The Role of TVET in Developing Skills for Kenyan Rural Women through Open Learning: A Case of Samburu Women at Coastal Region

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

During the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, 1990 the declaration on Education for All (EFA) was adopted. Furthermore, during the Millennium Summit in 2000, world leaders adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, now known as Millennium Developments goals (MDGs). Among the goals included: - 1. Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015. 2. Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, by 2005, and in all levels of education by 2015.

There have been achievements, but there is still much more into accomplishment of MDGs and EFA goals particularly for the rural women/girl. This is evidenced by findings of this study.
1.2 Brief overview of Samburu Community

Samburu people are a nomadic and patriarch community. Men own the animals, only they are allowed to slaughter animals or eat the meat. They must also eat first before women and children. Men are polygamous and wife beating is common as women are considered like children. They have a deep-rooted culture where child beading is a norm. This is a form of forced marriages whereby young girls are engaged to older men-relatives (incest). The girls also go through female genital cutting after which they must get married. (Cescan, 2012)

1.3 Rural Girls’/Women’ situation in Kenya

Of the many studies carried out in Kenya on education of girls/ women, conclusions are, only a small percentage of them can easily access learning (Claris, 2012).

The rural woman is faced with many challenges;

**Political:** Women are not involved in decision-making process. Women who attempt to raise their voices are humiliated and physically assaulted.

**Cultural:** Cultural impediments such as the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), forced early marriages as rites of passage stigmatize and traumatize young girls for life. Women hardly exercise their freedom of movement, expression, association or even address men in public.

**Economic:** Most women lack entrepreneurship skills and capital to run a business. They lack access to markets due to restricted life style.

**Physical:** Lack of easy access to schools and electricity to study; lack of water and sanitation exposing them to unhygienic conditions especially during menstruation leading to absenteeism.

1.5 Role of TVET

The regional and global dimensions of vocational education cannot be properly explored without cultural reflections and outreaches, especially as globalization tends to permeate all aspects of life. This obviously presents a new challenge to planners of TVET systems. In order for rural women folk to benefit, Planners of TVET Systems will have to understand the above challenges and come up with how to circumvent their negative effects on women.

1.6 Role of WITED (Women in Technical Education and Employment)

From the above challenges, girls/ women are quite disadvantaged. These and other factors hinder rural woman’s skills acquisition endeavors. WITED’s role is to counter these challenges by initiating affirmative action and intervention activities to reach out to the underprivileged rural women.

WITED -Kenya Coast Polytechnic Chapter (formerly Mombasa Technical Training Institute- MTTI) are upbeat in finding ways of defeating false perceptions and demystifying myths that prevent girls/ women from pursuing male-dominated courses/ careers. This is being achieved through sensitization/ awareness campaigns among other WITED activities.
2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the challenges facing rural women and girls in learning and skills development in Kenya.
2. To explore various open learning options suitable for rural women and girls in Kenya.
3. To determine the position of TVET in improving learning and skills development through open learning.
4. To establish the role of WITED in influencing rural women and girls to learning and skills development.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

After due consultation with existing literature a survey was conducted using interview, questionnaires, observations and participatory experience with respondents in form of focus group discussions.
The researcher/Author with some respondents during data collection
4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Findings from the qualitative data were summarized using measures of descriptive statistics and also presented in form of discussions. The researcher begins by analyzing the demographic characteristics of the respondents and then proceeds to discuss issues influencing education of the Samburu rural girls/women based on the objectives of the study.

4.1 Response Rate

Data was collected from 3 Samburu villages (Engwata, Naretwe and Nanelok) in Coast region of Kenya. 5 respondents answered questions on a semi-structured questionnaire while 10 were engaged in key informant interviews, 15 in groups of 5 each participated in 3 focus group discussions. The response was rated as very good, achieving a response rate of 94.3 %. The findings of the Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions are discussed as corroborated evidence of the semi-structured questionnaire.

4.3 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The section analyses respondent rate, aggregation of respondents by gender and age, and distribution of respondents per age brackets.

