

DEMYSTIFYING CULTURAL GENDER DISPARITIES EXPERIENCED IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Gender disproportions have been part and parcel of most African cultures since time immemorial.

Demographically, women are over a half population in most of the African countries but their participation in sectors of socio-economic and political spheres have remained inadequately represented. The enduring and biased beliefs on gender roles that view women much less important as compared to men are what forms the basis of concern to the welfare of women and most importantly the women entrepreneurs. This study reveals the long-standing cultural practices that have contributed to gender inequality and goes further to demystify areas in which women have continually experienced inequality and thus affecting their entrepreneurial spirit. Through the desk research methodology, it can be deduced that the following are key areas that pose a threat to women socio-economic and political development and hence the inequality being experienced even today in the twenty first century: harmful marriage, female genital mutilation, wife inheritance and HIV scourge, access to land including land rights and right to property, over-emphasizing patriarchal system of family, and gender violence. These factors compounded together, have resulted for unfortunate experiences that have been witnessed in the education sector, political participation, participation in policy making, gender division of labour and inaccess to credit facility. These experiences have severely thwarted entrepreneurial growth of women. The study therefore recommends that there is imperative need for a paradigm shift in these areas to ensure women are not only liberated and empowered but also their full participation in the entrepreneurship activities are highly strengthened and promoted.

Keywords: Culture, Gender, entrepreneurship, Development

INTRODUCTION

Background

African continent is one of the largest continents of the world and it's a multi-ethnic society with its peculiar nature and diverse practices. It has more than 250 ethnic groups with different cultural practices, which some have endured centuries of practice work for the people (Ojua, Ishor and Ndom, 2013). In Kenya, for example, some of the ethnic groups include: Agikuyu, Luo, Abaluyia, Akamba, Kalenjin, Gusii, Ameru, Mijikenda, Somali, Turkana, Maasai, Aembu, Taita among others (Chilungu, 2010).

Gender imbalances have existed in most African cultures for a long time now. In most African countries women constitute a greater number compared to men but they remain underrepresented in many areas of socio, economic and political activities. This is mainly due to long-standing traditional beliefs concerning gender roles, which are mostly based on the premise that women are less important, or less deserving of power, than men. Culture is an important capability that people bring into development. It influences development through its various forms of expression; attitudes and behavior related to work, reward and exchange; traditions of public discussion and participation; social support and association; cultural sites of heritage and memory; and influences on values and morals.

Development and growth require shifts from low to high productivity, the creation and adoption of new goods and services, new skills and new knowledge and these shifts can only happen by entrepreneurs who are the architects of "capacity creation" for productivity (Delwa, Bashar abd Bakar, 2014). Women who are culturally denied the opportunity to prove their worth end up not displaying this capacity and as such, economies of the most of the African countries remain dwindling for the longest time ever for lack of incorporating the women's input. Most importantly is the need to allow women entrepreneurs to take full charge in steering the growth a country. Kanchama, Divya and Beegom (2013) posit that an entrepreneur plays a significant role in the economic development of a country.

Mohammeds, Fauziah and Yusoff (n.d), for example, state that women's participation in the economic activities in the developing world is mostly confined to the informal sectors of the economy. The underrepresentation is evident in vulnerable areas of employment such as unpaid family work, seasonal agricultural labourers and domestic servants. Female entrepreneurs are highly marginalized and disempowered in the formal sectors in the developing world economies.

In this paper, we shall be exploring the meaning of culture and how it has influenced inequality in development today in Africa. We will demistify what inequality is in light of culture and by examples discuss how women in particular have suffered gender inequality in development as a result of culture.

Methodology

This is a review study of the literature which focused on determinants of cultural gender disparities which have continued to undermine women in ares of socio-economic and political spheres. The study is presented based on

the secondary data. The secondary data was collected from a number of publications which relate to the topic under the study. A general search was conducted using the names Culture, gender and development, and entrepreneurship. Information was sort from journal articles, conference papers, and others by making use of the internet. The information was considered useful and relevant as it addressed the objectives of the study.

