

Endangering Gender to Engender Gender: The Dynamics of Gender Equity in Education in Kenya and the Challenges of Achieving the International Commitments

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Abstract

Access to education is of critical importance in a plethora of development discourse. Eliminating inequality is a development imperative for purposes of fairness and efficiency. Emphasis on girls' access without due consideration to the boys risks leaving the boy an endangered species. Both the boy and the girl have an intrinsic right to well-being which is conditioned by each individual's capabilities. Seeing education as a right is important because access to education is then unconditional and valued independently. The existence of gender inequalities in society places a demand on education to pursue justice in dealing with gender. This study concludes that there is therefore, an urgent need to generate and sustain political will to achieve gender equality in education; and that the Government of Kenya is unlikely to achieve its international commitments to gender equality in education by 2015, unless there is a shift of focus.

Key Words: Gender; Education; Inequality; MDGs; Rights; Capabilities

Introduction

The role of education in economic growth cannot be overstated. It brings substantial benefits to people in terms of earnings and even greater resilience to shocks (Education Year in Review, 2012). There has been great progress made in attempts to realise the MDGs relating to education. However, despite all this, significant

gender inequalities in rights, resources, and voice persist in all developing countries (World Bank, 2000:4).

We cannot talk of gender equality without reference to practices of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits, access and control of resources. In essence, gender equity is the elimination of all forms of discriminations based on gender (Kenya, 2007), whether this is in the sector of education or any other socio-economic or political sectors.

Access to education is of critical importance in a plethora of development discourse as evidenced by the statement that “a talented, low-income student who is denied entry into tertiary education represents a loss of human capital for the individual person and for society as a whole” (World Bank, 2011). Gendered social relations inside and outside schools make access and progression difficult for large numbers of children, but the effects weigh especially heavily on girls (Unterhalter, 2007a:9). Eliminating inequality is a development imperative for purposes of fairness and efficiency. According to the World Bank (2012:5), assessing learning is critical for knowing who is learning, what is being learned, what influences learning, and how to improve it.

Social justice is encapsulated in MDG 2, and is considered measurable through access and outcomes monitoring (Lebeau, Ridley & Lane, 2011:446) and the World Bank (2011) states that there is a strong economic efficiency argument in favour of equity promotion. While gender equality has often been seen as an issue with regard to access to schooling among others, the MDGs recognise that gender inequality is also a significant dimension of quality in schools (UNESCO, 2003a) and inequality depends heavily not on economic growth but on national policies that determine who gets the education (Appiah & McMahon, 2002:39).

The Kenyan government is a signatory to major international conventions and agreements that address human rights and gender equality issues in order to increase gender parity and equity in schools, while enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the system (Abagi & Olweya, 1999).

The international conventions/agreements relevant to education are important blueprint to advance the participation of girls/boys and men/women in education. They indeed provide a legal framework to guard against discrimination and exploitation of human beings (Abagi, 1998:17). There is good progress that has been made particularly with regard to making available free primary education in Kenya. However, Nungu (2010) has made an observation that despite the success of the free primary education initiative and the increased enrolments, there has been little policy attention to issues of equitable access, relevance, quality, and outcomes of primary school education. It is admitted that education for all is a critical issue for economic development of a nation. Studies indicate that educating women ensures not only their equal participation in the socio-economic and political spheres of life, but also reduces child mortality, fertility, and the incidence of malnutrition (Abu-Ghaida & Klasen, 2004).

However, according to Unterhalter, North and Parkes (2010:1), there has been a persistence of gender inequalities within education and training systems and practices. Whereas these studies justify the need for enhancing access to educational opportunities for the girls, none appears concerned specifically with boys.

Kenya Situation Report on Gender Inequality

Chang'ach (2012:182) has noted that Kenya has virtually attained gender parity in enrolment at both primary and secondary education levels. However, closer scrutiny of this reveals that serious gender disparities in enrolment exist between regions with regard to access, retention, completion, performance and transition. The World Bank (2012:3) appreciates that persistent campaign for awareness of girl's retention in school has started bearing fruits, but in retrospect the society has ignored the plight of boys. The issue of the boys has not been adequately addressed, begging the question, is the gender question about endangering gender to engender gender? This position is supported by Chang'ach (2012:183), who says that in a country such as Kenya where girls are given prevalence, it leaves the boy child vulnerable in the foreseeable future.

It is generally agreed that to achieve gender equity and/or equality, there is need to remove the deep-seated barriers to equality of opportunity for both sexes – such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices and institutional processes (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007:23).

