

Global leaders are overlooking one of their most valuable weapons in the fight against everything from climate change to economic turmoil. Jordan's Queen Rania on the surprise solution to many of the world's most intractable problems.

Use whatever cliché you like: shooting ourselves in the foot; one arm tied behind our backs; sailing at half mast. The condition of millions of women and girls around the world is so illogical it verges on the absurd.

We face a devastating combination of global crises: economic turmoil, climate change, pandemics, poverty, extremism, conflict, human trafficking. They're woven together, impossibly difficult to unravel, like a Gordian knot slowly tightening around our necks.



And what do we do? We leave half of humanity out of the solution.

Think about girls: In all their soft, giggling, cute, and vulnerable glory, girls have the power to turn our world around. Development theory espouses it. Experience proves it. Common sense knows it.

Largely devoid of rights and defenseless, too many girls do not enjoy the protective care of citizenship and lack official identification such as birth certificates or government ID cards, which would allow them to attend school, vote, and access public services. Here's what happens: The majority of the world's 130 million illiterate youth are girls. In sub-Saharan Africa, 122 million girls live on less than \$1 a day. And nearly half of all sexual assaults worldwide are against girls aged 15 and younger.

Then this happens: Each of these girls turn into women who pass on the baton of intergenerational poverty to their children in the most interminable endurance race ever, where the end is never in sight, and no one ever wins.

Yet, if more global leaders placed girls at the top of their development agendas, and matched their earnest TV tones with investment in education, we could rewrite this cruel narrative. Because when girls go to school, life gets better for everyone.

For girls: They gain confidence and self-respect; they delay marriage and childbirth; and they become more likely to educate their own daughters. For every extra year a girl is educated, her income can increase by as much as 20 percent.

For nations: More girls in secondary school leads to fewer infant deaths, lower fertility, lower rates of HIV and AIDS, and better child nutrition. Just a 1 percent rise in the number of girls attending secondary school can boost a country's annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percent. What a deal.

When it comes to educating girls, cause and effect are irrefutably linked. That's what makes educating them such smart economics. But so far, the story of girls' education has been more of a slow burner than a page turner. A number of measures—scholarships, stipends, female teacher recruitment, and gender-sensitive textbooks—have proved effective in boosting girls' enrolment. In rural Ehtiopia, for example, the Berhane Hewan project encourages parents to keep their daughters in school by providing them with a \$25 sheep for free. The animal increases the family's farming income, lessening the need for the teen girl to be married off to an older man who would assume her expenses.