

## Gender Inequality in Administration of Secondary Schools in Kenya

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### Abstract

*This paper aims to provide a discussion on the nature and extent of gender inequality in secondary schools' administration in Kenya. Using content analysis of selected documents, the discussion shows existence of gender gaps in administration of secondary schools in Kenya. The paper concludes that the previous constitution presented a pitfall in the country's education management policies and unwittingly derailed the move to equal opportunity in education management. However, we acknowledge the massive improvements in the new constitution promulgated in 2010 and whose full implementation could be a watershed for gender equity in general. Recommendations are based on strong belief that stakeholders in education need to urgently address prevailing gender inequity in access to secondary school administrative opportunities in the country.*

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### Introduction

Gender difference, a product of institutions, emanates from institutionalized patterns of distributing resources, social value and power in public and private spheres worldwide (Mbilinyi, 2000). High inequality in income and asset ownership, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has become a major development challenge (Klotz, 2006) and there exists considerable diversity in women status across classes, regions and the rural-urban divide. This is due to uneven socio-economic development and the impact of tribal, feudal and capitalist social formations on women's lives. Consequently, development policies and programs have had different impacts on men and women, resulting in glaring gender disparities in women's access to education, health, economic resources, and political participation in decision-making at the family, community, and societal levels (Bryan and Varat, 2008). The implication therefore is that there is a need for greater participation of women in decision-making spaces; academic and research institutions;

advocacy and public awareness initiatives; political debates; private sector and within households. Ultimately, there is need to increase women's autonomy, recognition and power in decision-making within institutions so as to achieve transformation of gender relations (Mbilinyi, 2000).

Gender inequality is a global concern, and as indicated by the 1995 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing, gender inequalities in developing nations has received much of the attention (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998). At the heart of the gender inequality issue is the concern with opportunity distribution justice. The argument is that, on average, women and men have similar abilities and talents, and therefore should be treated, and rewarded equally (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998). When this fails to happen, injustice exists. The progress and prosperity of a country largely depends on the choices of education made available to its people. In fact, education has been recognized as the backbone of the infrastructure of any country, an important catalyst for socio-economic development (UNESCO, 2009). Education helps nations achieve their national goals through human capital imbued with knowledge, skills and competencies to shape future destiny. The gender issue has gained worldwide attention as a crucial component in the development process, assuming that inequalities will be redressed more effectively through strengthening basic and higher education management in developing countries (UNESCO, 2009). National secondary education system should be able to provide educational services to a country's citizens regardless of their geographical location, gender, learning abilities or socio-economic status (Ndala, 2006).

Developing nations, Kenya included, are enmeshed in struggle over gender inequality in almost all sectors and the degree of inequality is greater with few legal structures that support gender equality (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998). Developed nations have the capacity, both governmental and scientific, to collect, analyze and disseminate huge amount of data on gender inequalities.

Developing countries lack these capabilities. In Kenya, availability of gender disaggregated data is limited. In the present context, there is no comprehensive data and analysis of administration of secondary schools based on gender at the national level. This illuminates the general picture of gender inequality in access to secondary school administrative positions in Kenya.

### **The Concept of Gender**

Gender refers to a set of qualities and behaviors expected from a male or female by the society, the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female, the relationship between men and women, and girls and boys; attributes, opportunities, and relationships socially constructed and learned through socialization processes (EngenderHealth, 2005). This concept may also refer to the rights, privileges, duties, obligations, roles and status attributed to both men and women by virtue of their sex (UN, 2000). Gender roles are learned and can be affected by such factors as education and economics, and vary widely within and among cultures. While an individual's sex may not change, gender roles are socially determined and can evolve over time. Gender roles and expectations are often identified as factors hindering the equal rights and status of women with adverse consequences that affect life, family, and socio-economic status (EngenderHealth, 2005).

### **Gender and Development**

Gender is a critical concept in the analysis and achievement of development, and is a relational concept that denotes the manner in which women and men are differentiated and ordered in a given socio-cultural context (Gatheru and Shaw, 1998). In the larger society, some occupations may be regarded as 'male' or 'female' dominated and people may be discouraged or totally

barred from pursuing certain professions. The reasons for the distinctions are social, not biological, resulting in capable human beings being prevented from achieving their full potential and contributing fully to economic development (Gatheru and Shaw, 1998). Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or man in a given context. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to, and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities (UN, 2000).

Gender is a determining factor in placing women in subordinate positions vis-à-vis men and their access to resources, power, and authority is determined by interconnection of their gender with other social relationships. A holistic understanding of women's lives and their connection with other forms of inequalities is imperative for success of development initiatives aimed at bringing social change in women's lives. Creating equal opportunities for men and women will not automatically result in gender equity as they have different degrees of embodiment due to gender role ideology. Women's subordinate position in social relationships with the exclusive responsibility for reproductive roles has implications for their ability to exploit choices and make use of the opportunities created for them. Beyond the house-hold level, they have limited access to communal resources, are under-represented in public decision-making bodies, have limited bargaining power in labor markets, and often lack opportunities to improve their socio-economic position (Bryan and Varat, 2008).

