



GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: LOOKING BEYOND PARITY

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**FEMINIST RESEARCH AND BOYS' SCHOOLING: GENDER
EQUALITY AND CONSTRUCTION OF AFRICAN
MASCULINITIES: AN EXAMPLE OF STUDY OF AFRICA-
ASIA UNIVERSITY DIALOGUE NETWORK**

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ABSTRACT

Issues of gender equality and gender equity in education have been controversial for decades, and various studies have explored the problem from comparative as well as focused approaches. The Africa-Asia University Dialogue for Education Development (AA Dialogue) Network, an inter-university network of 28 universities (16 African and 12 Asian universities), is an officially accredited UNESCO-UNITWIN program, committed to conducting such studies following a common theme and framework. Participating universities are grouped into three themes that are key for EFA goals; A) Gender and Equity; B) Quality of Education and Educational Policy; and C) Teacher Professional Development. Many of our Gender and Equity group research explore access and retention among girls and women at the various educational levels (primary to tertiary) but few studies address gender in the context of disability, traditional cultures, or boys' education. All AA Dialogue studies are guided by a human rights approach to equality and equity as well as the Education for All goal number 2: access and completion of primary education with a good quality, and the Millennium Development Goal 3 gender equity at all levels of education. In this symposium, we are presenting one example study from Kenya that explores potential/actual effects feminist research on boys' education especially under girl-oriented programmes and policies. In Kenya, a few studies in the last decade are suggesting that, in specific educational subjects, the schooling of Kenyan boys is gradually deteriorating with a comparatively greater margin *vis-à-vis* that of the girls (Uwezo, Kenya 2010). Further, observations in some primary schools reveal that girls are becoming explicitly more confident than boys in engaging with schooling by quantitatively and qualitatively occupying comparatively greater learning spaces (UNICEF, 2008). It is under this context that this paper explores the basis of these emerging trends considering an argument that suggests that 'as schools become increasingly feminised spaces, boys tend to develop their identities within restrictive concepts of masculinity rather than with schooling' (Sewell, 2003; Bailey, 2003; Figueroa, 2000). Thus, this paper re-contextualises feminist research –*theorising and methodology* - by locating boys and men at the centre of feminist research alongside girls and women while concurrently underscoring the often elusive fact that it is by addressing the interests of both women and men as well as girls and boys that gender research becomes relevant in the acceleration of the attainment of the targets outlined in the EFA goals and the MDGs.

Key words: Feminist research, boys' schooling, girl-focused education

INTRODUCTION

By foregrounding the global feminist mission of challenging the oppression of women (and girls) and championing their rights and their empowerment through education, we engage in an apparently unstable terrain in the African contexts where frequent misinterpretation of this mission often helps to portray feminist thought and mission generally un-African and in particular, a threat to the construction of African masculinities.

In this context therefore, the beginning point for this paper is to align our argument to the premise that feminism –regardless of its various strands – is a potential tool that bears relatively greater promise in the unleashing women’s and men’s capabilities to free themselves from attitudes that are built on perceptions that portray femininity and masculinity as polar opposites and incompatible modes of being whereby femininity is the “Inferior Other”. This paper embraces feminism as the route through which to navigate ways and means of empowering women and men to courageously challenge gender inequalities within socio-cultural systems using evidence-based knowledge and strategic gender-based skills. The interrogation of the concept of *feminism*, its theoretical and practical functions, its derivative terminologies and the essence of its agenda, especially in African gender research encounters challenges that emanate from ideological conflicts and confusion emerging from an inability to distinguish the feminist thought (as a political agenda) from the gender agenda that provides the human rights context in interpretation of the feminist agenda. As educators in higher education, we have noted that students of gender and education often get caught up in this confusion, which consequently poses conceptual and ideological challenges in their graduate research.

