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Global Education for Gender Equality and Sustainable Human Development: Making the Connections

Abstract:

The paper examines and explores why gender equality must be seen as a final goal in and of itself and as a prerequisite for attaining sustainable human development goals and building global citizenship. Discriminatory practices in all areas including education, as well as traditional and harmful gender norms like violence against women limit, inhibit and eventually impede the full development and empowerment of women which is critical to the realization of these two goals.

Globalization brought about an increasingly commercialized orientation to education which mainly caters to market needs and priorities. In this context, there is an urgent need for a meaningful reorientation of educational programs that aims at strengthening and broadening students' critical thinking and understanding of education as a means to promote sustainable human development and global citizenship.

For illustration, the specific example of Miriam College in the Philippines, is used to discuss both the possibilities, and challenges of gendered global learning strategies.

Keywords: *commercialization of education, gender discrimination within the educational system, global citizenship*

Zusammenfassung:

Der Beitrag untersucht, warum die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter als Endziel an und für sich und als Voraussetzung für die Verwirklichung einer nachhaltigen menschlichen Entwicklung und den Aufbau globaler Bürgerschaft gesehen werden muss. Geschlechtsdiskriminierende Praktiken in allen Bereichen, einschließlich im Bildungssystem, sowie traditionelle und Gender Normen und Gewalt gegen Frauen verhindern die volle Entfaltung und Stärkung von Frauen, die entscheidend für die Verwirklichung dieser beiden Ziele ist. Die Globalisierung bewirkte eine zunehmend kommerzialisierte Ausrichtung von Bildungsprozessen, die sich primär den marktwirtschaftlichen Zwängen unterwirft. In diesem Zusammenhang gibt es einen dringenden Bedarf für eine sinnvolle Neuausrichtung von Bildung, die darauf abzielt, das kritische Denken und Verständnis zu fördern und Bildung als Mittel zu einer nachhaltigen menschlichen Entwicklung und einer globalen Bürgerschaft begreift.

Schlüsselwörter: *Kommerzialisierung von Bildung, Geschlechtsdiskriminierung im Bildungssystem, globale Bürgerschaft*

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to explore the connections between the notion of gender equality in education, sustainable human development and global citizenship. It begins with the assumption that social exclusion of women through institutions such as education has effectively denied them their rights to full development as human beings and becoming active agents of change. Engendering education with values of peace, environmentalism and social justice, are critical in developing a global citizenship regime now and in the future.

Globalization and its multidimensional manifestations have expanded our horizons, compressed time and space, brought peoples and cultures closer together and influenced unprecedented political, economic, social and cultural changes. However, many negative impacts have also been attributed to globalization processes including the widening of disparities between the rich and the poor aggravated by unbridled neo-capitalist economic systems; the erosion of national identities and values, and its promotion of consumerist culture to the detriment of the environment. Despite a host of criticisms against globalization, globalization has undoubtedly contributed to the development and expansion of a global community of social movements and advocates for social justice, women's rights, environmentalism and peace – movements that interrogate and challenge the very hegemonic political and economic powers that globalization itself has given rise to.

One of the most important institutions affected and influenced by globalization has been education. Education develops the foundation on which people build their understanding of their identity, their roles in society and their relationship with other peoples and cultures. Education as Arnot (2000, p. 2) suggests plays a "key role in the democratic process by giving individuals the opportunity, the knowledge and the commitment to influence the nature and direction of society". While education can be the vehicle for progressive, liberating and transformative ideas, it can also foster and reinforce narrow, parochial, exclusionary and discriminatory attitudes against people from marginalized groups and communities. Globalization processes offer a unique opportunity to improve the content, quality and direction of education given the enormous improvements in communications technology and the growth of knowledge based economies. However, it is also the case that in the era of globalization, educational systems have become

more attuned to business priorities and values which responds to the needs of the market for highly skilled labour force.

The escalation of economic globalization has driven a demand for instrumental education which can be clearly tied to the goals of production, productivity and employment. (Stromquist 2008, p. 105). There is now a proliferation of technological institutions, business and computer schools, virtual universities, and distance education programs that cater directly to the needs of specific economic sectors. As a consequence, programs for the development of critical thinking, humanities and the social sciences that foster a deeper understanding of global issues social justice, sustainable development and human rights have been diminished.

