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WEBINAR

GIRLS' EDUCATION RESEARCH AND POLICY SYMPOSIUM: PROTECTING
RIGHTS AND FUTURES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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PARTICIPANTS:

BRAHIMA SANGAFOWA COULIBALY
Global Economy and Development
The Brookings Institution

EDEN TADESSE
Future Rising Fellow
Girl Rising

JENNIFER L. O'DONOGHUE, Moderator
Fellow, Center for Universal Education
The Brookings Institution

NANGYALAI ATTAL
2021 Echidna Global Scholar, The Brookings Institution
Senior Policy Specialist, Technical and Vocational Education and Training
Authority of Afghanistan Founder Hode

ARUNDHUTI GUPTA
2021 Echidna Global Scholar, The Brookings Institution
Founder and CEO, Mentor Together

EDEM DOROTHY OSSAI
2021 Echidna Global Scholar, The Brookings Institution
Founder and Executive Director, MAYEIN

TRAN THI NGOC TRAN
2021 Echidna Global Scholar, The Brookings Institution
Co-Founder and Managing Director, ProPath Education Group
Vietnam Country Manager, Girl Rising

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. COULIBALY: Good morning. Good afternoon, everyone. I am Brahma Coulibaly, the vice president of the Global Economy and Development program at Brookings. It is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the girls' education research and policy symposium hosted by our Center for Universal Education.

This symposium could not have been more timely. The world today a monopoly of challenges, the global pandemic, economic turmoil, climate change, armed conflict, and maritime disasters among others. Unlike any other time in recent history, this social environmental and health crisis exacerbate existing gender inequalities and obstruct the pathways for girls and young women seeking quality education, economic empowerment, and improved life outcomes.

With crisis mode ever more common, the crucial question becomes what can we do to help protect and promote the right of girls and young women especially in times of crisis? Girls' education cannot be a privilege that is guaranteed to some under ideal conditions. It is the right that must be guaranteed to all, and we must turn and maintain our focus on girls and young women living in the most challenging circumstances.

In this conversation that kicks off the three-day symposium, you will hear from the 2021 cohorts of the Echidna Global Scholars. The Echidna Global Scholars visiting fellowship programs bring emerging leaders in girls' education from the global staff. Only six months fellowship at Brookings in which time they're pursuing individual research for girls on improving learning opportunities and life outcomes for girls and young women in low- and middle-income countries.

This cohort of scholars bring a diversity of backgrounds and a richness of perspectives to their studies consisting of technology and vocational agricultural education in Afghanistan, women entrepreneurship capacity background in Vietnam, the digital mentoring in support of female labor force participation in India and gender responsive education in

emergencies in Nigeria.

They will share lessons from their research over the past six months to help us understand what is it that we can do as researchers, practitioners of policymakers to ensure that every girl and every young woman can fully exercise her rights in and through education. We could not have been more proud to host this impressive diverse group of scholars.

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce the moderator for this conversation, a Brookings' fellow, Jennifer O'Donoghue who has done an outstanding job coordinating our global scholars program and leading our work in girls' education more broadly. Jennifer, the floor is yours.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much, Brahima. Thank you to all of you for joining us today for what we hope will be an engaging and thought-provoking conversation with the Echidna Global Scholars 2021. Throughout this discussion, we invite you to share your questions and comments on Twitter using the hashtag #EGSP21 or to email them to events@brookings.edu.

Before we invite the scholars on screen, it is my great pleasure to introduce Eden Tadesse, who in line with the theme of this year's symposium will help set the stage for understanding some of the challenges girls and young women face today. Eden is an award-winning journalist, social entrepreneur, digital innovator, and human rights activist from Ethiopia. She is the founder and CEO of Invicta, an award-winning social impact platform that connects refugees and internally displaced youth with courses, skills training, and job opportunities online.

As a proud nonconformist and global citizen, she strives to empower young people to cultivate their skills, develop habits for success and unlock their inner potential. Eden is passionate about leveraging innovation, diversity, and leadership to create sustainable solutions. Her professional experience spans across social innovation, education, sustainable economic development, women's empowerment, and leadership. Eden is an African union youth innovator, a global youth ambassador for their world and a future rising fellow at Girl

Rising. Welcome Eden. And over to you.

MS. TADESSE: Thank you so much, Jennifer. Good morning, everyone. First and foremost, I'd like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Brookings Institution for inviting me to part of this very exciting event.

So my educational journey began before I even stepped foot in a school. I was raised in the slums with 11 siblings, eight of whom are female. So I was introduced to inequality, gender discrimination and poverty before I even learned the alphabet. My father worked as a finance manager at a private school in Ethiopia and thus my siblings and I were very fortunate to attend this prestigious schools on a full tuition waiver.

So I spent 15 years at the school from kindergarten all the way to grade 13. And my experiences at the school were nothing short of phenomenal. I learned a great deal about myself and where I fit into the world. I was part of many associations where I established myself as a leader, as an empowered female leader. And in tenth grade my teacher actually told me, Eden, I want to hear from you 15 years from now from the United Nations Headquarters in New York as you are shaking things up. And today, I am proud to say that I am working for the United Nations to build strong and sustainable communities across Ethiopia.

Yeah, back then, you know, coming home to a house in the slums was a very bewildering experience for me. I was exposed at a very early age to life on both sides of the economic spectrum. And that to this day remains my biggest educational lesson.