Aikman and Unterhalter (2005:106) assert that the challenges that confront girls' education in Kenya include both in-school and out-of-school factors; they span the economic, cultural, social, regional, and policy realms.

However, as Unterhalter, North and Parkes (2010:2) have noted, since 1995 there has been considerable expansion of enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education in all regions of the world, and gender gaps are narrowing including even in the Kenyan case. A lot has been achieved with regard to enrolling children in schools in Kenya, and the government continues to stress the importance of education, especially as it leads to opening up opportunities for those who have accessed it.

There are various measures that have been put in place to particularly enhance access including among others abolition of fees, provision of sanitary towels for female students and school feeding programmes. Even though Unterhalter, North and Parkes (2010:3) observe that the abolition of fees in Malawi, Ethiopia, Kenya and Ghana resulted in an enormous increase in the number of children attending school with girls as well as boys enrolled, Chang'ach (2012:181) appears to challenge this position and makes a claim that the boy child of the 21st Century is faced with tremendous challenges like engaging in manual jobs, not attending school and being exploited as result of child labour (*ibid.*, p.184), which unless properly guarded, the society is losing him. He suggests that targeting of the girl-child, and in some instances the boy-child, is necessary if not essential for Education for All (EFA). This has led the boy child to be relegated at the periphery and thus endangered (*Ibid.*, p.184).

Education for all (EFA) means enrolling and retaining all girls and boys in school.

It is also about ensuring that girls and women (and men and boys) of all ages develop their full potential through education and are able to ensure their full and equal participation in building a better world (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007:27).

Nussbaum (2003:337) acknowledges that the absence of education involves a blighting of human powers without at all denying that the person who has been so blighted retains a basic core of human equality that grounds normative claims of justice. In this light, targeting only one gender while giving a blind spot to the other is tantamount to being unjust to the other as they are denied an opportunity which will open ways for the actualization of the functionings or the realisation of their capabilities, that make life complete.

The MDG framework in terms of parity emphasises equal numbers of girls and boys in schools. However, in the implementation on the ground, there has been an exclusive focus on girls' education that has led to confusion about gender equality goals (Unterhalter *et al.*, 2010:9). Emphasis on girls' access without due consideration to the boys risks leaving the boy an endangered species. It is against this background that this study seeks to answer the following questions:

What are the mechanisms of achieving gender equality in education in Kenya?

- (i) What are some of the challenges of achieving gender equality in education?
- (ii) Is the Government likely to achieve its international commitments to gender equality in education?

Table 1: Education Relevant International Conventions by Dates of Ratification by Kenya

International Conventions / Covenants	Date adopted by International Body	Date of Ratification / Accession by Kenya
The Charter of the United Nations	February 13, 1946 (UN General Assembly)	July 1, 1965 (Accession)
The Convention on the Rights of the Child	November 20, 1989 (UN General Assembly)	July 30, 1990 (Ratification)
The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women	December 18, 1979 (UN General Assembly)	March 9, 1984 (Accession)
The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.	July 1990 (Council of Ministers of the Organisation of African Unity)	July 1990 (Signing by Kenya's Representatives)
*The World Declaration on Education for All	March 1990 (Inter-agency Commission and Governments)	March 1990 (Signing by Kenya's Delegation)
*The World Summit for Social Development	March 1995 (Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations' Representatives)	March 1995 (Signing by Kenya's Delegation)
*The Beijing Declaration: A Platform for Action.	September 1995 (Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations' Representatives)	September 1995 (Signing by Kenya's Delegation)
Millennium Development Goals¹	September 2000 (Inter-agency Commission and Governments)	September 2000 (Ratification)

Source: Abagi, O. (1998). National Legal Framework in Domesticating Education as a Human Right in Kenya: Where to Begin. *An IPAR Special Paper*. Nairobi: IPAR. p.18.

* These are declarations based on international meetings of Government representatives, international donor agencies and non-governmental organisations.

¹ This is a later international commitment which did not appear in the Abagi (1998) Paper.

Theoretical Perspectives

According to Elaine Unterhalter, the capability approach has an intrinsic importance to gender equality in education, even as it differs both from the instrumentalism associated with human capital theory and basic needs and from the universalism associated with the rights-based approach (Unterhalter, 2007a:81). It is this position that will inform this study laying the ground for the utilisation of two complimentary approaches namely the capability approach and the human-rights-based approach.

