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OUR CHILDREN OUR FUTURE: DEPRIVING THE AFRICAN GIRL –CHILD EDUCATION: THE SUREST AND QUICKEST PASSPORT TO POVERTY

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Abstract

Education is argued to be one of the cornerstones of development in any given country. All levels of education should be accessed by every individual who needs education. Education should never be accessed along gender lines (Moyo, 2003; Zvobgo, 2000). The presentation of this paper is in four parts. First, it seeks to examine how primary school education could benefit the African girl. Klassen (1999), for example, carried out a study on: “Does Gender Inequality Reduce Growth and Development?”-and found out that the growth rates in East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East had different growth rates attributed to gender inequality in basic education. Second, it intends to analyse the role of secondary school education in upping the African girl child. UNICEF (2007) and Summers (1994) concur that any investment in the girl child education is one of the greatest pathways for economic development. Third, it critiques the benefits of tertiary education in a girl child. UNICEF (2007) found out that an educated woman gains a higher status and self efficacy than an uneducated one. Datt and Martin (2002), on the other hand, found out that low education has been costly to India’s poor, depriving them of the capacity to participate in economic growth opportunities. Challenges underpinning girl child access to the preceding levels of education as well as their suggested solutions will be discussed. This survey will gather empirical data from purposively sampled 50 Zimbabwe Open University lectures, 50 Belvedere Technical Teachers’ College lecturers, 50 secondary school teachers and 50 primary school teachers in the city centre of Harare. An in-depth questionnaire will be used to gather data within two weeks. The report will be compiled by 21 October 2010. We hope that this presentation’s findings will try to go beyond what has been documented regarding benefits and costs of investing in the African girl child education by level.

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Introduction

It is common knowledge that some African societies have had a tendency to perpetuate gender inequality in terms of educating the boy-child at the expense of the girl-child. Regardless of winds of civilisation that have swept past the African continent, the girl-child’s access to educational opportunities has remained a dream rather than a reality. This contradicts the fact that African populations are characterised by more females than males, for example, the 1998 Population and Housing Census registered 9 933 868 people of which 51 percent were females and 49 percent were males, with a population growth of 2 percent per annum (National Statistical Office, 2000 in Maluwa-Banda, 2003), it is imperative that the subject of depriving the African girl-child education be given priority in the

wake of the need to deliberately drive towards poverty alleviation and eradication in Zimbabwe. Where girl students continue to lag behind in educational achievement and access, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, where girls' enrolment, completion and achievement rates are lower, it becomes a big concern when we talk about the role of education of the youth in poverty alleviation, regardless of gender (Huggins and Shirley, 2007). Depriving the girl-child education is a complete departure from the view that education is a human right (Umar, 2004). Also the practice of depriving the girl-child educational opportunities is against the second and third Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) - which are to: achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality and empower women (Maluwa-Banda, 2003; Fant, 2008). Educating both boys and girls should be viewed as an investment into the future. Negative societal attitudes and practices that stifle girl-child access to education should never be ignored if ever African societies entertain any hopes to escape from poverty. This paper therefore attempts to remove the stigma that surrounds the subject about girl-child education by focusing on those practices that promote equality and economic empowerment of women. This is critical in our society, which is grappling with effects of poverty. It is therefore the intention of this paper to urge society to dissociate itself from the practices of marginalising the girl-child from education. To underscore this fact, Maluwa-Banda (2003:4) points out that, "The elimination or eradication of poverty and progress towards sustainable development will only take place with increased and improved levels of education". If ever poverty is to be eliminated, then such kind of education should be central to the achievement of equality in society, including between men and women (Fant, 2008).

Who is an African girl?

Before capturing the details of this paper, it is necessary to briefly describe the African girl-child in the context of Africana Womanism. The African girl-child is concerned about not only empowering herself, but to empower the whole Africana community (Weems-Hudson, 2002:80). By implication, an African girl-child can be viewed as someone who is not selfish. She is considered as a selfless human being. She possesses a very big heart concern for the upward mobility of others. She has a big concern for others. Hudson-Weems (1998) underscores the African girl-child's concern for others by likening the African girl-child to an Africana Womanist who is family-centred, as she is concerned with her entire family rather than with herself and sisters. She wishes a big success for every family member. The African girl-child is also nurturer and consistent in doing what must be done for the survival of the family, a commitment grounded in and realised through a positive sense of history, family hood and security (Weems-Hudson, 2002). Once more, she is concerned about the progress and well-being of her relatives and companions. The African girl-child desires positive male companionship, a relationship in which each individual is mutually supportive; an important part of Africana family (Weems-Hudson, 2002). She loves being liked. She loves her family. She plays a big part in looking after the family. In this regard, she should not be viewed as a competitor with men in areas of work, social status and the role one plays in society. Instead, she should be perceived as one of the big contributors to the societal development. The Africana girl-child is there to insist upon recognition of her humanness so that she may more effectively fulfill her role as a positive and responsible co-partner in the overall African struggle (Weems-Hudson, 2002). Emerging from the preceding opinion is the contention that the African girl-child needs not be physically and sexually harassed, abused and exploited in her bid to fight against poverty.

