Ethical companies support educational programs for children and adults because education is one of the most powerful tools for reducing poverty and creating a more just and equal society. Humanity still has a long way to go before it can consider itself equally educated. It doesn't matter whether you're talking about primary or post-secondary education in developed or developing countries. There are huge disparities in how well our people are educated.

OBSTACLES TO EDUCATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR HUMAN WELLBEING

Education is essential to solving almost every problem faced collectively by humanity. Study after study shows that as education levels rise, so does quality of life, income levels, health, and peace. Ensuring education for all is mandatory if we want to advance as a society and overcome our most perplexing issues. Yet today, achieving even a basic level of education is often a challenge for many communities because of numerous barriers that stand in peoples' way.

STATISTICS ON WORLDWIDE EDUCATION

Any global survey on the state of education reveals that academically speaking, humanity still has a long way to go before it can consider itself equally educated. It doesn't matter whether you're talking about primary or post-secondary education in developed or developing countries. By and large, there are huge disparities in how well our citizens are being educated because of race, economics, or gender. Here are some basic statistics on the state of education around the world today.^{i ii iii}

- **Millions not in school:** Millions of children worldwide do not attend school on a regular basis. In fact, 67.5 million children lack access to quality education, most of whom are among the poorest in the world.
- **Millions not completing primary school:** Because of poor attendance, many children from poor communities are not completing even the most basic educational levels. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, only 70% of all children who enter first grade go on to graduate.
- **Gender gap:** More than 50% of all children who do not attend school are girls, even though girls make up less than 50% of that group. In countries like Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, The Central African Republic, and Niger, there are only 80 girls registered for school for every 100 boys. Additionally, literacy rates among girls emerging from the education system in developing countries is lower compared to boys.
- Lack of teachers: There is a significant lack of teachers, especially in the poorest regions of the world, resulting in school closures and incomplete educational programs. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, there is a need for 1.2 million more teachers to reach the goal of universal primary education in the region.

- **Millions working instead of learning:** Many children go to work every day instead of going to school. Approximately 150 million children worldwide between the ages of 5 and 14 were engaged in labor in 2007. iv
- **Cost of education:** The UN estimates that to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education for all, external aid of \$16 billion annually will be required. Yet despite the high price tag, paying for 'education for all' is less expensive than achieving water and sanitation for all or even basic health and nutrition for all. Yi
- **Corruption disrupts funding:** A general rule of thumb is that corruption distorts how well a government or ruling power will make decisions. This results in the allocation of funds to programs that benefit only a few people. In the case of public programs like education and health care where there is no real profit, funds are often diverted to more lucrative sectors. Yet in the countries where corruption is rampant, there is a very low reporting rate because people don't believe the information will be used for good. In Burundi, for instance, the reporting rate is only 3.2%. Yiii

So as you can see, there are some huge challenges when it comes to seeing every human educated around the world. This is especially true in developing nations, as well as low-income communities in the developed world. And unfortunately, the lack of education in poor communities only serves to reinforce the poverty cycle, as you will soon discover.

The Mutually-Reinforcing Interplay of Education and Poverty Statistics

Lack of quality education increases poverty rates in both rich and poor countries throughout the globe. Conversely, those who live below the poverty line are more likely to have poorer academic performance and achieve fewer academic milestones than those living in wealthier families or countries. It's an incredibly complex, mutually-reinforcing relationship between poverty and education. The more education you have, the higher your earning potential, and the more wealthy you are, the greater your chances of receiving a good education. Consider these general truths about poverty and education:

- Lower earning households are more likely to be poorly educated.
- Employment rates rise for those with higher levels of education.
- Better educated individuals have earnings higher than those with less education.

There are many reasons for this interplay between education and poverty. For instance, children from poor families may not receive a complete education because their parents cannot afford school fees, uniforms, and supplies. Even if they are able to attend regularly, they may find it hard to concentrate and excel if they attend school on an empty stomach because of lack of quality food at home.

On the other hand, schools are often refuges where children find publicly-funded food programs, health care, and safety. The children who attend school regularly generally are healthier, less disease-prone, and therefore able to concentrate on their studies and achieve higher results during

their academic years. These children are more likely to go on to further education, and then into better jobs as adults.

