the already endemic problem of physical and sexual violence against Bangladeshi women.<sup>22</sup>

Egypt faces similar issues as Bangladesh regarding patriarchal views of women and religious laws. As previously discussed, female genital mutilation (FGM) is an extremely widespread practice in Egypt. Though the practice was deemed illegal in 2008, the government does not enforce the law strongly and hence, FGM continues to be a serious issue. Moreover, Egypt has no laws specifically related to domestic violence, and marital rape and polygamy are both legal. Adultery, however, is a punishable offense, and perpetrators of honor killings (in the case of a husband killing his wife upon learning she has committed adultery) are subject to reduced sentences of no more than three years in prison.<sup>23</sup>

Egypt and Bangladesh are very much alike in their extensive exclusion of women from the workforce and political participation, and so the patriarchal societal norms and expectations of women that promote this exclusion in Bangladesh are much the same in Egypt. Egyptian women are generally expected to be mothers and homemakers, and to be almost completely reliant on their husbands to provide for them. For the small percentage of women that comprise the Egyptian workforce, they are frequently undervalued and sexually harassed, which understandably drives many women to leave their professions.<sup>24</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

By analyzing and discussing the many contributing factors, this article illustrates the realities of violence and discrimination caused by gender inequality still faced by women in Bangladesh and Egypt. Though progress has certainly been made, it will be a long time before women in either country are considered equal to men.

Sharia law and societal views of women are the primary drivers of persistent inequality in Bangladesh and Egypt. A profound patriarchal mindset is firmly established among both populations and is largely responsible for the perpetual violence against women and the exclusion of women from the workforce and political participation. Additionally, the lack of enforcement and protections for women is unlikely to change due to the religious and societal norms that place men in positions of authority over women.

---

<sup>21</sup> Anju (2011), p. 504.

<sup>22</sup> Chowdhury (2009), pp. 606–609.

<sup>23</sup> UN Development Programme (2018), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Women's UN Report Network (2013).

Gender equality cannot be achieved without the social, political and economic empowerment of women. It is critical that efforts are increased to abolish harmful stereotypes and gender roles. More efforts are also needed to support and elect more women to all political bodies and to end the widespread reliance on men for economic stability. Through perseverance, education and empowerment, there is hope for equality for the women of Bangladesh and Egypt.

## References

- Anju, Sayeeda (2011). A Study on Positive Discrimination of Women in Laws of Bangladesh. *Journal of the Indian Law Institute*, Vol. 53, No. 3, pp. 491–506.
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) (2019). Gender Statistics of Bangladesh 2018. Reproduction, Documentation & Publication (RDP) Section Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (May); available at: [bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/Gender%20Statistric%20of%20Bangladesh%202018.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/Gender%20Statistric%20of%20Bangladesh%202018.pdf).
- Brandt, Michele and Jeffrey A. Kaplan (1995). The Tension between Women’s Rights and Religious Rights: Reservations to CEDAW by Egypt, Bangladesh and Tunisia. *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 105–142.
- Central Intelligence Agency (2018). The World Factbook: Bangladesh. Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency (February); available at: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/bg.html).
- Central Intelligence Agency (2018). The World Factbook: Egypt. Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency (February); available at: [www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html).
- Chowdhury, Farah Deeba (2009). Theorising Patriarchy: The Bangladesh Context. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 37, No. 4, pp. 599–622.
- Coleman, Isobel (2011). The Future of Women. *The World Today*, Vol. 67, Nos. 8/9, pp. 37–39.
- Megahed, Nagwa, and Stephen Lack (2011). Colonial Legacy, Women’s Rights and Gender-Educational Inequality in the Arab World with Particular Reference to Egypt and Tunisia. *International Review of Education*, Vol. 57, Nos. 3/4 (August), pp. 397–418.
- Moghadam, Valentine M. (2014). Democratization and Women’s Political Leadership in North Africa. *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 68, No. 1, pp. 59–78.
- Panday, Pranab Kumar (2008). Representation without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh. *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 489–512.
- Parvin, Anichha (2016). An Overview. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 77, pp. 815–827.
- UN Women (undated). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). UN Women, internet resource available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.
- UN Women (2018). Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment. UN Women (July); available at: [www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures](http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures).