REVIEW OF THE STUDY: DEMYSTIFYING CULTURAL GENDER DISPARITIES EXPERIENCED IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The Concept of Culture

Culture- the distinctive patterns of ideas, beliefs, and norms which characterise the way of life and relations of a society or group within a society (Baden and Reeves, 2000).

Culturally determined gender ideologies define rights and responsibilities and what is 'appropriate' behaviour for women and men. They also influence access to and control over resources, and participation in decision-making. These gender ideologies often reinforce male power and the idea of women's inferiority. Culture is sometimes interpreted narrowly as 'custom' or 'tradition', and assumed to be natural and unchangeable. Despite these assumptions, culture is fluid and enduring (Baden and Reeves, 2000).

Dominant cultures reinforce the position of those with economic, political and social power, and therefore tend to reinforce male power. Globalisation also has implications for the diffusion of culture, particularly of western culture.

The defence of 'culture' and 'tradition' is often used by men to justify practices that constrain women's life chances and outcomes. Interventions to challenge power imbalances proposed by local women's organisations or Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) are often denied legitimacy, or where an international agency is involved, denounced as 'western' interference or 'cultural imperialism'. Many within the international development community also remain resistant to goals of gender equity because they perceive these as interfering with the most intimate domain in society. Some women have themselves defended ideas of 'culture' and 'tradition' in order to hold on to what little power they have, or as a form of resistance. For example, before the revolution in Iran, women took up the veil to show resistance to the processes of westernisation that the country was experiencing (Baden and Reeves, 2000).

Nevertheless, there are real issues of concern for local women's groups when externally initiated interventions are tainted by colonial attitudes. In the past, women were often seen as 'victims' that needed protection. Male colonisers, however well intentioned, perpetuated this paternalistic idea to justify their colonial domination. More recently, certain western feminists have also colluded in this notion, giving overwhelming priority to such issues as veiling, arranged marriages, and female genital mutilation, at the expense of other perhaps more immediate concerns. Southern feminists challenge this idea of women as 'victims'. They want to set their own agendas - which may imply redistributive action or tackling poverty - and gain support for these from western feminists.

Gender inequalities: What Causes the Inequality in Africa?

The opposite of inequality is equality. Gender equality calls for women and men to have equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic and cultural development, and an equal voice in civil and political life. This does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born male or female (Bartels-Ellis and Franklin, 2011). Many people remain unaware of how inequality (also gender difference or discrepancy or inconsistency) occur in our society. But as Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui (n.d) indicate below:

Gender is a social construct which asserts that the expectations, capabilities and responsibilities of men and women are not always biologically determined. The gender roles assigned to men and women are significantly defined – structurally and culturally – in ways which create, reinforce, and perpetuate relationships of male dominance and female subordination. Through the process of socialization within the family, in educational institutions and other social spheres, boys and girls are conditioned to behave in certain ways and to play different roles in society. They are encouraged to conform to established cultural norms by being rewarded or punished for their behavior. At times, the places women occupy in society are essentialized through claims of innate predispositions. This conditioning and stereotyping could easily have the effect of questioning the capability of girls and women to perform certain tasks. Repeated regularly, it may solidify and become difficult to uproot from the mental frames of people.

But it is not just through socialization that inequalities are planted. Glaring gaps in policy, legal frameworks and investment opportunities make it difficult for women to perform to their full potential in social, economic and political spheres. For example, government policies and practices may view the *jua kali* (informal sector) and subsistence farming, dominated by women, as not requiring as much support as the foreign-exchange earning and export-oriented economic activities associated with men. The lack of support leads to poor performance and sustainability. But a closer look at sub-Saharan Africa shows that the survival of many countries depends heavily on activities associated with women in the *jua kali* sector. Furthermore, there are laws that deny women access to land ownership and opportunities to invest freely. These laws function as a handicap to women's economic capabilities and perpetuate a culture of dependence. Yet the economic independence of women is a major stage in bridging inequalities, preventing violence and fostering self esteem and well-being. Economically independent women are more likely to assert and demand their rights whenever they are violated. They are also likely to mentor girls and function as their role models.