When an educated person enters the workforce, their education history will impact how they are viewed by potential employers. Those with higher levels of education are viewed as having more abilities and skills, and as a result are less often unemployed and more often awarded higher-paying jobs.

As you can see, poverty begets poor education which begets deeper poverty, but education has the power to break the cycle of poverty. The challenge is that the poorest of the poor have the hardest time receiving a quality education. Yet their lives have the greatest potential for being transformed by receiving a good education.

WHY THE POOR AREN'T ATTENDING SCHOOL

So why is it so difficult for the poor to attend school on a regular basis, complete primary school and high school, and go on to post-secondary education? There are many factors that prevent low-income children from attending school and/or receiving a quality and consistent education. These barriers include the following:

- School fees are often too high for families to afford
- Required uniforms may be expensive (relatively speaking), without which students cannot attend
- Entrance tests may be too expensive for poor families
- Doing chores at home prevents poor children from attending school
- Children are often encouraged or forced to earn an income to support the family
- Some children are subjected to forced labor after being kidnapped or sold into <u>slavery</u>
- Many children are forced to become child soldiers fighting adult wars
- Poorly educated mothers have more children (i.e. more mouths to feed), earn less per month, and do not see the value of school
- Poor parents are more likely to be in <u>poor health</u> because of diseases like cancer and HIV/AIDS
- Children from poor families are more likely to be in poor health suffering from disabilities and diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, and dysentery
- Families living in rural regions may be too isolated or distant to send their children to school
- Local governments may lack funding for paying teachers and building schools

- Discrimination may prevent children from certain races, ethnicities, gender, or religions from accessing public education
- Hungry children experience higher absence rates and diminished academic outcomes

In addition to these immense challenges, girls living in developing and low-income communities face even more obstacles to receiving an education:

- When a family has limited funds for schooling, preference is given to sending male children to school over female children
- Teachers may give school lessons that reinforce gender inequality and stereotypes
- Lack of feminine sanitary materials (at home or at school) may prevent post-pubescent girls from attending school
- Sexual harassment from classmates and male teachers may discourage girls from attending classes
- There may be too few female teachers to serve as role models

Social values also play a role in reinforcing the cycles of poverty. Certain ethnic groups, for instance, may be discriminated against in the workforce. In Asian communities where there is a strong social caste system, even educated untouchables will find it hard to obtain an education because of stereotypes that prevent schools from selecting these individuals for entrance. This is true in both developing and developed countries.

But achieving a high rate of childhood education is not the only goal we should have for humanity. Ongoing education as adults is also important, especially for those individuals who are currently living in poverty. Some adults were not afforded the opportunity to get even a primary education, and as adults therefore need to achieve this goal in order to improve their quality of life and increase their chances of obtaining higher paying work. Yet this is often difficult if parents cannot afford the time or the school fees to reach their own education goals.

Evidently there are numerous factors that prevent children from attending school, which is one of the first challenges that must be overcome if we want universal education. These principles that keep people from achieving an education are true in developing countries, and also in developed countries like America where poor communities face significant obstacles to achieving higher education levels.

Challenges in the US Education System

Education deficits are not exclusive to developing countries. In fact, the educational system has often (in recent history) been ranked as merely average, even though the wealth of the nation is quite a bit higher than countries in low-income regions like Africa and Asia. There are many reasons for this poor showing in US primary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions, as you will see by these statistics:

- Low academic world rank: According to an OECD Programme report for the International Student Assessment (PISA), which compares the skills of students 15 years old in 70 different countries, the US ranked 14th out of 35 for reading, 17th for science, and 25th for mathematics. That's right, we're not even in the top 10 for the most basic subjects!
- **Unequal funding across socioeconomic boundaries:** In the US, school budgets are tied to property taxes. That means that poor neighborhoods get roughly half as much funding as schools in richer neighborhoods.xi Without proper funding, school districts can't hire enough teachers, provide quality food programs, purchase supplies for its programs, or ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. Student outcomes suffer as a result.
- **School buildings in disrepair:** 60% of all schools in the US have major building features in disrepair, 20% have poor indoor air quality, and 33% need extensive repair or replacement. Studies have shown that when buildings are in disrepair, students' academic outcomes suffer due to poor lighting, toxic air, inadequate tools and equipment, and unhealthy drafts and mold that promote illness, allergies, and asthma. Studies have shown that when buildings are in disrepair, students' academic outcomes suffer due to poor lighting, toxic air, inadequate tools and equipment, and unhealthy drafts and mold that promote illness, allergies, and asthma.
- **Economic graduation gaps:** The high school drop-out rate among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds is 16.7%, but only 3.2% for students from high income families.xiv In fact, there are 17 schools in the 50 largest states with high school graduation rates lower than 50%, with some as low as 24.9%.xv Post-secondary results are similar: 54% of students from wealthy families receive bachelor's degrees, whereas only 9% of those from low-income families.xvi

As you can see, the relationship between poverty and education is evident even in a developed country like America. Just as in Africa and Asia, poor parents have trouble securing a quality, consistent education for their children.

And this disparity carries on through to adult employment. In 2008, for instance, high school grads earned 15.5% more than those who dropped out. Additionally, studies have shown that when an individual receives a combination of post-secondary education, job training, and help with the job search, they can increase their chances of being employed by 21%, double their income and raise themselves above the poverty line.xvii

IMPACT OF FAST CONSUMPTION ECONOMY ON EDUCATION

To feed the desires of a consumer society, corporations look for all manner of solutions for reducing costs and speeding up production in order to produce cheaper, low-quality goods. Education is a casualty of this kind of economy on several levels. Not only does poverty push people to look for work instead of going to school, large corporations also enforce policies and procedures that discourage the education of its employees, which keeps them trapped in the cycle of poverty.

You can see the negative impact of industry on the education of both children and adults throughout the value chain - from extraction to production to disposal:

• **Child labor:** The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that there are more than 150 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 working regular jobs in developing

countries, with 61% of these children in Asia, 32% in Africa, and 7% in Latin America. Half of these children work full time and can therefore not attend school. The other half mix work and school responsibilities. *viii*

- Low wages reinforce poverty: Large multinational corporations and small producer companies alike often pay very little to their employees. In Bangladesh, for instance, where 80% of the industry depends on fashion, people made £7.16 a month in 2006 (half of what it was in 1994), while the prices of essentials (like sugar and rice) rose 200%.xix By paying employees less than a living wage, corporations reinforce the poverty cycle by ensuring individuals are not able to rise above the poverty line. Poor parents are less capable of sending their children to quality schools, which predisposes their descendants to repeat their life in poverty.
- **Discouraging further education:** Big corporations value automaton workers who don't think for themselves, but instead just take orders obediently. They therefore hire uneducated individuals and then create policies that keep them uneducated. Corporations either do nothing to encourage employees to get more education, or worse, create policies that outright discourage employees from bettering themselves. One factory manager in China is reported to having commented that running a factory is like managing animals in a zoo.**x
- Long working hours: In many factories around the world, employees are required to work very long hours sometimes up to 80 hours per week. Factories in Indonesia, for instance, were recently found to be requiring employees to work 65 hours weekly to make Adidas garments for the London Olympics in 2012.xxi This leaves adults little to no time to take advantage of educational opportunities that would help them advance into higher-paying jobs.
- Monotonous, uninspiring labor: Most factories require their employees to robotically repeat the same manual labor tasks hundreds or thousands of time every day, which is exactly the opposite of employment that stimulates and challenges an employee mentally and physically. These types of jobs, especially when done for long hours every day, can create incredible stress and severe job dissatisfaction for the employees, resulting in higher rates of burnout and health problems. This negatively impacts an employee's ability to advance themselves economically, and has a knock-on effect on their children's education as well.xxii
- Roaming transnational corporations: Many transnational corporations make it a habit of closing up shop and moving to new countries when wages in a particular region become too high. They go wherever they can hire people for the least amount of money. Employees who are left behind find their careers disrupted, and are required to start over again. This stunts their ability to advance and achieve higher wages over the long term. And without an income, they often are unable to send their children to school.
- **No health care coverage:** In one recent survey, 26% of the multinationals surveyed from 20 countries worldwide reported that they did not provide health care insurance for their employees. Without health care, employees suffer from higher rates of disease and stress-

related illnesses. This further hampers their ability to achieve higher education goals after hours and/or advance themselves up the corporate ladder. Poor health also makes it difficult to earn a regular income, which can harm their ability to pay for education for their children as well.xxiii

