Gender Equality and Equity in Education. The Case for Gender Responsiveness at Selected Secondary Schools in   Manicaland Province: Zimbabwe

Nyevero Maruzani[1]

Abstract

The right to education is an imperative in the sustainable development and social transformation discourse. While Zimbabwe is party to a number of conventions, declarations and protocols that promote equal educational opportunities, the contribution of schools in promoting gender equality is not well researched. This study interrogates school environments (social, physical and academic) on how they impact on learners in respect of   gender equality in education. Using the mixed method research approach, in depth interviews and semi structured   questionnaire was used for data collection. The interview was administered to purposively selected participants (four school heads and two education officers). At each school 20 boys and 20 girls were randomly selected for participating in the study. Convenient sampling was used to select three schools (a mixed boarding school, a peri urban day school and a private school). The Human Rights Approach framework was the theoretical underpinning for the study. Findings indicated that most school environments are not yet gender responsiveness. The study recommends more vigorous gender analysis of school environments, the gendering of all educational budgets and improved political will for gender equality in education.

Key Words: Human Rights Approach, human rights; gender equity, gender responsiveness; Zimbabwe

1.1 Introduction and background

The right to education is pivotal in the pursuit of development and social transformation (UNICEF, 2007). The Education for All goals set at Jomtien, Thailand (1990) are illustrative. These were reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in 2000 held in Dakar Senegal in 2000, The Millennium Development Goals of 2000, and the Universal Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF,2007; Sida,2015). In the outcome document from the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002 which is called 'A World Fit for Children' the commitments for Education for All were reaffirmed (UNICEF, 2007). Zimbabwe as a nation signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW,1979), The Beijing Declaration (1995) SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Significant achievements have been realised towards the improvement of girls' access, retention and performance in education (FAWE, 2004), there is need to confirm gender equality in education. The observation by Sadker & Sadker & Zittleman (2009) pointed to a scenario where schools are still failing at fairness. Schools claim to be neutral and fair in terms of treating boys and girls but the educational outcomes differ by gender. Zimbabwean schools may need an evaluation as to how learning environments contribute to the discourse on gender equality in education. This study therefore, presents gender analysis of secondary school environments in order come up with possible solutions for gender inequality in education. When that is done all learners will pull to their maximum possible educational potential which will be a step towards the sustainable development of communities.

Education is a human right and gender equality is fundamental to its full realisation (UNESCO, 2015). The acquisition of quality education has an impact on the overall development of communities. Arguing for the role of education in human development Sen (1981) is of the view that, if vast sections of the people of the world are left out of the orbit of education the world will become less just and less secure.

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[1] Midlands State University, Gender Institute, Private Bag 9055 Gweru, Email: nyeveromaruzani@gmail.com
Cell: +263 773684715

Gender equality is a priority on the international development agenda (UNESCO, 2015) for it contributes in a number of ways to social justice and social security as it is articulated in the sustainable development agenda. The emphasis on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in the Universal Sustainable Development Goals (USDGs) are clear testimonies of the importance of gender in development. Underprivileged communities especially women, face insurmountable barriers if they cannot read and write. Chief among the above referred barriers is their failure to enjoy the limited rights pertaining to their daily activities, for example, the right to own land, her own property or to appeal against unjust treatment (Karram, 2013). Gaps in education distances the deprived especially women, from the ways and means of fighting against that deprivation. In as much as education is a fundamental human right, the right is at times not enjoyed equally between females and males (Karam, 2013).

A snapshot of gender inequality in education shows that in 2013 girls accounted for 49% of the 57 million children out of school. COVID 19   amplified a preexisting learning crisis (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2021). While   girls' performance in Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is generally   poorer than boys' due to limited facilities and a culture which tends to discourage girls in STEM subjects, the pandemic added to girls' disadvantages in education. The socially constructed allocation of reproductive duties to girls added to girls' disadvantages in accessing education through alternative ways. The general observation is that the majority of the World's illiterate adults are women (Karam, 2013). In the long run women suffer various forms of violence and lack as a consequence of gender inequality that was taken for granted during their school days. It therefore, remains an imperative, that the situation of gender inequality in education must be interrogated for more sustainable school environments globally, Zimbabwe included.

