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Reforming Education in Ghana: A Critique of Gender Reform Policies

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Abstract

The paper presents a critique of gender policies in ongoing basic education reforms in Ghana. Reports, articles, policy documents, and textbooks were analysed to unpack conceptual underpinnings and implications for change. While lauding the reforms for articulating gender concerns explicitly, raising questions on inter-sectionality and proposing curricula review, it was also argued that the stop-gap and deficit approaches to policy framing impeded the structural change necessary for social transformation. Hence, a case was made for the consideration of the Larkin and Staton (1998) transformative equity model, which focuses on questions regarding access, inclusion, climate and empowerment, for confronting the structural impediments.

Since independence, a number of attempts have been made to address the numerous problems in the Ghanaian education system. In fact, every decade has been marked by major reforms that were meant to address problems such as low participation, curriculum dysfunctionality, gender gaps, rural-urban dichotomy and rich-poor disparities (Education Advisory Committee, 1972; Education Commission, 1986; Fobih, Koomson & Godwyll, 1995). Notable among them were the Accelerated Development Plan on Education of the 1950s, Universal Primary Education Initiative of the 1960s, Dzobo Reforms of 1970s and Anfom Reforms of the 1980s (Antwi, 1992; McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975). These efforts have, however, not been very successful in addressing the problems that they were intended to address. For instance, in 1984, in a message mandating the newly constituted Education Commission (i.e., the Anfom Commission) to draw up new proposals for reform in education, it was reported that:

The fundamental message of his [Chairman Rawlings] inaugural address was that our children must "grow up free from the stultifying

influence of the educational oppression, which has prevailed for long." He observed that a system which denies the majority of children equal opportunities, which values conformity before creativity and which encourages self-interest cannot be described as anything other than oppressive. He, therefore, charged the Commission to formulate "recommendations of national policy on education such as will enable the realisation of the objectives of the revolutionary transformation of the society in the interest of social justice." (Fobih et. al., 1995, p. 66)

Drawing from past and ongoing initiatives, the Education Commission presented some proposals that were aimed at addressing the problems of Ghanaian education more seriously (Education Commission, 1986). The central focus of the resulting report was on the democratisation of education for the social transformation of the Ghanaian society. This was to result in the revision of the then New Content and Structure of Education that had been proposed by the Dzobo Committee (i.e., the Education Advisory Committee) a decade earlier (Education Commission, 1986). Although the grave gender gaps were acknowledged, the proposed democratisation process did not include explicit statements on gender questions. Indeed, it can be concluded that questions about gender were not deemed critical. Consequently, it is being argued that prior to the 1990s gender questions were not central to the reforms. Rather, gender questions were peripheral to the education reform process. Although a very important initiative, namely, the Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (STME) programme had been initiated in 1987 to address gender gaps in the sciences, this was an isolated attempt rather than part of a comprehensive project of gender reform (Girls' Education Unit, 2000; Atakpa, 1995).

The lack of explicit policies and a comprehensive programme of reform can be said to have accounted for the situation depicted in the following claims:

> ...In spite of all the efforts that successive governments of this country [Ghana] as well as institutions and organisations have been making since independence to ensure that all children of school-going age go to school and complete at least basic education, gaps still exist between boys and girls in admission, enrolment and retention rates. These gaps grow larger especially in the northern sector of the country and as one goes up successive grades and

levels.... This situation is at variance with government's commitment to providing a basis for social justice and equality of opportunities to all. In view of this, there is the need to pay special attention to the problem of girls' education (Ghana Government, 1994. p. 5).

A year later, the following gloomy picture was painted regarding the persistent gender disparities in education:

Adult literacy is estimated at 53% of the adult population (15 years and above) but varies considerably between men and women, their respective rates being 64% and 42%. Primary and secondary school enrolment rates amount to 77% and 38% (respectively) of the population in the relevant age groups. Again the rates are higher for males than for females and the discrepancy widens as one ascends the educational ladder: a male-to-female ratio of 55:45 in primary school and 67:33 in senior secondary school. (Ghana Government, 1995, p.7)

This gloomy picture has been the subject of concern in many educational and development fora in the 1990s (Atakpa, 1995; Dolphyne, 1991; Girls' Education Unit, 2000; Nikoi, 1998). During such fora the significance of female education to the national development process was underscored. In fact, it was in one such fora that a Deputy Director of Education observed that:

The fact should not be lost that the full participation of women is essential to achieve sustainable development. Research has proved that women's education is the single important path to higher productivity, lower infant mortality and morbidity. Government is therefore convinced that by equipping the girl-child with the tool of education we are not only tapping the potential of our country's most valuable yet marginalized resources but we would be paving an effective way of breaking the vicious cycle of ignorance, exploitation, poverty, hunger and diseases that hold developing nations in bondage. (Tete-Enyo, 1997, p. 18)

The role of education in general and female education in particular, in national development cannot be overemphasised. Women as a category that occupy the margins of our socio-economic system are prone to suffer the problems outlined in Tete-Enyo's statement above. Initiatives such as the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies, Beijing Platform of Action, Abuja Declaration, Lagos Plan of Action, Khartoum Declaration and Arusha Strategies underscore the urgency of women's concerns regarding development in general and education in particular (Dolphyne Nikoi, 1998;, 1991).

It is indisputable that as a result of prior discussions and initiatives some action was taken resulting in increases in overall enrolment figures (Girls' Education Unit, 2000; Tete-Enyo, 1997; Ghana Government, 1995). However, the gaps remain too wide and far from elimination. For instance, in a millennium campaign in support of female education in Ghana, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) observed:

> In Ghana, in spite of the general improvement in enrolment at the primary school level, girls' education continues to be plagued by high drop-out rates between P2 and JSS 3 and low transition rates from JSS [Junior Secondary School] to SSS [Senior Secondary School], particularly in the rural areas. Currently, Primary School enrolment rate for girls stands around 47%, JSS 42% and SSS 37%. In the five (5) Universities, female students constitute only about 28% of the total enrolment. (FAWE, 2000, p. 1)

The above statistics are indicative of the sluggishness of progress toward gender parity in education. It also raises several questions regarding the gender reform policies and programme. It raises questions, among others, about the continued appeal to universalising principles, the distribution of resources, efficacy of programmes and the framing of policies. While all questions are attractive and necessitate critical analysis, acting within the confines of this paper, emphasis is placed on policy issues only.

Gender Reform Policies

The gender reform policies are a reflection of the overall educational goal of improving the quantity and quality of education as well as fostering social justice. This is better captured in the policy document of the Basic Education Sector Improvement Programme, also called the Free Compulsory Basic Education (FCUBE) initiative, as follows:

> The long-term goal of the initiative to which FCUBE will contribute is an empowered citizenry effectively participating in the civic, social and economic life of the country. The government is committed to ensuring that all of its citizens participate in the political, social and economic life of the country, regardless of the geographic region in which they live, their *gender*, religion or ethnicity. The central goal of the education system in Ghana is to ensure that *all citizens* are equipped with the fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to be full stakeholders in and beneficiaries of development. (Ghana Government, 1996, p. 15, emphasis added).

This policy statement paved the way for tackling gender questions in the education system more seriously as compared to previous initiatives. For instance, it was stated explicitly in the FCUBE policy document that "special attention will be given to promoting access for girls, the poor and rural children to basic education" (Ghana Government, 1996, p. 38). The strategies identified for achieving this policy goal were as follows: (a) Institution of Girls in Poor Families Scholarship Schemes, (b) Increasing of admission of women into initial teacher training colleges, (c) Provision of accommodation facilities for women teachers posted to remote areas, (d) Addressing of gender concerns in teacher training curriculum and Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) textbook and syllabi production, (e) Enhancement of Science Technology and Mathematics Education (STME) for girls and, (f) Social mobilisation to increase girls' participation in education, promote local participation in education and increase school-based community improvement programmes (Ghana Government, 1996).

As part of the process of realising the reform goal, a number of actions were stipulated to accompany each of the strategies. These stipulations were to guide practice as made evident in the following section.

The Gender Reform Policies in Practice

Although the focus of this paper is not practice, a brief look at practice will help further the policy analysis intent. Practice is framed here in terms of policy stipulations and actions. The discussions are drawn from various sources including briefs, reports, policy documents and reviews (Apusigah, 2002; Girls' Education Unit, 2000, 1999; Ghana Government, 1994/1996,). Four significant areas of practice emerge from the examination.

Support for female students.

Support for female students has taken the form of scholarship for girls in poor families. This line of support was aimed at providing financial aid for girls from deprived backgrounds to buy school uniforms and supplies. At the governmental level, the concept was piloted, initially, as part of the Primary Education Programme (Ghana Government, 1994). The reported success of the scheme enticed policy makers to try it on a national scale as part of the FCUBE initiative. Unlike the pilot project, which was supported by externally generated funds, the expanded programme was to be supported by District Assemblies. In addition to the special scholarship scheme, "all districts will be made to sign a formal undertaking to allocate 50% of all forms of scholarships awarded by the District Assemblies to girls. This will ensure that costs are lowered to parents to send their girls to school" (Ghana Government, 1996, p. 39).

