

GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA AND THE NEW CONSTITUTION FOR VISION 2030

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Abstract

Gender equity is the impartial treatment of women and men so as to ensure equal enjoyment of privileges and rights allotted to members of either gender. In Kenyan society, this has been a controversial subject since the country earned its independence. The subject is continually quelled by challenges and hindrances that not only make it difficult for the nation to make greater strides on its way to achieve gender equity but also continue to restrict the country's development whether in the political, social or economic spheres as envisioned in the country's economic growth blueprint dubbed Kenya Vision 2030. These challenges include traditional and cultural practices, rapid population growth, religion, poverty, disease and so on. Despite the aforementioned challenges, the country has still made enormous progress in trying to achieve gender equity in all sectors including education development and this is due to various efforts made by all stakeholders towards addressing the many gender issues and concerns experienced in the country. Among the progressive initiatives in this regard is the promulgation of the country's new constitution whose set of laws are aligned towards promoting gender equity and the incorporation of the country's economic growth strategic plan Vision 2030 which recognizes the achievement of gender equity and equality as an important component to driving economic development.

Key Words: Gender, equity, education, vision 2030

INTRODUCTION

Gender equity can be defined as the process of being fair or impartial to women and men and this can only be achieved through having strategies and measures in place that counteract the constraints that have blocked men and women in society from playing on a level ground (Wokocha, 2009). This is an unavoidable matter in Kenyan society since gender equity is among one of the many goals the country seeks to achieve in its quest to achieving middle income status within the next two decades. This has been clearly set out in the country's Vision 2030, the country's economic blueprint whose launch in 2009 has seen the country embark on the document's strategies which include having a new constitution in place, a feat already accomplished presently. The promulgation of the country's new constitution can be viewed as one of the greatest achievements in the country's quest for holistic reforms which has seen the enactment of laws in line with the achievement of gender equity in almost all sectors of the country. As discussed in depth later, the constitution has many gender equity gains that provide the required legal backing to ensure that both Kenyan women and men share equal enjoyment of resources, opportunities, rewards and social services (Kariuki, 2011). The various initiatives aimed at addressing the country's gender concerns in the new constitution are also asserted in the country's economic growth plan Vision 2030 and the Government of Kenya's policies as well as Presidential directives. However, there are various hindrances that the country still faces in the achievement of gender equity in education development as envisioned in the strategic plan. Some examples of such barriers are cultural, and religious resistance to gender equity, poverty coupled with disease, rapid population growth, and a lack of sufficient representation in key decision making sectors such as leadership and governance. Some countries in the world have revised their constitution and are ahead of Kenya in making sure that both men and women are given equal opportunities in developing and developed sectors. Some of the strategies these countries have used have been embraced by the Republic of Kenya and others have been engrained into future plans such as Vision 2030 and other departmental and ministerial policies as well as legislations.

Factors that influence gender equity in Kenya

Despite the fact that Kenya has enjoyed relative political stability since it gained independence compared to other developing countries especially in Sub Saharan Africa, the East African nation that has enjoyed fifty years of self rule has still quite a number of challenges that continue to hinder its development and progression as a whole. This also affects the progress in achieving gender equity and equality. There are quite a number of impediments that have continued to restrict progress in the achievement of gender equity in the country and these include factors such as disease, poverty and culture as well as politically enhanced restrictions such as corruption, a lack of good representation among many others.

Cultural factors

The present urban population in Kenya signifies a great contrast in this society's day to day activities as compared to the traditional and cultural heritage that this society emanated from when it achieved its independence. Despite this achievement, there is a lot that has not changed in the whole of Kenyan society with regard to gender equity. There is a general low status that is traditionally given to the female gender which has resulted in a hard-to-overcome inequality between women and men and this is in spite of the continued support from the government which has enacted a number of legislations as

well as forming and effecting policies that are in favour of the fair treatment of women. There have also been various non-governmental organizations that have continued to fight for this cause with large support from the media fraternity, and human rights organizations but all that has not had much effect on getting rid of the tension that lies between the traditional and modern rules in Kenyan society. This traditionally bestowed lower stature affects various sectors of the society such as education, and this has resulted in the female gender being less empowered generally since the general perception of women's roles according to tradition is that they are to be wives and mothers who should stay at home and look after the children. Consequently, many of the rural folk will not invest in educating their female children and this greatly reduces the chances of Kenyan women achieving any level of equity to Kenyan men.

