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Striving to Achieve Gender Equity in Education: A Zimbabwean Experience.

Owence Chabaya, University of Limpopo, & *Enna S. Gudhlanga*, Zimbabwe Open University

Abstract

Immediately after attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe, like most developing countries, alluded to the eradication of all forms of inequalities in its society, including gender inequalities in education. Such imbalances were caused mainly by the patriarchal family system as well as the colonial policies. This paper is an analytical exposition of the efforts made by the Zimbabwean government and international agencies in trying to redress gender inequalities in education, thus critically examining the achievements, challenges and constraints that have been encountered in trying to achieve gender equity in education. Since 1980, a number of policies and strategies were put in place to promote gender equity in education and they included introduction of education for all, free primary education and attracting international agencies that support education in the country. Significant increase in the education of girls and women in terms of numbers was noted in all levels of education although equity is yet still to be achieved. Noted constraints to the achievement of equity included lack of funds as well as lack of mechanisms to enforce and monitor implementation of policies meant to promote education of girls and women. It was recommended that there is need to seriously consider enhancement of policies and strategies that promote the education of girl children and women.

Introduction

Over the past years, girls' education in the developing world has been a story of progress. Interest and financial backing from developmental organisations have grown steadily in response to accumulating evidence documenting the many benefits of girls' schooling and female education and is now a major part of global development commitments including the Millennium Development Goals (Lloyd & Young, 2009). Many countries have attempted to eradicate gender gaps in their societies through legislation of various

gender policies. Chauraya (2012: 255) points out that "gender policies are developed out of the recognition that there are gender deficiencies in operations of the institution". In addition, a gender policy is viewed as an instrument for tackling gender deficiencies in an organised manner. Zimbabwe, as one of the developing countries, has always strived to achieve gender equity since attaining political independence in 1980 (Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango. 2009). Over the years, in its continued commitment to removal of all forms of gender discrimination in society, the Zimbabwean government has alluded to several national and international gender declarations and conventions. In the process, many policies were put in place to advance gender equality and some of them are the gender affirmative action policy of 1992, the 1999 Nziramasanga Commission and the National Gender Policy of 2004 (Chabaya, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to analyse the successes and challenges experienced in striving to achieve gender equity in education in Zimbabwe.

Conceptualising gender, gender equality and gender equity

Gender is not a psychological but a social concept that refers to sets of culturally defined character traits labelled as 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Peterson & Runyan, 1999: 257). Similarly, Riches (as cited in Chabaya, 2007) refers to the term gender as the cultural interpretation of maleness and femaleness as masculinity and femininity. In other words, gender refers to socially learned behaviour and expectations that distinguish masculinity and femininity. Capper (1993:94) says , "gender is socially constructed and describes the characteristics we ascribe to people because of their sex, the ways we believe they behave and the characteristics we believe they have, based on our cultural expectations of what is male and what is female". More importantly, because society places different values on masculine and feminine behaviours, gender is regarded as a basis for relations of inequality between men and women (Peterson & Runyan 1999: 5). In a similar way, Reeves and Baden (2000) refer to the distinctive patterns of ideas, beliefs and norms which shape the way of life and relations of males and females as groups in society. Gender as a concept is described in various ways, but in this paper takes the position that it is a social construct as opposed to sex which is biological.

Gender equality refers to a social order in which women and men share the same opportunities and the same constraints on full participation in both the economic and domestic realm (Bailyn, 2006). It emphasises treating people equally. Equality as a concept does not recognise the differences and conditions that these people may bring in which may stifle achievement of the intended equal outcome.

Gender equity in this paper means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment and or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities (ABC of women's rights and gender equality, 2000: 48). Gender equity recognises differences and accommodates them in order to prevent the continuation of the unequal status quo. In other words, equity emphasises fairness in the process and outcome.

