Chapter 15
Gender in Africa

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Introduction

Around the world, gender implies the primary division of roles between people. Every society sorts men and women into separate groups and gives them different access to property, power, and prestige (Henslin 2010). Gender is widely agreed to be a construct that arises out of culture. It is not seen as being biologically determined. However, Akanle and Adejare (2016) note that the term 'gender' has enjoyed frequent usage, but has also been subjected to diverse definitions and interpretations among scholars and non-scholars. For instance, in African culture and traditional life, gender is defined according to roles and functions in the society. It is what it means to be male or female in a certain society that shapes the opportunities one is offered in life, the roles one may play, and the kinds of relationships one may have. The World Health Organization (WHO 2012) defines gender as the result of socially constructed ideas about the behaviors, actions and roles a particular sex performs. Ferrante (2011) defined gender as a socially created and learned distinction that specifies the ideal physical, behavioral, mental and emotional traits characteristics of males and females. Ideal in this context according to Ferrante (2011) means a standard against which real cases can be compared. Although 'gender' is commonly used interchangeably with 'sex', within the academic fields of gender studies and the social sciences in general, the term 'gender' often refers to purely social rather than biological differences.

Humankind has for long created roles in which males and females must fit and must play diligently. Traditionally, the male is the provider, holds the power and makes important decisions on issues affecting the lives of members of his household.

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Women, on the other hand, are submissive nurturers. Women are socialized from youth to believe that their primary existence in life is to marry and give birth. Thus, this creates a mindset which paints the repression and subjection of women's role as acceptable Musau (2015). Consequently, when women step out of their prescribed gender role, society views it as challenging the male's exercise of authority. The male then feels an innate need to push the female back into her gender role(s) in any way deemed acceptable. There are several mechanisms that perpetuate gender ideals in society. One such mechanism is the socialization process of girls. Socialization theorists argue that an underdetermined yet significant portion of male–female differences are products of the ways in which males and females are socialized (Ferrante 2011).

However, in developing countries, traditional gender roles are gradually changing; especially in matters relating to household welfare (Yusuff and Ajiboye 2014). But it is more difficult to break down women's roles completely due to several factors such as the patriarchal nature and culture of most developing countries and the inadequate access of girls to formal education and socialization processes. Why, then, do these stereotypes persist? Largely because we do not differentiate between sex and gender, and many of us believe that 'anatomy is destiny'. As a result we ignore the importance of the social context that produces and maintains these stereotypes. All of these promote and sustain cultural gender myths that are detrimental to both men and women in African societies. The aim of this chapter is to holistically examine gender in Africa. How does society construct gender? What are the gender roles in Africa? How and in what ways does gender inequality manifest itself in the lives of African women? What strategies have been adopted by African governments to end gender inequality? And what are the pressing problems that hinder the achievement of gender equality? The next section examines how gender roles are constructed.

Understanding the Social Construct of Gender

A social construct is a concept or practice that is a construct (or artifact) of a particular group (Berger and Luckmann 1991). A social construct is something that does not exist; this means that its meaning, use and definition are contingent on culture. Social constructs are generally understood to be by-products of countless human choices rather than laws resulting from divine will or nature (Hacking 1999). Gender is one such construct. The idea that gender is socially constructed is a view presented in many philosophical and sociological theories (Jost and Kruglanski 2002). According to Jost and Kruglanski, society and culture create gender roles, and these roles are prescribed as ideal or appropriate behavior for a person of that specific gender. A social constructivist framework holds that there is no essential, universally distinct character that is masculine or feminine. According to Anderson (2000), behaviors are influenced by a range of factors such as class, culture, ability, religion, age, body shape and sexual preference.

In the opinion of Giddens (2004) the principal self-identification of an individual as a man or a woman, with ideas and desires that accompany that identification, depends largely on what label is attached to that individual in childhood. The ways in which we were socialized into gender begin from a very early age. For example, studies of mother–infant interaction reveal distinct differences in the ways in which boys and girls are treated, even in situations where the parents believe their reactions to both are the same. In addition, male and female adults usually handle infants differently and by age two children have a partial understanding of what gender is. Gender roles then, can be understood as those sets of norms that communicate what is generally considered appropriate for each sex (Burns 1996).

