

Unfortunately, education still has its facets of discrimination. A family in Bangalore once approached my office with a grievance, that their son was denied admission at a secondary school in Bangalore, on the basis that his parents were uneducated. When I had spoken to the principal of the school about the rejection, he dispassionately stated that, "the parents are uneducated, who will help the boy with his homework"? I was devastated at his response, knowing that this was a reputed school, founded on the basis of helping the poor. My response to him was, "Because his parents are uneducated, is it right that the result of your rejection of his candidature, meant that his generation would also go down, uneducated?" I fought tooth and nail for this child. Now, contrast this with the former principal of SIGA, Br. Julian Santi. This Salesian brother had left his home in Italy over sixty years ago, and dedicated his life to educate the underprivileged in India. The more underprivileged your family was and the more uneducated you were, the more love he demonstrated and educated multitudes of school dropouts, who now are spread across the world with their heads-held-high. What Br. Santi did, was not just educate these young boys with uneducated parents, he essentially gave them their dignity as a human being; infusing in their minds that though they were school dropouts, they have same dignity as a college graduate, that all are equal in the sight of God and everyone must be given an opportunity at life, and a good one. Here's what I enjoyed most about SIGA: I was a school dropout, and several of my classmates were college graduates, who had come to get a trade certificate at this institution. The playing field was now leveled, and all students had a shot at life - both school drops outs and graduates. Upon completion of the three years course, in utter amazement, some of the school dropouts got better jobs,



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Education
is the most powerful
weapon which you
can use to change the
world

— Nelson Mandela

international opportunities and better salaries, than some of those who had a college degree before joining SIGA.

I come from a family of poverty, which effected my education resulting in me dropping out of school (I was actually thrown out). But, soon I realized that if my family were to starve the poverty out of us; education would be my gateway. I embarked on distance education, then regular college, and completed my doctorate. I even studied at premier institutions as Harvard University and the University of Oxford. As a result of my education, I've authored nine publications, including two textbooks on Human Psychology. I've made several representations at world institutions, and the United Nations, something that no one could fathom, not even me. This is the power of education, in the hands of a poor, school dropout.

As reported by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, about 258 million children and youth are out of school, for the school year ending in 2018. The total includes 59 million children of primary school age, 62 million of lower secondary school age and 138 million of upper secondary age. This is nearly one fifth of the global population in that age group. And more than half of all children and adolescents worldwide are not meeting minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics.

The UN SDG on education stated that, in 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting more than 91 per cent of students worldwide. By April 2020, close to 1.6 billion children and



Br. Julian Santi

youth were out of school. And nearly 369 million children who rely on school meals needed to look to other sources for daily nutrition.

Corruption in the Indian education system is reprehensible, as parents are forced to bribe for admissions of their children, many times mortgaging their homes or selling their vehicles and jewellery to pay those bribes. Institutions are ever so corrupt in coercing the parents to pay a "donation", or a "building fund" as part of the admission prerequisite. Furthermore, according to a UNESCO report, India's education system is mired in corruption and a high rate of teacher absenteeism in the country was a key factor for it according to the new global study. The UNESCO's International Institute of Educational Planning study on corruption in education released recently says that 25% teacher absenteeism in India is among the highest in the world, second only after Uganda that has a higher rate. The global average of teacher absenteeism is about 20%.

Teacher absenteeism does not just affect quality of education; it is also a huge drain on resources resulting in the wastage of 22.5% of education funds in India the study said. Politics in teacher appointments and transfers is a major reason for teacher absenteeism according to a professor at National University for Education Planning and Administration.

Addressing the need to educate our children in India, the Ministry of Education, now headed by Shri Dharmendra Pradhan has mentioned this for its policy initiatives: "In line with the goal of nation building, India has been committed to providing free and compulsory education to all children. Towards this end, Indian Parliament has enacted a legislation making free and compulsory education a Right of every child in the age group 6-14 years which has come into force from 1st April, 2010. Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan has been launched recently as a step to universalize secondary education. Simultaneously, efforts are being made to create a robust and vast system of higher and technical education."

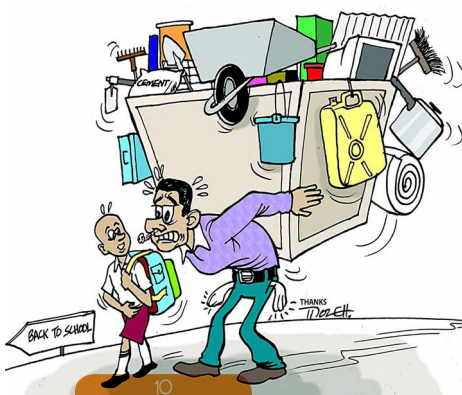
At UNADAP, the right to education and promoting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG-4) is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and has seven targets and three means of implementation.

The Holy Bible gives us a glimpse of the power of education, as with Moses; Acts 7:22 "And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds." In order for Moses to deliver Gods' people from the land of Egypt from slavery and bondage, God had prepared Moses well in advance through education. In stating that, I would appeal to young people to aspire in becoming civil servants to serve your country if you want the world to become a better place. Anyone could earn a living and take care of their own family, but it takes a special person, with a heart to serve, with a mind to remain steadfast in helping people who are downtrodden.

EDUCATION - A DEADLY WEAPON AGAINST POVERTY!



by
Dr. Dominic F Dixon
Executive Director, UNADAP



- TARGET | 4.1** Free primary and secondary education
- TARGET | 4.2** Equal access to quality pre-primary education
- TARGET | 4.3** Equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education
- TARGET | 4.4** Increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success
- TARGET | 4.5** Eliminate all discrimination in education
- TARGET | 4.6** Universal literacy and numeracy