Complementing the efforts of the District Assemblies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) agencies embraced the policy by instituting various educational scholarships for "needy but brilliant girls." Key NGOs supporting this endeavour include Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives, The Roman Catholic Church, Forum of African Women Educationalists, World Vision International and Action Aid Ghana.

<u>Role models and mentors.</u>

Recognising the significance of role modelling and mentorship for female students, the gender reforms sought to increase the number of female teachers in the education system. As a result, the training of female teachers was to be intensified and their retention in the education system ensured. In a brief, the Girls' Education Unit (2000) revealed that in 1991/92 female teachers formed only 36.8 % and 21.5% of the total number of teachers in primary and junior secondary schools, respectively. The low rates of female teachers were seen as a major setback to the role modelling and mentorship drive. As a result, reform efforts were aimed at reaching a 50% target by accelerating the pace of the training of female teachers. This was to be achieved through the expansion of existing infrastructure in order to increase the admission rates of female trainees. In furtherance of this cause, District Assemblies were encouraged to sponsor indigenes including females into colleges. On completion, they were required to return to their communities to teach. Fifty percent of those sponsored were to be females.

Both governmental and non-governmental agencies have collaborated in support of this policy goal. For instance, Action Aid Ghana has collaborated with training colleges, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to provide make-up courses for females resulting in the admission of qualifying ones to training colleges. Also, World Vision International has supported female leavers of Senior Secondary Schools with weak grades to undergo remedial classes in order to improve their grades. In collaboration with the Ghana Education Service, these females are offered appointments as teachers, which enables them to earn some income while working toward the improvement of their grades.

As part of the requirement to attract female teachers to rural areas, where there are hardly any models or mentors, conditions in those areas are being improved (Girls' Education Unit, 2000). Incentives such as accommodation and bicycles are being offered to entice teachers including females to stay and teach in rural communities. Accommodation facilities are being built especially in rural areas for teachers.

It is a policy requirement that fifty percent of such accommodation is set aside for female teachers.

Engendering school curriculum.

In appreciation of the effects of school programmes on students, the gender reforms have included the review of the curricula of teacher training colleges and basic schools. This has been aimed at ensuring that the curricula were sensitive to gender issues. It has sought to eliminate sexism and remove stereotypes and bias while ensuring inclusive content and language (Ghana Government, 1994; 1996).

Consequently, review workshops were held and the curriculum reviewed. Selected teachers were trained in the development and use of gender sensitive curriculum. The Girls' Education Unit has also embarked on a consistent programme of removing sexism in the educational system. In collaboration with non-governmental organisations such as Forum for African Women Educationalists and Action Aid Ghana, educational campaigns have been mounted. Posters, bumper stickers, sketches/dramas, music and talks are some of the aids used.

Another dimension of the curriculum reform process is the improvement of female access to Science, Technology and Mathematics subjects (Girls' Education Unit, 2000, Bobi, 2000; Awortwi, 1999). Consequently, the Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (STME) programme was established in 1987. The STME programme predates the FCUBE reforms. At the initial stage, annual clinics were held for 200 girls from selected senior secondary schools across the country. When it became part of the FCUBE reforms, the clinics were expanded to admit more students. The expanded programme has involved the decentralisation of the clinics and inclusion of students from junior secondary schools. As a result, in 1997 and 1998, clinics were held in four zones in the country of which a total of 1050 and 1150 girls, respectively, attended. In 1999 and 2000, the clinics were further decentralised resulting in the holding of clinics in each of the 10 regions of Ghana. From then on clinics have been held in each of the 110 administrative districts of the country. This has made it possible for over 2000 girls, nationally, to benefit from the clinics annually (Bobi, 2000; Girls' Education Unit, 2000).

The clinics provide opportunities for participants to interact among themselves and with role models. They are also taken through workshops, lectures and fields trips that are aimed at encouraging them to choose and pursue careers in the physical sciences. In furtherance of this cause, science teachers are trained in innovative teaching methodologies.

Community involvement.