- UN Women Bangladesh (2019). UN Women Bangladesh. UN Women. Asia and the Pacific, UN Women; available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/bangladesh>.
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2016). Egypt Profile on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. New York, NY: UNICEF.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2018). Egypt Gender Justice Assessment of Laws Affecting Gender Equality and Protection against Gender-Based Violence. New York, NY: UNDP; available at: [www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Gender%20Justice/English/Full%20reports/Egypt%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English-min.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/Gender%20Justice/English/Full%20reports/Egypt%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English-min.pdf).
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2019). Human Development Reports Gender Inequality Index. New York, NY: UNDP; available at: [hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606#a](http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606#a).
- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) (undated). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. New York, NY: OHCHR; available at: [www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx).
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Egypt (2020). Female Genital Mutilation. Cairo, Egypt: UNFPA Egypt (March 3, 2020); available at: [egypt.unfpa.org/en/node/22544](http://egypt.unfpa.org/en/node/22544).
- United Nations Treaty Collection (undated). United Nations, UN Treaties, Treaties." United Nations; available at: [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg\\_no=IV-8&chapter=4#21](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4#21).
- Vericat, José S. (2017). Women's Struggle for Citizenship: Civil Society and Constitution Making after the Arab Uprisings. New York, NY: International Peace Institute; available at: <https://www.ipinst.org/2017/10/womens-struggle-for-citizenship-after-the-arab-uprisings>.
- Women's UN Report Network (WUNRN) (2013). WUNRN Releases. WUNRN, Women's UN Report Network (April 22, 2013); available at: [wunrn.com/2013/04/egypt-discrimination-against-women-in-the-workplace/](http://wunrn.com/2013/04/egypt-discrimination-against-women-in-the-workplace/).
- World Bank (2019a). Women, Business and the Law 2019: A Decade of Reform. Washington, DC: The World Bank (February 27, 2019); available at: <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/reports>.
- World Bank (2019b). World Development Indicators / International Debt Statistics database (Washington, DC: The World Bank); as posted on the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/> (downloaded on January 16, 2019).
- World Economic Forum (2020). Global Gender Gap Report 2020. World Economic Forum, 2020, Global Gender Gap Report 2020; available at: [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf).
- World Health Organization (WHO) (2009). Promoting Gender Equality to Prevent Violence against Women. Violence Prevention: The Evidence, World Health Organization; available at: [www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/gender.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf).



# **Democracy: An Ultimate Remedy towards the Flawed Urbanization in Bangladesh and China**

Ka Long Tung

## ***Abstract***

*This article examines recent decades of urbanization in Bangladesh and China. It comes to the conclusion that some of the basic needs of these countries' urban people have been ignored. By applying ethical reasoning, it proposes the idea that strengthening democratic processes would remedy the flawed urbanization process Bangladesh and China have gone through. However, the authorities in both countries constitute the biggest barrier toward strengthening democratic processes.*

## **I. Introduction**

Urbanization constitutes a big part of any development plan. Instead of improving rural people's life, urbanization implies the movement of people to cities where development is typically happening at a faster pace. Bangladesh and China are two countries that have been undergoing rapid urbanization. Both countries have made significant progress with improving the living standards of their people. However, as this article shows, the living standards of some parts of the urban population have been overlooked during this urbanization and development process. If urbanization does not benefit the well-being of all people, we need to rethink the current urbanization process. More specifically, this article suggests that in the long run, improving democracy is the best way to protect the rights of the people.

This article examines the urbanization process of Bangladesh and China and proposes some steps to tackle the flaws of the current urbanization process. Following this introductory section, Section II reviews some literature related to the contexts, policies, and problems of urbanization in Bangladesh and China. Section III provides some socioeconomic background for these two countries. Section IV examines some key facts related to the urbanization process in both countries. Section V analyzes some ethical aspects by reviewing and discussing some scholarly ethical perspectives, which suggest that it is essential to meet the basic needs of everybody. Section VI provides some conclusions.

## **II. Literature Review**

Regarding the emergence of urbanization in Bangladesh and China, there is a wide variety of publications, including a large academic literature as well as many news stories and commentaries.

Especially for China, there is a large literature examining the side effects or by-products of the urbanization and development process. In response to the clearance of the so-called “low-end population” in Beijing, Ma (2017) criticizes the ignorance towards the rights of the “low-end” urban population, while Miller (2012) analyzes China’s outdated citizenship system and the necessity to modify it. Mahmud & Sawada (2017) point out the flaws of urbanization based on how urbanization affected the subjective well-being of the people in Bangladesh, while Huq (2016) summarizes a set of proposed solutions towards the rapid urbanization in Bangladesh.

