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INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL

**Emerging theme: Engaging young women and men, girls and boys,
to advance gender equality**

**THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY**

by

**EDNA AKULLQ
Self Help Foundation
Uganda**

Introduction

Uganda is a patriarchal society and for a long time women have been marginalised. This has caused persistent inequalities between men and women in all spheres of life. However, young women and men today have many opportunities to participate in the fight for gender equality. These include among others modern information and communications technology, the increasing population of young people. Politically the youth in Uganda shape the political outcome and can determine the political trends in the country due to their unmatched numbers¹. The recent 'Arab spring' has demonstrated that young people are catalysts and champions of change in the modern society. This gives young people an edge and makes them a fundamental resource in achieving gender equality faster and more effectively than any other group. Despite all this young people have been left out. But how do young people who have not yet appreciated the meaning and value of equality rally behind such a cause? The subject of gender has been highly trivialized at all levels of education; the media places a woman's face to mean gender and it is most commonly referred to as a family issue that does not warrant public attention and interest.

Better understanding and more action

Understanding the meaning of gender and gender equality is paramount for young people to identify with this cause. Like many countries in the world, young women and men in Uganda, lack the proper knowledge and understanding regarding gender and gender equality. They do not resonate with the fact gender affects them in all spheres of life as such do not attach the true economic, social and political meaning to gender. Young people do not consider gender inequality as a major problem; it has not yet gained relevance because to them, there are more pressing problems. For long the message of gender has been branded as a women's issue and not exactly young people's issue. The message of gender equality needs to be packaged in such a way that helps young women and men to appreciate the importance of gender equality and that it affects us in all spheres, politically, socially and economically and that it is as important. If the message of gender equality were packaged in such a way that young people were led to believe that it is important; the young people, with their unmatched numbers would be true champions of gender equality and gender inequality would be no more.

Social entrepreneurship² as a tool for empowerment of young men and women

Being young in our time has nearly become a 'curse', a 'double curse' if you are a woman.' as the society does not embrace the two. Being young has become synonymous with incompetence, confusion, disorganisation, and irrelevance. Many times young people are committed to seeing change in their corner of the world yet they get stuck with ideas that they cannot implement for very many reasons. Society does not give young people space to grow.

I have had many ideas of how I could change the education challenges in Northern Uganda. But like most young people I did not first of all know how to start up. I did not believe that I could act upon the idea that I had. Globalisation then expanded my horizons when I found sprout E-course, an on line course on Taking It Global that taught me the art of growing an idea, the basics of how to conceptualise an idea and plan for action. It was in the year 2010 that I not only saw a problem but recognized it as an opportunity to make a change and I took up the challenge.

¹ youth and young people constitute 78% of Uganda's population which is about 27 Million people.(Population Census 2002)

² Entrepreneurial approaches to social problems.

With this knowledge I founded Self Help Foundation Uganda³ to fill the information, knowledge and skills gap that existed in the communities of Northern Uganda, a place I called home but a region that had suffered two decades of civil strife and war. I consider education as a long term solution to the temporary recovery problem that the people of Northern Uganda still face even today. Armed to the tooth with ideas, I mobilized a team of five other young people that wanted to help; we designed a strategy to talk to the communities and encourage them to embrace education, send and keep their children in school. Self Help Foundation started working with one school but today it has expanded with work in six schools and three partners. We got help from student associations, charity organizations and trained local volunteers. I started with one idea that has turned into an institution. I needed just that knowledge that I acquired at that particular time, and my team mates just needed a leader that had that particular knowledge and vision. The experience of being a young woman social entrepreneur in rural Northern Uganda has been so empowering, I have in the process built a network of friends and partners, I have joined a community of young leaders who share their successes and challenges. This experience has enabled me to provide alternative policies based on the experiences of the grassroots people and to argue from an informed point of view

The greatest challenge with social enterprise is attitude, negative attitude. The young people do not believe that they can make a difference and the old people do not believe that young people can make a difference. Attitude. There are so many young people today that have great ideas to improve the lives of women and men but young social entrepreneurs cannot get the guidance and support from a society that frowns at them. The negative attitude exhibited is chiefly based on the irrelevance of social enterprise.

Social Enterprise must be addressed, in content and context, to help young people to engage in policy from an informed point of view. This initiative has worked in Uganda. With a group of twenty five young social innovators; comprising 13 ladies and 12 men; The Young Leaders' Think Tank for Policy Alternatives was formed to act as a unifying factor among many others bringing the young people together to discuss pertinent policy issues from their generation perspective with intent to forward these positions and alternatives in a policy form to political decision-makers and to the general population. This group is exemplary in the promotion of thematic areas, constructive dialogues and debates and adheres to the guiding principles of tolerance and objectivity. The Think Tank has produced two policy briefs on the issues of health and unemployment in Uganda. The paper on unemployment clearly highlights that the economy is not growing fast enough to provide jobs for the largely young population. This tally with the fact the private sector which is the largest job creator for young people is also struggling. The paper largely encourages public private partnerships to expand the private sector, and proposes job creation among young people with support from government and private sector.