Traditionalism and other cultural hindrances towards achieving gender equity in education development are conspicuous in much of Kenyan society particularly in the rural regions of the country. In much of the rural regions where the citizenry has held on to traditional and ethnic cultural beliefs, there is disregard for almost all of the gender equity values and this is particularly worse on the female gender since fundamental rights accorded to every Kenyan woman, man, girl and boy such as the right to basic education are continually overlooked (Society for International Development, 2010). Most girls are affected by traditionalist concepts such as early marriages and occasionally fatal practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM). Much of Kenyan society still needs to understand the importance of educating women so as to prepare them for development and leadership. This in turn would help in achieving gender equity which goes beyond just empowering women. The whole country should be empowered for development to take place. The fact that women's empowerment is key to achieving long term development has been embraced among almost all governments of developing countries and this is due to the crucial role women play traditionally which is essentially managing households.¹

Population growth Rate

Kenya's population growth rate currently stands at three percent per annum according to the National Coordinating Agency on Population and Development (NCAPD) and this has been noted as one of the many stumbling blocks the country has to deal with in order to achieve gender equity as well as growth in an economic sense.² Kenya's lack of family planning is one of the factors that have led to the high population growth rate and this can be faulted on many factors including culture and tradition as mentioned earlier. The traditionalistic culture which views women as mothers and wives will eventually lead to a situation requiring an urgent reduction in the country's population growth if it intends to attain middle level economic status as envisioned in Vision 2030 especially in development sectors such as education as was the case in developed nations in Asia such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand which reduced their population growth rates so as to strengthen their economies. This rapid population growth has also alleviated other challenges that also restrict the achievement of gender equity such as poverty and HIV prevalence.

Researchers from International aid agencies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have all noted that the country needs to figure out means to encourage couples within the country to have smaller families if the country is to achieve food security, universal primary education, and primary healthcare for every Kenyan as well as a decrease in maternal and infant mortality rate as planned for in Vision 2030 (Anyangu-Amu, 2010). The Kenyan population stood at 38 Million people in the year 2008 and this indicated that it had grown by a third since the previous count in 1999. From these figures, researchers have come around with projections that take the country's growth rate into account and these projections show that the country's population will continue to rise

reaching 82 million by the year 2040, which is ten years after the planned completion of the implementation of the national economic blueprint Vision 2030. This shows that the country's population growth rate, if not contained soon, will affect the country's future development plans since the size of a country's population always affects how much of the national budget is available for the provision of services including fundamental ones to the citizenry such as education provision hence the hindrance to the achievement of gender equity in the various sectors including education development.

Religion

Although religion is quite well embraced in Kenyan society, it has also been noted to be an impediment to the achievement of gender equity in education development as well as in the development of the country. Religion offers a platform for members of any society to be united and hence brings about peace and control to what would essentially be a catastrophic society but even with this great blessing bestowed on humanity by religion, it still portrays the female gender as being of lower rank than the males and this clearly acts as a constraint to achieving gender equity. For example, in 2004 and 2006, the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report which contains the Gender Empowerment Measure rankings showed that the top ten countries worldwide with the highest levels of gender equality are all greatly atheistic nations, while the countries that featured in the bottom ten of the rankings were all highly religious nations that had atheists at insignificant numbers (Palsule, 2009).

Looking at both Christianity and Islam which are the most entrenched religions in Kenya, both religions' dogma are set to encourage the women in society to gain knowledge that will be beneficial to their traditional roles of being good mothers and wives. Some Islamic religious practices like the *pardah* system encourage the seclusion of women and also emphasizes that women need to dress in a manner that conceals them completely.³ The system essentially restricts students from the female and male genders from working together due to religious beliefs and through this, it also serves to deny the girls an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills in technical and scientific areas that are continually asserted as the main driving forces of the transformation of the country into a middle income economy as laid out in Kenya's vision 2030 (Oparanya, 2010). In Christianity, the catholic denomination does not ordain women into priesthood and does not encourage women leadership in any church organizations. This setback is a hindrance to the country's development.