I was blessed by incredibly caring and supportive teachers who inspired me to give back in any capacity that I could. So I volunteered with many educational institutions who supported marginalized young girls, refugees, and orphans with early childhood education.

And this experience opened my eyes to all the shortcomings of our education system. Whether it was a poorly designed curriculum, overcrowded classrooms, or lack of mentorship. These young girls were not being afforded the right to quality education. This is very frustrating for me, but as an activist, I had to speak out.

I was invited to speak at the largest political conference in Africa where I got to

share my ideas on developing a comprehensive educational policy to tackle inequality and unemployment in Ethiopia. My experience then has enabled me to meet many inspiring changemakers from grassroots organizations to U.N. agencies who are changing the dynamic and reshaping the conversation around girls' education and empowerment to education.

This gives me hope for a brighter tomorrow. One where collective action is taken towards a common vision. But I am also reminded of the dire challenges whether political or environmental, but continue to exist and hinder efforts, global efforts, in moving the education agenda forward.

In 2017, as a freshman in college, I was distraught to read on the news that Africa was experiencing the worse refugee crisis in history. Two million South Sudan refugees fled to neighboring countries, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia, my home country. This news hit my conscious like a lightning bolt. I had to do something. So I took a gap here to travel back home to Ethiopia and work in a refugee settlement with the goal to support displaced youth with education. A friend and I set up a learning resource center.

We impacted many lives, and I knew then and there what my calling was, which is to help refugees find meaningful education and empowerment through education. In 2019, with the help of a Norwegian impact accelerator, I launched Invicta, an award-winning startup that supports more than 27,000 refugees and internally displaced people with education skills, development, and sustainable employment.

It all started with a firm vision, an urge, a plea. That is no one should be denied their right to access quality education. This year, I'm proud to say as a Future Rising Fellow, I'm working on a documentary to highlight how girls and women are disproportionately affected by the desert locust plague, which is a climate crisis in Southern Ethiopia.

My hope today is that we all take away something important and meaningful from this discussion. And thank you so much for tuning in and I look forward to a productive dialogue.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much, Eden, for providing us with a very

clear picture of just what is at stake and how critical it is to promote and protect girls' rights at all times and especially in the midst of the types of crises and challenges you described. I love your expression of collective action towards the common vision and hopefully that is what we can continue to work on through this conversation today.

We now turn to our panel conversation with the 2021 Echidna Global Scholars. Joining us today is Nangyalai Attal, Founder of the nonprofit organization, Hode, meaning a resilient decision. Dedicated to promoting girls' education in rural areas of Afghanistan. Nangyalai served as Senior Policy Specialist at the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority of Afghanistan from 2019 to 2021.

Nangyalai received international recognition in 2014 when the U.N. envoy for global education awarded him the U.N. Youth Courage Award. He served as lecturer at the Dunya University of Afghanistan and at the National Institute of Management and Administration. As a Fulbright Fellow, he completed a master's degree in Human Resources from Golden Gate University in San Francisco and he is current pursuing his Ph.D. in international education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Our second 2021 Echidna Global Scholar, Arundhuti Gupta is the Founder and CEO of Mentor Together, a nonprofit organization in India that provides mentoring relationships and networks to young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. Mentor Together runs programs at schools and universities across India through partnerships with state government, NGOs, corporate partners and over 1,000 carefully screened and trained volunteer mentors.

Arundhuti Gupta is also a Brookings Fellow, a world economic foreign global shaper and an international youth foundation global laureate. She completed her masters in finance at the Manchester Business School as a Commonwealth Scholar and graduated as the top rank holder from the Bangalore University's Bachelor of Commerce program in 2007.

Also, with us today is Edem Ossai, a lawyer with over 15 years working in child rights advocacy and education. As the Founder and current Director of MAYEIN, a nonprofit

based in Nigeria working to advance young people's development through equity and education, entrepreneurship development and practical civic engagement-initiated Girls without Borders, a school club-based program that teaches adolescent girls about their rights and how to exercise their own agency.

Edem holds a master's degree in international development and policy from the University of Chicago where she was selected as an inaugural Obama scholar by the Obama Foundation. In 2016, she was also named a Mandela Washington Fellow by the United States Department.

Our final 2021 Echidna Global Scholar is Tran Tran. Tran has dedicated over 20 years to working in the education sector. She is Co-Founder and current Managing Director of ProPath Education Group and the inaugural Vietnam Country Manager for Girl Rising. In 2020, she initiated the Future for Women program, the U.S. government funded training and mentoring program for female Vietnamese entrepreneurs to promote women's equality and empowerment.

She was selected for the Humphrey Fellowship by the U.S. Department of State, the Leadership Fellowship at Eastwest Center and the (inaudible) Fellowship by the Dutch government. Tran is current pursuing her doctoral degree at Andrew University.

Thank you all for being here today. And as always, I am honored to be in such illustrious company and especially even more after reading all of your very impressive biographies. And to our public, before we begin our conversation, I'd just like to remind you all that you can share your questions and comments on Twitter using the hashtag #EGSP21 or you can email them to events@brookings.edu.

Now, to start our conversation could each of you just briefly share the focus of your research and a bit more about how your own life experiences and challenges have shaped your interests in this topic. Edem, why don't we start with you?

