

# What Women Want: An Analysis of Discourses Surrounding Education Access for Underserved Populations

Heather MacCleoud, Executive Director & Chair of the Board, Asherah Foundation  
(corresponding author)

[HeatherMC@asherahfoundation.org](mailto:HeatherMC@asherahfoundation.org)

(202) 390-2927

1400 East West Highway #1420  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

**Thematic Area:** Gender and Sustainable Development

## Introduction

This paper will examine the discourses of underserved women working to access higher education, in comparison to the discourses of formal efforts to provide education access via the United Nations' Sustainable Development Agenda. It will analyze applications to an international scholarship program alongside an annual report regarding Sustainable Development Goal #4 pertaining to education access. Examples of advocacy for women's education at the local, national and international levels will be included. These discourses will be examined in contrast and comparison to the actual voices of underserved women around the world - highlighting differences between what is being advocated for and what is actually needed (as perceived by these individuals). A critical analysis of discourse surrounding (and within) the applications, the annual report, and the scholarship program will provide insight into ways in which efforts to provide access to higher education may be improved.

## Definitions of Terms

As this research seeks to provide guidance to those involved with the GEM Report, the terminology used in this paper will follow the definitions used by this report where appropriate.

## Education Levels

Education levels in the GEM Report follow “the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which is the classification system designed to serve as an instrument for assembling, compiling and presenting comparable indicators and statistics of education both within countries and internationally” (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 493). Much of the discourse relied upon for this research is in reference to tertiary education (levels 5-8 in the GEM Report). It should be noted that the Asherah Foundation uses post-secondary to refer to levels 4-8. To avoid confusion, this paper will refer to ISCED levels 4-8 as “higher education” in general. When discussing specific aspects of the GEM Report or Asherah Foundation policies, tertiary education and post-secondary education will be used as appropriate. For further information distinguishing the various levels of post-secondary and tertiary education, please see Appendix A: Education Levels (ISCED levels 4-8). Throughout this paper, “higher” education will be used to refer to all post-secondary education (levels 4-8). This will be done, in large part, as one of the goals of this research is to inform the dialogue about access for women to tertiary education including post-secondary education opportunities (level 4). For further information distinguishing the various levels of post-secondary and tertiary education, please see [Appendix 1: Definition of Terms](#).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The UN separates access to tertiary education and the development of skills for work into two separate sub-goals:

- Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

## **Forcibly-displaced Individual**

The United Nations provides very distinct definitions for terms such as migrant, refugee and internally displaced individual with legal implications for each term. According to the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Refugees are persons fleeing armed conflict or persecution.” This is in contrast to migrants who “choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons” (UNHCR, 2016). “Forcibly displaced” is used to combine refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons For additional information please see [Appendix 1: Definition of Terms](#).

The GEM Report does not talk about adult women migrant or refugee access to higher education. When referring to Asherah Foundation scholarship applicants who have provided evidence of legal refugee status, the term “refugee” will be used. When referring to applicants who have simply indicated that they have moved in order to pursue their educational goals, the term “migrant” will be employed. In all other cases “forcibly displaced individual” will be used. Many of the women sought out educational opportunities away from their homes due to extreme poverty and/or intimate partner violence (often coinciding with other reasons for migration such as war) and thus can be considered to have been forced to migrate from their situation.

## **Background**

### **United Nations - Education for Development**

After several years of deliberation and consultation with millions of scholars, researchers, policymakers, and others, the UN adopted its Sustainable Development Agenda in 2015. This development agenda included 17 aspirational Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to track progress towards the goals. SDG #4 is to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 6) and includes ten primary targets. The GEM Report breaks Target 4.3 into three constituent parts: Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Tertiary Education, and Adult Education. Of relevance to this study, Target 4.3 states “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university” (p. 7). This target is to be measured by reporting on the “[p]articipation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex” (p. 221).

## **History**

The United Nations (UN) has a history of developing global agendas for education with a focus on economic development. The GEM Report situates itself in a long line of agendas and reports that resulted from discussions in the 1960s and 1970s about the need to include sustainability into development agendas. Education has been a central component of UN development agendas. UNESCO was created in 1945 with 20 member states. In 1948, the organization recommended free, universal and compulsory primary education be introduced into member states. In 1968, UNESCO “organized the first intergovernmental conference aimed at

- 
- Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 7; see also Chapters 12 and 13).

The GEM Report notes that although traditional formal education has the goal of providing students with appropriate skills for the workforce, it has not always done so (UNESCO, 2016a, pp. 244 -253). However, the relationship between the two is considered strong enough that the supplemental Gender Review mentions further education as a possible way to improve the employment outcomes of women (UNESCO, 2016b).

reconciling the environment and development, now known as “sustainable development” (Milestones). In 1990, UNESCO’s inaugural World Conference on Education for All was held in Thailand. UNESCO, and the rest of the UN, then re-affirmed commitment to this agenda via the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) with goals to be met by 2015. This *Education for All* agenda was considered complementary to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Following progress towards the MDGs, a new set of development goals - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - were ratified by UN members in September 2015 (UNESCO, 2016a).

The 2016 GEM Report *Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all* was released in Fall 2016 and is the latest in a series of annual Reports on education-for-development going back to 2002 (UNESCO, 2016a, p. vi). The 2016 Report is designed as “the first of a new 15-year series” (p. 12). Its publication was directly intended “to contribute to the initial building blocks of the sustainable development agenda” (p. 12) as the report highlights the interconnectedness of education with the other SDGs and seeks “to make a timely contribution to the debate on what should be monitored and how” (p. 14). Of particular interest to this proposed research is UNESCO’s admission that there are many indicators for which appropriate monitoring mechanisms have not yet been identified. Throughout, the GEM Report encourages discussion about how to better address gaps in monitoring of progress towards achieving the UN’s education targets.