Contextually, the authors seek to generate theoretical and conceptual bases upon which to conduct an analysis of the potential and actual effects of girl-specific school-based projects/programmes on the schooling of boys in Kenyan settings. This is an area that has yet to receive focused attention with regard to systematic gender-based research that weaves in gender-sensitivity in order to engage both male and female subjects as equal within a subject-centred feminist methodology. It is important to recognise that boys’ education –formal and otherwise- is as important as that of the girls in any attempt of accelerating and attaining the EFA goals and the United Nations MDGs. Notably, studies in some African countries such as Swaziland, some Southern States of Nigeria and other parts of the world including the Caribbean have continued to indicate downward trends in patterns of boys’ participation in schooling, including attendance, transitions, completion, and performance –relative to that of girls. In Jamaica, for example, adult literacy among women outstrips that of men by approximately 15% while in Central Europe there has been an indication of gender disparities in literacy in favour of girls along the education ladder. A similar trend has been observed in countries of former Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, South Eastern Europe and the Baltic States where women’s educational achievement surpassed that of their male peers (UNESCO, 2003). Thus, this paper re-contextualises feminist research –*theorising and methodology* - by locating boys and men at the centre of feminist research alongside girls and women while concurrently underscoring that it is by addressing the interests of both women and men as well as girls and boys that gender research becomes relevant in the acceleration of the attainment of the targets outlined in the EFA goals and the MDGs. The content of this paper was therefore designed to provide the background of an on-going study on boys’ schooling in the context of girl-focused educational programmes in Kenya.

In the area of feminist and gender research -as many African scholars may testify, it is commonplace -at one time or other – to encounter resistance to, or suspicion about, the use of the concept of *feminism* and its inherent agenda to pursue the course of women. This is mainly because feminism is often perceived as a Western idea, and therefore ‘alien’ in all intent and purposes and

consequently a threat to the perceived African cultural and traditional norms of governing gender relations. More directly, feminism is perceived a potential risk in to the construction of African masculinities which are often founded on patriarchal ideologies and consequently juxtaposed as polar opposites to African femininities. Some African critiques of the Feminist movement argue that addressing women's issues *vis-à-vis* those of men outside the context of African and colonial histories only succeeds in camouflaging the racial dimension that makes the African woman's experience of womanhood fundamentally different from that of her Western counterpart. In these circumstances, it is imperative that in researching gender and its related constructs – more so, gender relations within the African context, the concept of feminism be adequately addressed and understood as both a unifying and distinguishing factor in women's experiences of subordination. Thus, the questions of **what is feminism, who are feminists** and **what do feminists do**, become necessarily pertinent in understanding the role of feminist and gender research within any feminist debate. As hooks (1984 & 1997) observes, it is important to allow the stepping out of the mainstream feminist debates to allow for novel ways of engaging with the feminist thought permitting to analyses of all aspects of men's domination over women. Furthermore, it is also important to reflect on the needs and experiences of not just women and girls generally but those of women (and men) in specifically in regards to socio-cultural and racial contexts such non-white and working-class women with non-western histories and experiences. Hence, a focus on the African, Asian and Hispanic contexts can only enrich the feminist research.

WHAT IS FEMINIST RESEARCH?

Feminist research is the scientific and scholarly exploration/ investigation of social relations seeking to generate knowledge that draws distinctly on women's experience of living in a world in which women are subordinate to men. Hence, experiential (phenomenological) data that is necessarily qualitative in nature is a peculiar feature of feminist research. One of the key specific purposes of feminist research is to seek answers to the 'why' types of questions that arise out of 'what' is already known about the subordinate positioning of women within the patriarchal gender relations of power. The methods used to answer the questions of 'what' and 'why' about women's subordination need to incorporate the questions of 'how' this subordination comes about and *how* the situation may be transformed, changed or improved in ways that would help eradicate subordination of women by men.

The question of men

Questions have been raised and answers given as to why in many societies men seem to have conspired to sideline women, in the both public private space. This has been –at times- theorised in terms of men's unexplained fear of women, contempt for the female gender, men's greater physical power over women, determination not to lose historical, socio-cultural and economic advantages over women, habitual socialisation that essentialises femininity and masculinity for a combination of all these reasons. An unwritten rule seems to have catapulted men to the role of controlling women, speaking and even making decisions for them on matters that affect women in fundamental ways. Feminist research seeks to generate evidence-based knowledge from women's perspectives to explain these assumptions.

What is feminism?

