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The Significance of Equality in Education for Sustainability in Community Service by Omer Solomon Wachara (PhD), St Augustine University, Tanzania

Abstract

Gender Equality is one of UNESCO's two global priorities, with a commitment to promote equality between women and men across the globe. Gender Equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for sustainable development. This paper is based on literature review. It is going to highlight the significance of educating women as a prerequisite to socio economic development and sustainability in the community service. It tries to explain that societies which educate women achieve a lot in terms of their development blueprint. Gender identities are complementary biological entities and moreover, to respect full equity and equality of each of the two genders, i.e., of the social roles that men and women assume in their lives is the foundation of any meaningful development in any society. These roles, it must be emphasized, are socio-political and cultural constructs, which have evolved through history, and vary from one society to another. The roles attributed to men and women are not static and eternally valid but, on the contrary these roles change, have changed and will be subject to further change as the world becomes a global village.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Gender Equity, Gender mainstreaming, Education for Equality, Socio- economic development and Community Sustainability

Introduction

Educating Women for Sustainable Community Development/ Service

The right to education is clearly perceived as the fundamental, central right that conditions many other rights and without the full exercise of which individual and the society to which they belong and the world into which they are born cannot develop. Thus, Individuals benefit from the education that they have received, and then they make progress that develops the society. Righetti (2010) (ed) asserts that the right to education plays a major role in the ambit of human rights, being crucial to the development and exercise of other rights. By enabling access to other rights, it, therefore proves to be a fundamental instrument through which economically and socially marginalized adults and children may emancipate themselves from poverty and obtain the resources required to act as full members of society.

Ranieri (2010) highlighted that, an examination of the right to education in Brazil's legal system shows that, Brazil's constitution singles out education as a right of all citizens and a "legal good" due to its key role in the development of the individual and the exercise of other civil political, economic, social and cultural rights. The constitution sets forth precise responsibilities and

competences for the federal state and municipal education system in order to ensure the exercise of their right in terms of the duty of the state.

Dandan (2010) asserts that Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights. As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities. It has a vital role in empowering women safeguarding children from exploitative and hazardous labor and sexual exploitation, promoting human rights and democracy, protecting the environment and controlling population growth. Increasingly, education is, recognized as one of the best financial investments states can make. But, the impertinence of education is not just practical, a well-educated, enlightened and active mind, able to wander freely and widely, is one of the joys and rewards of human existence.

Alston and Bhutta (2005),   basing their work on a case study of India, state that education is intrinsically important in as much as it directly improves a person's effective freedom in basic social interactions, education facilitates the attainment of employment and other sources of income, and helps persons negotiate and cope with circumstances that may threaten their livelihood. Education facilitates public discussion of social needs and encourages informed collective demand, which can produce better governance and greater effectiveness in the use of public resources, resist oppression, organize politically and alter distributive outcomes.

Liberia's President Ms. Hellen Johnson Sirleaf, in her address entitled *Uncovering barriers to women's political leadership* to women leaders from Africa and Asia, on her experience as first African woman president said:

> "There is a critical mass of illiterate women across the continent. In Liberia alone the illiteracy level stands at 30%, majority of those illiterate being women… There are many advantages of education for girls including having few children and marry later in life, the confidence in running for public offices (because they will have the necessary qualifications) and empowerment in all areas of economic, legal and political life. It is because an African woman was fashioned to grow to become a wife, mother and care giver in the family." http://daily news.haarileo.co.tz/magazine/index.php?id 9799.

Like in many African countries, Liberia's women have been victims of discriminative traditional practices that deny girls' the right to education, inheritance and ownership of property including land. Changing attitudes that women's leadership is as good will help change mindsets of those who have been conditioned to accept male domination in politics.

 The Center for Economic Social Rights reported that the universal vision of human rights can only be realized when communities become an integral part of fulfilling that vision. For this reason, the right to participate in education is an essential aspect of the human rights framework and a critical component for ensuring government accountability (Centre for Economic and Social Rights: 162 Montagre Street, Brooklyn, NY. 11201) www.cess.org.