### **Current Status**

The GEM Report is straightforward in expressing the need for improved access to higher education. For example, it states that “[i]ncreasing tertiary education in 10 recent EU member states would reduce numbers at risk of poverty by 3.7 million” (p. xv). Furthermore, “[b]y 2020, the world could have 40 million too few workers with tertiary degrees, relative to demand” (p. 51). In addition, the improved access of women (in particular) to education is stated as essential for achieving the other 16 goals throughout.

### **Asherah Foundation**

The Asherah Foundation is a United States 501(3)c nonprofit organization dedicated to providing “Second Chance Scholarships to Women around the World.” The organization was founded in March 2016 by three international education professionals; including this author. The idea for the organization came in response to reports received of women around the world finding themselves without resources to support their educational aspirations – often<sup>2</sup> due to their forced migration.<sup>3</sup>

The organization offered scholarships in both 2016 and 2017. Hundreds of inquiries from around the world testified to the urgent needs of women from a wide variety of situations; many including forced migration. Additional information about the applicants and the relationship of this organization to SDG #4 will be detailed below.

### **Reason for Study**

#### **Need for Diverse / Marginalized Voices**

There are several factors that will impact progress towards achieving these ambitious targets. The current increase in forced migration around the world has disrupted the lives of over 65

---

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that forced displacement is not an official requirement to apply for the Asherah Foundation scholarships.

<sup>3</sup> It also meets the need identified by the GEM Report for NGOs to assist with providing access to educational opportunities, etc.

million individuals. These forcibly displaced people migrate to other countries which struggle with over-burdened systems of education.

Another factor that is repeatedly called for by the United Nations, UNESCO, and critiques of the SDGs is data on underserved populations. The ways in which these populations interact with educational systems vary by age, gender, race, language, ethnicity, etc.. Adult women who have been forcibly displaced are remarkably absent from official discourses pertaining to the GEM Report.

### ***Forced Displacement Trends***

According to the UNHCR's 2016 Global Trends report, "65.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations" (UNHCR, 2017, p. 2). That is the "equivalent of 20 people being forced to flee their homes every minute of 2016."(ibid.).

### ***Need for Additional Voices***

Throughout the GEM Report, gaps in the overall development agenda are highlighted. The report frequently exhorts readers to engage in dialogue regarding ways to fill these gaps with additional research. For example, the report acknowledges that "[m]any important concepts in the 10 SDG 4 targets are not yet covered by any proposed indicator. Among those that are covered...details remain to be fixed in the indicators" (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 170). The report further notes that "many, if not most, major issues in education are context-specific and difficult to generalize or compare" (pp. 175-176) and that "both national and international reporting need to adjust to enable monitoring of the growing diversity in student attendance, programme delivery and private provision patterns, which have implications on inequality in access" (p. 231).

### ***Critiques of the UN SDG Process***

Although the process for developing the 2030 Sustainable Development framework was more open than that of the Millennium Development Agenda, many felt that the process was not open enough. In particular, Ahmed (2015) noted that women (as a marginalized group) were "deeply concerned by the general direction of the SDG process – whereas corporate interests from the rich, industrialized world have viewed the process favorably" (p. 191).

### ***Gender & Education - Essential for Development***

Of interest to this research is the supplementary Gender Review that was released in conjunction with the GEM Report. This supplement focused on the importance of achieving equity in educational attainment for both genders. It noted that "gender disparity is more prevalent in tertiary education than at lower levels" (UNESCO, 2016b, p. 25). This is problematic as data shows that successes in the majority of the 17 goals are tied to the ability of women to access education. Women's access to education "is important for female empowerment [that leads to] positive outcomes in health, nutrition, sanitation and energy, and between generations" (2016a, p. 13). The report notes that:

[i]n addition to educational opportunities, five other domains help frame the discussion of gender equality in education. These include gender norms, values and attitudes (many of which can be influenced through education); institutions outside the education system; laws and policies in education systems; resource distribution; and teaching and learning practices (Unterhalter, 2015)" (p. 264).

The GEM Report and supplement make it clear throughout that equity in access to education is essential for the achievement of the sustainable development agenda.

## **Forced displacement and education**

Many of the women that this study analyzes belong to another underserved group – forcibly displaced populations. The GEM Report notes that “**Forcibly displaced** populations are among the most neglected” (bold original, p. 254) and that “forced displacement tends to lead to gross violations of the right to education” (p. 271). The report asks readers to consider ways in which to collect information “that identifies individuals as members of other vulnerable groups such as people...who are forcibly displaced or speak a language other than the language of instruction?” (p. 256) as many of the scholarship applicants are.

## **Unique Population**

Many of the applicants to the Asherah Foundation’s scholarship program have left their country of origin and are thus not counted in official national reports (which comprise the majority of data used to develop the GEM Report due to the transitory nature of their situation [e.g. migrant, refugee]). These women also are not typically included in reports due to their age (many are beyond the “traditional” age of those included in generally-available statistics (tertiary enrollment: 19-23, tertiary graduation: 25-29; p. 230<sup>4</sup>). Many of the women already have an initial postsecondary credential and are in the process of re-tooling or upgrading their skills to better cope with the disruptions in their lives such as forced relocation or a change in marital and/or family status.

The initial problem that this study seeks to address is the lack of data in the GEM Report regarding the experiences of adult women (including forcibly-displaced individuals, economic migrants) attempting to access higher education opportunities. The purpose of this study is to develop a more complete understanding of the “on-the-ground” situation of underserved women struggling to access tertiary education to better inform future efforts to support them (by the UN, by the Asherah Foundation, etc). It is hoped that by analyzing scholarship applications that additional information may be provided to help UNESCO and other interested organizations (such as the Asherah Foundation) better address the needs of this underserved population.