Briefly defined, feminism is the ideology of women's liberation founded on the intrinsic belief that women suffer injustice because of their sex (Humm, 1995: 94). Under this framework are various feminisms that offer different analyses of the causes/agents of female oppression. Hence, feminism

is founded on a moral imperative to understand the power that governs the oppression of women and to seek how such power could be challenged and negotiated for women's liberation and empowerment in order to create equitable societies. Feminism is informed by serious reflection on the histories and nature of sexual differences and the mechanisms by which such differences are enmeshed in and created out of relations of male power, entrenched in patriarchal ideology. There is not a single definition of feminism as any definition tends to be shaped by specific ideology, training, race and histories. On the one hand, Marxist and socialist feminists underscore the multiple forms of interactions within the feminisms of class with those of gender, arguing that social distinctions between women and men in various contexts must be the locus of feminist analyses (Mitchell and Oakley, 1976; Weiner, 1994). On the other hand, black feminists argue that feminist analyses has obligation to address the multiplicity of social systems of oppressions in order to unlock the interactions of race and gender. Such dynamics in the field of feminist scholarship and research has resulted in several strands of feminisms that are worth exploring in order to understand the complexity of the question of woman within feminist research.

Who is a feminist?

Like feminism, there is no a single definition of a feminist simply because feminists have different affinities that drive their agenda in challenging women's oppression. There are those that focus on class and race (Marxist socialists), patriarchy and sexuality (radical), and individual freedoms and equal opportunity for women (liberal). A feminist, therefore, is a person who is committed to the theorisation and the ideological mission of challenging men's subordination of women and consequently demanding political, social and economic transformation in favour of women's empowerment.

What is feminist research?

One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematic from the perspective of women's experiences and uses these experiences as significant indicators of the 'realities' against which hypotheses may be tested (Harding, 1987:7). Feminist research is founded on the appreciation of the need for women to be the first to reveal what women's experiences are in their local contexts. Hence, according to Harding (1987), women should be part and parcel of the design and administration of the institutions where social knowledge is produced and disseminated for purposes of social justice. Feminist research also recognises that there is neither *universal womanhood/femininity* nor *universal manhood/masculinity*, as these are constructed based on women's and men's varied contexts, experiences, desires, and interests that are influenced by class, race, caste, ethnicity, age and culture which are subject to change.

Why conduct feminist research and why in African contexts?

There is unequivocal understanding that women –as a group – suffer oppression by men and that such oppression is indeed a problem that needs to be addressed and challenged within the framework of the United Nations perspective on human rights. This perspective provides the basis and justification of feminist research, which seeks to reveal experientially, the nature of deprivation, oppression, and exploitation and the hurt that women sustain as a group. Feminists seek to know and understand better the nature of women's subordination for the sake of bringing about change and improvement in the situations of women. In African contexts, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the issue of women's oppression has often been camouflaged under the guise of socio-cultural/religious beliefs which dictate that women be subordinate to the men in their lives (husbands, fathers, brothers and so on). Education and even schooling has often fallen prey to this guise, thus shaping the multifarious inequalities in the construction of femininities and masculinities (Chege, 2001 and 2003). This stance

automatically presents many challenges to the feminist agenda whose fundamental mission is to challenge women's subordination to men in all contexts where it is perpetuated.

FEMINISM AS A DIFFERENT (GENDERED) WAY OF SEEING 'THE PROBLEM'

Feminist research considers the diversity of womanhood (multiplicity of femininities) through the exploration of diverse views of women's experiences that are culturally specific and sometimes unique to different groups of women. Because of this, the authors uphold the feminist approach as key in revealing the multiplicity of the gender agenda in an African context. This multiplicity can illustrate unique social situations that require unique responses informed by gender-directed research. The feminist approach guides the researcher through specific questions such as:

- What entails women's/girls oppression in a particular context? Or
- What are the sources of such oppression?
- How can the eradication of the oppression be eradicated to bring about empowering change for women?

It is imperative that such questions are located in a gender context that seeks to identify and analyse the position of men (or boys) in the contexts being studied.

In addition, some feminist researchers focus on the problem of exclusion of women whereby women have been 'left out' of, for example, positions of family/community/divine/state power, oral/documented history, or are excluded from everyday conversations. Further, some feminists investigate the causes of women's inability to question their own oppressed situations and to demand their place in the social, economic and political space. Other feminists are committed to exposing the deliberate/ unconscious effort by men to lock out women from mainstream power and decision-making processes.

What do feminist researchers focus on?

Doing feminist research requires an understanding of women's own experiences as women in a patriarchal culture. Personal experience of **unease** about differences between the way the world functions *vis-à-vis* the way women might prefer it to function for them.. Notably, there are '**discrepancies** between what 'is' the situation and a sense of what women feel '**ought**' to be the case— and it is on this sense of discrepancy that feminist researchers position their research focus. Holistic understandings of women's experiences require an interrogation of men's understanding and interpretation of the same in order to capture the gender dynamics in women's and men's interactions. Such understandings are critical in informing the education of both the girls and boys.

