

EFA Initiatives and the Barriers to Educating Girls and Young Women in Tanzania: A Rights-Based Approach

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Abstract

This paper adopts a rights-based approach to analysing the predicament which Tanzania has been facing in its effort to fulfil the international and national obligation to safeguard the universal right to education for its entire citizenry, particularly for girls and women. The paper makes reference to various policy documents that directly and indirectly relate to the right to education-for-all in Tanzania and uses them as a framework for analysis. The main argument of this paper is that although Tanzania has signed and ratified international instruments on the right to education and translated them into the national constitution and internal education policies, much is still needed to be done. Currently girls' and women's right to education is still being inadequately addressed. While it is true that there has been no deliberate effort to deny women access to education, there certainly exist some structural problems as well as some prejudice resulting from the social, economic and cultural set-up of our communities, which continue to put girls and women at a disadvantage. Thus the government needs to create an enabling environment and demonstrate this in concrete activities before women and girls realise and enjoy their inalienable right to education.

Introduction

Women have several rights that deserve recognition and protection. These include the right to property, sexual and reproductive health, and to an adequate standard of living. In this paper, the right to education constitutes the focus of analysis. From a human rights' perspective, basic education¹ is considered as an indispensable means of realising other human rights. If one is to fully enjoy the benefits of scientific progress, freedom of expression, and a full understanding of the rights and duties of modern life, education must be accessible. It is arguable, for example, that education is a prerequisite for the exercise of political and civil liberties. In fact, Article 21(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that everyone has to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through chosen representatives. However, it is certainly true that the

¹ In Tanzania basic education encompasses pre-primary education, primary education and adult basic education (literacy and post-literacy programmes) for adults and youths. The main focus of this study was youths and adults who had never gone to school and were not expecting to do so because of their age as well as those who did not complete the primary school cycle. According to UNESCO, (1990), basic education should meet basic learning needs. These include both essential tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) as well as basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, develop their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning.

attainment of a minimum level of competence is regarded as a necessary condition in order to effectively exercise the right to vote and engage in political activity. In addition, education forms the basis for individual dignity and self-respect. Education helps human beings to unlock their talents, realise their abilities and develop a sense of moral and social responsibility.

This paper makes reference to various policy documents that directly and indirectly relate to the right to education for all in Tanzania and uses them as a framework for analysis. Accordingly, the paper is mainly based on the findings drawn from two interrelated studies that were conducted in 2008 and 2009. The first study aimed at investigating the formal status of the right to basic education for girls and women in Tanzania, so as to determine the extent to which the government is creating an enabling environment for the full realisation and enjoyment of such a right. The second study aimed at evaluating the viability of non-formal education intervention in providing a second chance of attaining education to out-of-school youth, particularly girls. Using the human rights-based approach, these studies also aimed at examining girls' and women's awareness of their educational right and highlighting the barriers that impede them from fully enjoying and realising this basic right.

Studies of this nature are crucial because in Tanzania today girls' and women's right to education still remains a problematic and thorny issue. Although there has been no deliberate effort to deny women access to education, some structural problems as well as elements of prejudice resulting from the social, economic and cultural set-up of our communities continue to disadvantage girls and women. These discriminatory practices had to be exposed, since failure to address them could slow down the anticipated development and progress towards realising the right to education for every citizen in Tanzania. In addition, such studies could help women and girls raise their own voices on their educational rights, why they missed the opportunity to go to school, and how they felt in their current situation. Such voices could help put their plight on the human rights agenda in Tanzania. Furthermore, such research could highlight women's educational needs, which could serve as an invaluable input for educational planners and policy-makers in a bid to improve practice.

The two studies were conducted in the selected communities of Kinondoni, Rungwe, Makete, Kibondo and Kisarawe districts, which were reported by the district education officials to have pockets of high illiteracy and dropout rates among girls. The sample of the study comprised teenage girls and women (aged between 14 and 35), who did not go to school and could no longer do so because of their age. The minimum age was chosen to be 14 because anybody beyond that age was not allowed to begin primary education in normal schools. Even though the Complementary Basic Education in

Tanzania (COBET) initiative provides a second chance for out-of-school children to be given an opportunity to go to school as well as those who had dropped out of school for several reasons, only those between 11-13 (Cohort One) years can be mainstreamed in normal primary schools. I also decided to make 35 years as the cut-off point because one would not expect to find an unschooled person in this age group given the Universal Primary Education Policy of 1975 and its subsequent enforcement through the Education Act No 25 of 1978. This act made primary education compulsory. It was in the interests of this study, therefore, to determine why these girls and women had not had the opportunity to go to school or who had ended up dropping out of school before completing the seven years of the primary education cycle.