## **Theory and Method**

### **Theory**

#### **Power Dynamics – Post Colonial Perspective**

Post-colonial theory is particularly apt as a theoretical framework for several reasons.

- 1) Critiques of the preceding development agenda, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) noted that they simply reproduced the power dynamics of the colonial order. Narratives of the North “helping” the “developing” (and thus inferior) “other” were embedded in the language of the agenda and in related materials. Stenlund (2016) notes that “postcolonial discourses can be found in the communication material development NGOs use to attract donations and volunteers” (p. 2).
- 2) The purpose of the SDGs is to guide international development around the world. They were created to help some of the most vulnerable peoples around the world. Unless done with extreme care, these goals have the potential to reproduce the unequal power dynamics that are a legacy of colonial rule by “more developed” nations and members of society (Gärde, p. 6).
- 3) The focus of postcolonial theory is on the ways in which power dynamics reproduce inequities. As the SDGs explicitly seek to mitigate this reproduction, it will be helpful to

---

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the GEM Report acknowledges that despite these common parameters there actually “is no consensus on which age group to use for reference”.

look more closely at how the discourses they (re)produce manage these power dynamics (see McEwan, 2—9; Brissett and Mitter, 2016).

An important part of the theoretical framework is that documents such as the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM Report) and the Asherah scholarship application essays are inherently persuasive. In addition to co-constructing social realities, these documents also have a more straightforward, persuasive component. In the case of the GEM Report, the report is trying to persuade those that engage with it of 1) its relevance and 2) the need for additional conversations around SDG #4. In the case of the Asherah Foundation scholarship application essays, the applicants are trying to persuade a review committee to provide scholarships to support their desired access to education. Saarinen (2008) writes “Persuasion is the property of texts to represent and construe competing views of the world as common sense and self-evident” (p. 344).

### **Method**

This research was performed from the perspective of critical discourse analysis as exemplified by Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001, 2013). This theoretical approach views the discourses of both the UN and of the applicants to the Asherah scholarship program as forms of social practice that develop and reinforce social constructs that should be critically viewed with an eye towards identifying possible alternative social constructs and practices.

Critical discourse analysis is well-aligned with the principles of voice and empowerment underpinning the Asherah Foundation. It is also well-suited to glean information about the unique and context-specific experiences of a population not currently captured in the GEM Report. Critical discourse analysis is useful for amplifying the voices of those who are not usually heard (and often contrasting it with those that seek to [either explicitly or implicitly] control them). In this case, this paper seeks to highlight the voices of the scholarship applicants and compare their personal, on-the-ground interpretation of the role of education in development with the narrative of the UN Sustainable Development Goal #4.

The primary method of analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis following the criteria set forth by Fairclough (2013, pp. 10-11):

- 1) It is not just analysis of discourse (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social practice.
- 2) It is not just general commentary on discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts.
- 3) It is not just descriptive, it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them.

The central research question of this proposed study is: What can be learned from applicants to the Asherah Foundation about the nature of their experiences accessing post-secondary education that could then inform the data collected and reported in UNESCO’s Global Education Monitoring Report? How do the discourses of these women compare to the discourses of the GEM Report?

### **Discourses of International Organizations**

International organizations (IOs) such as the United Nations can have enormous impact on the education that is available to people around the world. The influence of IOs takes many forms (Bassett & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009; Shahjahan, 2012; Shahjahan & Madden, 2014).

Funding from institutions such as the World Bank is an obvious example. The more ideological impacts come from the international engagement with various ideas (Spring, 2009; Shahjahan, 2012), the cross-national networks that are created (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), and the discourses that are created (King, Marginson, & Naidoo, 2011). Shahjahan and Madden (2014), referencing Robertson (2009) note that IOs have evoked a global discourse around what could be considered “a neoliberal social imaginary of [higher education (HE)], by which a convergent effect is produced in HE policy. IOs achieve this through the mobilization of “crisis talk” and opinion formation” (p. 707). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) and Teferra (2009) discuss ways that IOs have used discourse surrounding the idea of the knowledge economy to their advantage.

Shahjahan and Madden (2014) note that IOs have developed specific discourses around innovation in higher education through specific contributions to the working vocabulary and through “sharing best practices, highlighting innovative policy developments, establishing common definitions, and setting the frameworks through which state actors operate” (p. 708) (see also Antunes, 2006; King, 2009; Lebeau & Sall, 2011; and Wende, 2011). Saarinen’s (2008) research on the “persuasive presuppositions” of IO discourse around higher education is particularly instructive. She notes that “Presuppositions set the assumed common ground, which in turn sets the frame of interpretation of texts” (p. 341).

Shahjahan and Madden (2014) also point out that powerful actors (e.g. client states) often have a hand in shaping the discourses from behind the scenes (see for example, Moutsios, 2009 and Robertson, 2009). Common critiques of previous development agendas (such as the Millennium Development Goals) point out the disproportionate influence developed states had on the creation of the agendas – often at the expense of the “undeveloped” states they were seeking to aid; particularly in the realm of higher education (Naidoo, 2008; Hartmann, 2010; Collins & Rhoads, 2010; Salmi, Hopper, & Bassett, 2009).

Technical reports (such as the GEM Report) have often been “presented as influential forms of expertise that are not at the disposal of certain nation-states. State actors rely on IOs to provide them with the latest data on trends, current issues/dilemmas, and, more importantly, how to respond to [higher education] crises” (Shahjahan & Madden, 2014; see also Samoff & Carrol, 2003; Lebeau & Sall, 2011).