The gender policy required the mobilisation and sensitisation of communities in support for and promotion of female education. This requirement was informed by studies, which attribute the problem of low female educational enrolment and literacy rates to cultural factors (Daaku, 1999, Girls' Education Unit, 1999; Nikoi, 1998, Dolphyne, 1991). This initiative has involved the use of Participatory Learning Action (PLA) strategies to engage community members in analyses that foster awareness and ginger support for female education. Explaining the relevance of PLA, the Girls' Education Unit (1999) asserted:

> There are many constraints preventing girls from going to school and performing well. It is true that there exist poor classrooms and few teachers: there is also a lack of teaching and learning materials. But we must also acknowledge that parents' attitudes towards education are not always favourable. This is why the GEU is initiating a grassroots approach to community sensitisation aimed at increasing people's awareness of the value of education (p. 1)

Through PLA, community members are invited to critically examine their situation and strategize toward improving it. Specifically, the Girls' Education Unit uses the strategy to enable parents to identify and appreciate the effects of gender-based discrimination on female education (Girls' Education Unit, 1999; Agyeman-Duah, 1999; McAdams, 1999). On impact, Agyeman-Duah (1999) points out that, "PLA will empower [communities] to initiate their own action plans to increase girls enrolment, retention and transition rates"(p. 2).

As part of the campaign to address the problem of low female participation in education in Northern Ghana, between May and July 1999, the Girls' Education Unit organised workshops during which its regional and district officers and community facilitators were trained in the PLA skills. With the assistance of regional and district officers, the community facilitators, in turn, organised training workshops in their communities. The ten selected communities that formed the pilot phase of the project have benefited from the exercise. Reports from field experiences point to enthusiasm and willingness to change (Girls' Education Unit, 2000; Bobi, 2000; Agyeman-Duah, 1999). However, the positive reports have been marred by the inability to implement the project on a larger scale.

Taken together, the policy stipulations and actions did not only generate and intensify interest in gender issues in education, they also led to some improvement in female education (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000; Girls' Education Unit, 2000). However, various analyses show that these developments did not eliminate or close the gender gaps significantly (FAWE, 2000; Girls' Education Unit, 2000; Dolphyne, 1997; Tete-Enyo, 1997). In fact, gaps remain wide requiring serious attention. Various accounts have been advanced to explain the persistent gaps. These include lack of resources, poor supervision, lack of personnel, limited awareness and commitment. While these concerns might be real, a critical view of the framing of the policies raises equally important questions. Yet, very little is said of the policies themselves and/or how they inform and shape practice. Recognising the significance of the policy questions, the rest of the analysis is devoted to critiques of the gender reform policies.

Problematizing the Gender Reform Policies

The gender reform policies have focused on two essential ways of enhancing female education, namely, improving access and participation (Ghana Government, 1994, 1996). Previous analyses revealed that although there were significant disparities between females and males at the entry level, these were more pronounced higher up the educational ladder (Ghana Government, 1994; 1995, Tete-Enyo, 1997). This situation

suggests a low retention rate and a high disengagement rate. The gender reforms were thus aimed at not just attracting girls into schools but also ensuring that they stayed in school long enough to graduate. Although commendable, a critical viewing of the framing of the policies reveals some shortcomings. Discussions of the significant contributions as well as the shortcomings of the policies follow.

Significant Contributions

The gender reform policies are commendable for having been initiated in the first place. As already noted, in spite of the fact that questions regarding gender disparities in the Ghanaian education system were indisputable, no significant efforts were made to address them prior to the FCUBE initiative. The FCUBE was thus a novel endeavour. This novelty lies in the legal basis provided through the issuance of an explicit policy statement with guidelines for the pursuit of gender causes as a national concern. As an official policy, it provides legitimacy for ongoing efforts and paves the way for further action even as the policies attract critiques and reviews. Also, it provides a basis for gender workers to call policy makers on their words.

Another issue worthy of commendation is the effort to address gender issues in school programmes, which resulted in curriculum reviews. This component of gender equity reform is critical for beginning to address some of the structural causes of gender disparities. As well, this novel attempt has rightly recognised the need for gender sensitisation and training for teacher trainees ahead of practice. Hence, gender education was to be provided as part of the pre-service training of teachers. In addition, in-service training was to be given to serving teachers.

Also, for the first time, there was an indication of the recognition of a connection between gender, on one hand, and class, ethnicity and location, on the other. Although this connection was not well articulated to reflect a proper appreciation of the intersectionality of gender, class, ethnicity and location, the mere recognition of this connection is commendable. The proposed Girls' Education Scholarship Scheme reflects such recognition. With time, such schemes and others that might follow

can be better developed to reflect the cross-cutting nature of gender issues. This can be better captured when gender is treated as an integral part of mainstream policy and programme reforms.

