

Challenges Facing Faith-Based Organizations and The Kenyan Government in Curbing Gender Disparity in Primary Schools On Girl-Child: A Case of Central Pokot Sub County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the challenges the Faith-Based Organizations and the Government of Kenya have experienced in curbing gender disparity in learning spaces. The study adopted the exploratory research design and was cross-sectional. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify knowledgeable respondents from the subcounty. Secondary sources were derived from books, journals, and online sources. A qualitative data analysis method was employed to analyze data and a report compiled thematically. The article revealed that both FBOs and the GoK have done a lot to curb gender disparity. However, they have not achieved their goal leading to the question: What obstacles do they face in their endeavour to mitigate gender disparity? The paper was guided by the Cultural Adaptation Theory. The study examined the challenges facing the FBOs and GoK in curbing the gender disparity in primary schools, and enumerated obstacles such as Negative cultural practices, discrimination and limited access to quality education, access and control of resources, representation of the female gender key decision-making organs, poverty, and population growth. The study recommends that the FBOs in Central Pokot Sub County should help eradicate poverty by providing alternative projects to boost the community's income and embrace Alternative Rites of Passage as a tool to fight gender disparity. Therefore, advocacy and social mobilization should be stirred and built on the ground by the natives of Central Pokot Sub County of West Pokot County.

Keywords: Kenya, West Pokot, Cultural Practices, Resources, Cultural Adaptation, Gender Disparity, Government of Kenya, Poverty

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1.0 Introduction

Gender disparity concerning retention and completion of schooling continues to be a challenging issue for the education of the girl-child in marginalized communities such as the Pokot whose literacy level stands at a lower rate (23% against the national indicator which is 43% KBS from 2013 government of Kenya (GoK) report). The Kenyan government has made strides in expanding educational opportunities through free primary education since the year 2002, yet the retention of girls in primary schools continues to be low, a factor necessitating the inclusion of other stakeholders such as Faith Based Organizations (FBO). Apart from the Kenyan constitution, FBOs maintain that all humans are equal regardless of their gender. The purpose of this article is to explore the challenges facing the GoK and FBOs in addressing gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub County. This article was guided by Cultural adaptation and Feminist Education theories to determine factors leading to gender disparity. This article unveils the challenges the FBOs and the GoK have gone through in an attempt to curb gender disparity. This article revealed that both FBOs and the GoK have done a lot to curb gender disparity. However, they have not achieved their goal leading to the question: What obstacles are faced by FBOs and GoK in their endeavour to mitigate gender disparity?

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The impetus of this article was to explore the challenges facing the FBOs and the GoK in addressing gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub-County, and thus answer the question; what challenges are facing the FBOs and the GoK in addressing gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub-County, Kenya.

1.2 Objective

The main objective of this article was to examine the challenges facing the FBOs and the GoK in addressing gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub-County.

1.3 Challenges Facing the FBO and GoK in Curbing Gender Disparity in Primary Schools in Central Pokot Sub County

Addressing gender inequality is critical across sectors responsible for delivering justice, social, health, and security services to survivors and to those responsible for the education of boys and girls. Adalakun (2018) noted that some laws were repealed while others were enacted by the GoK and international organizations. However, women still face numerous social, economic, and political disadvantages because attitudes did not shift as quickly as legislation did. Since gender issues are ideologically driven, both men and women must change their attitudes and

behaviours in all areas. The GoK has made attempts to reduce gender inequality in Central Pokot Sub County's primary schools, but these initiatives have run into several obstacles. Several of these difficulties include:

1.4 Negative Cultural Practices

Traditional practices such as early marriages and teen pregnancies are common challenges that contribute to girls dropping out of school at a young age. Addressing these issues requires not only educational interventions but also broader community engagement and support. Resistance to change, especially from conservative elements within the community, can hinder efforts to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles.