The GEM Report frequently mentions that previous development agendas were criticized as being created for the benefit of “developed” states at the expense of the undeveloped states that the agendas sought to aid. Much of the GEM Report’s encouragement of dialogue is in reference to this critique. Likewise, Shahjahan and Madden (2015) encourage researchers to consider Non-Western perspectives on IOs. Although not directly referencing the UN, the voices of the women applying for the Asherah Foundation scholarships will provide a “non-Western” perspective on the nature of international higher education.

### **CDA of Sustainable Development Agenda & Related Policies**

The following examples provided overarching frameworks for initial analysis.

Brissett and Mitter’s (2016) analysis and critique of SDG #4 used critical discourse analysis (CDA). They begin with the premise that two historically-dominant discourses are reflected in the SDGs: “educational transformation and utilitarianism”. The utilitarian approach is intimately related with the neoliberal approach to education which sees education as integral to a capitalist society with the main purpose of training future workers for gainful employment (p. 183-184). The “transformative” approach “values education for its liberatory and critical capacities that can drive fundamental social change” (p. 185); reducing inequities and securing social justice. These two discourses are highlighted within the GEM Report. The concept of “education as

enabling right” combines these two views of education (e.g. MacCleoud, in progress; UNESCO, 2015a, p. 8).

Brissett and Mitter’s goal in conducting a CDA was “to expose the values that will ultimately shape educational outcomes, but also to create space for discourses that are espoused but rendered subordinate” (p. 182). Their analysis concluded that SDG#4 “grapples with both utilitarian and transformative approaches to education, yet ultimately renders its transformative ideals subservient to its dominant utilitarian focus” (p. 201). They argue that the SDGs should expand “the definition of ‘quality’ education—one that questions what is taught and learned, and how – that education can truly have a lasting impact on other areas of development (ibid.).

Andersson and Hatakka’s (2017) analysis of the ways in which women were constructed in certain education policies regarding information and communication technologies (ICT) was also instructive. They found that these policies produced three categorizations: victim, mother, and untapped resource.

### **Data**

The Asherah Foundation scholarship application process has provided a wealth of data from women around the world about their view of education. The application process asks women to share how education will benefit them, their families and/or their communities. The scholarship process embraces neoliberal views of education as it explicitly requires enrollment at an accredited program leading towards a credential. However, the emphasis on benefits to the family and/or community embraces transformative discourses as well. One of the winning applicants in 2016 was explicit about her goal of using her education to advocate for social justice.

### **Participants**

The focus of this study is on the scholarship essays of applicants to the Asherah Foundation’s Second Chance Scholarship program in both 2016 and 2017.<sup>5</sup> A summary of these applicants may be found in [Appendix 3: Scholarship Applicants](#).

### **Background**

Applicants reported having had survived war, disease, domestic abuse, child marriage, human trafficking, civil unrest, poverty, and illness. To even be eligible for this scholarship, applicants had to:

- 1) Demonstrate a “need” for a “second chance”
- 2) Been accepted and enrolled into an accredited education program leading to a post-secondary credential;
- 3) Be fluent in English, French, Spanish, or Arabic;
- 4) Have access to the internet and a level of digital literacy to enable them to send the application to the organization.

### **Overview**

Applicants ranged from 18 – 52 with an average age of 29.<sup>6</sup> Applicants came from 47 countries and were going to school in 31 countries. The most common country applicants were from

---

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 2: Description of Scholarship Outreach

<sup>6</sup> In 2016, only applicants 24 and older were eligible to apply. The age restriction was removed for 2017.



Palestine<sup>7</sup> (N=13) and the United States of America (USA) (N=9). The most common country applicants were going to school in were:

- USA (N= 28)
- United Kingdom (UK) (N= 11)
- Palestine (N=9)
- Uganda (N=8)

Those who listed dependents on their application had an average of 2.4 dependents at the time of application.

### **Process of Initial Analysis**

This paper represents an inaugural foray into a critical discourse analysis of these scholarship essays. There were several points of focus in this initial analysis of the applications that the Asherah Foundation has received. Based on the examples of Brissett and Mitter (2016), utilitarian versus transformative approaches to education were considered. Andersson and Hatakka's work on discourses of victimization, motherhood, and untapped potential (human resources" was also considered.

This analysis consisted of looking at the frequency of certain phrases and word choices to determine patterns. The models of both Brissett and Miller, and Andersson and Hatakka were adopted. Analysis looked at the prevalence of describing education as either utilitarian or transformative. Analysis also considered whether applicants described their relationship to education using the previously-identified descriptors of victim, mother, and/or untapped resource. In order to look for a counter narrative, (and in order to look more closely at power dynamics) essays were also examined for word choices describing applicants as having agency, and/or as being victorious in their pursuit of education.

### **Findings**

The Asherah Foundation does not explicitly seek out how applicants identify with each of these categories, but they often appear in applications. The applications explicitly ask for data on dependents (the "mother" aspect). In the very name of the scholarship (second chance) assumes that something bad has happened – inferring that these women were victimized in some way. In fact, many of them have escaped war, abuse and other forms of trauma. In writing their essays, the applicants touch upon these traumas and relate their need for education to assisting their families. The ways in which they talk about these topics often provides the reader with a sense of how they were victimized (e.g. "They found a husband for me – a violent, abusive, older man. I ran away, but was brought back and beaten. By fourteen years old, I was already married and pregnant. I was treated like property."). However, many of the applicants also see themselves as untapped resources. They are seeking educational opportunities to help their families – either economically or psychologically. They want to become doctors, lawyers, scientists and artists to help their families, their communities, and other women. They discuss their own potential as resources. The agency they describe can be as powerful as the victimization.

