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Education and Women Empowerment in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Education is a key part of strategies to improve individuals' well-being and societies economic and social development. Education contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the productive capacities of the labour force. Education is essential for empowering women to achieve gender equality which in turn is vital for sustainable development. Education can empower women to become leaders as they acquire literacy confidence and communication skills. It can give them a space to learn about and practice leadership. Further education and professional technical and legal training also help women to gain credibility and influence among leaders and decision-makers. Educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them. Women need the appropriate education and training to take full advantage of these opportunities. This research aims to investigate the role of education in empowering women and girls in Kenya. The research will be guided by the following objectives: to investigate the economical benefits that women get from education, to find out how education empowers women socially, to examine the political benefits that women get from education in Kenya. A comprehensive review of literature was done. The study was conducted using desktop research where information from the libraries internet, journals and journal articles on educating of women and girls in Kenya was analyzed using content analysis.

The study concluded that women are empowered socially, economically and politically by getting education. The study recommended that policies designed to improve the economic prospects of different regions should include programmes to increase the numbers of women and girls in education. Policies designed to increase the numbers of women consider how education can empower women through social norms and values on gender through institutions and through the equitable distribution of education resources.

Key Words: Education, Gender equality, Female education, Economic development and Women empowerment.

Introduction

There are always a number of elements in the society which are deprived of their basic rights in every society, state and nation, but these elements lack in the awareness of their rights. If we enlist such elements from the society, then women would top this list. In fact, women are the most

important factor of every society. Even though everybody is aware of this fact, yet nobody is ready to accept this fact. As a result, the importance which used to be given to women is declining in today's society. As a consequence of this growing tendency of underestimating women such as to make them occupy a secondary position in society and to deprive them of their basic rights, the need for empowering women was felt.

Today we enjoy the benefits of being citizens of a free nation, but we really need to think whether each of the citizens of our country is really free or enjoying freedom, in the true sense of the term. If we consider our country, each Kenyan citizen is given certain basic rights. The constitution of our nation doesn't discriminate between men and women, but our society has deprived women of certain basic rights, which were bestowed upon them by our constitution. Due to such current situation, there is a need to make women free from all the shackles and to empower them as well. This is nothing but empowerment of women.

1.0 Background Information

Women in Kenya are underrepresented in decision-making positions. They also have less access to education, land, and employment. Those living in rural areas spend long hours collecting water and firewood: interfering with school attendance and leaving them with little time to earn money or engage in other productive activities.

The untapped potential of women and girls is gaining greater attention in Kenya. The country's new Constitution, passed in 2010, provides a powerful framework for addressing gender equality. It makes a new beginning for women's rights in Kenya; seeking to remedy the traditional exclusion of women and promote their full involvement in every aspect of growth and development.

When Kenyan women have the freedom to reach their potential, all Kenyan families and communities will grow stronger.

2.0 Purpose of the Study

The paper looked into education and women empowerment in Kenya.

3.0 Literature Review

The literature review of the study revolves around the following: definition of women empowerment, importance of education, achieving empowerment through education participation in education and economic activities retrogressive, social, cultural and traditional values limited access to post - primary education, balancing productive and household and reproductive responsibilities limited economic empowerment and access to credit property ownership. Constraints overcoming social norms and attitudes that block equality in education through education, Theoretical Framework, policy suggestions and Agenda for reform and Recommendations.

3.1 Definition of women empowerment

Women's empowerment is defined as the process in which their spiritual, political, social or economic status is raised. This also includes the right to raise their level of confidence regarding their own capabilities. Empowerment includes the following aspects-

1. The ability to take their own decisions,
2. To take information and have other facilities at their disposal which would enable them to take proper decisions.
3. Firmness while taking collective decisions,
4. Possessing positive way of thinking regarding the ability to bring about transformation
5. The ability to bring about improvement in one's own capabilities
6. The competence to modify other's attitudes in a democratic manner.
7. To participate in continuous and self-propagated development process and to take active participation in the transformation process.
8. To control on negative factors and build up a positive image of oneself.

3.2 Importance of Education

If it is said that education is the key to all problems, then it won't be improper. Thinkers have given a number of definitions of education but out of these definitions, the most important definition is that which was put forth by M. Phule. According to M. Phule,

"Education is that which demonstrates the difference between what is good and what is evil". If we consider the above definition, we come to know that whatever revolutions that

have taken place in our history, education is at the base of them. It is through education that one realizes what is good and what is bad, what is proper and what is not (just and unjust etc). It is education which gives a vent/voice to injustice.