MS. OSSAI: Thank you very much, Jen. I'm very excited to be part of this important conversation. My research is focused on education in emergencies and how they

affect girls. I am exploring this through the School on Air intervention launched by the (inaudible) state government in Nigeria during the school closures led by COVID-19 in 2020.

I became interested in education in emergencies as a result of a childhood experience involving the loss of my father at the age of 13. At that time, our family experienced difficulty financially and my mother had to take up multiple roles to be able to support our education. I was fortunate in that my mother valued education and had relevant labor market skills to be able to, you know, gains these particular jobs to accommodate our education.

When I recognized that not many girls are as fortunate as I was. Having a young neighbor who, you know, was a direct evidence of that unfortunate situation many girls face taught me early that the loss of social protective networks and the interaction of gender factors as well as economic factors renders girls' education vulnerable in moments like that.

And so, I am very interested in exploring how emergencies, myriad emergencies, whether it's the public health relief, one that we have recently witnessed in the COVID pandemic or other kinds of emergencies like natural disasters and the likes affect girls' schooling. I hope to be able to draw lessons from these experiences to enable governments properly safeguard girls' education at moments like that. Thank you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you so much, Edem. And Arundhuti, can you share with us a bit about your research?

MS. GUPTA: Sure. Thank you so much, Jen. So my work as an Echidna Scholar looks at the role of digital mentoring ecosystems in supporting young women in post-secondary tertiary education as they look at their work force readiness as well as their work for transition plan.

This is a really important issue in India because even people with have had a very low female labor force participation rate of about 22 percent, which had been also declining very rapidly. And this overall is a real puzzle in the country because if you look at our economic growth as well as the increasing participation of young women especially in post-secondary or tertiary education, the labor force participation rate just doesn't add up.

So what I look at in my research is the triple impact of a skills deficit, a network gap and restrict gender norms that uniquely come together to constrain a critical participation of young women and the role of digital mentoring encountering that.

Coming to your second question about how my interests grew in mentorship. Even today, I can remember we would leave the experience of being mentored as a young person very much like how even for how Eden accounted in her opening remarks. I was a business student in University of (inaudible) in finance when a mentor encouraged me to get involved in community service.

And that simple act of connecting and volunteering and connecting my skills and abilities to opportunities around me where I could be of greater service to people was the most empowering thing I experienced as a young person. And really there wasn't any looking back after that. So two years after graduating from university, I set up Mentor Together, a nonprofit organization to put forward that kind of mentorship that had been so catalytic in my life.

Focusing especially on young people from marginalized background and just to ensure that mentoring is not something left up to chance.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Arundhuti. Tran, I'll turn it over to you. The same question.

MS. TRAN: Thank you, Jen. My interest is about developing women's entrepreneurships through education and training. Actually, over 20 years ago while in college, I started my first business which was selling handmade greeting cards, but the business go just one year after that because I had to fully focus on my study as requested by my parents.

I was not one so long after the Vietnam War and with own challenges and uncertainty then, I know that my parents always expected me to have a university degree and secure a safe and respected job, typically for women like teachers or a nurse. In school, I was never prepared for self-employment, looking broader as Vietnam influenced my confusion with them.

From an early age, I was taught four virtues which requires Vietnamese women to have. First, good housekeeping skills and then appearance, speech and morality. So women are expected to play the role of caregiver in the family. And the cultural and social norms and lack of knowledge and confidence get me from turning my ideas into business for a long time until over 10 years ago.

And I had the chance to attend a training program in the state and were first exposed to the concept of women's leadership and entrepreneurship. And that is when I open my eyes and realized how important education and training can promote women's entrepreneurship. And it has aroused my current interests.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you so much, Tran. And, Nangyalai, we'll close this introductory sector with you. If you could share with us about your research topic and how you arrived at that?

MR. ATTAL: Sure. Thank you, Jen. And for my research focus is on policy pathways that could increase girls' participation in formal agricultural education in Afghanistan.

Agricultural is considered as a (inaudible) sector. Seventy percent of rural women are either directly or indirectly involved in agriculture but when it comes to formal agriculture education, you know, girls' participation is just about 12 percent. You know, that is my research focus.

And how I got into girls' education? I grew up in the countryside on a farmland. My parents didn't have any formal education, but my mom was having religious education from her father. So she would teach basic religious subjects to the girls from the immediate neighborhood in our village. And at that point, I was going to school. When I would come back then I would teach the girls how to read and write.

That was the beginning for me and a natural bond that started. And for the past -- since then I have been involved in promoting education. And for the past two or three years, I was working as a senior policy specialist with the (inaudible) authority largely focusing on agricultural education.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Nangyalai. And thank you to all. I know for everyone watching this is a very quick introduction to the scholars' work. I just want to let you all know that each of the scholars will be hosting a deep dive virtual workshop into their specific topics. So please check our event page where you can find more information and register for these longer conversations around their work.

Now, I'd like to have more of a conversation. So feel free to jump in when you want to. But really thinking how different aspects of all of your research projects were connecting directly with girls and young women. Whether this was through interviews, focus group discussions, surveys or even skill assessments.

What have you learned about what matters most to these girls and young women as they navigate crisis situations? And how can this inform what's most important for us to focus on when emergencies strike? Arundhuti, let's just kick it off with you and then everyone else can jump in.