Gender relations in Zimbabwe have often taken the form of male dominance and female subordination (Ostergaard, 1992: 6). This has often legitimised the exclusion of women from decision-making processes. Male dominance is not only a sexual and a social problem but also a political problem directed at maintaining existing power relations which subordinate women. The glaring manifestation of these unequal relations is the failure of women to access basic resources like education, health and participation in politics (Gudhlanga, 2010, 2011; Gudhlanga & Chirimuuta, 2012). Capper (1993) points out that one's gender identification has tremendous influence on one's behaviour, perceptions and effectiveness. The paper discusses the various factors that prejudiced women's participation in education and the challenges they encounter when they try to enter male dominated domains; and it finally gives some possible suggestions on how women can improve their participation in education.

The colonial period and its impact on gender

In Zimbabwe, the colonial government that existed before 1980 put in place education policies that served the interests of the white male-dominated colonial socio-economic order. The colonial education system in the then Rhodesia did not have a specific policy for the education of women and girls. Policies were race specific and gender

neutral (Gordon, 1994). There were two systems of education namely the European Division and the African Division. The European Division of education was non-fee paying, compulsory and of higher quality meant for white, coloured and Asian children. The African Division of education meant for black children was neither free nor compulsory and had inadequate education provisions.

Furthermore, the colonial education system had a deliberate policy of bottle necking the education of African children. Only 12.5 % of all African children completing primary education could be allowed to proceed to secondary education (F1 schools). This percentage was achieved through the use of the stanine system in marking the Standard 6 and Grade 7 final examinations. In the mid 1970s a further 37.5% of primary school graduates were admitted to vocational secondary schools (F2 schools). The remaining 50% were expected to fend for themselves (Mlahleki, 1995). Such policies further marginalised female children who were already under represented in the education system.

Also worth noting is the impact of patriarchal system. According to Ucheaga (1999), when Aristotle declared in his 'Politics' that men were more intelligent than and superior to women, and that it was natural function of the men to rule while women should be subordinate, little did he know that he was laying a philosophical foundation for male chauvinistic society that has wrought tremendous damage to the development potentials of women. The patriarchal Zimbabwean society placed women on subordinate roles in the family. The lowering of women's status was further exacerbated by the colonial government which also introduced customary law in which women wielded very little power if any, in both civic and social circles. Under customary, law, property was owned by husbands and women were reduced to propertyless dependents who had to submit to the will and wishes of their husbands or male relations in order to survive (Ncube, 1987). In fact, women were reduced to perpetual minors. Fluid and flexible traditional practices were turned into hard and fast rules by customary law. While traditional custom was both adaptable and sensitive to extenuating circumstances, customary law was not (Schmidt, 1990). The colonial government used customary law which was heavily engraved with Victorian values to give more power to the domestic authority of the African male guardians (Gudhlanga, 2010). The inequality caused by the colonial system has

been aptly summed up by an Albanian female representative at the UN Conference On The Decade Of Women in 1980 who pointed out that, "The true cause of inequality between men and women was the division of society into oppressors and oppressed and a contributory cause was the aggressive policies of the super powers" (Aribino, 1996). Thus the colonial impact diminished the prerogatives and rights which African women formerly enjoyed (Hafkin & Bay, 1976).

During the colonial period, there a few government schools designated for African children. Africans had to rely mainly on mission schools for their education. Due to traditional patriarchal attitudes, shortage of schools and considerable financial constraints, African parents opted to send male children to school. Even the fewer women who managed to go to school got less pay than men. Ngwenya (1983) confesses that during the colonial period she was a teacher and she got less pay than her male counterparts who had the same job and qualifications as hers. This amply demonstrates that colonial education further marginalised women into the periphery of the means of production.

Inadequate provision, traditional sexist attitudes, customary law and poverty combined to place enormous constraints on black girls' access to education (Gordon, 1994). This state of affairs placed the African girl child at a great disadvantage as far as education was concerned. As a result by 1971, only 43,5% of black children of school going age were in school of which only 3,9% of them were in secondary school. Very few black children reached Form 4 and Form 6 level and of those who did, girls were a minority (Gordon, 1994). For example, only 19 black girls were in Form 6 in 1971. Table 1 clearly shows how women were marginalised in high school education.

Table 1
Enrolment of African pupils in Forms 4 and 5 by sex 1971

	Male		Female		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Form 1V	1 793	75.2	591	24.8	2 384
Form V1	154	89.0	19	11.0	173

Source: Dorsey, 1975: 77

The differences that existed in the number of male and female pupils in schools is further highlighted by Stromquist (1995) who argues that in many African, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries, girls' primary and secondary school enrolments lag substantially behind that of boys.