Ferantee (2011), in explaining the construct of gender, noted that there are gender ideals in almost every society in the world, which shape practically every aspect of life-influencing, among other things how people dress, how they express emotions and what occupations they choose. This has led to gender polarization which is the organization of social life around male and female ideals, so that people's sex influences every aspect of their life. This includes the way they dress, the way they pose for photographs, and all the social roles they take on, even the way they express emotions and experience sexual attraction. Decisions and viewpoints about any aspect of life are considered gender schematic if they are influenced by a society's polarized definition of masculinity and femininity rather than by criteria such as self-fulfillment, ability, interest or personal comfort (Ferantee 2011). The most important insight on the construct of gender is that because boys and girls are treated differently and put into different learning environments, they develop different needs, wants, desires, skills and temperaments. In short, they become different types of people—men and women—who hardly question why they are different and how they ended up being different. Society treats them differently and gives them different opportunities for development. This differential treatment promotes certain behaviors and self-images that recreate the preconceived cultural stereotypes about gender. The process repeats itself over and over in an unending spiral across the generations, so that although gender stereotypes are being constantly re-created and modified, they seem natural and impervious to change. The next section examines gender roles across Africa. This is to buttress the fact that gender roles are socially created and vary from one country to another.

Variations in Gender Roles in Africa

Each culture has its own gender-role norms and values, and the degree of equality between men and men differs across African societies. Ferrante (2011) notes that gender inequality exists between men and women when one category relative to other (i) faces greater risks to physical and emotional well-being; (ii) possesses a disproportionate share of income and other valued resources; and/or (iii) is accorded more opportunities to succeed. In Africa, there are several areas in the developmental process where women as a group are disadvantaged more than men.

North Africa

In Islamic societies in North Africa, there is a great deal of variation across Islamic societies concerning women's roles in the family, education, politics, and employment opportunities. Each country in North Africa interprets women's rights under Islam somewhat differently Sabban (1995). However, social class and religious laws often play an important role in defining women's educational and employment opportunities. Haq (1996) argued that Islamic women's roles are complex. On the one hand, some women's organizations have been challenging some of the most repressive Islamic laws and practices of Muslim fundamentalists that limit women's participation in education, politics and the economy. On the other hand, many women often reject the West's permissive sexual attitudes and what they see as a lack of cooperation between males and females in the family. Sabbagh (1996) reiterated this when he pointed out that many Islamic women feel safe and protected by being 'veiled' and clothed in garments that cover the woman's entire body. In Arab countries, Muslim fundamentalist men compete with educated urban women over limited educational resources and shrinking employment opportunities (Haq 1996).

In Sudan, there are clearly defined gender roles. Men make decisions, but also bear the responsibility of providing financially for their mothers, sisters and aunts. Women take care of children, the sick and the elderly, as well as running the household. Gender relations in South Sudan are complex: the roles and responsibilities of women, men, boys and girls are clearly delineated. Women and girls have responsibilities related to farming, collecting water and firewood, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and brewing beer. Men and boys have responsibilities as decision-makers for the community and their families, cattle (boys in particular tend to be cattle-herders), hunting, fishing and charcoal making. In times of crisis, gender roles and responsibilities change to take account of the context, the needs and the different coping strategies families and individuals adopt (Ali 2011).

In general, South Sudanese women from rural villages are treated as second-class citizens. They do not hold roles of authority or have any esteemed significance in their families or communities. They are obligated to marry a man chosen by the family in line with the dowry system, a system that treats women as a commodity to essentially be bought or sold. Rural South Sudanese women have no voice regarding their own rights, and are unable to participate in any major decision-making processes regarding themselves or their families (Kuanyi 2010). Gender-based violence and protection violations in South Sudan are driven by a culture of silence and stigma, masculine identity tied to cattle-raiding, bride-price, a lack of access to legal recourse, and customary practices that favor compensation for crimes (Ali 2011). In some tribes, such as those in the Dinka and Nuer regions, women are regarded solely as a source of income for the family's benefit. Rarely is the importance of designating resources to send a wife or daughter to school to receive an education considered. In these male-dominated cultures, women are to be submissive and subservient to their family-in-laws and to their husbands (Care 2016).