These studies were qualitative in nature, by which two main methods were used to collect information. The first one was reading and, whenever possible, collecting documentary sources of relevant locally-generated information that was available. Documents such as research reports, papers, policy documents from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (initially the Ministry of Education and Culture), and the Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children, the National Education Act No.25 of 1978, as well as the National Constitution, which stipulates the right to education for girls and women, either explicitly or implicitly, were reviewed to determine the current formal status of basic education in Tanzania.

The second was the interview method, whereby these interviews were divided into two parts. Part one was composed of structured interviews to collect baseline data and provide a general picture of the current status of basic education in the communities under investigation. Interviews were used instead of questionnaires because they could be administered orally, hence convenient for people with little or no formal education. Interviews were also used to collect information from ministry officials.

Part two was concerned with in-depth interviews conducted with a limited sample. Preliminary analysis of the information obtained through structured interviews helped to get the necessary sample for detailed in-depth interviews. The data collected was based on the voices of women and girls on their life experiences/stories, and what they thought the concept "The Right to Education" meant for them as girls and women. Their life stories helped to uncover the "hidden barriers" that impede women when it comes to fully realising their right to education.

Conceptualising the problem of the right to education for girls and women

The United Nations in 1948 declared that education was a basic human right to which every person was entitled (see article 26 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

As in the case of children, adult education was also to be provided to out-of-school young adults or those who could not enrol in school for one reason or another. To establish mechanisms for enforcing the UDHR, the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) adopted the Convention against Discrimination in Education in 1960. The right to education has also been specifically recognised and reaffirmed in some detail in two other international human rights instruments: the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural rights of 1966 and the Convention on the Right of the Child of 1989.

Although more than five decades have passed since the UDHR, the right to education is more of a vision than a reality for many people, especially vulnerable girls and women. The World Conference on Education-for-All, which was convened by executive heads of UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank in Thailand, 1990, noted with agony that the right to education has remained an empty promise for millions of children and adults. According to 1993 UNESCO statistics, nearly one thousand million adults, two-thirds of them women, were at that time unable to read or write (UNESCO 1993 quoted in Limage, 1994).

Accordingly, the education of girls and women was identified as a universal and key problem that needed to be tackled with the utmost urgency. A global survey revealed that women generally were severely disadvantaged in terms of access to basic education, leading to the unanimous affirmation:

The urgent priority is to ensure access to and improve the quality of education for girls and women and to remove any obstacle that hampers their active participation (Article 2, World Conference on Education For All 1991).

Whereas the problem of educational imbalance between men and women is a global one, it was conceived to be more prominent and serious in the least developed countries (LDCs). In 1991, UNESCO estimated that about one out of every three females is illiterate compared to one out of five adult males. If this trend is allowed to continue unabated, it was projected that illiteracy among females would be around 60 percent by the year 2000. The mid-decade meeting convened in Paris in June 1996 to review the progress towards Education-for-All noted that for girls and women, especially those from LDCs, the enjoyment of the right to education was still a distant goal. Although African countries have managed to increase primary school enrolments, the number of out-of-school children belonging to the 6-11 age-group has grown by two million since 1990, now totalling 39.3 million, two-thirds of whom are girls. Similarly, despite the rate of adult literacy having improved from 40.2% in 1980 to 50.8% in 1995 in Sub Saharan Africa, the gap between the rate for men and women still persists, with a difference of 19 percentage points. In fact, less than half of African women are literate, with their

literacy rates falling below 25% in a number of countries (UNESCO, 1996). It was also projected that the illiteracy rate in the region for women over 15 years would increase from 86 million in 1990 to 93.4 million in 2000. This was conceived as a shortfall towards achieving education-for-all and, indeed, was a source of grave concern. This situation has not changed much to-date. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2008 (UNESCO, 2008), women still account for 64% of adults worldwide who cannot read or write with understanding. Furthermore, despite most countries making steady progress towards gender parity in adult literacy rates, significant disparities between adult men and women remain, especially in the developing countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Tanzania, for its part, has been trying to ensure that the right to education-for-all is realised. An analysis of the government's efforts to improve education to-date suggests that the focus of its post-independence policies has been on the distribution and equalisation of educational opportunities at all levels, including the attainment of universal basic education. Indeed, as a result of this, Tanzania attained one of the highest enrolment rates (of 96% for the 7-13 age-group) in Sub-Saharan Africa in 1983 and a high literacy rate (of 90%) among the adult population in 1986. However, these rates have been falling since then. Mundy (1994) observed that the impact of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in Tanzania has shifted the nation's attention away from political to economic endeavours. Consequently, this has also diminished the nation's commitment to achieving social equity through education.

Studies conducted in the 1990s (for example, Carr-Hill et.al 1991 and Kadege et al. 1992) established that the majority of adult basic education classes were no longer functioning, and were instead characterised by high dropout and low retention rates. This trend continues to-date almost unabated. Presently, the literacy rate is estimated to stand at 69.4% compared with 90% in 1986 (URT, 2008).