In short, the applicants' discourses regarding education included both utilitarian and transformative views of education and the role it plays in their lives. The applicants also identified with the three categorizations of: victim, mother, and untapped resource. It is important to note that the "counter" discourse of agency – of being victorious and helping others was particularly strong throughout the essays.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Asherah Foundation does not have a position regarding recognition of the State of Palestine. These numbers reflect self-reporting by applicants.

## Next Steps

These essays present a wealth of information pertaining to the ways in which underserved populations discuss their access to higher education. It will be useful to examine the essays in greater detail, for example looking at the ways in which the discourses of education for utilitarian and/or transformation overlap and are correlated with discourses about victimhood, “mothering,” untapped potential (human resource), and agency / victory.

Additional analysis should also include the following:

- Additional Contexts
  - What are the relationships among
    - Events?
    - Subjects?
    - Processes?
    - Objects?
  - Who has responsibility
    - For what?
    - For / to whom?
    - Why?
  - What is presented as “fact”
- Comparisons
  - Region
  - Level of Education (certificate, baccalaureate, graduate)
  - Reason for “Second Chance”
    - Refugee / Civil Unrest / War
    - Economics
    - Other

## Conclusion

This study is significant as it will contribute to the development of better understanding of the struggles that women face when trying to access higher education. This better understanding will provide a basis for developing improved indicators and methods of measuring (and encouraging) progress towards equitable access to higher education for underserved women (and thus the achievement of the sustainable development agenda). Both the UN and the Asherah Foundation are dedicated to improving the ability of women to access higher education.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to the production of knowledge that the GEM Report was designed to encourage (p. 173, 176). It will contribute to the discussion around locally-appropriate responses (p. 9) and provide additional ways to promote equity in educational access. It is also hoped that this research will assist the Asherah Foundation in better tailoring its scholarship program to support women around the world. The GEM Report reminds us that “education is both a fundamental human right and an enabling right, i.e. it enables other human rights; that it is a public good and a shared social endeavor, which implies an inclusive process of public policy formulation and implementation; and that gender equality is inextricably linked to the right to education for all (UNESCO, 2015a)” (p. 8). It is hoped that this research will make a significant contribution to the goal of providing this enabling human right to underserved women around the world.

## REFERENCES

- Andersson, A., & Hatakka, M. (2017). Victim, Mother, or Untapped Resource? Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Women in ICT Policies. *Information Technologies & International Development*, 13, 15.
- Antunes, F. (2006). Globalization and Europeification of education policies: Routes, processes and metamorphoses. *European Education Research Journal*, 5(1), 38–55.
- Ball, S. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes. *Discourse* 13, no. 2: 10–17.
- Bassett, R., & Maldonado-Maldonado, A. (2009). *International organizations and higher education policy: Thinking globally, acting locally*. New York: Routledge.
- Brissett, N. and Mitter, R. (2017). For function or transformation? A critical discourse analysis of education under the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge University Press.
- Collins, C. (2011). *Higher education and global poverty: University partnerships and the World Bank in developing countries*. New York: Cambia Press.
- Collins, C. S., & Rhoads, R. A. (2010). The World Bank, support for universities, and asymmetrical power relations in international development. *Higher Education*, 59(2), 181–205.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and Power*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman.
- Gärde, R. (2016). Preserving the Colonial Other: A postcolonial discourse analysis of the Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals.
- Gee, J. P. (2014a). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2014b). *How to do discourse analysis: A toolkit*. Routledge.
- Hartmann, E. (2010). The United Nations educational, scientific and cultural organisation: Pawn or global player? *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 8(2), 307–318.
- King, R. (2009). *Governing universities globally: Organizations, regulation and ranking*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- King, R., Marginson, S., & Naidoo, R. (Eds.). (2011). *Handbook on globalization and higher education*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Kress, G. R. (2010). *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. Taylor & Francis.
- Lebeau, Y., & Sall, E. (2011). Global institutions, higher education and development. In R. King, S. Marginson, & R. Naidoo (Eds.), *Handbook on globalization and higher education* (pp. 129–147). Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- MacCleoud, H. (In progress). *Education as Enabling Right: The Need to Incorporate Data on Forcibly Displaced Women's Access to Education in the GEM Reports*.
- Martín, L. & Gabilondo, A. (2006). Michel Foucault. In *Handbook of Pragmatics Online*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Martin-Beltran, M. (2013). "I don't feel as embarrassed because we're all learning": Discursive positioning among adolescents becoming multilingual. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 62, 152-161.
- "Milestones" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, n.d.) <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/about-us/who-we-are/history/milestones/>
- Moutsios, S. (2009). International organisations and transnational education policy. *Compare*, 39(4), 469–481.
- Naidoo, R. (2008). Entrenching international inequality: Higher education as a global commodity and its impact on developing countries. In W. Shumar & J. Canaan (Eds.), *Structure and agency in the Neoliberal university* (pp. 84–100). New York: Routledge.
- Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2010). *Globalizing education policy*. New York: Routledge.
- Robertson, S. (2009). Market multilateralism, the World Bank, and the asymmetries of globalizing higher education: Toward a critical political economy analysis. In R. Bassett & A. Maldonado-Maldonado (Eds.), *International organizations and higher education policy: Thinking globally, acting locally?* (pp. 113–131). New York: Routledge.
- Rogers, R., & Wetzel, M. M. (2013). *Designing critical literacy education through critical discourse analysis: Pedagogical and research tools for teacher-researchers*. Routledge.
- Saarinen, T. (2007). *Quality on the move: Discursive construction of higher education policy from the perspective of quality*. University of Jyväskylä.
- Saarinen, T. (2008). Persuasive presuppositions in OECD and EU higher education policy documents. *Discourse Studies*, 10(3), 341-359.
- Salmi, J., Hopper, R., & Bassett, R. (2009). Transforming higher education in developing countries: The role of the World Bank. In R. Bassett & A. Maldonado-Maldonado (Eds.), *International organizations and higher education policy: Thinking globally, acting locally?* (pp. 99–112). New York: Routledge.
- Samoff, J., & Carrol, B. (2003). From manpower planning to the knowledge era: World Bank policies on higher education in Africa. *UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge*. UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, Division of Higher Education, UNESCO.