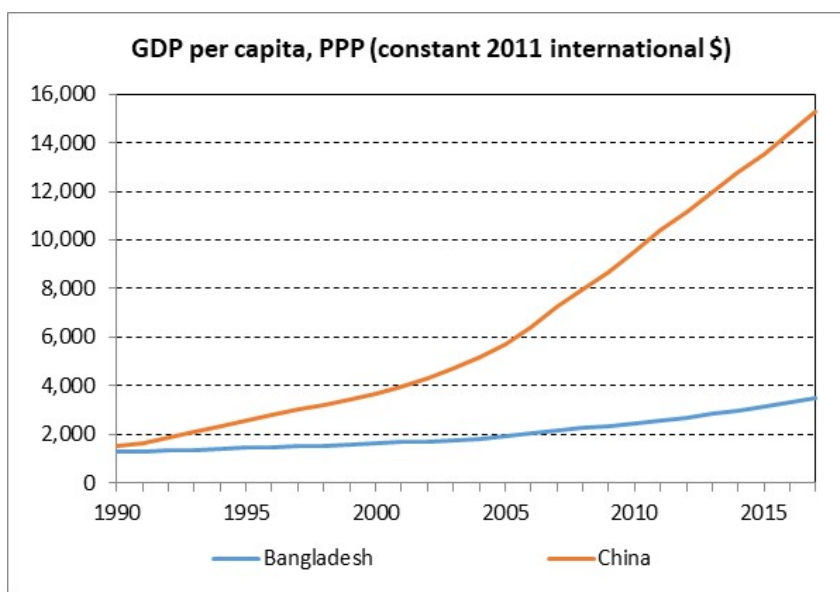
- Ma (2017) reviews the recent history of China’s rapid urbanization and criticized the objectification perspective during this process. She pointed out that even many years after 2008, which was the first year that more than half of the global population lived in urban areas, China had not improved its outdated citizenship policy. By prolonging the policy, it cultivated the basis of discrimination and inequality. Schooling, for example, is not granted for the children of rural-to-urban migrants, and they have to place their children into private and/or illegal schools. Those schools have a diverse level of quality, and thus the learning outcomes for students are not guaranteed. The Chinese concept of urban development had placed the rural to urban migrants into a dangerous situation for decades, which Ma referred to as objectification. Under this notion, people can be simplified as human capital, whose value comes from his/her contribution to economic development. Given that people are being regarded as human capital, there had been no need to revise the citizenship policy.
- Miller (2012, p. 1) acknowledges that “[t]he journey from farm to city is the story of China’s transformation from a poor and backward country to a global economic superpower.” Nonetheless, he analyzes how the *hukou* system, a system that grants rural and urban citizens different citizenship since 1958, discriminates against the people who migrate to the urban centers. He agrees with the fast-paced urbanization in China as a development strategy, but he also stresses that allowing rural migrants to become full urban citizens is the key to boost consumption. Miller argues that migrants need to get social security and legal protection, and that the children of migrants need to be granted education rights.
- Mahmud and Sawada (2017) found out that air and water quality, as well as traffic accidents, were related to the subjective well-being of the people in Bangladesh. They conducted the study in seven areas in Metropolitan Dhaka and four areas in Metropolitan Chittagong. The study shows that the basic needs could be fragile for some urban citizens in Bangladesh. Mahmud and Sawada (2017, p. 228) propose that “while urbanization is important for growth and the economic emancipation of people, the considerable disadvantage of urbanization (density) lies in congestion, road safety, public health, environmental challenges, and affordable housing.”
- Huq (2016) comments on several international workshops and meetings on migration and urbanization held in Dhaka towards the end of 2016. As rapid urbanization was the reality in Bangladesh, he argues that urbanization is not an issue to be prevented but to be managed. He suggests that more had to be invested in other cities and towns around the country to attract the migrants from the rural areas in order to soften the pressure for the capital, Dhaka, where the rapid urbanization was accompanied by a massive slum population. Speaking of slum-dwellers, Huq (2016) suggests that they deserve to be treated like other citizens and be provided with services, such as water, sanitation, electricity, and healthcare. He also suggests that it is important to engage the people in lower social status into the process of decision-

making regarding urbanization. He acknowledges that this will not be easy, but that we need to think about shifting the emphasis from infrastructure to people, with a bias in favor of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

### III. Socioeconomic Background

This section analyzes the data from the World Bank (2019) for three indicators, namely PPP-adjusted GDP per capita, life expectancy and literacy, to gain some insight on the evolution and level of development of Bangladesh and China. As shown in Figure 1, in 1990, Bangladesh had a purchasing power parity (PPP)-adjusted GDP per capita of \$1,288, while China's was \$1,526. In 2017, Bangladesh's GDP per capita had increased to \$3,524, which is nearly three times its 1990 value. China's GDP per capita increased to \$15,309 in 2017, which is slightly more than ten times its 1990 value. Hence, while the two countries had nearly the same GDP per capita in 1990, there is now a huge gap in the level of GDP per capita between Bangladesh and China.

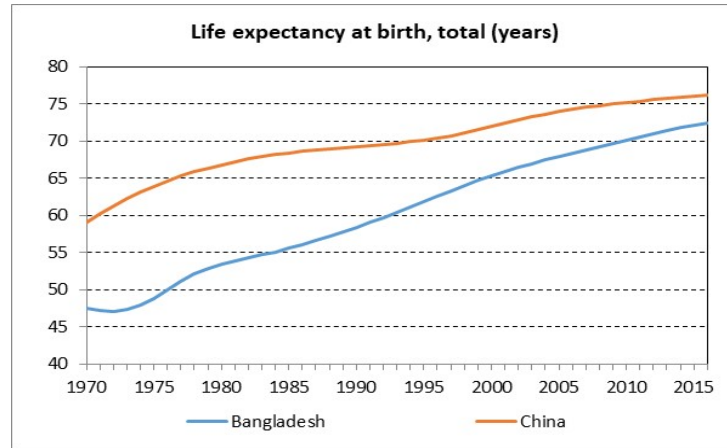
**Figure 1: PPP-adjusted GDP per capita (constant 2011 international \$), 1990-2017**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

With regards to life expectancy (shown in Figure 2), the discrepancy between the two countries is not as big as for GDP per capita. For Bangladesh, the life expectancy at birth had increased by 25.0 years, from 47.5 years in 1970 to 72.5 years in 2016. China's life expectancy increased by 17.2 years, from 59.1 years in 1970 to 76.3 years in 2016. While China continues to have a longer life expectancy at birth than Bangladesh, the difference between the two countries narrowed from 11.6 years in 1970 to 3.8 years in 2016.