Recognition of the right to basic education for girls and women in Tanzania

Tanzania believes in equality and in the universal human right to education. This belief has been expounded in the Constitution of the Ruling Party, CCM, and that of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 as amended in 1984 although it is not legally enforceable in court⁴. Both constitutions emphasise the equality of human beings, the

²The right to education is classified under Part II of the Constitution dealing with fundamental objectives and directive principles of State Policy but these are not legally binding. Article 7(2) states clearly that the provision of this part of this chapter, fundamental objectives and directive principles of State Policy, are not enforceable by any court. Thus, no court shall be competent to determine the omission by any person or any court or any law or judgment that complies with the provision of this part of this Chapter.

need to recognise and value humanity and maintain equality before the law. In fact, the constitution provides for individual freedom of both sexes to educate themselves up to the desired level. Article XI (2) of the Constitution of Tanzania states:

Every person has the right to self-education, and every citizen shall be free to pursue education in a field of his choice up to the highest level according to his merits and ability (URT, 1998:19).

Tanzania is a signatory to the UN Declaration acknowledging that all human beings are equal and deserve the same rights before the law and in the distribution socio-economic services, including education. Tanzania is also a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which it signed in 1991. Furthermore, Tanzania ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. Tanzania also participated in the Education for All Conference in Jomtien (1990) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995).

As a signatory to the CEDAW, Tanzania is, therefore, bound by the provision of Article 3 of the Convention, which obligates the country to be committed to “ensur[ing] the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise, and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the basis of equality with men”. To this effect, a fully-fledged ministry, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Children was created in 1990 to deal with (among other issues) the eradication of all obstacles hindering the access of women to educational and training opportunities to the best of their ability (URT 1992).

In the country report submitted and presented before the UN Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1998, the representatives from Tanzania indicated that steps had been taken to inform the public of the women’s rights, including the publication of a booklet on women’s rights, and translation of the CEDAW into Kiswahili, the national language. The report also noted that the Beijing Platform for Action served as the resource material for educating women and girls on their rights, although the dropout rates for girls, particularly from basic education, remained significantly high.

Apart from the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania as well as the country’s signing and ratifying of the international instruments concerning universal education, Tanzania has also formulated some strategies for enhancing gender parity in education. Indeed, references to educational entitlements and duties appear in Tanzania’s 1995

Education and Training Policy, which spells out that the intention of the government is to guarantee access to primary and adult basic education by all citizens as a basic right. Tanzania has also tried to incorporate the international documents it has ratified into its national policies. In this regard, reference can be made to the following examples:

- In 1970 Tanzania launched a comprehensive national literacy campaign to reduce illiteracy among the adult population. As a matter of fact, 1970 was declared as Adult Education Year in Tanzania. On the eve of the New Year the then president, the late Mwalimu (meaning teacher) Nyerere implored the nation that adults must be educated first, since the impact of that on development was immediate. In Mwalimu's view, investing in children was a long-term investment. Generally, this literacy campaign was characterised by high motivation and expectations among the people and leadership. The campaign led to a high literacy rate among the adult population, which rose from 15 percent at the time of independence in 1961 to 90.4 percent in 1986.
- In 1974, the government launched an ambitious Universal Primary Education (UPE) drive which aimed at enrolling every child between the ages of seven and 13 in school by November 1977. This politically-motivated manoeuvre relied on the ideal that education was a basic human right that should be implemented without any further delay. This scheme was geared towards providing mass education through the improvement of adult education and the provision of UPE for children. The entire population was mobilised towards achieving universal literacy in a short period. This was done through the media and by involving the party (then the country had embraced a one-party political system) and government leaders. Expansion of enrolment was immediate as over-age⁵ children seized this opportunity to enrol under UPE. In 1980, the gross enrolment rate reached an estimated 93%. The number of pupils enrolled in Standard One in 1978 was 878,321 compared with only 248,000 in 1974, an increase of 354 percent (Sumra, 1995).
- In 1978, the National Education Act No. 25 (further amended in 1995) was passed to consolidate the UPE efforts. Section 35 of the Act requires compulsory attendance for primary education for every child aged 7-13:

³ In Tanzania the entry age for primary education is seven and it takes seven years to complete the primary school cycle. Any child aged above 13 is not allowed to begin primary school class one. Rather she/he has to enrol in adult literacy classes.

It shall be compulsory for every child who has not attained the age of thirteen years to be enrolled for primary education and that the parent or parents of every child compulsorily enrolled for primary education shall ensure that the child regularly attends the primary school in which he is enrolled until he completes primary education.

Contravention of this act led to some parents being fined or imprisoned although in most cases, as observed during fieldwork, the issue was resolved at school level between the parents and the head teachers.