The Capabilities Approach and Education Equality

This paper attempts to interrogate the capability approach as an approach of development, and to assess its application to education. It should suffice to say that this approach has been viewed as a framework of distributive justice. According to Terzi (2008:125), theories of distributive justice are fundamentally concerned with the fair distribution of benefits and burdens among individuals.

The capability approach was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Sen conceptualised development as the process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen, 1999). He however, was quick to add that selection of capabilities should be the task of democratic process (see Nussbaum, 2000; Robeyns, 2005). His work on this capabilities approach has tended to be used in general discussions of policy and critiques of theories regarding education and the economy. Nussbaum's work, on the other hand, has been of considerable interest because of her concern with the content and process of education (Unterhalter, Vaughan & Walker, 2007:1).

The capability approach has been viewed variously, with some scholars holding the view that it provides a normative framework for the assessment of human development and also

evaluations of specific areas of social policy, such as education (Unterhalter *et al.*, 2007:1), while others hold that capability is freedom and rationality combined (Walker, 2006:165). Equality in essence, should also refer to the equal chances that people have to get either services or resources. People should have equal opportunities to achieve any 'functionings', which ideally will be the benchmark as to whether or not the capabilities are of any value to the person. From this perspective, we may also be tempted to draw an inference that these two positions are utilitarian in orientation. It is this realisation that prompted Unterhalter (2007a:81) to conclude that for capability approach, gender equality is important because it widens opportunities, enables the realisation of other capabilities and alerts us to human difference.

The key idea of the capability approach is that social arrangements should aim to expand people's capabilities – their freedom to promote or achieve 'functionings' which are important to them (see Unterhalter, *et al.*, 2007), even though, there are some significant overlaps between rights and capabilities in a general sense (McCowan, 2011:291). In apparent consonance with these two positions, Terzi (2008:139) holds that capabilities are constitutive of well-being, and that seeking equality in itself is tantamount to equalizing actual possibilities for well-being. A capabilities framework is well-equipped to address the factors which in subtle, and not so subtle ways, prevent individuals from fully exercising a right (McCowan, 2011:293). Capabilities and well-being have been found to be complementary and like two faces of the same coin.

This intertwined relationship between the two, goes further to justify the need to seek equality in the capability approach (see for example Sen, 1992; 2004; Nussbaum, 2006; Walker, 2006; Terzi, 2008).

In relation to the Kenyan context, it is important to note that this intertwined relationship is useful for recognizing that people have different educational needs, and that progress and equality in education is critical for well-being. As such, both the boy and the girl have an intrinsic right to well-being which is conditioned by each and every single individual's capabilities, and it is the duty of the State therefore, to offer a conducive environment for the fulfillment of these.

Unterhalter (2007b) in trying to understand the importance of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach to education settings, shows the intrinsic importance of gender equality to education by isolating reasons why gender inequality is objectionable. These are the fact that education has a bearing on the capability set, that is, the freedom to achieve capabilities; gender inequality is a key aspect of how individuals convert resources into capabilities; gender equality in education helps enhance the way in which education contributes to enhancing other valued combinations of functionings (Unterhalter, 2007a: 77-79). Sen identified education as one of the basic capabilities, when he refers to it as one of those relatively small number of centrally important beings and doings that are crucial to well being (Sen, 1992:44). Education for freedom entails the capacity for critical thinking and self examination as one of its critical ingredients (Nussbaum, 2006:387-8). Critical thinking in this respect is not limited to the boy or the girl, but is applicable to both.

Emerging democracies such as Kenya needs citizens who can think for themselves and also cultivate their capacity for effective democratic citizenship (Nussbaum, 2006:389).

In this light, when making educational opportunities available, it should be with respect to both the girl and the boy and also men and women, as both are important ingredients for the democratic broth.

Seeing education as a right, rather than simply as an instrumentally valuable good is important primarily because access to education is then unconditional and valued independently (McCowan, 2011:285). This position appears to elaborate on Robeyns (2006:82) who asserts that rights are always rights to something, while capabilities on the other hand, are always things that must matter intrinsically. A capabilities approach draws attention to the importance of the wider moral imperative for providing a quality education, which arises from interactions between three overlapping environments, namely the policy, the school and the home/community environments (Tikly, 2011:10-11). These interactions are clearly manifest in the Kenyan education system in which each of the three actors plays a role that determines the levels of not only participation in education, but also outcomes.