Poverty

Education throughout the world enhances any type of development since it gives people the knowledge and the skills needed in social, Economic, and political sectors. Women form the majority of the uneducated population in Kenya and as such they are more vulnerable to being victims of poverty. This has continued to contribute to the gender disparity in Kenya and thus poverty is one of the great challenges that will continue to hinder the country's achievement of gender equity as well as middle income status as it has been proposed in the country's Vision 2030. Looking deeper into how poverty restricts the country's progression in terms of gender equity shows how much the aspect has greatly held the country back on the road to development. This poverty which is a result of many other factors such as corruption, natural disasters, poor governance as well as the aforementioned such as rapid population growth and culture has in turn affected many other areas that are of great impact to the country's development. Some of these areas are education, leadership, and health which are viewed as fundamental requirements for development. A lack of these skills affects the society in many ways. For

example, poor parents would prefer investing in a boy's education than in a girl with the belief that the girl will only enrich her husband's family when she gets married. As a result of this ignorance, many women lag behind as they lack basic empowerment avenues that would equip them with skills which would help them make major contributions to the country's development. Poverty in Kenya affects mainly the women as explained above and is experienced in more than one avenue hence making it a challenge for the country (Kombo & Kimani, 2010). Persistent hunger and starvation that affects the country almost every year and inability to access fundamental services such as healthcare, education, shelter, and clean water is presently defined as a humanitarian crisis in Kenya. A lack of these facilities continues to restrict the country's advancement towards attaining gender equity and this is because all the aforementioned factors affect Kenyan women in a worse capacity compared to men since women are more marginalized and excluded.

Transition rates in the education system

Low transition rates of students especially girls has been a great restriction to Kenya in achieving gender equity especially in education development. The result of the low transition rates has led to the decline in the proportion of the females enrolled in schools higher up in the Kenyan education structure and very much significantly in the tertiary institutions such as universities and middle level colleges.⁴ Studies done on this aspect indicate that female students' enrollment in public universities is at thirty per cent of the total enrollment and this has also led to the under-representation of female students in technological, scientific and mathematical professional programs. Consequently, this leads to the aforementioned professions being bloated by males thus greatly impeding the achievement of gender equity (Wosyanju, 2009).

Although the Government of Kenya recognizes education as the basic tool required to develop the required human resources so as to improve the quality of life of every Kenyan as envisioned in the country's economic blueprint, the relatively low transition rates, despite efforts made to increase accessibility and equity in the education sector still continue to restrict the country from making gains in terms of gender equity concerns (Society for International Development, 2010). The enrollment rates have been on a steady rise since the implementation of several reforms in basic education which intended to eliminate the gender disparity that continues to affect the sector but sustaining these achievements requires more investment by the government since making basic education easily accessible is not all that the sector needs. The country needs initiatives to quell impediments to raising transition rates such as developing frameworks and policies that will address the issue of making education accessible to children in communities in the arid and semi-arid areas where pastoralists communities and the nomadic culture continue to deny many children, especially girls, their basic right such as education.

Representation of the female gender in key decision making organs

As mentioned earlier in the article, the low transition rates of girls to positions of higher education as well as other factors such as poverty and culture have resulted in the proportion of women in professional positions being quite small in comparison to the fact that in Kenya women account for slightly more than half of the total population. In addition, they also form the majority of the Kenyan electorate. This under representation in the professional scene has resulted in women being quite few in strategic decision making positions as compared to other developing countries, for instance, Rwanda which serves as an ideal example in regard to having equity in representation. The fellow East African

nation had female legislative representation at 48.8% as of 2005 and as it is well known, having representation increases the attention to gender specific areas, such as education development. In Kenya, gender equity still requires a lot of intervention for its achievement to be realized (African Development Forum VI, 2008).

Access and control of resources

Gender inequity in Kenya is driven largely by a lack of access to and control of resources which is highly divided along gender lines in favour of men. The inequality is especially manifested in the discrimination that is involved in the access to basic necessities and services such as education, land, credit financing as well as markets. The country is also experiencing a general decrease in access to formal employment and this definitely affects the women harder than it does the men. A lack of access to opportunities and control over key resources has been fuelled by many factors such as a lack of women representation in the key decision making organs of governance and other aforementioned factors such as culture and traditions. It has also been driven by slow growth the country experienced in the past as a result of poor governance. Slow economic growth significantly impact on the country's poverty hence making the situation worse. As a result, the slow growth acted as an impediment to attaining gender equity or any form of progression in the economic and political spheres of Kenyan society thus further restraining any advancement that the country could make in line with achieving middle income status by the year 2030.