In the then Rhodesia, girls of all races who were in school were subjected to some sexist practices and conditions. Subject choices, extra curricula activities and sports were different for boys and girls. Girls were directed into 'feminine' areas such as needlework and cookery (Gordon, 1994). This segregation based on gender demonstrates that the curriculum itself further marginalised women. Success was measured in terms of masculine behaviour. For example, school textbooks transmitted heavily stereotyped images of men and women with women adopting low profiles and having traits of passivity and dependency on men, low intelligence and lacking in leadership (Stromquist, 1995).

Foreign religions and their impact on gender

Colonialism came with foreign religions like Christianity and Islam. With the introduction of new patriarchal religious values, women sometimes lost opportunities to occupy important and high positions in society which they had formerly enjoyed (Gudhlanga, 2010). Religion has been found to settle and humanise the relations between people who belong to a given community, but in the process demands unconditional surrender to its principles where some of these beliefs are set for the service of one class to the detriment of other

(Kone, 2009). For example, the very idea of female leadership is inconceivable in Islam (Ogundipe-Lesly, 1994). Relegating women to second class citizens impedes development because a society cannot develop in a healthy manner without the active participation of women in its cultural, political, social, economic and intellectual life. Thus traditional and religious patriarchal attitudes combined with colonial policies further widened gender inequalities in pre-independent Zimbabwe.

Measures taken in post independent Zimbabwe to attain gender equity in education

When the Zimbabwean government took over the reins of political power in 1980, it had to immediately address the imbalances that existed in the education sector among other areas. The new government introduced policies that were geared towards creating an equal basis of opportunities to all Zimbabweans. The government was guided by a socialist ideology, which it had adopted during the liberation struggle. Its policy on education was first enunciated in the ZANU (PF) Party's 1980 Election Manifesto in which the ZANU (PF) government pledged to maintain a uniform educational system, abolish the distinction between African and European education, introduce free and compulsory primary and secondary education for all children regardless of race and above all, to abolish sex discrimination in the education system (ZANU PF Manifesto 1980). As a result, the education policy in Zimbabwe reflected the government's perception of education as both a basic human right and the main means by which equity could be achieved (Government of Zimbabwe, 1981). According to this policy, no one could be discriminated against because of their sex, race or creed (Chivore, 1990).

Soon after independence the government of Zimbabwe organised a major Conference on Reconstruction and Development (ZIMCORD). Its main purpose, according to Chikombah (1999: 37), was to "woo international agencies to come and assist in the reconstruction of infrastructure such as schools, clinics and dip tanks that had been destroyed during the liberation struggle. Many agencies and foreign governments committed themselves to help re-build Zimbabwe". The Australian government, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the German Foundation

for International Development (DSE) provided expatriate teachers to teach Sciences, Mathematics and technical subjects. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Danish International Agency (Danida) and REDD BARNA reconstructed clinics, schools and teachers' houses in rural areas. SIDA also put up a very impressive Curriculum Unit Centre in Harare and trained staff both locally and abroad (Chikombah, 1999). UNICEF has been active in the country and since 1993 it has embarked on gender sensitisation programmes which have become one of the many widespread programmes in Zimbabwe.

Thus the building of more schools by the school development committees, donor agencies and the government meant that not only the quality of African education was improved but it also meant that more girls had greater chances of acquiring western education since so many schools had sprouted throughout the country. The number of primary schools increased tremendously from 3, 161 to 4, 633 from 1980 to 1995, while secondary schools increased to a total of 1, 557 during the same period as compared with the 179 inherited from the colonial government. Attempts were made to make sure that no primary school child travelled more than 5 kilometres to school and no secondary school pupil travelled more than 10 kilometres (*Zimbabwe Mirror*, 11-17 May 2001).