This paper feels that the African girl-child draws her roots from the philosophy of feminism. According to Kenilworth (2006) the aim of feminism is to emancipate and empower women and other subordinate groups in societies on the basis of gender, age, class, race, ethnicity and other divisions in society. It takes women as the primary subjects of investigation. In the context of this paper this feminist description suits the African girl-child who seeks emancipation from mental, physical, racial, ethnic, class, and gender slavery. Ritzer (2000) underlines the preceding view by pointing out that feminism understands gender inequalities by examining women's roles, lived experiences and feminist perspectives in various fields. Feminism is therefore a critique to social relations from a woman's point of view to provide a background for the promotion of human rights, interests and issues. This critical analysis and empowering is often called the Enlightenment project (Ritzer, 2000). The key questions that feminists seek to answer are descriptive, evaluative and qualifying in content. These questions according to Ritzer are: What about women? Why is the situation as it is? What about differences among the women? She is also looking for empowerment so that she can equally participate in national development issues with men. It is against this background that the reader audience shall find the focus on the African girl-child taking centre-stage throughout the discourse.

What is Poverty?

The World Bank (2003) reports that of the world's six billion people, 2.8 billion or nearly half of the world's population live on US \$1 per day. The figure of US \$1 per day is considered a poverty line for defining absolute poverty and 44% of the absolute poor people in South Asia. The World Bank further suggests that poverty characterises itself with powerlessness, voicelessness, vulnerability and fear factors for which there are no readily available metrics. The Nobel laureate, Sen (1999), meanwhile describes poverty using what he referred to as the "capability" approach which implies an absence of freedom to participate in economic life leading to a deprivation in the range of things needed to act independently for productivity or personal welfare consumption. Similarly, Agyapong (2010) views poverty as a condition or state of financial wretchedness in a man's life, which one cannot meet basic and essential needs such as food, clothing and shelter. In the context of education, Todaro and Smith (2005) indicate the assumption that people tend to hold with regards an uneducated person is that a man without education is always jobless and a thief. If that person happens to be a woman it will not be surprising to learn that she will be referred to as a prostitute and parasite. In such instances, keeping away people from their basic human right to education is associated with dehumanising and disempowering consequences, which are in case of women against the virtues of African Womanism. In this regard; low levels of education reduce an individual's capacity to combat discriminating customs. Poverty exists in cases where people regardless of gender are denied access to educational opportunities of any level of education. This paper plausibly adopts the perception that poverty entails one's inadequacy in financial wealth, lack of property ownership, lack of information and deprivation of basic necessities in life such as food, shelter, primary education, clothes and minimum health care facilities. The same paper still accepts the opinion that poverty could also be taken to mean deprivations of people including the African girl-child from political participation, education, economic empowerment programmes and information needed to participate in the wider society at local, national or global levels.

Factors that appear to deprive the African girl-child Education

Factors which seem to stifle the African girl-child's access to education are far from resulting from colonial and post-independence policies. This is particularly noted in the Ghana's Education Department Report of 1938/39 as to the effect that the education of girls was far removed from local life and giving the girl-child nothing with which could be of real value to them (Bening, 1990:95). Despite these factors, it is common cause that some few girls have had access to education. While this deprivation of the African girl-child within the context of education has been largely viewed as emanating from pre-independence and post-independence policies, there are also cultural factors that need to be taken cognisance of.

Seemingly relevant to the Zimbabwean situation, Wolf and Odonkor (1998) argue that the cultural dimension that often draw boundaries for changes are not specific while customs and traditions which form an integral part of a people usually are used to perpetuate situations which subordinate women to men by the same token. Ghana District News (2007) in Fant (2008) observations that try to underline how cultural factors stifle girl-child access to education;

- For example, the District Education Director remarked about the cultural norms that do not allow the girl child to enroll and complete schooling.
- Girls' education in the Bunkpurugu/Yunyoo District is under threat because some parents are betrothing their girls in junior secondary schools to men and also replacing girls with boys at the primary level.
- The practice does not only deny girls the needed education to unearth their talents, but also jeopardises their lives in the long run, making them misfits.