Unterhalter *et al.*, (2007:4-5) argue that the capability approach does not explain the causes of educational inequality, but it provides a tool with which to conceptualise and evaluate them. It is important to consider that capabilities can be diminished as well as enhanced through education. This brings us to a rather sensitive issue of 'capabilities conditioning'. An example in the Kenyan context is the limited nature of colonial education and why some specific subjects like the sciences, math and technical courses were reserved for the colonialists while the colonized were limited to the humanities and the social sciences. This in a way 'conditioned' the capabilities of each of the different categories.

Despite the yearnings of one to exceed what was 'conditioned' for him, the achieved functionings were of capabilities already conditioned by the education system in both the colonial and post-colonial education in Kenya.

There is also potential for conflict between adults' and children's freedom and well-being, for example, how do we expect children to achieve their functionings while their capabilities are being 'conditioned' by their parents?

The Human Rights Approach and Education Equality

To compliment the Capabilities approach, this paper also focuses on the human rights approach to education and holds the view that in tandem with the international commitments, provision of education should be a right on its own with the citizens as the rights holders and commanding a reciprocal duty-bearer in the State. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna stressed the fact that women's rights were part and parcel of human rights. It stressed the importance of all human rights and gave particular prominence to the human rights of women and girls (Unterhalter, 2007a:66). Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Governments (World Conference on Human Rights, 1993).

The international commitments have been general on the rights of human beings; however, the complication has been, on the actual implementation of the international commitments. Gender equality is one of the dimensions of universalism that underpins the moral and legal basis of rights (Unterhalter, 2007a:81), and this right extends to all other sectors including education. This gives a justification for the demand for education and equality in its provision as a right for all Kenyans regardless of gender.

In an apparent criticism of the capabilities approach, McCowan (2011:286) puts forward an argument that capabilities are not a substitute for rights, but that they enrich a rights framework by providing a more comprehensive

view of the content of the right. He goes further to challenge the right to education, which assumes that school is the most appropriate vehicle for the delivery of the right, without adequate discussion of the multiple forms that education can take. He has however, identified three areas in which capabilities can make a significant contribution in the field of education, namely: providing a fuller conception of the realization of the right; directing attention towards the heterogeneity of learners; and guarding against an overly state-facing approach (McCowan, 2011:293).

It has been observed that extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity and that it becomes incumbent upon the State to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process by the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty (World Conference on Human Rights, 1993). Poverty by all means should not be an excuse as to deny either a boy or a girl in Kenya, the right to an education of quality. It is this education that will enhance an individual's capabilities as Vaughan (2007:117) says that "once children are participating in education, once the 'mechanisms' of education are functioning correctly, it is possible to consider the capabilities that can be gained through education... it contributes to other life functionings, as opposed to purely educational functionings."

Gender Inequality and Education in Kenya

Gender-neutral as well as gender-bias interventions are not sufficient to introduce gender equality into education (see for example Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007).

To highlight that boys' education is in need of attention "is not necessarily adopting the retrogressive conservatism of the burgeoning 'men's movement' which at times seems to claim that boys are now in greater need than girls of special provision in schools" (Evans, Davies & Penny, 1996:178). Because of the immense private and social benefits derived from education, individuals as well as governments invest enormously in it. However, in spite of the heavy investment in Kenya, access to education by all members of the society remains a big challenge (Gravenir *et al.*, 2006:70). The existence of gender inequalities in society places a demand on education to pursue justice in dealing with gender. This is not just a requirement to 'do something for the girls'; it is an issue about the quality of education for all children. A good education is founded on social justice. Boys' programs are appropriately located in gender equity programs when those are based on a general social justice framework (Evans *et al.*, 1996: 178).

A recent Report by UNESCO acknowledges that gender parity and equality in education constitute a basic human right, as well as an important means of improving other social and economic outcomes; and that narrowing the gender gap in primary enrolment is one of the biggest EFA successes since 2000 (UNESCO, 2012:3). In Kenya, as elsewhere, education is a form of capability because it can enhance the opportunities of all people to choose what they wish to do or be, and gender equality in education is intrinsically important because it enlarges capabilities generally (Unterhalter, 2007a:79). The Beijing Declaration (1995) also acknowledges that education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace; and that non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men.

Kenya is indeed a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and should therefore not only aspire to adhere, but also domesticate its provisions. Beyond poverty, there are other factors that impact on the ability of families to have access to education in Kenya and also of the State to effectively meet their obligation of providing education of quality. The importance of education for women is stressed, but this should not be pursued in isolation of the education for boys.