The Two Sexes (Male And Female) As Complementary Biological Entities

Paulk (2008), argue that, the dominant cultures for centuries have prevailed over women's acquisition of education. That an educated woman is not fit to find personal happiness through her designated role in the domestic sphere; without a man to support her, this woman will meet a

bad end. This notion looks at a woman who has gained knowledge of the discourse of power is a threat to the dominant culture. Those supporting female education however, have argued that education preserves rather than undermines female virtue. Supporters of female education have proposed that a highly literate woman makes a better companion for her husband and a better educator of her child (Kanake,1997; Manya,2000; Morley,2006; Onsongo,2006; Raburu,2011). In order to justify seeking education, women have had to take recourse to motions of a woman's "proper" place in order to push the boundaries of that same sphere that, a woman's role, in the home has taken a new twist so that educated women are nation builders who raise future citizens.

In Europe and the Americas, women have excelled in male-dominated careers like financial management, chemistry and anatomy. They have also broken the boundaries separating the male and female, public and private realms by pursuing careers as court writers and professionals (USAID, 2008). In other words, in countries with an educated citizenry, women's increasing access to education is providing them with concrete benefits. However, inequities between men and women have not yet been eliminated. Thus, there is need to continue to push the boundaries imposed by the hegemonic culture's beliefs and practices.

Phiri (2008), observed that the major challenges for African Women Theologians is the struggle to empower women to contribute their critical thinking and analysis to advance current knowledge using a theoretical frame work based on theology. Women face challenges of re-defining the identity of African women in theology, promoting more women to study theology, inclusion of African women's theology in the curriculum and collaboration with male theologians. Thus, there is need to use the gender approach to studies so as to expose the injustices that exist in the church, culture and the bill in the relationship between men and women. Human beings construct culture, therefore cultural practices in the bible and in our own cultures should not be confused with the will of God. That, it is important to acknowledge that both men and women are created in the image of God. The process of change requires an analysis of the African worldview and how people's identities are constructed.

The 6th African Development Forum (ADF VI) reported that women continue to face considerable barriers in African labor markets as a result of lack of education, inadequate access to training, discrimination and cultural attitudes about their role in the work place. In Malawi for instance, the lower representation of women in the employment is as a result of poorer and less opportunities in accessing employment, unequal treatment in employment and lower educational attainment at all levels. On the hand, women who are educated and trained sometimes experience discrimination during selection for jobs and interviews. Some employers have advertised that they are seeking to employ men, whilst some selection panels ask gender insensitive questions such as on pregnancy, marital status, and family responsibilities. Sexual harassment is also common at the work place where employers seek sexual favors from the prospective employees (Budlender, 2002).

In most sub-Sahara African countries, women dominate the informal sector where they are found in the fields of trading, agriculture and food processing. This means that, women will not be covered by social security and other benefits such as maternity leave. African countries continue to be beset by a range of harmful traditional practices, like female genital mutilation (FGM), early/enforced marriages, child betrothal and polygamy, violence against women and girls in conflicts and situations of insecurity is widespread. Furthermore,   major obstacles to the

promotion of gender equality and empowerment despite the widespread commitment shown by the international and regional gender equality frameworks include the large gaps between policy and practice. Shirley and Diana (2009) observed that Girls' education on the African continent has reached crossroads. The gender gap has lessened significantly particularly in primary education, despite the high priorities placed on girls' education in national, continental and International education policies and laws, conventions and agreements like MDG and EFA. (UNESCO, 2008/09 EFA Report).Without significant change to traditional curricular and representations of women in roles of inferiority, girls would find it difficult to aspire to transcend gender parity.

The Social Roles That Men And Women Assume In Their Lives

Gender refers to the social differences and relations between men and women which are learned, vary widely among societies and cultures, and change over time. The term gender does not replace the term sex, which refers exclusively to biological differences between men and women. The term gender is used to analyze the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and needs of women and men in all areas and in any given social context. Gender roles are learned behaviors in a given society, community or other social group. They condition activities, tasks and responsibilities which are perceived as male or female. Gender roles are affected by age, class, race, ethnicity and religion, and by the geographical, economic and political environment.

Gender equality is the equality between men and women with the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities while gender mainstreaming, also known as mainstreaming a gender perspective, is "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies, and programs, in any area and at all levels". It is a call to all Governments and other actors to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programs, so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively. In other words, it is a call to place human relations, as manifested in their "male" and "female" roles, at the centre of all programming, action, and evaluation, instead of treating these as marginal or even "ghettoized" phenomena. Gender mainstreaming thus, underscores the principle that there can be no sustainable development as long as discrimination of one of the two sexes/genders exists. The injustice created by inequalities based on gender/sex discrimination threatens in the long run not only the discriminated gender but the entire society.