- Shahjahan, R. A. (2012). The roles of international organizations (IOs) in globalizing higher education policy. In J. Smart & M. Paulsen (Eds.), *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (Vol. 27, pp. 369–407). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Shahjahan, R. A., & Madden, M. (2015). Uncovering the images and meanings of international organizations (IOs) in higher education research. *Higher Education*, 69(5), 705-717.
- Spring, J. (2009). *Globalization of education: An introduction*. New York: Routledge
- Teferra, D. (2009). Higher education in Africa: The dynamics of international partnerships and interventions. In R. Bassett & A. Maldonado (Eds.), *International organizations and higher education policy: Thinking globally, acting locally?* (pp. 155–173). New York: Routledge.
- Titscher, S., Meyer, M., Wodak, R. & Vetter, E. (2000). *Methods of text and discourse analysis: In search of meaning*. London: Sage.
- “UNHCR viewpoint: ‘Refugee’ or ‘migrant’ – Which is right?” (News report, United Nations High Commission on Refugees, 11 July, 2016), <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2016a). *Global Education Monitoring Report: Education for people and planet*. Paris, France.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2016b). *Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Review: Creating sustainable futures for all*. Paris, France.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2015a). *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*. Paris, UNESCO.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2015b). *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015: Education for All 2000–2015 – Achievements and Challenges*. Paris, UNESCO.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2016) *Figures at a Glance*. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.
- Unterhalter, E. (2015). *Concept Paper Prepared for London Workshop Beyond Parity: Measuring Gender Inequality and Equality in Education*. Paper for Beyond Parity: Measuring Gender Equality in Education, London, 18–19 September.
- Virtanen, T. (1990). On the definitions of text and discourse. *Folia Linguistica*, 24(3-4), 447-455.
- Wende, M. (2011). Global institutions: The organization for economic Co-operation and development. In R. King, S. Marginson, & R. Naidoo (Eds.), *Handbook of globalization and higher education* (pp. 95–113). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Wodak, R. (2001). What CDA is about-a summary or its history, important concepts and its developments. *Wodak, R. y Meyer, M. Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. Sage, Londres.



## Appendix 1: Definitions of Terms

### Education Levels

Education levels in the GEM Report follow “the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which is the classification system designed to serve as an instrument for assembling, compiling and presenting comparable indicators and statistics of education both within countries and internationally” (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 493). Much of the discourse relied upon for this research is about tertiary education (levels 5-8 in the GEM Report).<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the Asherah Foundation uses post-secondary to refer to levels 4-8. To avoid confusion, this paper will refer to ISCED levels 4-8 as “higher education” in general. When discussing specific aspects of the GEM Report or Asherah Foundation policies, tertiary education and post-secondary education will be used as appropriate. For further information distinguishing the various levels of post-secondary and tertiary education, please see [Appendix A: Education Levels \(ISCED levels 4-8\)](#). Throughout this paper, “higher” education will be used to refer to all post-secondary education (levels 4-8). This will be done, in large part, as one of the goals of this research is to inform the dialogue about access for women to tertiary education *including* post-secondary education opportunities (level 4).

### Education Levels (ISCED levels 4-8)

Education levels according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which is the classification system designed to serve as an instrument for assembling, compiling and presenting comparable indicators and statistics of education both within countries and internationally. The system, introduced in 1976, was revised in 1997 and 2011.

- Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED level 4). It provides learning experiences building on secondary education, preparing for labour market entry as well as tertiary education.
- Tertiary education (ISCED levels 5-8): It builds on secondary education, providing learning activities in specialized fields of education. It aims at learning at a high level of complexity and specialization. It comprises:
  - Level 5: Short-cycle tertiary education, often designed to provide participants with professional knowledge, skills and competencies. It is practically based, occupationally-specific and prepares students to enter the labour market.
  - Level 6: Bachelor’s, often designed to provide participants with intermediate academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a first degree or equivalent qualification.
  - Level 7: Master’s or equivalent level, often designed to provide participants with advanced academic and/or professional knowledge, skills and competencies, leading to a second degree or equivalent qualification.
  - Level 8: Doctoral or equivalent level, designed primarily to lead to an advanced research qualification.

Source: UNESCO, 2016a, pp. 493-494.

### Forcibly-displaced Individual

“**Forced displacement**” is a catch-all term that includes slightly different populations depending on who is doing the defining.

In its 2016 Global Trends Report, the UNHCR uses “**forcibly displaced**” to cover refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, and “other groups or persons of concern” (p. 57).

**Forced migration** - A migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects).

(<http://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>).

The International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) defines [**forced migration**] as "a general term that refers to the movements of refugees and internally displaced people (those displaced by conflicts) as well as people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine, or development projects."

<http://www.forcedmigration.org/about/whatisfm/what-is-forced-migration>



## **Appendix 2: Description of Scholarship Outreach**

The data for this research was collected through the Asherah Foundation's 2016 & 2017 Second Chance Scholarship application process. This process was conducted between May and August of 2016 and 2017. Applicants were sought through outreach on social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn). In particular, the following organizations were directly contacted, based in large part on the personal relationships of board members:

- EducationUSA Advisors and REACs
- Embassies in the Washington, DC area
- Ministries of Education & Culture
- Key Universities

Due to a longstanding relationship with Al-Fanar Media, the scholarship has been listed on its scholarship database since May 2016.

