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Author(s): Okkolin, Mari-Anne; Lehtomäki, Elina

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GENDER AND DISABILITY - CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION SECTOR DEVELOPMENT IN TANZANIA

In line with the UN Millennium Development Goals, the government of Tanzania has set poverty reduction as the most important challenge for the future. Education is a key sector in the long-term process of poverty reduction. Three of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focus on gender. The Progress report (UN Secretariat, 2005), however, fairly strongly states that it is unlikely, that any of these three MDGs can be met, if women lack the education, influence and resources to care for their families, and to fully participate in the development process. In this paper, we analyse findings of previous research on gender and disability in the education sector development and explore ways to bring the socio-cultural perspectives into the sector development discussions.

1 Socio-cultural Approach to Education Sector Development

According to the World Education Forum, held in Dakar in 2000, the socio-cultural factors which contribute to girls' successful participation in education are: short distance between home and school, female teachers as safe role models, legislation and regulation that increase security in schools, and participation of family and community in decision-making concerning school management, selection of teachers and contents of curriculum. On the other hand, several international studies and policies have emphasised that education of girls actually means educating future families, contributes to lower birth rates, healthier children and overall socio-economic development (e.g. Stromquist, 1998; Mella, 2003; PRSP 2000). In addition to social and economic investment perspective, it has to be borne in mind, that education is an undisputable right of every child.

The Dakar summit participants agreed that in order to eradicate discrimination of disadvantaged groups, based on e.g. gender and disability, usually deeply rooted in education systems, committed involvement of the whole community around schools is required (Savolainen et al., 2000; UNESCO, 2003b). Recent studies investigating

reasons for gender gaps in achievements in schooling have concluded that, whilst poverty at both national and household levels is associated with under-enrolment of school-aged children, the gendered outcomes of such under-enrolment are more a product of adverse cultural practice than of poverty in itself (Colclough et al., 2000; Peasgood et al., 1997). It has also been pointed out (e.g. Swainson et al., 1998) that the trend towards programme and sector policy approach raises a risk that gender responsive initiatives could be lost. Therefore, in addition to mainstreaming, specific policy interventions and gender specific actions are still required in order to remove adverse cultural practices.

The emphasis on mainstreaming gender perspectives in education sector shows that the interests and needs of girls' and women are recognised, and they are systematically pursued in the formulation of all government policies and programmes. In addition to mainstreaming at the policy and programme levels, knowledge regarding socio-cultural interpretations of the meaning of education at the community-level is needed for realistic and meaningful planning. In-depth qualitative information regarding values and cultural views on educated girls and disabled children would significantly support the education for all process and poverty reduction strategies.

In Tanzania, the abolition of tuition fees in 2000, a move that was introduced in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), stimulated an enormous demand for schooling. It also created the need to safeguard educational quality through adequate classrooms and supplies, and sufficient numbers of teachers (UNICEF, 2005). According to the IDT/MDG Progress document (UNDP, 2001a, 10) key factors that affected enrolment levels were public expenditure constraints, lack of capacity for management and planning, poor quality and poor relevance of curriculum, poverty, lack of community and parental involvement in the education process and low participation in decision making. The progress document pointed out that especially the lack of community and parental involvement created a challenge to achieving universal primary education. Similarly, the Poverty and Human Development Report (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2002, 24) demanded greater involvement of parents and communities in school management.

2 Gender and disability in the education policies and programmes

UNESCO (2003a) emphasises that international declarations have to be interpreted in the context of each country. In Tanzania, gender balance and inclusion of disabled children are goals of the current education sector reforms. The Tanzanian Assistance Strategy (TAS), the National Poverty Eradication Strategy (NPES) and the PRSP all identify education as a national priority. The present education policy framework in Tanzania provides also supportive environment and opportunities of promoting education and empowerment of girls. The Government is signatory to many international and regional human rights agreements asserting equity policies and non-discrimination policies in education. It has also initiated a series of policies and reforms in the education sector with the aim of ensuring that all children have equitable access to a compulsory primary education of good quality.

In addition to the general Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP, 2000), there are three guiding plans for pre-primary, primary and secondary education. The Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP, 2001) is the first outcome of efforts to formulate international commitments, especially poverty eradication, Education For All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals into feasible strategies and actions for the development of primary education. As a five-year plan (2002-2006) the PEDP provides a framework for follow-up of progress achieved, problems encountered and recommendations for future action at national level. The PEDP has four strategic priorities: Enrolment Expansion, Quality Improvement, Capacity Building and Institutional Arrangements. It is implemented through the existing Local Government Structures, and the whole chain of roles and responsibilities from the central ministerial level to school level is defined in the plan.