This paper, therefore, demonstrates how traditional cultural practices that marginalise the African girl-child access to education could worsen the poverty, situation in Zimbabwe. While basic primary education in Zimbabwe is compulsory, the girl-child may still be denied access to education because parents are not legally sued for not sending their children to school. Furthermore, parents who betroth their girl-children to men are rarely legally tried and arrested for violating their children's human rights. They cut short and destroy the girl-child's future and potential to contribute to national development, thus, letting down the girl-child's capacity to fight against and eliminate poverty. Such girls will have no future and humanity.

Different cultures construct gender categories differently and symbolise male, female and their relations differently; there is little doubt that distinctions along gender lines are universally made (Fant, 2008). Cultures view their gender differently. Pauline and Tembon (1999) say that socio-cultural attitudes and traditions often determine the

status of girls will eventually marry and become house wives means that mothers consider what they learn at home as important, if not important than what they learn at school. Through Marxist feminism, Mosen (1993) a family and social organization are viewed in a negative way. For example in Zimbabwe, women and children are the bulk of the potential labourers. Capitalist initiatives that have been dominated by men thrived on ownership and control of women and children as a pool of cheap labour, usually unpaid. Capitalists would argue that gender oppression is class oppression maintained because it serves class or capitalists into the ruling class (men). Therefore, according to Fant (2008), the norm would be for girls to stay closer to their mothers as they grow up and learn household skills to stay closer to their mothers and learn household skills and behaviours to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers. In some Zimbabwean societies, girls are not allowed to go to school. Girls are born for boys. It is enough for a girl if she knows how to cook and how to keep houses well. The belief in sending the girl-child to school would be a sign of impoverishing her family, while at the same time enriching her future in-laws. In some cases, where families are financially challenged, given the opportunity to send either the boy-child or the girl-child to school, they tend to prefer to send the former to the latter. There is a tendency of believing that the boy-child has more capacity, responsibility and authority to look after their families, relatives and communities even after they get married. However, in view of rapid urbanization, this could be contestable on the grounds that some boy-children appear to be settling in the cities, thereby, neglecting their assumed responsibilities. To make matters worse, some boys have detached themselves from rural areas, thereby, exacerbating poverty levels in their societies. What is apparent from a progressive society's point of view is the fact that access to education should never be gender discriminating. Sending the girl-child to school economically empowers everybody in the nation, hence the relevance of the old adage, 'if you educate a man you educate one person and if you educate a woman you educate the whole nation'. This point however may be contested from a masculinity perspective on the assumption that if you educate a man you will have educated the whole nation. In some Zimbabwean societies, the boy-child will eventually grow into a man who will possess a very big heart for not only his immediate family members, but the extended family. As a man, usually regarded a bread winner, he can play a big part in facilitating the empowerment of everyone through funding the education of the extended family members, both from his side and those from the in-laws. Interestingly, a girl-child is viewed as a co-partner in both theory and practice, but with varying degrees of positivity depending on who will be assessing and rating them in society. Under normal circumstances, a married African girl-child is believed to be well cultured and focused to such an extent that she will mutually complement the husband's role to empower relatives from both sides through education. This role appears to be more enhanced if the girl-child has attained very high levels of education. She will be in a position to appreciate the need to provide relatives with good education. Thus, society will not suffer from poverty, and otherwise, the society will be relegated to abject poverty in cases where the African girl-child is deprived access to educational opportunities.

Historic marginalisation is one other considered factor that may hinder the African girl-child's education. According to Huggins and Randell (2007), Rwandese girls and women have historically been marginalised from the education system, and from participating in public life more broadly because girls' schools were introduced a full 40 years after boys'. The same authors go on to say initially, girls' education focused on developing skills which reinforced their socialized roles such as secretarial skills, home economics and general hygiene-while boys were prepared to be co-partners in administration activities and other development. Young men also enjoyed favoured access at higher levels and in different fields, including administration, science and technology. Perhaps this may explain why most of the post-independent Zimbabwe's key posts in the Public Sector, Industry and Commerce were a preserve of men for quite a long time.