### Appendix 3: Description of Scholarship Applicants

First Name	Last Initial	Age	Country of Origin	Country of School	Degree	Subject	Dependents	Year of Application
Abeer	Al-K.	31	Palestine	Egypt	PhD	Business	4	2017
Abijuru	F.	20	Rwanda	Uganda	Bachelor		2	2017
Aicha	B.	26	Morocco	Egypt	Master	Cultural Industries Management	N/A	2017
Alice (Rev.)	K.	43	Kenya	Kenya	BA	Counselling Psychology	N/A	2017
Amal	R.	33	Belgium	Belgium	MS	Not listed	N/A	2017
Amani	J.	39	Palestine	Palestine	MS	Water & Environmental Science	3	2016
Amani <sup>9</sup>	J.	40	Palestine	Palestine	MS	Water & Environmental Science	3	2017
Ameera	Al-H.	27	Yemen	Egypt	Masters	Pathology	2	2016
Anwar	A.	26	Palestine	Palestine	MS	Environmental and Water Studies	N/A	2017
Arunima	S.	22	India	USA	MS	Management Science and Engineering	N/A	2017
Azza	B.	28	Egypt	USA	Masters	TESOL	N/A	2016
Begsoltan	M.	31	USA	USA	Associate of Applied Science	Electrical Engineering	N/A	2017
Beryn	O.	21	Kenya	USA	B. Sc.	Economics	N/A	2017
Charlene	W.	47	Trinidad & Tobago	USA	BA	Industrial & Labor Relation	2	2016
Chaza	H.	30	France	France	Master	Design and Communication	N/A	2017
Clare	K.	33	Uganda	Uganda	Certificate	Early Childhood Education	N/A	2017
Dalia Awad	Y.	26	Egypt	Germany	MS	Chemistry	N/A	2017
Dalitso	K.	32	Malawi	UK	MS	HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	N/A	2017
Damiana	C.	25	Italy	Sweden	MS	Joint European Master of Space Science and Technology	N/A	2017
Dana	S.A.	19	Palestinian Authority	Palestinian Authority	BA	Medicine	N/A	2017
Dania (Monia)	R.	33	Libya	UK	MS	Public Health	N/A	2017

<sup>9</sup> This applicant received an award in 2016 and submitted applications materials for continued funding in 2017.

Darin	N.	37	Syria	Hungary	PhD	Not listed	3	2017
Dilofarid	S.	26	Tajikistan	UK	MS	Business	N/A	2017
Doaa	H.	29	Italy	Italy	MS	Business Management	N/A	2017
Edwina	A.H.	24	Lebanon	Cyprus	MBBS	Not listed	N/A	2017
Elizabeth	T. D.	37	Tanzania	UK	MS	Biological Photography and Imaging	N/A	2017
Eman	M.	32	Sudan	England	MS	Not listed	N/A	2017
Engy	E.	31	Egypt	UK	MSc	Behavioral Economics	N/A	2016
Esra'	H.	33	East Jerusalem	UK	PhD	Physiotherapy	N/A	2016
Fadwa	S.	21	Palestine	Palestine	BA	Medicine	N/A	2017
Fanta	S.	28	USA	USA	BA	Business Administration	N/A	2017
Fatma	A.	32	Egypt	Netherlan ds	MA	Heritage Studies: Preservation of the Moving Image	N/A	2016
Fatma	H.	32	Palestine	UK	Masters	Masters	3	2017
Francis	W.	21	Uganda	Uganda	Bachelor	Pharmacy	3	2017
Fuheid	S.	51	Israel	Palestine	M.Sc.	Not listed	3	2017
Gianna	D.	18	Jamaica	USA	BSc	Clinical Laboratory Science	N/A	2017
Haiam	J.	44	Yemen	Yemen	MA	Degree in Translation	3	2017
Hala	J.	29	Jerusalem (West Bank)	Ireland	PhD	Arts Practice	N/A	2016
Halah	F.	24	Yemen	Yemen	Not yet enrolled	Not listed	4	2017
Hanadi	M.	34	Canada	Canada	2-Yr Diploma	Not listed	N/A	2017
Heba	A.	24	Gaza	Palestine	Bachelor	Not listed	1	2017
Imene	D.	27	Algeria	France	Mastère Spécialisé	Not listed	4	2017
Jenelyn	L.	25	Philippines	Philippine s	BA	Not listed	1	2017
Jessica	A.	27	Chile	Chile	unknown	Trainee - assistant manager	2	2016
Joan	M.	41	Kenya	Kenya	BA	Business Management	2	2017
Joelle	T. W.	27	Cameroon	Cameroon	MS	Geography	N/A	2017
Khetam	S.	31	USA	USA	PhD	Not listed	1	2017

