

The Gender Equality and Basic Education in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Education has been pointed out as a tool for democracy, multiculturalism and diversity by the international development sector. This article has posed the problem formulation investigating how the Ethiopian Education policy and legal framework address and shape inequalities in the education system and primarily those related to gender. Currently, girls' education has also received great attention because, in the words of the United Nations, education is not only a right but a passport to human development. Evidence has been mounting on the pivotal role that educating a girl or a woman plays in improving health, social, and economic outcomes, not only for herself but her children, family, and community. However, girls and women constitute a majority of those who remain deprived of education as evidenced by the low level of their education and the prevailing obstacles to their access to education at all levels. Despite Ethiopia has brought some economic progress over the last decade, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of several economic parameters. In fact, the Ethiopian government acknowledges that promoting gender equality for Ethiopia where women constitute approximately half of the populace is not only in the best interest of the society at large, but also fundamentally that of ensuring the human and democratic rights of women.

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1. The concept and meaning of the gender equality and basic education

Today, education is the back bone of development that transforms the life of human being through continuous process of learning in the world. It is a process by which man transmits his experiences, new findings, and values accumulated over the years, in his struggle for survival and development, through generations.¹ One of the aims of education is to strengthen the individuals and society's problem-solving capacity, ability and culture starting from basic education and at all levels.² Education is a universal, fundamental human right, recognized as such by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reaffirmed in international human rights conventions.³ In other word, education is a human rights and the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which recognized the right to education, together with other rights, as essential in promoting world peace and democracy. Indeed, Human rights are universal and all human beings are equal as rights-holders.⁴

Gender can be defined as a set of characteristics, roles, and behavior patterns that distinguish women from men socially and culturally and relations of power between them.⁵ While Gender equality refers to the equal rights, opportunities and influence of women and men, girls and boys in all aspects of life – political, civil, social, cultural and economic and it also goes beyond parity in numbers, and while equality under law is a precondition, it contains a combination of quantitative and qualitative aspects.⁶ The concept of gender includes our expectations about the characteristics, attitudes and behaviors of women and men, and is vital in facilitating gender analysis.⁷ To this end, removing gender discrimination in basic education constitutes a non-negligible enabling factor for socio-economic and political development, and for women's participation in social, economic and political life.⁸ On the other hand, According to UNESCO's Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation, Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of 1974 education is defined as

*"Education implies the entire process of social life by means of which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within, and for the benefit of, the national and international communities, the whole of their personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge."*⁹

As far as the basic education is concerned the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first

¹ .Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia Education and Training Policy, First Edition, Addis Ababa April, 1994, p.1

² Ibid

³ Website: www.unesco.org

⁴ Lori Lake and Shirley Pendlebury, Children's right to basic education, South African Child Gauge, 2008/2009 p.19

⁵ Adebayo Olukunle Ajala and Sunday Kolawole Alonge, Gender Issues in Basic Education and National Development in Nigeria, Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) Ojoo Ibadan.p.646

⁶ Rights and diversity in Danish Development Cooperation, strategic framework gender equality August 2014, p.7 (www.Danid.Dk)

⁷ . *European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Sciences - Issue 15 (2009) p.175*

⁸ . Aicha Bah-Diallo, Deputy Assistant Director-General for Education, gender equality in basic education, UNESCO 2002 p.13

⁹ Hiwot Abebe, the Right to Education of Children with Intellectual Disability and Its Implementation in Addis Ababa, (LLM thesis, Addis Ababa university March, 2011) p 10

century, stated that “Basic education is the first step in attempting to attenuate the enormous disparities affecting many groups – women, rural populations, the urban poor, marginalized ethnic minorities and the millions of children not attending school and working”. The concept of basic education has led to broaden the magnitude of the right to education: “extending from initial or basic education to lifelong learning”.¹ Besides to this, UNESCO defines basic education as: “The first nine years (progressively extending to 12 years) of formal education, of which, the first five or six are often identified as primary and the rest lower secondary. It also includes basic education for youth and adults who did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age. Basic education prepares the population for further education, for an active life and citizenship. It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacy and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life.”²