In 1995, realization of considerable differences in women and men's access to, and opportunities to exert power over economic structures, governments worldwide made a commitment to promote women's economic rights, including access to employment and control of economic resources. It is therefore important to address the systematic nature of gender inequalities and

engendering of the social, economic, and political institutions/structures that continue to create and recreate gender inequalities against affirmative actions (Huggins and Randell, 2007). The transformation of public institutions for substantive equality will demand political (and therefore constitutional) rather than technical solutions.

### **Gender Inequality in Kenya**

Throughout colonial period, women in Kenya experienced considerable social, economic, and political inequalities relative to men (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998). The colonial state neglected women's education and training, favoring males in provision of paid labor needed by settlers, resulting to gross underrepresentation of women in paid labor. Most female employees provided unskilled labor in agriculture, and concentrated in low paying jobs in the non-agricultural sector. On pay, early female entrants into formal employment earned considerably less than male employees. During the 1950s, women's earnings were uniformly less than those of men in all branches of industry and domestic services. In agriculture, they earned half of men's earnings (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998)..

In light of the inequalities, the government adopted an ideology of African socialism to bring about equality among men and women in terms of equal participation in development and an equal share of its rewards and opportunities. This symbolized the government's desire to promote equal representation and treatment, to confer to women both an equal role in development and an equal share of its rewards and opportunities. This equality has not been reached, and in fact there has been little progress (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998; 2001; Mueller, Mulinge & Glass, 2002). The previous constitution (1963-2010) was seen as propagating gender

inequality in Kenya. For example, whereas discrimination on the basis of race, place of origin, political opinions or color was not allowed discrimination on the basis of gender was not expressly outlawed in that constitution or any labor relations law (Mueller and Mulinge, 1998). This has been addressed in the new constitution which contains one of the most progressive Bills of Rights in the history of constitution-making (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), 2011).

### **The Call for Equal Opportunity**

The 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 noted that poverty had a women's face, and that 70% of the world's poor then were female. This was partly linked to a lack of voice in political life, decision-making, social subordination and exclusion, and lack of access to resources and opportunities for human development (DFID, 2000). According to a United Nations report (UN, 2000) women perform 53% of all economic activity in developing countries, but only a third of their work is currently measured and acknowledged, compared with three quarters of men's. Despite their educational and other advances, women still face major obstacles in entering senior positions in society. Women are poorly represented at all levels of political life and decision-making, leading to the wide spread neglect of women's priorities by politicians and bureaucrats (DFID, 2000). Although women are more frequently and widely disadvantaged than men, it cannot be taken for granted that this is true in every sector of development.

Sustainable economic development embodies principles of participation and equity and is characterized by optimal use of human resources and fair compensation for work (Gatheru and Shaw, 1998). It promotes the involvement of women, men and children in production of goods and services, and equitable sharing of benefits accruing from their inputs. Inequity in

compensation between men and women has received global attention (Doyle, 2000), aiming to realize that women who previously felt devoid of status and power, gain increased standing and esteem within society through involvement in leadership (Vargas and Aguilar, 2004). Undeniably, significant biases and inequalities in access to employment, physical and social resources exist, predisposing women to greater vulnerabilities and constraints in enjoying presumed benefits of development (Vargas and Aguilar, 2004). The Equal Opportunities (EO) debate concerns creating conditions where men and women have equal responsibility and opportunities in both family and working life, and how to respond to demographic challenges that require maintaining conditions of growth through high female participation in labor market (Beardwell and Holden, 2001). Equal treatment for men and women was embodied in the Treaty of Rome of 1957, where equality encompasses issues of pay and other substantive terms and conditions of employment, as well as quotas of the working population (Beardwell and Holden, 2001). .

### **Gender and Secondary School Administration in Kenya**

Currently, Kenya follows the 8-4-4 system of education which replaced the 7-4-2-3 system in 1985. There has been a tremendous increase in the number of secondary schools in response to rapid increase in number of primary school leavers seeking entry to secondary school level. Two categories of secondary schools exist – public and private. Public schools are funded by government or communities and are managed through Boards of Governors and Parent-Teacher Associations. Private schools are established and managed by private individuals or organizations.

A report carried out by the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (2010) reveals that less than 15% of secondary schools in Kenya are administered by female principals. It is also noteworthy that there is no university-level training program specifically and expressly on secondary school administration and management. The school administrative and management component is mostly a course in in-service training programs but largely not in secondary institution management curricula. It is apparent that the Kenyan government after independence invested heavily in improving access to, and quality of primary education, and in developing strong networks of colleges and universities, leaving less attention and priority to the secondary level. Similarly, leading country-based international organizations in the education sector have largely neglected secondary education in favor of primary education investments.