The Zimbabwean government also introduced free primary education for all and heavily subsidised secondary education especially in rural areas. This meant that even the African girls who could not go to school due to lack of finances could then actively participate in education. Enrolment figures at school level in both rural and urban areas increased from 1, 235, 815 in 1980 to 2, 476, 575 in 1995 which was an increase of about 100.4% (World Bank, 1994). The situation was further enhanced by the removal of or ignoring age for one to be enrolled at any level in the schools. One could find varying age groups in different class levels where some who lost the educational opportunity during their prime time due to poverty and bottleneck re-entered the schools. Even though girls did not outnumber boys in enrolment, there was a substantial increase in their number as compared with the colonial period. Table 2 clearly shows this.

Table 2

Enrolment in primary schools by sex 1981-1985

Year	Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%
1981	982 680	52.0	822 489	48.0
1982	991 111	52.0	916 114	48.0
1983	1060 150	52.0	984 333	48.0
1984	1101 899	52.0	1030 405	48.0
1985	1142 480	51.5	1079 398	48.5

Source: Statistical Year Book 1987: 62

To counteract the bottleneck entry into secondary school which existed in the pre- independent era, the Zimbabwean government introduced automatic promotion from one grade to the next in primary school. This also culminated into automatic entry into secondary schools. The transition to Form One was expected to be 100%. The number of students in secondary schools increased from 74 321 in 1980 to 711 090 in 1995 (Mashingaidze, 1998). The increase in secondary school enrolment was mainly a result of subsidised secondary education especially in rural areas and high density suburbs in urban areas. This massive expansion of secondary education attracted so much international attention such that Zimbabwe acquired the reputation of 'Africa's flagship' in the development of education in Eastern and Southern Africa (Mashingaidze, 1998). This meant that more African children in general and girls in particular proceeded to Form 1. Table 3 amply demonstrates this phenomenon.

Table 3
Enrolment in secondary schools by sex 1981-987

Year	Male		Female		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	
1981	86 550	58.0	62 140	42.0	148 690
1983	187 397	59.0	128 885	41.0	316282
1985	287 061	59.6	194 393	40.4	481454
1987	354 175	58.6	250 447	41.4	604 622

Source: Annual Reports of the Secretary for Education, 1981-1987

Quite a number of girls are now proceeding to 'A' level as compared with the 19 girls in 1971. A fair percentage of girls though still less than that of boys now proceed to 'A' level as shown by Table 4.

Table 4
Enrolment in secondary schools Forms 4, 5(L6) and 6 (U6) 1985-1991

	Form IV			Lower Form VI			Upper Form VI		
Year	Total Enrolment	% male	% female	Total enrolment	% male	% female	Total Enrolment	% Male	% Female
1985	89 517	62.20	37.80	3416	60.70	39.30	8704	73.00	27.00
1987	113 915	61.00	39.00	6401	67.50	32.50	5966	68.70	31.30
1989	117 061	61.20	38.80	7747	69.70	30.30	6959	70.60	29.40
1991	153 667	57.73	42.27	9889	61.77	38.23	8629	62.35	37.65

Source: Annual Reports of the Secretary for Education, 1985-91

Table 5
Women participation in higher education 1980-1992

Year	Teacher Education			University Education		
	Total number of students	No. of females	% females	Total number of students	No of females	% females
1979	3084	1587	51.49	1941	508	26.17
1980	2829	1528	54.01	2240	494	22.01
1981	3610	1726	47.81	2525	569	22.53
1982	4873	2142	43.96	3091	680	22.00
1983	6502	2646	40.70	3620	805	22.24
1984	7734	3177	41.08	4131	933	22.59
1985	5513	2496	45.27	4732	1110	23.41
1986	8649	3607	41.70	5886	1400	23.79
1987	14450	5455	37.75	6873	1676	24.39
1988	16167	7003	43.32	7699	1930	25.07
1989	16231	6713	41.36	9288	2235	24.06
1990	16179	7032	43.46	9017	2194	24.33
1991	13492	6037	44.75	8635	2140	24.78
1882	14069	6377	45.33	8456	2135	25.25
Total	133308	57526	44.43	78144	18809	23.76

Source: Statistical Year Book, 1993

The vast expansion in primary and secondary education meant that more teachers were needed. The government introduced the Zimbabwe Integrated National Teacher Education Course (ZINTEC) in 1981 to increase the number of primary school teachers. To further

expedite the increasing of secondary school Science teachers desperately needed in the rural secondary schools, the government embarked on a programme of sending students to Cuba to be trained as Science teachers. These then came back and serviced rural secondary schools. Both male and female students benefited from this programme. Conventional teacher training colleges and the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) also increased their enrolment of student teachers and this also benefited women. Although the enrolment of women in teachers' colleges and universities did not equal that of men by 1992, it however increased substantially after independence. Table 5 amply demonstrates this point.