In the PEDP, there are some explicit gender objectives, but all down the line, gender specific objectives and systematic strategies to operationalise gender objectives are missing (see FAWETZ, 2002). Research reports focus on education as a means to reduce poverty in general, ignoring the gender differences in education and economic participation. For instance, Jung and Thorbecke (2003) found that well-targeted patterns of education expenditure have efficiently reduced poverty in Tanzania. The research takes into consideration urban and rural poverty but ignores gender and other socio-cultural aspects associated with poverty.

During the last decade enrolment of girls has increased in Tanzania. It is an expected result of the national commitment to the global EFA process, which emphasises girls' access to education. According to the EFA 2000 Assessment (UNESCO, 2000) the progress towards EFA goal in Tanzania has been much slower than anticipated. The Situation Analysis of Children in Tanzania (The Government ... 2002) stated however, that the enrolment rates have risen impressively and gender parity in primary education at the national level has almost been achieved and in secondary education may be met by 2005. It has to be noticed however, that regarding universal access to primary education by 2015, annual rate of increase should improve substantially, because in 2001 the net enrolment rate was 65.5%. The net enrolment rate for girls was 65,2%, and the rate for boys was 65,8%; almost half of the districts recorded net enrolment rates of below 50%.

Still, girls tend to drop out at a higher rate than boys and even those who stay in school perform less well (Primary School Leaving Examination PSLE pass rate 28.6% in 2001; 21.4% for girls and 36.2% for boys). In addition, gender parity becomes a severe problem at the higher secondary (36% in 1999) and tertiary grades. (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2002). Disparities between urban and rural districts, and even wider differences across districts and between schools were revealed both by The Situation Analysis of Children in Tanzania (2002) and a nation-wide school-mapping study (JICA, 2002). The studies emphasised that schools and districts differed not only in enrolment but also, especially in performance and attainments. Furthermore, they suggested that social and cultural factors played a more crucial role than sector policies and strategies in education development.

Rising enrolment rates and simultaneous prevailing dropout rates indicate clearly that one of the goals may be achieved through policy and strategy work, while another goal requires a different approach. From gender perspective the emphasis should be put on addressing the performance of girls and avoiding dropout of girls during the final stages of primary education and throughout secondary education. On one hand this means addressing issues related to gender relations in the classroom and in the curriculum, but on the other hand it reaches beyond the realm of the education sector and relates to social and cultural values towards girls, especially at or after puberty. (See e.g. The United Republic of Tanzania, 2002; UNESCO 2003b, 2004).

The lack of specific objectives and strategies, and community level contributions to planning is even more evident in the case of disability. It may be assumed that the MDGs and EFA process include also people with disabilities, but research does not support this assumption. Different from the education sector development data concerning gender, there are no reliable numbers and proportions of children with disabilities in any of the previous study and reports. One of the reasons is the difficulty in defining disability that is always a complex phenomenon and experienced in contact with the social and physical environment (Peters 2003; Traustadóttir & Kristiansen 2004; Wiman & Sandhu 2003; Yeo 2003); what is a disability in challenging socio-economic and ignorant environments, may be easily overcome in other contexts, e.g. by providing eye-glasses or adapted learning materials.

According to Wiman and Sandhu (2003) interpretations of the MDGs and implementation programs have ignored the poorest of the poor, people with disabilities. They suggest that particular attention must be paid to people with disabilities when interpreting the MDGs. To understand the goal of achieving universal primary education (MDG 2) means that we ensure all children in any community, without exclusion, have access to school and successfully complete primary education. Promoting gender equality (MDG 3) requires enabling all girls to perform well in school and all women to participate in society.

Several researchers have pointed out that while mainstreaming is essential, specified data, focused support and follow-up measures are required (e.g. Stubbs 1999; Wiman & Sandhu 2003; Wirz & Meikle 2005; Yeo 2003). The socio-cultural interpretations and barriers to participation associated with impairments, health, and physical and social environments require the participants' view. Families, people with disabilities and their organisations should be involved in identifying their needs, planning and making decision on education and poverty reduction. We assume that mainstreaming gender and disability may fail to address the complex phenomenon of girls with disabilities.

