UNDER DEVELOPMENT AS A REFLECTION OF GENDER DISEMPOWERMENT AND INJUSTICES IN SOCIETY: The Way Forward

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Abstract

Our societies are in pathetic state and are gradually recovering from their traditional amnesia to the wake of modern civilization. However, in both traditional and modern, the societies are experiencing a state of gender disempowerment, gender injustices characterizing human rights abuse and an imbalance of roles played by member. This makes them not realize and utilize their maximum potentials towards development, hence lowering human dignity.

The paper critically assesses issues raised in the above; elaborate them and relate how each hinders economic development. It discusses how these problems can be tackled through institutions such as the government; NGOs, and how they can fully participate in handling certain issues. Such issues include domestic violence, female genital cut, African taboos and traditions in relation to gender, and the effects of male domination in civil warfare.

Introduction

In many developing regions of the world, gender disempowerment and gender injustices have hindered the full access and control of resources, hence creating a disparity for economic and social development. This is mainly characterized by the presence of gender inequalities in many aspects of human activities. According to World Bank, ...

Inequalities between boys and girls in access to schooling or adequate healthcare are among the poor.

While disparities in basic rights; in schooling credit and jobs take their most direct toll on women and girls, the full costs on gender inequality ultimately harm everyone... (2001:xi)

This means a continuous ignorance of gender disparities will propel great costs on the people, hampering their efforts to improve their standard of living and the countries ability to make any sustainable development, thus stagnating if not deteriorating the economic and poverty levels of the countries. Hence, there is need to address the disparities in women, men, boys and girls and propose the way forward for maximum development.

Women and Girls

Sexual Segregation

The sexual divisions of labor have left plenty to be performed by women than men. So grave is the matter that almost all activities are defined as either masculine or feminine in some communities. Indeed, Reeves states that:

...Sexual segregation in tribal societies is more common than sexual integration. Egyptian peasants say, "there is no man who is not a farmer, and no woman who is not a housekeeper and a man cooking or sewing or a woman ploughing or irrigating the land is something unheard of in our village... (1981:81)

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This promotes interdependency amongst households because the death of a husband who has been the food producer makes the woman begin borrowing food because traditions will not allow her. If not so, she will succumb to wife inheritance and subject herself to the risk of HIV/AIDS infection which translates into long-term medical costs for treatment. Eventually, there is no room to improve the living standards of the family, which may remain in poverty for generations.

Healthy Motherhood

This has direct implications on safe motherhood. It will be difficult for the mother to acquire relevant information on family planning, child bearing and nutrition. Moreover, a World Bank publication reports that this will:

...substantially affect her capacity to withstand difficulties during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period as well as her capacity to produce a strong and healthy child, including to nurse and care for it... (1989:73)

The nursing of the baby will largely depend on the literacy level of the mother. An educated mother will possess more health promoting behaviours than her uneducated counterpart. In developing regions, the mother care levels are considerably lower than other regions largely because their literacy and socio-economic levels are low. The graph below indicates the nursing activities. The immunization rates of children aged 12-23 months depend on mother’s educational level in different regions.

However, the mother care level could be equal to that of a mother who is not educated even when the mother had achieved primary or secondary education. This emerges where the education system has little or no family life education hence causing teenage pregnancies. This, a World Bank publication reports that:

...pregnant adolescents in Kenya like those in most developing countries, undergo enormous, social, economic and psychological trauma... (1989:72)

If the girl has to resume her studies, she may be forced to leave the child under the care of an uneducated mother who will definitely lack good mothering skills. This may lead to the child suffering from deficiency diseases and death at worst.

In most communities, a social stigma is placed on the girl and low expectations are realized. For the uncompromising fathers, their wrath may lead to complete withdrawal of fees payment or total disowning of their daughters by sending them away from home.

Worse still, this wrath could be shed on their wives by battering them while accusing them of ill-advising their daughters. However, if the girl resumes her schooling, her aggressiveness to participate in school activities will be greatly hampered by the shame and guilt accompanying her throughout. Teenage pregnancies will also occur when traditions stipulate early marriages. This is prone to accelerate HIV/AIDS spread. All this is present due to lack of gender equality in education and social cultural issues. From a World Bank publication, this means that:

...the AIDS pandemic will spread rapidly over the next decade – until up to one in four women and one in five men become HIV infected, already the case in several countries in sub-Saharan Africa... .......(2001:4)

This means that unless strategic measures are put in place on gender empowerment, many are going to die thus reducing the working population and eventually reduce the countries’ productive capacity.