Given this situation the question for educators then is, how do we meaningfully utilize the enormous impact of globalization to develop and foster not only education to prepare students for jobs and employment but education that develops a deep understanding and solidarity for transcendent core values like justice, peace, equality and sustainable development? Many analysts contend that cross cultural exchanges, new information technologies and even migration of people for permanent settlement facilitate not only biculturalism but multiculturalism and transnational identities. (Suarez Orozco, 2004). More than at any other time in history, globalization processes can lead to the development of a “global culture” that is to say a culture that embraces multicultural differences (Stromquist 2005; Moghadam 2000) contends that organizing and building of alliances and partnerships of transnational feminist networks have been possible only because women learned to utilize the positive aspects of globalization. Suarez Orozco (2004) strongly asserts that educators have the duty to “place tolerance – and even celebration – of cultural differences at our educational agenda” (Suarez Orozco, 2004). A good education is one that “promotes a non- parochial attitude, facilitates communication and understanding, and encourages people to broaden their knowledge and their experiences” (David Bloom in Suarez Orozco, 2004).

But what exactly is global learning?

Global learning is defined in different ways. Education is viewed as global or international when it is “more attuned to and responsive to pressure and opportunities in a globalizing environment.”¹ Internationalism, the guiding principle of international education, refers to approaches in education that seek to strengthen the international orientation of students, programs and institutions. However, internationalism in the context of globalization processes may have divergent purposes. One purpose of such a strategy is clearly instrumental and mainly focussed on ensuring that educational institutions are able to keep in step with international quality assurance standards in terms of curricula, assessments and certification, credentials that are considered valid across national borders and jurisdictions and can produce graduates who can become part a global professional workforce (Universitas 21, 2001).

Another purpose of internationalizing education is to expand and broaden students’ understanding and appreciation of socio-economic political realities of other countries and cultures as they relate to their own national and local realities in the hopes that such exposure can bring about tolerance of dif-

ference and solidarity for the common good. Global learning is also defined as education “that puts learning in a global context that fosters critical and creative learning; self-awareness and open mindedness towards difference; understanding of global issues and power relationships and optimism and action for a better world”.² Eight concepts are considered at the heart of global learning including: global citizenship; interdependence, social justice; conflict resolution, diversity, values and perceptions, human rights, and sustainable development (ibid). A significant articulation of what global learning ought to be has been articulated through the joint university project called Shared Futures: Global Learning and Social Responsibility which has been working towards a “vision of educational excellence with a strong commitment to global, civic and democratic engagement” (Kevin Hovland 2005, p. 1). This vision aims to equip and prepare students to understand other peoples and their problems; develop intercultural competencies; analyse the tensions in the world today, and contribute to their communities and to the world in their own personal ways (ibid).

Gender Equality in Education

“Gender equality in educational access, participation and outcome is central to the promotion of democracy. A vibrant civic life in which citizens are engaged in all aspects of society is critical to the flourishing of democratic institutions, and an important precondition for promoting social justice and human rights” (Arnot 2003, p. 1).

“Gender refers to the socially constructed roles of men and women ascribed to them on the basis of their sex that depends on particular socio-economic, political and cultural contexts and are affected by other factors, including race, ethnicity, and class. Gender is one of the most fundamental organizing principle that shapes human life in all its dimensions, that also creates and perpetuates social differences and inequalities. Lastly, gender must also be understood as a structure of institutionalized social relationships that organize power at all levels” (Mahler and Pessar, 2006 p. 27–63).