In order to see the inequalities clearly one would need to scan various domains of life and to question them vis-à-vis roles accorded to women. Gender inequality manifests itself in a number of spheres within the family, labor market, politico-judicial structures and in cultural-ideological productions, for example in the mass media. Values, norms, and practices enshrined in domains of social interaction may contribute to fostering inequalities, reinforce gender related power differentials or increase violence against women. For instance, the cultural practice of son preference may contribute to denial of girls' access to education and curtail their opportunities in life. It may lead to early marriage and the onset of childbearing. In addition, perceptions that politics and economics are principally

the preserve of males may lead to disparities in political, economic and social participation, decision-making and leadership. In spite of these deprivations, it is important to recognize that gender equality and women's empowerment are an integral part of national development, peace building and conflict-resolution. They are at the center of humanizing the world. Whereas interventions to redress these inequalities could be political and economic, others may be cultural.

A closer look at the cultures of this region may show practices that have had potential of contributing or promoting gender inequalities, as we shall show presently.

The African Cultural Practices that have contributed to Gender Inequality

2.3.1 Harmful Marriage: Practices also contribute immensely to the increasing HIV rates especially among women. Early marriage practices also increases maternal and child mortality since the woman would be biologically, economically and socially unprepared to cater for a family and some young girls end up with vesico-vaginal fistula. Early marriage is still the worm in many parts of the African countries. Some parents see it as a way of protecting their girls from the outside world and maintaining their chastity. In most rural communities, widows are made to swear to deities, shrines and ancestral spirits explaining due to accusations the reasons for the death of their husbands. Some are forces to drink the water of the corpse, sleep in the same room with the corpse, eat with unwashed hands, among other practices All pointing to the fact that if they survive they are innocent of the accusations (Ojua et al., 2013)

As Ojua, et al., (2013) note, in almost every part of African society, it has almost become an acceptable norm and practice for men to have concubines outside marriage especially when their wives are pregnant or have just put to birth. This increases considerably the chances of contacting and spreading this deadly disease. Also because of the large age gap between husband and wife, lack of education and low status, young married girls cannot negotiate condom use to protect themselves against HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Male and female circumcision is another cultural practice that enhances the transmission of HIV. Apart from other attendant obstetric problem that female genital mutilation may bring, it puts women and girls at risk of contracting HIV from unsterilized instruments such as knives, and broken glass that are used during the procedure, this is because most of these circumcisions especially female genital mutilation are done in the villages where no form of asepsis is taken into consideration (Ojua, et al., 2013).

Gachiri (2000) notes that FGM or 'female circumcimsion' is globally practiced as a cultural practice; Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and the Sudan account for roughly 75% of all cases. According to Gachiri, the World Health Organisation classifies the practice in four ways (Procedures):

Type i. Clitoridectomy – Excision of the prepuce, with or without excision of part or the entire clitories.

Type ii. Excision – Excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora (small lips at the opening of the genitalia). At times even part of the labia majora (large lips) are removed. This is the most common of FGM, comprising up to 80% of all cases in the world.

Type iii. Infibulation – The Third and most severe form of FGM. The word infibulation means to fasten with a clasp or buckle (like that of a belt). The procedure involves the excision of the clitoris, labia minora and at least two thirds or the whole of the labia majora. The two sides of the vulva are then sewn together to close up the opening of the vulva. A small opening is left for normal bodily functions of urination and menstruation.

Type iv. Unclassified – This includes:

- Pricking, piercing, or incising of the clitoris and/or labia;
- Stretching of the clitoris and/or labia
- Cauterisation by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissue;
- Scraping of tissue surrounding the vaginal orifice or cutting of the vagina;
- Introduction of corrosive substances or herbs into the vagina to cause bleeding for the purpose of tightening or narrowing it;
- Any other procedure involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious, or other non-therapeutic reasons.

The above description gives some understanding of the three feminine sorrows coined by infibulated women, (i) the sorrows on the day of mutilation, (ii) the wedding night when the opening must be cut and (iii) birth of a baby when the opening must be enlarged and often restitched. Pain is the major accompaniment at each point and the circumcision causes an enormous blood loss from women who are already malnourished, under-nourished, ill and overburdened with many chores (Gachiri, 2000).