Female genital cut

This is a type of aggression that is seemingly justified but blinded by the fact that since men endure the agony of circumcision, so are girls expected to withstand the same. While to the males it is advantageous, to the girls it has grave physiological complications. The cut is intended to deny a woman sexual pleasure and inculcate a sense of shame about her body.
Apart from denying sexual pleasure, which is a basic right, it is forceful, causing permanent injury, placing illegal detention, which means a host of other human rights abuses only equaling terrorism and causing underdevelopment. Richard Munguti reported a girl in Narok (Kenya) as having been:

...forcefully circumcised and suffered permanent injuries...forced to live in an illegal detention known as chandoni and. ...even before she healed her genitals, she was taken from the bush against her will. The cruel operation was done without any application of modern medical knowledge. She also without her will, became pregnant during the ordeal...(1999:19)

From this heinous act, the girl is likely to develop a sex-phobia becoming a “cold natured woman” who will not easily get subdued to male coercion. This will adversely affect the stability of marriages causing a rise in divorce rates because Gallichan describes her as:

...lacking understanding of the fundamental facts of life. Their resistance to the acceptance of the facts of love of the sexes is frequently so stubborn that no kind of instruction appears possible in their case. The cold woman suffers from an inhibitory force, which is hidden, and expresses itself, as “i will not”...(1927:1)

This level of frigidity will inhibit easy reproduction, and production when working in an environment containing the opposite sex thus less is achieved of fruitful development in numerous cases.

**Domestic violence**

The unique personality that everyone develops is largely dependent on environmental factors. This contributes greatly to the character acquired by an individual. Thus a violent character is easily inherent from violent parents. A child subjected to live scenes of domestic violence is at a higher position of possessing a violent nature in future than a child subjected to watching violent movies. This stems from the fact that philosophically, there is a difference between appearance and reality, and a high tendency to believe in reality. Whilst most movies are largely in appearance form, domestic violence is a reality. A study show that domestic violence erupts after a quarrel and so the child believes that after a disagreement follows a quarrel, then violence in order to agree. At this final stage anyone amongst the conflicting parties can initiate the violence depending on the level at which the anger has heightened. This being common amongst couples, either man or woman can begin it. Aluoch gives an example of a young girl who reported her father of his sneaking habits to:

...her mother who pounced on her husband raining blows and kicks on him while cursing him...(1994:3)

Indeed, inheriting a violent character will be easy for the girl. Where domestic violence leads to death, it translates to losing part of a society thereby declining the society’s capacity to produce and retarding the socio-economic growth of a nation. A World Bank publication reports that it also leads to

...lower productivity, more absence from workplace, increased homelessness, greater demand for medical and community services and larger expenditures for police and judicial services....and generates a climate of fear ...(2001:78)

In developing countries, this violence is common against women hence causing gender subordination of women, leading to the above-cited problems.

**Men and Boys**

**Low life expectancy**

Socio-cultural norms stipulate men as breadwinners in the family in many parts of the world. This becomes much attached to them so much so that it is comparable to masculine superiority, as the only chief provider of needs. In the modern world, this requires a man to have a job. However, third world regions do have plenty of joblessness, which greatly affects men as follows. World Bank’s Engendering development says:
... men have experienced absolute declines in life expectancy in recent years. Increases in mortality rates—the largest registered in peacetime—are associated with growing stress and anxiety due to rapidly worsening unemployment among men... (2001:14).

**Boys in rural Lesotho**

The plight of the boy child is hardly negatively affected because most cultures and traditions take pride in having a boy. However, in rural Lesotho, this pride fails due to requirements imposed on the boy which cause death.

APS features reported that from the age of five when the boy is able to move out of the compound, he takes up his role of looking after animals. Due to the large numbers of animals between 10-200, most families prefer that they are herded on the mountains where there is enough pasture. Once the boys leave and head for the mountains, they stay away for seven months while the weather is favourable. When winter sets in, they are meant to retreat back home. It is at this time that the unfortunate boys are trapped by snow and storms that blow in on the mountains. To the ones who survive, by the time they are able to move on from the job of looking after animals, they already are old enough to get married. This partly explains why the literacy rates of the female are much higher than of the males in Lesotho. Having had no education, the best young men opt for employment at the mines in South Africa (1997:9).

This means that the lives of many in rural Lesotho are in constant poverty and the social norms exacerbating gender inequality. The deaths on the mountains reinforce economic underdevelopment.