Nowadays, many governments support women’s basic education in order to foster economic growth, to fight diverse forms of economic polarization between rich and poor, or to eliminate poverty and it is by now widely recognized that investment in girls’ and women’s basic education has also positive impact on wider social development, inclusive of increased family income, reduced fertility rates, reduced infant and maternal mortality rates, and better family health and nutrition.³ It is also a precondition for the effective exercise of women’s human and legal rights and responsibilities and empowers entire nations, because educated citizens have the skills to make democratic institutions function effectively.⁴

2. The right to education as human right

Basically, human right is a right a person acquires, is entitled to, which a person can claim just by the virtue of being a human and human rights are universal, that is, same all over the world, belong to all human beings when they are born and cannot be taken away by anyone i.e. state or individual.⁵ Education works as a multiplier since it in turn enables people to exercise other human rights. It enhances both economic, social and cultural rights, such as the right to work and the right to food, and civil and political rights, such as the right to vote and the right to free speech.⁶ In addition to this, education is fundamental to a well-functioning democracy has been long accepted. Thomas Jefferson well articulated the connection between education and democracy, arguing that to render democratic governments safe, the people's "minds must be improved to a certain degree" and that therefore "[a]n amendment of our [Virginia] constitution must here come in aid of the public education."⁷

According to Ban Ki-Moon, UNs Secretary -General:

*"Education is a fundamental right and the basis for progress in every country. Parents need information about health and nutrition if they are to give their children the start in life they deserve. Prosperous countries depend on skilled and educated workers. The challenges of conquering poverty, combating climate change and achieving truly sustainable development in the coming decades compel us to work together. With partnership, leadership and wise investments in education, we can transform individual lives, national economies and our world."*⁸

As human right the right to education imposes an obligation on the governments which can be held accountable in case of violation.⁹

3. Policy and legal frame work of gender equality and basic education in Ethiopia

The current Ethiopian Education and Training Policy were approved in 1994 and the overreaching goal of the Policy is to provide a new education system which will achieve the present and future national and social development goals.¹⁰ The Policy focuses on increasing access to educational opportunities based on enhanced equity, quality and relevance and in particular it promotes an education system that would remove the cultural and traditional misunderstandings attached to benefits of female education.¹¹

In universal primary of education goal in the policy, the government aims to increase both girls’ and boys’ on-time enrolment in primary school; to ensure that children arrive at school with a strong foundation in language, early literacy and numeracy as well as the social and emotional skills required for learning; to decrease early dropout rates and to enhance overall primary school performance¹².

¹ . UNESCO ,Operational Definition of Basic Education , Thematic Framework , December 2007

² . Achieving Universal Basic Education Constraints and Opportunities in Donor Financing London, October 2009, p.1

³ Aicha Bah-Diallo, *Deputy Assistant Director-General for Education*, gender equality in basic education, UNESCO, 2002 p.13

⁴ .supra note 20

⁵ Mamta Viswanath *Ph.D. Research Scholar*; Right to Education using Human Rights Based Approach: *Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) Volume 19, Issue 6, Ver. V (Jun. 2014), P. 49*

⁶ Gauthier de Beco, the right to inclusive education , *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, Vol. 32/3., 2014.,p.265

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⁸ www.efareport.unesco.org

⁹ www.iosrjournals.org

¹⁰ http://devdata.worldbank.org/idg/IDG_Profile.asp

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Education for all 2015 National Review Report,: Ethiopia efa2015reviews@unesco.org

4.1 Legal frame work of gender equality and basic education in Ethiopia

As education in general and basic education in particular is one of basic human rights that is incorporated in many international and regional human instruments that Ethiopia has ratified as its integral part of law. Accordingly, some of those legal frameworks of gender equality and basic education in Ethiopia will be discussed below.

4.1.1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

According to Article 26(1) of the UDHR states that "everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory."¹ It expressly stated under UDHR education as human rights and both boys and girls shall be given equal chance of learning beginning from his/her childhood.