In 1982 the Zimbabwe government introduced the Equal Pay Regulation which meant that both men and women with the same qualifications and doing the same job could earn the same salary. The policy was meant to eradicate the colonial policy where women were earning less than their male counterparts with the same qualifications and jobs as theirs. Such policies, if well implemented have the potential to help girls and women realise the benefits of being educated and also provide positive role models. In the same year the government introduced the Legal Age of Majority Act which meant that men and women were for the first time legally equal (Mahlaule, 1995). At the age of eighteen both men and women were considered to be majors. This law rescued women from the bondage they had been put into by customary law.

The number of female students at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ), the only university in the country at independence, has always been very low. This was not because women are less intelligent than men but was a result of the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society which glorified male dominance and kept women subordinated (Zinanga, 1995). In an effort to raise the number of female students at UZ the government introduced the Affirmative Action Policy in 1993. According to this policy female students were to be accepted into tertiary institutions with lower pass rates than their male counterparts. At the UZ entry qualifications for female students were lowered by two points in every faculty. This move saw a substantial increase of female students at the institution.

Due to the increased demand for university education and the need for an increase in science and commercial programmes as well as open and distance learning among the Zimbabwean population, more

universities sprouted throughout the country after independence. These included National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Catholic University (CU), Africa University (AU), Midlands State University (MSU), Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE), Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) and Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT). The increase in the number of universities implies that more African children including girls now have more access to university education. Table 6 captures the increase in the number of women participating in higher and tertiary education in Zimbabwe.

Table 6
Evolution of female participation in higher and tertiary education 2001-2003

	Year					
Type	2001			2003		
	Male	Female	% Female	Male	female	% Female
Teachers Colleges	8121	9328	53%	8660	10233	54%
Universities	22283	12470	36%	27797	15550	36%
Technical Colleges	14297	6705	32%		5127	32%

Source: Ministry of Higher Education EMIS Statistics, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Also of significance was the introduction of the Zimbabwe Open University which catered mostly for previously disadvantaged groups, women included. These women had a number of factors like customary law, patriarchal practices and the colonial education militating against them. The introduction of the Zimbabwe Open universities gave women more opportunities to participate in university education (Gudhlanga, Magadza & Mafa, 2012). Table 7 amply demonstrates the increase in numbers of women accessing university education through Open and Distance Learning.

Table 7
ZOU student enrolment 2005-2011

Year	Male	Female	Total	%age Female
2005	11 997	8 485	20 482	41.4
2006	*	*	17 782	*
2007	*	*	19 694	*
2008	10 305	7 382	17 687	41.7
2009	9 699	6 586	16 295	40.4
2010	9 345	6 778	15 618	43.4
2011	5 196	4 301	9 497	45.6

*Gender Segregated Data not available

Source: *ZOU Statistics 2005-2011* compiled by M. Damson

Table 6 demonstrates that women are a significant group in the student enrolment. A study of enrolment in the Zimbabwe Open University (Table 7) shows that there is quite a fair percentage of women participating in university education in Zimbabwe today. This was the previously disadvantaged group which could not access university education in the past due to policies that segregated women.

Currently, the ministry of Education Sport and Culture is trying to revamp the curriculum to make it more responsive to the contemporary and future socio-economic needs of the country. It has created a Science base in which Mathematics and Science are being taught in simpler ways. This is an endeavour to demystify these subjects and make them more child and user friendly at all levels of the school system (*The Zimbabwe Mirror* as cited in Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2009). The ministry has also encouraged girls to develop a more positive attitude towards Mathematics and Science than before. In order to achieve this objective, the Ministry organises Mathematics and Science camps for secondary school

girls during school holidays with the assistance of donors like UNESCO and UNICEF *(The Zimbabwe Mirror*, as cited in Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2009). The Ministry is also in-servicing teachers to make them more gender sensitive in their teaching.