The education of girls and women leads to a wide range of benefits which include improved maternal health, reduced infant mortality and improved general welfare of individuals, communities and nations at large. That is why gender equality in education remains a priority in the 2030 Agenda (Karam, 2013). Girls and boys should be able to attend school without the interruption of either in school or out of school factors. For education to be equitable, historical and structural inequalities need redress for all to access quality education at all levels. This calls for the rights based approach to education where all aspects of education are considered from a rights perspective including structural features of the education system, methods of education and the content of the education curricula (UN Chronicle, 2013). Research has established that gender inequalities in education are still prevalent and educational set ups are not yet gender responsive (Way and Harremore, 2016; Miller and Wai, 2015; UNESCO,2015).   Even in some Developed countries gender disparities are still existent in STEM fields with the same severity as it was thirty years ago (Karam 2012). There is persistent gender inequality in access, retention career choices and opportunities (UNESCO, 2015). In the aftermath of the two African decades of educations and a global pandemic a lot still needs to be done if the continent is to realise improved access to, quality and relevant education. In the wake of all these developments, the AU (African Union) birthed the (Continental Educational Strategy for Africa (CESA) 16-25 focusing on revitalising the teaching profession to ensure quality and relevance at all levels of education (CESA 16-21). This study is mainly linked to CESA strategic objective 2 which makes reference to conducive learning environments to expand access to quality education.

1.2   Rationale for the study

The rationale for this study was based on the fact that secondary education has a strong link with tertiary education. Secondly, secondary education makes individuals employable and thirdly it gives individuals access to technical and vocational training (CESA 16-25). When women and girls are afforded an opportunity to access secondary education and/or education in general it works as one of the most effective investments for peace and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015). While a number of initiatives have been put in place globally, regionally and locally to improve gender equality in education there remains a need to interrogate the realities about gender equality in education mainly because there is the prevalence of unequal treatment of boys and girls leading to gendered educational outcomes (Sadker and Sadker, 2009). To add on to that research work guided by gender analysis in Zimbabwe has been limited which justifies the current study. Lastly, recommendations from this study can be a springboard for possible interventions to redress gender inequalities in education.

Defining terms

This section delves into defining terms that are associated with this study:

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, independent of nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language, or any other status. All human beings are equally entitled to human rights without discrimination.

These include the right to life, equality before the law, the right to work, social security, education, and the right to development. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible (FAO, 2017). In this study the focus is on education as a human right to all human beings.

Gender equality is the same valuation of males and females and sameness of enjoyment of rights, power, opportunities, treatment and control of resources between males and females in society. It implies the equal valuation by society in both the similarities and differences between women and men and the varying roles that they play (Gender Equality Analysis Policy Status of Women-Canada in Mawere et al 2011). Gender equality implies that men and women's access to rights and opportunities is not affected by gender.

Gender equity Is a process of achieving fairness and justice among men and women in relation to distribution of opportunities, responsibilities and resources as well as in accessing and controlling the benefits from the resources (Gender Equality Analysis Policy Status of Women-Canada in Mawere et al 2011). It refers to proportional distribution of social resources and services as well as proportional representation of men and women in the development process. Representation of males and females in all aspects of development must be commensurate with the national population (Chauraya, 2011 in Mawere et al 2011). Gender equity is a contributing factor to gender equality.

Gender responsiveness refers to a situation where the stage has been set that every individual can participate in a developmental initiative to her/his maximum potential. In such an environment, limiting barriers related to gender, ethnicity, race or any other aspect have been removed and the playing field has been levelled for all to participate to their maximum possible potential. When gender equity and equality have been practicalised the outcome is gender responsiveness.

1.3 Study broad objective

To make an assessment for gender responsiveness at selected Zimbabwean secondary schools.