3.3 Importance of Education in women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is not limited only for the Kenyan society. If we consider the global aspect in this regard, we see that women are being given equal treatment in developed nations. In fact, if we take a retrospect of history, we come to know that women have always been given secondary position in society, but the difference between men and women created by the nature is but natural. It is education through which we realize this fact. When American women realized this, they opposed this injustice which was meted out to them by way of a huge movement, through which they asked for equal rights. For eradicating this injustice, the UNO(United Nations' Organization) framed a convention/charter which is called "The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW), which further led to the formation of Women's Commission.

Education sector interventions aim at promoting girl child participation in education through provision of scholarships and bursaries; expansion and improvement of physical infrastructure in schools including sanitary facilities, construction of boarding schools in Arid and Semi-Arid Lands; provision of water and sanitation facilities to create conducive and gender responsive environments in schools.

3.4 Retrogressive Social, Cultural and Traditional Values

Social, cultural and traditional practices and unfounded norms deny women various opportunities to effectively participate in production systems. Cultural norms form a major challenge in Kenya. Most Kenyan cultures still regard the place of a woman as being in the kitchen and raising children as part of the reproductive role. This kind of socialization makes it hard for many men to fathom the idea that they can share the same platform with a woman. Consequently, women are locked out of political representation and hence locking them out of participation in decision making forums. By joining politics, women in such cultures are still considered as breaking the rules that govern gender roles.

Moreover, some traditional practices governing land and livestock ownership, access and control over land, and benefits accruing to land produce tend to favour men compared to women. This to a large extent disadvantages women in accessing credit especially when collateral is required. In 2004 only 1% of land titles in Kenya were held by women and 5-6% was owned jointly.

3.5 Limited Access to Post Primary Education

Although gender gap has reduced in primary and secondary education, gender disparities persist in tertiary education (technical and university) and participation rates are equally low at secondary school level. Disparities are also more prevalent among tertiary education programmes with male students dominating such courses as engineering, technology and finance. This contributes to limited knowledge among women to excel in more lucrative sectors such as manufacturing and highly profitable entrepreneurship programmes.

3.6 Balancing Productive and Household and Reproductive Responsibilities

Like other parts of the Continent, Women in Kenya face the challenge of balancing between work and family responsibilities. On average women work for 12.9 hours a day compared to 8.2 hours for male counterparts (Mekonnen and Spurling, 1994). Time spent by women in attending to household tasks leaves them with limited time to engage in time demanding enterprises that in most cases would be located away from the homestead. Perhaps this is the main reason as to why women dominate the wholesale and retail businesses.

3.7 Property Ownership Constraints

In most communities in Kenya, most of the property is owned by men. This is an obstacle to the welfare of women when they get married and also when they get divorced or in polygamous

homes. In the case of a monogamous home, the wife has no control of property especially land. In some communities where commercial farming is practiced, the woman contributes in not only keeping the home and reproductive activities but also in contributing labour for commercial farming. However, the man has control over all these resources. Whatever wealth the man and wife build together belongs to the man. The situation becomes worse if the man divorces the wife, in which case there is no law that ensures equal division of property. It should be noted that the law protects any title deed holder or any person in whose name any property is registered and in most cases such properties are registered in the name of men. Since customary law allows for polygamy, if a man marries a second wife, the first wife loses part or all of the shared property that they have built together for all the years she has been married to the husband, which is used to cater for the added wife/wives. Without control on property, women are therefore vulnerable to dispossession and they are thus constrained from initiating long-term projects.

4.0 Theoretical Framework

Various theories have been used to contextualize the gender inequality aspect. This ranges from socialization theory to hierarchical gender prescriptions. Risman (1998) identified three distinct theoretical traditions that help understand sex and gender. The first difference focuses on gendered-selves, that is, whether sex differences are due to biology or socialization. This focus is on the individual level of analysis encompassing social identities in which case men mature to be competitive and work oriented while women mature to become nurturing, person oriented and child centered. In terms of gender, the socialization theory suggests that children are taught to behave a certain way according to their sex. Boys are taught to be masculine and girls to be feminine. For example, parents will often buy boys trucks or army toys and for girls, they will buy dolls and playhouse sort-of toys.