Disease

Disease form part of the many challenges that continue to constrain progress made in gender equity in many sectors of the country. Communicable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS are greatly propagated by poverty. Since poverty greatly affects women who form the majority of the poor in the country, it shows that women form the large proportion of those vulnerable to disease hence leading to their withdrawal from empowering avenues such as gaining education or employment. This signifies how much diseases form much of the impediments that continue to hold back the achievement of gender equity in education development. Studies on how disease continues to negatively affect gender equity particularly in education development have been conducted in other African countries that share relatively the same stature as Kenya in terms of achieving gender equality. For example, studies conducted in Zimbabwe and the Kingdom of Swaziland indicated that HIV and AIDS continue to have a negative impact on the living and schooling arrangements of children (Boler & Aikman, 2008). This was particularly noted to greatly affect orphaned children especially girls where even general statistics indicated that fewer girls than boys were able to access basic education or advance to higher levels of education. This drawback is also experienced in Kenya which has tried to work on various plans and strategies in order to expand access to education and good health so as to improve the livelihood of the citizens. HIV and AIDS continue to affect gender equity particularly in the development of education. This happens because the disease brings about money and labour shortages and due to gender biased division of labour emanating from cultural and social factors, the girls' schooling is interfered with since they must work in order to provide food for their families. Women and girls in this society are forced to undertake the great pile of household tasks as well as responsibilities such as contributing labour towards preparations in cooking and other related tasks during communal events such as funerals and feasts. This helps them to earn a little income which enables them to buy food for their families. The old women in the society are affected most because they are left with large families to take care of when the young people die from the disease. This shows how diseases such as HIV and AIDS which is regarded

to as a pandemic and continues to show alarming prevalence rates continue to essentially paralyze efforts that Kenya has prepared to undertake towards attaining gender equity.

However, despite the many hardships the country encounters, a lot of achievements have been made. For example, there are many projects that have been completed, while others have been strategized, that will adequately address the issue of gender equity and equality in education development in the country. This will form the basis for the country to have an enabling environment as described in the country's economic blueprint, Vision 2030, which sets sights on "transforming the country into a globally competitive and prosperous nation".

Achievements and future strategies

Kenya has made a lot of achievements in the last nine years when the new government took over power. For example, the promulgation of the country's new constitution as well as the establishment of the country's development blueprint whose objective is to help transform Kenya into a "middle income country that will provide a high quality of life to all its citizens by the year 2030"⁵ among many other government policies and legislations are just a few of the many initiatives that aim to address gender equity. This signifies the commitment the country has towards development in gender equity. For instance, the constitution states that thirty per cent of positions in all sectors of development, employment, and leadership should be reserved for women.

Free primary education

Despite the gender disparities that are reflected mainly in completion rates, transition rates, high adult female illiteracy and low academic achievement levels, the governments implementation of free primary education, (FPE) in 2003 brought about an enormous rise in enrollment rates for girls as well as boys. Over the five year period since the implementation of FPE, the average girls' enrolment was forty nine per cent while in 2008, the net enrolment rate for girls was estimated to be at ninety one per cent which was a great improvement (Ojiambo, 2009). With these encouraging figures it is quite clear that the implementation of free primary education offers the required platform for gender equity in education development since the FPE program seeks to empower both boys and girls hence offering the female gender a fair opportunity. The ratification of the country's new constitution made free primary education a right for every Kenyan hence making it illegal for any parents who choose not to send their children to school as opposed to the aforementioned scenario where due to tradition and culture, female education was overlooked.

The scrapping of school fees and provision of free primary education has helped the girl child access education since the parents no longer need to make preference on which child to send to school. This has helped in making progress in achieving gender equity in line with the country's development goals and strategies such as Vision 2030 since most families that had financial constraints would typically have chosen to take boys to school rather than girls. Similarly, the need to have school fees further affects women and girls as they will resort to any means so as to get finances for crucial education. Such means include engaging in negative money making avenues such as prostitution which is risky and exposes them to fatal diseases such as HIV and AIDS. It also exposes them to situations prone to gender based violence (Wosyanju, 2009). Free primary education therefore serves in many ways to counteract the gender disparities in the country but more importantly it shows the commitment of the country to recognizing basic education as a right enjoyed by every child regardless of gender as well as a vital component to driving the country towards attaining middle income status as intended in Vision 2030.

