

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Oshewolo, Roseline Morenike

Department of History and International Studies, Federal University, Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of gender in development with a focus on its impact on the socio-economic development of Africa. It analyses the impact of gender equality on the development of Africa and emphasises the importance of mainstreaming gender in all development policies and programmes at all levels of governance in Africa. It looks at how the issue of gender influences human advancement explaining that in order for development or peace building to be sustained, a gender perspective must be incorporated in every activity of life. The study stresses that like men, women also play paramount roles in development.

Keywords: Gender, Development, Africa, sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

The connection between gender and development is beginning to gain attention in the scholarly literature. The need to recognise the important roles of the female gender in the development of any nation has taken the centre stage in the fields of research, advocacy and policy. This has contributed to the upsurge of interest by feminists on the need to be gender sensitive at all times. For any meaningful development to be possible gender perspective must be recognized by government entities, international and non-governmental organisations. More so, most people are beginning to realise that the failure to adequately recognise the capabilities of women in driving development will only disenfranchise them or limit their involvement in the process. The promotion of gender equality enhances development and promotes the standard of living of the masses. Women empowerment and free access to resources promotes development. The introduction of policies that address the issues of gender will also lead to equitable development.

Thus gender mainstreaming will facilitate and enhance development and promote sustainable development in any society.

Conceptualising Gender and Development

The concept of gender refers not only to whether a person is a male or female but also the power relations between them (Idyorough, 2005). It is the social differentiation of men from women and thus defines the ways men should relate with women (Gupta, 2000). More often than not, people tend to confuse sex and gender. While sex is a product of nature, gender is socially and culturally constructed. Thus, gender is a socio-cultural construct which has to do with whether a person is a male or a female. The sex of an individual is biologically determined, whereas gender characteristics are socially constructed. More so, gender refers to the assemblage of guidelines and features that recommend and forbid a conduct for individuals, in line with their sex either as male or as female. These guidelines may be intentional or unintentional. Gender exists in all spheres of life. A thorough examination of gender is needed. The reason being that a common outcome of the gendering of social activity is an unequal and inefficient distribution between male and female. Gender Identity is a person's personal conception as being masculine or feminine, as differentiated from his or her biological sex. For so many people, gender identity and biological features are the same. There are some instances in which a person experiences minute or not even a linkage amongst sex and gender. Gender identity is not secured at delivery; both physiologic and social influences contribute to the primary formation of a fundamental distinctiveness, which is improved and stretched by collective dynamics as the child grows.

The concept of gender is an important one as it tends to expose how women are often being relegated to the background. Through this exposure the need to challenge male supremacy and promote gender equality is advocated. Gender relations are constantly being renegotiated in the context of changing political, economic, social, and cultural environments at the local, national and international level (Gita, 1999).

Gender in the social context is extensively used and is mostly used wrongly (Momsen, 2010). Most times, the word has been mistaken to mean women alone. Although they are related but they differ from each other, reasons being that it does not have only women as central in the

statement of problems, it takes into consideration activities of both men and women. Because gender issues are not women issues but are issues pertaining to both men and women (Idogorough, 2005).

Development in human society is a multifarious one. Development at the level of individual denotes improved skill and capacity, more autonomy, ingenuity, self-control, accountability and material wellbeing (Rodney, 1972:1). Development could also mean essential change that has progressive influence on all areas of life by the proper utilization of resources (Ajayi and Oshewolo, 2013:1)

Development could be said to be an enhancement in knowledge approach and welfare of a person and the method by which the enhancement is made manifest. More so development also includes fairness and parity at meeting people's needs. The progress achieved from one phase to another in making sure that women's needs are met also constitute the key components of women development (Idogorough, 2005)

The concept of development in relation to Africa can be described as the process whereby simple, low-income national economies are transformed into contemporary industrial markets. Though the word is occasionally used as a substitute for economic progress, often times it is used to give an account of a transformation of a nation's economic growth (Myint, 2010).