Expectations from feminist research

Feminist research is charged with exposing various social and gender stereotypes that demean, humiliate and sideline women while demanding that men support the human rights of women as equal human beings. Using evidence-based research, feminists endeavour to design their work in such ways that allow the research process and its outcomes to challenge resistance to women's inclusion in the world of politics, economics and culture through a process of critical awareness raising, education and conscientisation (see Freire. 1971 & 73). Further, feminist research is meant to highlight the values and strengths embedded in the concerted effort to support the course of women in dismantling their subordination while concurrently reforming social institutions to facilitate women's empowered and inclusion. Feminist research seeks to examine—critically- all existing knowledge with a view to constructing new knowledge that brings on board women's knowledge and interests. Thus, feminist research is instrumental to enhancing women's education,

increasing women's income level, as well as strengthening women's control and ownership of property and resources. Consequently, feminist research is expected to yield new conclusions about women's place in a society where men have enjoyed historical advantages over women. Feminist research elicits high hopes of new recommendations and new actions to usher in support for women's empowerment on the same footing with that of the men.

In order to make the presumed new outcomes relevant, there is need to capture the voices of women as they speak about their lives, in their own linguistic idiom (not through men's words), about their experiences of being women, being frustrated, humiliated, subordinated and put down, of being invisible, of violence and of being violated, of losing and regaining self regard, of being trapped and of gaining or regaining their freedoms.

*The role of **voice** in feminist research*

Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1997) demonstrate the centrality of women's voice in revealing the reality of womanhood. They underscore the need to –methodologically- pay attention to women's and girls' voices as well as their silences (what they say by their silences). These would include **voices** of women rising above difficult times; of their histories and cultural heritage, of childhoods, teenage years, young adulthood; of being wives and mothers, single women, of obtaining an education and jobs, and of being in the paid and unpaid workforces. Further, feminists seek the **voices** of women about institutions they find themselves in (or excluded from, or incarcerated in) – voices of life in schools, hospitals, churches, work organisations, parliaments, bureaucracies, unions, marriages, prisons and so on. In addition are the **voices** of women's experiences with men, of being of different classes, castes, ethnicities and racial backgrounds; of their mystified bodies and of their related reflections; voices of their illnesses and addictions, of menstruation and of menopause and related stigma; of giving birth, growing older, having different abilities and disabilities, of chronic and acute illness, and of dying – all in a manner that is outside the male-centric experience of being or the masculine epistemology. In this context, women's voice becomes a central tool in feminist methodology whereby the use of language forms part of the analysis. Contextually, Zulu Sofola (1998) points out the problematics that language, specifically the English language, presents to non-Anglophones mainly because of its gendered tendency to present the feminine as an appendage of the masculine. Sofola (1998: 53) demonstrates the fundamental difference between this colonial language for the African whose language defines the feminine gender independently of the masculine. Embedded in women's voices is the woman's reality of her linguistic world as she experiences its effects on her social life. According to Harding (1987), feminist research does not derive its value in the questions that are asked women – but more significantly, in **those that are not asked** and which are as determinative of the total picture. Harding (1987: 7) adds that women should be allowed to reveal what their experiences are in their own terms and in their own voices –in the best way they know how.

FEMINISTS METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Feminist researchers have preference for techniques that are women-centred and are designed to yield the best results for women. For instance, traditional standard surveys of collecting numerical information and performing statistical computations can be made friendly to the feminist mission if they are designed to establish patterns and the extent that these impact on women's positions *vis-à-vis* those of men. Methodologically, techniques that allow the analyses of documentary material such as policy papers, research reports and theories that reveal issues that are key to women's experiences. Above all, the feminist methodology entails approaches that support

the direct listening to the life stories of women through recorded in-depth interviews and ethnographies. The life history approach has remained a favourite technique in feminist research methodology particularly in Third World countries of Africa and Asia as well as minority women in Developed Worlds. Life histories entail the analyses of women's lives based on oral narratives, letters, diaries, autobiographies, thus producing feminist knowledge. By avoiding universalism and focusing on individual stories, life histories become potentially potent in dealing with the specifics of women's oppression in multifarious contexts that surveys can hardly capture (see Humm, 1995).