• **Disregard for cultural wisdom:** Large multinational corporations encourage cultural melting pots over diversity, and as such discourage the cultivation and transmission of cultural knowledge, such as ancient weaving techniques, time-testing building methods, and so on. This makes it difficult for cultures to hand down their cultural wisdom from one generation to another, which represents a type of educational setback for indigenous peoples.

Consumers have a big part to play in this system. By purchasing cheap, low-quality goods, individuals reinforce for corporations that there is a market for their goods. And as such, consumers are part of the system that stunts the educational advancement of the economically disadvantaged all around the world.

ALTERNATIVES TO ACHIEVING BETTER EDUCATION RESULTS

Education is foundational for economic and social progress. Quality education is required for humans of all ages – from primary school children, to secondary school students, to adult learners. Companies that support all levels of education and work to preserve cultural knowledge help to eliminate child labor abuses, increase wealth, reduce gender inequalities, improve community health, and support democratic evolvement.

Thank goodness the traditional fast consumption economic model isn't the only way corporations can conduct business. There are many new and innovative, responsible, ethical businesses and social enterprises that are not only turning a profit, but helping to create communities where education is both valued and encouraged.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR EMPHASIZING EDUCATION IN OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM

What do these sustainable companies look like? Here are some of the values you will see reflected in ethical companies:

- **Prohibit child labor:** Perhaps above all else, ethical companies will absolutely prohibit the employment of children. This will ensure children are free to attend school and are free to play and grow in a community. It will also prevent children from being exposed to hazardous working conditions that may physically harm them and/or limit their health, both of which would diminish their chances of participating in school.
- Living wages and fair trade: Organizations that take responsibility to pay their employees a sustainable, living wage and to trade fairly with producers have a tremendously positive impact on educational outcomes of a community. When parents earn more money, they can afford to send their children to school, which benefits the next generation. But wealthier

adults are also able to use their income to achieve educational milestones of their own by participating in after-work academic or job-training programs.

- **Professional development:** A company with a sense of corporate responsibility will make it a priority to help its employees reach for academic accomplishments, knowing that employees who are smarter and more satisfied with their work will perform better and contribute positively to society. This can be done through professional development programs, scholarships for additional education, time off or flexible schedules for attending classes, and so on.
- **Encourage family togetherness:** When big corporations transport parents from their homes to far-off factories, they disrupt the transfer of knowledge from one generation to another. This can stunt the academic growth of children. Ethical corporations will use business models that value family togetherness to prevent these kinds of community brain drains.
- **Preservation of cultural knowledge:** Businesses the value traditional wisdom will look for ways to tap into, incorporate, and encourage the use of local knowledge. This may be as simple as creating a market for traditional textiles, or as complex as consulting local elders to find out the best way to care for indigenous forests. The result is the preservation of local knowledge and community education.
- **Community development:** Many sustainable companies will go above and beyond by building directly into a community. This can be as simple as providing school uniforms and supplies for local children, or as generous as building schools and sponsoring quality teachers. Either way, ethical businesses make these kinds of investments knowing that the more educated the community, the better they will be equipped to lift themselves out of poverty.

There are many organizations that provide structure and support for the work of ethical companies. For instance, at Hearts, we work with <u>fair trade</u> organizations that have already developed standards that value education and prohibit child labor, require community development projects, and ensure traditional knowledge is preserved. By following the fair trade principles laid out by these reputable organizations, we know our artisans are doing their part to ensure education is a top priority in their communities.