Khulood	A.	24	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	Bachelor	Not listed	2	2017
Kimuli "Charity"	D.	43	N/A	Uganda	BA	Education	3	2017
Koninee Regina	J.	24	South Sudan					
Lama	R.	23	Palestine	Palestine	Master	Not listed	N/A	2017
Lana	D.	18	Lebanon	Lebanon	BSc	Nutrition and Dietetics	N/A	2017
Leila	S.	27	Uganda	Uganda	BA	Business Administration	3	2017
Lena	Y.	36	Malta	UK	Masters	Dermatology & Aesthetic Medicine	3	2016
Livia	O.	26	South Sudan	Kenya	Bachelor	Law	3	2017
Manar	H.	31	Palestine	USA	MFA	Book & Creative Writing	N/A	2016
Maria	H.	26	Jordan	Canada	MS	Master of Science	N/A	2017
Maria Ukamaka Clare	O.	40	Nigeria	USA	MS	Master of Science	N/A	2017
Marylin	C.	19	Ghana	USA	Bachelor	Mechanical Engineering	N/A	2017
Maryline	J.	28	Liberia	Liberia	BSc	Environmental Health Sciences	2	2017
Massira	EI-Q.	42	Morocco	Morocco	Master	Manager des affaires	N/A	2017
Maureen	M.		Zambia	Belgium	Master	Rural Development		2017
May	K.	26	USA		PhD	Architecture	N/A	2017
Mira	B.	24	Canada	Canada	MSc	Geography, Urban and Environmental Studies	N/A	2017
Muna	D.		Ethiopia	USA		Nutrition and Dietetics	1	
Nada	H.	38	Sweden	Sweden	PhD	Global Health - Health System & Policy, Medicines	N/A	2017
Nana	A. T.	21	GHANA	USA	Undergraduate	Engineering	4	2017
Ndoundkeu	E.	36	Cameroon	Cameroon	MS	Human Rights	1	2017
Nermin	E.	39	Egypt	Egypt	PhD	Clinical Hematology	N/A	2017
Nour	L.	25	Jordan	USA	MA	Arab Studies, Focus Development	N/A	2017
Nour	M.	25	Syria	USA	MS	Architecture /Urban Design	N/A	2017
Nurul Huda	A. R.	32	Malaysia	Malaysia	PhD	Electrical, Electronics & Systems Engineering	2	2017
Nyemachi Choice	A.	42	Nigeria	Ireland	MSc	Nursing Studies	3	2017
Omima	M.	52	Egypt				N/A	2017

Paris	M.	N/A	Iran	Canada / US	PsyD	Psychoanalysis	N/A	2016
Pemphero	B.		Malawi	USA	MA	International Development	N/A	2017
Phebemary*	A. S.	47	GHANA	South Africa	PhD	Doctoral Proposal or Transdisciplinary	3	2017
Rabia*	N.	27	Pakistan	USA	M.Phil	English Literature	N/A	2017
Rahsa	T.	43	Sudan	Germany	Masters	Simulation Science	N/A	2016
Randa	M.	33	Israel	France	unknown	Art	N/A	2016
Regina	J.	24	South Sudan	South Sudan	Certificate	Not listed	3	2017
Rhoda	G.	29	Kenya	USA	MsEd	Early Childhood & Childhood General Education	N/A	2017
Rihab*	R.		Lebanon					2017
Robyn*	McP.	18	Jamaica	USA	BA	Not listed	N/A	2017
Rola	A.	21	Lebanon	Lebanon	MS	Biomedical Sciences	1	2017
Roula	A.	34	Syria	UK	MSc	Business Information Management	N/A	2017
Rwan*	Q.	25	Palestine	Italy	unknown	Dentistry	N/A	2016
Said	H. J.	21	Comoros islands	Canada	BS	Biology	N/A	2016
Saja	A.	20	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	BA	Graphic Design	N/A	2017
Samar*	T.	25	USA	USA	MS	Industrial/Organizational Psychology	N/A	2017
Samia	R. D.	50	USA	USA	Certificate	Managing Evidence Module (Higher Education Leadership and Management)	2	2017
Sandra	B.	22	Uganda	Uganda	Certificate	CLEAR-AA, Development Evaluation Training Programme in Africa (DETPA)	N/A	2017
Sara	F.	24	Sudan	Germany	MBA	Building Sustainability	N/A	2017
Sara*	T.	19	USA	USA	PhD	Pharmacy	3	2017
Sawsene	N.	26	Morocco	UK	PhD	DPhil in Oriental Studies	N/A	2017
Shahd*	B.	27	Palestine	Palestine	MS	Democracy and Human Rights	N/A	2017
Shakira	W.	22	Uganda	Uganda	Diploma	CLINICAL MEDICINE	1	2017
Sindia	P. M.	33	Chile	Chile	Bachelors	Preschool Education	3	2016
Sireen	S.	24	Lebanon	Lebanon	MS	Not listed	2	2017

Souad	K	47	USA	USA	PhD	Department of Linguistics	N/A	2017
Soundarya	B.	21	India	USA	MS	Management Science and Engineering	N/A	2017
Stuti	S.	22	India	USA	MS	Biomedical innovation and development	N/A	2017
Suha	E.	48	Jordan	CYPRUS	DDS	DENTAL SURGERY	2	2017
Suheir	H.	27	Palestine	UK	MSc	Education, Power & Social Change	N/A	2017
Tabu	J.	21	South Sudan	Uganda	BSc	Public Health	2	2017
Tala	Al-H.	19	Jordan	Jordan	BA	Economics	N/A	2017
Theresia Njoh	A.	27	Cameroon	Cameroon	Bachelor	Human Resource Management	N/A	2017
Tiliko*	B.	23	Malawi		BA	Computer Science	2	2017
Trisha	G.	27	Belize		MS	Energy	2	2017
Yasmin	S.	26	Palestine	Ireland	MS	Not listed	N/A	2017
Yosra	H.	27	Egypt	USA	MBA	Business	unsure	2016
Zaina	H.	20	USA	USA	BA	Physics	N/A	2017
Zhyldyz	N.	30	UAE	Canada	2-yr diploma	International Hospitality Management	N/A	2016
Zvijezdana*	M.	26	Bosnia	USA	LLM	United States Law	N/A	2017

\*Essays not included in initial analysis due to technical incompatibility.