Also, considerable efforts have been made by UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, to provide a second chance for those who missed out on formal education. As indicated in the background, almost half of Tanzanian children and adolescents of primary school age (7-13) never start or complete primary education. Most of these unfortunates come from poor families and hard-to-reach communities and, as such, are not adequately served by the formal education system. This element raised some concern as Tanzania realised that it cannot achieve UPE as anticipated through the formal structure, hence the need for an alternative. Towards this end, in 1997 the Ministry of Education and Culture (at that time), in collaboration with UNICEF, decided to develop the Complementary Basic Education Programme (COBET) to help provide primary education to out-of-school children and adolescents, especially girls in a non-formal setting. The programme is part of the Basic Education Master Plan (BEMP) and has now become a country-wide undertaking. Available statistics show that by 2009, COBET classes had managed to register 82,989 learners (47,091 boys, and 35,898 girls) out of the 2.5 million children and youth estimated to be out of school for various reasons (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, 2009).

Given that Tanzania has signed and ratified the international conventions on the right to education for girls and women and also given that these are reflected in the national constitution and other policy documents, one would expect Tanzania to be in a very strong position when it comes to promoting the right to education-for-all. However, this is generally not the case. Whereas it is true that some actions have been taken to ensure equal access to education-for-all, they remain inadequate. In fact, the barriers that undermine the provision of education for “all women” persist. The next section analyses some of the barriers that hinder women from fully realising and enjoying their right to basic education.

Barriers prohibiting women from fully realising their educational right

Expulsion of pregnant school girls

For a long time now, the official practice in Tanzania has been to expel all the schoolgirls who get pregnant while in school. The circumstances leading to the pregnancy, the impact of expulsion, or the views of the pregnant schoolgirls are never taken into account when deciding these cases. Experience shows that in some cases teachers have coaxed the girls into providing information on the person responsible for their pregnancies. However, when it comes to prosecution of such cases as required by law, there is no follow-up. In fact, in most cases the person responsible for impregnating the girl is not called upon to account for his crime. Often, the parents of the girls lose hope or give up on seeking justice and are resigned to heaping blame on the girl to shoulder the consequences. Apart from being denied their right to education, many girls also face humiliation and misery. Moreover, having their school life prematurely terminated doubly punishes them, first, by lowering their social status and second, by having to care for a child as a single parent at such a tender age. During fieldwork, I had the opportunity to talk to some of the girls who had had to cut short their schooling because of pregnancy. Their experiences were touching, and most of them were ignorant about the fact that coital experience could result in pregnancy.

Box 1: I remained alone and was expelled from school

I was in Standard Four and was doing very well in class. I had no idea at all what it means by having a sexual relationship with a boy and later becoming pregnant. I had a friend in my class. He was a bit older than I was. He proposed to me and one day after a lot of hesitation, I agreed. It was just out of curiosity. After two months, I started feeling awful. I vomited almost every morning. One day, my mother asked me whether I was okay or not. I didn't understand what she meant. I replied quickly that everything was fine with me. Then, she became more serious and asked me again. Before, I could even think of an answer, she slapped me on my cheek and asked me whether I had ever slept with a man. I recalled the incident but I didn't dare to tell her about it. I kept quiet. Finally, she took me to a doctor who confirmed that I was pregnant. My parents were very annoyed and forced me to reveal the man's identity. I have never seen my father as angry as that. I was scared. I mentioned the name. My parents were more annoyed to hear that it was just my classmate who was still as dependent on his parents as I was. My parents met his parents to discuss the matter but his parents were not cooperative. Instead they met with the head teacher who issued a letter for the boy to be transferred to a distant school. I remained alone. I was expelled from school. (Source: Interview extract with one teenage mother (name withheld)).

Although reliable statistics are not readily available, it is estimated that more than 3,000 primary school girls are expelled annually due to pregnancy (URT, 2009). Statistics from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training show that the number of girls dropping out of school because of pregnancy is increasing, although its contribution to the school dropout rate in percentage terms remains comparatively small in relation to other factors such as truancy (girls also feature in this).

Table 1: Girls expelled from school because of pregnancy (2002-2009)

Year	Total number	Percentage of all dropouts
2002	2,227	5.2
2003	2,550	5.6
2004	2,590	6.2
2005	3,479	6.0
2006	3,190	5.6
2007	4,362	5.5
2009	3,370	4.6

Source: *Basic Education Statistics in Tanzania* (2009).

It is important to note that these figures are likely to be low as many pregnant girls drop out of school, citing other reasons and leave school before the pregnancy starts to show to avoid the social stigma. The average onset of sexual activity for girls in some parts of Tanzania can be as low as 12 years (Bhalalusesa, 2003). There is a general consensus that the majority of adolescents are sexually active in Tanzania. The widely reported cases of premature sexual activity in Tanzania, coupled with the low use of contraceptives since adolescents are excluded from contraceptive services in Tanzania, attest to the fact that

pregnancy levels among teens in school are much higher than the available statistics suggest.

