

## Tanzania's Girls Struggle for Education

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By Alyssa Stein



Tanzania, a country whose population growth vastly exceeds its economic growth, is the [26th](#) poorest country in the world. While tourists revel over Mount Kilimanjaro's natural beauty, locals struggle to keep themselves afloat. Consequently, Tanzanian families are constantly seeking ways to raise their incomes and increase their standards of living.

According to Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), raising a Tanzanian student education level by even one year could [increase](#) household income by roughly 30 percent. However, education comes at a high price, and with a shortage of schools, sacrifices must be made. In a traditionally patriarchal society, these sacrifices often come at the expense of Tanzania's young women.

Enrollment rates for secondary school are significantly lower than enrollment rates in primary school. Between the shortage of secondary schools and the exorbitant cost of tuition and supplies, Tanzania's [net enrollment rate](#) for lower secondary education is around 31 percent, and has only once [peaked](#) at 35 percent. Though gender parity is nearly achieved at a primary level, the gap grows significantly at the secondary level of education.

Even if young women are able to attend primary and secondary schools, they face several hurdles their male counterparts do not. While all Tanzanian students must walk three to five miles to and from school, young women face an even greater risk walking these streets alone. As the treacherous walk takes place at both dawn and dusk, girls are vulnerable to sexual abuse en route. With a higher risk of abuse comes a higher risk of pregnancy, and in a society that [believes](#) “pregnant girls have expelled themselves” and have committed adultery, the only option left for these young women is to drop out and care for their young children.

There are numerous international organizations seeking to provide better educational opportunities for girls in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa School Assistance Project (ASAP) is one of many that focuses on Tanzania specifically and has already established five local schools, three primary and two secondary. In the past six years, ASAP has provided 1,500 children with the right to education. After noting the success of its first all-girls school, Idetemya Secondary School, ASAP has developed a new model to provide girls with a rich education that will benefit them and address the challenges they face throughout their education.

This model, called the Kupanda Project for Girls, aims to boost access and retention rates for girls in secondary schools. The project not only implements more dormitories for girls, but also significantly increases health, sanitation, and nutrition services. In addition, the Kupanda Project includes school-based initiatives such as teacher training, tutoring sessions, and a girls leadership program. Though the project is still in its developmental stages, it will be piloted in 2016 with a group of 144 girls.

According to ASAP, projects such as the Kupanda Project are [beneficial](#) because “girls who receive a secondary education will marry later, have higher family incomes, tolerate less domestic violence, and give their children better care, thereby reducing infant mortality rates.”

“In order for [the Kupanda Project] to work,” explains Susan Bachar, executive director of ASAP, “it must be simple to implement, conducive to serving girls in rural areas, culturally appropriate, inexpensive, and, above all else, it must be replicable.” If ASAP raises graduation rates for girls by 50 percent, then the next goal will be to establish the model throughout the rest of rural Tanzania, and potentially extend throughout other East African nations.

Tanzania is not the only sub-Saharan African country in need of education reform. While there have been many initiatives focused on education equality across Africa, there have been very few that bring all areas necessary for female education together. “Some focus

on increasing access to school, some on teacher training, [and] some on mentoring the most promising girls to develop leadership skills and business acumen,” explains Bachar. The Kupanda Project, however, serves to address all of those issues in one initiative. Bachar states it is “predicated on the idea that girls need more than one answer to the question: ‘What do you need to be successful in secondary school?’”

While education is the first step toward empowering youth, it is not the only sector that needs reformation to adequately provide a supportive environment for girls and women. In a traditionally gender-biased society, social and political infrastructure need to be reformed, allowing girls and women their opportunity in the spotlight. “When women hold positions of political power,” explains Bachar, “they are far more likely to influence policy in ways that support girls and women.”

The only way to achieve this in a long-standing patriarchal society is to encourage Tanzania’s men to embrace female empowerment. As Bachar states, “Fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers must be the target of ardent and relentless education campaigns in order to create real change for girls and women. Only then will programs aimed at women’s full participation be successful.”

Of course, changing a patriarchal mindset will take time. As a first line of action, education initiatives must target young girls and women. When women are educated, studies show self-confidence and leadership levels increase significantly. In the [words](#) of Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, “One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.” ASAP and other pro-social organizations like it aim to provide these resources to young women striving for better tomorrows.

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