Importance of context

Exploring the settings and the reasons why women have continued to experience what they experience - as women in relation to men – helps to validate women's claims about their worlds. Such settings and reasons constitute contexts of women's lives that entail history, political economy and material realities all of which need critical examination. In examining these contexts, it is imperative to ask guiding questions such as, **who** benefits from available resources at family, community and state levels; **how unhelpful but dominant stereotypes** are held in place even when they lack scientific basis (e.g. the idea that in order to remain relevant, 'women must be youthful, sexy and beautiful', or the unscientific idea that 'fathers always know best', or 'boys will be boys'). Further, in order to understand contexts, feminist researchers are bound to raise questions regarding **how** women find themselves colluding with ideas that hurt them or **what** women are facing when they attempt to resist or act differently than stereotypes that hurt them. More questions that arise may address women's successes and triumphs and the necessary conditions for these to thrive. While confronting these questions, it is critical to explore the interface of men's histories as compared to that of the women in order to understand what makes masculinities.

Ethical considerations in feminist research

Being qualitative in nature, feminist research is governed by ethical considerations that are employed in qualitative research. These include tenets of subject centredness, mutual respect, sensitivity, empathy, reflexivity and flexibility among others. Hence, the feminist researcher consciously reflects on methodology and always asks the questions aimed at protecting women such as:

- Does this technique dis-empower women?
- Will women be harmed by this approach - whether individually or as a gendered group?
- Will women's knowledge and understanding be most enhanced by this technique?
- Does the process of feminist research empower men as strategic allies to women?

Can men do feminist research?

As a historically woman-centred and woman-driven theatrical and practical approach to issues of women's subordination, the question of whether men can indeed conduct feminist research is justified and pertinent. Based on the premise that a feminist is a woman who knows that she and other women are oppressed **on grounds of gender from personal experience**, then a man will not be in a position to either be a feminist or do feminist research. However, if a man comes to **realise** that women are oppressed on **grounds of gender from his own experience** whereby he and other men collectively benefit from the oppression of women and if the man takes the position against this, then men can be pro-feminist, and can engage in pro-feminist research. Nevertheless, while it may not be prudent for men to research women's experiences directly, it seems reasonable for pro-feminist men to research men's own dissatisfaction with elements of patriarchy as well as the resultant oppression of women. Pro-feminist men are capable of turning their attention to how structures of subordination of women by men function and to find relevance in feminist methodological approaches in

researching their experiences and those of other men in order to transform these subordinating practices. According to Harding (1987: 11) it would be foolhardy to assume that men were incapable of making important contributions to feminist research and scholarship, considering that men are important actors in women's subordination and oppression. Harding (1987) further observes that there are clearly important contributions to the history of feminist thought that have been made by men such as John Stuart Mill, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and others - all of whom belonged to male privileged social classes. Their writings regarding women's subordination are as insightful and even as controversial as are others by feminist scholars.

WHY GENDER RESEARCH

According to Nyokabi Kamau (2011) feminist thought in Kenya is still treated with suspicion, *not just by men but even some women who have worked with women and with gender movements for many years* (2011). This is possibly due to a lack of access to gender-based analyses of power relations between women and men whose consequences may be only appreciated through systematic gender research. This assertion is better understood through the feminist approach to research which is motivated by a need to demonstrate the outcomes and impacts of power relations on women or men. The interrogation of the relational realities of women (or girls) and men (or boys) is in essence what is referred to as gender research. Further, the opening up of, and welcoming of men into, feminist research helps to locate the importance of having women and men working together to dismantle inequitable relations between the two sexes, not just in the various contexts of family, workplace, politics and economics but also in the world of educational research that explores the processes of educating and the ensuing outcomes. Thus, the understanding the relationship between the feminine and masculine (gender and gender relations) both in the process of doing research and in a given research becomes key to the understanding how humanity functions in its gendered nature.