According to Risman (1998), the second tradition focuses on how social structure creates gendered behaviour. This approach argues that men and women behave differently because they fill different positions in institutional settings, work organizations and families, that is, they take on different gendered roles.

A third theoretical underpinning is the interaction perspective, which emphasizes contextual issues such as cultural expectations and take-for-granted situational meanings. According to Risman(1998), this concept implies that an individual is expected to create differences that are neither inevitable nor essential. This gender differences can therefore be interpreted to mean legitimization of inequality, as what is female in a patriarchal system is devalued (Daniels 1987; Kynaston 1996). This argument finds support in similar studies in which case there is often less than efficient investment in girls because the returns are perceived to accrue to another family after marriage (Dollar and Gatti 1999).

The hierarchical view expounds on gender inequalities and their linkages to development. The foundations of the hierarchical theory are grounded in Amartya Sen's arguments. Amartya Sen(1999), equated development to freedoms associated with it: freedom to exchange goods and labor, freedom to make choices and influence one's life, freedom to live longer, and freedom to choose to get education. Based on this context, restrictions on owning property, saving or borrowing, or making labor contracts would qualify as disincentives to growth, while freedom to exercise these activities would be associated with economic growth. Thus gender inequality, considered as a hierarchical view of gender relations, with men above women, and women regarded as inferior and less valuable by virtue of their sex, is growth retarding (Mikkola 2005). The argument is that gender equality expressed in an equal valuing and provision of opportunities for both gender enhances development in all spheres.

Mikkola(2005) further argues that Gender hierarchy shows in family, inheritance laws and customs, valuations of women's work as opposed to men's work, and the power to make decisions in society, family, church and social networks. It shows in the opportunities available for development,

education, health and nutrition. It shows in violence and in general invisibility of the women's work. The hierarchy is generally acceptable by both genders, and is not normally questioned. It is general enough to apply across nations, cultures and time periods with the underlying presumption that changes in the status of women will become apparent in development only over a longer time period.

5.0 Achieving Empowerment through Education

Free school education is a highly effective policy for addressing the barrier of poverty in getting girls into school. However, free school provision is most successfully implemented when; The role of girls and women in families, local communities and economies are understood and worked with and Social norms and practices which have gender implications are also addressed at the same time. Education is a powerful means of improving women's status in their community through boosting their economic status. Educating women means that daughters are more likely to be educated as well. Daughters of educated women are more likely to experience better educational and occupational attainment.

Education is capable of increasing women's sense of agency which will support wider reforms in support of gender equality. Institutions that train teachers should investigate their own gender norms and ideas and how these are likely to impact upon the student teachers that they train. Sexual education is more effective when undertaken from an empowerment, feminist perspective. Teacher training offers a window of opportunity to improve teachers' skills in challenging persistent and damaging gender norms and expectations.

5.1 Policy Suggestions and Agenda for Reform

Some of the policies that have been put in place have yielded positive impact in increasing women participation in higher education levels. However, more needs to be done in most sectors including economic empowerment, access to financial services, employment, access to financial services, employment, participation in decision making and improving data management for use in planning and policy processes, among others.

Learning institutions and youth programmes play a critical role in sensitizing youth on gender issues. Education also plays a role in addressing gender disparities through its capability towards enhanced access to education opportunities, and empowerment of women to be able to participate in major economic activities. Parental guidance which is a form of informal education is also critical especially among communities with retrogressive social and cultural effects. Emphasis should be laid on methods of allocation of duties to male and female children such that from the early ages, the children are taught not to discriminate based on sex. Consistent attention has to be paid to violence against women and girls. Such changes may require pre and or co-requisite transformation of mindsets within Government, decision makers, youth, men and even women themselves on greater awareness of the gendered consequences of policies and programmes in the country. One very effective way that transformation of attitudes and beliefs can be obtained apart from legislation is through wholesome and action oriented political willingness to promote changed attitudes through allocation of resources to public sensitization programme geared towards this goal.

5.2 Recommendations

Policies designed to improve the economic prospects of different regions should include programmes to increase the numbers of women and girls in education. Policies designed to increase the numbers of women and girls in education should consider three domains of how education can empower women; through social norms and values on gender, through institutions and through the equitable distribution of educational resources.

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