Schooling can save African girls from early marriages

MICHAEL ADDANEY
EDUCATION

Millions of African girls are becoming wives every year. In Niger, about 75 per cent of girls will become child brides before they turn 18. In Chad and the Central African Republic the figure is 68 per cent.

Some countries, like Ethiopia, are recording some important victories in the fight to protect girls from becoming child brides. But the practice remains alarmingly common and is growing. In a 2013 report on the issue, the United Nations Children Emergency Fund warned that:

If there is no reduction in the practice of child marriage, up to 280 million girls alive today are at risk of becoming brides by the time they turn 18. Due to population growth, this number will approach 320 million by 2050.

How can child marriages be stopped? The answer, research suggests, lies in improving girls' access to basic education – and in changing school curricula so that both girls and boys realise women can contribute a great deal to their societies if they are not just married off and forgotten.

Countries in sub-Saharan Africa have some of the world's lowest levels of school enrolment and completion. The situation is particularly dire for girls – they account for 55 per cent of the region's children who aren't at school, and 52 per cent of its out-of-school adolescents. A study by the World Bank that explored the links between child marriage and education found that child marriage and underage pregnancies collectively contribute to between 15 per cent and 20 per cent of school drop-outs in the region.

Other research has suggested that any girl who completes 10 years of education is six times less likely to be pushed into marriage before she turns 18 than a less-educated peer. .

So what is it about education that can make such a difference to a girl's prospects of becoming a child bride? Quite simply, education is a dynamic tool for change. It has the power to transform individuals' lives and improve their social standing. It also empowers girls to understand and claim their rights – particularly in the areas of further education and their own reproductive health.

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Letters

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Proposed varsity admissions sytem will promote tribalism

Changing the university admissions system is likely to lock poor students out of top colleges and encourage tribalism. According a new proposal, the Universities (Amendment) Bill 2015, which was sponsored by majority leader Aden Duale, universities will be tasked with selecting their own students instead of leaving it to a single agency.

If the Bill is passed into law, universities will have their own admission bodies while the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Services (KUCCPS) will be charged with developing career guidance programmes for the institutions of higher learning.

In totality, the whole Bill sounds nice "from far", but if you asked me, it is very far from nice.

It is almost common knowledge that campuses, colleges and tertiary institutions breed tribalists. Gone are the days when we thought education would help fight vices in the community. Most students share rooms with fellow tribesmen, associate with students from the same ethnic backgrounds and speak their first language, thus stopping students from other communities from freely associating with them. During campus and college elections, leaders are picked on tribal lines. The graffiti on toilet walls or corridors in almost all the institutions tell it all. Even relationships are tribal oriented! Do you still think such citizens will come out of institutions and preach unity?

Similarly, the institutions' managements are tribal. Institutions located in particular areas have three

A graduation ceremony at the University of Nairobi. SALATO NJAU

quarters of their staff coming from the local communities. Bursaries, work study jobs, first class degree awards and many privileges will be given to students from the "correct" tribe. Departmental heads in some cases favour students from their tribes. Some lecturers will never give a supplementary to students from their tribe .

Such favours discourage hard work and breed hostility, enmity and tribalism that may prove a big challenge to fight since it emanates from people who are seen as opinion leaders and role models in the society.

If this is already happening what will happen if admissions are done at the university level. The selection will the most skewed in the history of this country. Most campuses and colleges will draw students, college workers, teaching and non-teaching staff and the entire management from one tribe.

Proposing Bills and passing them may be fun to the legislators, but it is quite clear that some of these Bill, if they become law, may be counterproductive in the long run.

Parliamentarians need a "third eye" when proposing Bills and especially before passing them . This is the 21st Century and tribalism should be aggressively fought by shunning all everything that might encourage such divisions. Bringing down varsity admissions to the university level is not the right thing to do at this point. The proposed Bill should not be passed into a law in Kenya.

WILBERFORCE SONGONI MANALI

Employment prospects dimming for local engineering graduates

Mike Eldon's article titled "Focus on technical training in higher education timely" is spot on. But there is more.

Today, engineering graduates have poor job prospects and those who get jobs are lowly paid.

University students studying engineering are looking to change careers to go into banking, procurement and other jobs that seem to pay better.

Poor returns

I have struggled (without success) to stop engineering graduates from enrolling for CPAs.... even though I am in finance.

Students do not want to study technical subjects because they are difficult and offer lesser prospects and prestige than the so-called easier subjects.

We will pay a Filipino technician a large sum in dollars but peanuts to a polytechnic graduate who if nurtured would do the same job at a fraction of the cost. Also, with the slow growth in industrial production, where are these graduates going to get employment?

Unless the job market changes, we may find few takers for the technical courses as prospects become dimmer and graduates end up doing unskilled work in other fields.

Onchi Maiko

Boards must step up oversight on cyber security

RICHARD GITONGA
SECURITY

In 2014, both public and private organisations in Kenya lost Sh15 billion to cybercrime, according to Kenya Cyber Security report.

This figure is likely to increase exponentially as cyber criminals continue to explore and exploit vulnerabilities across various sectors in the Kenya economy. Previously, all one had to think about was physical security in the form of high perimeter walls, manned gates and security dogs to feel relatively secure. In today's digital age, the security environment has changed significantly. It is now characterised by totally different actors, both legitimate and illegitimate. Unfortunately, this new scheme of things has created a sort of "fog of war" in most organisations.

Some board members were born in an era when single computers used to occupy entire buildings. Yet others were born in an era where computers where the size of refrigerators. Presumptively, a minority of current board members were born in the era of personal computers, tablets and smart phones. This does not mean that the digital immigrants are any less ignorant. Some are even leading organisations that are centres of excellence in information technology innovation.

However, a fair majority of our esteemed board members can be described as luddites. In as much as they oversee organisations that are fast embracing technology to either sustain or gain a competitive advantage, they are still relatively sceptical towards information technology.

This attitude is untenable as progressive and engaged boards are acutely aware of the need to embrace sound IT governance practices. They have to facilitate the development of a framework that supports effective management of IT resources to achieve their organisations' strategic objectives. Through the board risk committee, they have the responsibility to oversee broader risk implications of IT.

In this era of cybercrime, cyber terrorism and cyber warfare, few boards have an understanding of the real and tangible risks that their organisations are exposed to. This minority, notwithstanding that they may not be technically inclined, have some working or rudimentary knowledge of basic terms such as malware, Trojans, spear phishing and Distributed-Denial-of-Service.

They are aware that customers, shareholders, investors and regulators are increasingly demanding effective controls to protect sensitive information and avoid liabilities. They understand the potential exposure their organisations face to cybercrime and have provided leadership to management and approved cyber security strategies, policies, action plans and incident response plans. Progressive boards in this digital age have spear-headed the effort of establishing a "cyber smart" culture within their organisations. Keen board chairpersons must take up the challenge and take their board members for cyber security governance training.

- Institute of Directors