Deep-rooted cultural and traditional norms can perpetuate gender disparities in education. In Central Pokot Sub County, certain cultural practices and beliefs may prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to lower enrolment and retention rates for girls. These beliefs can be difficult to challenge and change, particularly when they are deeply engrained in the community's traditions. Overcoming these norms requires sustained efforts to change mindsets and promote the value of girls' education. For example, early marriage is still prevalent in some communities, with parents opting to marry off their daughters at a young age rather than send them to school. This undermines the government's efforts to promote gender parity in primary schools (Society for International Development, 2010).

Early marriage and teenage pregnancy are prevalent challenges in Central Pokot Sub County. Girls who are married at a young age or become pregnant often drop out of school, leading to significant educational gaps. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that involve community engagement, awareness campaigns, and access to reproductive health services. Parents opt to marry off their daughters at a young age rather than send them to school. This deprives girls of the opportunity to pursue their education and limits their prospects. Additionally, some cultural practices dictate that girls should focus on domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of younger siblings, while boys are encouraged to attend school and pursue careers. This reinforces gender roles and stereotypes that limit girls' opportunities and perpetuate gender inequality. Such cultural practices undermine the government's efforts to promote gender parity in primary schools and need to be addressed through education and awareness-raising campaigns.

Additionally, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM) as a rite of passage can have serious health consequences and can also prevent girls from attending school, as they may be forced to drop out due to the physical and psychological effects of the procedure. Such cultural practices perpetuate gender inequality and undermine efforts to achieve gender parity in education. It is important to work with communities to raise awareness of the negative impacts of such practices and to promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls. During this study, an elder clarified that most girls are affected by cultural practices such as early marriages and rites of practice such as female genital mutilation (FGM)".

In the Pokot community, male children are preferred over female children, and girls may not have the same access to resources and opportunities as boys. For instance, inheritance laws favour male heirs, which means that women and girls may not have the same access to property and resources as men.

As a result, a large portion of Kenyan society still needs to comprehend the value of

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educating women to prepare them for leadership and development. The achievement of gender equity, which goes beyond simply empowering women, would be aided by this. The majority of participants in the focus groups believed that Central Pokot Sub County needed to be empowered for development to occur. All these should be done while keeping in mind that women's empowerment is key to achieving long-term development and has been embraced among almost all governments of developing countries. This is due to the crucial role women play traditionally which is essentially managing households.

1.5 Discrimination and Limited access to quality Education

Despite having comprehensive laws addressing gender disparity in primary education there seems to be a lack of political goodwill, inadequate legal protection, improper enforcement, insufficient resource allocation and poor implementation of national commitments to gender disparity in education.

Respondents in one of the FGDs complained that West Pokot County governments may have laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls, such as laws that restrict women's rights to own property or policies that do not provide equal opportunities for girls' education. The remote and rural nature of the Central Pokot sub-county scumple for limited access to quality education for both boys and girls. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of qualified teachers, and limited educational resources can hinder efforts to provide a conducive learning environment.

It seems the government pays limited attention to marginalized groups; insufficient attention has been paid to gender disparity in primary education due to the absence and analysis that helps develop an understanding of gender disparity in Central Pokot Sub County. USAID (2016) notes that high advocacy messages without data hinder the government's effort to ensure policy commitments and investments are adhered to, however, none is making a follow-up on girl child education.

1.6 Access and Control of Resources

The county government of West Pokot in trying to curb gender disparity in primary school is largely affected by a lack of access to and control of resources which is highly divided along gender lines in favour of men. The inequality is especially manifested in the discrimination that is involved in the access to necessities and services such as education, land, credit financing as well as markets (Chebitwey, 2016). Central Pokot Sub County is also experiencing a general decrease in access to formal employment and this affects the women harder than it does the men. One of the head teachers argued that;

A lack of access to opportunities and control over key resources has been fueled by many factors such as a lack of women representation in the key decision-making organs of governance and other aforementioned factors such as culture and traditions which inhibits Central Pokot Sub County in trying to curb gender disparity in primary school (Laktabai 17th November, 2018).