Women had always been excluded from educational institutions in every culture and society until the 18th century. Politically, they were not considered citizens and were lumped with children and the incapacitated as non-citizens. Women were thus dependent for their identity on their fathers, husbands and brothers. Women began their struggle for equality by demanding rights and access to education which was a key step in their political participation and empowerment. But access to education is not enough as education itself was gendered and socially constructed in a way that stereotypes about women and men were perpetrated in the curricular content as well in the tracking of educational courses that basically reflected the traditional roles of men and women. Feminist scholars addressed these issues by raising fundamental questions on why history had been gender blind; why women were rendered invisible in the development of civilization and why their social, economic and political contributions were not valued? By looking afresh at the evidence already available and reinterpreting this with a gender lens, these scholars reinterpreted heretofore gender-blind historical narratives, explored new sources of historical material, as well as introduced new methodological approaches and research techniques to more faithfully capture the

rich tapestry of women's lives, experiences and wisdom. Historical narratives were challenged, and standard teaching and research categories and methodologies in the academe were interrogated for their inadequacy in reflecting women's lives. The re-telling of history from a gender lens thus emerged as a political act of history-making in itself.

In the last fifty years, important historical milestones have been achieved by women. The development of human rights instruments particularly the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (UN CEDAW) set the international standards and norms in the treatment of women. CEDAW or the Women's Convention, now ratified by over 193 countries, obligates states to work towards the realization of the right of education and to achieve gender equality within education and through education. Several important conferences and campaigns such as the Beijing Platform for Action, UNESCO's Global Campaign for Education for All, the UN Girls' Education Initiative and the Millennium Development Goals, have all affirmed the need to address the political, economic, social and cultural impediments to girl's education. The MDGs in particular are addressing gender equality in education issues alongside extreme poverty, a condition that prevents the advancement of both women and men. To further strengthen its commitment to promote gender equality in education, UNESCO developed what is now termed as the Gender Equality Framework that identifies four dimensions of gender equality in education: equality in access; equality in the learning process; equality of educational outcomes and equality of external results (UNGEI 2008).

As a result of these efforts, significant progress has been made in terms of narrowing the gender gap in the number of girls who are out of school. However, many of them are also likely to drop out before finishing basic education as long as the social, economic and cultural roots of gender inequalities are not adequately addressed.

Despite these gains however, girls and young women are still subjected to stereotypical portrayals in school, gender discrimination and violence such as sexual abuse and sexual harassment (Jyotsna 2011). Social barriers continue to impede girls and young women's access to education – such as extreme poverty and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, early marriage, son preference and others. In conflict situations, girls and young women have been particularly vulnerable and hundreds of thousands of them have been the target of rape and sexual violence in Bosnia, Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone and in Sudan. The negative impacts of war and conflict on girls including physical injuries and psychological effects such as trauma, depression, shame and withdrawal have long term consequences in their ability to go to school and their learning prospects (ibid, pp. 13–14.).

It is quite evident from the foregoing that education in general and global education in particular cannot be truly inclusive without interrogating and addressing the gender biases perpetuating gender inequalities embedded in educational systems as well as in the socio-economic restrictions that prevent girls from going to school. To exclude one half of humanity in the development of knowledge and expertise is not only a tremendous waste of human resource but also a serious violation of the inherent rights of people to education. As the Education For All

Global Monitoring Report 2011: A Gender Review asserts, education is a human right of everyone, including girls and women. Much more needs to be done in terms of educational reforms such as redefining quality of education to include:

- transformative, gender- responsive educational processes and outcomes;
- Ensuring safety and protection of girls particularly in conflict areas;
- Higher investment in early childhood care and education is crucial for promoting sustained girls' education;
- Engendering schools thru textbook revisions and teacher training, and providing space and support systems to encourage girls and young women to take on non-traditional subjects such as math and science.³

Unleashing Women's Active Participation in Sustainable Human Development.

Women constitute one half of the world's population but remain one of the most underutilized human resources in most countries. Very often their full potential and capacity is limited by discriminatory practices in both public and private life; legal systems that do not recognize the rights of women to land ownership; access to financial resources; access to schooling and protection against violence. The OECD observes: "In failing to make the best use of their female populations, most countries are under-investing in the human capital needed to assure sustainability" (OECD 2008). Despite serious and sustained efforts to improve the situation of women worldwide, the facts still show serious gaps and inequalities between women and men; Poverty has a woman's face and of the 1.3 billion people in poverty, 70 % are women. Two thirds of the world's illiterates are also women. Household work and caring responsibilities of women are unpaid, devalued and excluded from national incomes accounts rendering women practically invisible in the growth of economies." Many of women's economic contributions are grossly undervalued or not valued at all – on the order of \$ 11 trillion per year. Women work longer hours than men in nearly every country. About half of this work is spent in economic activities in the market or in the subsistence sector. The other half is normally devoted to unpaid household or community activities" (Human Development Report, 1995).