In addition, the attempt to increase the number of female teachers in schools is laudable. At least, the endeavour reflects the recognition of the fact that the education system is implicated in the marginalization of females. It constitutes an indirect acknowledgement of the male-centric nature of schools and classrooms. The very presence and support extended by in-school mentors and role models constitute a great motivation for female students to stay in school. By working closely with the female students, these female teachers/role models/mentors are able to assist them in ways that enable them to confront and deal with their challenges. The female teachers provide guidance in both academic and non-academic matters.

Although the mentorship initiative is not far reaching, it at least recognises the importance of moving beyond the mere opening of access. In order to foster retention, it is critical for the reforms to look beyond questions of access. This recognition provides the critical entry for taking up questions of systemic and structural nature. The mentorship initiative provides the much-needed avenue for working toward establishing the support structures necessary for addressing the unique challenges of female students. Indeed, it paves the way for moving the discourse from a focus on issues about access to begin negotiations toward addressing systemic and structural issues. This is an indication of the realisation, even if nominally, that both overt and covert factors and forces affect the education of females.

Although these policies were phenomenal and groundbreaking, given the specific Ghanaian history of reforms, they were also fraught with some difficulties. Analyses of past reform efforts reveal a persistent focus on logistic and administrative difficulties. In the following section, focus is shifted from these by directing attention to conceptual difficulties. By so doing, the intent is not to minimise and/or dismiss the logistic and administrative issues. Rather, what is sought is to draw attention to an equally important area of analysis.

Shortcomings

Commendable as the new policy directions seem, they do not adequately address gender questions. One key concern regarding the gender reform policies is the stopgap measures that frame them. The policies are stopgap insofar as they aim at remedying an immediate problem without any indication of an interest in long-term solutions. For instance, the policies require that school texts and syllabuses be reviewed to reflect an inclusive language and content but do not challenge the political underpinnings of the curriculum. Questions about power and its implications for curriculum development, politics and its effects on school reform and, authority and its manifestations in the control of educational institutions remain unasked. Issues are not made of questions regarding the investment and gains of the status quo to particular individuals and groups and whatever resistances there might be. In fact, the critical politics that underpin such social justice questions trouble the liberal ideologies that frame the ongoing socio-economic reforms in the country, which drive the education reforms.

The training of female teachers to serve as models is another stopgap measure. Apart from the same problematic focus on enhancing access, the policy does not look at systemic factors such as power and how it affects female participation. These policies reflect a simplistic assumption that the more female teachers there are in schools, the more modelling and mentoring there will be for female students. Hence, they fail to engage in the kind of critical questioning that troubles existing structures and compel renegotiations toward the equitable change anticipated. Likely questions may include: What kinds of models are sought? What are the unique locations of models and mentors and how will they affect their work? What sensibilities do these models bring to the gender question, given that their own experiences in the educational system are not different from what the reforms seek to change? Is the gender question reserved for females only? These questions reflect the complexity of gender issues. They are indicative of the fact that gender questions require the use of more sophisticated strategies than anticipated in the gender reform policies.

Another stopgap measure is the scholarship drive. In a country where depravity is the norm rather than the exception, poverty related problems require strategies that are more comprehensive than the mere provision of stipends. While scholarship schemes might serve as starting places for dealing with emergency situations, it is equally critical to begin to think of more sustainable ways of addressing the causes of poverty. Questions about unemployment and underemployment, vagaries of the weather, food insecurity, rising costs of living including education and the privatisation of essential social services become critical for seeking redress.

Another stopgap measure is the STME programme. On STME, Bryson and de Castell (1995) argue that technology is "always already gendered" and is a "masculine" disciplinary field (p. 38). As a result, even programmes that target females have "involved adjustments directed at a regenderment of the relation of female students and technology" (Bryson & de Castell, 1995, p. 38). They explain that programmes directed at the re-socialisation of females in terms of changing their attitudes towards technology or repudiation of technology are pre-gendered, classed and/or raced. By extension such programmes only end up re-inscribing discrimination rather than eliminating it.