International instruments have, for instance, stressed the need to advance the goal of equal access to education by taking measures to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, language, religion, national origin, age or disability, or any other form of discrimination (Beijing Declaration, 1995). Studies have indicated that Universal Primary Education would be a hollow achievement if the focus were simply on enrolment rather than on the completion of primary education. In 2010, the global primary completion rate (measured by the gross intake ratio to the last grade of primary education) reached 90 per cent, compared with 81 per cent in 1999 (UN, 2012:18). This is a good indication, however, the little details that emerge when the data is disaggregated by gender becomes startling.

Women's education is both crucial and contested. In Kenya, women's education is a key to the amelioration of many distinct problems in women's lives, but it is under threat, both from custom and traditional hierarchies of power and from the sheer inability of States and nations to take effective action (Nussbaum, 2003: 327). Gender equality means that boys and girls would experience the same advantages or disadvantages in educational access, treatment and outcomes (UNESCO, 2003a:44).

This has not been translated as such in the Kenyan context where emphasis has been on increasing access for the girls.

One of the resolutions at the Beijing Conference was that all governments shall provide universal primary education in all countries before the year 2015 (Beijing Declaration, 1995). Recent studies indicate that girls and boys have similar chances of completing primary education in all regions except for sub-Saharan Africa and Western Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, boys are more likely than girls to complete primary education in 25 out of 43 countries with available data (UN, 2012:18). However, a closer scrutiny at the situation in Kenya indicate that there are factors that directly impact on the boy which could result in some boys having relatively fewer chances of completing primary school than the girls (see for example Mukundi, 2004; Sifuna, 2007; Nungu, 2010) .

These include need to look for income-generating activities to raise money for family upkeep, caring for younger siblings orphaned by parents dying of HIV/AIDS and no incentives to complete the full primary education cycle as there are no prospects for getting funding for secondary education. It should be noted that even as the Government of Kenya tries to implement the Subsidised Secondary Education, the condition that have been put in place for the schools to benefit make it difficult for the local schools with low student population to benefit, meaning that they still continue to be excluded, even as the NGOs take care of the female students.

Education helps legitimate social inequality by leading the dispossessed to blame themselves for their class position. Studies have found parallels between education's role in producing class and gender inequality (Finley, 1995:227). It can lead to a replication and perpetuation of the class differences and the established social structures in the society.

Other benefits of education include facilitating functionings such as employment, good health and participation in political processes.

Social inequality in Kenya has continued to be perpetuated by inequalities in education access, where the rich continue to take their children to good private schools and continue to perform better than the poor who have to rely on poorly facilitated public schools.

How the government is responding to the question of gender equality

Education has a social role to play in the society. This social role must however, go hand-in-hand with the economic considerations, both of which must be dictated by the political context. Studies have found that as a man's educational status increases, his likelihood for physically assaulting a partner decreases (KNBS & ICF Macro, 2010: 247).

This is a social benefit of education which stresses the need for continued consideration of educating the boy. In the same light, the social and economic background of a woman has a bearing on her chances of experiencing physical violence. The prevalence of physical violence generally increases with the age of a woman as well as with the number of living children she has (ibid., p.247).

In line with responding to the commitment of attaining Universal Primary Education, the government of Kenya has in the recent past come up with two main initiatives. In 2001, it passed the Children's Act, which acknowledged basic education as an inalienable human right and made it enforceable legally (Gravenir *et al.*, 2006:71) and also the introduction of free primary education.

There is increasing perception that measures aiming at implementing EFA in general favour increased access of girls to education in particular, although retention still remains an issue and strong cultural barriers persist in several countries (UNESCO, 2003a:45).

Aikman and Unterhalter (2007:30) have observed that good policy frameworks on gender equality are a first step in addressing the problem. However, governments should go the extra length to ensure that these frameworks guide the development of good policies in order to achieve high quality results. In the Kenyan case, to assess the extent to which the government is committed to achieving gender equality in education, a look at the main policy documents reveals a gender-bias in perspective skewed to the girls. By all indications, this is a trend which is likely to impact negatively on the aspiration of achieving gender equality, thereby denying the boys the ability to enhance their capabilities through education, and also denying them one of their fundamental human rights.

Other ways in which the Government of Kenya has responded to address inequality in education include improvement of academic infrastructure, learning materials and teachers (Kenya, 2012:56). Whereas there has been a tremendous increase in enrolment numbers, this puts to question the quality of education as the teacher-pupil interaction is limited and the education is not seen as child-centred. Drawing from the capability approach, it helps us highlight the importance of understanding the quality of education people receive, and whether or not children are empowered by their education.