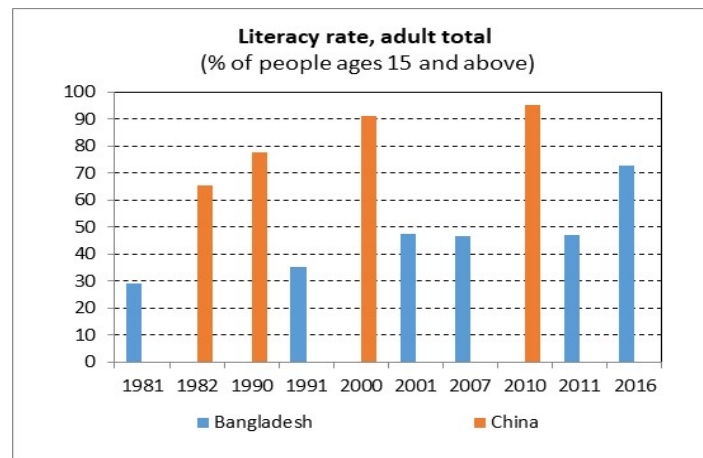
**Figure 2: Life Expectancy at Birth (years), 1970-2016**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

Consistent with the data for GDP per capita and life expectancy at birth, Figure 3 shows that literacy rates have also improved in both countries. For Bangladesh, the adult literacy rate had increased by 43.5 percentage points over a period of 35 years: from 29.2 percent in 1981 to 72.0 percent in 2016. China had a literacy rate of 65.5 percent in 1982, which steadily increased to 95.1 percent in 2010. This implies an increase by 29.6 percentage points over a period of 28 years in China. Though this data implies an overall higher annual growth rate for Bangladesh, it should be pointed out that Bangladesh’s higher annual growth rate is due to the very significant increase from 2011 to 2016. From 2001 to 2011, Bangladesh has made only marginal progress with increasing adult literacy.

**Figure 3: Adult Literacy (percent of people ages 15 and above); all available years**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

In conclusion, both Bangladesh and China have made huge progress in all three indicators. China has done much better than Bangladesh in terms of increasing GDP per capita, while Bangladesh has done better than China in terms of increasing life expectancy and literacy rates, though Bangladesh’s life expectancy and literacy rates have been and remain below those of China.

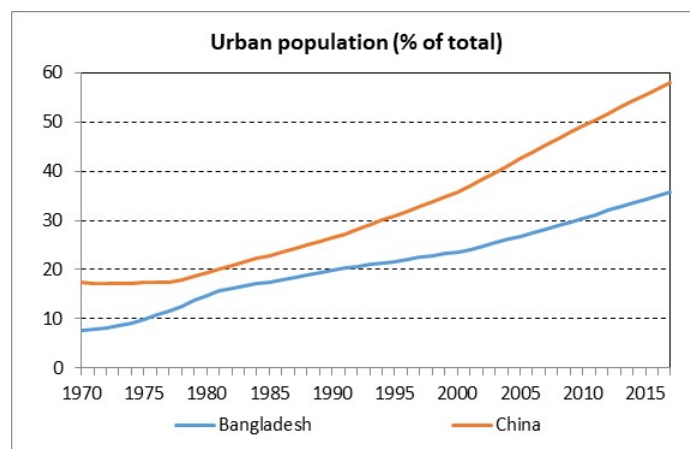
## IV. Key Facts on Urbanization in Bangladesh and China

This section examines the key facts related to urbanization, by analyzing the evolution of the share of the urban population, the share of the urban population living in the largest city, the percentage of the urban population living in slums, and the access rate of the urban population to electricity, drinking water and sanitation, always comparing Bangladesh with China.

### IV.1. Rapid Urbanization

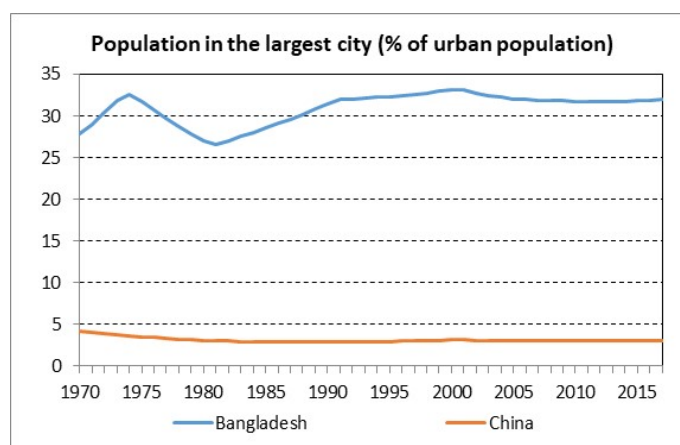
As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of the urban population has kept rising rapidly for both countries since 1970 for Bangladesh and since 1978 in China. In Bangladesh, the urban share of the population increased from 7.6 percent in 1970 to 35.9 percent in 2017, which is an about seven-fold increase. In China, the urban share of the population increased from 17.4 percent in 1970 to 58.0 percent in 2017, which is slightly more than a three-fold increase. While both countries are facing fast-paced urbanization, China's share of urban population has grown more than Bangladesh in absolute terms, though Bangladesh's share has grown more in relative terms.