Constraints and their impact on gender equity in education

Lloyd and Young (2009) point out that in 2000, governments agreed to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 (Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5 in Education for All framework). However, the UN 2008 Report shows that 113 countries failed to reach the 2005 Millennium Development Goals on gender equity and few show prospects of meeting them by 2015. Some of the obstacles to the achievement of this target are discussed below. Zimbabwe has been found to be in the same predicament of failing to meet the target in spite of its sound policies meant to promote gender equity in education 33 years after independence.

When the Zimbabwean government put in place the policy of education for all and free primary education it did not put some mechanisms to ensure that all children of school going age were going to school. As a result some parents whose values were deeply rooted in traditional patriarchal beliefs did not take up the offer to send their children to school especially girls who were needed at home to assist with domestic chores. Some religious sects such as Johane Masowe and Johane Marange who usually send their children to school only for the first three years, did not change their ways in response to the government's offer of free education at primary level and subsidised secondary education. To these religious sects education is only important in as far as it teaches people how to read and write and nothing more. Even today female adults and teenagers who belong to such church sects engage in some informal trades. For example, in Bulawayo before Zimbabwe adopted the multi-currency system, young women from these sects used to line up the streets buying and selling foreign currency illegally.

In 1989 the Zimbabwe government abandoned the socialist ideology it had followed since independence because it had realised that the ideology was not healthy for its economic development. It embarked on a new direction of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

(ESAP). This meant that less money was to be injected into social services like health and education. Thus free primary education and subsidised secondary education became a thing of the past. In 1993 the government re-introduced payment of fees in urban primary schools. The subsidy on secondary education was scrapped. These stringent economic measures meant that most parents could no longer afford to send children to school and given a choice they would again resort to sending male children at the expense of girls. Thus the new capitalist path of development followed by the government continued to sideline women.

The independence of Namibia and other developments in Eastern Europe led to the diversion of Donor Funds from Zimbabwe to the new areas where aid was desperately needed. Thus the shortage of funds meant that equity was no longer considered to be an issue and policies including educational ones, meant to achieve equity received no priority.

In August 1997 Zimbabwe plunged into economic crisis signalled by the crash of the Zimbabwe dollar in November of that year. The country was plagued by astronomical inflation and between the period 1997 – 2009, Zimbabwe experienced economic hardships. To make matters worse, Western countries imposed economic sanctions due to schisms over human rights and governance issues with the government of Zimbabwe. This further ruined the ailing economy. Production in both agriculture and industry and commerce has gone down. The donor community has also withdrawn aid to Zimbabwe and set the proviso that they will resume aid when the human rights and governance environment is conducive for donor funding. All these activities affected the country's economy resulting in it failing to give adequate support and public services including the education sector.

Another major problem in achieving gender equity in education is that, 'despite women's increased access to schooling and extended years in education, the knowledge and skills they have acquired in school tend to reproduce rather than alter gender ideologies' (Stromquist, 1995). For example, mission schools and church institutions like Solusi University, Africa University, Catholic University and Reformed Church University still emphasise on Christian values of male dominance and female subordination. The nursing and teaching professions are still dominated by women,

whereas men still dominate professions like medicine, engineering and architecture among others. Women are still under-represented in previously male designated jobs.

Although a lot of strides have been made towards the promotion of gender equity in Zimbabwe, results of the SADC 2000 elections show that women are still grossly under-represented in decision making positions. In Mauritius only 4 of the 62 contested seats were won by women and of the 4 elected women only one made it to cabinet. Also election results in Namibia and Malawi were worrisome. In Zimbabwe, of the 55 women who stood in the June 2000 parliamentary elections across the parties, only 13 were elected and only 2 were appointed by the president to make them 15 women only in a parliament of 150 members (The Renaissance as cited in Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2009). Furthermore, only one woman made it into the cabinet in Zimbabwe. In 2000 there were also only 2 female deputy ministers out of 7 and one provincial female governor out of 10. Also in the current parliament in Zimbabwe women still comprise only 14.3%. In the 2008 harmonised elections 118 out of 710 candidates for the House of Assembly were women, while 60 were vying for the senate out of the total 196 candidates. In council elections 740 out of a total 1 958 candidates were women (Kwenda, 2008: 5). Even if all women had won, these figures are still very low. It also still remains a mystery why there is not a single female presidential candidate to date after the flurry of campaigns (Kwenda, 2008).