In this context, contemporary feminist researchers insist on the explicit distinction of the concept of 'sex' and its related concept of 'gender'. This is not in any way contradicting the fact that biological sex has always provided the material with which societies construct gender and gender relations through the process of *gendering*. As Simone De Beauvoir (1972) ably argued, human beings are born female or male (their biological sex) but society constructs them exclusively socially and culturally as women and men respectively whereby male is often positioned as the 'positive norm' –the first sex- with the woman as the 'negative' other sex, or the second sex. Based on this theorisation, feminist researchers embrace gender as both a theoretical underpinning as well as a practical category of analysis that requires analytical tools that are responsive to the gender equality agenda. Research theorists and scholars have demonstrated, quite convincingly, that many of the renowned male-based socio-psychological theories, especially in the area of learning, have been founded on research by men who were grossly gender blind. Their perspectives were explicitly shaped by their understandings of boys and men within their selected social classes. Here we find examples of theorists such as Freud and Kohlberg. After them we find a different category of feminist scholars such as Carol Gilligan's (1982) whose study on how girls developed moral autonomy presented an direct challenge to Kohlberg's theory of moral development which was based on a study of male children and eventually applied, unreflectively to 'all children'. Notably, Kohlberg's findings were based on his work of middle class males while the counter-findings from Gilligan's research were based on a sample of white middle class females. Importantly, Gilligan's study showed that girls' socialization, which was group-oriented and founded on mutual responsibility, caring and relationships, formed the basis of their development and a communal sense of morality while Kohlberg's boys were more individualistic in their development of moral autonomy as is prescribed by

proponents of masculine rationalistic theories. All this begs the question whether a similar study in different contexts of Africa would yield results of a different nature.

Suffice it to mention that studies of women's and men's socialisation and education require a gender perspective to guide realistic interpretations of gender power relations that has been proven to be potentially detrimental to women's wellbeing in many African contexts. With regard to health for instance, a Public Health Service (1985) task force in the United States found that the exclusion of women from clinical research was detrimental to women's health that affected their response to the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, menopause, physique and other health parameters. Research has also revealed instances whereby woman have been unable to access the much needed health services because cultural norms in their communities prevented them from travelling alone to a health clinics. In other instances, married women have contracted HIV from their spouses because societal standards encourage the husband's promiscuity as a sign of virility while simultaneously preventing the wives from insisting on safe sex through use of condom.

Does gender research make a difference in feminist perspectives?

The value of gender research lies in the potential to increase the shift of emphasis in feminist scholarship away from women *per se* to gender relations (men and women). After years of either ignoring feminist work or assuming it is only for women, many theorists are increasingly turning to feminist scholarship in order to examine the positive impact that the gender perspective can have on **what we know already and how we know it**. Furthermore, feminist scholarship can also allow issues about the social **construction of masculinities** as well as **femininities** to be addressed in a relational manner. Gender research is therefore a necessary component of contemporary feminist research – creating the idea of feminist gender research that has provides theoretical and conceptual tools for enhancing gender equality and eradicating women's subordination that is founded on research-based knowledge.

For Kenya, a newly promulgated constitution that articulates explicitly the position of either gender in all public engagements (Kenya Constitution, 2010; article 81) has become the milestone upon which a new gender order will ultimately be constructed. The theoretical, conceptual, and practical implications that this constitution bears on gender vindicates the feminist agenda in a developing country like Kenya. In order to facilitate a knowledge-based gender transformations that uphold the feminist mission of empowering women, educational research is significant in presenting pertinent knowledge and skills that can guide effective interventions in the interpretation of national agendas as outlined in the Kenyan constitution and the Kenya Vision of Year 2030 (see The 2008 Kenya Vision 2030).

In view of the above observation, Kenyans require an unequivocal understanding that the category 'woman' (and 'man') does not representing any single homogeneous group, but rather a multiplicity of women who are differentiated by class, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality, religion, etc. This would help to clarify the fact that gender relations are multifariously constructed and are context-based. The appreciation of the nature of gender roles as socially constructed for purposes of separating the women's world from that of their male counterparts in the various local and socio-cultural contexts becomes a basic feminist and gender concern for any research that seeks to inform implementation of the new constitution and the Kenya Vision 2030. Of equal importance is the need for most Kenyans to recognize that social role differences between women and men are fundamentally different from –though closely linked to– sexual role differentiation and that the Kenyan education process should address this fact both through the formal as well as the informal

curricula.