**Figure 4: Share of Urban Population (percent of total), 1970-2017**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

**Figure 5: Share of Urban Population in the Largest City (percent), 1970-2017**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

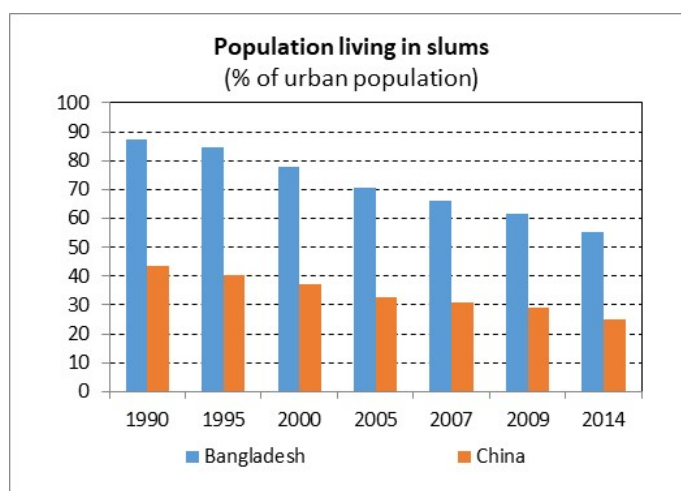
Comparing Figures 4 and 5, we can see that even though Bangladesh has a far lower share of its total population living in urban areas, the percentage of urban population living in the largest city is significantly higher in Bangladesh than in China. This indicates that Bangladesh’s urbanization is mostly focused on Dhaka, while China’s urbanization is spread out over many urban centers. Indeed, as shown in Figure 5, less than five percent of China’s urban population live in Shanghai (China’s most populous city; with a slightly higher population than the capital: Beijing), where about one third of Bangladesh’s urban population lives in Dhaka (Bangladesh’s most populous city and capital).

## IV.2. Population Living in Slums

The percentage of urban population who are living in slums is a useful indicator to assess the living standard of the urban people. As shown in Figure 6, Bangladesh had 87.3 percent of the urban population living in slums in 1990, and it had been improving throughout the year. However, the ratio was still a disappointing 55.1 percent in 2014. For China, the ratio was 43.6 percent in 1990, which had gradually declined to 25.2 percent in 2014. Although improvements have been made in terms of reducing the percentage of urban population living in slums, having still more than half and more than one quarter of the urban population living in slums in Bangladesh and China, respectively, cannot be considered to be successful urbanization.

Furthermore, given that the number of people living in cities has increased drastically (due to positive population growth and the increase in the percentage of urban population, the absolute number of people living in slums has actually increased continuously in both countries. In Bangladesh, the number of people living in slums has increased from 18.4 million in 1990 to 29.4 million in 2014. In China, the number of people living in slums has increased from 130.9 million in 1990 to 186.5 million in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 6: Population living in slums (percent of urban population), all available years**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

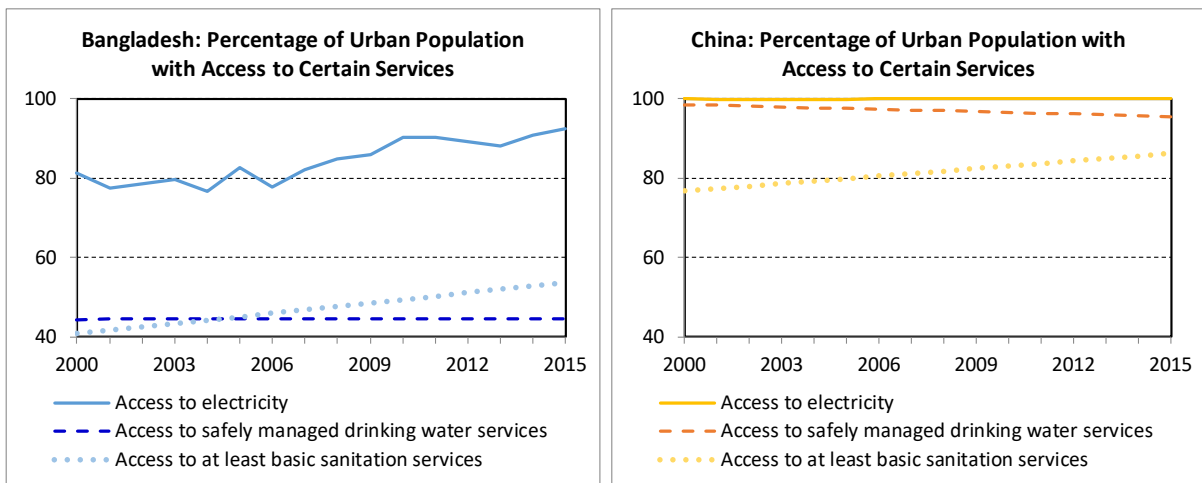
<sup>1</sup> Calculations by author based on World Bank (2019) data for urban population and people living in slums as percent of the urban population.