A second major concern is that the policies reflect a deficit framing of gender issues. Bennison, Wilkinson, Fennema, Masemann & Peterson (1984) define the deficit approach as "characterized by the assumption that differences among groups of learners exist which render them unequal in ways that are important to the educational process" (p. 6). They point out that the deficit approach results in the viewing of differences or disparities between female and male participation rates in education as stemming from some inherent inadequacies which disadvantage females and which can be compensated for to bring females and males at par. Thus framed, gender disparities are blamed on an inherent ability or the lack of it rather than systemic and structural inadequacies. Remedies are then geared toward compensating for the shortcomings, which often result in victim blaming.

On their part, Bryson and de Castell (1995) speak of the paradox that attends the deficit model as follows:

> Typically, educational reformers identify female students as a disenfranchised group whose members are systematically denied

opportunity for equitable access to educational technologies, and who therefore represent a high priority target for the construction of nondiscriminatory policies. Paradoxically, instructional practices that are designed to promote gender equity embody exclusionary values that, we have argued elsewhere, are more likely to entrench discriminatory practices and to reduce their range of possible relations to technology than to empower the oppressed. (p. 21)

For Bryson and de Castell (1995), gender questions have deeper implications than the simplistic approach implicit in the deficit model. Although these deficit approaches present an optimism . necessary for confronting gender and other forms of disparities they do not delve into the remote and subtle workings of educational and social systems that lead to the privileging of one group over the other in the first place. With Bryson and de Castell, it is argued that deficit measures though might have some merit, eventually lead to the re-inscription and re-entrenchment of discrimination by their tendency to blame the victim.

On their part, Larkin and Staton (1998) argue that "focusing on the alleged deficit of girls has diverted our attention from the myriad factors that interfere with their ability to get an equal education. When structural barriers are ignored, the onus for girls' lack of success can fall squarely on their own shoulders" (p. 17). Indeed, as evidenced in the Ghanaian reforms, which place great emphasis on creating access without commensurate efforts that seek to level the playing field, retention becomes an issue right after the primary level. The progressively high female disengagement rate along the educational level is a pointer, among others, to the problematic nature of the discriminatory educational institutions into which they are condemned. Yet, even the efforts at addressing the problem of low retention remain woefully inadequate, as already pointed out.

From the above analysis, it becomes clear that in spite of the good intentions of the gender reforms, the stopgap measures and deficit approaches adopted render them inadequate. By their very framing of gender questions, the transformative goals that are intended in the reforms are compromised (Ghana Government, 1994, 1996). Indeed, the failure to

address long term structural and systemic forms of discrimination in the educational system undermines the equity project intended. Consequently, an invitation is extended to Ghanaian policy makers and programme planners to take a look at the Larkin and Staton (1998) transformative model of gender equity. In the following section, attention is turned to discussions of the model while showing how it might benefit the Ghanaian process.

A Transformative Model of Gender Equity

The attraction to the Larkin and Staton (1998) transformative equity model lies in its ability to move gender questions beyond quick fix approaches that only scratch the surface. Its very framing of gender questions facilitates the tackling of issues of the structural and systemic kind. This model does not reject the quick fix but works from them toward more sustainable approaches. By tackling problems that focus on issues regarding access and inclusion it becomes possible for fostering a climate conducive for the empowerment of female students. That the Ghanaian reforms seek transformation, recognise the need to move beyond access and have already begun looking at questions regarding retention, makes the Larkin and Staton model very attractive.

Larkin and Staton (1998) espouse four essential elements for modelling gender equity. The four elements are access, inclusion, climate and empowerment. Hence, the acronym, the AICE model. In the following analysis, discussions focus on these elements as they might inform ongoing gender reforms in the Ghanaian education system.

Larkin and Staton (1998) view access-oriented initiatives as crucial for working toward transformative gender equity. Viewing access-oriented programmes as a starting point of the process, they stress the need for recognising the fact that such initiatives are necessary but not sufficient measures for securing equitable change. For them, access-oriented initiatives should not stop at the mere creation of access for entry into existing spaces or traditional fields but should also enhance entry into non-traditional fields such as STME.

Wary of the violence that attends discriminatory and/or exclusionary system, Larkin and Staton (1998) caution against complacency with access-oriented approaches to gender questions. They

argue that the liberal ideologies that underpin programmes such as affirmative action render them inadequate for addressing complex gender issues. They also point out that such approaches have traditionally been geared toward "incorporating girls into the existing educational structure rather than transform the educational system in which females are systematically devalued" (p. 17). They argue that rather than address the systemic issues confronting females, such efforts result in the further victimisation of women. They trace the situation to the appeal to policies that are purported to present the same ground rules and assume that the playing field is level/even. In reality, however, females are presented with unequal opportunities and expected to compete favourably with their male counterparts.