The essential benefits of gender mainstreaming are the promotion of democracy and social equality and that a new quality of social innovation can be achieved (Weg 2007). Other benefits are that more gender equality policy efficiency is achieved; all political decisions and measures are enhanced with equal opportunities; all responsible entities are responsible in the top-down process; existing disadvantages for both genders are dismantled; gender equality measures

become more efficient, because gender aspects are incorporated from the start; prevention is more (cost-)efficient than the subsequent dismantling of disadvantages incurred and that it is an act of economic rationality that furthers the economic change of structure.

The use of gender mainstreaming leads to an amelioration of the concept of democracy within organizations and society. An organization becomes more democratic, if women and men in their diversity equally shape, develop and participate in the results. Organizations develop gender democracy with the implementation of gender mainstreaming, and put national requirements into practice, for example laws or directives. The use of gender mainstreaming ensures foresighted and lasting policies by adjusting to the concepts of life and work of the employees as well as the diverse interests and initial situations of men and women (competitiveness).

Gender-sensitivity and the use of gender-political issues in expert work increases gender competence and improve leadership behavior (Human Resource policy). The social and expert qualification of female and male executives is increased through gender competence. Corporate culture improves when approaches regarded as "feminine" and "masculine" receive similar appreciation.

Equality in Education as the Foundation for Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction.

The World Educational Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, established a framework of action to achieve Education for All (EFA) by 2015 and EFA Goal V is to remove gender disparities and inequalities in education. (Dakar World Educational Forum: 2000). The Millennium Development goal 3(a) also aimed at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels (Randell 2006). African Union too, developed a gender policy through Article 4(L) of the consultative Act of the African Union (Feb,10 2009) with the main purpose to establish a clear vision and make commitments to guide the process of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment to influence policies, procedures and practices which will accelerate achievement of gender equality, gender justice, non discrimination and fundamental human rights in Africa. That, the AU Organs, Regional Economic Communities and Member States will:

1. Harmonize and align sub regional and Member States gender policies to the AU Gender Policy by 2011, where appropriate.
2. Develop capacity to establish effective Gender Management Systems (GMS) by 2020
3. Build requisite capacity in Member States and collaborate with civil society and other interest groups for gender mainstreaming and women empowerment while creating forums on gender related thematic issues in the regions.

 However, the targets set by the African Union, Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have largely been missed because a lot of girls are dropping out of school or not being sent at all because of the poverty of parents. Traditional cultural attitudes are still very strong especially in African rural areas. For instance, an investigation into a 12 year old girl dropping out of school in Chanchaga village in Northern Nigeria revealed that the father to the girl thought that he could not "waste" his meager resources in educating a female child who would eventually be given out in marriage. (Mlama, 2001).

Ogot (1993) observed that virtually equal numbers of boys and girls begin primary school in Kenya. However, by secondary school, there are 1.33 boys for every girl. The public university sex ratio is double that of secondary schools at 2.68 males for every female! Only for the Teachers' College sector of higher education is there reasonable gender equity (1.15 males per female). There are many cultural reasons for the low participation of women in African higher education, especially traditional family patterns which emphasize that the proper role of women is to stay in the home and care for their families. Parents often discourage their daughters from obtaining advanced education (beginning as early as the transition from primary into secondary school) because they believe potential husbands will not be interested in marrying highly educated women. Many parents are also more willing to pay school fees for sons than for daughters because after marriage women are considered members of their husbands' families.

Many strategies for increasing the participation of women in higher education have been advocated, e.g., counseling and the creation of awareness of educational opportunities among girls, re-orienting attitudes of male counterparts, changing attitudes of parents, reforming organizational management practices that exclude women from senior administrative posts in African higher education, development of an indigenous women's movement, and government promulgation and enforcement of affirmative action policies. Nevertheless, there is still much room for improvement with respect to gender equity in Kenyan higher education.

A review of literature and research on Kenyan universities reveals that there are no policies or mechanisms in Kenyan universities (public and private) related to the implementation of the proposals made at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (Wesonga 2003; Nyamu 2004; Onsongo 2002, 2005, Kimani 2005). By 2003 four public universities had established gender centers (Egerton University – 1992; Moi University – 2003; Kenyatta University – 2002, Maseno University – 2001). However, the privately owned chartered universities had not established gender centers at the same time. For those that had established the centers were faced with some challenges. That, the gender centers were found to be ineffective in enhancing gender equity in the universities in which they have been established (Keino 2002).