### IV.3. Access to Electricity, Drinking Water, and Sanitation

Access to electricity, drinking water and sanitation are also useful indicators to determine whether enough efforts have been made to address the structural changes of the population. As shown in Figure 7, Bangladesh has clearly failed the urban people to having access to safely managed drinking water services. The percentage of urban population with access increased only very marginally, from 44.53 percent in 2000 to 44.62 percent in 2015. Bangladesh has made some progress in increasing access to electricity, which increased from 81.2 percent in 2000 to 92.5 percent in 2015. The biggest progress Bangladesh has made among these three indicators is access to at least basic sanitation services, which increased from 40.7 percent in 2000 to 53.7 percent in 2015.

Comparing Figures 7 and 8, we can see that access rates to all three services are much higher in China than in Bangladesh. However, except with access to electricity, which has been universal in China for all the years we have such data, China also failed the urban population with having access to safely managed drinking water, where the percentage of the urban population decreased from 98.3 percent in 2000 to 95.5 percent in 2015. Like in Bangladesh, China also increased the access to at least basic sanitation services, from 76.6 percent in 2000 to 86.2 percent in 2015. Still, with the huge number of people living in urban areas, there are millions of urban people without access to water and sanitation.

**Figures 7 and 8: Access to Electricity, Drinking Water, and Sanitation (percent of urban population), 2000-2015**



Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2019).

## V. Ethical Analysis

### V.1. Ethical Foundations for Development

Astroulakis (2013) proposed a development ethics paradigm, which suggests that development should contain ethical aspects. He quoted Louis-Joseph Lebret to show that the meaning of development should not exclude a human's needs. Lebret had pointed out three categories of needs, namely essential subsistence needs, needs related to comfort and facilities which render life

easier, and enhancement goods. To apply the notion of development ethics paradigm to Bangladesh and China, both ethical theory (how one should live) and political economy (investigates the laws of political, economic and social life) have to be considered in the policy-making process.

Urbanization is a process of economic development, but the drawback can be that it turns out to overlook the needs of the people who are involved. As we have shown in the previous section, the rapid urbanization in Bangladesh and China has not been equivocal the improvement of the people living in the urban area. James Scott (1998, p. 89) proposed the concept of high modernism, in which he described it as “a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied - usually through the state - in every field of human activity.” Scott (pp. 88-90) points out that high modernism is not an ideology as it has both right- and left-wing variants, however, high modernism can in a way change people’s habits, work, living patterns, moral conduct, and worldview. High levels of urbanization and modernism leads to the illusion of high development, while ignoring the people that are excluded from the overall development.

## **V.2. Democracy and Long-term Development**

The basic needs issues are crucial for the evaluation of urbanization. As Astroulakis (2013) suggested the well-being of the people should be the one to be considered as it is the utmost important indicator of development. In order to apply this to the central part of urbanization, democracy, as Scott (1998) suggested, is inevitable. He pointed out (p. 101) that liberal democratic ideas are barriers towards high modernism in the sense that “the idea of a private realm has served to limit the ambitions of many high modernists.” To attain this ideal, liberal democratic settings in a country are necessary. As Scott (p. 102) put it:

The freedoms of speech, of assembly, and of the press ensure that widespread hunger will be publicized, while the freedoms of assembly and elections in representative institutions ensure that it is in the interest of elected officials’ self-preservation to prevent famine when they can.

As a result, democracy, in both institutional and social senses, is needed to prevent high modernism from hurting the people. What is needed, as Scott said, is institutions that are “based on the assumption that the citizens should continually modify the laws and policies of the land” (p.357). This idea suggests that development is an ongoing process, in which no one should hold a certain power of agenda-setting. Every single person should have a say on what the city should look like.

Scott’s critique echoes the ideas proposed by the *Human Development Report (HDR) 2000*.<sup>2</sup> The report reviewed the historical context of the human rights agenda during the cold war, when two covenants were adopted: one focusing on civil and political rights (which were pushed for by the Western countries), and another one focusing on economic, social and cultural rights (which were pushed by the Soviet Union and its allies). However, the two sets of rights are not divisible as both are needed to be developed to strengthen each other. The HDR 2000 then pointed out that human development and human rights are both of the utmost importance and deserved equal attention.

The HDR 2000 defined human development as a process of enhancing human capabilities - to expand choices and opportunities so that each person can lead a life of respect and value. Moreover, the HDR 2000 stresses that human development provides a systematic assessment of

---

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2000).

