

Community Aspirations for Children's Education in Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka has been maintaining a very high record in literacy which is more than 90 percent, for years because of the long standing free education and positive social policies prevalent in the country. There is no gender discrimination in the education system, either. Consequently, majority of the parents at present know the importance of education and are keen to provide a good education for their children disregarding the gender. Because of that, parents prefer to send their children to good schools. Although the school network is available throughout the country, there are regional disparities in the school system. National schools located in cities are considered as good schools, because they are provided with facilities and good teachers. Compared to facilities available in urban schools, however, those in remote schools located in economically poor regions are very low.

In Sri Lanka there is a huge competition among parents who belong to upper, upper middle and middle level of social classes to get their children admitted to good schools located in major cities of the country. Affluent parents often prefer to admit their children to reputed schools situated in Colombo which is the capital of the country since they are aware of the fact that these schools have a lot of facilities and good teaching staff. Also they know that most of the educated people in the country happen to be the products of these schools and they would like to take pride in sending their kids to the same reputed schools. While providing quality education, the parents ensure that their children will grow up with students in the same background.



The rural school children of Sri Lanka

Nevertheless, schools available in major cities are not adequate to meet this demand. In response to this demand a number of private schools have emerged in the country in the recent past. When parents fail to admit their children to well-known reputed schools, they send their children to private schools which are known as international schools, because children of expatriates also attend these schools. Since the medium of instruction is English in these schools, some parents are happy to see their children studying in English medium. Having known that knowledge of English is essential to secure a job in the present job market, many parents prefer to send their children to such international schools.



The urban/ international school children in Sri Lanka

Situation is much different when it comes to economically disadvantaged rural areas. Despite the substantial expenditure incurred by the government on education, many rural schools do not have necessary facilities and teachers to provide quality education to the children. Some schools have only one dilapidated building with only one or two teachers. Many schools have the difficulty in retaining teachers as they lack accommodation and other facilities in those areas. In some schools, children are compelled to sit on the floor as they do not have even desks and chairs. Many schools also lack water and sanitation facilities. Only parents belonging to lower social strata send their children to these schools as they cannot afford to send them to better schools situated in nearby cities.

Girls are most vulnerable to this situation due to the combination of a couple of common factors. Poverty is a major reason. Many girls are forced to leave schools while others never have the opportunity to go in the first place. Many parents do not wish to send their daughters to far away schools due to security concerns. Everyday newspapers carry stories about rape and sexual abuses. Girls are more prone to sexual violence in rural areas. Although there was a big protest against the perpetrators, this kind of incidents occur very frequently.

There are also other reasons associated with poverty which have negative impact on girls' education. In poor rural communities, many mothers tend to go abroad as domestic servants because of their poverty. In the absence of mothers', older girl children have to sacrifice their education as they are supposed to assume household responsibilities.

Despite the above drawbacks, girls excel in education once they are given the opportunity. It has been revealed that the number of girls who succeed in higher education is much higher than that of boys. Women's population in the country is more than 50% and girls in urban areas have equal access to education with more facilities than what is enjoyed by their rural counterparts. These reasons affect the achievements of girls in higher education. In view of this situation the State has to take more positive measures to promote education in Sri Lanka.