

GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: THE KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Keynote Speech

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Alice Auma Ochanda, PhD

Programme Specialist

UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa,

Nairobi, Kenya

GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: THE KEY TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Education – the concept:

- *“Education is the great engine of personal development through which the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor; the son of a mine worker can become the head of the mine; while the child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation”* – Nelson Mandela
 - In other words, education is an equalizer – it does not have boundaries in its capability to transform an individual irrespective of his/her gender.
 - *“ A liberating and democratizing force that cuts across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances”* – Indhira Gandhi
- 2 UNESCO - “Education transforms lives and is key to building peace, eradicating poverty and driving sustainable development. It is a human right for all throughout life. It is a path for integration of an individual into society – the best investment in sustainable development.

Gender Equality and Education

3

Gender and Gender Equality:

- Is a social construct and not synonymous to women – A relational concept that focuses on power dynamics, roles and responsibilities of women and men, boys and girls – not a biological difference – defines the boundaries of what women and men should be and do;

Gender Equality:

- UNESCO – “ means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunity to realize their full human rights and potential to contribute to the development of their societies”
Also –seen as “the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and differences between men and women and the different roles they play”. It is a human Right!!
- Gender equality cannot be addressed without looking at the gender relations – Education Plays a big role in determining the role a person plays in society –
- Roles** are learned during socialization phases – further entrenched as shaped by family, school, peers, media, culture, ideologies, etc.. However –political status, class, age, physical and mental disability, etc., can modify gender roles
- The way a person views themselves (**gender identity**)– who they believe they are, etc., drives their perception of the world – affects the choices they make, their behaviour and way they fulfil responsibilities of their roles. How roles are carried out is influenced by the gender identity of an individual...
- 3rd gender relation is - the way power and influence is distributed between genders and further sustained by legal and social frameworks – **gender power structure**

Gender Equality and Education- Cont.

- The three aspects of gender relations are arrived at because of empowerment through education – However, education can also be either inclusive or discriminatory;
- If we agree that education is the act of **teaching or training**, then we confirm that *educating an individual, means equipping him/her with some desirable knowledge, understanding, skills, interests, attitudes and critical thinking. **The individual irrespective of gender should then be able to think critically about various issues in life and take decisions about them.***
- However, men and women, boys and girls encounter gender differences when attaining their educational goals – gender disparities remain among the most persistent forms of inequality world-wide – it affects half the world's population.
- Unfortunately, gender inequality has increased in recent years (Human Development Report Gender Equality Index, 2019). - **To understand gender equality in any sector, we must identify the gender inequalities therein**
- “If we do not put inequality at the heart of the global development agenda, we are doomed to failure”. **Gro Harlem Brundtland, Former Prime Minister of Norway (The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019)**

Gender Equality and Higher Education

- Increase experienced in Women's participation in Higher Education over the year – yet inequalities still exist in participation in STEM – Gap continues to widen
- Long standing biases and gender stereotypes continue to steer girls and women away from science related fields,
- Past 15 years seen a lot of interventions in engaging women and girls in science – but exclusion from full participation still prevails
- Research tells us that just 29.3% of researchers worldwide are women, only 35% of all students enrolled in STEM related fields of study are women, while only approximately 30% of all female students select STEM-related fields in higher education.
- UIS statistics further reveal that despite improved access to education, women still face considerable barriers as they move up the ladder to research
- Furthermore, globally, female students' enrollment is particularly low in ICT (3%), natural science, mathematics and statistics (5%), and engineering, manufacturing and construction (8%) UNESCO, 2014 -2019).
- Unfortunately, STEM underpins almost all the SDGs - *“Our world as we know it and the future we want are at risk. Science is our great ally in the efforts to achieve the Goals” - António Guterres, UN Secretary-General (The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019)*

Gender Equality and Education

6

- Reality – tackling some of the greatest challenges of 2030 Agenda for SD requires harnessing of all talents – we must get more women to join the work –bring in fresh perspectives, talent and creativity;
- Bridging the gender gap is vital for achieving sustainable development goals and for creating solutions that work for all people;
- For a just and inclusive participation in the three dimensions of sustainable development – social (people), economic (prosperity) and environmental (the planet), we must ensure gender equality in STEM education in higher education- their achievement needs existence of peace and partnerships which cannot prevail when some members of the community excluded or marginalized;
- Need for gender responsive policy frameworks in institutions of higher learning, change of institutional and societal attitude towards gender equality in education, a revamped pedagogical approach to teaching and learning of STEM and a more gender responsive workplace.