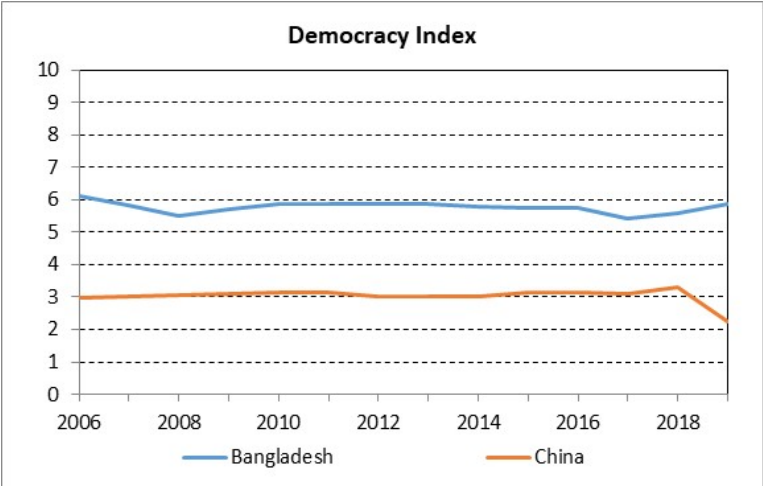


economic and institutional constraints to the realization of human rights. To put it another way, focusing on human development can enhance freedom while paying attention to human rights can protect freedom itself. In this sense, both Bangladesh and China have to improve both the civil and political rights as well as the economic, social and cultural rights for its people, while Bangladesh has a heavier job to do to increase the basic needs for the urban population. As noted in Section IV, the basic needs of many urban people have not been met. The voice of those underprivileged living in undesirable circumstances has to be heard. The society should regard them as part of the stakeholders and consider their well-being in the decision-making process. As a result, the flaws of urbanization can be resolved.

In the long-run, it is of utmost importance for both countries to install democracy in order to guarantee that the urbanized process will not overlook the well-being of its people and turn out that the city is developing for its own sake. Social engagement has to increase such that the voice of everyone within the urban area can be heard. To increase social engagement, the power-holding people have to share some of the power to the previously underprivileged whether in the forms of freedoms of speech, of assembly, and of the press (Scott’s words) or civil and political rights (HDR 2000 words). If this is not the case, the urbanization process ignores that development should for all the people.

Democracy is about protecting the basic needs of people, and also sometimes go beyond it. For example, Qin (2018) reported that since 2015, there had been more than 400 local markets shut down in Beijing, which was a by-product accompanying rapid urbanization. For ordinary people, it resulted in higher living costs and inconvenient daily life. Although it went beyond the basic needs of the urban people, the issue was still important to be noticed in the sense that it highly affected the daily life of the people. If the respect of humans is one of the concerning factors regarding urbanization, then the people should have a say in these kinds of demolitions. As Qin (2018) pointed out, those markets were fields for building trust and social capital, where a system of care and love bounded the neighborhood.

**Figure 9: Democracy Index (0-10 scale)**



Source: Created by the author based on Economist Intelligence Unit (2019), Table 3, data for 2007 and 2009 are, respectively, averages of 2006 and 2008, and 2008 and 2010.

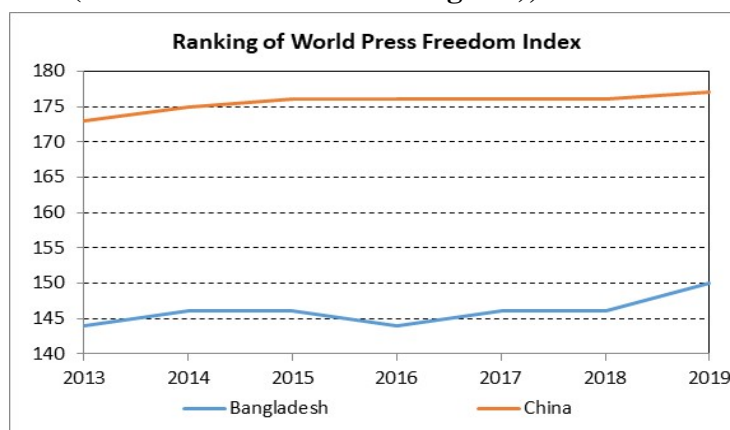
Based on the Economist Intelligence Unit's (2019) democracy index, which ranks countries from a low score of 0 to a high score of 10,<sup>3</sup> the overall score for Bangladesh was 5.88 in 2019 (which falls into the category of a hybrid regime), while China scored a poor 2.26 in 2019 (which falls into the category of an authoritarian regime). As Figure 9 shows, China has been ranked lower than Bangladesh in terms of the degree of democracy for all years such data exists (2006 to 2019). Figure 9 also shows that overall, both countries have been relatively stable in their score, though comparing 2006 with 2019, both countries' score have deteriorated, especially in China.

According to the Reporters Without Borders' (2019) world press freedom index<sup>4</sup>, Bangladesh ranked 146 (scored 50.74) while China ranked 177 (scored 78.92) out of 180 regions in 2018, whereby a higher ranking and a higher score implies less press freedom. Figure 10 shows the evolution of these two countries' ranking from 2013 to 2019, which shows that overall, both countries have worse rankings (that is the rank is higher) in 2019 compared to 2013. By commenting on the two countries, Reporters Without Borders (2019) assessed Bangladesh's and China's press freedom as follows:

Bangladeshi journalists have been among the leading collateral victims of the tougher methods adopted by the ruling Awami League and its leader, Sheikh Hasina, the country's prime minister since 2009. The campaign leading up to her re-election in late 2018 was accompanied by a disturbing increase in press freedom violations, including violence by political activists against reporters in the field, the arbitrary blocking of news websites, and arbitrary arrests of journalists.<sup>5</sup>

By relying on the extensive use of new technology, President Xi Jinping has succeeded in imposing a social model in China based on control of news and information and online surveillance of its citizens. At the same time, he has been trying to export this oppressive model by promoting a "new world media order" under China's influence.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 10: Ranking based on World Press Freedom Index (out of 180 countries and regions), 2013-2019**



Source: Created by the author based on data provided by Reporters Without Borders (2019).