Kenya's new constitution

The country's new constitution was promulgated on 27th of August 2010 replacing the country's independence constitution of 1963. This was a major fete in the country's progress towards achieving reforms in all sectors including the achievement of gender equity. The constitution guarantees equality for women and men in Article 27 which offers equal and full enjoyment of all fundamental freedoms and rights, which include education, while also asserting that both women and men have the right to equal opportunities in every sector and they have the right to equal treatment. The constitution also establishes the Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission which has the framework to effectively promote gender equity and equality while also handling gender mainstreaming for the development of the nation. The earlier discussed aspect of under-representation in decision making organs which serves as an impediment towards gender equity in education development is also addressed in the country's new constitution. Although it doesn't create a fifty-fifty gender match, it still creates a considerable representation for either gender which is set at no more than two thirds of public appointments hence guaranteeing women representation in key decision making organs handling leadership and governance such as the National assembly and the soon to be established Senate where they will have the opportunity to advocate for and increase the attention to specific issues affecting the female gender (FIDA Kenya, 2010).

Discrimination has also been greatly addressed in the country's new constitution through various legal measures which provide adequate mechanisms to address gender equity concerns that were notable in the past due to several disadvantages that were essentially targeted towards the systematic discrimination of women. These avenues of systematic discrimination against women particularly restricted and limited them from accessing professional skills through higher learning which in turn limited them from having an equal chance of gaining formal and informal employment as well as restricting them from accessing and controlling key resources for socio-economic empowerment such as land. In addition, equality in the provision and protection of economic and social rights has also been addressed in the recently promulgated Constitution and this serves greatly in addressing various gender concerns that weren't prioritized before. There are also provisions in the constitution that address equality and equity such as Article 43, which provides for equality in access to basic needs such as reasonable housing standards, adequate food of acceptable quality, the highest attainable standards of

health including reproductive health, education, as well as social security. Hence, Kenya's new constitution has set out the needed structures to significantly achieve economic development as laid out in Vision 2030 through acknowledging the importance of gender equity (Kariuki, 2011).

Government policies and legislations

The Government of Kenya has shown its commitment towards the achievement of gender equity and equality in the country through various initiatives such as legislations as well as policies and presidential directives. The aforementioned free primary education program as well as the country's new constitution are among the many initiatives in support of achieving gender equity that the government has fully pledged support for. Other government measures put in place in support of achieving gender equality include the establishment of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development which was a break away from the former Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services, in order to set up efficient mechanisms in support of gender mainstreaming as well as to enhance implementation of international agreements in support of gender equity and equality such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The ministry also has highly qualified professionals and even though understaffing constrains the implementation of the ministry's strategic plan, it still has departments for services provision in every district in the country and also organs to attain its objective, namely, the Department of Gender and the National commission on Gender. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development also has the responsibility to implement, monitor as well as offer reports on the Republic of Kenya's progress in implementing international treaties and statutes specific to gender concerns such as the aforementioned millennium development goals, the commission on the status of women and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). All the treaties that the country is signatory to have positively influenced the contents of the country's new constitution as well as its strategic economic growth plan, Vision 2030.

Other government initiatives in support of achieving gender equity in education development include the enactment and implementation of various policies such as the National Policy on Gender and Development of the year 2000 which the government implemented due to the need to have a comprehensive and coherent framework to guide gender mainstreaming within the different sectors of government so as to ensure the end to misplacement of enormous national resources (Society for International Development, 2010). A Gender Policy in Education was also developed in 2007 through the Ministry of Education and its intent was to have a framework for the designing and implementation of various gender-responsive education sector programmes such as the measure to raise the levels of gender parity at all the levels of education. Other measures outlined in the policy include using gender responsive research to address gender concerns in the education sector by using institutional capacity, setting up of a gender and education unit, mechanisms to address gender based violence as well as sexual harassment concerns within the education sector, and a framework to monitor and evaluate the progress made during the implementation of the aforementioned measures. Already strategized initiatives that the ministry wishes to use in order to implement the measures include the establishment of a Gender Desk within the ministry, setting up a Ministerial Task Force on Girls' Education and a National Task Force for Gender and Education.

