Chapter 8
Wicked Problem and Gender Inequality in the Educational Sector

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ABSTRACT

Since the coinage of the term 'wicked problem' in the 1970s, various dimensions of the concept have emerged. Various social ills such as inequality, political instability, terrorism, diseases, famine, poverty, and corruption are considered as wicked problem. Many of the wicked problems are so called because of their complexities and difficulties of finding solutions to the problems. A major wicked problem that is pervasive in many African countries is gender inequality in education. Universal access to education for girls and boys is one of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also emphasized quality education and gender equality as two of the main agendas that should be achieved by developed and developing countries. This chapter explores the gender inequality in the educational sector in selected Sub-Saharan African countries. A comparative analysis of the inequality on school enrollment in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa was explored. The implication for policy and practice is discussed in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

'Wicked problem' was coined by Rittel and Weber (1973) to refer to a pervasive socio-political problem that is difficult to solve. The authors adopted the word in the sense that the phenomenon is "malignant", "tricky", "vicious" and "aggressive". In order words, the term is difficult to understand and appears not to have a solution (Bishop & Dzidc, 2014). Grint (2005) opines that wicked problem has no unilinear solution, no 'stopping point', and no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, but there are better or worse alternatives.

It is interrelated and symptomatic of other problems (Head & Alford, 2015). This interconnectedness makes wicked problem a complex and multi-dimensional concept (Walton, 2017) that has a ripple effect on other systemic components. In light of this, Mertens (2014) submits that a systemic nature of the world's problems must be identified in order to come up with solutions.

One of the dimensions of the world's wicked problem is gender inequality in education. Gender inequality in education is said to have a direct effect on economic growth by reducing the average level of human capital growth (Jayachandran, 2015; Kleven, Landais & Søgaard, 2018). This consequently leads to gender inequality on investment which indirectly affects population growth (Klassen & Cosgrave, 2002). The preceding argument is consistent with the position of Rittel and Webber (1973) that a wicked problem can be considered a symptom of another problem. Gender inequality in education can be seen as a social problem that has manifested as gender inequality effects poverty, general income level, human capital, health and politics (Meny-Gibert & Russell, 2012; Taylor, van der Berg & Mabogoane, 2013; Walton, 2017).

Previous studies by scholars such as O' Brien, Fitzsimmons, Crane and Head (2017), Sen (2001) and Fotaki (2012) have identified gender inequality as a wicked problem. Scholarly works have also advanced on the link between education and a wicked problem (Southgate, Reynolds & Howley, 2013; McCall & Skrtic, 2009). However, the concept of gender inequality in education as an instance of a wicked problem has not been given adequate attention.

Gender inequality in education has been witnessed in Europe and North America (Fotaki, 2001) but is said to be more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Caribbean countries. While Latin American and Caribbean countries show annual growth rate of 1.53 percent, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa recorded 0.57 percent (Klassen & Lamanna, 2009).

Furthermore, in terms of access to education, the girl child in Africa seems to suffer more discrimination (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). There is continuous discrimination against girls and women in education as girls recorded more than 55 percent of out-of-school children (Wang, 2013). It is estimated that women made up two-thirds of the world's illiterate population. A recent report by the UNESCO (2015) indicates that 58 million children and 63 million adolescents are not in school, and more than half of out-of-school children are girls. The report further explains that of the out-of-school children, not enrolled in school, 31 million girls are of primary school age and 34 million girls are of lower secondary school age. While 75 percent of women are literate, it is 86 percent for men across all developing countries (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014). It is in this sense that Walton (2017) conceptualised education exclusion as a "wicked problem".

Despite many years of research and global interventions, gender inequality in education continues to mirror some attributes of a wicked problem. One such intervention is the laudable initiative by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the objective of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 (Lewin, 2009; UN, 2002). Educational for All (EFA) has generated commitment to improving access to education. Gross enrolment has been evident in some Sub-Saharan African countries with an average rate of 97 percent, where girls now gain more access than boys (UNESCO, 2015; Delprato, Akyeampong, Sabates & Fernandez, 2015). However, countries that were unable to achieve the MDGs and EFA access to education by 2015 deadline are mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2015). An estimated 43 percent of all out-of-school children will never go to school, and 48 percent of girls and 37 percent of boys will never enroll (McCleary-Sills, Hanmer, Parsons & Klugman, 2015). Gender inequality in education remains a wicked problem which requires a holistic approach to nip in the bud (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Lumby (2013) is of the view that scientific

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