With regard to Ghana, Larkin and Staton (1998) help throw light on questions regarding the persistence of gender inequities in spite of the time and effort, material and immaterial, put into fostering a more equitable education system. As a country that has uncritically embraced liberal ideologies in politics and economics, there is no gainsaying how this has informed and shaped policy initiatives. As a matter of fact, we can find explanation in the continued appeal to universalising policies that are rooted in a notion of equality without considerations for equity. This is evident in the appeal to blanket policies even when transformative change is intended.

Larkin and Staton (1998) take the advocacy further by urging the need for initiating programmes that will facilitate the proper use of the access so created or opened. Arguing that programmes that just add females to discriminatory processes and stir further their subjugation and domination, Larkin and Staton seek ways of enabling females to become active members of the systems into which they gain access. They suggest that access-oriented programmes be enhanced to facilitate the effective inclusion of females in educational institutions and programmes. For Larkin and Staton (1998), inclusion involves looking at gender biases in teaching and learning materials both in terms of language and content. Inclusion, for them, means counting in female students. They argue that our classrooms have been places for male, not female students. The classrooms are gendered, traditionally favouring males, as reflected in biases in teacher contact time and educational material use. They argue

that male-centric school curricula remain unchanged while simplistic reforms continue to add in female students without changing the playing field. To counteract this condition, they propose sweeping changes in the school system in ways that foster the critical questioning of the existing curriculum. This is consistent with the curriculum review proposed in the Ghanaian reforms. A notable difference, however, is that in addition to content and language, Larkin and Staton are critical of contact time, resource allocation and curriculum politics. What they seek is a complete transformation of the curriculum.

Citing Watkinson and Epp, Larkin and Staton (1998) point out that:

> Inclusive curriculum necessitates the asking of questions, which may bring discomfort and in some cases, disharmony, such as: who decides curriculum? Who is left out? Whose ideology is represented here? Would this have the same meaning if examined by people not of our culture? The questioning provides classroom space where educators/teachers and students raise critical questions and interrogate texts in light of their experience. (p. 18).

The sort of critical questioning proposed above, necessitate the introduction of gender analysis during policy making with the view to facilitating effective programming. In the long run, it fosters gender mainstreaming, an intended but yet to be fulfilled goal of the Ghanaian process (Akpalu & Offei-Aboagye, 1999). Such questioning also requires that reforms capture systemic and structural issues by encouraging the setting of policy goals that match means and ends. As already noted, the gender reforms in Ghanaian education are short on such critical viewing.

One way of creating inclusive education systems is through the appreciation of the significance of subjective experience (Code, 1993; Scott, 1992). This involves not just recognising but also embracing women's experiences as a critical element of the curriculum. It requires the incorporation of women's experiences in knowledge systems in ways that can authenticate the curriculum and lead to the completion of the missing link in the epistemological process. Also, it can enable women to recognise and identify themselves in the process as knowing beings. In

addition, women's experiences can generate new insights and meanings for initiating and negotiating effective change. Since our patriarchal institutions fail to provide effective answers to the numerous problems that confront us today, an inclusive and for that matter expanded knowledge base enhances our repertoire and as such holds great potential for confronting today's problems with the novelty that they deserve.

To be able to take advantage of the benefits of an inclusive system, spaces need to be created for female students to tell their stories as best known to them. Since females have different experiences in our patriarchal institutions, experiences which remain largely untold, it is important at this stage for reformers to begin to initiate work toward their telling. Reforms should facilitate processes for females to share those histories. The inclusion of such histories in school curriculum can serve as first hand information for fostering gender equity. For female students to feel safe and secure to tell their stories, a supportive climate is necessary.

By climate, Larkin and Staton (1998) mean the creation of an educational atmosphere that supports equity. This requires not just the availability of classrooms that are safe for all persons but also that the entire institution and its various components enforce zero tolerance policies against all forms of violence. People must feel safe in all institutions at all times irrespective of their gender, class, race, and ethnicity. This might involve eradicating all forms of violence such as sexual harassment, verbal abuse, emotional torture, physical abuse and any other form of derogatory behaviour that creates fear and insecurity.

Larkin and Staton (1998) cite a number of studies that show that although both males and females suffer some form of harassment within schools, the rate for females is higher. They found that females were more prone to experience some form of verbal and physical harassment in schools. They point out that females are more likely to be teased, insulted and degraded by their peers, especially males. As a remedy, Larkin and Staton advocate for the creation of safe spaces that can help minimise or eradicate gender-based violence in schools.