MS. GUPTA: Sure. Thank you. So the digital mentoring program that I study in my policy mentor program. They serviced over 7,000 young people across 10 states of India in the 12 months that immediately followed the COVID-19 pandemic influence on college campuses across the country.

And despite not targeting girls specifically, what we found was surprised that 61 percent of all the enrollment in the program in that 12-month period were of young women in tertiary education, and young women access 71 percent of all the mentorships we facilitated in that 12-month period. So I would say that we saw actually an incredible demand for digital immediate support services especially to formal education while it was happening virtually, but demand for other services.

And I was struck, I think, in the policy brief and the research process by how clearly the articulation was of the young women I spoke with. They were so clear about why they were in tertiary education. It was their pathway to becoming economically empowered. They so clearly understood the challenges they were up against. They especially identified the

lack of work readiness skills and the very small network they were part of.

So they were very eager and aspirational to get these support services that could help them make the most of their period of tertiary education even during the midst of the global pandemic.

MS. OSSAI: I mean jumping in on Arundhuti's contribution. I'd say I experienced something very similar in my drafting sessions through several focus groups with adolescent girls in upper secondary level in Edo state, Nigeria across both rural and open areas of the state.

Girls expressed a keen fervor for learning which did not disappear or diminish in any way during the crisis. Indeed, girls continued to demonstrate a hunger to access educational opportunities in moments of crisis. When asked, for instance, in those qualitative interactive sessions, what influenced their return back to school after the protracted school closures? Girls had blank stares looking at me and said the alternative was unthinkable.

So girls have clearly identified schooling as a pathway to the fulfillment of their dreams and aspirations in the future. Unfortunately, we also found in those sessions that families who represent gatekeepers as well as support, you know, systems and the lives of girls often stand as form of an impediment to girls' opportunities for learning in moments like that.

There were several issues raised such as unilateral control of their time. And also, girls were unable to access relevant tools required for accessing the, you know, broadcast-based forms of learning as a result of parental distrust of these tools. So, you know, that's why these huge interest in learning, girls continue to face barriers which often, you know, could be represented as families.

MS. TRAN: Off of my study, I was impressed by the strong learning motivation and commitment of the young women who are aspiring to become entrepreneurs. They were well aware that entrepreneurship is a long-term learning process. And they expected to maximize the benefits of the learning opportunity they had.

For example, on the time (inaudible) really is considered major barriers to

women's learning. To women in my study express concern about the length of the program, but they were more concerned about whether the program would give them enough time for interaction and practice.

Unfortunately, the program they had enrolled before were generally intensive lasting one to six days normally. So they did not have time to acquire the knowledge and skills of how to view network they need and learn from others.

MR. ATTAL: Like for other scholars, what I would say that the Afghanistan girls are having resolute aspiration despite conflict in so many challenges.

We service over 300 young girls from agriculture schools and institutes. And they want to become agriculture engineers. They want to become veterinarian doctors and faculty. We found that 90 percent of girls that we serviced, they want to pursue a degree in applied agriculture. They were highly aspirational, but unfortunately that degree does not exist within the agriculture achievement system currently. And their pathways, unfortunately, to higher education are very limited due to policy hurdles.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Again, I'm just going to jump in here quickly. Edem, you mentioned family as both a gatekeeper and a support. Could you share with us a little bit more about what you found in that sense?

MS. OSSAI: Yes, Jen. Families are very critical. Girls are enclosed within, you know, gatekeeping and support structures as we know. And this plays out even more strongly in times of crisis when typically schooling is disrupted and as we saw in the COVID pandemic, young children have to learn from home.

And so, the, you know, competing activities in the lives of young girls as laid for them by their families will pretty much define whether they are able to access learning opportunities or not. If families do not place educational and learning opportunities at the top of the priority of hierarchy in these activities, then girls are unfortunately be barred from participating.

What we found was families were critical with respect to access. You know,

girls like I said, lack significant control of their time. Whether it was in the form of increased house chores or just having to support family income by activities in farms especially for girls in rural parts of Edo state. Or also, just, you know, being sent to learn a skill or vocation particularly dressmaking and hairdressing. Girls were unable to carve out time to actually participate in these telecasts, you know, learning programs.

Another critical thing is families beyond just creating opportunities for access are also very critical for the quality that girls are able to derive out of these programs. Girls need support. They want to ask questions. They need their parents to be on hand to be able to guide them in understanding the content or all the siblings for that matter.

And so, families are very critical for both support in terms of access to the programs and the quality derived. And girls in particular said that if the government wants us to learn from home, they have to tell our parents. Otherwise, as they said, our parents will continue disturbing us. So this informs, you know, education planners about the very critical role that families play in moments of crisis.

MS. TRAN: Let me add to Edem's comments about the role of the families especially for women. In my study, to women entrepreneurs play the role of parents. And that's why the families play a role in their entrepreneurial experience as a source of obligations and duty.

Due to COVID lockdown and actually even before COVID because of the gender role in the family as I shared at the beginning. So women did more housework and childcare than men. And they share with me that because of these unpaid domestic responsibilities, they have challenges being a seconding their entrepreneurial ideas into a business plan.

So they wish to see more family friendly policies from the government in the future.

MR. ATTAL: Yeah, building on what Tran mentioned and Edem about family. In our survey, we found that there is a persistent perception, negative perception, of agriculture

as second-class education. And that perception is pushing away girls from pursuing agriculture education.