Even then, expulsion of pregnant girls from school is a violation of the girl child's fundamental rights; however, it has no legal basis in Tanzania. This contradicts the Education Act No 25 of 1978 and the Constitution of Tanzania that give every citizen the right to education, as well as the international conventions that Tanzania has signed and ratified.

Indeed, expulsion due to pregnancy severely limits the life options for the girl and undermines her potential contribution to society. In some cases, the fear of expulsion forces the girls to resort to poorly performed, clandestine abortions, at the hands of quacks, hence risking their lives (Kuleana, 1999). In fact, expelling pregnant schoolgirls amounts to punishing them for something over which they often had little control, as both the girls and boys receive little or no sex education in primary schools and rarely have access to contraceptive services.

Meanwhile, there has been a long debate on introducing sex education in schools so that children could understand the changes taking place in their bodies, especially at puberty. The introduction of sex education has generally encountered sustained resistance from Tanzania's diverse society on religious, cultural and even moral grounds. Meena (1993) once noted that the moralists have been arguing that sex education will be a licence for extra-marital relations. Instead, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced Family Life Education in selected schools as a pilot study. However, educators such as Meena (perhaps due to experience) feel that implementing a pilot study simply meant postponing dealing with this urgent issue. In the meantime, the girls continue suffering from remorseless expulsions from school when they are found to be pregnant. Information obtained from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training indicated that the issue was under review although it has yet to issue any directive or re-entry policy, explicitly stating the right of pregnant girls to continue with their education after delivery (see Jamhuri ya Mwangano wa Tanzania, 2008).

Inappropriate programmes

There has been a growing concern about the functionality and proper instructional focus of adult basic education programmes for women in Tanzania. Although studies (Carr-Hill et al. 1991 and Kadege et al. 1992) show that more women participate in adult basic education programmes than men, very little attention has been paid to the process of programme development. Scholars such as Mushi and Bhalalusesa (2002), and Torres

and Schungurensky (1994) attributed this problem to the orientation of this initiative—its heavy top-down model of programme development. The pressure to establish these programmes had been coming from the state. In fact, these programmes are primarily male-dominated, hence reflecting the perceptions of the programme developers, most of whom were men. Therefore, the basic adult basic education programmes that have been developed have been too general to meet the unique needs of women. For a long time, the government has overlooked the fact that women, as learners, had specific needs, interests and aspirations. The government also overlooked the fact that women had their own life experiences and ways of learning, which could have provided a valuable input in the development of successful adult education programmes. Consequently, the skills and knowledge imparted through ad-hoc programmes have proved to be of a low level and inadequate to bring about significant changes for women. This had a counter-productive de-motivating effect on the learners who eventually withdrew from adult basic education classes.

It should be noted that doubly deprived in their capacity as women and women living in poor conditions, Tanzanian women shoulder multiple responsibilities, which leave them with very little time for leisure pursuits and even less for educational activities. Even in cases where they attended classes, it was sometimes because of external force (See Bhalalusesa, 1993). At times, they did so to avoid being hassled by the village government that had been given explicit instructions to ensure that women in the village attended such classes. However, if education is their inalienable right then the women should be able to see that its benefits exceeded the cost of participation. Furthermore, this education should empower them and bring about an improvement in their difficult living conditions. As a matter of fact, the issue of education in the human rights context has to go beyond access to its orientation, content and impact that should be tailored to the education needs of these women.

The current Integrated Community Based Adult Education (ICBAE) programme was developed on the assumption that it would remedy the weaknesses of the previous programmes in a bid to address women's particular needs. However, not enough has been achieved so far. An evaluative study (Swai, 1999) in the four communities where the programme has been in operation since 1995 and a study by Mushi and Bhalalusesa (2002) both indicate that the programme has not enabled women to develop themselves and live better lives in their communities. In most cases, the teachers give lessons on what is easily learned and what they perceive as women's needs, without ever considering their expressed needs. In addition, the programme appears to have failed to accommodate the interests and needs of all adult learners and out-of-school children because of its selective nature, with priority being given to the easily reachable parts or those providing the highest motivation to initiate the programme. Indeed, given the

current trend in programme expansion, coupled with the financial constraints, the population of adult illiterates is likely to continue increasing. Thus, concerted measures need to be taken to address the problem. Statistics (URT, 2009) show that the number of adult learners registered in functional literacy classes was 572,142 in 2006, going up to 574,801 in 2007, with the majority of them being women, who constituted 289,895 in 2006 and 308,854 in 2007 of this figure. But these statistics do not translate into much if there are no tangible benefits and if the beneficiaries, especially women, are not retained in the programmes until they fully benefit from them.

Poverty

In the course of fieldwork, a number of reasons were provided to explain the socio-cultural factors prohibiting girls and women from fully benefiting from their right to education. At the heart of the problem was the issue of poverty. Poverty is traditionally defined as a household lacking the economic resources to enjoy the customary standard of living of the society to which it belongs. According to the World Bank, the poverty line may be thought of as comprising two elements: the expenditure necessary to buy a minimum standard of nutrition and other basic necessities (clothing and housing), and a further amount that varies from country to country, reflecting the cost of participating in the everyday life of society (Eide,1995).