Gender-based curriculum and teaching methods, according to Huggins and Randell (2007) and Fant (2008) appear to be a major barrier in girls' education as the education is existing in a masculinised school environment: curriculum, classroom buildings, and assessment methods, among other attributes-are all consistently tailored to male students. Moreover, in Rwanda, there is a lack of female teachers or role models for girls (Huggins and Randell, 2007). This scenario is somehow different in the Zimbabwean urban schools which are staffed with more female teachers than their male counterparts. What remains to be explored in future studies is the degree to which female teachers in Zimbabwe have the capacity, influence and commitment to play and provide the role model for the girls. The paper is content that teachers must become change in the life of people in their societies. Teachers have the power to influence societal perceptions through the curriculum, teaching methods, research and interaction with the society. Education of the African girl-child remains a dream rather than a reality if school environments are to remain masculinised.

One other factor that tends to work against African girl-children's education is lack of facilities. Many schools in Rwanda, Mozambique and Malawi, for instance, do not have adequate dormitory and sanitary facilities, and many do not have separate facilities for boys and girls (Huggins and Randell, 2007; Maluwa- Banda, 2003; http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/pga/pdf/Internationalisation_2006.pdf). It is common knowledge that some rural and urban families in Zimbabwe so much poor to the extent of not being able to buy sanitary napkins for girls. This results in having many African girl-children staying away from schooling during menstruation periods, causing high rates of absenteeism. Such a scenario eventually affects African girl-children's performance in both classroom standardized tests and examinations.

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a widespread problem in Rwanda, as it is throughout the Sub-Saharan Africa Region (Huggins and Randell, 2007). Girls who are subjected to abuse, harassment and violence at home and at school or in their communities, regardless of their background suffer from trauma, causing them to perform worse in their studies (Huggins and Randell, 2007). This paper particularises the preceding situations in the Zimbabwean context by contending that girls who encounter violence or intimidation at their schools may feel afraid to attend school, and may decide to abandon or drop out of school. In this regard, physical, emotional, verbal and sexual abuse of the African girl-child at either home, school or in society act as a deterrent to the African girl-child's desire to access and attend education. As a result of GBV, it will not be surprising to learn that the African girl-children will be under-represented in the educational institutions of all levels. Thus, they will be deprived of a basic human right. The African girl-children will be victims of poverty as a result of inadequate or lack of education. They become disempowered and hardly functional in a dynamic environment.

Masculine domination of the sociology of knowledge seemed to take charge before rise of feminism. Frazer (2000) explains that feminists argue that women are 'knowers'. Therefore, they can write their social experiences in a better way than the men. In the past men were viewed as better scholars than women. In Frazer (2000) feminists explain that Sociology as a discipline is a suspect because it is a science of society yet it represents one side, that happens to be the side of men. For instance, sociology is said to be a result of the 'fathers' of Sociology such as Comte, Durkheim and Marx Weber. However, one might need to ask the question: Where were the women when the fathers of sociology were studying and writing about society? In the interests of this paper, the authors would not like to ask the question: Where is the African girl-child when the boy-child is accessing education of any level at will? The paper shall explore the possibilities of not having knowledge monopolised along gender lines.

How depriving the African-girl child basic (primary) education may be the surest and quickest passport to poverty.

Depriving children education is one of the worst curses in people's lives. It therefore follows that any deprivations of the African girl-child from educational opportunities are bound to meet more costs than benefits. Seemingly confirming this view, Dollar and Roberta (1999), in their study on Gender Inequality and Growth found out that nations under invest in girls' basic education grow more slowly. They also found out that this kind of under investment is often attributed to religious or social customs and that market failures result in a failure to invest in the girl-child education. Implied by these two definitions is the existence of poverty as a result of the African girl-child's lack of education. In another related study, Klassen (1999)-"Does Gender Inequality Affect Growth and Development?" found out that the growth rates in East Asia, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East had different growth rates attributed to gender inequality in basic education. Klassen (1999) further observed that inequality in accessing education hinders progress towards reduction of fertility and mortality rates. The foregoing results tend to indicate huge costs that a nation like Zimbabwe is likely to incur, if the African girl-child is deprived of her human right to access basic education. This paper notes that uneducated girl-children will have limited knowledge on the use of contraceptives and other recommended child spacing methods and practices. They will also not be conversant with child nutritional and sanitary health. Above all, they may not appreciate the need to take children under the age five to the nearest health centre for free medical checkup and health monitoring once every month. Therefore; the African girl-child's lack of education becomes a fountain of otherwise avoidable poverty in the preceding cases.