And 37 percent of our respondents said that they needed some type of parental permission to study agriculture. Or that other girls were pushed away because of economic could not come to agriculture education due to lack of parental permission. And 40 percent of agriculture with (inaudible) students mentioned that they were pushed away by their relatives to stop studying agriculture, so family is critical. And especially having a positive perception to support their education is instrumental.

MS. GUPTA: I think summing up this group of reflections on family shows that family norms around the role of women, societal norms enforced by family often define the role of women being primarily of that of a caregiver or a caretaker is one of the main reasons why female labor force participation in India drops off in that period when those responsibilities increase and disheartenedly stays that low. And women don't tend to reenter the work force at a later time period either.

So what I found in the study in the policy brief and period of research was that there was one positive norm and one norm that looked slightly concerning. The positive norm was that in India today, the tertiary education as poor secondary education of young women is actually encouraged very positively. Today, 19 million young men and women equally participate in tertiary education in India.

And I found that in the study where the young women have enjoyed a lot of freedom of decision making in terms of the course they could study, the college and overwhelmingly tertiary education was supported and championed by their parents. But then look to the profile period ahead in their lifetimes. Young women were actively planning for their aspirations as empowered young women, but their families were imminently planning for their marriage.

Heartbreakingly, one of the (inaudible) as a young girl who was just 19, 20 told me as she looked at her life ahead. She said, I have so little time. My family has set schedule

in which everything has to happen.

I study, I get married then I do a job then all these other things follow. So I have so little time to pursue all of these ambitions of mine. So I think that was the interesting contrast when norms have changed to make tertiary education of young women in India something championed and supported, but not what follows from there.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Arundhuti. And I feel like we can continue to have a conversation just about that one topic.

But I want to return to something that, Tran, you mentioned in your introduction around, you know, how women and women entrepreneurs in particular in your study wanted to learn in a more sort of relational style of learning. And this was something that seemed to come out in all of your research.

Maybe, Tran, you could start by sharing with us a bit more about what this meant for the young women in your study?

MS. TRAN: Sure, Jen. What I found from my study is that relational learning for women entrepreneur is not the relations between trainers and learners. It is more about the real-world connections. And those connections come from, for example, mentorship because they say that with a mentor, they would be able to learn from real experiences and then open up new business network.

This is especially helpful because previous research and reports shows that limited network has been a major challenge for Vietnamese entrepreneur especially during COVID pandemic. And connection also come from panel talks, site visits and peer groups. They say that in panel talks, they love hearing success and failures stories from experienced entrepreneurs. They also like to see what entrepreneur handle the everyday work in their working lives from site visit and they feel like more motivated sharing their challenges and their business plan with other peers.

So the connection with those role models makes them become active learners who acquired knowledge and skills through observing, analyzing, and perfecting.

MR. ATTAL: Yeah, Tran referred to role models. One thing that we've found in our survey was the lack of female teachers and role models in the case of Afghanistan in agriculture education. Of all the permanent contracted teachers in agriculture just three percent were women.

And of all the short-term contracted teachers only eight percent were women. So lack of female teachers was substantial issues that actually girls wanted to have a female teacher. And in some cases, that could convince also their families as well. So female teachers was one of the key findings that we found that girl students were lacking.

MS. OSSAI: I mean building up on that. We also in our research with adolescent girls in upper secondary school discovered that, you know, gender plays a strong role in how we learn. And girls expressed that very keen, you know, desire for relational learning in the form of wanting to ask questions, wanting to seek clarification, wanting detailed explanations.

Unfortunately, through that negated form of learning using technology the lack of interactive features built into the telecast or broadcast forms of, you know, a lesson delivery became a limitation for girls. Girls expressed, for instance, that they became used to taking notes. And then taking these notes to their private lesson teachers to ask for explanation.

So it is critical from the voices of girls that, you know, formats in this nature as we enter into a world of where we will continue to lever technologies to deliver classroom learning beyond the classroom that interactive feature that built into these portals so that girls can engage. Girls can ask and seek detailed explanation and, you know, continue to derive contextual analogies to be able to connect the concepts that they are taught.

MS. GUPTA: I say like Edem shared the experience of girls sort of looking at formal learning and then what they need to do supplementary to that. Digital mentoring was definitely perceived as being very complementary and supplementary to the experience of formal learning and was actually championed in a way through higher -- by higher education in situations as something that teachers could encourage their students to participate in and

actively drive enrollment in mentorship.

Two things that I found in terms of this whole learning with mentors and learning through mentors is we did see large changes in decision making, emotional management. A whole host of work readiness skills that girls learn through their mentors.

And I think the mentor's ability to really take their life experiences and take these topics that can sometimes be mastered or even -- not even understood in a way. Like what do I do with communication? What is problem solving? And take those and make them very real for students while an education is felt to realize how this is the bridge to becoming, you know, active in the work force and is valued by employers.

And the second thing that I found from the digital mentoring, network creation is -- it wasn't just the one-to-one learning with the mentors like Tran said. Because the network gap is so stark. Most women are not surrounding young women in our program had new on average five to seven people in the career of their choice. But look at the network of mentors. In any of these mentors has such rich social capital networks. So we were able to create a very large and rich diverse network primarily because of digital technologies allowing us to do this at scale.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. One of the things that Tran mentioned and then I know from having read all of your wonderful policy briefs is the importance of that real world connection.

