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The Global Importance of Women's Rights to Education and Political Participation

Iranian women's rights advocate Mahnaz Afkhami writes, "The connection between women's human rights, gender equality, socioeconomic development, and peace is increasingly apparent." Women's rights are human rights, and the benefits of empowering women around the world are evident on both ethical and socioeconomic grounds. Women are fundamentally entitled to the right to education, political participation, and freedom from violence and discrimination, yet they are often barred from these because of their gender. To provide equal rights to women not only improves the living standard of women themselves, but also better the state of countries, economies, and our world.

Firstly, the right to education is essential to all people. Education is the cornerstone of civil society, the key to success, and the greatest equalizer. For women especially, education is empowerment: it provides the knowledge and perspective that enables women to find better jobs, raise fewer and healthier children, and overcome gender inequality. Beyond the individual, educating women improves the global economy. The United Nations reports, "Increased educational attainment accounts for about 50% of the economic growth in OECD countries over the past 50 years, of which over half is due to girls having had access to higher levels of education and achieving greater equality in the number of years spent in education between men and women." (1) Safe, quality schools foster the intellectual and personal growth of women, and respecting this fundamental human right to education allows women to chart their own paths and improve the world around them.

Secondly, women have the right to political participation, whether that be to vote or to run for office. Women in politics still face opposition and violence due to cultural, social, and economic barriers, yet it is only just that they be part of the decision-making process. In addition, women leaders create equitable and peaceful public policies. The United Nations explains, "Women demonstrate political leadership by working across party

lines... and by championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws and electoral reform." There has been a direct correlation between women politicians and increased childcare in Norway, for example, and also higher numbers of drinking water projects in India. (2) Women in politics can provide a more community-minded, empathetic insight that can change laws and policies to better society. Providing a voice and vote to women furthers socioeconomic development, and encourages peace across communities and country borders.

It is clear that women's human rights to education and political participation are linked to socioeconomic development and peace. Women today face a slew of setbacks because of their gender, but we must remember that women's rights are fundamentally human rights, and concern the wellbeing of people everywhere. Empowering women and providing equal rights does not detract from others', but instead, lifts up our world as a whole. As Mahnaz Afkhami eloquently summarizes, women "are indispensable to the accumulation of the kind of social capital that is conducive to development, peace, justice, and civility." (3)

References

1. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>
2. <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>
3. <https://legacy.scu.edu/ethics/architects-of-peace/Afkhami/essay.html>