Generally, the realisation of human rights requires the eradication of poverty. Those who do not have an adequate standard of living are often the most vulnerable in society, and are often unable to claim their right. In this study, poverty was found to be the major reason why girls and women are denied their right to education. Poverty is largely a rural phenomenon, with 51% of the population being considered poor as their average income falls below the poverty line. Many families in the rural areas depend on subsistence production and low earnings, making parents unable to meet school costs, such as exercise books, textbooks, and uniforms. Such was the reality in the communities being studied. Indeed, many parents, particularly single mothers, lived in a state of abject poverty and failed even to pay the minimum annual Tshs 2000 required for every child enrolled in school. For these villagers, struggling to make ends meet was a way of life.

Sometimes, a family had to choose from among their numerous children the ones they were prepared to support at school with their meagre resources. In such a case, the girl-child is excluded for a variety of reasons that relate more to hidden costs and social and cultural factors. The hidden costs include the loss of assistance to parents in the home and on the land, on which the families depend for their survival.

Although girls and boys are both subject to the same economic forces, the odds are stacked against the girls because of gender-based discrimination and gender-determined roles. On the whole, girls remain victims of circumstances just as their mothers and their grandmothers before them.

Box 2: I wish I had gone to school....

I was born in a family of five children: all girls except one. He was the only one who was sent to school up to Standard Seven. My father always said girls were useless and he would not spend the little income he obtained through hard work to send us to school. He always compared our intellectual ability with that of our mum who was just a housewife, saying she was equally useless apart from giving birth to female children. My mum could not send us to school because she had no money. The yields we got from the farm were not even adequate to keep us going for the whole year. When MEMKWA classes were introduced I went to school and registered myself. But it became very difficult for me to continue because of the situation at home. I had to assist my mother in the farm since my father decided to leave us alone and married a second wife whom he hoped would give birth to male children... I thank my aunt for bringing me to Dar es Salaam and for giving me an opportunity to work in her hair salon. I can now generate some money to share with my mother. I wish I had gone to school. Maybe I could have been somewhere better than this place.

One point worth stressing here is that, because of poverty, boys are also forced to drop out of school (URT 2003) and assume their traditional role of breadwinners at a tender age. In fact, some children have been forced into child labour of one form or another to support their parents' families. In Kinondoni (Mbweni), for example, the researchers observed many school-age boys just roaming along the seashore during school hours. They were waiting to assist the fishermen in scaling and selling fish, while others were selling groundnuts, eggs and cigarettes. Most of these children were hired and forced to undertake such activities because there was literally nothing at their homes. The same situation was observed in Makete District, where some children (especially girls) were forced to work in their own villages to support themselves and their siblings following the death of both their parents.

Conflict of interest between traditional values and Formal Schooling

The enjoyment of the right to education for women and girls in the communities being studied depended also on the prevalent cultural practices and traditional norms. Before formal schooling started in Tanzania, many societies used to practise initiation rites as a way of transmitting knowledge and skills to the younger generation. This was done mainly through oral tradition and was gender-specific. Today, a few societies in Tanzania still do this. The communities selected for this study were among these few societies, with the exception of Kibondo district.

I learned, for example, that with the advent of puberty, which traditionally ushers in adulthood, most of the girls were removed from school and confined inside. Sometimes, the girls were kept in seclusion even before the onset of puberty. Such precautionary measures were taken to shield the girls from early pregnancy. But in the picture, this could also mean the end of formal schooling for such girls as some of them would not have an opportunity to attend school before they were married off.

Although, on the one the hand, such practices were seen as important cultural values, on the other, they were understandably perceived as negative ones by teachers and educators. The teachers saw these cultural practices as having a disruptive influence that resulted in the girls' being kept away from their studies, without even knowing what their future held in store for them. Some of the girls interviewed in one rural community in Kinondoni district had stayed inside for more than six months. What struck me is that they seemed unconcerned about missing school lessons. For the girls and their mothers, this initiation rite was a social obligation perceived as so important that skipping it was associated with lack of social values and self-esteem. The parents commonly claimed that they kept the girls inside until after the initiation ceremony because if the girl got pregnant before then, the initiation ceremony would not be performed for her. She is considered to have breached the tradition and, therefore, would be an incomplete woman. Consequently, this *lack* was considered to lower the social standing of the mother. Hence the parents had to take all the precautionary measures that included withdrawing the girls from school once they reached puberty.

The teachers, for their part, said that they sometimes advised the parents to keep the girls inside for a week and allow them to return to school afterwards. Then, they could perform the actual initiation ceremony during the school vacation. Currently, the majority of parents who abided by this were those who valued formal education. Those who did not, continued to keep their daughters inside until they deemed it necessary to let them out, thereby disrupting their children's attendance at school.