Cooperatives are similarly beneficial. By working together, groups of producers and artisans band together to cultivate resources and create finished products while infusing money into the community through projects like school buildings and adult education programs. The benefits of this kind of ethical production can be seen at every level of the community.

It is clear that education is a key puzzle piece in overcoming poverty. By cultivating our business with a high value on educating people at every level of society, we at Hearts believe that our entire species will receive dividends multiple times over.

Benefits of Educating Women and Girls

Although it is important to educate both boys and girls, men and women, what is perhaps most striking is how much families and communities benefit when girls and women *in particular* receive a quality education. Here are some statistics on how important the education of girls is to societal health.xxiv xxv xxvi xxvii xxviii xxviii xxii

- Women are more equitable when distributing wealth: Educated women earn more money than their less-educated counterparts. And when educated women earn more money, they are more likely than men to equally distribute the wealth rather than hording it. Studies consistently show that when focus on the betterment of their families and their communities as a whole, whereas men tend to earn money primarily out of a desire for individual enrichment. In particular, when women control household income, they tend to spend more of it on their children's health and education than when men control it.xxx
- **Educated women help to increase democracy:** When girls are educated, democracy is stronger in a country. This is often due to the fact that they marry later, which allows them time to become involved in politics through voting and serving in government.
- **Education increases childhood survival rates:** Girls who are educated for five years have a 40% better survival than those who are not. When girls complete secondary education, they are seven times less susceptible to HIV. This is often because schools have clean water facilities, proper sanitation, and are a safe haven against those who might harm them. They additionally bear are generally in much better health educated mothers ensure higher rates of immunization, more regular doctor visits, and better nutrition (related to wealth).
- Education for girls increases their wealth potential: Educating women is good for a country's economy as a whole. By increasing the number of women completing a secondary education, a country can boost their annual per capita income by 0.3% and increase overall economic growth. Increasing a girl's education by just one year of secondary schooling increases her future wages by 10% to 20%.
- **Educated girls = education nations:** Studies show that when girls are educated, the overall educational levels within a nation rise. This is due largely to the knowledge passed down from mother to child educated mothers provide more at-home education to their children than undereducated mothers.
- **Educated women have fewer children:** Educated women generally have fewer children, which is a benefit for the planet as a whole which is currently suffering under the weight of overpopulation. Fewer children means a smaller economic burden for the family, and as a result, more educational opportunities for each individual child.
- **Higher education for women = lower gender inequality:** The higher the completion rates for girls in developing countries, the smaller the gender inequalities in society as a whole. This is due in part to the increased involvement of educated women have in public life compared to those women with less education.
- **Lower crime rates:** When children (girls and boys both) stay in school and complete their education, they are far less likely to become involved in crime. This pays for itself many

times over by preventing the need for prisons, reducing community violence, and ensuring more individuals work for the economic betterment of their families and neighborhoods.

Those are some astounding statistics, don't you think? It's amazing the positive impact educated women can have on society. We at Hearts are inspired by the potential that the education of girls can have on our world and work hard to make this a priority in our business.

ETHICAL LIVING TIPS FOR ENCOURAGING EDUCATION IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND THE ECONOMY

- 1. **Support fair trade:** If you want to make education a priority in your conscious shopping, then be prepared to support fair trade. This may mean you spend a few bucks more, but keep in mind that fair trade costs have a very noble purpose. Unlike big corporations that pocket their profits, fair trade organizations pour funds into poor communities to help them do things like build schools and pay teachers. Your few extra bucks is funding change!
- 2. **Choose ethnic products:** Fast fashion produced in a fast fashion manner is monotonous and boring for those making it. When you mindfully consume by choosing products created by true artisans rather than machines, you provide jobs that make use of people's unique skills and knowledge of traditional arts.
- 3. **Be a mentor to a low income child:** Volunteer with an organization in your community to help them succeed in school. Having an educated mentor who inspires them can significantly improve education outcomes for a child.
- 4. **Talk to your politicians:** If you want to make education more equitable in America, talk to you politicians about coming up with a way to fund low-income schools more equitably than based on the tax system. Being politically active is the best way to create change in your own community!

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