Higher education and Science for Sustainable Development

7

- SD- Development that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Bruntland Commission Report 1987) – also ensures that people can live a life in dignity and prosperity on a healthy planet.
- To achieve SD - acknowledge existing inequalities and need to address them.
- Engagement of higher education is crucial for SDG achievements
- STEM skills and expertise needed for effective realization of SDGs.
- Collaboration, social responsibility on the part of everyone, knowledge provision, research and dissemination is critical for providing a **better life for people**, on a **healthy planet** through **peace and partnerships**;
- All research and knowledge to be generated should engage a gender lens while social responsibility and all forms of collaboration must consider gender equality as an integral part of sustainable development; -
- Education is central in all that we do – hence the importance of ensuring existence of gender equality in all that we do – from poverty eradication, ensuring good health and well-being to building partnerships.

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8

- Universities must lead in advocating for gender equality in education (they transform people's lives through education and wider impact of research – enriching society and fostering SD), should be seen to be more inclusive and responsive;
- Universities must be held accountable for their ineptitude in addressing the widening gender gap in the sciences in higher education – the farthest must be reached first – we must address the cycles of disadvantage and existing inequalities;
- Must go beyond mere acknowledgment of need for attention to existing inequalities but must address the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of all = transformative aspect of leadership and policy making.
- Need for institutions with leadership that ensures existence of policies and initiatives that **challenge** existing and biased /discriminatory policies, practices, programmes, etc. – only way to address and dismantle root causes of gender inequalities = realization of gender equality = consequently SD.

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9

- 21ST Century – defined by 2 issues that affect development – **climate change and technological transformation;**
- Moreover, the 4th Industrial Revolution and technological advances (i.e. Machine learning and AI), can leave behind an entire group of people – even countries, thereby shaping inequalities in human and national development;
- A gender lens is imperative when addressing climate change and technological advancement issues;
- Gender gap in **Technology and digital literacy** should be a concern as we strive towards achieving gender equality in education -
- Issues that hinder gender equality in education at all levels to be addressed - **Need for realignment of policy goals; call for quality;**
- Emphasis on quality gender responsive education for all ages at all levels – **a life cycle approach to STEM Education, teacher capacity development in gender responsive pedagogical and technological skills**
- Ensuring gender equality in educational opportunities = expansion of human capabilities and realization of ideals for Agenda 2030 for SD.

Conclusions & Recommendations

10

- The business community, science and research institutions, the academia, and all Governments to have a stake in bridging the gender gap in STEM in higher education for prosperity;
- We must invest in education that provides opportunities for both men and women, boys and girls to learn, grow and innovate in science and technology;
- To reduce the gender gap, we must go beyond the numbers and identify the real issues that deter women and girls from pursuing careers in the sciences.
- Change cannot be effected without relevant, up to date and accurate data. We need to move from mere sex disaggregation to gender disaggregation in our statistics - identifying the qualitative factors, to support decision-making, policy development and strategic planning.
- Remember - our future will be marked by scientific and technological progress, which can only be achieved when women and girls are creators, owners, and leaders of science, technology and innovation. Bridging the gender gap in STEM Education is vital to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and for creating infrastructure, services and solutions that work for all people.

Conclusions & Recommendations

11

- Higher education has a social responsibility to the society it serves and must ensure that knowledge that is generated has gender-disaggregated data and helps to address the needs of the people for their prosperity on a healthy planet.
- Moreover, higher education must provide skills for the job market while ensuring that STEM graduates are equipped with entrepreneurial skills for innovation and job creation. **These are the needs of our time.**

□ Thank You 😊!