Is education the missed or the missing opportunity among young people?

³ www.selfhelpfoundation.org

Most young people in Uganda are poor, for a young person in Uganda, poverty ranges from failure to attend school, limited reproductive health services and socio-political instabilities to unemployment. To them unemployment would be more of a problem than unequal relationships. Education is expected to expand opportunities for young people and for women in particular. This is not happening because the economy is not growing fast enough to create jobs for the young people. The 2009/2010 Uganda National Household survey used the labour force participation rate¹ to assess the employment situation in Uganda. The labour force participation rate⁴ for the youth (international definition of, 15-24 years) rose from 44% in 2005/2006 to 60% in 2009/2010. The labour force participation for youth as defined nationally defined, 18-30 years increased from 77% in 2005/2006 to 86% in 2009/2010. Consequently Uganda required about 15.6 million jobs for her active population aged 15-64 years by 2010. But due to the current unemployment rate of over 3.5% and a whopping youth unemployment rate of over 32.2% then about 4.37million people have remained jobless. The new African Development Indicators report 2008/2009 puts the figure of unemployed Ugandan youth to 83 percent.

Given the population of young people, unemployment then defeats the purpose of education. That gender inequality exists in the labour force cannot be denied, thus a failure to link job creation for young people with gender equality is a missed opportunity. There is a need for private sector expansion to absorb young women and men. Increased involvement of young people in trade related activities can boost the economy and create more jobs in the economy. There is a need to prioritise trade and private sector involvement for young people to get economically empowered.

Schools are handing down gender inequality through generations. These educational institutions have not provided the safety net and motivation for boys and girls to join and stay in school. As a result 'early marriages'⁵ have become an increasing trend in the rural communities; many girls drop out of school to help out with the farming but also to fetch dowry in marriage. In fact many of them see little or no relevance in education because they graduate in primary school with no 'real' skills to earn a living outside their father's home. Some of the girls face sexual harassment and violence from teachers and their male counterparts in schools and end up dropping out of school.

The education institutions are not transforming the ascribed roles and responsibilities of men and women assigned by society. The curriculum itself does not address the relationship between men and women. More often than not the girls drop out of school once they start their menstruation periods because they share toilet blocks with boys and are not sensitized enough to know what to do. In schools children are taught that the head of the family is the father, those who have mothers as the head of the family are told that this is not right. The young people are not prioritising the issue of gender equality because they do not understand the issue, education should in fact be an opportunity, the families are the best source of transformation and yet again, we are not utilising them well.

⁴ Labour force participation rate means the number of persons in the labour force expressed as a percentage of working age population.

⁵ Marriage before the age of eighteen years and for this context marriage at fifteen years

Families, which are the first learning institution for children reinforce gender inequalities by promote traditional norms and beliefs within the society. This is demonstrated through division of labour amongst boys and girls: Girls are taught the nurturing and reproductive roles while boys are taught to protect and provide for the home. In many communities there is still double discrimination of being young and being female, Girls are often pulled out of school because they are surrogates to their mothers, the next best alternative when she is sick or dead. In fact parents prefer to educate the boy even with unlimited resources because as it is they are the 'name bearers', clan promoters.

Key recommendations

- Young people should organise instead of agonising, analyse policies, make policy briefs and present them to the relevant ministries, send out petitions

Trained and motivated young people can themselves play a substantial role through peer education initiatives. Peers can reach out either in an organized manner or informally to other youth, imparting information and knowledge on issues such regarding gender equality. Peer education can happen in small groups or through individual contact, and can take place in a variety of settings such as in schools and universities, clubs, churches, workplaces, on the street or in a shelter.

- Governments
Believe and support young people and invest in the education of women because the Chinese are right; when you want to provide for a hundred years, educate the women.

Create a transformative educational curriculum which encourages equal relationships between boys and girls, examines social norms that define women and men's roles and addresses different forms of violence and how to intervene.

Include gender equality as a value taught to children at all levels of education
Make transformative investments in families since families are the first education institution for children

Engage young people in decision making; they are not at decision making tables.

Encourage participation of young people by providing a quota for them to join official government delegations and for them to represent their countries

- Private sector; Actively support social initiatives by creating spaces for Young people to engage and also craft messages that convey the right messages of equal opportunities between boys and girls.

Since governments are constrained by limited financial resources, there is a need to explore the use of public-private partnerships to overcome shortfalls in the education sector but also to support young people's initiatives. Public Private Partnerships can also enhance the linkages between the formal education sector and the private sector.

- Donor community; Invest and fund young people's social entrepreneurs and provide global learning opportunities for young people.
 - UN Women; encourage member states to invest in social entrepreneurs who will promote gender equality
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