Development is considered by World Bank as a well-being and the process of transforming the society. Some of the key indicators of well-being are: rate of poverty, peace, freedom, life expectancy at birth, adult illiteracy, access to health care services, access to safe water, access to sanitation, infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, prevalence of malnutrition, population estimates, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (World Bank, 2008). The concept of development is also used to mean the drive of a society from a modest to an elaborate one or from traditional to modernity (Gowon, 2007:202)

Gender and Development in Africa: Some Preliminary Issues

The development of any society lies in the hands of both men and women. For effective development to be possible there must be progress in all spheres. Many international forums have diverted their attention to the aspect of gender and development. The world generally is now focusing attention on development knowing fully that if this is done it will enrich most nations and also help in the alleviation of poverty. Thus, the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender equality being one of the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sadly, the patriarchal system practiced by African countries tends to diminish the roles played by African women in the development of their various communities (Gowon, 2007:214). Women have participated creditably in the development of African societies, be it at the local or international level. As rightly posited by Dodo (2001:1), women are the livewire of a nation. For a nation to succeed and continue to survive, the positive role played by her women must not be ignored.

Several women have contributed in one way or the other to the development of their communities from time past, but it is sad to note that their participation in development process has been hindered by their inability to impact on policy making and planning. Besides, they are being faced with the constant re-affirmation of patriarchy by their male counterparts; this has continued to reduce their status to a mere subordinate one in their various communities. That is not to say that African women are redundant, they have contributed immensely to the growth and development of their various communities, this achievement was also observed by Awe (1992) when she referred to women as ‘saviours of their societies’

In Africa for instance several women have left indelible marks on the history of the continent. The great Queen Nzinga of Ndongo kingdom contributed immensely to the liberation of her people from foreign attacks (Levin et al, 2000:223); Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria also advocated for women’s right to vote, besides she is remembered today for her doggedness in spearheading the movement in the abolition of tax rates for women in Nigeria. Women had performed tremendously in the past and are still performing creditably well and will still perform if given the opportunity to do so.

It is often said that almost all countries in Africa needs economic growth through the prosecution of gender parity to enhance their living standards. By so doing, poverty and susceptibility will be fought to its barest minimum. The colonial practice that introduced Western gender views and practices affected the local involvement of African women in the development of their societies, thereby culminating to women's relegation to the background as well as economic and political disempowerment.

A gender and development approach in postcolonial development discourse strove to restore the significance of women in development, also recognizing that the damaging effects of poverty and disease touch both women and men. Even if women are made visible and they increase their economic production capabilities, their toil and efforts would only be subjugated if there is no change in the uneven arrangements of government.

Despite all the measures put in place in Africa in achieving gender parity through the conveying of international and regional conventions and commitments by African countries, gender disparity is still very common and is still highly practiced in Africa thereby posing a great challenge to the development of Africa. Most women in Africa are still being discriminated against. They still do not have access to the basic social amenities, compared to men. Women have been deprived of several opportunities; women even in recent times still do not have access to land, in most parts of Africa (Human Development Report, 2016). This happens as a result of the cultural beliefs of the African society as well as the prevalence of patriarchal system in Africa. To tackle this gender inequality there is the need for a change in government policies that promotes gender inequality and also policies that enhance gender equality, opportunities for women and development should be introduced and sustained (Manda and Mwakubo, 2013; Human Development Report, 2016).

Finally, women's underdevelopment in the continent of Africa is still positioned within the old framework of colonization and neo-colonization. Many writers are of the view that though women in pre colonial African societies were subordinate to men when it comes to status and influence, there existed some institutional interactions and arrangements that afforded them some amount of respect, power, and sovereignty. For instance women had their own farms

where agricultural activities takes place and thus the cultivation of their own food was made possible, having done that surplus food products was sold out, provided health care, and made income from such undertakings (Stamp, 1989).

Dissecting Women's Limited Involvement in Africa's Development

Sustainable development could be said to mean a development process which increases peoples' ability to generate and consume wealth on a significant period of time. Sustainable development, however, requires a very conducive atmosphere which allows people to engage in and sustain the development process. The environmental interaction between the people and various societies could either enhance or mar sustainable development as such scholars has emphasized the need to promote governmental policies that enhances gender equality (Meena, 2007).