This clearly indicates that women in Zimbabwe have not risen enough to occupy decision-making positions to date. The government of Zimbabwe has made very little effort, if any, to promote more women into decision-making positions. The results of the SADC 2000 and Zimbabwe 2008 elections fall short of the SADC 30 % target of women in decision-making by 2005 which has since been adjusted to 50%. This demonstrates a dearth of women role models to motivate the girl children to get educated.

Commenting on failures of gender policies put in place in Southern Africa, including Zimbabwe, a number of studies point out on a number of issues as the stifling factors such as lack of addressing gender in explicit terms, lack of agendas to cater for specific needs of females and lack of consciousness (Chirimuuta, 2006; Manase, Ndamba & Makoni, 2003).

In this view, some possible interventions meant to improve the effectiveness of the policies are presented below.

Possible intervention strategies to redress gender equity in education

As has been discussed above, the Zimbabwean government put in place a number of policies soon after independence which were meant to achieve equity in general which culminated into gender equity in some cases. However, thirty three years down the lane, Zimbabwe is still very far from reaching the intended levels of gender equity. It is hoped that the following suggestions, if followed well, could improve the levels of gender equity, especially in education.

Gender sensitisation in schools and tertiary institutions

The school is viewed as one of the primary socialising agents (Haralambos, 1995). One of its primary roles is to pass on norms and values of society to the younger generation. The government should introduce courses that are gender sensitive at all levels of the education system. As Stromquist (1995) noted, schools should offer courses for both boys and girls that address sexuality in its social context. The current school syllabi focus on anatomical and physiological features of sexuality, rather than the social dynamics of sexuality and how these dynamics tend to affect women negatively. For those teachers still in colleges, the curriculum in higher education needs to incorporate gender awareness programmes. Gender sensitive education needs to be introduced and enhanced so that those teachers will not perpetuate male dominance and female subordination in their lessons. Stromquist (1995) has also observed that in the United States of America there are 621 women study programmes at tertiary level which offer approximately 30 000 gender sensitive courses per year. This might explain why the United States of America has managed to make considerable strides in achieving gender equity at all levels.

Book publishers should be encouraged to publish reading material, which is free from gender bias. Bhusumane (as cited in Gudhlanga, 2011), has observed that, 'reading through most textbooks creates a feeling that men are creators and rulers of this world'. Also the prescribed history and literature textbooks have more heroes than

heroines. In Africa students are exposed to male leaders of nationalist movements like Kwame Nkurumah, Samora Machel, Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela and Joshua Nkomo among others. Students also read about men of fame from other parts of the world. These include Vasco da Gama, David Livingstone, Aristotle, Plato, Shakespeare and Socrates among others (Bhusumane as cited in Gudhlanga, 2011). Hence these book publishers should stop depicting men playing major roles and women occupying subordinate positions. Instead they should also focus on female heroines.

Furthermore, the government should introduce a thorough sex education programme in learning institutions as suggested by Stromquist (as cited in Gudhlanga, 2011). Such programmes would assist in modifying preconceptions of femininity and masculinity. These sex education programmes should be introduced quite early in the school years because behavioural and attitudinal approaches to sexuality are best introduced in early childhood, at about 5 years of age. This approach has been used in Sweden and they have managed to do away with such gender biases to some extent (Stromquist as cited in Gudhlanga, 2011). Also parents should desist from buying girl children doll toys only, but should go ahead and buy them toy cars, planes and guns just like they do to boy children. Children will learn that they are equal at an early age and as they grow up no sex group will feel to be either superior or inferior to the other.

Improving the economic status of women

The government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should come up with educational programmes that will improve women's economic status. Once this is done women will be able to challenge men in all domains of life. As long as men remain the sole breadwinners nothing can be done in terms of promoting equity since women would continue to depend on men for food and shelter (Aribino as cited in Chabaya, Rembe & Wadesango, 2009). As Makamure (1996) has noted, the government should introduce measures of social support countrywide which would ensure that society in the form of families makes greater efforts to support female children to succeed and develop more positive attitudes to their potential in Zimbabwean society.