The confusion and conflict of interests between cultural tradition as a form of education and modern formal schooling can also be reflected even within certain provisions of the international instruments. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, provide for the right to cultural identity. The argument is that every cultural group has the right to maintain its own specific culture. In fact, the international law strongly protects the *liberty of parents* to choose the kind of education for their children according to their religious, moral or philosophical convictions. However, as Nowak (1995) notes, this provision in the international law was in contravention of the Tanzania

government's corresponding duty to provide *compulsory education* for all until they had completed primary education.

Lack of awareness of the right to education

The study also explored the extent to which girls and women were aware of their right to basic education. The findings show that many women were unfamiliar with the concept of "human rights", and even those who had some idea had misconceptions about the term. Some of the women perceived it as a political slogan mainly used by women's movements in urban areas. For these rural dwellers, human rights for rural and poor women were far-fetched. These women saw the education of a girl or woman as a privilege rather than a right. They believed that they did not have the same rights as men. Indeed, the girls and the women interviewed believed that boys had more right to education and needed it more than girls. Girls in particular were conditioned to believe that they should grow up and marry and have children. But this was simply a reflection of how older women, and the girls' mothers, had been brought up themselves. Naturally, the women carried negative images of themselves deep inside, and they lacked self-esteem and pride as people with greater potential than what they were allowed to exercise by their patriarchal society. These negative elements had been inculcated into them while they were growing up. Worse still, they were made to feel worthless, weaker and smaller than their male counterparts.

It was also learned that, in the past, parents had a culture of marrying off girls between the ages of 12 and 15. However, these customary practices are generally on the decline. Where they were still practised, the justification was mainly on the grounds that they prevent pre-marital sexual activities, thereby promoting moral values within the community. In such communities, they feared that failure to marry off girls early put the girl child at risk of being a victim of immorality. Ibhawoh (1999) observed in Nigeria that the girl child is a symbol of the family's respect and, hence, the parents considered it safer to marry her off properly at an early age rather than risk the dishonour which might come to the family if she engaged in immoral sexual activity. Parents view early marriage as a solution to problems girls might encounter in adolescence.

Given a second chance what would young women like to learn?

Earlier, it was pointed out that concern had been growing for a long time over the functionality of educational programmes designed for women. So far these programmes have proved to be less meaningful for women since the basic knowledge and skills imparted cannot be translated into practical activities that can benefit the women in their daily existence. Evidently, the acquisition of literacy in the narrow sense of simply learning to read cannot mobilise women and bring about desired change.

Hence, this study tried to explore from the women what they would prefer to learn should they be given a second chance, and more importantly what they expected from an educational programme.

The findings revealed that the lack of literacy skills was not the main concern of these women. Whereas they appreciated the importance of being literate, they did not want to learn to read as an abstract social value. They felt that as much as they wanted to be literate and read newspapers and other materials, they wanted something more, something that would resolve their immediate problems. In fact, the women equated lack of literacy skills with lack of freedom. They cited examples of failure to read the doctor's prescriptions when their babies were sick, failure to enjoy reading newspapers as well as messages on '*Khanga*', their wrappers, a favourite dress among women, as some of the handicaps of being illiterate. Nonetheless, they considered these shortcomings as secondary since their primary concern was economic liberation. They urgently wanted to learn how to design and run small income-generating projects because these would increase their income and liberate them from gnawing poverty. This idea was generally shared by the women interviewed. They believed that once they were economically empowered, everything else would fall into place. In the view of these women, in addition to becoming literate financial capability is also needed. The major responses are summarised in Box 3.

Box 3: Summary of responses of what young women would like to learn

If only they can teach us how to design and run small income-generating projects, of course with credit facilities so that we have some important activity to do, not only coming here to read and write.

I wish I could read newspapers. Nowadays there are lots of funny and interesting stories. The cartoons for example. I end up looking at the pictures and pretend to read what is written.

You feel quite embarrassed when you ask someone to read the message on a *Khanga* whenever you want to buy it. You feel you have no freedom.

I wouldn't like my daughter to fall into the same trap. I want to teach her about family planning. My mother didn't teach me anything and I got pregnant the moment I tried [to have sex]. I want to read books on family planning.

Oh yes, and AIDS the killer disease. There is nothing to hide. It could be a good topic for discussion when we meet in our women group.

The only problem is time. We are busy running here and there. But if there is something like a revolving fund to begin income-generating projects... That will be fine because you will then be sure that the children have something to eat.

This summary of responses reflects the women's socio-economic context and the practical problems they encounter in their daily lives as women. It shows that the women do indeed desire to become literate but this literacy drive should go hand-in-hand with the acquisition of practical skills and means that would help them change their lives for the better. The issues they wanted covered should include those relating to their welfare as women and their health, such as family planning and AIDS prevention, the law and how it affects them as women and their families, employment, and entrepreneurial skills.