The Human Development Report of 1995 asserted that there are four elements in the concept of human development which includes:

Productivity. People must be enabled to increase their productivity and to participate fully in economic growth. This implies for women, the elimination of all forms of violence as well as economic and political barriers to their full economic participation including employment and income generation.

Equity. People must have access to equal opportunities. All barriers to economic and political opportunities must be eliminated so that people can participate in the development process. Without eliminating the barriers that prevent women from fulfilling their potential, there can be no genuine equity.

Sustainability. Access to opportunities and natural resources must be ensured not only for the present generations but for future generations as well. Consumption patterns that are sustainable and are respectful of the environment must be encouraged.

Empowerment. Development must be by people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. For women, this means both personal and social empowerment. By being able to claim and assert their rights, women can more meaningfully exercise their agency in determining the directions of their lives (ibid. p. 1).

The attainment of gender equality requires a long process of social, political and economic change that can be achieved through the sustained activism of both women and men; the political will of governments and the international support for a new sustainable human development “that regards all people, irrespective of gender, as essential agents of change” (ibid.). The human development paradigm must be engendered and based on three principles

- Equality of rights between women and men as a fundamental principle
- Recognition that women are agents and beneficiaries of change.
- The engendered development model, though aiming to widen choices for both women and men, should not pre-determine how different cultures and different societies exercise these choices. What is important is that equal opportunities to make a choice exist for both women and men (ibid. p. 2).

Women and Gender Institute at Miriam College

Miriam College is an 85 year old educational institution in the Philippines that is one of the few schools which successfully integrated academic and advocacy for global and local issues. Its Vision-Mission says as much:

TRUTH: We believe in the power of knowledge and the liberating force of truth. We commit ourselves to the systematic and scientific search for truth and to fairness and openness in its pursuit. We reject all forms of deceit, falseness and dishonesty. We strive for the highest quality of intellectual and academic output at the same time that we recognize and value the wisdom of the heart.

JUSTICE: We believe that all human beings should be equally blessed to be responsible for and to enjoy the fruits of knowledge-generation and social progress. We commit ourselves to a society where power and opportunity are equally shared and where the “naked are clothed and the hungry are fed.” We reject discrimination of any kind against any individual or any group. We believe in gender equality and strive for and support a diverse and interdependent human community in which people’s rights, welfare and empowerment are centrally valued.

PEACE: We believe that we should be peace-builders. We also believe that peace means the absence of violence as well as the presence of values, attitudes, behaviour and ways of life based on non-violence and respect for the fundamental rights and freedom of every person. We reject violence of every form and in every social interaction and all institutions. We are committed to work for creative and constructive ways of solving conflict and to foster caring and loving relationships among all human beings and between humans and the rest of creation.

INTEGRITY OF CREATION: We believe that God has called us to be stewards of all creation and that the well-being and happiness of future generations rest upon sustainable and equitable systems and processes of production and consumption. We reject

destruction of the environment and waste of natural resources. We commit ourselves to care for the earth and to practice a lifestyle that sustains the health of the planet on which all life depends. (Miriam College, 1998)

To realize the Mission-Vision, the college institutionalized four advocacy centers – the Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), the Center for Peace Education, the Environment Studies Institute and Institutional Network for Social Justice to complement the academic programs of students as well as to explore and expand the school’s partnerships with a wider public particularly NGOs, communities, marginalized sectors and professionals. A course Ethics and Values is required, a course that integrates the core values of the institution from the pre-school and basic education levels to the undergraduate and graduate levels. The core values including gender are mainstreamed through regular teacher training; classroom activities and outreach field exposure as well as engagement with partner communities and NGOs. Students spend their internships in any of the four advocacy centers and their partner communities, and are integrated into all the activities of the centers. Gender is a crosscutting issue in all the centers but WAGI is principally responsible for developing gender equality through research, training and advocacy. All the centers have diverse linkages and networks locally and internationally.

