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## Book Reviews

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### Chelewa, Chelewa The Dilemma of Teenage Girls

The book is basically about the problems of young women in Tanzania who, owing to a variety of factors experience different problems attendant with early motherhood. The research under which this work was produced was carried out by women in different sub-disciplines of the social sciences.

The book began with the examination of the realities of the situation of the typical teenage girl in Tanzania. It analysed the *demographic* situation of teenage Tanzania girls between 1978 and 1988. The conclusion is that there has been a change in this direction because of the increase in the ratio of teenage girls compared with the rest of the population. Next it considered the evolution of population policy in Tanzania and pointed out that there has been a change from hypersensitivity and eventual hostility to a more detailed attempt to formulate an explicit population policy after the middle of the 1980s.

Moreover, the first chapter looks at the various stereotypes of the teenage girl which have resulted in what is described as 'the pathologization of the teenage girl'. The authors suggest that this method of stereotyping should be changed. They argued in this direction that various other options such as the evaluation of the population problem and 'men's uncontrolled desire' should now replace the old image of teenage girls as ignorant, deprived, depraved and exploited.

Chapter 2 takes a look at the present and past situations of pubescent girls, and discussed the customary modes of contracting marriage relationships in certain rural areas of Tanzania. This analysis shows that the average pubescent girl is given out to marriage to satisfy the aims of other people — parents, aunties and society in general. The girl who is about to become a woman is not seriously considered in marriage transactions. Her hopes and aspirations are subordinated and she has little or nothing to contribute while contracting this relationship which is bound to change her life completely. Chapter 2 ends with the challenging remark by the authors that they meant to make the teenage girls' voice heard. They also wanted to overturn the usually sympathetic, slanderous or condemnatory perception of the pubescent girl.

Chapter 3 delves into the education of girls in Tanzania and the implications of pregnancy in this direction. The chapter analyses the enrolment of girls in higher and tertiary institutions and concluded that the percentage of girls enrolled in these institutions is small compared with that of boys. It goes on to discuss the choice of subjects among those girls and their performance at school. It is stated that the performance of girls in some selected schools has declined from 14 percent in 1985 to about 10 percent in 1987 and then to about 7 percent in 1989. Specific reasons for this are not given.

It was also asserted that girls tend to prefer language subjects and most of them tend to shun technical subjects because they don't like them. Another point of focus is the impact of pregnancies on secondary school girls, parents, teachers, administrators and the students themselves who have different understandings and interpretations of the situation. However, it is obvious from the study that school-girl pregnancy has negative consequences not only for the girls and their children but also for the community. For example the girls can no longer further their education and with this goes the possibility of securing good-paying jobs. The parents lose all the money they have invested in the girls education and since the girls are usually expelled from school when they become pregnant, the resources the state had devoted to the training of the young girls is wasted.

The chapter concludes on a sobering note, and states that once the girls are pregnant they are somewhat ostracised and receive little or no support from fathers, husbands, religious leaders and the community. The community is indicted because it seems not interested in protecting the youth from the dangers of adolescent life. Instead, the authors argue, the community is prepared to risk the sexual and reproductive health of the youth in order to uphold traditional norms and morality.

Chapter 4 examines the phenomenon of arranged marriages in Tanzania and Zanzibar regions. In some areas, it is noted that parents arrange marriages for their daughters in order to fulfil religious obligations. In other areas the prevalence of arranged marriages is low as compared with what happened in the past. In the Wakurya society, for example, arranged marriages figure mostly on the basis of tribal culture. In the conclusion, the author suggests that socio-economic pressure is bound to have repercussions on both marriage and on the division of family assets in cases of divorce. Additionally it is further suggested that improvements should be made to the Wakurya customary laws by removing those that are oppressive to women.

The fifth chapter is devoted mainly to various initiation rites prevalent in certain societies in Tanzania. The structure and modes of these initiation ceremonies are thoroughly discussed. The symbolic details of their meanings are also explained. This chapter is very interesting in certain respects. First, it shows that some communities in Africa have well-organised and

institutionalised ways of launching a female from girlhood to womanhood. Secondly, these initiation rites constitute a link between puberty and marriage. It also clearly demarcates the rôles of women within the family set-up. However, it is clear that modernisation had taken these instructions on sexuality out of their social and cultural contexts. Previously, for instance, these rites were organised at the community level. These days they are becoming increasingly individual and private. In addition to this, the modern approach is biomedical and gives less emphasis to the socio-cultural implications of sexuality and fertility. The authors state that in the past initiation rites were aimed at safeguarding the moral and reproductive order in the context of given societies. Presently, the community pays lip service to the question of bridging the gap between the situation of their young daughters in the past and what obtains in the present.

Chapter 6 focuses mainly on the matrimonial set up in a community in Tanzania called Mwera. This Mwera is found in the Lodi region. In this community matrilineal set-up is very strong. There is also a discussion of the conflict between the traditional initiation rites and the need to improve girls' opportunities for formal education. In this connection, the authors note that there are statutory policies which are intended to improve the educational opportunities for the girls. However, there are factors which hinder the realisation of the objective of these policies. Here it was noted that where both the demands of education and culture exist simultaneously, one of these forces has to give way to the other. There was also a discussion of the traditional stories told to children about the way children are brought into the world. Most of these stories are false with the result that when girls grow up they engage in sexual activity unprepared and ignorant of its consequences.

