

Indigenous Education Against Gender Equality in Cameroon

Ngwabienwu John Tumbuh (PhD)

University of Bamenda, Faculty of Education

Department of foundations of Education

Abstract : Indigenous education is not a feature, common only in Cameroon, but in other African countries and across the world. Indigenous knowledge is passed on from one generation to the other both in formal and informal setting. In communities in Cameroon, gender inequality is the order of the day. The characteristics of indigenous education, varied from one community to the other. Traditional societies and their traditional practices are eminent in determining and respecting the rights of all. Some of these practices discriminate against women and girls, one sex superior and another inferior within the same community. The question here is, why can gender equality not be achieved in the trans-generational transmission of knowledge? In this article, some reasons why it is difficult to achieve gender equality are advanced, recommendations are also made on recognizing women, men, girls and boys as agent of development and narrowing the gender gaps existing.

Key Words: trans generational, indigenous knowledge, indigenous education, traditional practices, gender inequality.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contrary views exist on what constitute, and reflect indigenous education in Cameroon. Indigenous people maintain and perpetrate inequality in the society among women and men, girls and boys. Indigenous education with the transmission of knowledge from the old generation to the younger generations, the practice of gender inequality is based on the fact that, indigenous education being characterized, as community oriented geared toward solving the problems of the communities. The instructional activities were directed thus, toward the social life of the community so as to prepare the learners, to fit appropriately into the Kenyatta (1961, in Mushi 2009) holds that, “ it was taught in relation to concrete situation. The boys and girls learn about birds that were harmful, how they could be controlled, and what birds could be eaten, in the same way, they learnt about trees that were good for firewood, building or for propping crops like banana and yams as well as those which resisted ants.” It was also characterized as being illiterate, it put emphasis on practical learning, with learning by doing, it was functional, the knowledge, skills, values that were imparted were relevant to the socio-economic activities of an individual who were earmarked for various community roles and these roles were what is termed today as gender roles. Indigenous education had some compulsory subjects like religion, fighting, law, history, agriculture and animal husbandry.

The passing on of traditional practices, traditional norms, cultural and rites, from one generation to the other, leads to

the practice of gender inequality with one sex being favored and the other disfavored with discrimination, domination and suppression at the center stage. The second decade of education in Africa Plan of Action for 2006-2015, was to “eliminate gender disparity and ensure gender equality for girls and women’s empowerment throughout the educational system” with reference to increasing the proportion of female teachers and ensuring gender sensitivity in teaching and learning environments and material (African Union, 2006). Cameroon educational policies are linked with education for all (EFA) goals, and the national plan for action for EFA, has been developed referring to gender equality in Cameroon, however, gender parity has not yet been achieved in primary and secondary schools in Cameroon, in 2011, the gender parity index (GPI) for gross enrollment was 0.89 in primary education, and 0.84 in secondary education (UIS 2012). Policy efforts promoting gender equality have focused on facilitating access for girls schools retention and completion. With indigenous education, communities efforts are to promote transmission of indigenous knowledge from the elders to the young generation, however, discrimination suppression, domination of one sex by the other comes into play and making it difficult to achieve gender equality.

1.1 Context of the study

Indigenous education had no paper word-testing and certificates but learners could be graduated ceremoniously. There were no formal examination taken at the end of a specific level of training, but the learner was considered a graduate when he or she was able to practice what was being taught within that period of training. The learners had expectations and responsibilities that the society expects from them based on gender since the community has attributed to them.

About 40% of Cameroonian practice indigenous religion, or ancestral worship, commonly referred to as traditional African religion, the men were the only one, who could be initiated and for the women, it was regarded as a taboo for them to appear in public to talk about Jesus Christ, for it is said in holy Bible according to saint Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verses 33-35, 33 says “ for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints. 34 Says “let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak , but they are commanded to be under obedience as also said the law, verse 35 further insisted that, “ for if they will learn anything, let them ask

their husband at home , for it is a shame for women to speak in the church”. Saint Paul again said in verse 37 for if a man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that, the things that I write unto you, are the commandment of the Lord.

It is also interesting to note here that, indigenous population and their traditional set-ups, were extract of the holy book, they did so, because they never wanted to have any doubts in their traditional practices. As soon above, the holy bible quoted, is biased and these indigenous population too in their practices, became biased thus discriminating, suppressing and placing the women in subordination positions and passing on knowledge unto the younger generation maintain this inequality.