**Prison cells**

Social stratification has tended to adore masculine strength and endurance in difficult times. However, this has been greatly abused by imposing brutality in the sense of correcting a man's wickedness. With little or no consideration from legal authorities, officers and prison warders encounter the same with prisoners. The Kenya news agency reported an example is the Kodiaga prison in western Kenya where tales of brutality come from the penal institution. Living conditions are pathetic, congestion, dwindling finances, poor schemes of service for wardens and obsolete facilities have combined to make Kodiaga a living hell for wardens and prisoners alike.

Lack of privacy forces many married officers to stay at the quarters alone, leaving their wives at the rural homes. Some officers are forced to sleep on the floor, just like inmates and some junior officers live in mud houses whose floors have not been cemented. Toilets are nonexistent and officers use buckets to relieve themselves, which often overflow with waste before inmates remove them. The bathrooms have no doors and officers are not allowed to live outside the prison. Moreover, their pay, which can be as little as Kshs.4200 is not enough to rent a decent house. Many warders wear uniforms that are worn out and they are sometimes forced to buy their own. Living under such conditions makes the officers irritable and edgy, which translates to brutality on the prisoners at the slightest provocation. In the men's cells, one ward with four mattresses and blankets accommodates over 50 inmates at a go. This has led to increased cases of sodomy thereby contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. A nurse at the prison says at least 200 cases of HIV infection were discovered amongst inmates... in June alone ... yet even in the hospital, they had to share beds because the wards do not have enough mattresses. The prison which was designed to house 800 inmates is currently home to over 200 prisoners overstretching the institution's resources (KNA 2003:2).

For those who come out safely, the thought and sight of administrative frameworks like the police, prison warders and prison itself creates a feeling of insecurity which hinders an individual's performance in any social economic activity.

**Masculine Domination**

Social norms have attributed greatly to the masculine nature of killing rather than the feminine nature of procreating. Peggy Reeves also comments that:
"it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex which brings forth, but that which kills. In addition, male activities involving the destruction of life are given more prestige than the females ability to create life ...(1981:176)

Thus in civil warfare, masculinity dominates because it prides in causing aggression. In Uganda the Lords resistance army has been raiding villages and abducting for many years. Kathryn Westcott reported that:

...new male captives are forced to participate in atrocities such as killing, maiming and intimidating the local population by burning their homes. Older female captives are forced to become wives of senior commanders and are subject to rape, unwanted pregnancies and the risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. The young girls are forced into grueling domestic work...(2003:16)

She also reports that it leads to

...many of them suffering from severe trauma ......and are very aggressive, others have an overwhelming need for revenge ,either against their own people or rebels ...(2003:16)

This means that there is no room for offering education and all focus made on the children is for the males to fight and for the females to submit to abuse of human rights irrespectively.

Strategies
Reform institution to empower people.
They should play an essential role of enabling both men and women to become gender empowered in order to improve their standard of living. This will promote gender equality, hence allowing equal opportunities for girls and boys in schooling who will in turn create good fatherhood and motherhood. A World Bank publication says that:

...because social legal institutions shape women and men's access to resources, their opportunities, and can participate productively in society, attain a basic equality of life, and take advantages of the new opportunities that development affords...(2001:15)

The reformation process should involve communities in designing social amenities to facilitate equitable service to both men and women, that is, the prisons. This will help avoid criticism and bias towards the services delivered. It will also help in promoting safe motherhood.

Promoting Economic Developments
Firstly, it will help equitable resource distribution hence reducing poverty, which translates to reducing gender disparities like domestic violence. Examples of financial disputes causing violence become unheard of. Secondly, it will help support incentives that isolate gender discrimination like in markets, which require decisions on work, savings, investments and consumption. An informed society will help eradicate female genital cut where its advocators become sanctioned with heavy penalties because of the knowledge of its adverse effects.

Create vibrant policy measures
A World Bank publication says that since

... Combined effects of institutional reform and economic development take times, there needs to be a creation of formidable policies to solve gender disparities over short and medium term periods. These include;

• Promoting gender equality in access to productive resources and earnings capacity,
• Reducing the personal costs to women of their household roles,
Promoting Gender Equality in Access To Productive Resources And Earnings Capacity
This is and can be achieved by *offering, as it is with the Kenyan primary education. It will certainly oppose social cultural norms that easily deny the girl child her education due to lack of school fees or the parents’ unwillingness to pay the same. Hence, gender equality will be achieved in offering education. This will also see the boys in societies in rural Lesotho go to school. Hence social norms causing gender inequalities will be riddled away.