1.3.1 Specific objectives

i.   To find out if educators understand the meaning of gender responsive school environments;
ii.   To explore gender responsiveness in school environments (physical, social and academic);
iii. To come up with policy proposals and recommendations on how to make schools more gender responsive for gender equality in education

1.3.2 Theoretical Framework

Education is one of the rights that were declared globally since the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights. In summary form, some of the rights included; the right of access to education meaning that it is the right of every child to access education on the basis of equality of opportunity and without discrimination on any grounds. To achieve this goal, education must be available for, accessible to and inclusive of all children. Every child has the right to quality education which implies that every child must get quality education that enables her/him to fulfil her/his potential, realize opportunities for employment and develop life skills. To achieve this goal, education needs to be child-centred, relevant and embrace a broad curriculum, and be appropriately resourced and monitored. Every child has the right to respect within the learning environment which implies that every child has to be respected for her/his inherent dignity and to have her/ his universal human rights respected within the education system. To achieve this goal, education should be provided in a way that is consistent with human rights, including equal respect for every child and opportunities for meaningful participation in education (UNICEF, 2017).

It is from the above referred rights perspective that this study adopted the Human Rights Based Approach as the theoretical underpinning for this study. Declarations for human rights date back to 539BC when Cyrus the Great freed all slaves and allowed everyone the right to choose own religion and established racial equality (Sutto, 2019). From that time on a number of changes happened to the original format and structure of human rights. Mention can be made of The Magna Charta of 1215 which emphasised on the "rule of law", The French Declaration of The Rights of Man and the Citizen adopted in 1789 by France's National Assembly. At the end of the Second World War (1948) Rene Cassin drew up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Sutto, 2019).

The following table gives a diagrammatic representation of the rights to, in and through education. A gender responsive environment is critical in the realisation of the aforementioned   rights in education for overall gender equality.

Table 1.1HRBA Right T, In and Through Education

Right TO	Right IN			Right THROUGH
	FRAMES	PROCESSES	RESULT	
Education and skills development should be guaranteed directly to everyone without discrimination.	-Structure -governance -Curricula -Teachers -Resources	-Pedagogy -Methods of teaching and learning -Content of learning	-Effects for individual: changed attitudes and values - Acquisitions of skills, competencies and abilities	Effects for society :Shared democratic values and commitment

Areas of action

Framework as stated in convention

Can be measured with indicators, monitored and evaluated

Adopted from Sida (2015)

Using this framework helps to assess how school environments contribute to the realisation of human rights as laid down in the United Nations Human Rights Conventions. It also helps in monitoring how the values and principles underpinning these United Nations conventions (non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency) are applied to the design and processes of educational programmes. It also helps boys and girls in education to address their situations and claim their rights individually and collectively (Sida; 2015).

1.5 Methodology and Protocol

This section   presents the   research methodology and protocol deployed in this study in order to produce answers to the key research questions

1.5.1 **Methodology**

The study embraced the mixed method research approach. It adopted the case study design. Semi-structured questionnaire (quantitative) and interview (qualitative) were used to gather data for the study. The ABC of Gender Analysis (a framework for gender analysis of textbooks and reading material) was used in the assessment of textbooks and other learning materials. Schools were purposively sampled. Interviews were administered to four school heads and two education officers at district level.

1.5.2 Protocol followed

Clearance was sought from the relevant authorities and permission was granted to carry out the study in the selected schools. Students participation was authorised by the school heads who acted in loco parentis to the students. Before the students consented the researcher discussed issues related to freedom to withdraw even if they had partly participated in the study, that identity remained anonymous and participation was voluntary and free. Informed consent was also sought from the school heads and education officers who had interest in participating in the study. At each school arrangements were made for students to respond to the questionnaire in a free atmosphere. A total of 120 questionnaires were filled in and six interviews conducted

1.6 Presentation of findings
This section focuses on data presentation. This is done through tables and key themes that emerged from data collected for the study.

1.6.1 Knowledge of gender responsiveness

Table 1.1 Definition of terms

Term defined	Response	frequency	Percentage
Gender	refers to women and men	38	31.6
	No idea	17	14.2
	About women	65	54.1
	total	**120**	**100**
Gender responsiveness	No idea	13	9.2
	Environment good for girls	96	83
	Good for all	11	7.5
	Total	120	100
Importance of gender equality in education	For individuals to do their best	27	22.5
	To improve girls lives	88	73.3
	The ministry says it is important	5	4.1
	Total	120	100

While much has been done to address issues relating to gender and development at various platforms some participants were not clear on the difference between gender and women. Policies are introduced for all in society not much has been done to make sure that these policies and terms used in the gender and development discourse are explained for the benefit of everyone. With a limited understanding of terms, it then is next to impossible to fully operationalise policies aimed at addressing gender problems.