The first part covers Gender and Age response rate providing descriptive statistics in form of the same. The researcher was keen to bring in gender and age balance during data collection as a way of eliminating bias. However since the researcher was more interested in girls/women the female gender was notably dominant. This is indicated in table 4.1 and 4.2 respectively:

Table 4.1: Gender response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Age Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 - 20 years</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 25 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>60.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 35 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From table 4.1 and 4.2 above, out of the 33 respondents, 24.4 % were male and 75.6 % were female. Of the above mentioned respondents 87.9 % were below the age of 35. Considering the age bracket, majority of respondents were young adults, a factor which may have contributed to their high response rate and which may lead adoption to new ways of living including integrating education with culture. Culture is very much deep-rooted within older individuals who perceive themselves as experienced, resisting change while mentoring the young into maintaining the status quo. It is this age bracket whereby some respondents were unwilling to participate.

4.3 Economic Activity
The main occupation for males was entertaining tourists, looking after their few cattle remaining after draught attack and guarding the village from external attacks. All females excluding those in school, 20%, were housewives, 80%. Their occupation was mainly wifely duties; cooking, fetching water and firewood, tidying up, beading jewelry. Some of them, 50% entertained tourists, sold charcoal and bead-work jewelry. All married women must build houses for their families.

4.4 Level of education
22.2 % girls were in primary school, 16.8% had no basic education, only 5.5% were secondary school-leavers, 55.5% were primary school dropouts. Apart from the 22.2 % girls in primary school all other women were married. The literacy level for girls/women was rated as very low. This was attributed to early marriages, child beading (forced marrying of girls to old men). Poverty, lack of schools nearby, boys were given first priority to education, family obligations. Low motivation since they would not further their education beyond primary school. Male respondents claimed that the Samburu men too were not learned so they feared the girls/women would become more learned than they were.

4.5 Interest in vocational/Technical Training
All respondents said even though they had never engaged in any training, given a chance they would enroll for training. The illiterate ones preferred practical skills, while school-leavers said they would fit in any form of training.

4.6 Career preference
Those in primary school, 22.5%, preferred such professions as doctors, pilot, Engineer, lawyer. These careers were perceived as prestigious. Primary school leavers/dropouts preferred dressmaking, hairdressing, building, driving. Older women preferred entrepreneurship-how to start, run and sustain a business.

4.7 Reasons for interest in Training
A secondary school-leaver said she would like to enroll in hairdressing / beauty course and claimed it was a talent and a dream career. She would enroll only if the husband allowed it. She would become a role model and envy of the village. Other girls agreed with her. The reason given by all respondents for wanting to train is the desire to improve their family’s economic status.

4.8 Awareness about available TVET institutions
17.1% of the respondents were only aware of Mombasa Technical Training Institute and Mombasa Technical University. Others, 82.9% were not aware of any training institution.

4.9 Mode of Learning
Respondents were given options of learning modes: - face-to-face, elearning, mLearning, Mobile Classroom, Digital villages, ‘merry-go-round’ learning. Around 80% preferred face-to-face describing it as more interactive, convenient to use books/ learning materials and more practical for technical skills. MLearning was preferred by around 40% had mobile phones. Married women, 78.5% preferred a learning mode that could be organized within the village whereby they could learn alongside their wifely responsibilities. The mobile classroom, digital villages and ‘merry-go-round’ were considered more flexible on time. Women had formed women groups’ dabbed ‘merry-go-round’ to support each other socially and
economically. Elearning and mLearning were preferred by all, but 50% expressed lack of basic knowledge and language barrier. No TVs and only two radios were available within the three villages. However they received radio signals via mobile phones.

4.9 Role of TVET
Responses were unanimous regarding what the government should do to improve education for girls/women including providing affordable schools. Women preferred boarding schools to protect girls from cultural interferences and harsh environmental conditions. Government could create sources of income like boosting their businesses by providing markets for their bead-work, entertainment to tourists and cattle. The government could also sponsor them to government schools.

4.10 Role of WITED
Regarding what WITED could do for them, girls/women suggested WITED convince their men to allow them to complete learning. They claimed men are the masters of culture and should be sensitized on benefits of education. Likewise men/boys need to be encouraged because if they were not learned, there was no way a girl/women could learn. Men indicated that girls/women should be warned against abandoning their families, wifely duties and culture after being educated.