So many of you have talked about networks and that relational piece. And so, I think continuing on that theme, this idea of the real-world connection or the relevance that girls and young women see in their education that is, you know, how does it build pathways to economic empowerment? How does it build pathways to gender equality more broadly speaking?

Maybe, Nangyalai, you know, you've talked a lot, and in your work looked at this idea of the lack of pathways to work as a factor dissuading girls and their families from choosing agriculture education. Could you share with us a bit more about that?

MR. ATTAL: Yes, sure. As I earlier indicated that lack of female teachers is a critical challenge. So if girls want to become teacher which our survey found 87 percent want to become teachers. Especially agriculture, veterinarian institute graduate. But current policy will not allow them to become. They would not become eligible or shortlisted to become teachers.

And also, there were challenges both in the public sector and in the private sector, an absence of career pathways to these girls. For instance, at the Ministry or Agriculture, the entire female work force at the Ministry of Agriculture just seven percent.

So that indicates how a low number of opportunities are there. And we found that 50 percent of our respondents said, if employment and jobs were provided that their families would be more encouraging. Their relatives would be more encouraging. But unfortunately, all those pathways are not available resulting in a loss potential of a lot of young women and girls.

MS. OSSAI: I mean it's very interesting point that Nangyalai raises because two things. During a crisis, relevant takes on a broader meaning beyond just formal subjects.

As we know education in emergencies is not just interested in making sure that young people can safely access qualitative learning that's relevant to their needs. But that also those young people who face higher risks are able to gain psychosocial and physical support in those times.

Unfortunately, we found that School on Air was very focused on formal subjects and did not provide for the holistic, you know, needs of girls in that moment ranging from their psychosocial needs, their health needs and even just addressing disinformation trends within that period.

The second thing, you know, I found is that I mean as we know evidence shows that schools, traditional schools, are sites for enforcing existing societal biases. So we're curious to see how moving to broadcast-based forms of school, what did we -- what did School on Air present to girls in terms of the gender picture of the world? And it was evident

through the findings that girls, you know, were presented with content that reenforced existing societal and gender biases.

For instance, just in the form of male/female teacher distribution across the subjects. With male teachers dominating math, physics, economics, government and all these productivity and numerical based subjects as opposed to female teachers featuring most strongly in English and literature. Girls were presented with seven vocations and fields and disciplines as masculine and the others as female.

And we also saw that, you know, in some subjects seven vocations like terms like precedent, government were described using specific male pronounces. Thus, you know, painting a picture of a world where these positions and future leadership occupations are specifically masculine.

MS. TRAN: I found something similar to what Edem just shared about the focus of the program and the gender bias. Were that we were entrepreneurs in my study said finding leadership traits such as professionalism or softness or sensitivity was not a weakness for leaders.

This still feels like they needed to learn about traditionally viewed masculine traits such as assertiveness or risk tolerance or minimization to become more successful. So we can see that although they were progressive not to undervalue feminine traits, they were actually facing gender identity conflict between being a woman and being an entrepreneur or leader. So will definitely need a program that not only equipped them with technical knowledge and skills but also to transform their mindset and to increase their self-efficacy.

MS. GUPTA: I recall back to right at the start. I spoke about three things that young women will need to fit, to find a more equitable pathway to economic empowerment. Tackle the skill that addressing the network gap and changing those restrictive gender norms.

You know, through digital mentoring, we saw the first two can be done within the program itself. We can help young women with skills. We can grow their network and introduce them to these larger digital opportunities. But the question still remains of how do we

change the mind, the traditional mindsets of families and communities?

What I found is that we can create a very equalitarian network which was what girls experienced in mentorship. Their mentors actively championed all their dreams and aspirations. A mentor told me, it's not my mentor's dream. It's my dream. It's our dream. We all hold a responsibility to fulfill. But the question is that if that network doesn't actively -- it's not within the network of mentoring that we need to champion these girls. It's outside of the network of mentoring that we need to actively champion these norms and change the mindset of the traditional families and communities.

And that is what I see as a big takeaway from my research is the urgent need in India that we have to say that this is the right of every girl and every woman to work to have her rightful place in the economy and what role of secondary socialization network that champions these norms has in changing the traditional mindsets faster and quicker than it would take over many generations.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: All right. Thank you all so much. I continue and here I have spent the past six months with you on this research, but I continue thinking that I wish the conversation were longer on all of these topics. So I hope that people will be able to join you all in your workshops over the next few days so that they can dig deeper with you on all these issues.

I want to move us a bit away from findings to talk more specifically about recommendations. And, you know, we've had many questions coming in that have been focused on really, you know, how can we ensure? What can we do? What needs to be done? And specific questions related to some of the topics that you all have studied like adolescent girls in particular as in Edem's case with leveraging technology as in the case of (inaudible). With families who are losing their livelihoods I think in the case of all of you.

And also, in rural access in particular? So I'm sort of folding in many questions into one. From the audience into one question for all of you. But if you could just share with us what you see as some of the practical implications of your research that can help protect and

promote girls and young women's rights and future pathways in times of crisis. So what does your research say needs to be done as we move forward? And why don't we start with you, Arundhuti?

