

A CRITICAL CHALLENGE TO EDUCATION FOR THE GIRL CHILD

Exclusive and unequal distribution of education amongst male and female hinders the progression of national development at any stage. Research carried out by two scholars, Shahidul and Karimu (2015) shows that dropout rates are higher for girls in 49 countries worldwide. Bonneau (2010) defined Dropout as “ any student who leaves school for any reason before graduation or completion of a programme of studies without transferring to another elementary or secondary school”.

The gap between primary school enrolment between boys and girls is narrow at the bottom and widens at the top as they progress due to school dropouts. Females face challenges in academic progression than males. School dropouts in girls is primarily influenced by several factors classified as economic, household level, school level and cultural factors. These factors feed into child marriages, poverty, lack of school fees and cultural practices. According to Herald news published on 17 March 2015, 52% of secondary school dropouts in Zimbabwe were female and 1191 dropped out of school due to marriages.

These factors contribute to the low rate of academic progression shown by the fact that only 157 in every 1000 children successfully progress from form 1 to form 6 (Ministry of Primary & Secondary Education). In the Zimbabwe’s case the unavailability of educational support funding also contributes to school dropouts. UNESCO Institute for Statistics projected that school age going population in Southern Africa is likely to increase to 24.2% by 2020 as compared to Central and Eastern Europe’s -14.2%.

The demand for the government module, Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) and Non-Governmental support has increased due to the poverty alarming levels particularly in the rural of Zimbabwe. The situation is likely to gain momentum due to the looming drought in 2016-2017 agricultural year. Drought factors affect the rural children most and recently the government of Zimbabwe has taken a step forward to protect school children from extreme hunger.

The government recently announced in the Sunday Mail News on 7 February 2016, that it will soon start providing free meals to school children to shield them from drought induced hunger and improve nutrition levels. The programme requires approximately US\$2million and shall be funded by community share ownership trust in resource rich areas.