

A Look at the Educational Progress in Costa Rica Using the Education Data

Obtained from the World Development Indicators Database

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1. Introduction

There has been much progress in the educational attainment of the people of Costa Rica. This is in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 4 as defined by the UN General Assembly in 2015, which states to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” (United Nations, e.d.) Further discussion of this goal, background and analysis follows.

Sustainable Development Goal 4 deals with all receiving proper education that will allow people to flourish. This is important for those who are in a poverty trap. Education can effectively lead to a well-paying job and allow them to escape from the trap they are in. Underneath the overarching goal of providing equal education there are smaller targets to allow attainment to be more easily achieved and measured. It is important to note that these goals are to be achieved by 2030 unless otherwise stated. The first target is to make sure that a quality education is free and provided to all those who need to complete both primary and secondary education. Second, make sure that everyone has access to quality early childhood education and development so that they are prepared to receive primary and secondary education. Third, is to ensure that all people have access to post-secondary training that is affordable and of good quality to allow them to work productively and for a living salary. The fourth target builds off of the third, which is to increase the number of people, specifically youth who have skills relevant to today’s society with technical and vocational skills. Fifth, eliminate gender discrepancy and ensure equal access to all levels of education and training for males and females inclusive of those with disabilities. Sixth, all youth and most adults achieve an acceptable level of literacy and numeracy. Seventh, all who attend school acquire the knowledge and skills needed to work their way out of poverty by means of

sustainable development in not just education, but lifestyle, human rights, gender equality, developing a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and cultural diversity. Eight, build or upgrade facilities that allow for safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning for all children. These are to be disability and gender sensitive. Ninth by 2020, expand the number of scholarships that are available to people in developing countries to allow for achievement in higher education. Finally, the tenth target is to increase the number of qualified teachers in developing countries. (United Nations, e.d.)

There must be an improvement in not only the acquisition of education, but the quality thereof, in order to alleviate poverty in developing and developed countries alike. There is a discrepancy not only in the educational attainment between primary school and secondary school but between genders as well. There has been a steady increase in the economic growth in Costa Rica, as well as an increase in demand for a workforce with higher education than those they are replacing. Thus, creating a higher demand for education in general. Although the government in Costa Rica has been working to create and enforce higher educational standards, there is still a need to decrease the poverty level overall.

The target of this paper is focused on closing the gap between the education of males and females. This target specifically states: “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (United Nations, e.d.). This is apparent in the educational attainment between males and females in Costa Rica. In this paper I will compare the discrepancy of educational attainment between genders, as well as possible reasons for it. Finally, I will discuss the progress that has been made toward completing this target and analyze if the current trajectory of Costa Rica is on track to reach this target.

2. Background

The 17 sustainable development goals were developed by the United Nations to help eradicate extreme poverty throughout the world. These were in response to the previous millennium development goals and were set as a way to continue working toward the end of extreme poverty. When it was discovered that the first goals would not be achieved by their due date, the United Nations revised and reformatted their goals in response to the progress that had been made. Each of the sustainable development goals is simple, with sub-goals called targets to increase the probability of their achievement by 2030.

These goals are as follows: eradicate extreme poverty, have no hunger, establish good health and well-being, ensure a quality education is available and received by all, establish a pattern of gender equality, access to clean water and sanitation for everyone, use affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, use industry, innovation, and infrastructure to repurpose old materials, reduce the inequality experienced by all, encourage sustainable energy cities and communities, be responsible when producing and consuming goods, take action to reduce climate change, carefully manage waste to take care of life below water, take care of life on land, provide the access to peace and justice for all through strong government institutions, finally revitalize the global partnerships to achieve these goals (United Nations, e.d.).

The goal for all to receive and complete a quality education is important throughout the world as it allows for the next generation to become the world's leaders and innovators as well as increases the knowledge available to all. As jobs throughout the world become increasingly competitive and require more knowledge, the need for a basic education also increases.

Educational attainment allows for an increased number of job opportunities which provides a larger income to those who are considered to be in poverty of any level.

It is interesting to note that Costa Rica has been a leader in the developing world when it comes to education. Beginning near the end of the nineteenth century, and continuing throughout the twentieth century, there has been an emphasis placed by the government on the attainment of education for all (Funkhouser, 1998, p. 295). As a result of this, there has been an increase in educational attainment within the country which also led to a significantly higher literacy rate among adults when compared to other Latin American countries (Funkhouser, 1998, p. 296). Multiple factors have influenced this gain in literacy. These include a decrease in correlation between the amount of siblings, the level of education attained in families, and access to education for those with disabilities and the economic returns of education for individuals.

In relation to the correlation between the amount of siblings and the amount of education attained by the children in a family, it was found that in the twentieth century, the more older siblings a child had, the more education they would achieve (Funkhouser, 1999, p. 45). In more recent years however, it has been discovered that there is not as great of an effect, if any, from the amount of siblings that one has and the level of schooling they attain. This could be attributed to the economical development in Costa Rica as well as a decline in the fertility rate of women (Li, Dow & Rosero-Bixby, 2014, p. 1449). This has led to a lower number of children in the country.

