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Goal Four: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Entry Points

In South Africa, everything is divided, from the educational system to access to social services. This presents a monumental challenge, as it will require cooperation and collaboration between all levels of government and civil society within and without the country. One of the most glaring examples is the school system in South Africa, where there are essentially three tiers of education: private schools (typically the most funded), public schools that levy fees and finally 'free' public schools (most often found in the townships). This divide is something that hampers any meaningful development of equitable education, as within the townships, the only way that children are able to attend school at all is if there are no fees and that the school is within walking distance. Free public schools, at least in Pietermaritzburg are chronically underfunded, and when compared to the schools that levy fees on students, the difference is as stark as noon and midnight.

Because of the difference between the tiers, the best and brightest teachers tend to be attracted to the private schools first, then the fee schools, and then finally, the free schools. Teachers in public schools are chronically overworked, with Slangspruit Primary having an average ratio of 40-45 students per teacher, while a neighbouring school has closer to a 60-1 ratio.

Recommendations

Change occurs with each generation, and within each generation, change occurs in thousands of tiny tasks and accomplishments, which add up to a systemic change. As such, ensuring that education is equitable would mean ensuring that township schools, not just public schools with fees within the cities receive adequate amounts of funding and support. By supporting these schools outside of the city and promoting them to the community, this will slowly allow for students coming from the most impoverished backgrounds to gradually get their bearing on life. This is where NPO's and NGO's can come into action, whether it be pressuring the government to increase funding (for schools) and accountability or working with schools to provide sustainable quality education to students.

One such way to help students is to provide scholarship programs, which reward academic excellence and remove the stress of paying for school (or the other costs, such as uniforms, books, etc.). However, while scholarships are an excellent means of ensuring that a few students are able to attend higher education/quality schools, they do not address the root issue of the stark divide between impoverished schools and the more posh schools. By investing in these schools; either through financial support, additional training for teachers or fostering partnerships between the school and different branches of government or civil society, the schools will be able to create a network of support not only for themselves, but

also for their students and staff. For example, at Slangspruit Primary School, the school is currently partnering with the Municipal Library of Pietermaritzburg to establish a satellite office on the school grounds for the community. In doing so, Ukulapha and the school are simultaneously empowering the community and securing support for the school, both in terms of funds and networks. Furthermore, these types of partnerships are ideal, because they are far more sustainable than those wrought by foreign NGO's, whose programmes are dependent on their funding, which can vary greatly from year to year or government to government. Finally, this partnership is beneficial for all involved, whereby the community is able to have greater access to the library services (books, computer lessons, etc.), the library is able to have a secure location for its office, and the school is able to further its connections with the local community. Small acts like these are what allow communities to provide quality education to students and their families.

Between Goals Four and Five

Education is empowerment, and this means that in order for girls and women to be empowered in South Africa, they need a voice, and they need an education, and in this way, are able to fight their own battles without needing to rely on outside support/advocates. Furthermore, this will also allow for a change in the home life of many; as it stands, South Africa is a very patriarchal society, for all ethnic groups within the state. In my few months here, I have had the privilege of meeting many women who have been empowered by their education and who were able to climb out of the cycle of poverty. But for every woman that I met, there are countless other women and girls who have not and will not have those same chances to escape the cycle of poverty. This is why equitable and quality education is so important, because without these opportunities, the cycle of poverty is impossible to escape for the vast majority of women. One such example of this education is sexual education, as we have been told (and have seen) the results of poor sexual education on both genders. However, in a patriarchal society like South Africa, it is the mother who has to bear the challenges of raising a child and struggling to support a family, whereas the male (as is too often the case) can simply leave. Therefore the connection between education and the empowerment of women and girls cannot be overstated, especially in a country as divided as South Africa, and it is through education that these divides can slowly be mended.