On the legal and policy levels, factors contributing to the gender gap include inadequate and /or lack of government funding for schools and teachers, lack of free and compulsory basic education in many African countries, lack of financial incentives for girls' education that would offset the belief that sons are taken to school for economic investments while girls are a liability to the families because they are set for marriage.

It is imperative to note here that educating females and males produces similar increases in their subsequent   earnings and expands future opportunities and choices for both boys and girls. Providing a quality relevant education leads to improved enrollment and retention, but also helps to ensure that boys and girls are able to fully realize the benefits of education for posterity. (USAID's May 2008).

Research has shown that one of the most effective development investments countries and their donor partners can make is education. Education produces significant improvements in health nutrition and life expectancy and countries with an educated citizenry are more likely to be democratic and politically stable. (USAID 2005) Thus, it appears that educating girls possibly yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world, that, when girls

go to school, they tend to delay marriage, have fewer but healthier children, and contribute more to family income and national productivity.

In most developing countries, being female exacerbates an already difficult situation, that, girls are less likely than boys to enroll in school, stay in school, or have their educational needs met through non-formal means. (USAID,2005). For instance, interventions involving both girls and boys appear to be successful in addressing constraints that limit girls' participation in education. Through a USAID funded project in Ethiopia, boys became more sensitive to the multiple burdens girls face that interfere with their schooling. (DeJaeghere, 2004). As a result, boys no longer judged girls as intellectually inadequate. The aforementioned factors pave way for females not to aspire higher learning and thus missing job opportunities. Offorma (2009) assert that when one acquires education, it helps him or her to develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically. This means that the individual has acquired adequate and appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and values, known as cognitive, psychomotor and affective behaviors to be able to function optimally as a citizen. These behaviors are the focus of training individuals in instructions of learning. The planned and systematic training given in an institution of learning is formal education.

Okeke, Nzewi and Njoku (2008) identified child labor, poverty and lack of sponsorship, quest for wealth bereavement, truancy, broken homes and engagement of children as house helps, as factors or the clog in the wheel of children's access of education. That, in most African countries, girls are abducted for early marriages, recruited as domestic servants and are subjected to sexual violence and abuse or simply barred from education under military regimes in certain countries. Most of the factors that militate against the girl-child access to education are socio-cultural. Many countries on the African continent are ranked among the poorest in the world, the on-going HIV/AIDs pandemic, tribal warfare and despotic governments have contributed to the denial of girls their fundamental human right.

In Uganda, Birungi (2008) cited the glaring gaps in implementation of the girl-child education yet the government has done nothing to alleviate the problem. In Kenya, even with the introduction of free primary education, access to education is still remaining a wide dream to may Kenyan children especially the girls who still find themselves out of school owing to the demands for their labor in the homes, assisting taking care of their siblings, child marriage, death of parents and looking after the side members of the family (Mwangi, 2004).

UNICEF (2003) reported that in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of girls out of school each year has risen from 20 million in 1990 to 24 million in 2002. The worst hit country in The Republic of South Sudan which has been seriously affected by civil war. UNICEF noted that in the area, as few as 15 percent of primary school aged children were in school and girls represented only one quarter of the number.

However, all is not lost. In Kenya for example, the government has taken some initiatives in the promotion of children's education by enshrining this right in the children's Act, 2001. The Act also created a department of children to deal with their rights and welfare. In the Act section 127 states that "any person found guilty of negligence is liable for a maximum of five years imprisonment or a fine of a sum not exceeding Kshs.200, 000 or both fine and imprisonment.

Much awareness is created by NGOs, so that people are educated on the importance of taking girls to school. (Republic of Kenya: children's Act 2001). One major challenge that needs to be

overcome is the prevailing social thought that discourages or minimizes the importance of education for girls. Coupled with this, the fact that most schools in Africa are often substandard with poor quality education, with classes being held in crowded, poorly constructed structures and limited access to paper and pencils and even less access to textbooks and computers.

Uggins and Randell (2007) made the observation that though Rwanda has made enormous strides forward in improving access of boys and girls to education, girl students continue to lug behind in educational achievement and access particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. That, girls are underrepresented in government schools, and are instead more unlikely to attend more expensive and lower quality private schools and universities.