Inheritance and HIV Scourge

The cultural practice of subjecting women to sex as objects and that when their husbands die they end up being inherited spreads and make the HIV reported cases high. By the end of 2002, an estimated 58 million people had acquired HIV infection worldwide. Of these about 22 million had died (Helen Jackson 2002:9 as cited in Njogu and Orchardson-Mazrui, n.d). In sub-Saharan Africa, 3.4 million new infections were reported in 2001, compared to 3.8 million in 2000 and 4.0 million in 1999. The situation remains serious and precarious. Also in Africa, 54% of adult infections by 2002 were women. Moreover, women are in general infected at a younger age than men. And they die younger, because AIDS related deaths in women in sub-Saharan Africa peak in women in their 20s, whereas the deaths peak in men in their 30s and 40s. The early infection of women is partly attributed to cultural practices that deny women the right to make decisions related to their bodies.

Access to Land (Land Rights and Right to Property)

Women's rights to equal inheritance, to equal shares of matrimonial property, to recognition as legitimate and legal owners of land and property, who can buy, sell, lease and raise loans on the basis of that property, are denied all over the world, in a wide range of cultures and communities (Abeyesekera, n.d).

As Meena (n.d) notes, land tenure systems, for instance, are based on discriminatory policies. While most African states have considered agriculture the backbone of their economies and acknowledge the significant role of women in the agricultural sector, few have paid much attention to the land tenure systems which have been discriminating against women.

Women's access to loans and other credit facilities for agricultural improvement has been constrained by their inability to own land. This being an issue of patriarchal system in the African tradition.

Pic 1: Studies show that African women-owned farms produce less than men-owned farms (Source: Dlamini, 2014)

The impact of discriminatory land tenure systems on agricultural production; and specifically on production of food crops; is an area which needs careful analysis by policy makers and planners. This problem is more pronounced in countries where the migrant labour system has led to an increase in female heads of household who lack power and control over the land they work. This condition is worsened by the fact that the existing rural credit policies are also blind to the existing discriminatory systems. Women agricultural producers are not benefiting from rural credit facilities and this limits their contribution to promoting sustainable development in this sector.

Zimbabwe's Supreme Court Rules against Women's Inheritance

In a case involving inheritance rights, the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe issued a landmark decision in April 1999, giving precedence to customary law over the Constitution. In this case, Venia Magaya, a 58-year-old seamstress, sued her half brother for ownership of her deceased father's land after her brother evicted her from the home. Under the Zimbabwean constitution, Magaya had a right to the land. However, the court ruled unanimously that women should not be able to inherit land, " because of the consideration in the African society which, amongst other factors, was to the effect that women were not able to look after their original family (of birth) because of their commitment to the new family (through marriage)."

The court backed up its decision by referring to Section 23 of the constitution of Zimbabwe. This section recognizes exceptions to the general rule against discrimination when it involves adoption, marriage, divorce, burial, devolution of property on death or other matters of personal law and in applying African customary law. Essentially, by making this judgment, the Supreme Court elevated customary law beyond constitutional scrutiny.

Fig 1: Source: Abeyesekera (n.d)

Over-emphasizing Patriarchal System of Family

The African society embraces more of a boy child than a girl child. This has significantly contributed to less participation of girl child such as education. According to Dr. Akubue, the gap between male and female literacy rates in the Third World has been narrowing, although female illiteracy continues to be higher than male illiteracy. Out of an estimated 840 million illiterate adults in the developing world, 538 million of them are women. The female illiteracy rate stands at about 39% in contrast with a male illiteracy rate of 21% (Akubue, 2001).

2.3.6 Gender violence

According to a 2010 UN report on violence against women in Africa, the scourge of violence against women in Africa is still largely rampant, but hidden beneath cultural practices and beliefs. This because of a number of reasons, namely (Dlamini, 2014);

- the predominance of the system of patriarchy across Africa has meant that women are still perceived of and treated as subordinate to men;
- violence against women is accepted as the cultural norm in many societies and is often condoned by community and sometimes state leaders;
- the stigma attached to female victims of violence has resulted in very low rates of reporting; and
- often if women do report violence against them, they are either turned away because the authorities see violence against women as a matter to be dealt with privately or within the family, or they struggle to access justice in a criminal justice system that is not informed by or sensitive to the needs of women.