In a nutshell, in Kenya, education quality is being sacrificed at the altar of quantity by It must also be borne in mind that inequality is not only exhibit at the level of gender. There are also inequalities that are occasioned by the type of school a pupil accesses, also dependent on the economic status of the parents, as already discussed earlier.

The Task Force commissioned in Kenya to streamline the education sector in line with both the Constitution and Vision 2030, did recommend among others that the following should be taken into consideration to expand access to primary school: reviewing FPE grants upwards; investing more in infrastructure; in partnership with TSC, to employ and deploy more teachers; providing additional learning materials and abolishing all levies (Kenya, 2012:65). Admittedly, inequality in educational participation and outcomes reflects broader inequalities in society. These embrace social norms and customs, which create powerful incentives that guide people's behaviour, and determine the roles that women and men can have in the family and community (UNESCO, 2003b:117-118).

Research shows that far from being safe havens for learning, schools are often sites of intolerance, discrimination and violence. Girls are disproportionately the victims. Many girls who surmount the barriers preventing them from attending school face harassment and sexual abuse from their peers or from their teachers once they are enrolled (UNESCO, 2003b:143).

Table 2 : Primary Schools Enrolment by Gender for selected years (2001 – 2010)

Year	2001	2004	2007	2010
Boys	3,002,500	3,815,500	4,222,800	4,759,900
Girls	2,939,100	3,579,300	4,031,000	4,629,300
TOTAL	5,941,600	7,394,800	8,253,800	9,389,200
Parity Index	0.98	0.94	0.95	0.97

Source: Kenya, Republic of. (2012). Task Force on the Re-Alignment of the Education Sector to the Constitution of Kenya 2010 – Towards A Globally Competitive Quality Education for Sustainable Development. Report of the Task Force. Nairobi: Government Printer.

Role models for older children are less frequently family members but still remain defined by gender. Younger children however are known to generally take their parents as role model defined by gender. In the case of older children, where their role models are family members, girls will usually identify with their mothers while boys will identify with their fathers. Likewise, in the school setting, the boy students will identify with the male teachers while the girl students will identify with the female teachers. Suggestions have been made that non-stereotypical role models for both boys and girls are potentially an important means of changing attitudes about gender (UNESCO, 2003b:146). However, in the Kenyan case, this may remain just at the suggestion level if appropriate cultural re-orientation and re-configuration are not taken.

Challenges of Meeting International Commitments – EFA, UPE and the MDGs

Despite the progress recorded so far, the government of Kenya still has to go a long way to meeting the international commitments. Among the main challenges facing the achievements of the international commitments on education are:

- The high number of pupils and not matching facilities – this is the question of sacrificing quality at the altar of quantity. This study is in agreement with the position that measures and actions for ensuring the quality of education and achieving gender equity in

education are not addressed explicitly in any of the MDGs (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007:18);

- Lack of Human resource – teachers are not prepared for the huge number of students enrolled;
- Stress on government resources – community systematically withdrawing in the belief that it is the duty of the government to fully finance education;
- Increasing numbers of dropout – concentration has been on enrollment and this is not tracked effectively to ascertain the level of retention and actual completion.

There is therefore, an urgent need to not only generate, but also sustain political will to achieve gender equality in education. There is also need to build the capacity of the government to be gender-responsive, as well as that of teachers to adopt gender-aware pedagogical strategies.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the role of education in economic growth, and has stressed on the critical importance of equality in access to education. It has gone ahead to outline some of the major international conventions and agreements to which Kenya is a signatory, especially the ones that address human rights and gender equality issues in order to increase gender parity and equity in schools.

The paper has also looked at the Kenya situation report on gender inequality in which a grim picture is painted of gender equality in education access and performance. It has looked at some of the mechanisms adopted by the Government of Kenya in attempt to achieving gender equality in education, including: improvement of academic infrastructure, learning materials and teachers, streamlining the education sector in line with Vision 2030 and other international commitments like EFA and the MDGs, and legal frameworks like passing the Children's Act of 2001, acknowledging basic education as an inalienable human right and making it enforceable legally and also the introduction of free primary education.

Some of the challenges of achieving gender equality in education in Kenya have been identified as: sacrificing quality at the altar of quantity, lack of appropriate human resource, stress on government resources and lack of appropriate tracking mechanisms to ascertain the level of retention and actual completion.

With this in mind, the study concludes that the Government of Kenya is unlikely to achieve its international commitments to gender equality in education by 2015, and will continue to shift the goal posts until there is a shift of focus from concentration on increased access, to monitoring the actual processes within the education system including but not limited to issues of equity and performance.

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