Emphasis on empowering girls has disenfranchised the boy child

By MACHARIA HUNENE
and
SONIA NYANGI

One of the growing socio-economic threats is the neglect and false of the boy child in the drive to promote the girl child. Such neglect implies the existence of a reverse discrimination at all levels of policy making: global, national, village and the home. The disconnect leads society to ignore the damaging effects of disenfranchisement of the boy child and on long term national interests. Although the damage is visible in many parts of the world, it appears acute in the Mt Kenya region that is undergoing depopulation due to the implications of the boy child. The drive to promote girls was a well-rooted global phenomenon to deal with external habits of putting limitations on what women could or should do.

In the USA, the anti-slavery crusades of the 19th Century and the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s sparked feminist movements. There, however, was no consensus among the movements as to whether to stick equally with men to be anti-men. Equity advocates crafted removal of artificial obstacles to retain natural social practices that tend to reinforce relations between men and women. Some of the anti-women women went overboard and implied that men were irrelevant. The two versions were exported to Africa and went by times, embraced uncritically.

The phenomenon of anti-men feminism hit Africa hard and appeared to imply anti- Africanness. The gender gendis, the former crusading Nazadas pass Joseph Kaguthi used to declare, has “not our agenda” as much as it helped to destroy the African social order. And among the destroyed social order was the relationship between the boy and the girl. This created an inability on the part of the boy to indulge the girl who too developed an inability to intern the boy’s increasingly limited resources. To Kaguthi, the gender agenda had destroyed the African agenda and had led to the destruction of the African family. How had that destruction come about?

There was general agreement on the need to empower women in the socio-political field by giving special encouragement to the girl child to overcome traditional inhibitions. In the process, we all sang the same song about girl-child discrimination and everybody got down to business of getting the girl-child educated.

There was a problem with this emphasis because it tended to engage in social isolation of the boy from the girl.

In the process, the girl was conditioned to reject her grandmother’s ways and to embrace something else. We did not consider giving the same encouragement to the boy, who was also facing similar challenges of overcoming traditional inhibitions related to the expectation of what boys and girls should or should not together or separately. In many ways, the boy still retained some of his grandfather’s ways for he was not prepared for the new realities associated with the new girl. This failure to consider the welfare of the boy child was particularly pronounced in Kenya where the boys seemingly became demoralized.

The failure manifests itself in several ways, among them in churches and schools which have broken down and are no longer places of refuge and respect in times of distress. There are, for instance, proliferations of “churches”, that provide little solace and these desperate women seeking spiritual refuge from domestic chaos. The ticks specialize on fleecing desperate women financially, materially and sexually.

Learning institutions are little better than the churches but have problems providing the needed guidance. Instead, they have lost prestige as teachers are often absent from schools or are regularly on the streets shouting “sick set”. Some engage in unbecoming behavior that is publicized in the media for the youth to read, hear and watch.

With the emphasis on girl-child education and the neglect of the boy, the number of boys in classes has dropped drastically. At the universities and colleges, it is normal to have 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the students being boys while the rest are girls. And the girls tend to be more serious than the boys, who show lots of discouragement.

In some prominent schools for girls, the students reportedly were motivated to “beat” boys in particular schools in national examinations or marry them. The implication was that the girls went to relate to boys who are their intellectual equals or better rather than in engaging in the lowering of socio-intellectual expectations.

The tragedy is that there is a serious imbalance between well-educated boys and girls. The number of boys who fits the expectation is down as many become demoralized by the realities of the 21st Century.

The consequence of ignoring the boy is socio-silencer and the Mt Kenya region has been hit hard. Young well-educated and ambitious women ignore their less endowed age mates, some get attracted to men old enough to be their fathers partly because they love men and the expectations. In the process, the demoralized boy tends to remain a perpetual child and is reluctant to leave his mother’s safety and establish his home.

Some end up being self-esteem by being dependent on their peer group and wives. There are these, without officially paid work or who are poorly paid, who become domesticated “housebands”, which raises social tension. Some end up being drinkers due to forget to result of many failure to provide economic support.

This leads to biological inadequacies, with some men sleeping under beds, which in the long run is a threat to national interests in that it depletes the country.

There is, therefore, need to reconsider the neglect and the tribulations of the boy child quickly and as a threat to national interests.

Prof. Muneke is a professor of history and international relations and Prof. Kirugu is an assistant professor of psychology at USIU.