Research on secondary school teachers and principals in Kenya only offers a weak basis for guiding policy and program development, with less evidence of structured induction, orientation and mentorship programs for aspiring and new principals in secondary schools. We established that there is little research on gender issues in administration of secondary schools, mainly from a secondary principals' perspective, with little research on female principals and secondary school leadership in Kenya. Most studies on gender only provide information on enrollment and progression rates of girls and boys from primary to secondary school levels.

### **Discussion and Policy Implications**

Gender inequality is a global issue that developing nations need to confront. In Kenya, men dominate the access and control of household resources, assets and decision-making pattern while women control only minor resources and assets. Women are most vulnerable to consequences of a gender ideology that subordinates females at the level of the family.



Unfortunately, this scenario replicates itself in the administration of secondary schools in the country, where men continue to largely dominate school leadership positions. The family socializes women to accept gender inequality, which finds expression in unequal division of labor and power over resources (Clarke, 1997). This is why inequity exists in the current power-sharing arrangement as regards to gender of secondary school administrators / principals, confirming the view that societies are organized around hierarchical power relations with male domination, reducing women to economic and emotional dependency. Hence, men and women suffer different consequences, according to their gender. This is largely a policy issue, and the Ministry of Education needs to immediately take a step towards realization of a favorable gender representation in administration of secondary schools in Kenya. This could probably call for measures such as quota systems for women involvement in leadership for all schools in each province and the entire country. However, this has to be preceded by an accurate inventory of all secondary schools in the country, and also by comprehensive and thorough research undertakings on gender representation in leadership of all secondary schools in the country.

The Millennium Development Goal number three focuses on gender equality, and provides for elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015 (Riverson; Kunienda; Roberts; Negede & Walker, 2006). In Kenya, women have limited opportunities to acquire higher education and attain professional and technical degrees. The gender ratio in public sector universities is lower than that of men and this impedes women pursuing higher education. This state of affairs is unlike in other countries, such as Rwanda, where achieving gender parity in higher education, and practicing a policy of affirmative action to promote women's educational and social

advancement are designated as policy priorities for realizing development goals of the country (Huggins and Randell, 2007). Kenyan Universities may need to develop specific institutional management programs for both primary and secondary schools and guarantee equality in access to such programs by qualified male and female candidates in an attempt to appreciate good governance from both genders. Good governance is an issue that acts across teacher and principal recruitment, retention, and retraining and should not be biased as only stemming from a particular gender. At one level, good governance is about ensuring that education systems can be led effectively and transparently (Alvarez; Gillies & Bradsher, 2003), calling for equal opportunity in provision of school leadership opportunities to both men and women based on merit.

There is also need to focus attention to induction and mentoring programs which have a useful and necessary role to play in developing effective teachers. Allowing teachers to “swim or sink” on their own brings out lower expectations, lower morale, lost opportunity to consolidate good practices and address poor ones (Halliday, 1999). Enthusiasm and commitment of newly appointed teachers, particularly those straight from colleges of education, must be captured. The first years are crucial to professional development of a teacher. Therefore experienced staff, particularly school principals, have a key role in assisting and mentoring new teachers to improve and consolidate their teaching and classroom management skills. Motivation is also related to career-path projections and opportunities for progression. Many female teachers become de-motivated by lack of status and recognition (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2002). Particularly, many teachers are demoralized by the lack of transparency and information in the promotion process (Gaynor, 1994).

There is also need for school leaders to develop an environment that encourages retention, and strives for gender equality. In doing so, it will be increasingly important that females are adequately represented among school principals. Some countries such as Uganda have begun to use quota systems to increase proportion of female school principals. In secondary school administration, policies and institutional governance should allow for efficient organization, implementation, monitoring, and allocation of resources. There should be adequate strategies and operational plans in place and agreed by all major stakeholders (Holsinger and Cowell, 2000). Administrative structures should allow for accountability mechanisms.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Research on secondary school administration in Kenya offers only a weak basis for guiding policy and program development. More needs to be done to attain gender equity in administration of secondary schools in Kenya. For instance the introduction of a quota system that specifically allocates slots for female administrators may be necessary. Such a measure would ensure that there is gender representation and equity in secondary school administration in the country. There is also need for institutional administration programs expressly for administration of primary and secondary school institutions to equip managers of such institutions with the requisite skills in management, and specifically in gender management for positive results in school set-ups. Training programs targeting female teachers are core to realizing effective administration from leaders, and such programs could serve to motivate potential female principals to embrace the challenge of institutional leadership. Mentorship programs may also help in school leadership succession management, so long as they reflect issues of gender equity. Achieving gender equity is part of most countries' commitment, under

international conventions, both from a poverty reduction and a human rights perspective, stemming from the realization that supporting women is a high yield-investment, resulting in stronger economies, more vibrant societies, healthier communities and greater peace and stability.

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