Denying the African girl-child access to basic education will ensure that countries lag behind in their pursuit of economic development. The following perceived benefits that African nations may remain a pipe dream if the girl-child is deprived of the opportunities to access primary education. Poverty will be a sure case if a nation has uneducated citizens. First, according to UNICEF (1997), primary education is central to the improvement of the

quality of life. In the context of this paper, provision of primary education is assumed with the benefits of improved living conditions, lowered infant mortality and improved educational attainment of the next generation. By so doing, chances for economic and social well-being of a country's citizens are further enhanced. This paper adopts the position that in the absence of the African girl-child's education, the aforementioned benefits of education tend to remain a wish rather than a reality. In that regard, any African nation that ignores the importance of sending the girl-child to school runs the risk of impoverishing itself and its citizens.

Africa does not only lose in terms of improved living conditions, but also in the field of agriculture. In our paper, we are content that stifling the African girl-child's access to education may have unpleasing consequences on agricultural productivity. African countries most of which are agro-based may miss their economic development targets if ever they resort to the practice of marginalizing their girl-children's education. It will not be surprising to learn that such countries will fail to escape from poverty solely because of their failure to realize the contributions of education to agriculture. Subscribing to the preceding view, UNICEF (1997) contends that research has shown that primary education, regardless of its basic status, can improve agricultural productivity, enhance status of women, influence environmental protection, and generally raise the standard of living. The following five points help to demonstrate the degree to which nations which stifle girl-child access to basic education could quickly head for poverty by their failure to realise the benefits accrued from a pronounced relationship between basic education and productivity.

- First, four to six years of primary education is the minimum threshold for increasing agricultural productivity.
- Second, literacy and numeracy allow farmers to adopt new agricultural methods, cope with risks and respond to new market signals.
- Third, literacy helps farmers to mix and apply chemicals (such as fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides) according to manufacturers' directions, thereby, reducing risks to the environment and human and animal health.
- Fourth, a basic education helps farmers to gain title to their land and apply for credit at banks and other money lending institutions.
- Finally, the effects of basic education are at their greatest when the proportion of females is educated to threshold levels that equal that of males. This fifth point confirms earlier findings by Psacharopoulos and Woodwall (1986) who found out that female Kenyan farmers were more productive farmers than their counterparts who had had no access to formal basic education.

The bone of contention in this paper is that ignorance is a disease and education is a curative process. A careful consideration of the above pointed out reasons for highly regarding the need for African countries to promote the girl-child education as a vehicle for economic development is of great necessity if poverty is to be alleviated. Therefore, denying a nation's citizens opportunities to access basic education is a surest and quickest passport to condemn them to economic backwardness, doom and poverty.

How depriving the African girl-child secondary education could be a surest and quickest passport to poverty.

While primary education lays the foundation for economic development of any nation, it is irrefutable that secondary education refines those means and ways that enhance the pursuit of economic development. According to World Bank (2002), secondary education creates pathways for opportunities and benefits of economic, social and political development. It is this paper's view that secondary schools produce better informed citizens than primary schools. According to World Bank (1998) globalisation and the increasing demand for more sophisticated labour force combined with the growth of knowledge-based economies give a sense of urgency to the demand for secondary education. In Zimbabwe and beyond; a female secondary graduate is more knowledgeable; trainable and employable than her primary school compatriot. All things being equal, it can be argued that if the two school leavers are to be employed for same job, it is assumed that a secondary school leaver would be more productive than a primary school leaver. We feel that any African nation is bound to reach alarming poverty levels if it elbows out the girl-child from accessing secondary school education. Such a practice would limit the numbers of females entering tertiary education and the labour market. In essence, the chances for those countries to have more women being gainfully employed so that they are able to look after their families and be able to contribute to the tax revenue base will be insignificant. Under such a scenario, both the individual and the nation will be poor.

World Bank (2007) recognises the critical role of secondary school education to economic, social and human capital development of the nations around the world. This paper notes that any attempts by a nation to deny the girl-child access to secondary school education are a recipe for poverty, disaster and lack of development. It may be argued that the African girl-child when given the opportunity to attend secondary school education could capitalise on opportunities for further education and career development to flee from poverty and its dire consequences. Secondary school education is the gateway to the girl-child's access to tertiary education and university education, thereby, producing a highly trained, skilled and qualified labour force. The argument here is that secondary school education is the link between primary schooling, tertiary education institutions and universities. The escape route from poverty tends to be blocked if the girl-child's desires for a secondary education are not taken on board by developing nations like Zimbabwe and her African accomplices. The nations that ignore girl-child's secondary education are likely to run the risk of being left worse-off in terms of poverty than they were supposed to be if their girl-children had accessed secondary education.