<sup>3</sup> The index is based on civil liberties, political culture, political participation, the functioning of government and electoral process and pluralism. Based on the index, countries are then categorized into four types of regimes, namely full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes.

<sup>4</sup> The index was conducted based on the criterion of pluralism, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, infrastructure, and abuses.

<sup>5</sup> First paragraph of assessment, available at: <https://rsf.org/en/bangladesh>.

<sup>6</sup> First paragraph of assessment, available at: <https://rsf.org/en/china>.

Although Bangladesh attained a better ranking than China in terms of press freedom, both countries have been performed poorly. And the comments from the Reporters Without Borders suggest that both countries' existing authorities had been harming democracy by damaging the freedom of the press, which is a critical factor for a functioning democracy.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Urbanization and economic growth are interrelated. However, urbanization has brought challenges for Bangladesh and China. This article finds that both countries had undergone rapid urbanization, which is highly centralized on Dhaka in Bangladesh, while it is more spread out over many urban centers in China. Though progress has been made with reducing the percentage of people living in slums in both countries, the fact that still more than half (55.1 percent) of Bangladesh's urban population and more than one quarter (25.2 percent) of China's urban population still live in slums is unacceptable.

With regards to fulfilling the basic needs of its urban citizens, China has higher access rates to electricity, drinking water, and sanitation than Bangladesh. Nonetheless, both countries need to do a better job in creating a more just society. More specifically, both countries need to change their flawed urbanization of the past decades, which will not be easy as a further increase in the urban population will bring new challenges in the coming years.

By applying ethical perspectives, this article suggests that more needs to be done to fulfill the basic needs of the urban population. And to ensure long-term human-based urbanization, it's utmost important to install democracy in both countries so as to empower every stakeholder to speak up. However, the brutal reality is that the authorities in both countries do not like the idea of empowering their people. Given the poor performance of the two countries in terms of freedom of speech and preserving democracy, it is not optimistic that the governments themselves will empower their people.

No one knows where the edge of high modernism is that triggers the people to stay hand-in-hand and resist against the authorities. But as Scott (1998) said, high modernism changes even the worldview of people, that is numerous people might turn out to take the unjust status quo for granted. However, if the people stand hand-in-hand and demand change, a more just society can be achieved. Human development and human rights, civil and economic rights, democracy and basic needs are never divisible. Overlooking one of them will in return harm the other ones.

## **References**

- Astroulakis, Nikos (2013). Ethics and International Development: The Development Ethics Paradigm. *East-West Journal of Economics and Business*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 99-117; available at: <https://www.u-picardie.fr/eastwest/fichiers/art169.pdf>.
- Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (2019). *Democracy Index 2019: A Year of Democratic Setbacks and Popular Protest* (London, United Kingdom and New York, NY: The Economist).
- Huq, Saleemul (2016). Is Rapid Urbanisation Good or Bad for Bangladesh? *The Daily Star*, News article of December 21, 2016; available at: <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/politics-climate-change/rapid-urbanisation-good-or->

[bad-bangladesh-1332994](#).

Ma, Li (2017). Wǒmen dōu xíguàn tán `rénlì zīběn'yǔ jīngjì gòngxiàn, què hūlüèle rén de zūnyán [We are all used to talking about "human capital" and economic contribution, but we ignore human dignity]. *Initium Media*, News report of December 2, 2017; available at: <https://theinitium.com/article/20171202-notes-where-to-go/>.

Mahmud, Minhaj and Yasuyuki Sawada (2018). Urbanization and Subjective Well-Being in Bangladesh. In: Yasuyuki Sawada, Minhaj Mahmud, and Naohiro Kitano (eds.) *Economic and Social Development of Bangladesh: Miracle and Challenges* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 215-232.

Miller, Tom (2012). *China's Urban Billion: The Story Behind the Biggest Migration in Human History* (London, United Kingdom: Zed Books).

Qin, K. (2018). Chùle `dī duān rénkǒu', 400 duō gè huāshì, cài shìchǎng děng yě bèi qiēchúle [In addition to the "low-end population", more than 400 flower and vegetable markets have also been cut off]. *Initium Media*, News report of December 12, 2018; available at: <https://theinitium.com/article/20181212-mainland-where-to-go-one-year/>.

Reporters Without Borders (2019). 2019 World Press Freedom Index. Retrieved from: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking>.

Scott, James C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press).

United Nations Development Program (2000). Human Development Report (HDR) 2000: Human Rights and Human Development (New York: United Nations Development Program); Overview Chapter; available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2000\\_EN\\_Overview.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2000_EN_Overview.pdf).

World Bank (2019). World Development Indicators / International Debt Statistics database (Washington, DC: The World Bank); as posted on the World Bank website: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/> (downloaded on January 16, 2019).