

The purpose of this study was to investigate factors that influence gender mobility to the top levels of educational management in Kenya. The study hoped to offer explanations as to why women are under-represented at these levels. It hoped to illuminate and reveal gender-based concerns prevailing at the top levels as they affect the participation of women and men in educational management. This, it was assumed, would increase awareness of the critical need to have women adequately represented at these levels.

The conceptual framework argues that the patriarchal ideology and the social mechanisms it puts in place such as socialization, gender-based division of labour, myths and stereotypes offers the main explanations to women's low participation at the top levels of educational management. The concern of women's status vis-à-vis that of men was built on the realization that women remained and continue to be subordinate to men. This was attributed to patriarchal structures dominant in majority of cultures globally.

The study endeavored to answer five questions including: What socio-cultural and structural factors promote/hinder women and men's mobility to the top levels of educational management? What practices at the top levels of educational management hinder or promote women and men's mobility to the top levels of educational management? What impact do the existing policies have on the participation of men and women in educational management? And lastly, how has the political environment influenced hiring of men and women at the top levels of educational management?

The site of the study was the Ministry of Education Science and Technology headquarters. The study targeted male and female officers working at the top levels of educational management for in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. As the Ministry of Education headquarters had mostly male education managers, Nairobi Provincial Education Office, that was said to have high numbers of female educational managers, was purposively sampled for comparison.

The case study methodology was used and focused on officers both male and female at the top and middle level management positions of the Ministry of Education Headquarters. It solicited their views, perceptions and experiences regarding the low participation of women at the top levels of educational management. Information was generated mainly through in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions and document analysis. Data obtained was analysed manually using thematic groupings guided by the research questions.

The analysis presented here puts more emphasis on the responses of the officers holding senior and middle level management positions in the Ministry of Education both at the Ministry Headquarters (Jogoo House) and Nairobi Provincial Headquarters (Nyayo House). As the main purpose of the study was to document the experiences of the officers, other sources of information, for example, document analysis was used for confirmatory purposes.

The main findings of the study were that the low participation of women in educational decision-making in the Ministry of Education may be explained by a complex set of interacting factors including the historical development of education in Kenya that relegated women and girls education to a less important position. This emanated from the societal perception of the role of boys and girls in society. The education of boys was given priority and was directed towards making them have stronger economic base. This was based on the societal ascribed role of boys as the heads of households and breadwinners that was strengthened by the colonial system. The education of girls was seen as of less value as girls were expected to get married and did not need a lot of education to be good housewives.

This negatively impacted and continues to affect women's participation at various sectors of employment. Further, the institutional factors including structural and organizational ones,

gender neutral hiring and promotion policies, stiff competition for few posts at the top, inadequate exposure to broader issues of management, lack of adherence to the set criteria in promotion and politics, all play a major role in determining who gets to the decision-making positions. Of particular importance were the informal structures of interaction in the professional world that affected advancement of officers to management. Important and critical decisions were said to be made in "old boys networks" only to be formalized in the officers. As women have no such networks, they tend to be left out.

Further, the problems caused by traditions on the perceptions of the role of the role and place of women and men in society are of critical importance. There is subtle resistance to women's participation in spheres long held by men. At the same time a number of socio-cultural factors were found to be a major hindrance to the advancement of women to the top levels. These included; socialization, cultural expectations of what are suitable for women, gender division of labour and myths and stereotypes.

The study recommended that gender inequalities be addressed at every level of education to enable women to participate in the education sector and attain higher education levels. This will create large reservoir of female officers necessary to gradually to advance into decision-making levels. Other recommendations include; affirmative action, management induction courses, gender sensitization programmes, personal empowerment courses, gender responsive employment policies and social and social transformation where the divisional of labour will be fairly distributed to men and women. Men and women should be encouraged to challenge cultural and traditional mechanisms that create situations of subordination of one gender.