The African girl-child's access to secondary education should never be undermined. In an attempt to emphasise this point, UNICEF (2007) and World Bank (2007), concur that secondary education is really necessary in developing countries' economies in the wake of globalization and competitiveness in the information age. This is of the view that Zimbabwe is a knowledge-based economy which should never be left behind in terms of information. The recent good news is that Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rates in Africa. Perhaps what are yet to be established empirically are the literacy rates of the girl-child in connection with her access to secondary school education. It may not be disputed that developing countries are poverty-bound if they fail to offer the girl-child secondary education in a number of ways. First, the absence of information negatively impacts on economic development. Lack of information on reproductive, infant and nutritional health, maternal and sanitary health is indicative of very big signs of poverty. These poverty indicators lower the living standards of people. The quality of life of a people is compromised. Also such indicators of poverty appear to be costly to the national budget allocations. In practice, the state may be forced to set aside huge budgets for the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare at the expense of funding other productive sectors of the economy such as mining, tourism, agriculture, forestry and manufacturing industry.

Summers (1994) who carried out a study on "Investing in all People: Educating Women in Developing Countries," established that investing in women's secondary education is one of the most highly regarded tools for dealing with poverty. Echoing the same sentiments with Summers are Huggins and Randell (2007) who point out that educating women is fundamental to economic development and poverty reduction within the region, to promoting women's human rights, and is intrinsically linked to improving other development indicators, such as reducing maternal and child mortality rates, reducing birth rates, and reducing basic health indicators of entire families. In addition when a gender fair approach to education is employed lives can be saved and protected with a greater degree of proportionality because of achievements in fewer people dying, falling sick, or suffering deprivation will benefit women and men in better proportion to their relative suffering (Sweetman, 2001:11). In the light of these findings, this paper contends that stifling the African girl-child's access to secondary education would make Africa than what is expected of her. Arguably, the female citizens and their offspring will not be aware of the effects of environmental pollution. They might not see anything wrong with dumping litter on land and in water. Worse still, they may not value the need for not polluting the atmosphere with smoke and harmful gases. Above all, they may not appreciate the need to live in a noise free environment. All these effects of lack of secondary education on the part of the African girl-child could undermine a nation's quality of health. When a nation's health status is compromised it follows that her citizens are poor. Thus, the governments will be forced to come up with supplementary health budgets. Furthermore, female and male students without secondary education may lack information on HIV and AIDS. This lack of information is bound to make such students to engage in promiscuous activities which ultimately defeat the nation's intent to control and fight against HIV and AIDS. The nation becomes poorer because it will be directing financial resources to health at the expense of other competing public social services such as transport, housing, social amenities and education-which are indicators of development rather than poverty. In a bid to avert this catastrophe, wise leaders of African nations consciously champion the need to promote accelerated girl-child education.

How depriving the African girl-child tertiary education is a surest and quickest passport to poverty.

This presentation contends that tertiary education is a pre-requisite for economic development of any nation. Our paper is of the belief that any deprivation of tertiary education from the African girl-child will automatically slam

the door on the face and shoot down the following research evidence regarding the benefits of tertiary education in a girl-child. According to Mortenson (1999), tertiary education associates itself with these beneficial activities and behaviours. Tertiary education graduates are:

- More likely to volunteer work. This paper argues that tertiary education graduates value work and are aware of the benefits of work. Therefore, any failure to promote girl-child access to tertiary education could result in having a society that lacks work ethics and values.
- Less likely to smoke. Our paper contends that while there are other tertiary education graduates who smoke, most of them are aware of the health hazards posed by smoking. In this regard, keeping away the girl-child from tertiary education could endanger the society as more people may smoke without realising the hazardous effects of smoking. Therefore, tertiary education may be associated with increased understanding of the dangers associated with smoking.
- More likely to use the internet and computers. African girl-children in primary and secondary education sectors are less likely to use the internet than the tertiary education ones. They are more empowered with the ability to access more information about health, social life, economy and politics on the internet and communicate with other people at global level. We believe that lack of information makes people suffer from poverty. People could be an endangered species as a result of lack of information. Women may get used, misused and abused by politicians who may bend on advancing their own selfish ends regardless of security and well-being of the electorate. Through education all citizens are empowered to make the right decisions regarding choosing community and political leaders. That way, they become an informed electorate. The chances of a life with dignity for both women and men are bound to be increased if women are to be educated because women will have greater control over their situation during crisis and hopefully in the long term (Sweetman, 2001). Everything being equal they can also meaningfully contribute to the constitution building process without fear and reservations.
- More likely to exercise. The present paper is of the view that some tertiary education graduates are more likely to value the need for one to exercise one's body than primary and secondary school graduates. It is against this assumption that this paper observes that any failure to expose girl-children to tertiary education is a deliberate step towards poverty. It is common knowledge that people who lack exercises are both prone and susceptible to ill-health and disease. By implication, a nation is forced draw a big share from the ever diminishing national cake at the expense of the competing demands from the other Public Service Departments.
- More likely to buy and read newspapers, magazines and books. The current think held by this paper is that the higher one climbs up the ladder of education, the more and better one becomes aware of one's surroundings. The present authors feel that lack of tertiary education among African girl-children clouds them with a dark cloud of ignorance. They are less likely to be conscious of what is happening around them. They are not empowered with research skills that enable to solve problems that impoverish them. It is only through research that they will be able to become poverty-life related challenges problem solvers. They will be able to employ tried and tested ideas to solve problems that that they experience in their environments.