In Africa several policies have been observed to have hindered the implementation of a gender bias free society and these has prevented economic development of the continent of Africa. For instance the ideological believe in Africa that men are more superior to women has limited the role of women at developing their various societies this has deterred them from participating fully in the sustainable economic development of the African continent.

Aside from that, the policies on education as well as educational plans have restricted women from participating fully in the economic affairs of their various societies. The inherited colonial form of gender stereotyped system of education has also slowed down sustainable development. Most women in Africa still do not have access to qualitative education; poor enrolment of women in all levels of educational institutions has been as a result of the poor representation of women in the mainstream of development planning, thereby hindering them from contributing meaningfully in the actualisation of development planning goals. In addition, the percentage of educated women at the post graduate level compared to that of men is still at a very low margin. As a result of this low turnover not much women are able to contribute meaningfully at managerial level of their various countries.

In most countries of the African continent, women's participation in policy making is very minimal in both governmental organizations and non-governmental organisations. The reasons

are closely connected to the prevalent structure of gender inequality in most African countries. Thus the government need to invest more on development policies that will help in the development of human resources. To further support this assertion the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa reiterated that, economic development and transformation will be impossible in Africa without sustained policies for human resource development and utilization. Therefore, Africa must accord high priority to human resource development and utilization (African Leadership Forum, 1990).

Regrettably, most countries in Africa tend to view the training of high-level human power as the only means for human resource development. This narrow view is also tilt in favour of the male gender. Though the training of human resources is of paramount importance; the quality of human resources should also be considered in order to achieve a sustainable growth; more so, investment in human developmental assignments must take into consideration other welfare packages that will enhance the living standards of women and children.

Despite the present effort towards development in Africa, nations are still suffering from underdevelopment, reasons being that efforts made towards attaining progress that will enhance development are hindered by the various misallotment of existing resources and degradation of institutions (Ajayi and Oshewolo, 2013).

Civil unrest on the continent of Africa has slowed down the ability of most African countries to harness adequately the required resources for development. For instance the unrest in Darfur, Central African Republic, and Zimbabwe respectively has slowed down development in these African countries. In addition to civil unrest is the fact that most government policies do not carry women along in formulating their policies; however, for an equitable sustainable development to be possible, women in Africa must be carried along in the formulation of all the policies. Thus, plans leading to the establishment of a well developed Africa must not discount the concerns of women in all spheres of life who have been marginalised.

The major problems facing the implementation of gender planning in Sub-Saharan Africa are the fundamental deleterious attitudes and beliefs about women's roles and status in the society. Gender discrimination is deeply rooted in the mind set of both men and women

and is reiterated through the existence of many cultural, traditional, and religious practices that continue to relegate women to the background. This is not to say that African women are the only ones experiencing gender-based oppression and discrimination. But records show that many African men are resilient to progressive changes that tend to empower women.

More so, due to the fact that gender planning focuses more on equality and empowerment, development planners in countries that practice patriarchy such as those found in Africa find this approach very challenging. In the past, national governments and donor agencies were more willing to endorse policies that target the equalization of women's access to education, employment and health facilities as opposed to those that aim at meeting women's strategic needs such as men's involvement in domestic responsibilities or the payment of a wage for domestic work (Loutfi, 1980).

Promoting the Role of Women in Africa's Development

For the two genders to participate in productive activities, security must be provided. Existing legal systems have not in any way protected women from the abuses of their basic human rights. Most women are living in an unsafe environment where there is no availability of human right protection. Worse still, domestic violence is still a major issue awaiting to be addressed by existing political systems, despite several reports of domestic violence as well as sexual harassments from all spheres of life; which has not allowed women to contribute meaningfully in the development of their various nations. Thus there is an urgent need by the government to formulate policies in favour of women and state clearly sanctions for sexual harassment and violence against women and children.

