

Gender Questions and its implications on Developmental processes in Contemporary Africa

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Abstract

This paper seeks to discuss the gender questions and its implications on developmental processes in contemporary Africa. The term "gender" refers to the social norms/practices linked with biological sex in terms of roles, behaviour, appearance, cognition, emotions, and other factors. All interactions in which gender subjectivities are present are referred to as social relations of gender or gender relations. These interactions include those between individuals as well as those between individuals and the institutions, systems, and developmental processes. The gendered division of labour, uneven power relations, and gender-based stereotypes are three aspects of gender relations that are typically consistent across social ideologies and myths, and the study explores their development-related consequences. The research relies on primary and secondary sources for data collection, namely newspapers, journal articles and books. The article examines several methods for incorporating gender analysis in development processes and goes on to illustrate how important gender is to the development enterprise.

Keywords: Women, gender, gender equality, development, Africa

Introduction

Gender is a social construct that is connected to biological sex but not constrained by it. All aspects of one's lived experiences, including roles, behaviour, appearance, cognition, and emotion, are covered by the social prescriptions associated with biological sex, which are referred to as gender. When a kid is born, their observed biological sex is considered as a starting point for socializing them into a specific gender. To put it another way, the youngster is taught explicit instructions or less direct messages through conditioning and modeling about what is and is not socially acceptable as a girl or boy, a woman or man. Individual differences exist in the degree to which these normative ways of being are internalized and reinforced by biological propensities and skills within any culture. In this token, gendered traits and identities are the product of the interplay of biology, socialization, and self-control, which may lead to a person having a gendered subjectivity that complies with or deviates from gendered practices in their social context (Wood & Eagly, 2012).

Interestingly, people engage with their environment as gendered individuals, hence social relations of gender or gender relations include all interactions in which gender subjectivities are present. In spite of the fact that the phrase "gender relations" most often bring to mind images of interactions between men and women, it also includes interactions between men and women as well as between individuals and institutions, systems, and processes. Despite the fact that gender is a social construction, there are certain similarities among the beliefs and manifestations of gender in various situations. This research focuses on three aspects of gender relations that are largely universal in human societies: gender beliefs and myths, gendered labour division, and uneven power interactions. Gender beliefs / ideologies are opinions that are frequently held to be inherent, self-evident, and unalterable with regards to the traits and skills of men and women. Some gender ideologies exaggerate biological differences; for instance, the idea that women are physically and psychologically inferior to men is based on the observation that men tend to be stronger physically than women. Other gender ideas are based on unproven premises, such as the notion that men are more suitable for leadership roles than women. Social institutions mirror these beliefs as they become commonplace. The cultural assumption that women should be largely or even completely responsible for care duties, for example, is based on the fallacy that women are innately maternal in effect, that the attributes that make a "good" mother are innate rather than learned. It must be noted that some females, as a result of socialization, may subscribe to and perpetuate gendered beliefs to the detriment of themselves and other women; these behaviours are then used to justify another widely held myth: "Women are their own worst enemies" (Anyidoho, 2020). The second discernible aspect of gender relations is the division of labour, which is based on

gender beliefs and perpetuates power disparities between men and women. The "reproductive" and "productive" roles, as well as the "private" and "public" spheres, are typically contrasted in gendered divisions of labour across countries. Through "the daily regeneration of the wage labour force," reproduction extends beyond biological capacity to include the social reproduction of society (Chant, 1989). The major responsibility for both biological and social reproductive duties is therefore derived from women's ability to bear children (Wood & Eagly 2012). Even when women have other accomplishments or goals, these are frequently overshadowed by reproductive responsibilities, leaving mothers, wives, daughters, and homemakers as their most prominent roles or identities. In fact, in poor nations, women's paid job is frequently an extension of or a variation on caregiving (Kabeer et al., 2013). As a result of their greater social and material benefits in their "productive" positions as breadwinners, employers, and workers, men, on the other hand, predominate in the "public sphere income-generating activities" (Chant, 1989). The fact that much of the reproductive work done by women is unpaid and not included in the gross domestic product, a traditional indicator of national prosperity, is clear evidence that women's activities have lesser social and economic value (Marçal, 2016).