West Africa

Ghana

Ghana's ethnic, cultural and agro-ecological diversity make generalization about gender relations and their consequences for women's access to resources, decision-making and status extremely difficult. Different ethnic groups are characterized by a variety of kinship systems with different implications for access to resources and decision-making power by gender (Adama 2016). Combined with this is the strong patriarchal family structures, which influence women's lack of influence in decision-making (Basden 1999).This results in generally more limited options for women. The Akan ethnic group constitutes the largest ethnic group residing mainly in the southern part of Ghana. The Akan are organized along matrilineal lines but most other ethnic groups, in the North and the East, are organized along patrilineal lines. The Ga, who are concentrated around Greater Accra, are somewhat anomalous in having bilateral inheritance and kinship structures. However, matrilineal systems may give women greater access to resources outside marriage than patrilineal systems although they are characterized by a weaker nuclear household offering little economic security to women. Patrilineal systems do not necessarily imply significantly greater access to resources and/or higher status for women (Quartey and Martin 2008).

Gender division of labor in Ghana is highly segregated by sex in both the traditional and modern wage sector. Only a very small number of women have broken through into modern sector occupations and even fewer into managerial positions (Global Gender Report 2013).Women's labor participation rates are generally high throughout Ghana. There is some regional diversity and variation in socioeconomic opportunities for women from different backgrounds. The most striking feature, however, is that about 99% of women are self-employed or work as unpaid labor in agriculture, agro-based enterprises and commerce or small-scale manufacturing in informal sector activities with low productivity which on average yield low incomes (Ofosu-Baadu 2012). Osei-Boateng and Ampratum (2011) noted that women predominate in the trading sector, mainly in petty trading, although a small minority of women had gained substantial market power. Women's trading activities according to Osei-Boateng and Ampratum (2011) are hindered by poor infrastructure, bad road conditions, weak marketing channels, limited storage facilities, and a lack of other facilities at marketplaces such as water and toilets. The continuing gender imbalance in access to education in Ghana limits women's access to employment and productivity. For instance, in urban areas, lack of qualifications and a narrow range of skills limit female access to formal employment. Also, in rural areas, lack of female education limits farm productivity (FAO 2012). Currently, Ofosu-Baadu (2012) points out that three-quarters of female farmers have no education, and inadequate literacy and numeracy skills are also reported to limit the efficiency of female traders.

Nigeria

There are two main religions in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity, and a variety of indigenous beliefs across the country that have a significant impact on gender roles, apart from culture. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender, but customary and religious laws continue to restrict women's rights. The gender roles among Nigerians of different ethnic group vary, and this can be viewed from the aspect of the major constraints women face in public/private and traditional positions: their overall workload and the moral pressures and negative attitudes of both men and women towards women. Prior to now, the traditional and social practices as well as role stereotypes have confined women to the home as housewives and child bearers, hence they were largely economically dependent on their husbands, and by implication subservient to them (Odeyemi 2013).

Yoruba culture does not discriminate against women participating in decision-making within the home and in the political or public sphere. Although, Yoruba culture is hierarchically based with men on top of the ladder, respect is reciprocal and understood to work for the preservation of the community. Differentiation is more likely to be viewed from age or position (respect) rather than gender in the traditional Yoruba society. However, Azuh et al. (2015) noted that the hierarchical nature of Yoruba society in Nigeria relegates women to a subordinate position in matters of family planning and otherwise. Makama (2013), in a study among the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, found that the most important factors contributing to maternal deaths is Islamic culture that undervalues women; a perceived social need for women's reproductive capacities to be under strict male control; the practice of purdah (wife seclusion), which restricts women's access to medical care; almost universal female illiteracy; marriage at an early age and pregnancy often occurring before maternal pelvic growth is complete; harmful traditional medical beliefs and practices; and responsibilities of husbands among others. The keeping of women in seclusion (purdah) is another perceived area of female subjection among the Hausa ethnic group. In the practice of purdah, women's movement outside the house is severely circumscribed and public forms of physical labor are associated with considerable shame and insecurity for women (Zakaria 2001). In Northern Nigeria, this practice is coterminous with the introduction of Islam. Today, Hausa-land is a major area in the whole of Africa where the seclusion of adult females is strictly practiced as a cultural norm (Mudiare 2013).

Gender roles defined the place of the male and female in Igbo society. The female is seen as being subordinate to her male counterpart, which was how it was defined by the traditional setting in Igbo society. Igbo traditional society attaches much importance to this gender issue, where men and women operate in separate practices, albeit in the same culture gender functions have been so arranged and segregated that men arrogate superior functions to themselves and inferior functions to women. Over the years, these roles have been tolerated and assimilated by people and have become part of the people's customs and traditions. Discourse on the role of women in Igbo traditional society by many scholars who examined the economic

role of Igbo women established that such revolves around agriculture, manufacturing and trading (Ezuma 2003). In agriculture, for instance, Igbo women fill a substantial role in decision-making and execution in the production process and the associated food processing activities (Ikpeze 2000). In the area of trade, women dominate the marketplace in traditional Igbo society where they sell agricultural products as well as handicrafts and other manufactured goods; however, the men engage in long distance trading (Ikpeze 2000).