A number of legislations have been enacted in support of addressing gender equity concerns in the country. The employment act of 2007 is one ideal example that addresses many gender concerns through offering provisions such as providing for three months of fully paid maternity leave for pregnant employees, offering legal requirements stipulating that all men and women who perform work of equal

value will be remunerated equally as well and the creation of legal prohibitions to sexual harassment within the 6th section of the bill which clearly defines sexual harassment to include the use of language, whether in verbal or written correspondence, of a sexual nature. Other legislative measure the country has undertaken in the great strides made towards attaining gender equity as well as equality include Sexual offences Act of 2006, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Act of 2008, Occupational Safety and Health Act of 2007, the Labour Relations Act of 2007 which all have provisions that are in support of the country achieving gender equity in education development in line with the achievement of middle income status as stipulated in Vision 2030.

Incorporation of Vision 2030

Vision 2030 is a national plan-cum strategy developed by the Government of Kenya under a Presidential directive in 2006 to have the National Vision Steering Committee develop a medium term plan on development programs to be implemented with the promise of driving the country's economic growth till the year 2030. The growth set out in the national plan covering the following two decades has been established on three main pillars which are the political, economic and social pillars. The gender concern addressed in the plan particularly, is the equity in resource distribution and power between the genders. The social pillar which identifies gender issues requiring attention has its goal as achieving "a just and cohesive society enjoying equitable social developments in a clean and secure environment"⁶. The plan's social pillar also highlights the various areas of inequality in the economic, political and social spheres and has strategies in place as well as set targets which include initiatives like gender mainstreaming and the initialization of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) which has turned out to be a success in other African countries where it has been implemented such as Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa. Similarly, several strategies have been put in place to address the gender concerns in Vision 2030 as it seeks to increase women participation in all social, political and economic decision making processes as well as increasing all-round opportunities for women. In order to achieve these aims, the plan intends to begin by raising women representation in the National Assembly, improving access to services such as education, health, housing and justice. All these factors will positively enhance gender equity in education development in the country through minimizing the aforementioned vulnerabilities by prohibition of damaging cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation, raising enrollment for girls especially those from nomadic communities as well as slum and poor rural communities, and achieving gender parity and impartiality in the delivery of justice.

Vision 2030 flagship projects

The country's strategic plan has various flagship projects which are to be implemented during the initial five years of the plan covering the years 2008 to 2012. A couple of these projects in Vision 2030 are designed to address gender equity concerns through promoting women's rights. One of these flagship projects is the supporting of the Women's Enterprise Fund which seeks to empower Kenyan women through creating opportunities for them on the economic front hence in turn benefiting the social and political empowerment of the female gender. The fund's inception in 2007 was followed by a budget allocation of Kshs. 1 billion in the same year indicating the government's commitment to addressing gender issues as well as women empowerment. The money from the Women Enterprise Fund is distributed through two channels namely, the Constituency Women Enterprise Scheme (C-WES) and selected financial intermediaries such as microfinance institutions such as the Kenya Women's Finance Trust (SID, 2010). The fund's administration is the responsibility of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development and even though current data indicates that the demand for credit greatly

outweighs funds made available by the treasury, there are several strategies that the Government of Kenya is looking into so as to find ways to scale up the fund in order for it to have a significant impact on the empowering of women as well as to address gender inequity in the country.

The second flagship project to be implemented in line with Kenya's Vision 2030 is the establishment of the Social Protection Fund under the plan's social pillar whose objective is to offer support to the vulnerable and poor women in Kenya. The fund is to be established by 2012 and is sure to tremendously steer the nation towards achieving gender equity in education development as it recognizes the significance of the economic empowerment of women in order to promote equal participation with men. The Social Protection Fund is intended to enhance the facilitation of easy access to credit as well as cash transfers on flexible terms and this clearly aims at promoting the establishment of small scale businesses for women. Through the SPF, the government will address women's needs and hence the fund's establishment provides the needed basis for the attainment of the goals in Vision 2030.