Areas Women Experience Gender Inequality

Education

Education is said to be a vehicle that break the shackles of poverty thereby leading to transformation, development and progress (Ikoni,2009). Wangeci and Gathungu (2013) also note that the country's level of entrepreneurial activity and consequent economic prosperity can be enhanced by the level of achievement motivation through education and training .With the 2005 MDGs' first deadline for attainment of gender parity in primary and secondary schools' enrolment already has been missed, the ability of women and girls to empower themselves economically and socially by going to school, or by engaging in productive and civic activities is still being constrained by their responsibility for everyday tasks in the household division of labour (CEC Report 2007).

Education is very key not only to men but also to women as the late Prof. Wangari Maathai said in her speech during the 4th UN World Women's Conference in Beijing, China (Maathai, 1995):

“...The privilege of a higher education, especially outside Africa, broadened my original horizon and encouraged me to focus on the environment, women and development in order to improve the quality of life of people in my country in particular and in the African region in general...”

Dr. J. E. Aggrey, an eminent educator from Ghana, observed that "if you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family" (Akubue, 2001). Among the short-term benefits of educating girls and women are smaller families, better spacing of births, healthier children, less economic dependence, and less vulnerability to abusive spouses. According to Akubue (2001) this is not surprising because in the absence or poor enforcement of legislation on compulsory education for all children, coupled with the tendency to value sons over daughters, girls are less likely than boys to go to school.

As much as women would like to participate in adult literacy programs, their incredible responsibilities and workloads keep them from taking advantage of opportunities. The persistence of poverty among many families also works against the education of girls and women. Due mostly to hardship in poor households, girls are more likely than boys to stay at home to help their mothers with income-earning efforts and other household chores.

In some societies, parents see educating girls as an exercise in futility since they are given away in marriage and the reward of years of education may elude the natal family. Lastly, the impact of colonial perspectives on gender roles continues to influence gender educational opportunities. A curriculum that emphasizes housework, for instance, does not help women improve their capabilities as farmers. This curriculum is, however, sustained on the premise that humanity would be best served if women could "improve the way in which they cared for their children and catered for the family needs. As a result family welfare programs were devised which gave women instruction in home economics, in improved nutrition, health, and hygiene" (Akubue, 2001).

Political Participation/Barriers

The tenth parliament (2007-2012) had the highest number of female legislators in Kenyan history. However, the percentage of female legislators was only 10.4 percent. Female participation in political processes is limited in several ways, mostly through voter registration processes and voting rules (Gachiri, 2000).

- The high level of illiteracy makes it difficult for women to understand their voting options. In marginalized communities such as the Maasai, the Samburu, and the Turkana, young girls are not sent to school, as their fathers believe that it is a waste of time and money to educate a girl, as her only role will be that of a wife. The Maasai men consider it a worthy investment to educate boys instead.
- Family voting is a practice where women are led to the voting booth by their male relatives or husbands. This hugely constricts their freedom to vote for whomever they please. Having had the opportunity to work with women from the Maasai and Meru communities, I have heard similar stories from several Loita Maasai women, who informed me that their husbands retain their national identity cards (a prerequisite for voting) and only hand them over on election day, when they would accompany their wives to the polling station.
- Raising sufficient resources to fund a campaign for office is extremely difficult, particularly for women who often lack established funding networks or collateral.
- In Kenya, women who run for political posts face societal opposition, from both male and female citizens. Most opt to drop out of the political race. In the 2007 Kenyan general elections, a woman who was running for a

parliamentary seat in Meru's North Imenti constituency dropped out of the race after she was attacked, tortured, and physically assaulted by young men during her campaign.