MS. GUPTA: Sure. So I would say very much that at this time as you're sort of doing planning economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Standing beside of very low female labor force participation is even more vital, even more critical.

And given the findings and the evidence that visible mentoring can help young women with skills, networks, and transformative gender norms. The issue at hand is really about how do we ensure, one, young women can continue to access and enroll in tertiary education? We can't take this for granted especially like you said, the economic impact of COVID on the livelihoods of everyone in the informal sector especially which is where most of their families worked in.

So I would say that in showing (inaudible) need financial support to marginalize girls in India. India has a strong framework of culturally social responsibility that can champion that financial support to ensure that girls can continue enrolling and staying in tertiary education. The second is then ensuring inclusive participation of young women in tertiary education. And I propose a digital ecosystem with (inaudible) partner of the state that can coordinate these activities actively champion mentoring through the higher educational institutions and that being really a model to ensure widespread access to mentoring.

And then the third thing is if young women are in mentorship, are in education can access mentorship how can we do this with quality and impact at scale. While mentoring is so intuitively powerful in implementing it, you have to be very careful about the kinds of mentors you choose. What training they receive? What mentors and mentees actually do in the mentorship? How do you support creation of social capital networks? Changing norms? All of those need careful planning, monitoring and impact measurement.

So I propose how that can be done through different players and actors in this ecosystem.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you so much, Arundhuti. Tran, why don't we move onto you?

MS. TRAN: Based on my findings, I think that the next generations of female entrepreneurs who can survive and thrive. My primary recommendation for the policymakers is to ensure that female entrepreneurs receive the support they really need. So the first act must be to identify what they need.

However, in the times of crisis like what we are now facing with only uncertainty to prepare better for the future. Those intervention should start from their needs but should not end there. But should guide them to envision the future expectations of the entrepreneurs.

And last but not least because capacity building our education cannot be a standalone effort. So policies and programs should support one another. So the next recommendation is to ensure both a vertical and horizontal approaches which means that women are placed at the center of the national effort then there is the close coordination among government agencies and private sector and civil society as well.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Tran. Nangyalai, what practical recommendations would you give?

MR. ATTAL: Thank you, Jennifer. Let me respond in two ways. Number one, the most important urgent need right now for providing funding and support to the needs of Afghan girls and their educational aspiration. And I think the international community needs to continue the funding that it provided for the past two and a half years.

We would not be able to implement some of the recommendations that we have without the support of the international community. I would like to propose that in order to increase girls' participation in agriculture education since their participation, it's really instrumental to food production and food security as our highest priority right now for the people of Afghanistan.

So number one, is that we need to introduce agriculture as first-class

education. And to do that we need early intervention as early as secondary education through curricula to normalize that process.

And number two is increasing the number of female teachers to (inaudible) authority should introduce a new teacher recruitment or separate teacher recruitment procedures that make it easier for female applicants and also make eligible agriculture with institute graduates to become teachers.

And in addition to that improving quality. Quality is really instrumental. Now, we need to (inaudible) authority with the support of international communities to establish new labs and forming learning forums where young women and girls can learn. But that cannot be done without the support of international community and their continuous funding. It's our shared responsibility and we shall not abandon our responsibility towards the young women and girls of Afghanistan.

MS. OSSAI: I mean just building off on everything that Tran and Arundhuti and Nangyalai have shared has for me demonstrated how foundational education is to all the aspirations of girls across the world. And this places a huge responsibility on education planners and government all over because what we are finding is that in responding to crises, crisis though appearing in different forms and shapes and sizes. The one thing we can all agree on is that crisis itself as a concept is a constant.

And so, having resilient systems in education to deal with crisis requires a long-term system of planning. We need to establish long-term systems. We need to have people with clear specific mandates to deal with education emergencies. We need to have actors. We need to have, you know, a training, funding all dedicated to what education in emergencies.

And so, these structures are pillars that exist and can easily address, you know, all the changing fluid situations that crisis presents. And as we create these permanent systems, it is critical to ensure that girls' voices are placed at the center of these systems. All too often societies are often used muting the voices of girls. We don't seek their opinion. We don't ask their opinions. We plan and think for girls.

Moving into a new world where girls' needs are properly built into, you know, education emergency systems require us to consult directly with girls to hear their insights and building these perspectives into the features and programs that we create for them.

And finally, it is critical that we engage the families of girls. Girls exist as I stated earlier within cycles of gatekeepers and support systems, families. And making sure that education in an emergency reaches the most vulnerable girls requires us to partner with families and communities to ensure that there are pathways and partners in reaching the girls themselves.

Communities in (inaudible) state, for instance, examples can be seen of how some communities set up temporary or pseudo-School on Air viewing locations. This show that this does exist, and governments can leverage with the skill of more community involvement to ensure that girls are reached even in times of crisis.

Finally, I'll just end by saying that if we are going to ensure a future, and if we envision societies in the future where girls' potential is fully harnessed and tapped, we have to adopt a different way of dealing with crisis and dealing with education in general. Girls have to be placed at the center. Girls must be consulted, and systems must be built that are permanent for dealing with crisis. Thank you.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you all so much. Those are, you know, really powerful recommendations that you're making to both policymakers and practitioners, and funders and others locally and internationally.