Reducing the Personal Costs to Women of Their Household Roles
When the primary responsibility of household maintenance and motherhood are left for the woman, personal costs should be considered to cater for times lost, hence reducing economic strains. World Bank reports that there will be a need for

...protective labor market legislation that help spread the costs of maternity leave and selected investments...(2001:24)

This will promote safe motherhood because the mother will have adequate time to care for the child

Active Response to Emerging Gender Issues
With the presence of a rapidly changing world, policy makers will be needed to critically observe the changes on gender enabling them to raise matters of gender concern thus help prevent a would-be gender disparity. World Bank says that amongst the changing circumstances include;

.... globalization, decentralization in government, spread of HIV aids and the aging world population ...(2001:27)

This aging world population needs the following;

Providing Gender Appropriate Social Protection
Due to uncertainties that mankind dwells in, there needs a consideration of gender differences in risk and vulnerability while designing social protection. In developing regions special consideration should be given to uncertainties in employment and old age. World Bank reports that

.... women command fewer resources with which to cushion shocks, while men as the traditional breadwinners, are particularly vulnerable to stress associated with large changes in, or uncertain, employment. Old age security programmes that do not account for gender differences in employment’s earnings and life expectancy risk leaving women, especially widows—particularly vulnerable to old age...(2001:25) due to declining birth rates.

Recommendations
Tinker (1990:25) says that educational systems are bound to reflect the cultural biases and values of societies that establish and support them. Thus, a gender empowerment programme would be introduced in the education system. This can be achieved through either multidisciplinary approach or interdisciplinary approach. In the long-term, it will help create a gender-empowered society and generation creating room for huge gender development. It will also help eliminate traumatic issues like domestic violence, which has its major effects on children.

World Bank says that in many developing countries the states capability and commitment are weak, the private sector and civil society have an important role to play in transforming gender structures, through markets and through political involvement (2001:25) in form of non-governmental organizations and gender institutions. How-
ever, the state itself would create a conducive environment to allow these other sectors to operate in. This will include offering security and the right to perform their duty. It will reinforce good gender equality environment in developing countries. This will propel actions like empowerment through mass media and campaigns in the society, thus promoting economic development and help stop gender oppression in both males and females. World Bank reports that an example is the south coast of Kenya project initiated as a pilot project of ministry of water development to improve water supplies in two locations in the Kwale district. It is managed and implemented by the ministry of water development with assistance from Kenya water for health organization (KWAHO) and in conjunction with the ministry of health. KWAHO is a Kenyan NGO. This directly implies that the estate, private sector and the civil society can work together to enhance development. In the above case, the development enabled to reduce the time spent by women walking long distances to draw water eventually helping the to focus on other economic issues that would enable improve their social welfare.

In many developing countries, rights are derived not from one legal system but from several statutory, customary and religious law that exist side by side. Therefore, when the governments intend to create policy reforms on gender issues, then they ought to consider the three laws and come forward with a resolution that has the support of the majority.

This support will enable quick implementation of the law and prevent one law overriding the other that is, i.e., A statutory law and a customary law. An example is the customary law of wife inheritance after death of a husband and the marriage legal system; these two should be intertwined carefully in order to avoid clashing with the society and abusing of the basic human rights. Diplomatic channels should be continuously used with a goal of achieving a peaceful resolution to civil warfare especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Summary and Conclusion

Gender disempowerment has faced women from many dimensions in third world countries. Yet without ignoring our women and girls, there is still a need to look at gender disparities facing men and boys in order to eradicate these disparities in our society. From this paper, the gender disparities facing women and girls include sexual segregation in playing of various roles, female genital cut, domestic violence and the education impact of low schooling; while those facing men include traditional roles subjecting them to harsh living conditions, low quality prison life and the effects of masculine domination in civil warfare.

All the above disparities cause underdevelopment as they hardly occur in developed countries. Due to the vast difference in customary and religious laws, the statutory laws have lacked a guarantee in implementation of complete gender empowered society. Therefore, there needs to be a modality to address these gender disparities in both men and women, and take action. This will become possible because each member from both sexes will develop keen interest, then develop a concern, and finally get committed to solving the existing these gender disparities. Eventually, when action begins to take place, it will steer the gender development of third world countries, thus ensuring economic growth, as it will help realize talent, skill and knowledge. This is because of to a healthy gender environment that will help utilize maximum potential in our people.

References