Women's Participation in Policy Making

Women constitute a very small minority in policy making bodies, such as parliament, cabinet, judiciary and managerial and executive positions in both public and private sectors. In Zimbabwe, for instance, women's participation in legislative bodies since 1980 is as follows (Meena, n.d):

- Women have played a very marginal role in the cabinet. Presently, there are no full-time women cabinet ministers.
- Similarly, in Tanzania, women members of Parliament constitute a very small minority despite the introduction of a quota system, which has ensured the maintenance of a certain percentage of women in Parliament. Women members of parliament have scarcely exceeded 10%.
- This trend explains why most states in this region have not made any fundamental changes in the laws they inherited from the pre-colonial patriarchal structures and those introduced by the colonial patriarchal rule, which favoured men. Such laws include those related to issues of property rights, marriage and child custody.

Women's Initiatives

Meena (n.d) explains that participation of women in the development process has been constrained by their inability to influence policy making and planning, as well as by their inability to change the patriarchal ideology which continues to legitimize their subordinate status in society.

The majority of women have been participating in the economy as marginal actors in the agricultural sector, where they till land they do not own with the crudest tools and produce crops they do not control.

Others have opted to participate in the informal sector, where there is no state support and where at worst they are victims of state repression because most of their activities; such as street vending or local beer brewing; are considered illegal. The fraction employed in the formal sector participates as semi-skilled, unskilled or low-paid wage earners. They have been victims of the retrenchment measures which governments are pursuing in the name of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs).

Gender Division of Labour

According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) report (Woytek, Newiak, Kochlar, Fabrizio, Kpodar, Wingender, Clement & Schwartz, 2013), labor markets and access to economic opportunities across the globe remain segregated along gender lines. Despite some progress in recent decades, female labor market participation is persistently lower than male participation, women account for most unpaid work, and, when women are paid,

they face significant wage differentials vis-à-vis their male colleagues, often in spite of equal or higher education levels. The career patterns of women differ substantially from those for men, and in most countries, senior positions in both the private and the public sectors remain a largely male domain. To unleash the full potential of the female labor force, with significant prospective growth implications, policymakers need to pursue an integrated set of policies to promote and support female employment.

Not having as much access as men inhibits rural women's technological literacy and, definitely, their motor, cognitive, and interpersonal communication skills. Consequently, some researchers have contended that the "most common result of 'development' is to relegate women to the subsistence sector in agriculture and low-paying jobs in manufacturing and industry" (Tadesse, 1982, as cited Akubue, 2001). Manufacturing and Industry Technological development in the modern industrial sector unmistakably has opened up diverse job opportunities for Third World women.

However, questions have been raised about the quality of the jobs thus created. These have been mostly low-wage (Picture: 2), low-skill, dead-end jobs where they are easily dispensable. Lacking the necessary skills and specialization, women workers in modern sector factories "mostly are engaged in non-technological gathering, assembling, arranging and packaging activities and therefore technical skills are not being transferred equally to men and women" (Srinivasan, 1981, as cited in Akubue, 2001).

Picture 2: Women in temporary and low wages jobs

(Source: <http://www.handinhandinternational.org/results/kenya/>)

Inaccess to Credit facility

Generally, rural financial institutions still prefer and require land title as collateral for loan extension in many Third World countries. This requirement tends to be partial to male borrowers, since land ownership and title in most cases belong to men (Akubue, 2001).

Lacking outright land ownership and land title commonly required by banks for loan extension almost guarantees lack of funding for the women. The traditional moneylenders' practice of charging usury rates is an exorbitant and exploitative alternative source of credit. Without a propitious rural financial market to count on, women have difficulty mobilizing enough start-up capital for new businesses or expanding existing undertakings. Women, like men, need credit to acquire essential appropriate technology, tools, and material input to improve productivity, profits, and standard of living. Not surprisingly, the cumulative effects of protracted denial of women's access to productive resources, education, and training are worsening gender disparity and inequity.

2.4.7 At Glance: Significance of Women Issues in East Africa

- 2/3 of women are illiterate, that is only 30% can read and write
- Less than 10% of women have high paying jobs as managers, CEOs, directors, ministers e.t.c.
- Women compose a high number of people in part time jobs due to household chores.

- Women form a high percentage of poor people due to unemployment, low pay and non-participation in the informal sector.
- Women own less than 10% of the region's property.