By the same token, UNICEF (1997) aptly observed that tertiary education is associated with benefits that characterise themselves in life altering ways which consciously seek to alleviate poverty. Chief among them include some of the following:

- An educated woman gains a higher status and an enhanced sense of efficacy.
- She tends to marry later and have a greater bargaining and success in the "marriage market".
- She tends to have fewer and healthier children.
- An educated woman a smaller family size and seek health care when necessary to do so.
- An educated woman has high education and career expectations for her children.
- For females, education profoundly changes their lives, how they interact with society, and their economic status.
- Educating a woman creates more equitable lives for women and their families.
- Furthermore, it increases their ability to participate in community decision making and work towards achieving sustainable goals.
- Above all, education increases woman participation and earnings as well as increasing productivity for employers, yielding benefits for the community and the economy.

This presentation accentuates that the above benefits of tertiary education are consistent with the intents of Africana Womanism which preaches the gospel of empowering women in all spheres of life. In cases where the African girl-child denied access to tertiary education, the realization of the above benefits of tertiary education becomes elusive. When that has taken place, we can safely deduce that depriving the African girl-child education is the surest and quickest passport to poverty.

In Abdi (2006), people greatly value education not necessarily for its direct utilitarian or economic purposes only, but for its overall contributions to the socio-cultural and other community based advancements. Tertiary education has the capacity to bestow the individual and the society at large. In the same direction, Folsom (2006) exhorts that education has led to the creation socio-political consciousness among people in both rural and urban areas. Also Sweetman (2001) notes that the overall capacities of communities to prepare for and cope with future disasters will be enhanced through harnessing the resources and active participation of both women and men. The preceding three-fold observation entails the concern that denying the African girl-child a basic human right to education in favour of the boy-child is an absolute curse for any nation to an irredeemable poverty.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing discussion, the following conclusions are drawn.

- Education empowers women in the same way it does to men. It is critical tool for a society interested in pursuing the philosophy of Africana Womanism. When women are empowered, they are bound to help some countries to increase and sustain economic development. This will help nations to escape from poverty.
- When given more human rights and opportunities, African girl-children as women begin to receive more education, and thus increasing the overall human capital of the country. The human capital is assumed to be a vehicle for nation to drive poverty away as people will be gainfully employed and having very high earnings.
- When given more educational opportunities at all levels, more women are seen to be able to act more responsibly in helping people in the family and in their societies. This is because an African girl-child in the context of Africana Womanism is not a selfish person since she is both a family and a community person.
- When better educated, more women appear to be in control of their lives and are more successful in bringing down rapid population growth because they tend to have more than family planning issues. The belief is that large families are generally prone to poverty. They tend to lack basic needs.
- This paper bears in mind that the relationship between the provision non-gender discriminatory education and poverty is quite clear. Educated people including women tend to have higher earning potential and are better able to improve the quality of their lives. Such people are less likely to be marginalised within their societies. Lack of African girl-child education results in gender based poverty.
- Education empowers a person regardless of gender and it helps them to become more proactive, gain control over their lives and broaden their available options (UNESCO, 1997). They become masters of their destiny. They are able to be self-reliant and self-sufficient. They do away with a dependency syndrome that usually enslaves them to men.
- Education is considered as a basic human right and is closely related to virtually all dimensions namely, physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, morally, economically and politically. Through education women know what is best for them rather than what men claim to be best for women. They know very well how to use education as a weapon to fight against poverty.
- Education is a key factor in improving the quality of governance that has a significant impact on national income, thereby, exhibiting African girl-children's intentions to deal with poverty.
- Since women and children are more likely to be malnourished and less likely to receive medical services, clean water, sanitation, and other benefits. Education for the African girl-child could be pathway for poverty alleviation. Education awakens African girls' minds to the extent that they are empowered to actively take part in policy analysis, implementation and evaluation of national policies and programmes that directly affect their day-to-day quality of life.
- Expanding African girl children's education, for example, has a positive effect on fertility, infant mortality, and nutrition and enrolment rates of the next generation.
- Keeping children in school for a long while is a commendable strategy for reducing child labour.