4.1.2 International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, (1966)

According to Articles 13 of the covenant states that: "(1) the state parties to the present covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. 2. (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all; (d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education."²

4.1.3. Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979

The increasing global focus on economic, social, and cultural rights during the recent years has given impetus to the enhanced awareness in regard to specific human rights problems encountered by women³. According to Article 10 of the CEDAW states that : "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women : (a)The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training."⁴

4.1.4 Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

The convention provides for positive obligation of states to ensure adequate standards of living, access to education, health institutions, social security, etc. which correspond to the universal human rights in many areas and in addition, also embodies a number of human rights that specifically addresses the problem encountered by children due to their very nature.⁵ Under Article 28 (1.) the convention puts the right to education to every child without discrimination and its corresponding obligation on the part of government; "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;"⁶

4.1.5. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981)

According Article 17 of the ACHPR charter also recognized that every individual shall have the right to education based on equal opportunity and access.⁷

4.1.6. The Federal Democratic Republic constitution of Ethiopia, 1995

The Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic constitution under Article 41(4) imposes the obligation that the state should allocate ever increasing resources to provide the public education to its citizen. On the other hand, the Constitution clearly stated that efforts should be done to realize equality of the gender in every aspect of social, economic and political rights, including the right to education more specifically basic education to women shall be fulfilled. Thus, Article 35 of the FDRE constitution Rights of Women state that equal enjoyment of rights and protections provided for by this Constitution with men.⁸

Thus, the gender equality and basic education issue are covered in international and regional human rights law .However, in domestic constitution it is provided slightly in general term. Hence, the country has no comprehensive and specific legislation in detail and broad manner to implement the right to education and equal opportunity to women. In other words, the country has not yet enacted special proclamation concerning basic education and gender equality.

5. The practical application of gender equality and basic education and its challenges in Ethiopia

Basically, international human rights impose three types or levels of obligation on states parties: the obligation to

¹ . Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

² International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966

³ Amsalu Darge , the integrated approach: a quest for enhancing justifiability of socio-economic rights under the Ethiopian constitution(LLM thesis, AAU, December 2010) p.42

⁴ . Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979

⁵ .supra note 30,p.45

⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

⁷ *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* (1981)

⁸ . The Federal Democratic Republic constitution of Ethiopia, 1995

respect which requires states to refrain from interfering with the enjoyment of socio-economic rights, to protect which requires states to prevent violations of such right by third parties and to fulfill which requires states to take appropriate legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and other measures towards the full realization of such right¹. Among these obligations the right to education, as a civil and political right, falls under the obligation to respect and as a socio-economic right falls under the obligation to fulfill because it demands resource.²

However, of total population of the country, in 2012, the child age population of Ethiopia reached at 34.8 million which is 41.5% of the total population.³ As far as educational background of women are concerned, the recent study conducted in Ethiopia show that only 18% of Ethiopian women are literate, compared to 42% men, i.e., there is still a significant gender gap for literacy particularly in rural areas of the country⁴. Besides to this, though there are gaps in the enrolment of both female and male children, the percentage of school age is higher than males⁵. The related study also shows that the women's attainment and skill acquisition was lower than men's at all levels including basic education⁶. This study states that the women and girls access to education is constrained by lack of awareness of policies, guidelines and programs, socio-economic and socio-cultural problems comprising of poverty, HIV/AIDS, workload in the house, early marriage and parents preference to educate their sons, school distances, sexual harassment, girls shyness and feeling of discomfort to participate with men, lack of role models due to the small number of female teachers in schools, and small number of leadership.⁷ Currently, despite the efforts have been made to redress the inequitable distribution of education opportunities among male and female children, between urban and rural populations and different nationalities the gap still persists.⁸ A study conducted in 2014, with regard to Ethiopia's situation in terms of achieving educational equity, described as follows.