It has also been driven by the slow growth the country experienced in the past as a result of poor governance. Slow economic growth significantly impacts the country's poverty hence

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making the situation worse. As a result, the slow growth acted as an impediment to attaining gender equity or any form of progression in the economic and political spheres of Kenyan society thus further restraining any advancement that the country could make in line with achieving middle-income status by the year 2030.

1.7 Representation of the Female Gender in Key Decision-making Organs

The findings further indicated that the low transition rates of girls to positions of higher education as well as other factors such as poverty and culture have inhibited the Kenyan government from trying to curb gender disparity in primary school. This has resulted in the proportion of women in professional positions being quite small in comparison to the fact that in Kenya women account for slightly more than half of the total population. One elder interviewed stated that;

Under representation of the female gender in key decision-making organs has resulted in increased gender disparities in primary schools within the region (Elder 3, Interview, 17th November, 2018).

Efevbera, Bhabha, Farmer & Fink (2017) observe that “women are quite a few in strategic decision-making positions as compared to other developing countries, for instance, Rwanda which serves as an ideal example regarding having equity in representation. The fellow East African nation had female legislative representation at 48.8% as of 2015 and as it is well known, having representation increases the attention to gender-specific areas, such as education development. In Kenya, gender equity still requires a lot of intervention for its achievement to be realized (African Development Forum VI, 2015). Lack of female role models: The absence of educated and successful female role models in the community can limit girls' aspirations and hinder their motivation to pursue education. This is the case in my study area of Central Pokot that needs to be taken into consideration. Despite efforts by the FBOs and government, there is limited awareness and understanding of the importance of gender equality and girls' education within the community. Effective advocacy and awareness campaigns are necessary to challenge prevailing norms.

1.8 Poverty

Poverty and lack of economic resources can make it difficult for families to prioritize education, especially for girls. Girls may not be seen as potential contributors to household income through marriage or labour, leading to decisions that prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term education. Poverty and limited access to resources can hinder girls' education. Families facing economic hardships may prioritize limited resources for boys' education or require girls to contribute to household chores or income generation. Financial constraints, lack of school fees, and the cost of school supplies can disproportionately affect girls' access to education. Poverty is a significant challenge in Central Pokot Sub County, with many families unable to afford basic needs such as food, shelter, and education. Poverty affects girls more than boys, as families often prioritize boys' education over girls' education. This makes it difficult for the government to achieve gender parity in primary schools.

Education throughout the world enhances any type of development since it gives people

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the knowledge and skills needed in social, economic, and political sectors. Women form the majority of the uneducated population in Kenya and as such they are more vulnerable to being victims of poverty. This has continued to contribute to the gender disparity in Kenya and thus poverty is one of the great challenges that will continue to hinder the country's achievement of gender equity as well as middle-income status as it has been proposed in the country's Vision 2030. Looking deeper into how poverty restricts the country's progression in terms of gender equity shows how much this aspect has greatly held the country back on the road to development. This was according to an interview response from a chief who alleged that:

Poverty which is a result of many other factors such as corruption, natural disasters, poor governance as well as the aforementioned such as rapid population growth and culture has in turn affected many other areas that have of great impact on the country's development and initiatives to curb gender equality in primary schools (An interview with, Rotino 15th Nov.2018).

Some of these areas are education, leadership, and health which are viewed as fundamental requirements for development. A lack of these skills affects society in many ways. Another interview response indicated that:

Poor parents would prefer investing in a boy's education than in a girl with the belief that the girl will only enrich her husband's family when she gets married. As a result of this ignorance, many women lag as they lack basic empowerment avenues that would equip them with skills which would help them make major contributions to the country's development (An interview with, Lorupe 17th Nov. 2018).

According to Narayan (2014), persistent hunger and starvation that affect the country almost every year and the inability to access fundamental services such as healthcare, education, shelter, and clean water are presently defined as a humanitarian crisis in Kenya. A lack of these facilities continues to restrict the country's advancement towards attaining gender equity and this is because all the aforementioned factors affect Kenyan women in a worse capacity compared to men since women are more marginalized and excluded.

