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Brian A. GALLAGHER

Juliette, to get us started, talk about how a child gets started in life, the importance of good health, nutrition, a good start for life. What is the basis and foundation, the principles that have to be employed for a young person to have the best chance getting started?

Juliette TUAKLI

Thank you, Brian. Ideally, a child would be born to a well-nourished mother. I would actually amend that and say a well-nourished and well-educated mother, who had received adequate pre-natal care and having a supportive partner who ideally, would also be educated and well-nourished. Thereafter, the child would be exposed to pre-school education that focuses especially on creativity and learning a lot of the soft skills that would make them relevant adults with negotiation, inter-personal conflict management and sharing skills. It is very important that pre-school education be supervised to provide these skills adequately for pre-schoolers. What tends to happen in some of the countries I have worked in in Africa is that the government has said we need pre-school education but has not contributed any official guidance as to how that should be set up. People establish warehouses for pre-school children, for want of a better term, where they are not being taught the prerequisite skills that are so important in this very vulnerable period. Over the past several decades, our educational and health services in much of Africa have become attenuated, with a huge emphasis instead on hard infrastructure. If we were to look at human beings as soft infrastructure, the hard infrastructure, for example, would be what pertains in Ghana, where we have big hospitals and many clinics built by various foreign companies and agencies for the good of the Ghanaian people. However, we do not have the human capacity to fill them with medical staff, so they sit idle, unused, whilst there are many people living in the adjacent communities, without adequate access to good, basic healthcare, unless they can afford to go into the private arena. The same thing pertains in the educational sphere. With money one can afford to attend private educational institutions that are now being built by private entrepreneurs, but the majority of the country's nationals have to attend very poorly resourced public institutions where, of course, they get churned out, undereducated for the kinds of jobs available once they come out onto the job market. As alluded to earlier, we have huge numbers of young populations in Africa; 65% of our population is under 25 years of age. We have huge numbers of young, undereducated persons that result from these poor national Development investments, in health and education.

Brian A. GALLAGHER

Do you know why? A lot of times there is an even greater emphasis on the education of girls, early childhood and primary education. Why is that? What is the greater leverage of investing in young girls?

Juliette TUAKLI

In Africa we have very strong cultural traditions that disempower girls, particularly as they transition from 13 to 15 years of age, where they are now considered reproductive beings rather than young girls capable of going to school and learning. Certainly, the empowerment of young girls through education has enormous dividends. Somebody alluded to how high the fertility rate was, as per Emmanuel Macron, but this is true only for certain parts of the continent. Where there are high levels of young girls being educated, especially at the younger levels, one finds that fertility rates have actually gone down and that they are delivering on average only 2.4 children per person, not 8 or 9 as will be found in the areas where they are under or non-educated.