1.6.2 Academic environment

(a)   Allocation of subjects by gender
Responses to this question were linked to the generally accepted stereotypes that girls are good in arts and humanities and boys in science, mathematics and technology. At all the sites visited classes are streamed according to subject allocation.   Boys dominate in STEM related subject combinations and girls remain in arts and humanities.
(b) Explanations for answers in (a) above:
To further understand responses given above the questionnaire demanded an explanation. The following explanations were given:
-    it is natural
-    some teachers prefer a certain sex in their subject
-    we found it like that in this school
-    the subjects are not important to girls
-    the school makes the allocation of subjects to boys and girls (they just give you the subject you will do)

(c) Table 1.2 Preferred genders in specific subjects

Subject	frequency	Gender preference
Indigenous language	28	Boys 23%
	92	Girls 77%
History	60	Boys 50%
	60	Girls 50%
Maths	24	Girls 20%
	96	Boys 80%
Geography	54	Girls 45%
	66	Boys 55%
Pure Sciences	12	Girls 10%
	108	Boys 90%
Integrated Science	66	Boys 55%
	54	Girls 45 %

(d)Images /stories/statements from textbooks

For the analysis of images two Ordinary level textbooks for core subjects (Maths and English) were used in this study

Table 1.3 Images

	frequency	percentage
Men only images	60	50
Women only	20	16.6
Including both	50	41.6

(d) How learners associate in classroom activities
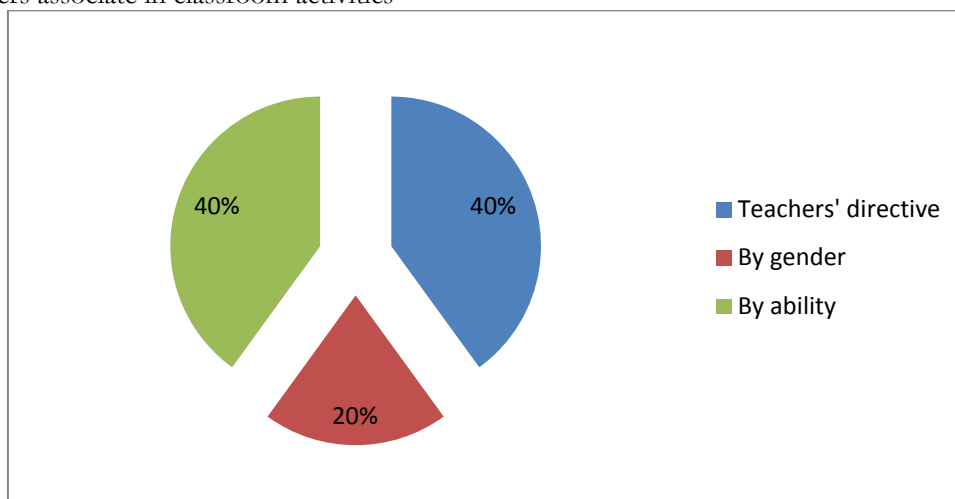

Figure 1.1How learners associate in classroom activities

Group activities are based on the way students sit in the classroom. Observations from the study indicated that girls if given choice would prefer groups with boys and not really the other way round unless certain girls are fairly better than boys in certain disciplines.

Distance to toilets is the same for boys and girls but toilet facilities in one of the schools were not up to date as water and sanitation facilities were poor.

(e) Duties commonly done by boys and girls in the learning environment

Table 1.3 Allocation of classroom duties

Girls	Boys
Sweeping the classroom	Class monitor
Cleaning windows	Cutting the grass
Tidying the teachers table	Moving furniture
Book monitors	Book monitors
Deputy class monitors	Make final decisions on classroom activities

f) Treatment of boys and girls

In the case of indiscipline and corporal punishment the treatment is not the same. Girls were treated in a more gentle way while boys were given hard manual work or given more hard lashes by male members of staff. The male respondents viewed the treatment of girls as too much pampering.

g) Drop outs from schools

Both boys and girls dropped out of school. It was indicated that more girls than boys dropped out of school. The reasons are indicated below:

Why boys dropped out of school:

- economic hardships in the family;
- joined gold panning activities;
- drugs and substance abuse and
- general rebellion against the school system

Why girls   dropped out of school:

- unwanted pregnancy
- economic hardships in family
- religion (girls not allowed to go far with education)
- early marriages (cultural and religious)

(h) Measures to return dropouts to school

There were no in school measures to bring the dropouts   back into the school system. Indications were that families took it upon themselves to return their son /daughter to another school or the privately owned colleges or tutorial groups.