1.9 Population Growth

Kenya's population growth rate currently stands at 3% per annum according to the National Coordinating Agency on Population and Development and this has been noted as one of the many stumbling blocks the country has to deal with to achieve gender equity in primary schools (Adelakun, 2018). The findings showed that if the country wants to achieve middle-class economic status as envisioned in Vision 2030, especially in development sectors like education, the traditionalist culture that views women as mothers and wives will eventually lead to a situation requiring an urgent reduction in the country's population growth. According to an informant, "rapid population growth has also reduced other issues that also hinder the realization of gender equity." To achieve food security, universal primary education, primary healthcare for every Kenyan, and a decrease in maternal and infant mortality rates as planned for in Vision

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2030, the country must find ways to encourage couples within the country to have smaller families, according to researchers from international aid agencies like the United States Agency for International Development report from 2016. Since the size of a country's population always affects how much of the national budget is available for the provision of services to its citizens, including fundamental ones like education, the country's population growth rate will therefore have an impact on future development plans if it is not quickly stopped. As a result, gender equity in various sectors, including the development of primary education, will be hampered.

1.10 Other Factors

Some schools in Central Pokot Sub County lack basic infrastructure such as classrooms, toilets, and water. This makes it difficult for girls to attend school, as they often have to walk long distances to access schools that have the necessary infrastructure.

Central Pokot Sub County is a vast and geographically challenging region, with remote and sparsely populated areas. Lack of infrastructure, including roads and transportation facilities, can make it difficult for girls to access schools. The limited availability of schools in some areas, particularly for girls, exacerbates the gender disparity in education.

The GoK has allocated funds to promote gender parity in primary schools, but these funds are often inadequate. This limits the government's ability to implement programs and policies that promote gender parity. Community involvement is crucial in promoting gender parity in primary schools. However, some communities in Central Pokot Sub County are not supportive of girls' education, which makes it difficult for the government to achieve its goals.

Shortages of qualified and trained teachers in Central Pokot Sub County can impact the quality of education and contribute to gender disparities. Limited teacher capacity to address the specific needs of girls, including gender-sensitive teaching methodologies, can hinder girls' academic progress and participation in schools. Lack of parental awareness and involvement in their children's education can contribute to gender disparities. Engaging parents, particularly in remote areas, to understand the importance of girls' education and actively support their daughters' schooling is crucial in curbing gender disparity.

While the Kenyan government has implemented policies and initiatives to address gender disparities in education, effective implementation and monitoring at the local level can be challenging. Ensuring that policies are effectively executed, resources are allocated appropriately, and progress is monitored requires coordination and collaboration between the government, faith-based organizations, and other stakeholders.

1.11 Alternative Rites of Passage as a Tool to fight gender disparity

During this study, most of the respondents suggested that since the Pokot value rites of passage, there is a need to promote alternative rites of passage. Rites of passage are important cultural practices in many African communities, but they can also present challenges, particularly when it comes to issues of gender equality and human rights. Apart from exposing girls to a lack of access to education: Traditionalists may view education as a threat to traditional values and practices, which can limit access to education, particularly for girls, some of the challenges of rites of passage include: the cut can result in physical and emotional trauma and some rites of passage may exclude certain groups of people, such as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or those with disabilities, leading to social exclusion and

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inequality. In addition, some individuals may feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations during rites of passage, which can limit their opportunities for personal growth and self-expression. At the same time, some rites of passage may have harmful traditional practices.

The alternative rite of passage for the girl-child strategy championed by Jacinta Muteshi Donald (2010) can be adapted by the religious society and FBOs to bridge education and culture in the Pokot community as an example of enculturation. During the adolescence stage, a program that runs for three weeks could be developed to teach the girl-child important cultural values and principles for rightful living by Pokot religious leaders without necessarily going through the entire process of FGM. This will protect the girl child from the harmful FGM and early marriage thus giving her ample time to pursue education (Sharma, 2004). Spiritual leaders can teach bible doctrines and prepare teenagers for the expected body changes and how to deal with the same. After the three weeks seminar a graduation ceremony could be done then the graduates can be showered with a lot of gifts.