The above points are noted from a personal document file (pdf) from (<http://kenya2007.chauglie.com/iawik%20doc.pdf>)

African women, equality and economic empowerment

According to Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2011) African women play a significant part in agriculture (the United Nations Development Programme estimates that women farmers account for nearly 50% of the agricultural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa). Despite the role women play in agriculture, productivity on women-owned farms is significantly lower per hectare compared to men, according to a new report jointly published by the World Bank and the ONE Campaign entitled "Levelling the Field: Improving Opportunities for Women Farmers in Africa".

The report, looks into the differences between how much men and women farmers produce in six African countries – Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda – which together make up more than 40% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population (FAO, 2011).

RECOMMENDATION

Democracy anywhere in the world is the prerogative of the people (Makama, 2013). This is because sovereignty they say, belongs to the people (women inclusive). It is therefore important that the act of governance should be diversified to capture the interest of women through adequate representation. First of all, the United Nations General Assembly should reaffirm its convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) thereby making it compulsory for all nations of the world to adopt as cardinal objectives of its constitutions. Violation of this convention in any form should be meted with strider sanctions. Again, relevant clauses of the Beijing Conference should be reactivated giving specific rights to women. This way, the personality and character of women will be respected. Second, Societal obstacles of religion, tradition and other obnoxious beliefs must be broken, women should not be domesticated, they have to enjoy right to work and associated benefits as men. They along with men have to have access to free and functional education and health care, electoral process and contest must not be a preserve of the rich. All these are parts of what can create level playing ground for both men and women.

However, the reality is that those stated preconditions could only ultimately be secured when patriarchy is challenged. Some scholars have suggested that patriarchy is located in six relatively autonomous structures, which are adopted in this paper as programmatic sites that patriarchy can be attacked (Walby,1990 and Igbuzor,2012 as cited in Makama, 2013). These sites include domestic production, paid employment, culture, sexuality, male violence and state. It is important to point out that the level of work at the six sites below has to be at the local, national and international levels (Makama, 2013):

Domestic production

- Challenging patriarchal division of labour in the home
- Advocating for equitable distribution of housework
- Promoting male responsibility for fatherhood and
- Inclusion of domestic work in the computation of GDP.

Paid employment

Challenging stereotypes in paid employment

Fighting discrimination against women in paid employment

Promoting the entry of women into male “dominated or reserved” professions

Culture and Religion

- Combating cultural practices that oppress women e.g. widowhood practices, wife inheritance, female genital mutilation etc
- Challenging cultural taboos that subordinate women
- Challenging practices that promote son preference
- Challenging cultural practices that predispose women to malnutrition and restrict access to food.
- Challenging stereotypes in upbringing of the boy and girl child
- Promoting education of the girl child
- Challenging gender stereotypes in the media
- Promoting radical and women sensitive interpretation of religion

Sexuality

- Empowering girls and women to have control over their sexuality
- Challenging practices that predispose women to infections such as STIs and HIV/AIDS
- Promoting women sexual and reproductive rights
- Combating violence against women
- Interrogating masculinity and femininity and promoting new conceptualizations of a transformed man and woman.

State

- Challenging the patriarchal arrangement of the State and the violence in the State.
- Challenging neo-liberalism and fundamentalism
- Challenging State practices that fuel violent conflicts
- Promoting women participation in governance
- Promoting women friendly constitutions and legal frameworks
- Promoting redistribution of national budgets in favour of women
- Supporting affirmative action for women and other marginalized groups

CONCLUSION

The rapid turn of events in the socio-economic and political spheres regionally calls for a total paradigm shift in the manner in which we treat the gender issues in the society. For Africa and Africans to grow in all spaces, there is an urgent need to involve women in most of these events driving the growth of the world so that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are realized fully and in time. The untapped entrepreneurial skills of women need not be disregarded, however this can never be made possible without tackling the gender issues and biasness that continue to rot our societies (part of the reason for under development for most of African countries). Therefore, there urgent need to address the policy issues that will ensure parity between men and women. Although some efforts have been demonstrated by some governments and various stakeholders, there is still a glaring gap that need to be filled for a rapid socio-economic and political development.

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