

Good Governance Can Reduce the Gender Gap in Secondary Schooling

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The social benefits of girls' completion of secondary education cannot be overstated. In developing nations, these include delayed marriage and pregnancy, lower fertility rates and family sizes, decreased infant, child and maternal mortality, reduced levels of HIV, and greater educational achievement among children (World Bank 2016; Burroway and Hargrove 2018). Increases in female secondary education also support economic growth, democratic composition, income equality, and poverty alleviation (UNESCO 2013). Yet, despite improvements in girls' secondary education enrollment, there are still over 34 million female adolescents out of school—the majority in developing nations (World Bank 2017).

In Sommer and Fallon (2020), we ask if government education expenditures alone can effectively improve girls' secondary education enrollments relative to boys in developing nations. Previous research focusing on educational attainment broadly and for both boys and girls, is mixed. A few studies find that education spending increases educational attainment, but most find that there is little, if any, relationship between education spending and educational outcomes. We argue that the inconsistencies in findings may be linked to differences in state governance, with the effectiveness of education expenditures dependent on regulation and the proper distribution of resources (Rajkumar and Swaroop 2008).

This is particularly relevant for girls' secondary educational enrollment levels since systemic educational gender inequalities privilege the interests of men and boys over women and girls. Misappropriated funds, lack of enforcement in the delivery of funds, and predatory relationships with the private sector reduce investment in the needs of girls, making it more difficult for them to enroll (UNESCO 2013). For example, if school is costly from corruption, or books and other education materials are expensive, families will privilege their sons over daughters. Moreover, if school violence is prevalent or gendered bathrooms are not available, families may forgo enrolling their daughters. If education funds are fully allocated, well-planned, and consistently delivered, girls have a much better chance of being able to enroll in school and remain in school.

Drawing on previous studies (Rajkumar and Swaroop 2008; Sommer 2018; Gupta and Abed 2002), we identify and define four primary components of state governance contributing to the relative enrollment of girls in secondary school: (1) controlling corruption (2) government effectiveness in creating and implementing coherent policies and procedures (3) ensuring oversight and enforcing spending decisions, or the rule of law and (4) regulatory quality or the government's internal functioning and its collaboration with the private sector.

We find that governance increases the effectiveness of education expenditures by improving girls' secondary education enrollment compared to boys' for a sample of 105 low- and middle-income nations from 1997 to 2012. Our predicted effects further reveal that rule of law and government effectiveness boost the beneficial effects of education spending more than regulatory quality

Closing the gender gap in secondary schooling in developing countries needs more than government spending; it needs better governance in the creation of coherent policies and in the enforcement of these policies on the ground

and the control of corruption. Our findings suggest that governance combined with government spending can promote effective and efficient education spending, increase the amount of education funds available and create strong and transparent partnerships with the private sector to generate more resources to enhance girls' secondary education relative to boys. Thus, increasing education expenditures alone will likely not improve girls' secondary education enrollments—governance is key.

Our findings inform on-going and future development policy plans that acknowledge the health and economic benefits of girls' education. We recommend that national governments, international bodies, and non-governmental organizations increase and facilitate the integration of state governance alongside investment in girls' secondary school enrollment. National governments may form gender equity teams to evaluate current education spending. For example, such teams could dedicate some of the education funding marked for infrastructure to build separate bathrooms for boys and girls. This special attention given to the needs of girls may help enhance the effectiveness of education spending even if funds are low. Gender equity teams may similarly form partnerships in the private sector to create special funds or scholarships for girls in large families or in rural areas that are often most at risk for not sending girls to school.

We similarly encourage international bodies to continue to support education initiatives for girls, but to also better integrate programs that support government regulation. In doing so, girls' secondary educational enrollment levels should increase, and ultimately other development indicators, such as infant, child, and maternal mortality should also improve. Local and international non-governmental organizations must continue to provide on the ground support for girls' education, while also pressuring local and national governments and international bodies to provide more specialized relevant state support for and oversight of girls' education. Ultimately, considering a state's capacity for development will help us to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of what nations can do to improve girls' and women's social and economic status.

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