The problems related to FGM and early marriage are not unique to the Pokot community, most of the pastoral communities in Kenya practised the same but due to interventions from Faith-Based Organizations, FBOs, NGOs and the government the problems were minimized and, in some places, completely eradicated.

As illustrated by Muteshi (2008) Promoting Gender Equality and Advancement of Kenyan Women, The Family Planning Association of Kenya (FPAK) combated FGM successfully in Nyambane District by adopting the following steps; The implementation of the projects involved various activities that included: information, education, and advocacy activities like counselling, family life education, workshops, the non- mutilating rite of passage and a graduation ceremony (Shahidul, 2015).

Boys and young men were also targeted for the training to enable them to agree not to use circumcision as a criterion for determining the marriageability of girls. The strategy requires a project advisory committee composed of opinion leaders including a council of elders who act as gatekeepers and wield great influence over their communities Ruto- Korir (2006). The project included the recruitment and training of volunteer community Gender Educators to teach the consequences of FGM and girls' early marriage, teenage pregnancy, HIV and AIDS, STIs and the importance of girls' education. The circumciser should be given support for example a dairy cow or any other economic empowerment to abandon FGM. From my research I discovered that those who participate in circumcision get material gain therefore FGM is a sort of business to some women in the Pokot community (Robinson, 2015).

During the three weeks, the Christian counsellors should consider studies to uncover the myths, taboos, and practices on sexual maturation; the setting up of teen clubs and raising awareness about sexual maturation with information and knowledge that is enabling girl's education and the biblical teaching on the same (Puna, 2011). Jacinta noted that FGM has stopped in Uasin Gishu, Nandi, and Kericho, and has been minimized in Bomet, Keiyo Marakwet, Kisii, Meru, Narok and Samburu counties respectively therefore if the same strategy is applied in Central Pokot division West Pokot County it will help to minimize gender disparity and to boost girl-child education. Faith-Based Organizations can adopt an alternative rite of passage as an intervention to stop FGM, this is the initiation of girls into adulthood without genital cutting which traditionally forms part of the initiation ceremonies of FGM. Girls

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are brought together for three weeks in a ceremony that is marked with educating girls on various life skills (Psaki, 2016).

The ceremony includes sessions with counsellors who educate them on what is expected of them as they grow up, thus fulfilling an important aspect of this traditional ceremony. Sessions also focus on building girls' self-esteem and confidence. This is meant to help them deal with ridicule and stigma in their communities for not being circumcised. Parents, relatives, and other community members including leaders are usually invited to witness the last day of the initiation ceremony where the girls are showered with gifts and presents (Psacharopoulos, 2015). Furthermore, the opinion leaders and all the men in the Pokot community should be made aware of the harmful effects of FGM thus accepting the Pokot women as their wives without making circumcision a mandatory rite of passage. This results in the ability to cope with all the challenges and opportunities of the new culture of Pokot. The Faith Based Organization in essence should integrate into the Pokot culture with its values and challenges to penetrate their worldview.

1.12 Conclusion

This article concludes that there are challenges facing FBOs and the Kenyan government's effort to mitigate gender disparity. These challenges include Negative Cultural Practices, Discrimination, Access and Control of Resources, Representation of the Female Gender in key decision-making organs, Poverty, Population growth, infrastructure, inadequate funds, and lack of community involvement.

1.13 Recommendations

The study recommends that more funds should be allocated to FBOs and the GoK to support programs intended to minimize gender disparity in primary schools in Central Pokot Sub County. Further, the article recommends that challenges facing the FBOs and the GoK in curbing gender disparity in Central Pokot Sub County can be addressed by implementing anti-discrimination policies.

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