Education policy in Cameroon, is aligned with a number of international frameworks, of particular importance here include the millennium development goals (MDGs) number 2, on achieving universal primary education for all and number 3 to promote gender equality and empower women, which after it evaluation in 2015,loop wholes were realized and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2016 were proposed to close the gap realized in the MDGs (2002) number 4 which was to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

As the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, (EMRIP) points out: “Education of indigenous children contributes to both individual and community development, as well as to participation in society in its broadest sense. Education enables indigenous children to exercise and enjoy economic, social and cultural rights, and strengthens their ability to exercise civil rights in order to influence political policy processes for improved protection of human rights. The implementation of indigenous peoples’ right to education is an essential means of achieving individual empowerment and self-determination. Education is also an important means for the enjoyment, maintenance and respect of indigenous cultures, languages, traditions and traditional knowledge. Education is the primary means of ensuring indigenous peoples’ individual and collective development; it is a precondition for indigenous peoples’ ability to realize their right to self-determination, including their rights to pursue their own economic, social and cultural development.”

Thoughtfully interwoven Indigenous content and approaches must be informed by an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies (how knowledge can be known), and pedagogies, (how knowledge can be taught). While there is much diversity among Indigenous Peoples, and therefore among Indigenous way of knowing, teaching, or learning, many Indigenous education scholars, have argued that there are also some notable commonalities among Indigenous societies worldwide (Cajete, 1994; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hampton, 1993; Henderson, 2002; Marker, 2004). Gender which is referred to as, a socio-cultural construct which

attribute roles, responsibilities, values to individuals based on gender norms and traditional practices.

Indigenous pedagogies connect learning to a specific place, and thus knowledge is situated in relationship to a location, experience, and group of people. For curriculum developers, this means creating opportunities, to learn about the local environment and to learn in connection to their local places. Indigenous education that recognizes inclusive educational practices, is an important tool for a holistic and long term national goal. At independence, Cameroon introduced an education intervention, to ensure that all school going children had access to education through it education for all policy.

1.2 Indigenous education and gender stereotypes

In our communities, there are generalized views, or preconceptions about attributes or characteristic, or rules that ought to be performed or possessed by women and men, girls and boys. These gender stereotypes, are harmful when they limit women and men, girls and boys from reaching their capacities to develop their personal abilities, or pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives. Societies with harmful traditional gender stereotypes perpetuate gender inequalities. For instance, the traditional view of women as care givers, and mothers passed on indigenous knowledge to their female children to know that some of their fundamental roles, or attributes in the society is to take care of their homes, and aged persons, making them to know as responsibilities that often fall exclusively on women.

Gender stereotypes compounds and intersecting with other stereotypes have a disproportionate negative impact on groups of women in our communities, such women come from minority indigenous communities like women with disabilities, women from lower caste groups, women with lower economic status, often feel neglected, discriminated upon within the community.

Ascribing to individual women or men in indigenous communities, characteristics, attributes or gender roles by reason only of her or his membership in the social group “group stereotyping”. In Cameroon with about 252 ethnic groups, gender attributes, gender roles, norms, responsibilities, values, habits, vary from one community to another, and gender stereotyping are wrongly, when it results in violation of fundamental human rights and freedom like not:

- Criminalizing marital violation or rapes, perceiving that women are the sexual property of men.
- Failure to investigate, prosecute and sentence perpetrators of sexual violence against women and girls, believing that survivors of sexual abuse agreed to sexual acts as they are not dressing properly and behaving modestly.

Wrongful gender stereotyping, is a frequent cause of discrimination against women. It is a contributing factor in violation of vast array of rights such as the rights to education,

especially as it is believed that, only boys have the right to go to school even at higher levels until they start facing diminishing returns, while the girls are trained by their mothers or considered to be future mothers or future housewives, this maintain inequality between women, men and girls and boys of the society. Some of these communities violate the rights of women, men and girls and boys to healthy life, adequate standard of living, marriage and family relations, work, freedom of expression, freedom of movement political participation and representation in the public spheres.