The African continent must come to terms that not until men and women are carried along in the formulation of development programmes and policies for the development process, sustainable development may never be actualized. For development to be actualized the issue of gender inequality must be adequately addressed. Besides, when potential participants of developmental policies are excluded in the developmental process of a nation, there is bound to be flaws. As a result of this realisation, gender equality agenda must become a major focal point of the international community (Mallon and Cassell, 1999).

With the recent focus of the international community on development as a prerequisite of reducing poverty, the fight against gender disparity will facilitate development. Gender equality needs to be integrated in development and peace building to enhance sustainability. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the continent of Africa has impacted on women negatively more than men; and thus affecting the entire development process of the African region (DESA, 2009). Several efforts have been put in place to diminish gender disparity in welfare; gender inequality is still on a very high side. Though United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) recognises gender equality as one of her major goal, fundamental progress has not been achieved (Olowu, 2012).

If gender equality is embraced in Africa it will lead to rapid growth and development, besides policies targeted at development can lead to a meaningful developmental outcome. Which will in turn, lead to a boost in the living standards of both men and women. However, given the goal of economic development, which is to enhance the ability of people to provide for themselves and their families. Disparity hinders the attainment of human welfare due to the fact that it could culminate into uneven political, social and economic control.

Adequate research work is still needed to focus on the challenges associated with gender disparity and what needs to be done to move towards reducing gender disparity. Gender parity should be given its fair position, this is not to say that there must be the same number of male and female in all functions neither is it to treat them in the same manner but the presence of equity in terms of opportunities and a society in which men and women are able to lead equally fulfilling lives.

Gender development has to do with creating attention between gender and development initiatives and feminists viewpoints amongst such matters are health and education, decision making and leadership, peace building, violence against women and economic empowerment. Gender equality however becomes a central issue to developmental process. Eradicating gender disparity offers the world a better opportunity to progress (AusAid, 2012).

It therefore, suffices to say that for equitable economic and human development to be possible there must be the existence of gender parity that supports women's rights with an emphasis on

equal opportunity for women and men to support economic growth and to eradicate poverty to its barest minimum (Muleya, 2012)

Gender equality is one of the eight aims of the Millennium Development Goals. To improve the lives of both men and women, there is the need to promote gender equality. While progress has been made on the third Millennium Development Goal to “promote gender equality and empower women,” as indicated in the 2013 Millennium Development Goals Report, the actualisation of such goal in terms of equal education and economic opportunities for women has not been reached.

Thus for Africa to achieve a balanced development agenda there must be full participation of the two genders in the development process. To make this possible there must be total eradication of all forms of inequality which restricts women from accessing higher education, the empowerment of women so as for them to discover their potentials, there should be equal access to resources such as land, adequate enhancement of opportunities for women, enhancement of peoples security and the war against violence above all there must be the gradual reorientation of members of the various African society on the need to promote gender equality in order to enhance a sustainable growth and development (Meena, 2007; Gowon, 2007:8; Human development Report, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Gender parity should be the basis for operation in Africa, because it is only when both genders are treated equally that the continent can achieve the much anticipated sustainable development. To be able to do this, there must be an equitable distribution of all opportunities that may come their way. However, gender equality does not mean that the number of both genders must be the same, but it means the available resources should be distributed in line with the needs of each person not minding that the person is a male or a female. Gender equality should be encouraged in Africa. African women should come out and speak for their right, the patriarchal ideology of the African continents needs to undergo transformation. The relegation of women to the background through this patriarchal system/ideology should be revisited.

The earlier African countries recognise that power distribution amongst men and women is mutually rewarding to both groups the better. Thus, rather than maintaining the patriarchal order, should work towards actualising a sustainable development that allows women the free hand of participating freely in the affairs of their various societies. Gender rules should be geared towards the total eradication of all forms of gender inequality. While promoting the need for a gender free society where all forms of oppression of women is abolished and equitable distribution of all opportunities and responsibilities amongst both genders. In all, gender inequality undermines development (Latham, 2007). The pervasiveness of female disadvantage is one of the most interesting and least understood features of economic life. Gender matters for women, but it also matters for men. Hence, for a sustainable development to be enhanced in Africa, there must be gender parity.

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