Consistent with the Ghanaian gender reform agenda of enhancing access and retention, it becomes necessary to examine school climate in order to determine the ways in which they contribute to discouraging

female students from staying long enough to graduate. The review above points to the fact that females do not stay in school as long as males do. This suggests a need to direct attention to finding reasons for the higher disengagement rate for female students, in general. It also establishes the need to investigate and determine why disengagement is more intense at the higher levels and more so in rural settings, in particular. As well, we need to find out why more females from Northern Ghana than Southern Ghana disengage from schools and why participation rates are higher for those in urban settings than in rural settings (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000; Ghana Government, 1994, 1995). It is also important to look into the schools but also other socio-cultural forces for ways that they are implicated in female disengagement. When this is done and when female students feel safe enough to tell their stories, initiate and negotiate dialogue as well as begin to take up the challenges confronting them, they will be taking the path toward empowerment.

The ultimate goal of the equity project, for Larkin and Staton (1998), is empowerment through the creation of safe spaces for forging solidarity toward liberatory action. Such spaces can serve as powerful sites for females to strategize against the negative and/or conflicting messages that they receive within and beyond the educational system.

To empower females is to enable them to assert themselves and confront issues that affect them. To be able to do so, female students will need the requisite knowledge and skills for recognising, naming and fighting back domination. It will take the individual and their personal participation to be able to reach such empowerment. Inarguably, the institution of mere policies is insufficient for reaching empowerment. This is especially so if the policies do not enable individuals to confront their challenges. It is not being suggested, at this point, that the onus be shifted to the disadvantaged to justify their inclusion as implied in simplistic strategies. Rather, what is sought is a corroboration of Freire's (1997) assertion that transformative processes should involve participants in active deliberations that aim at conscientising them to the problems they face while equipping them with the critical tools and safe spaces for initiating and working toward self reclamation and collective liberation.

Such corroboration stems from the fact that most of the harassment that occurs in schools, but also in society, goes unnoticed. Harassment

occurs in settings that are not always obvious. It also tends to present itself in ways that are at times too embarrassing to tell. However, if females are equipped with strategies to deal with issues by themselves and are guided by informed opinions, they will be able to recognise and handle potentially devastating situations before they occur. This is enhanced by the availability of a safe environment.

In fact, the fourth element, empowerment, is very consistent with the broader goal of the educational reform process in Ghana. The mandate of the Education Commission, cited above, requires that the education system should empower citizens to contribute to the revolutionary transformation of Ghanaian societies (Fobih, et. al., 1995; Ghana Government, 1994). The citizens in question are all Ghanaians, including women. In the light of this, it is time to begin to incorporate empowerment issues in the policy making and gender reform processes. As suggested by Larkin and Staton (1998), when reformers provide for and work on enhancing access, fostering inclusion and creating enabling climate that center females in the process of change, they are put on the path of empowerment. Also, when all four components are facilitated thoroughly and deservedly, change that is transformative and equitable occurs.

Conclusion

The discussions above have comprised an examination of ongoing gender reform policies in the Ghanaian Education system with particular reference to the basic sector. In the process, the strengths and weaknesses of the policies were unveiled and ways suggested for improving them for the enhancement of the transformative goals of education intended in the FCUBE. The discussions were focused on the historical context, conceptual underpinnings and implications of the policies for promoting an equitable education.

The analysis revealed, on one hand, that the FCUBE attempt at gender reform policies was commendable for its: a) novelty, b) recognition of the significance of role-modelling and mentoring, c) suggestion for curricula changes, and d) appreciation of the intersectionality of gender, class, ethnicity and location. As well, the

FCUBE reforms paved the way for negotiating work that could begin to tackle structural and systemic sources of gender discrimination. On the other hand, it was revealed that the reforms were fraught with problems, namely, the adoption of simplistic stopgap measures and deficit approaches to address complex gender questions. It was argued that the stopgap and deficit measures proposed in the policies lacked the long-term perspectives for reaching sustainable change resulting in the re-inscription of inequities through the shifting of the onus to the already disadvantaged.

To remedy the situation, Ghanaian policy makers were invited to turn to the Larkin and Staton (1998) model of equity, which it was argued, held potential for the transformative change intended. Locating this potential in the move beyond access to tackle issues on inclusion, climate and empowerment, it was demonstrated that by remodelling the policies along those lines it would become possible to begin work toward a more sustainable and equitable programme of gender reform.

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