Historical marginalization from the education system, poverty that above is 35 percent of Rwandan failures withdraw their children from schools because of their inability to afford educational costs. Lack of gender-based curriculum and teaching methods are major barriers in girl's education. The school curriculum is masculinized, that is, classroom buildings, assessment methods are all tailored to male students. Many schools do not have adequate sanitary and dormitory facilities, and many do not have separate facilities for boys and girls.

 In addition, poverty prevents many families from purchasing sanitary towels. Many adolescent young women therefore must stay home from school during their monthly periods, causing higher rates of absenteeism. Gender – based violence in schools. That girls who experience abuse within their homes and at their schools or in their communities suffer from trauma, causing them to perform significantly worse in their studies. When girls encounter harassment, intimidation or violence within their school environments, they may be afraid to attend school and may abandon their studies.

With all these factors working against girl's educational attainment, it is important to build proactive policy interventions to rectify these sources of direct and indirect bias and to positively promote girls' education. A particular area of attention is to devise interventions that improve the performance indicators of female students at all levels and raise completion rates.

The Challenges Facing Women As Community/Public Servants For Sustainable Development

It is hypothesized that a good leader is defined according to normative masculinity (Binns & Kerfoot, 2011). The skills, competencies and dispositions deemed essential to leadership including assertiveness, competitiveness, autonomy and authority are embedded in socially constructed definitions of masculinity. Gender and organization scholars have argued that rather than seeing the women as requiring remedial support, it is the organizations that require transformational change. Aziz (2011) asserts that in the 21st century, it is human capital rather than physical capital that will define performance and progress. Women represent half of the world population and therefore half the potential resource that can drive such performance.

Being in the public sector is all about bringing value and benefits to its citizens. Such benefits can include improved housing, education, health and transportation. Successful nations are those that have accorded priority to its human capital and to organizational review and transformation. Given the scarce high – powered human capital, there are tremendous opportunities for women with capabilities in the public sector and thus contribute towards achieving the greater well being of the

population. While the opportunities are immense for women in the public sector, yet few rise to leadership positions. For a woman who is a mother, wife and daughter, the sacrifice involved is great.   The challenge is to recognize continues reinvention that is needed to acquire new knowledge, new skills, and new experience so as to be able to have the new capabilities.

Linde, VanRensbug & Sikalieh (2010) put it that women may lose out in terms of promotion because senior managers do not know them well or have an inaccurate view of their ambitions and may therefore underrate their job performance. That, the supervisors are unlikely to attribute the performance of women to them; women are seen as less promotable.

UNESCO (2000) reports that it is an established fact that women constitute a major educating force in society, both in the traditional and modern senses of the word but little credit is given to their contribution to the development of society. That is, women have become catalysts of social transformation, not more important than men, but rather with the same dignity and nature. Yet there is still a great amount to be done to establish gender equality. The widely accepted importance of educating women is a prerequisite for social transformation and national development.

Through its own National Plan of Action for the Advancement of women, Vietnam prioritized protecting and ensuring broad understanding of women's legal rights across all social state. However, there is a gap between actual laws and public understanding of the law. Moreover, while women currently make up a quarter of the representatives in the National/Ministries, the proportion at lower levels of government is not as high. (The Asian Foundation, June 2011).

Thus, women have been given negative tags as weak and or emotional leaders as opposed to men who are looked at as methodical and forthright(Bagilhole and White, 2011; Ohene, 2010; Onsongo, 2004; Obejide, 2003; Rab, 2010). Stuff and Coyne, (2009). They have to continually establish and re-establish their credibility, not only with their peers but also with subordinates and supervisors, which drain morale and threaten productivity. That, great paradoxes of Africa's persisting development crisis are the continuing under-engagement of millions of potentially transformational female talent in managerial roles, and the systematic relegation of their educational and capacity development needs based on misguided traditional values and gender-based prejudice (Ibeh and Debrah, 2011)

Amugwom(2009), argues that, despite more and more women in Nigeria acquiring tertiary education, they do not get involved in the labor process in Nigeria. This is attributed to such factors like the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian labor market. Women attitudinal and psychological dispositions, choice of marriage partners by women among others.

 As such, there is need for education to address the imperatives of development by liberating women from unfounded and baseless myths or stereotypes that keep them away from labor participation that will make them sustain the development of their communities wherever they are.

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