The Youth Enterprise Fund is another flagship project of vision 2030 that also resonates with the two other aforementioned projects in the implementation of various initiatives that seek to address gender equity concerns in Kenya. The fund greatly empowers women through ensuring equal access to credit facilities which in turn significantly benefits young Kenyan women since they are now able to establish successful businesses which, apart from creating an opportunity for them to earn incomes essential to improving their lives, also create the opportunity for them to create employment opportunities for other women. The fund which falls under the administrative structure of the Ministry of Youth and Sports has also been focused on meeting gender equity goals through having its initiatives being advanced more towards young women than men and as statistics presented by the Kenya Gender Data Sheet in 2008 indicated, more young women had received funds for the purpose of business establishment than young men (ADFVI, 2008).

Higher education reforms

Several reforms in higher education in the country have also helped in steering the country towards attaining gender equity in education development. One such initiative is the adoption of affirmative action as a policy by the Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology which aims to offer more opportunities for women in higher learning institutions during admission (Onsare, 2011). The ministry intends to implement the policy so as to be in line with the new Kenyan Constitution by enhancing provision for higher education qualifications to women who will eventually form at least thirty per cent of public appointments and positions as well as holding positions in at least thirty per cent of all industry sectors.

Higher education institutions have also set out strategies that address gender equity in education development. Many public universities have set out periodic strategic plans that have included and addressed gender equity importantly and these plans have included setting up outreach strategies to involve stakeholders such as women groups in their local communities. For example, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology has established a directorate of gender which aims at enhancing gender equity in research and training while also being tasked at enhancing gender equity throughout the institutions through various means such as empowering women by training those in rural areas in basic entrepreneurship skills as well as agriculture.

Gender equity in other countries

Throughout the world, promotion of gender equity has become widely accepted as an essential requirement for attaining development in terms of economic growth as well as in other sectors. The great number of global initiatives including global treaties which focus especially on achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women are testament of this commitment. Looking at a few countries that have made good progress in the journey to achieving gender equity, we note that Kenya is on the right path since the country is also a signatory to the many international and regional treaties in support of achieving gender equity in all sectors including education development. For example, Argentina has accomplished a lot in the quest to achieving gender equity as its well known globally. Despite various impediments such as traditional Catholic influence which is a big driver of the “macho” culture, the country’s widely known history of having female leaders has had a great impact on the progression of gender equity. Initiatives such as the adoption of a quota law for the participation of women in the country’s Congress as well as a significant rise in the female representation in the National Legislature which was at 33.7 per cent in 2005 from a low of 4.3 per cent in 1983 signifies this progress. Illiteracy levels among the country’s women also stands equal to that of the men at 3.1 per cent which shows how much gender disparity has been quelled and hence it’s not shocking that the country is ranked fifteenth in the world for female participation in national legislation (Foundation for Sustainable Development, 2011).

African nations are also determined to achieve gender equity due to the aspect’s significance towards attaining development targets. South Africa was among the pioneers in setting out to achieve gender equity through various notable initiatives such as the innovative Women’s Budget Initiative (WBI) that was set up in 1995. This initiative intends to impact on the resource allocation mechanisms by ensuring impartial benefits between the genders. It does this by tracking down the impact of country’s budget on women. This budget is developed from a gender perspective view. Similarly, Rwanda is tremendously ahead among all other countries within the Eastern African region in the promotion of gender equity in all areas especially education development. Comparing the country’s female gross enrollment ratios (GER) to those of the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa as indicated in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report of 2005, Rwanda’s GER was at 102 as compared to the region’s 86 for primary school enrollment, while the secondary schools GER was at 93 compared to Sub-Saharan Africa’s 79. This can greatly be attributed to the country’s environment policy that has improved both the access to education as well as massively improving gender parity in all education levels (Ojiambo, 2009).

Conclusion

In summary, although Kenya can be said to be significantly ahead in terms of attaining gender equity in education development in comparison to many other Sub Saharan African countries, the facts and statistics still indicate that the Kenyan women form a minority of the country’s decision making mechanism in all areas including the management of the country’s education system and that gender disparity continues to restrain the achievement of gender equity particularly in education development even with the enhanced accessibility since that only forms one part of educational opportunities. But the country’s new constitution as well as newly enacted policies and legislations which have already been successful in strategizing gender equity in all sectors including education development are encouraging. Kenya therefore looks forward to implementing her policies and making sure that the success she has made is maintained in order to achieve middle income status by vision 2030.

Endnotes

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