- Educating more girls and boys means that more people have easier access to information about disease (such as HIV and AIDS prevention) and other life threatening diseases (malaria, diarrhea, cholera, dysentery), as well as other public health issues.
- This paper has also noted that educated African girl-children are capable of taking better care of the children and have easier access to formal sector employment, social and other benefits. It is no surprise, therefore, that empowerment of women through the promotion of gender equality and elimination of gender disparities in primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors is crucial factor to poverty reduction, a message fully conveyed by the World Development Report (World Bank, 2001).
- If Africans want to remain perpetually poor and beggars, they do not have to send their girl-children to school. If they entertain any hopes of hopping the ladder of progress and development, they need to send all their children to school.
- African countries that deny girl-children's access to education will be shooting themselves in the foot in regard to poverty. Their societies remain ignorant, barbaric and vandals. They do not value public property; hence, destruction of public property is rife. Therefore, the society and the nation are further impoverished as the public will be called upon to pay more tax in order to repair destroyed property.
- If African societies want to perpetuate gender stereotyping, they do not have to send their children to school. Such societies are poor in their own mindsets because women are supposed to apologise for their strengths, while men apologise for their weaknesses. Women remain subordinate to men forever much to the detriment of the development of the society.
- If society does not appreciate the need for an educated African girl-child electorate in favour of a society that is likely to be easily manipulated, misused, abused and exploited by other empowered members of the society, it signifies existence of poverty.
- All kinds of education are supposed to reflect human capacity to reason, to decide and to act rationally. By implication, any human being in any society needs to be exposed to education if that person is supposed to actively participate in the developmental process of the society and nation at large. In practice, most of us Africans are yet to grasp this reality.

Recommendations

In view of the preceding presentation and conclusions, the ensuing recommendations are made.

In order to promote gender equality empowering women and promote the education of the African girl-child it is necessary to note:

- The need to allocate adequate resources to all levels of education.
- The need to construct new schools and colleges in resettled areas in Zimbabwe.
- The need to resuscitate adult learning programmes that may enhance literacy and numeracy among adult learners.
- The practice of ensuring that the government monitors enrolments and provides adequate support schemes to prevent high girl-child dropout rates. This implies monitoring completion rates in order to increase them.
- Those other indicators pertain to the participation of women in the broad field involving decision making. This about considering the percentage of women civil service positions as well as the percentage of women in Parliament and local government today. Such women are bound to be role models for other girl-children who look up to them for inspiration and motivation. Good examples to underscore this recommendation are the Zimbabwean Vice President, Comrade Joyce Mujuru; Deputy Prime Minister, Mrs. Thokozani Khupe; academics such as the Zimbabwe Open University's Vice Chancellor, Doctor Primrose Kurasha and the University of Zimbabwe's Pro Vice Chancellor, Professor Chipo Dyanda and Women's University of Africa's Chancellor, Professor Hope Sadza and Africa University's Dean of Students, Doctor Ellen Gwaradzimba to name a few key female role model personalities in Zimbabwe.
- Putting in place a broad based economic growth and development strategy in favour of the poor and that supports women empowerment.
- Emphasising the gender and human rights approach to HIV and AIDS interventions at all levels of is central to poverty alleviation.
- Building the national capacity to mainstream gender and HIV and AIDS into national policies and programmes is crucial in mapping strategies to curb poverty.
- Carrying out country wide advocacy campaigns to eliminate negative societal and cultural attitudes that deprive African girl-children access to education is a critical approach to handle and minimise poverty.

- Providing adequate information on what it costs to eliminate existing gaps between men and women in terms of access to educational opportunities of all levels of education.
- The findings of the present study are far from being exhaustive since the study has been largely qualitative. Therefore; further research using quantitative research approach needs to be carried out at national scale targeting selected primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary education institutions throughout the country. They may go a long way in generating meaningful, credible, authentic and valid knowledge.

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