According to previous research (Dale, 1999; Schafer, 1999), international resolutions, agreements and cooperation programmes strongly direct national education policies. Their impact on district, ward, village and community level education sector implementation strategies and process is far less evident. In collective cultures, such as in Tanzania, socio-cultural interpretations at community level may however, have a

stronger influence on girls' opportunities than international and national policies. The Government of Tanzania and UNICEF (2002) have suggested that education establishment and communities have to come together and envision ways to improve schooling. To take full advantage of strategic opportunities for institutionalising gender and disability at all levels of the education sector, vertical and horizontal dialogue, and well-articulated initiatives of how to turn principles into sustainable practices is required. Views of girls, their families and communities are crucial in the dialogue and contribute to sustainability. In order to achieve the defined objectives, there is a clear need to incorporate *both mainstreaming and gender and disability specific approaches* in education sector.

3 Education as an Enabling Environment

As suggested in the Poverty and Human Development Report (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2002), an important challenge to policy makers and the Government is how to transform primary schools into providers of life skills i.e. to enable learners successfully to manage their environment for their own betterment and that of the whole society. There is little point in providing the opportunity for a child to enrol in school if the quality is so poor that she will not attend, become literate, numerate, or become equipped with facts and skills for life. For this reason, for example UNICEF defines Life Skills-Based Education (LSBE) critical for quality education (see www.unicef.org/girlseducation/index_quality.html). Furthermore, it has to be noticed, that parents with limited resources say that the quality of education plays an important role in their decision of whether or not to put or keep their daughters in school: if girls are not learning, if what they learn is not useful, or if the school environment is not safe for them, parents will not invest in sending their daughters to school (ibid., see also Colclough et al., 2003, 53-90).

According to UNDP (2001b, see Figure 1) girls' empowerment is closely connected to enabling environments. If we view education as an enabling environment, there are findings concerning legal, political and economic factors; hardly any on social and familial factors. Still, these two factors form the basis of the enabling environment and empowerment process.

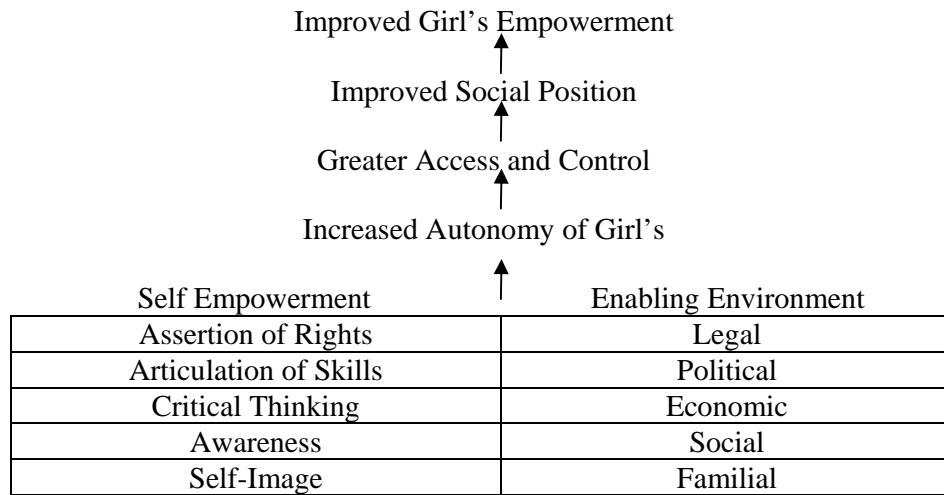


Figure 1. *Process Towards Improvement in Girl's Position (UNDP, 2001b).*

Changes in the rationales show that educating girls has gained a broader foundation. According to Cream Wright (2003), it is not just about redressing a gender disparity in education, but about focusing on the most pivotal groups in order to help eradicate poverty, prevent and ameliorate the impact of HIV/AIDS, promote democratic decision making and good governance, mitigate the impact of food deficits and malnutrition, as well as safeguard children from harmful practices like child labour and sexual exploitation. Consequently, there are vital linkages with other sectors and operational areas, and especially, with the closest socio-cultural context – family and community.

Kenneth King, Robert Palmer and Rachel Hayman (2004) point out that education needs to be embedded in a wider environment of a particular kind for its social and economic impact to be fully realised. They emphasise that we have to ask how primary education is intimately affected by post-primary education and training environment, and how the education system as a whole, including particularly primary education, is affected by the wider economic and social environment. King, Palmer and Hayman divide education environments into two categories: first, the internal, referring to the education and training system itself, and second, the wider non-educational environment outside the education system (including legal, political, economic, social and familial spheres).