Female role models

In Zimbabwe, teaching and nursing professions have been viewed as women's main professional areas. However, after independence, the Zimbabwean government has made an effort to absorb women in various sectors, even to those that used to be viewed as mainly male domains. Despite the efforts made by the government there are still very few women found in these previously labelled as male domains. To enhance the speed at which women get into all forms of professions, there should be a massive mass media campaign, where women who have done it in life are depicted. This helps to create role models whom the younger women and girls can emulate (Anna-Maria, 1997). On career's days held in schools, women who have made it in life should be lined up for school children (both boys and girls) to see and chat with. This would also make a male dominated patriarchal society appreciate that women are as good as men and could compete equally well with men in all spheres of life.

Proportional representation

The policy of proportional representation of women and men should be introduced in all spheres of the economic sector. Enrolment at all levels in the education system should have about 51% of the students being female since the Zimbabwean population comprises of approximately 51% women. It is hoped that if such proportional representations are implemented in the political, social and economic sectors, more women will be elevated into decision-making positions. The percentage of women in parliament is very low especially in SADC countries. SADC countries that have more female representatives in parliament have used the proportional representation system. For example, in Tanzania women constitute 23.1% of parliament, in Mozambique, 20%, South Africa 42.8% and Seychelles 27.2% (SADC, 2006). In view of these persistent discrepancies in gender equity, proportional representation could be of great importance in redressing the inequitable gender representation in Zimbabwe.

Affirmative Action (AA)

The Affirmative Action (AA) policy is not new in Zimbabwe. It was introduced in many sectors in the early 1990s. The reason why it has

not yielded substantial results in terms of gender equity is that no mechanism was put in place to ensure that the policy was implemented. If AA is implemented it is likely to assist in improving the number of women entering into traditionally male dominated areas like engineering, medicine and law among others. Thus AA could be used as an uplifting programme for women.

Scholarships for capable women

Scholarship programmes that particularly target at promoting talented women should be boosted. Such scholarships would act as a realistic and effective means of ensuring that a greater lot of women, especially in rural areas would proceed to tertiary education including university (Makamure as cited in Gudhlanga, 2011). Also events like The Miss Zimbabwe and Face of Africa pageants should not only emphasise on charity work but should source out funds and award scholarships to women so that they can further their education. First Ladies of different countries should endeavour to raise money for the education of women. For example in Zimbabwe, The Sally Mugabe Foundation used to sponsor female students studying for higher degrees in the sub-region. Such programmes should not die a natural death but have to be revived. Also spouses of Zimbabwean ambassadors and female ambassadors should source out funds to sponsor women's education. This is possible because ambassadors usually have the confidence of the governments to which they are accredited. Multi-national companies like Coca-cola, Caltex, BP and Shell among others should be encouraged to set up scholarships that would particularly benefit women. The government should institute legal instruments which would enable companies sponsoring women to pay a very insignificant amount of tax. Non Governmental Organisations operating in the country should follow the example of UNICEF and UNESCO that are already working towards the emancipation of women.

Improving the quality of education in commercial farming areas

Since more women and girls are concentrated in commercial farming areas where they provide cheap source of labour, the government should make sure that the quality of education offered in commercial farming areas is improved. It should again institute legal instruments which compel farmers to provide education of acceptable standard

(Chikombah, 1999). It should also help by improving the infrastructure at farm schools. Farmers who improve the quality of education offered at their schools and those who have high numbers of female enrolment should be given incentives to keep the momentum.

Conclusion

It is not a matter of debate that women constitute more than 50% of the world's population (UNESCO, 2003) but there is a key concern about their education which can be described as of less than equal to that of their counterparts (Indabawa, 2004). In Zimbabwe a number of initiatives have been made to achieve gender equity in education and this led to increases in the number of women in the education system. Yet gender equity in education is yet to be achieved three decades after independence. Success in this endeavour could be expedited through combined conceited efforts of the individuals, families, government and some donor agencies.

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