There were some questions that were raised at the concluding paragraphs of the chapter. Some of these have to do with the question of how marriage is understood by members of the community. There is also the question of the impact of modernity on the matrilineal set-up of the Mwera. Finally there was the issue of how to modify the customs of the Mwera people in order to protect the girls from becoming victims of AIDS.

Chapter 7 is appropriately titled 'Looking for Men'. It discusses the various ways in which girls come into contact with the opposite sex. From the discussion, it is evident that the opportunity for such contacts is greater in the urban centres than in the rural areas. We are also told of the divergent things which motivate the different young men and women into establishing relationship. For example, girls are sometimes attracted to men because of economic reasons and sometimes out of the sheer attempt to do what others do. For the men, generally, they want to have fun. And some of the married men who indulge in having girl friends do so simply to live up to the phallogocentric world-view of the community which is richly reflected in the

symbolic language of ordinary discourse in food utensils, tools for farming and architecture. Sometimes these casual relationships may lead to pregnancy and then to marriage. The authors point out that in sub-Saharan Africa, married couples do not form a unit in the same sense in which this obtains in Europe. There is a sort of alienation, according to the authors, between the husband and the wife in sub-Saharan Africa. It is alleged, quoting Jacobsons-Widdins, that the only thing a man and a woman have in common is the night. In the past, according to them, these boundaries made it possible to have what is termed as dangerous mixing of bodily fluids. They conclude by stating that remnants of this alienation can be traced in contemporary conflicts between men and women.

Chapter 8 begins with the assumption that teenage mothers have their babies before they are fully aware of the implications of their reproductive abilities, rights etc. The basic theme of this chapter is that teenage mothers need more information on their sexual capabilities and reproductive health. The chapter also shows that it is usually the mothers of the young girls who give them information regardless of the implications on their sexuality. Although the authors do not condemn the traditional approaches to reproductive health and sexuality among girls totally, they urge that more scientific knowledge in child birth should be made available to traditional midwives so that they can offer safer services. All these are argued within a wider context of a more holistic approach to child birth so that cultural issues of the community have to be considered in so far as they do not interfere with the child bearing process and the health of the mother and the newly born baby.

Chapter 9 opens up with the study focused on how much or how little young mothers know concerning their sexuality and reproductive health. Knowledge of reproductive health among these mothers is generally taken to be low and some of the young girls express anxiety and fear over the possibility of becoming mothers. The research in this chapter, just as in most other chapters of the work, is based on field work which entailed the questioning of the various segments of the population.

The study argues that teenagers, based on the sample interviewed, do not receive enough information concerning their reproductive health, the piece meal information which they gathered came from their fellow girls, mothers and other close relatives. It is also stated that these teenagers are mainly ignorant of their physiology, family planning methods and the dangerous consequences of frivolous sex. It is however shown that some of the expectant teenagers who are children in their own rights, did not even know that they were pregnant until some months after pregnancy had occurred.

Because of the negative reaction of parents, boy friends and relatives of these young mothers end up being anxious over their future. It is as if the society has abandoned the young mothers to their fate. The next chapter has

to do with the legal and sociological components of teenage motherhood. This chapter is very instructive because it analyses the legal aspects of the situation involving young girls. Sometimes, it is shown that the law appears to be unfair to these young mothers. For instance, with regard to contraception, although there is no law prohibiting girls from contraceptives, the existential facts of the community was bound to interfere with this freedom in practice.

With reference to abortion, there is the curious fact that its illegality has led to a situation whereby so much activity goes on unrecorded and consequently in many cases have led to illegal and unsafe abortion through quacks. It cites the UN convention on all forms of discrimination against women. This convention interprets access to health care as including, among other things, family planning services and information on reproductive health. The conclusion is that the Tanzanian government should be prepared to take appropriate measures to live up to the ideal set up in the aforementioned UN convention.

The book is mainly descriptive with scattered suggestions here and there. It is well written, simple, clear and hence easy to understand and it clarifies some of the ambiguities and obscurities which are generally associated with usual discussions of teenage motherhood. The book also uses field research, the questionnaire method and there are a number of helpful tables and diagrams contained in the text.

One of the problems however is that it advocates a kind of marriage between traditional customs and modern methods, especially with reference to the sexuality and reproductive health of young teenagers. There is no specific statement on how this unholy marriage is to be effected. Furthermore, the book seems to absolve these young mothers from any blames — it is either the parents, the boyfriends, the community even the governmental agencies that are held to be blameable (p.31). But what about the young girls themselves? Is it not possible that many of these young girls made responsible choices contrary to advice, exhortation and other attempts to make them live more reasonable lives? This is probably an attempt to look at the other side of the coin without an attempt to analyse the sharing of responsibility. Teenage girls, we are told, in the first chapter, have hardly been considered as a specific group for the purposes of analysis (p.15) as a target and not as an actor in her own right... speaking for her and not giving her chance to raise her own voice. Now that teenage girls speak for themselves, it is natural they will blame others for their predicaments.

It is to the credit of the authors that an attempt was made to combine Western feminists and African scholars writing about African societies. The inherent politics of discussions of culture is therefore greatly watered down. But the notion that men's promiscuity can be explained as the result of African phallocentric world-view (op.161) suggests some remnants of

Eurocentric tendencies. Male promiscuity in the West is neither less serious nor rampant even though men's phallocentricity is sometimes assumed to be absent in their non-symbolic languages. All in all, the attempt shows that anthropological studies of African societies need to stress more the way Africans see themselves and perhaps less of how the West sees them.

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