1.3 International human rights treaties and community preconceptions.

➤ Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, (CEDAW)

Article 5 states that, parties shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of women and men boys and girls, with a view of achieving the elimination of prejudices, customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes, or on stereotyped roles for women and men, girls and boys. Treaty as such, not respectful due to the fact that, traditional societies continue to initiate the younger generations on how to maintain harmful gender norms, gender roles, and attributed responsibilities. Therefore, gender equality cannot be achieved.

➤ Convention on the rights of people with disabilities (CRPD)

In article 8, it states that, parties under take to adopt immediate, effective and appropriate measures to fight gender stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life. The right to nondiscrimination and equality provided under other international human right treaties, such as the covenant on economic , social and cultural rights and convention on the rights of child, have also been interpreted to include, discrimination and inequality that are rooted stereotypes, including gender stereotypes of varied cultures of the country with varied socio-cultural practices, are designed such that men enjoy certain rights when practicing traditional rites and will want to enjoy them forever, and the women continue to enjoy their inferior positions in the society. .

1.4 Home economics, situational analysis of gender issues in Cameroon

The national Gender policy document considered, the women are traditionally confined to domestic division of labor, especially house hold activities, while men are engaged in public spheres, Home economics is thus, the area reserved for the women who will derive little value and recognition thereof, she invest most of her time in it, which significantly reduces her

participation in gainful and trading activities which becomes the reserve for man.

In Cameroon, houses make up a significant number, the women, mother or wife is socially responsible for the household. She prepares meals, handles health care and education of children, the sick and the elderly supplies the families with water, and Domestic energy, takes care of the hygiene and sanitation. She is also responsible for household repairs, she takes an active part in production activities including food security. The woman also assist the husband in his own social responsibilities as family head, and in some communities, she plays an important role in some secret societies. She takes change of all that helps the man to perform his duties. In case of incapacity of the husband, the woman refers to her husband's family for possible decision.

The woman is found between, for her professional status and her status of a woman, with another. She finds it extremely difficult, to reconcile the different roles assigned to her by the

society, as "her administrative functions are simply added to those considered normative and

intended for the wife".

But today, she tends to focus on her professional work which somewhat empowers her,

and gives her status as a mothers and wife or even her womanhood. As a mother, her work

interruptions sometimes due to maternity slow down her education career and help jeopardize her evolution, unlike that of her status as a mother and wife. As a wife, she carries out activities which must be compatible with her status as a wife, because she must have sufficient time to

care for her family. Conversely, the man has the right to return home late, the woman must be

there earlier to watch over the children and prepare the family meal. As a woman there are areas inaccessible to her because of her socialization and this rate attributed her therefore, not enabling her to participate in productive labor and decision making.

This is explained not only by sociological and cultural mores, but also by the under estimation of activities rates, which exclude household chores in the system of national

accounting. Education plays a very important role in introducing innovations that contribute to reflection on value and ethics, and also contribute to the transformation of a more sustainable society.

1.5 Significance of the study

To the government

The results of this research will certainly help the government to discourage all form of socio-cultural practices or socio-

cultural norms that go against the education of both boys and girls through her legal tools. Also, it will help the government to enact laws, rules and regulations that will guide and protect the wellbeing of women and girls in the society, as well as ratified conventions that relate to the rights of the child, and take measures to increase the participation of women and girls in decision making bodies. Also, consider them as partners in development. The research will help the government to determine, establish the type of traditional practices, norms and values involving gender education. To pass laws that prohibit gender discrimination in education, and encourage gender mainstreaming and foster development and growth in the country.

The Community

Equity for girls means equity for everyone, by following gender equity guidelines to improve education, it is improved for boys as well as for girls. The sustainable development goals number four stipulates to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all and number five of same document says achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. These goals does not entail neglecting or suppressing boy and men, But by putting girls and boys on equal plane relatively increase values of girls will also benefit boys by informing them of the strength, capabilities and contributions of girls and women in the process of development. This in turn, may help to decrease the pressure boys feel to conform to the traditional roles, behaviors and ways the society expect from them as ascribed.

Eventually, stereotypes may be counteracted eliminated, and so education may begin to be more gender balanced.

Focusing on girls' educational achievements, and career aspirations allows societies to ensure women's economic security, and better quality of life, and more career choices. As a result, the need for social welfare will decrease since most families in poverty are headed by females or women with inadequate education. Thus, targeting equitable education techniques will not only improve the lives of individuals women, but will also advance the communities as well.