"The Ethiopian education system is one which is characterized by both intra and inters regional disparities in participation. Gender disparity is not yet fully conquered. The national average gender parity index (GPI) for primary school participation shows 0.9 in favor of boys. Though progress with regard to bridging the gaps in access, retention and completion between male and female students is underway, the current trend indicates that things are all in favor of the male especially when we go up the ladder of education."⁹

In Ethiopia, Child labour is also one of the major impediments that affect children's school attendance particularly females.¹⁰ Another limiting factor of girls' education is violence, most of the time girls are victims in this regard because they are forced by their peers, older people who are members of the family such as step-fathers, parents' relatives, etc. or some teachers to have sexual intercourse with them and Such violence is may be committed either on the way to school, at home, or in school.¹¹

6. Conclusion

The Ethiopia has emphasized a commitment to human rights for all including the women rights and basic education by endorsing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ratifying the ICESCR, CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the federal government has undertaken obligations to promote and protect human rights throughout the country through all appropriate measures, including legislation, education and policy. To this end, Ethiopia has recognized all women's' rights and the right to education in its constitution and policy document. Similarity, the right to free education especially at the primary school shall be immediately enforceable and not be postponed. To meet those obligations, the country as whole, regional and local governments must reach their full potential to implement human rights in general and women rights and the right to education in particular. But, the country fails to have comprehensive and special legislation so as to balance the gender equality in education sector more specifically basic education.

As far as gender equality and basic education is concerned, the country has made a significant effort to narrow the gender gap in basic education level, still women are suffering to either not to attained initially and drop out after enrolment to school . In Ethiopia as opposed to males, females are deprived from the right to education as a result of socio-economic, socio-cultural and other factors. For instance, even though international

¹ Hiwot Abebe, The Right To Education Of Children With Intellectual Disability And Its Implementation In Addis Ababa, (LLM thesis, Addis Ababa university, Addis Ababa , March 2011), p.20

² .Ibid

³ ., Reports of the 1994 and 2007 Population and Housing Census and the 2012 Inter-censal Survey, Population stabilization report Ethiopia CSA, March 2014, p.12

⁴ .WWW.oxfam.com

⁵ . <https://www.usaid.gov>. (Preliminary Gender Profile of Ethiopia)

⁶ . www.jica.go.jp.

⁷ . Ibid

⁸ Heike Roschanski, deprived children and education in Ethiopia , Amsterdam, The Netherlands, December 2007 (P.V or info@irewoc.nl) 44.supra note 43

¹⁰ Study on Situation of Out of School Children (OOSC) in Ethiopia, Ministry of Education and UNICEF Ethiopia Country Office, Addis Ababa, July 2012 , p22

¹¹ Ibid. p.43

standard to basic education (primary school) to school distance is 1- 2 kilo meter, still rural students are obliged to go more than 5 and above kilo meter. Hence, distance to education hinders the female students from learning. Secondly, poor conditions of school facilities, lack of drinking water and sanitation facilities, shortage of textbook, insufficient sitting and writing materials, shortage of human resources especially absence of role model female teachers and administrative staffs as well as poor management in the school also widens the gender gap in primary school. Thirdly, harmful traditions like early marriage and sexual harassment in and out of school as well as the societal perception with respect to female education especially in rural areas of the country increases the gender disparity in basic education in Ethiopia. Early marriages, even though officially discouraged, are still very widespread in rural Ethiopia. Finally, because of poverty, currently female children are exposed to child labor, in rural and urban areas of country for domestic work (people prefer female for male for domestic work more specially to nurse their children), agricultural, industrial and service so as to generate income for themselves and their family for survival strategy so that they are engaged in such activity by spending their time rather than going to school.

Thus the Ethiopia must develop a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to human rights implementation in general and women's rights and gender equality in basic education in particular. Though the gender equality and the right to education is guaranteed constitutionally, if the socio-economic rights of women especially the right to women's basic education is not reaffirmed by special legislation, i.e. proclamation, which contain the procedure, the mechanism of enforcement and the remedy whenever there is violation of such rights, it cannot be realized. Indeed, the special law should be promulgated so as to realize this right more than what it is today. Awareness should be increased how to promote, protect, implement and enforcement of the gender equality on part of the public. Owing to the poverty some the of females who are totally excluded from school and /or forced to dropout from school so as make them enjoy this right that the government and other concerned bodies like NGOs must support them by providing basic necessities services like food, uniform, exercise books, pens, etc.

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