WAGI conducts gender sensitivity training sessions and a host of other trainings on specialized subjects on gender for teachers, students, employees and diverse groups from government, communities, international organizations and NGOs from the Philippines and other countries. These sessions deal with critical issues on the various dimensions of education, human rights, migration as well as development from gendered, human rights and global perspectives. The Summer Institute on Women’s Human Rights which started in 1999 is one of the longest continuing programs of such nature in the Philippines and Southeast Asia. It discusses basic concepts and issues of gender and empowerment; like the history of the women’s movement; the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination; case studies of violence against women in different cultural settings.

Participants to the Summer Institutes, both male and female (coming as far as Syria, Lesotho and Mexico) with different religious, cultural and political viewpoints, participate in active discussion and debates in an atmosphere of openness and respect for cultural differences. Part of the modules is a discussion on the dilemmas and challenges of cultural diversity and its impact on women’s human rights and the exercise of their rights. WAGI’s Summer Institutes and seminars are a veritable school for global education on international issues utilizing both academic material and the lived experiences of participants who are themselves practitioners in a wide variety of fields. Several enabling conditions allowed WAGI to explore and expand the range of its activities. First, it is the political commitment of the school’s president to make Miriam College a center of progressive, enlightened and values-oriented education and advocacy based on its well-articulated mission and vision. A second factor is the academic setting that allows for diverse groups such as government and civil society groups to come together and engage in critical thinking and discussion. Another factor that helped the programs grow is the presence

of many resource persons from inside Miriam College who had worked in the UN in different capacities as well as a good number of specialists from both government and civil society.

Conclusion: Towards Building an Inclusive Global Education for Global Citizenship

To be meaningful at all, global education must embrace the principles of social inclusion, gender equality, peace, human rights, environment and diversity as ways to develop global citizenship. The recognition and the understanding of gender equality in education as an essential precondition in promoting sustainable human development is a necessary step towards this goal. There is a general sense shared by many educators and activists that human survival does not only depend on economic development but also on the development of those values and principles that strengthen our commitment to all humanity. Though global citizenship has not been embraced by all who cannot fathom a world without formal and legal structures and national borders, an increasing number of people and movements are bound by common desire to “find one’s development through the development of others” and develop the skills of working for and wanting the commonweal and the well being of all (Miller, quoted by Noddings 2005, p. 25). Educators and social activists are at the forefront in saying that the time to engage, educate and actively involve young people about their preferred future is now. Global citizenship principles, values and behaviour can be proactively promoted now. Groups like Educators for Peace, proponents of peace like the Hague Appeal for Peace, groups that support human rights such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, coalitions and networks of women’s groups that work for women’s empowerment and gender equality are all working in formal and informal ways to develop global citizenship.⁴ However, we need to always be reminded that there is no such thing as gender neutral notion of citizenship. In promoting education that is oriented towards global citizenship, we need to integrate a gender perspective (Marshall and Arnot 2008) that requires national curricula to:

- Unpack the historical and sociological meanings of national curricular norms;
- Recognize (if not deconstruct) the various male and female forms of knowledge and their representations in the curricula,
- Understand the different types of gendered performances within different school subjects;
- Be sensitive to the changing gender relations brought about by globalization and its significance in terms of male and female relationships to knowledge.

Not all of those who profess social change are absolutely united about all the issues that they profess to support. In fact there are tremendous differences between and among civil society groups in terms of perspectives, approaches and strategies. They

are, however, united that the social injustice, all forms of inequalities and discrimination, wars and conflicts can only be eliminated through solidarity and laying the foundation for global citizenship. It is the task of governments and the international community to institutionalize these ideas that ensure the future for the next generation.

Annotations

- 1 Allan Bernardo, *International Higher Education: Models, Conditions and Issues in Higher Education in Education and Globalization*, edited by Tereso Tullao, APEC Study Center, Makati: Philippine Institute of Development Study, 2004
- 2 *Globalizing the Curriculum*
- 3 Jya, op. cit. pp. 17–19.
- 4 Without claiming that they are helping to build global citizenship, social movements and global civil society groups are united in solidarity to advance peace, a just global economic order, a sustainable human development and gender fair and socially just and inclusive society.

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