The segregation and segmentation of the labour market provide more evidence of gendered divisions of labour. The concentration of men and women in various sectors of the economy and the overrepresentation of women in professions that involve caregiving, such as food production, teaching, nursing, and customer service, are examples of gender segregation. Women are also overrepresented in the informal sector of the economy, which has fewer entry hurdles than the formal sector and is more tolerant of women's family duties but is also less stable and satisfying (Chen et al., 2005). The difference in positions held by men and women within the same industries is known as gender segmentation in the labour market. For instance, more women than men enter the field of nursing in the medical industry, despite the fact that medical doctors are overwhelmingly men. In addition, women frequently receive lower pay than men even while doing the same type of labour. Women earn less and are more likely than males to be employees or unpaid contributing family members in the informal economy of African countries, where women tend to gather (Chen, 2016). There is gender disparity even in West Africa, where women are most often associated with retail in the informal sector (records of female traders date back to the mid-1800s). For instance, women typically sell consumer goods like kitchenware, toys, textiles, and clothing, while men typically sell more expensive goods like electronics and auto parts (Darkwah, 2007).

Thirdly, men and women clearly hold unequal power when it comes to access to resources and opportunities as a result of the aspects of gendered interactions that have been

explored so far. Patriarchy, a societal structure centred on male dominance, privilege, and control, is based on this power disparity. It is institutionalized in political, legal, and economic systems and procedures. The foundation of patriarchy is the presumption that men are more deserving of authority or superior than women. The subordination of women and younger males is implied by patriarchy.

The information above is a summary of gender and associated ideas as they appear in modern human culture. The fact that conceptual and actual experiences of gender do vary across socio-cultural and historical settings must be acknowledged in order to counteract these assumptions. This is critical given the propensity of Western theoretical and methodological foundations which emerged from feminist concerns, struggles, and research in particular context to become unhelpfully universalized. Oyewumi (1997) in her seminal book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, questions the idea that female subordination is a universal aspect of gender relations. She does this by highlighting the inherent contradiction of Western feminist theory, which accepts gender as a social construction and thus mutable but also assumes that the construction of gender will be similar across social settings. The scholar further questions the primacy of gender as the vantage point for the examination of inequalities, oppressions, and other types of social injustice by making specific reference to the social and historical circumstances of Africa. Despite criticism that Oyewumi's work essentializes and romanticizes gender interactions in pre-colonial Africa (Apusigah, 2006), her work is valuable for promoting a historical perspective on gender to understand how time, and particularly the era of colonial control, has reconfigured gender relations. Women and men might have similar functions in precolonial African civilizations because of gender relations' flexibility, according to one school of thought in the literature (Amadiume, 1987), while another contends that while women and men did have separate responsibilities, they were equal and complimentary (Sudarkasa, 1986). In order to inform a context-specific approach to development, it is clear that a better conception of gender is required. It is specifically necessary to view gender equality and women empowerment in "space, history, politics, and geography" (Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010).

The remaining sections of the research, makes the case for the importance of gender to the development enterprise, and several patterns for incorporating gender analysis into development processes. The study goes on to highlight how women have taken action to enhance gender equality before discussing the needed interventions to make gender equality a major development goal.

Gender and Development in Africa: Emerging Issues

Prah (2001) defines development as "the improvement and upliftment of the quality of life of people so that they are able to attain their potential, build and acquire self-confidence, and manage to live lives of reasonable accomplishment and dignity. He also sees development as an "obsession" of African countries. Development strategies, projects, and plans should be institutionalized to push societies toward sustainable and societal advancement.

The Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2030), which can be viewed as a worldwide consensus on the goals and strategies of progress, and the Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) both include gender disparity as an essential requirement for development. The relevant definition of development advanced by Sen (1999) as "a process of developing genuine freedoms that people enjoy" makes it simple to identify gender discrepancies as sources of "unfreedom" and, consequently, as developmental roadblocks. Unfreedoms exist in both historic and contemporary institutions of government as well as in social and economic structures like the family and the labour market. The project of development, broadly stated, is an effort to alter people's lives both individually and collectively. Given that gender is a factor in every element of life, including sexuality, work and livelihoods, and family duties, progress inevitably entails a shift in the social relations of gender. Secondly, gender matters in development because every interventional policy, programme, or initiative is gendered in its assumptions, objectives, and methods of implementation, as well as in its effects (in the differential ways it affects men and women).

The burden of contextualizing gender is crucial in light of the foregoing conversation. More knowledge is required, namely, of how gender is conceptualized and applied (Razavi & Miller, 1995), particularly in development initiatives in Africa. African womanhood has allegedly been characterized as abnormal with respect to development practices, according to opponents of the global development project (Lewis, 2005). The stereotypical conception of the "beneficiary" of development as a poor, rural woman who is burdened by motherhood and household duties does not take into account the variety and complexity of African women's realities according to Win (2004) in her article "Not very poor, powerless or pregnant: the African woman forgotten by development." In addition, it does not provide consideration of the numerous subjectivities, including income, class, race, nationality, location, and sexuality in which a woman may simultaneously be empowered and disempowered. These criticisms serve as a warning regarding the use of gender in development: while gender and associated ideas (gender equality, gender equity, and gender mainstreaming) are frequently used in development discourses, they are also prone to misunderstanding and abuse. The gender gap between research on the subject and how

it is applied in development discourse and practice has other significant causes. Anthropology and history are the two academic disciplines that have been most productive and important in research on Africa, and they have contributed their prejudices and errors to the development discourse (Lewis, 2005). European government officials, missionaries, and explorers who were influenced by both their own gender ideologies and their colonizing or "civilizing" missions created the first written histories and anthropological studies on Africa that invented, reinterpreted, or reinforced social relations of gender (Beoku-Betts, 1976; Sudarkasa, 1986). History written after this time has not done much better in terms of how women are portrayed; the most influential historical studies on Africa, written by both African and non-African males, barely mention women (Zezeza, 2005). Additionally, the study of anthropology has a history of producing static images that fail to effectively capture the tensions, rifts, and contradictions that exist inside African communities (Lewis, 2005). By planning interventions in areas such as formal work, commercial agriculture, and education on the notion that men, rather than women, are economic actors and breadwinners, colonial policies constructed, reinforced and perpetuated these distortions of gender relations. Attempts at social and economic control even included attempts to forbid women from engaging in certain sexual activities through laws and regulations governing women's fertility, marriage, and attire (Nyanzi, 2011).

However, the "hegemony of developmentalism" could influence decision-makers and practitioners in the field to "sever scholarship from the agendas and priorities facing African women and to delimit questions of development narrowly to economic and donor-related concerns" (Lewis, 2005). Fecundity, AIDS, and child hunger would all be considered "gender issues" by Lewis' developmentalism, but not trade policy, sexuality, or "the commonplace, the ordinary, and the seemingly inconsequential" aspects of women's existence. The (re)presentation of women's entire lives has benefited greatly from feminist study. However, a neo-liberal economic development paradigm collaborates with other ideologies to obstruct the adoption of research in ways that could improve the lives of women. Finally, the development industry emphasizes policymaking and policy activism over intellectual activism, thus the gap between development policy and research endures (Tsikata, 1997).