From the discussion with women it became evident that the education programmes designed for them must be designed in a participatory and democratic manner. These programmes should cater for women's most felt and pressing needs and problems as well as raise their awareness of their human rights. Ultimately, these programmes should contribute to enhancing their position of power and autonomy in their respective communities as well as in their families. The type of education must be conceived as a political instrument for women's empowerment. On the whole, these programmes should be aimed at instituting changes in the women as well as the whole society, whose mindset also needs to be transformed for the betterment of the women's well-being.

Another important point is that the majority of women in Tanzania (especially in the rural and urban slum areas) are poor and have already been over-burdened with too many tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, for an educational programme to be successful it needs to be discussed, defined and designed by taking on board the views of the women themselves, then taking utmost care when it comes to implementation to guarantee maximum success. Strengthening women's organisational and entrepreneurial skills is imperative. Women need to unite and organise themselves as a group so as to acquire a power base within their community and make their voices heard. They also need to acquire skills to enable them to tackle the problems they have defined themselves as those that are most urgent. Above all, these efforts need government support, especially in form of provision of resources.

Conclusion

The overall picture one can get from this paper is that the right to basic education for girls and women in Tanzania is still a distant dream. Certainly, incorporation of international instruments into the constitution alone does not automatically guarantee the realisation and enjoyment of human rights by girls and women. The fact remains that a lot more still needs to be done by the government, the communities and by the

girls and women themselves before the right to basic education can be fully realised. Furthermore, the government needs to create an enabling environment and demonstrate this in concrete activities before girls and women can realise and enjoy the right to education.

Recommendations

on the basis of the conclusion made above, the following recommendations are advanced:

The need to revive a strong political will: In the advent of harsh economic realities and insufficient resources, the realisation of the right to education for girls and women depends for the most part on the voluntary consent of the government in power. There is a need for a stronger political will, particularly as regards the allocation and distribution of resources. Special efforts are also required to ensure that children from poor families are supported to continue with their education. In addition, the community need to be involved in the regard to advocacy and mobilisation of resources, through which people will learn to appreciate the government's efforts and, as a result, develop a sense of shared commitment to a common purpose.

The need to link policy with practice: The official practice of expelling pregnant girls has been revised but the policy to that effect is not yet operational. In addition, measures have to be taken by the government and parents to ensure that pregnant schoolgirls get support for their right to continue with education post-delivery. It is also time for the government to introduce health and sex education in primary schools to curb the rising rate of promiscuity, and also serve as a weapon that could help stem the tendency of parents of removing girls from school once they reached puberty since the girls would know how to take care of themselves and avoid becoming pregnant. Indeed, health/sex education will equip the girls with information on how babies are conceived and how they can avoid having babies before they were physically and emotionally ready to take care of them. They should be made to understand that children should not be born unwanted.

The need to integrate cultural traditions into the school curriculum: There is a need to rethink how best the good aspects of cultural traditions (initiation rites) can be integrated into the formal school curriculum to resolve the conflict of interests between cultural values and formal schooling. After all, it is not enough, let alone fair, to identify and dismiss cultural traditions as barriers and limitations to the right to education and reject them wholesale when there are some positive aspects that could be derived from

them. It is more pertinent, therefore, to understand the social basis of these traditions and how cultural attitudes may be changed and adapted to complement formal schooling. However, such changes and integration must involve local initiatives in a way that does not jeopardise, or undermine, the cultural integrity of the local people.

The need for Human Rights Education: It must be emphasised that effective realisation of international human rights (such as the right to education) does not rest on laws and institutions alone. Equally important is whether people are willing and ready to utilise them to challenge situations that fall short of human rights. Nonetheless, it is also a fact that people will not challenge or claim a right they are not aware of. Girls, for example, are socialised from the very beginning to accept their situation and the ideology of male supremacy typical of a patriarchal society. For this matter, women would need powerful social, cultural and economic cues to develop a sense of self-worth to pass on to the next generation. Accordingly, since the right to education is just one among many rights unknown to women, there is an urgent need for concerted efforts to provide education on the human rights of women. Furthermore, for an education programme of this nature to be successful, it must also commence with a needs assessment survey to determine the gap between the current level of knowledge women have regarding human rights and what they ought to know. In the effort to transform the relationship between students and knowledge, it is probably more effective to begin with the women's own concrete personal experiences of reality.

As the conclusions and recommendations in this paper were based on qualitative research, this necessitated a limited but purposive selection of the geographical coverage. The research methodology adopted allowed the researcher to gain deeper insights into the problem being investigated, but it limited its application in terms of what is happening all over Tanzania. Nonetheless, the study has shed light on the state of play regarding the right to education for girls and women in Tanzania as a whole. In fact, this may form the basis for further research for all those interested in and committed to the uphill struggle of helping women and girls realise their right to education.

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