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of discussions of findings, conclusions and recommendations, presented based on the objectives of the study.

5.1 Challenges Facing the Rural Women/Girls in Learning and Skills Development

Economic: – poverty, family responsibilities and obligations, lack of financial support for school leavers. According to the findings, there was limited source of income. Only 46% occasionally entertained tourists and sold charcoal and beaded jewelry to earn income. Men could not support them economically as they only relied on entertaining tourists.

Cultural: – The dominant cultural practice was early marriages, and ‘Child beading’ (forced marrying of girls to older men). Men deterred them from schooling due to preferred family obligations. Low motivation was prevalent due to the awareness they would not be allowed to proceed beyond primary school. Some admitted staying longer in primary school to avoid forced marriages. This is what the researcher refers to as the ‘feminine syndrome’ as these girls/women believed it was by fate and nature things were that way, and women were born to suffer.

Social: - Village elders’ decisions and orders had to be obeyed. The researcher had to seek permission to talk to the women. “This happens all the time,” says a villager. Any form of deviation is perceived as non-conformity.

Environmental factors: - schools are faraway, no colleges or technical institution nearby. Respondents were only aware of Mombasa Technical Training Institute and Mombasa Technical University. Interesting was how they knew about existence of the two institutions, “I usually see the buses pass by, since I know how to read, I always read the boldly written names,” says one girl as a few others agreed.

Poor infrastructure for technology to be a reality: - There is no electricity, TV, Radio or Internet connectivity.

Communication/language barrier due to high level of illiteracy: - Though many of the villagers owned mobile phones, they lacked basic education including communicating in English. Majority could speak ‘Kiswahili’ but 50% could not read or write.
Ignorance: - The level of education was rated as ‘very low’. This was evident as 50% girls/ women were illiterate and others not gone beyond primary school level.

Technophobia: - There was no computer, laptop or tablet available. Majority of adult men had mobile phones (cell phones). Amongst females who had mobile phones majority did not have capacity to operate and relied on men to do so.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

5.2 Various ODL Options Suitable for Rural Women/ Girls

Open learning and distance learning (ODL) refers to approaches to learning that focus on freeing learners from constraints of time and place while offering flexible learning opportunities. It is a way of combining work and family responsibilities with educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2003).

From the findings it was evident that all respondents were eager and ready for vocational/ technical training. Learning styles would depend on the unique demographic characteristics or needs of rural women. A Multi-pronged approach was recommended with a hybrid of: mLearning, Mobile classroom accompanied by mobile libraries, Tele-learning, Digital villages, ‘Merry-go-round’ learning, TV and community radio broadcasts, Peer-learning and Face-to-face learning mode.

Majority of respondents preferred the traditional face-to-face mode of teaching/ learning perceived as more interactive (teacher-student, student-student) and more ideal for practical skills. However this was attributed to the fact that the villagers were not aware of other learning environments/ experiences. This perception changed when they were enlightened on other learning modes.

Correspondence delivery centres which the researcher referred to as mobile classroom could be set up and used as study centres. These could be stationed each in every village whereby printed study guides, audio and video learning materials are delivered. The trainers would then coordinate with the ‘mother’ institutions providing the distance learning services.

The television and radio could be used to deliver lectures to individual home-based learners/ groups in these remote classrooms where face-to-face support is being offered.

The researcher also suggests digital village for multimedia delivery, involving a team of specialists including media and information specialists, instructional designers and learning specialists. Internet – based systems could also be established by which multimedia materials in electronic format could be delivered through computers via databases and electronic libraries, to enhance teacher-student and student-student interactions either synchronously or asynchronously by email, computer conferences and bulletin boards. Tele-learning would be a preferable supplement to other forms of ODL delivery, but this would only be possible with Internet connections.

Mlearning presents favorable option as this requires only mobile phone, or a tablet or MP3 player or Smartphone. From the findings, mLearning was also preferred by many as 40% had mobile phones. It was also considered convenient for those who had families they could not leave to attend classes.