This study will create an awareness in the community on the fact that women should be given equal educational opportunities, shared responsibilities, especially in domestic duties and help minimize stereotyped ideas and male dominance.

It will also sensitize the community on the note that women, when educated and given the chance to, can contribute in nation building. Educated mothers invest more in their children schooling, thus, improving both families and society's development projects. They are also likely to have fewer children. For instance in Brazil, women with a secondary education have an average of 2.5 children, whereas illiterate women have 6.5 of average children. Having few children allows families to invest more in the education and

health of each child, thereby, raising the productivity of future generations (Bloom and Weston, August 25, 2003).

1.6 Gender and Indigenous Peoples Education

According to Roland in Glehart, (1997) who wrote from traditional gender role towards gender equality, the developmental theory is based on the assumption that traditional societies are characterized by sharply differentiated gender roles that discourage women from working outside the home. An extensive literature in demography, sociology, anthropology and social psychology has documented the familiar, yet profound transformation of sex roles associated with the process of societal modernization. Crone (2018), virtually all pre-industrial societies emphasized childbearing, and child rearing as the central goal for women, and their most important function in life, along with tasks like food production and preparation at home, jobs in the paid workforce were predominately male. In postindustrial societies, gender roles have increasingly, converged due to a structural revolution in the paid labor force, in educational opportunities for women, and in the characteristics of modern families. In most affluent countries, people are marrying later, than in previous generations and having fewer children .A rapid increase in pre-marital cohabitation is challenging the once-privileged position held by marriage. More and more women, especially those who are married, have entered the paid labor force, creating the transition from male breadwinner to dual earning family.

Crone said although the gender-gap in rates of economic participation is narrowing, the nature of women and men's roles in the labor force continue to differ. Women still have to juggle the demands of family responsibilities and market work, and they hold different jobs than men, often with lower status and rewards. These social trends, raise questions about long established moral values and attitudes towards the family and gender roles that were once taken for granted. Traditional family values have by no means disappeared but they appear under greater strain in postmodern societies. Not all consequences of these sweeping developments can be examined here, but this account leads to four major predications that are open to empirical investigation, namely, we expect to find systematic differences in cultural indicators of gender equality : in societies based on their level of economic development, within societies based on generational cohorts, between women and men and within societies based on structural and cultural factors like education and class.

1.7 Ending Inequality against Women in Cameroon

According to Jude Thaddeus in (2017), the movement for the empowerment and autonomy of women in Cameroon, and the improvement of their political, social, and economic and health status, has gone a long distance, but is still far from reaching its intended destination. Cameroon has made key strides toward gender equality and women's empowerment through major international commitment, including the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination

against women (CEDAW), the Beijing platform for action, the declaration of the head of state and government of the African union on equality between women and men, and the sustainable Development Goals. However, though these international and regional commitments takes precedence over Cameroon's national laws, customs and traditions, the preference for customary laws remains and means that discriminate against women continues in Cameroon, especially in rural areas with strong traditional practices.

Further, the preamble of the constitution of Cameroon includes several provisions that enshrine gender equality. But many questions about ending inequalities faced by women continues to linger, such as the recognition of rape between husband and wife, protection for unemployed women, pension for child marriage, breast ironing and other gender issues.

1.8 Recommendations

- Stakeholders, all un agencies, government, community leaders, traditional leaders, community based organizations, Association should work together in creating awareness on the harmful effects of traditional practices that suppress women, discriminate against women by so doing, gender equality can be achieved.
- Community leaders should be sensitized on the fact that girls and boys , women and men be recognized as agents of development, boys and girls have equal right to education, good health care, good standards of living, free movement, freedom of speech without limitations.
- Children should be educated to know that some traditional practices, norms and values taught to them is only to help them understand the history of their

society and should not be applied today and in the future.

II. CONCLUSION

Indigenous education and gender inequality in Cameroon, stems from the fact that, indigenous education and gender norms maintained gender inequality in our local communities, colonial ideas introduced became so difficult to uproot and also the fact that most traditional practices of these traditional societies are extracts from the holy bible, as quoted in the article, the Cameroon government in a bit to fight against these social ill, has been leaning on the regional treaties, international treaties, and national laws to have women and men, girls and boys be on the same level ground, but not easy, reasons why strategies for the achievement of gender equality within these societies keeps meeting a lot of challenges.

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