

Whitney

Yousafzai miraculously survived and relocated to England where she continues to advocate for the right to education. In 2014, Yousafzai was a co-recipient – with Kailash Satyarthi of India – of the Nobel Peace Prize – the youngest ever Nobel Laureate at the age of 17.

In a recent Time article, “Who runs the World? Girls!” Yousafzai described the reality for millions of girls who, due to cultural traditions all over the world, are subject to arranged marriages at ages as young as 11.

Yousafzai: “This summer I met Najlaa, a Yazidi teenager in Iraq. At 14, her parents took her out of school and told her she would be married. On her wedding day, Najlaa ran away – in her wedding dress. She wasn’t ready to give up on her education and dreams of becoming a journalist. When she was 16, ISIS invaded her village and forced her to flee again. Today, she lives as an internally displaced person in Kurdistan and walks more than an hour to school each day. Girls like Najlaa inspire my work.”

The reality is that 130 million girls are out of school due to child marriage, poverty, conflicts, and wars. Despite the fact that two years ago, United Nations leaders committed to ensuring every girl receives 12 years of education by 2030, progress is glaringly slow, as donor countries have either stalled or declined in their support. Yousafzai founded the Malala Fund to invest in educators in developing countries.

Yousafzai: “In Afghanistan, they are recruiting female teachers to work in rural schools. In Nigeria, they are running mentorship clubs to help girls resist family pressure to drop out and marry as young as 13 years old. In Lebanon, they are developing e-learning programs to teach STEM skills to Syrian refugee girls. I believe we can see every girl in

school in my lifetime. I believe in girls like Najlaa, who are leading the fight for themselves and their sisters. I believe in the millions of people who support our movement.”

Sioni Ayubu Mollel, ‘18 at Brewster Academy in Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, walked a similar distance as to school as Najlaa. Sioni is Maasai, a tribe of semi-nomadic pastoral people living along the border of Tanzania and Kenya, Maasai land now primarily wildlife preserves and national parks. For six years, Sioni walked an hour and 20 minutes through the arid landscape of the Monduli Hills of northern Tanzania to go to school, eventually attending the Orkeeswa School.

Founded by Peter Luis, founding director of the Indigenous Education Foundation of Tanzania, Orkeeswa is a tuition-free alternative for students to pursue education beyond primary school, in a country where less than a quarter of the population has access to secondary school.

When independent filmmaker Elizabeth Nichols asked two Orkeeswa students to do a film about early marriage, Sioni co-wrote the film *Black Head Cow*, which debuted at the 2016 Toronto International Film Festival. Mollel is now a freshman at Franklin & Marshall College.

Believe it or not, the education of girls worldwide has huge implications for population growth as well as global warming. In *Drawdown*, Paul Hawken lists (1) educating girls (2) family planning and (3) women small holders as three female initiatives of crucial global importance.

Hawken: “Women with more years of education have fewer, healthier children and actively manage their reproductive health...If all nations adopted a similar rate (as Korea) and achieved 100 percent enrollment of girls in primary and secondary school, by 2050 there would be 843 million fewer people worldwide than if current enrollment rates sustain.”

According to Brookings, “The difference between a woman with no years of

schooling and 12 years of schooling is almost four to five children per woman... in those areas of the world where girls are having the hardest time getting educated... population growth is the fastest.”

Gender inequity also affects the global economy for women smallholders – families who operate subsistence-level agriculture on less than 5 acres of land – which amounts to 475 million families, among the poorest and most malnourished people in the world.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, if women smallholders gained equal access to resources, their farm yields would rise 20 percent to 30 percent. Agricultural output could increase by as much as 4 percent, reducing the population of undernourished people in the world by as much as 15 percent – 150 million people would no longer go hungry. What’s more, all other things being equal, women with equal resources as men exceed their output by 7 percent to 23 percent. Efficient agriculture and better land use reduces deforestation, while regenerative practices in lieu of chemical ones produce soil that becomes a carbon storehouse, reversing global warming.

I recently visited New York City and went in search of the “Fearless Girl.” I walked right by her at first – an easy mistake because she is no longer basking in the sun of an open courtyard. According to the tourist guide next to me, the relocation occurred because the four-foot girl was “getting more attention than the bull.” She’s on her own now, but hopefully, that means she is her own story, a story all men and women of the world need to hear – helping educate girls and women helps the entire population of the world as well as the planet.

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