Pre-requisites for gender feminist research

By centring their research around boy's educational experiences, the Kenyan researchers are employing feminist thought in a critical light that raises awareness of the possibilities of sidelining boys (men in the making) in a social process that may result in their future subordination in society. Gender concerns must always be considered by the research team members in order to avoid assuming that boys and men are above socio-economic and cultural marginalisation. For this reason, our researchers undertake periodic capacity retooling activities/training that helps in refresh their gender skills. Such retooling ensures that the researchers remain aware of not only the gendered histories of their research subjects but also of themselves. Effective feminist gender research requires participatory approaches that empower both women and men and use a bottom-up approach that entails 'doing research with the people'. Hence, the training and re-training of researchers is an imperative undertaking that enables researchers to record, as part of their data, the expression of emotion that comes with self-reflexivity of the research subjects, be they women or men. Our study of boys in selected schools will, through a focus on boy's/male voices, harbour insight on the gender terrains through which both the girls and boys navigate their school lives. In this context therefore, feminist gender researchers take on a political action –that is, beyond research for the sake of increasing knowledge and information *per se*, to envisioning feminist research as form of political advocacy that aims to:

1. generate a concrete impact on policy and programme formulation
2. create social change – including within social institutions, structures, and cultures of the school and beyond

CHOOSING DATA SOURCES AND METHODS –THE KENYAN STUDY

For the Kenyan research, there are two readily available sources of data that are responsive to the feminist gender research namely, **documents** (for secondary research) and **subjects/participants** (for primary research). For secondary research, documentary/desk or literature review is being conducted as a useful way of gathering information about what is being conveyed in policies, project/programme objectives and initiatives as well as their intended and unintended outcomes. Documents on project/programme evaluation, reports on best practices, as well as other relevant documentation are crucial for this aspect of the research. With regard to documents, such as policies and programme/project reports, the following questions are being asked:

- *How do policies and/or laws affect boys and girls differently?*
- *Do girls and men receive different levels of benefits from the policies being reviewed?*
- *Is the language used gender-sensitive or does it reinforce gender roles and stereotypes?*
- *Are the policy statements focused on the plight of both genders or only one?*
- *Have girls and boys been involved in drafting or interpreting these documents?*
- *Does the researcher have access to a full range of documents on this issue?*

For primary research, generating data from research subjects will typically make use of triangulation of methods and data sources as well as researchers. This requires knowledge and understanding of how to administer a wide range of research methods that include both the quantitative and qualitative, as well as the more modern and innovative interactive community participatory methods. The following is a list of examples –though not exclusive- of methods that help generate primary data in feminist gender research

1. Survey questionnaire

2. Open-ended interviews
3. Focus group discussions
4. Non-participant observations
5. Other young-person friendly methods such as photography and drawing

PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was already been conducted using a typical school where girl-focused programmes were instituted for over five years with the sole aim of increasing school participation for girls and school performance. Hence, in analysing the pilot study findings, the researchers raised the following questions:

- **Where** are the girls' views? Where are the boy's views?
- **What** are the girls saying? What are the boys saying?
- **How** do the female and male teachers interpret the gender regime of the school?
- **What** gender differences can be observed through the research?
- **How** does the research issue and process differently affect women and men?
- **What** power relations have been observed through the process of conducting the research?
 - What about between the researcher and participants?
 - What about amongst the participants themselves?

Some emergent answers

The pilot study indicated that the views that boys and girls were reflected in different ways depending on the different methods of questions (such as open ended responses vs. more closed questionnaire). Importantly, the patterns emergent in their responses to questionnaire were indicative of a relatively equitable school gender regime while the more open ended interviews revealed some dominant discourse that praised teachers for paying equal attention to both girls and boys. However, the voices from both female and male teachers revealed a lack of a deeper understanding of both the theoretical gender agenda and the feminist perspective of an assumed oppression of women that impacts childrens' schooling and socialisation at the family and community levels. Observations of out of classroom activities during the students' free time revealed an emerging breakthrough in crossing the gender boundaries in sports and games among girls, who had an active football team. The school chief administrator articulated the positive role of girl-focused programmes/project in the school while at the same time highlighting the potential and real risks of leaving boys out of the school's project of enhancing participation and performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Three conclusions are derived from this article. Firstly, while records have presented the origins of feminist thought as un-African, its mission and vision of exposing and challenging women's subordination is in tandem with contemporary thinking of the human rights perspective as expounded by the United Nations and to which many of the African countries –including Kenya- are signatory. Secondly, in order to achieve the Kenya Vision 2030 within the framework of the newly amalgamated constitution research needs to become more responsive to the wellbeing of all citizens in a gender sensitive way and without discrimination, thus legitimising the engagement of feminist gender research. Thirdly, the gender dimensions in feminist research offer a critical point of departure from the traditional women's/girls'-only focus to a more interactive process of addressing social gender relations as generated through the voices of girls, boys, women, and men enlisted in different roles within the social fabric of education –formal and non-formal.

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