Another recommendation is what the researcher refers to as ‘Merry-go-round’ learning, a peer style of learning whereby groups of learners with similar learning needs move from place to place, study together while performing other social-economic activities. The term was coined from a phrase originally used by rural women to refer to self-help groups dabbed ‘merry-go-round’ whereby women move from household to household to raise funds, do communal work and support each other. Samburu women had formed women groups and visited each other within households/villages. These group forums could be used to train various skills of interest. Many were interested in business or entrepreneurship skills, hairdressing, dress-making and even building modern houses.
5.3 Role of TVET

The writer suggests positioning of TVET in promoting open learning through formulating specific policies to accommodate rural women with affirmative actionable strategies; extension activities; developing unique curriculum; promoting techno-literacy; strengthening communication facilities in distance education centres through provision of easy and affordable access to electronic media and Internet.

The researcher recommends some actionable strategies based on a roadmap that TVET institutions could consider adopting:-

1. Problem Identification

TVET needs to come to the realization that EFA is far from being realized as long as rural women/girls are still marginalized. The fact that many rural girls/women are still not aware of the opportunities for learning in TVET was a worrying situation.

2. Needs/Situational Analysis

TVET institutions without relying on government statistics regarding illiteracy levels, ought ‘to find out on their own’ the actual situation in rural environment. It is the responsibility of TVET institutions, at institutional levels to carry out situational/ needs analysis.

3. Selection, Planning and Execution of ODL

The institutions could then identify ODL options to be employed based on research, situational/ needs analysis findings. The ODL modes selected must match the special learning needs/ situations of individuals or groups. Factors such as culture, social, economic, political and environmental conditions, literacy levels would need to be put into consideration. This would ensure viability and sustainability of ODL programmes, High-quality and competency-based curriculum delivery.

4. Quality Assurance

TVET institutions and systems require to position themselves to higher status and improve their attractiveness ‘to be a magnet’ to learners and stakeholders. TVET programmes must guarantee a strong link between what is learnt and needs of the labour market, producing ‘high quality’ graduates who are highly employable. Quality assurance is therefore essential at all levels within TVET systems.

5. Clear- cut- policies

TVET policies need not be vague or general, but very specific on ODL for rural girls/ women. It is important to customize Universal, regional or national policies to meet local needs. ODL could be formally institutionalized in such policies as open admissions, and freedom of selection of what, when and where to learn; flexible organizational structures, delivery and communication patterns as well as the use of various technologies to support learning.

6. Budgets

It is imperative for planners to come-up with well-budgeted projects/ programmes to ensure sustainability. Budgets have to be authentic to attract funding from government, NGOS and stakeholders.
4. Collaborations/ Partnerships

The above would be more achievable through partnerships with policy makers; curriculum designers; ODL specialists, industry/ employers, NGOs and organizations such as COL and UNESCO; through MOUs and joint projects.

5.4 Role of WITED

Seafaring girls brought in by WITED-Team, during a practical session in the N-Computing Lab

The major role of WITED would be to sensitize rural women on available training opportunities, ODL options, and career prospects including self-employment. This could be done through:

1. Awareness campaigns and outreach programmes in remote rural environments
2. Mentorship and career guidance programmes to school girls starting at elementary levels to mitigate socio-cultural interferences at an early age
3. Rigorous and strategic campaigns to convince men, village elders and opinion leaders to educate girls and release women to gain skills
4. Exploring ODL options appropriate for particular individuals and groups of girls/ women
5. Initiating projects to benefit rural girls/ women educationally, economically and socially.
6. Collaborating with TVET systems, government, NGO’s and organizations like COL, UNESCO, ILO, other WITED Chapters, and stakeholders

7. Participating in gender-related forums and educational seminars/workshops/conferences to build capacity and create awareness on promoting girls/women education.

CONCLUSION

From the findings it is evident that though there have been remarkable achievements elsewhere, there is still much more into accomplishment of MDGs and EFA goals particularly for the rural women/girls. ODL could be the ultimate approach that TVET, WITED and all education stakeholders should embrace to bring girls/women on the education platform.