Promoting the Role of Women in Africa's Development

In order for both genders to engage in fruitful activities protection must be provided. Women have not been in any way shielded from violations of their fundamental human rights by the existing legal frameworks. Majority of women are unable to access protection for their human rights and live in hazardous conditions. Even worse, despite numerous reports of domestic violence as well as sexual harassment from all walks of life, domestic

violence is still a burning issue that needs to be addressed by the political class. This has prevented women from making meaningful contributions to the development of their various societies. There is now a pressing need for the government to develop policies that are supportive of women and clearly define the consequences of sexual harassment and violence against women and children (Morenike, 2018).

The African continent has to accept that sustainable development may not be achieved unless men and women are included in the creation of development policies and programmes. Gender inequality is an issue that must be properly addressed if development is to be realized. This consciousness has necessitated the international community to shift its principal focus to gender equality as a key issue (Morenike, 2018).

The international community has recently placed a greater emphasis on development as a necessary step in eradicating poverty, and this will help development if gender inequality is reduced. In order to promote sustainable growth, gender equality must be incorporated into peacekeeping and development. Women have been adversely affected by HIV/AIDS more than men, which have had huge influence on the continent's overall development. The gender pay gap in welfare has been reduced in certain ways, but it still remains significantly higher than it should be (Olowu, 2012).

Consequently, accelerating growth and development, policies aimed at fostering development can result in tremendous developmental outcomes in Africa if gender equality is accepted. The living standards of both men and women will rise as a result. However, given that economic development seeks to improve people's capacity to support their families and themselves, as a result of the possibility of it leading to unequal political, social, and economic control, inequality impedes the pursuit of human welfare.

It is still necessary to do adequate research to address the difficulties posed by gender inequality as well as the steps that must be taken to reduce it. The concept of gender parity should be given due consideration. This does not imply that there must be an equal number of men and women in all roles, nor does it imply that they should be treated equally, but rather that there should be equity in terms of opportunities, and that there should be a society where men and women can live equally fulfilling lives.

The health and education sectors, decision-making and leadership, peace-building, violence against women, and economic empowerment are just a few of the themes that gender development focuses on in order to bring attention to gender and development projects as well as feminist ideas. However, the growth process makes gender equality a

key concern. In order for the world to advance, gender inequality must be eradicated (Morenike, 2018). Therefore, suffice it to say that for there to be gender parity, which promotes women's rights and places focus on equal opportunity for men and women to support economic growth and eradicate poverty to the extent feasible, both human and equitable development must be attainable (Muleya, 2012).

Thus, for Africa to attain a balanced development agenda, both genders must actively participate in the development process. All forms of inequality that prevent women from pursuing higher education must be completely eliminated. Women must be empowered to realize their potential and have equal access to resources like land. Women's opportunities must be adequately improved, people's security must be improved, and the fight against violence must be intensified. But most importantly, members of the various African societies must gradually come to understand the importance of this task (Gowon, 2007).

Conclusion

In order for Africa to experience the long-awaited sustainable development, gender parity should serve as the guiding principle for all operations. A fair distribution of all potential chances must exist for them in order to be able to achieve this task. Gender equality does not, however, imply that there must be an equal distribution of people of both sexes; rather, it calls for allocating resources according to each person's needs, regardless of whether they are male or female. The promotion of gender equality in Africa is necessary. It is time for African women to stand up for their rights and for the continent's patriarchal worldview to change. It is time to reconsider how this patriarchal structure and mindset have relegated women to the background. The sooner African nations understand that balancing power between men and women benefits both groups, the better. Therefore, rather than upholding the patriarchal system, African nations ought to aim toward a sustainable development that gives women the freedom to fully participate in the activities of their varied cultures. Gender inequity must be completely eliminated in order for gender regulations to be effective. The authors advocate for the creation of a gender-neutral society that eliminates all forms, shapes and manifestations of gender-based discrimination and ensures that both sexes are given an equal opportunity to participate in society's possibilities and assume its responsibilities. From the foregoing, gender disparity hinders progress. Therefore, gender parity is necessary for improving sustainable development in Africa.

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