
ZAMBIA: Higher education gender disparities reduced

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Zambia has said it is on the way towards meeting one of the Millennium Development Goals of eliminating gender disparities in education - including in higher education through affirmative action programmes for female students.

In a speech to parliament last month, Vice-president George Kunda said the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of gender equity in all levels of education by 2015 had prompted the government to create bursaries for female students to participate in higher education, including at the country's oldest institution, the University of Zambia.

He said the affirmative action of establishing bursary schemes for girls who excelled academically but could not pay for tertiary education served to promote education for girls. At the University of Zambia, he added, 25% of bursaries had been set aside for girls.

The target of eliminating gender disparities, he told parliament "is likely to be met by 2015, as reported in the last MDGs report".

During the same debate Education Minister Dora Siliya told parliament that in meeting the MDGs the country faced funding challenges in sustainably financing higher education.

As a result, she added, the government was "looking for sustainable ways and various possible solutions to continue to finance higher education", which was consuming a huge chunk of the nation's budget every year.

Siliya said that a recent meeting between members of parliament and traditional chiefs in Luapula province had resolved to build more universities, indicating the enormous pressure to widen access to higher education.

The government was sharing education costs with parents, guardians and students at the University of Zambia and at Copperbelt University, education minister said, and had launched an experiment at Mulungushi University that required economic fees to be paid to assist in improving quality.

"We know that this country has tried free education from Grade 1 to university before, and it failed lamentably," Siliya added.

* Meanwhile, Zambia's Deputy Minister of Tourism and Natural Resources, Moses Mwangala, told lawmakers that the World Bank had provided funds for a climate change resilience programme under the Strategic Climate Fund, a multi-donor trust fund within the bank's **Climate Investment Fund**.

He said Zambia was one of the 19 countries in the world and one of the three in Africa, including Niger and Mozambique, which has been selected for this pilot programme. Sectors that stood to benefit included agriculture, which could use the funds to develop agro-forestry and climate change-resistant crop varieties through research, and the energy sector, which could develop energy conservation and water management systems.