King, Palmer and Hayman (2004, 3) demand planning of holistic systems of education. This may well be a prerequisite for achievement of MDG for primary

education, since large number of poor parents will require pathways and opportunities for continuation (secondary, technical and vocational, and tertiary education) of basic education for their children. Additionally, there is a clear need of research for secondary and tertiary levels. Quoting the Millennium Project Task Force, King and his colleagues propose, that for the many claimed benefits of girls' education to be effective, a positive and egalitarian environment in respect of women's work and status is necessary. This environment would include e.g. following critical systems: strong macro-economic environment (growth that creates employment); strong political commitment, a strategic political framework; a need to balance quality/quantity; a focus on equity; adequate financing; data to guide policy; partnerships with community, donors, countries etc.; cultural and contextual factors; enforceable contracts in relation to property rights; access to capital and to microfinance; infrastructure; and access to technology. So far, research on impacts of holistic enabling systems is lacking.

Additionally, it is important to see, that the relationship between schooling and the wider environment is not a one-way street. More accurately, there is probably a two-way influence, where the very provision of mass schooling will itself play a role in determining whether the environment is enabling or not (King et al. 2004, 7-10). From gender perspective, current policy initiatives give extremely central position for education: "education is a significant part of empowerment process for girls, leading to greater participation, decision-making power and control, and transformative action" (UNDP, 2001b). In this regard, the accounts of educated girls would reveal essential information of "survival and social change throughout the life course", as Stone (2001, 62) writes.

Referring to King and his colleagues (2004) we doubt whether the policy literature on the benefits of education, especially at the primary level, has paid sufficient attention to the enabling environments and contexts essential to achieving full potential of schooling. Furthermore, we need to explore processes of addressing barriers to schooling from the social and familial perspectives, regardless of mainstreaming and/or gender specific approaches adopted at the legal, political and economic levels.

4 Agents of Their Own Development - Voice of Educated Girls

There is a great amount of information on quantitative changes in enrolment rates and participation in education (regular country reports and statistics by UN, donor community and NGOs). Conclusions have, however, emphasised the need for *qualitative indicators* to assess *quality of education* and its *impact on participation and attainment*. Previous research on education development has mainly focused on policy reforms (e.g. Cammish & Brock, 1997; Dale, 1999; Takala, 1998) and reasons of exclusion (Colclough et al. 2000, 2003). Tanzanian researchers (e.g. HakiElimu, 2001) have pointed out that *community-level perspectives on relevance and quality* of education are seldom recognised.

According to the Poverty and Human Development Report (The United Republic of Tanzania, 2002) specific studies focusing on obstacles to participation in education and factors causing dropouts and poor performance among girls are needed. We suggest, however, that as important is to recognise *differences between districts and/or schools* and to identify socio-cultural factors that support *successful participation*. Different from previous emphasis on access and participation, our pre-study aims at giving voice to *educated girls* and finding out whether education sector development programmes “create conditions whereby girls can become the agents of their own development and empowerment” (OECD, 1998).

There are communities *successfully implemented equity policies*, and what is more important, families who have find ways to *address or remove barriers* to educating their girls, including girls with disabilities. We are interested in identifying these successful processes and practices. So far there has been hardly any research on district, community and family level interpretations of the right to education, and on dialogue between districts, communities, and families. We assume that research of this kind, would disclose essential information of enabling environments supporting girls’ education and empowerment.

Education policies and systems reflect socially and historically constructed views of pupils’ future role in society, and, at the same time education may have a significant impact on constructing new identities (Antikainen 1998; Bhalalusesa 2001; Vavrus 2002). It has been suggested that priorities in education sector will become shared through international dialogue and development cooperation (e.g. Buchert 1998;

Dale 1999; Eleweke & Rodda 2002; Schafer 1999). This would mean that equality and equity become global goals, e.g. education of girls and children with disabilities would be recognised as right. Our research interest focuses on local dialogues and interpretations.

Similarly to international declarations, academic research does not bring any change without contextualised interpretations and practical applications (see Stubbs 1999; Yeo 2003). Our study analyses the education sector development process context from gender and disability perspectives. It forms a foundation for joint planning with our Tanzanian colleagues, researchers on gender and disability. Our shared goal is to explore how education enables agents of their own development and empowerment, and how the agents' voice is included, and could be better included, in planning of education and poverty reduction policies, strategies and programmes.

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