1.6.3 Physical   environment

This physical environment is the buildup area in the school. For example the   toilets,location of classroom in relation to sports field and the location of guidance and counselling rooms

a)   The respondents rated the security of the school as indicated in the table 1.4 below:

Table 1.4 Security of school

	frequency	percentage
Good	30	25
Bad	72	60
Excellent	18	15
Total	120	100

b) (ii) Sexual maturation classes

In all schools these are found in the guidance and counselling   sessions. It is normally taught by the guidance and counselling teachers. Informally some teachers help students when they feel the need is upon them.

c) Games that are popular in the school

Boys football is the most popular in all schools all year round. Girls football is in most cases more localised and popular during the second term.

1.6.4 Social environment

(i)   Policies that affect the day to day running of activities
(i)   The Education Act
(ii) Education for All Policy
(iii) The National Constitution of Zimbabwe
ii)   Religious affiliation

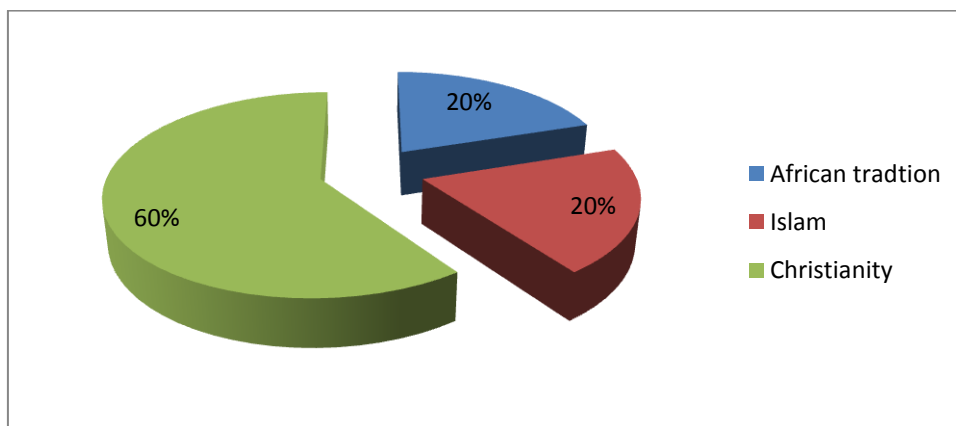In the figure below participants indicated their religious identities

Figure 1;2   Religious affiliation

iii)   Specific provisions for girls in the learning environment

Indications were that the learning environment was "gender neutral". The thinking that   when   boys and girls are exposed to the same situations in the teaching and learning environment it constitutes fairness for equality.

vii) Suggestions for equal participation in educational settings

-    Gender in-service training for teachers
-    Resocialisation of girls to work hard
-    Add gender in the teaching and learning curricula at secondary school
-    More funding for gender related research in education

1.6.5 Themes from Interview

-    Gender in education is political, if there is no political will nothing will change
-    There is need for more funding for training educators on gender issues, for gender analysis of textbooks, curriculum review, awareness campaigns among others
-    Empowered girls are detrimental to societal stability

1.7 Analysis and interpretation of results

The issue of gender in education is not new to educators and students alike. Unfortunately, there are a lot of misunderstandings of what gender implies to boys and girls. In some cases, it is associated with issues relating to women and girls only. Those teachers who are recent graduates from universities or teacher training colleges have a less informed understanding of gender responsiveness. It is these teachers who   limit gendered approaches to processes in the teaching and learning process. In the same school one can find gender stereotypical titles being used in one department while another department is not using them. In line with Ministry expectations matters pertaining to gender are often situated in the guidance and counselling   department yet most of the guidance and counselling teachers are not trained on how to handle gender   issues   in the teaching and learning environment.