I think I'm going to try to sneak in one last question before I turn the floor back over to Eden. I think this is a really interesting question for us to go out on. It comes from Chris. And he or she has asked whether the barriers that you're seeing and whether, you know, with the experience of the research that you have we can feel like barriers are being reinforced at this time? Or do you feel like these crises that we're living today could potentially be a moment of disruption?

And if you could take, you know, 15, 20 seconds maybe to answer that

question? I know it's a much deeper question, but what do you think? Are we at a moment of disruption or reinforcing?

MS. OSSAI: I can set that off in 15 seconds by simply saying that COVID represents a teachable moment. And every teachable moment definitely is disrupting what we knew as the old pattern.

For instance, we are all envisioning for the future teaching beyond the classroom in very practical ways. This means that we enter into a world where we move along with technology to provide the services that we have done traditionally through in person, you know, relationships. But what do we need to do to make sure that we do not reinforce its old barriers as we move into these futures is to make sure that the most vulnerable people, the most vulnerable schooling populations, their needs are factored in and addressed within this new world that we envision?

And that's why gender responsive education in emergency is critical because it requires us to systematically understand the differentiated patterns and learning between both boys and girls, men, and women. To see that we address all the differentiated patterns and the root causes of these patterns in the new structures that we build. That's what will help us make sure that we do not reinforce the barriers that are old and preexisting.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you, Edem. Arundhuti?

MS. GUPTA: COVID has rapidly accelerated adoption of visitor services in India. In 2020, women's ownership of Smart phones grew faster than the rate it grew for men. So I would say that is the disruption that we definitely have to see.

We can't improve access to business usually in terms of technology and option and technology services. The crisis and the setback, I think is in the economic recovery and how that has impacted most women in the workplace. More women have left the workplace than men and that's the setback that I think is in the larger topic that I'm looking at given India's already low rate. It is something we have to actively ensure that they can follow.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you. Tran, I see that you have unmuted yourself.

MS. TRAN: Yeah. Thank you, Jen. I think that COVID or any crisis actually identifies the existing problems that we had. And this is a definite, a perfect time for all of us to closely working together to create a sharper middle-term and long-term positive impact. Not just responding to the crisis but building back better so we don't replicate the existing problem.

So, yes, definitely to crisis both impose the challenges but also open up the opportunities like we just hear from the scholar. For example, technology or the (inaudible) and the need to transform the (inaudible) for long-term impact.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Great. Thank you, Tran. Nangyalai, unfortunately, I think because of time, we're going to have to turn this back to Eden. You know, all of the scholars mentioned the importance of talking with girls' and young women and this is why we wanted to reach out to Eden as a young woman activist who could really help to lay out the challenge for us at the beginning of this conversation.

But not only that but also to highlight what for her are the main takeaways. So, Eden, I would like to invite you back to share with us what are you taking away from this conversation? And what do you hope that policymakers, practitioners, and other girls' education advocates will learn about what needs to be done to protect girls' rights in futures in times of crisis?

MS. TADESSE: Thank you so much, Jennifer. Thank you all so much for the insightful discussion. I understand or I believe that we can all play a key role in responding to the global challenges surrounding girls' education.

My key takeaway from this discussion is first of all how important it is to promote safe and inclusive schools. It is always important to construct and rehabilitate schools that ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment for girls but especially now during times of crisis. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, collective action, collective action, collective action. Engage different stakeholders in the discussion and implementation of the different programs. These are community leaders, religious leaders, teachers and, of course, family members.

Second of all removing barriers to schooling. So engaging parents again, school leaders and addressing the social and cultural norms and perception that prevent girls' education. Addressing the financial barriers through scholarship and grants is also one way tackling that.

And third of all addressing safety especially now during a global pandemic. One way of doing this again was mentioned during the discussion was by leveraging technology and innovation to enable perhaps remote learning. Third of all, supplementing education with mentorship as was mentioned. This is all so very personal for me because I've had several mentors and I still do who have played an instrumental role in my beliefs, my values and my success. And I thank them very much. And I would like to pass on the torch to other young girls. And I would encourage you all to do the same.

Mentorship increases employment prospects for young people which is extremely important. But in the long run it will create pathways for sustainable economic development. Personalized education for girls. So having focus group discussions with girls to better understand their needs and adapting that into a curriculum.

And then also investing in teachers, right? Because we have to provide professional development for teachers so that they are able to start better. And then providing teachers training on curriculum development and digital literacy so that the quality of the content that they teach is also improved. And then of course investing in grassroots organizations because from my experience working with them, they're very much active on the ground to working with different stakeholders.

And then last but not least developing life skills for girls, promoting girls' empowerments, skill development through different programs and social cohesion, trainings and so on. And then prioritizing promoting women in stem programs which I think is also very important. So protecting girls' education is much more than policies and donor funding and philanthropy programs. It's also about stakeholder engagement, community activism and supporting brilliant scholars such as Tran, Edem, Arundhuti and Nangyalai to continue their

groundbreaking research and impactful interventions. So thank you so much.

MS. O'DONOGHUE: Thank you again so much, Eden. It's been wonderful to have you join us today. Thank you to all of our Echidna Global Scholar. I say it all the time and it's a privilege to work with you and I mean it every time I say it. And thank you to all of you for joining us today.

Please continue this conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #EGSP21 and we hope to see you all again in our virtual workshop. The next one starts -- the first one starts in about an hour so hope to see you there. And take care. Stay safe and healthy everyone. Thank you.

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