

**Statement made by Theresa Devasahayam, Soroptimist
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Girls and women are clearly a vulnerable group. They are marginalized, disadvantaged and invisible in many social and cultural contexts. The idea of investing in the girl child is compelling and has real life benefits. Educating a girl child translates into economic independence for her in adulthood as well as improves the well-being of her children. That women and girls should be perceived as an investment demands a shift in cultural consciousness as well. In many societies, cultural practices continue to disadvantage women and girls. Cultural values such as associating girls with marriage and as caretakers of the family and managers of the home persist and should be seen to be detrimental to women's progress. There should be interventions to enable girls to stay in school. Interventions should include reaching out to parents and convincing them about the importance of education for girls. Laws should be in place to ensure the prohibition of marriage among girls under 18 so as to keep them in school longer and discourage parents from marrying off girls before they complete their education. In fact child marriage should also be construed as a form of violence as it takes away the opportunity from the girl child to better herself and reach her fulfilment fully and it violates her rights. An educated woman is more likely to engage in the labour force of the country. But beyond her being self-reliant and ensuring the well-being of her family, an educated woman who is an active worker contributes to the economic growth of the country.