It was revealed from the study that consciously or unconsciously   boys and girls receive different educations. Despite the equal treatment which is espoused in the Zimbabwe Education Act (2004) boys and girls continue to receive totally different kinds of educational experience. Teachers expect a certain gender for a particular subject. It is taken as natural for boys to do well in STEM subjects and girls in Arts and Humanities.

On a positive note some schools in Manicaland are slowly joining the gender responsive bandwagon. In such school girls are no longer confined to dresses for day to day uniform and gym skirts for sports. The use of slacks allows girls to be more free especially in science labs where high stools are used. Supply of cheap sanitary wear to schools has increased girls' presence in schools. In Masvingo Rural District schools the construction of sanitary disposal incinerators and girl friendly latrines have improved girls school attendance (Tuso, 2015). The programme contributed to restoration of girls' dignity. The sanitary facilities facilitated   girls' privacy and security which is key to girls' empowerment. The funding organisation SNV also encouraged the use of reusable menstrual pad 'RUMB' in schools. A similar project was done in Kwekwe in Zhombe district. While these efforts are a step towards making the school environment gender responsive more needs to be done to keep girls in schools.

Considering the physical environment, toilet facilities and supply of water are poor in most schools. At times school administrators justify themselves by saying that they are exposing girls and boys to same "neutral situations'. This can apply to manual work, corporal punishment or dismissal time at school. In such situations girls remain worse off than boys. The poorer the physical facilities the more the quality of education is compromised. With poorer physical facilities the special needs of the girl child at puberty tends to be ignored. To add to that not many teachers have the gender sensitive eye to notice these gender gaps in the teaching and learning environments.

1.7.1 Curriculum content

Most of the textbooks if exposed to the ABC of Gender Analysis are still found wanting in terms of presentation and illustrations that are used. Textbook materials subtly promote patriarchal and sexist ideologies. Feminist ideologies have helped in doing away with gender stereotyping in textbooks and learning materials. However, most educational textbooks are authored by males which gives them an opportunity to promote the male advantage.   On the other hand, students and teachers' religious and traditional backgrounds fuel the unequal treatment of girls and boys in the academic environment.

It was also revealed from the study that communities with gender retrogressive traditions and practices promote gender inequalities in the school. However, there are some   gender progressive attributes that are emerging in some religions and cultures. These new trends support governmental and nongovernmental initiatives for equality of educational opportunities. Despite all this, girls reduce in number as they go up the educational ladder. Poverty, economic insecurity, peer pressure and an unfriendly school environment continue to send girls out of school for premarital sex, unwanted pregnancies and geneeral poverty which contributes to   the general underdevelopment of societies.

In terms of gender responsiveness in education, Zimbabwe is not yet there.   The larger and more critical part is still not gender responsive.

1.8 Policy directions and proposal

In this section the study presents proposals which can possibly help in informing   policy makers on possible directions towards increased gender equality and equity in education.

- It is important that   the government and ministry facilitate in-depth gender analysis of all textbooks to be used in the secondary school curriculum. This has to be done in line with but not limited to the ABC of Gender Analysis.

- There is need for in-service training of educators and all stakeholders on how to create a gender responsive environment in their educational spaces. Periodic evaluations can be done in line with outcomes over a period of time.

- There is need to increase the empowerment of girls through girls' camps, use of positive role models, affirmative policies both at school and at national level. There is need to rope in educational activities that help girls to change their personal psyche. Girls must be socialised on how to develop the "I CAN" mentality which will help them work hard for gender equality through merit.

- There is a need to do gender awareness campaigns in schools and in communities on the importance of education for all and how lack of   education especially for women is detrimental to development. Communities need to be educated on religious and traditional norms which disadvantage girls and boys   in education.

- In as much as the Nation of Zimbabwe had adopted gender affirmative policies at tertiary level of education where entry points for previously male dominated disciplines has been reduced by one or two points. Similar policies can be adopted for girls at secondary school level.

- If the nation is to realise the above mentioned proposals, there is a need to adopt gender responsive budgeting approaches in the education sector.

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