There has been an increase of access to education for those with disabilities within Costa Rica since 1985. As a result, there has also been increased awareness for inclusivity in the classroom for those who deserve this kind of education as well. A new standard has been set that teachers who are going to work with children who have disabilities need to be “selected carefully and have ... specialized training” (Stough, 2003, p. 8). There is a continued push to integrate and

incorporate those with disabilities into classrooms with children who do not. There has been progression in ideas that range from keeping children with learning disabilities for extra time after the normal school day, to placing them in a regular classroom for subjects in which they excel and in a smaller classroom for the subjects where they need individualized help. This has allowed for the rate of education among Costa Rican citizens to increase (Stough, 2003, p. 11).

3. Empirical Analysis

A. Data and Methodology

It is easy to see the completion rate of school through statistics that represent the percentage of those who completed schooling at specific milestones. When looking at the gender gap between male and female school completion rates you are able to identify who is receiving more education, and then begin to understand why this is the case. By analyzing the gender gap in educational attainment in Costa Rica it is possible to see the progress that has been made toward the goal of having equal access to, and the subsequent completion of at least secondary schooling. The information being used for this analysis is from the years 2007 to 2016, it is taken from the World Development Indicators database as reported from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

B. Empirical Results

As seen in the graphs in the appendix there are some interesting changes when it comes to completion of education between primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary schooling. In regards to primary education, males complete more than women. It is shown that there is a 0.43601 percent gap in the attainment of a primary education between males and females. The mean attainment for primary school is 81.24023 percent of adults over the age of 25. This has increased by 3.69544 percent during the years measured and indicated previously. The high percentage of completion is because everyone is required to complete at least a primary school education.

The completion rates of upper and lower secondary school have some slightly different results. In general, more women attain a secondary education than men do. This is most likely due to the fact that educational returns for women when considering any level of secondary school are higher than those for men. This can be seen as a general pattern for most countries (Patrinos, Psacharopoulos & Tansel, 2004, p. 6). The rate of educational return for women is “at least two percentage points higher” thus showing that schooling will influence the economic performance of a country, and of women in general (Patrinos et. al., 2004, p. 12). The completion rate for lower secondary school of women is 1.22707 percent greater than that of men, and for upper secondary school 1.95579 percent greater than the attainment of men.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The country of Costa Rica has been making progress to ensure that everyone has access to and receives a quality education. There have been policy changes and increased awareness in many areas where the educational system has previously fallen short in order to create a more inclusive and easily accessible education for all. The country has succeeded in many ways in this aspect, especially concerning those with disabilities. Many strides have been made to ensure that there is no discrimination, and that they truly are receiving the same education that other students are. In addition, this has alleviated some of the financial stress that having a family member with a disability can bring.

While much progress is being made, there are still some pitfalls that need to be addressed. As the data above shows, there is still an unfortunate discrepancy in the amount of education attained by males vs. females. Although it may be seen as necessary for males to go out and work at a younger age, ultimately it provides them with a disadvantage as they begin to have families of their own. This will perpetuate the cycle of poverty and undereducation, as well as make it difficult

for their own children to go to school. I do believe however, despite this fact, that Costa Rica is on track to achieve this goal by 2030. There has been a 4.83863 percent increase in the number of people who have completed an upper secondary education from 2007 to 2016, and this number will keep increasing. As the need for an upper level education increases, so will the percentage of people who attain it.

As stated before, some of the factors that influence the success of Costa Rica's education program are the involvement of the government in setting the standards, as well as widespread availability. Costa Rica is unique in this aspect. The government leaders understand that there is a need for a quality education in their country and are working to reform and change government mandates according to the changing of the world. They have placed an increased urgency toward the attainment of an education, and its importance. One of these policies that was briefly mentioned is the inclusivity of those with disabilities. There was a time when children either were cared for at home and never received any schooling, or they were sent to a school where there were only children with special needs. This has been changed to include many different programs throughout the country to allow children to receive a fair and balanced education. Overall, Costa Rica has made many great strides toward equalizing education and allowing all of its citizens to attain it.

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Appendix A

Tables and Visual Representation of Data

Tables

Table 1

Educational Attainment, at Least Completed Primary School - Costa Rica

Time	Cumulative	Male	Female
2007	77.50686	78.26855	76.81767
2008	79.0691	79.55879	78.63162
2009	79.7336	80.6181	78.9334
2010	79.26555	79.4169	79.12891
2011	79.91407	80.05759	79.7858
2012	80.23139	80.28529	80.18296
2014	82.0141	82.71715	81.39379
2015	81.3329	81.24835	81.40936
2016	81.24023	81.47034	81.03433

Figures

Graph 1