East Africa

Pankhurst (2002) claims that Uganda's gender relations remain "highly unequal by any standard measure." In Uganda, women's rights or equality is more talked about than are a reality at different levels. Within education, women's participation remains below that of men, with a net enrolment rate of only 21% of girls in secondary school (UNICEF 2011). In university education, women have remained a minority as students and staff, and especially as academics and managers (Yusuff 2014). Kasente (2003) points out that men have a clear advantage over women in access to and control over resources, while cultural practices also bestow more power on men than on women in various aspects. In Kenya, gender roles tend to vary by ethnic group and by rural-urban settlement. Gender equity is highest in Nairobi and the areas around it and lowest in the northeastern part of the country. However, 60% of the land is owned by women (CEDAW 2011). Land is the primary asset in Kenya and 70% of livelihoods are in agriculture. Patrilineal inheritance traditions mean that men own all but a small portion of the land. In 2010, it became legal for women to have their name on a land deed but women's access to land is controlled by men (Ndiritu and Nyangena 2010). In Malawi, the government is trying to discourage traditional practices where girls are married before the legal age. Despite these attempts, girls as young as 13 are often married off (FAO 2011).

South Africa

In South Africa:

> Culture plays an undeniable part in traditional gender roles. Within South Africa, there is a specific atmosphere which reinforces traditional gender roles. In general, all racial and ethnic groups in South Africa have long-standing beliefs concerning gender roles, and most are based on the premise that women in South Africa are less important, or less deserving of power, than men. Most African traditional social organizations are male centered and male dominated (Hutson 2009).

Much of the problem in South Africa lies within the African women themselves. Because the young men played such a crucial role in the collapse of apartheid, they are eager to collect their dues, and the women understand and respect such a notion.

Therefore, the constraints that emanated from the post-apartheid society were to give priority to the full employment of young men. These are supported by the women in South Africa who believe that the young men need the jobs more than women (Meer 2007).

The Rise of Feminism

For the past few decades the world has witnessed a resurgent interest in feminist jurisprudence. This interest has culminated in the emergence of numerous global strategies geared towards women empowerment and emancipation. Examples of such strategies are the Vienna Declaration Programme and Action; Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women: The ICPD Programme of Action; the Beijing Conference among others. This global feminist interest has also given birth to a catalog of international and national instruments aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of women. The instruments in question include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974); the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2000); and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (1986). These legal instruments unanimously affirm the fact that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights without any distinction of any kind, including distinction as to sex. They recognize the fact that discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents women's participation on equal terms with men in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity. There is, however, contention over the applicability of Western feminists' ideologies in Africa, bearing in mind the culture and colonial experiences of Africans (Yusuff 2013).

Manifestation of Gender Inequality in Areas in African Countries

In simple terms, 'gender equality' is equality for all, where one group of people are not preferred or discriminated over others in the distribution of food, shelter, healthcare, education, job training and professional opportunities. It is where every group or individual is subject to the same laws, with no individual or group having special privileges. It means equal rights under the law, such as security, voting rights, access to education and healthcare, safety, respect, assembly and property rights. It also means that everyone regardless of human limitations and circumstances of birth

should enjoy the same rights and privileges as all others in the society. There are several areas where gender inequality manifests itself, but only three areas will be discussed here.

Female Unemployment in Africa

Women continue to face considerable barriers in African labor markets as a result of lack of education, inadequate access to training, discrimination, and cultural attitudes about their role in the workplace. However, official figures provided by UNESCO (2010a) indicate that there is very little difference between the unemployment rates of adult women and men in Sub-Saharan Africa. In contrast, young women are less susceptible to unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa. This does not imply, however, that young women in this region have better access to the labor market; rather, they do not have the 'luxury' to actively search for a job and hence take up employment in the informal sector or remain outside the labor force. Although the female employment rate for some African countries has increased, since 1990 none of the countries for which recent data are available has reached 50% gender parity in wage employment (IFAD 2011a). The countries that were closer to reaching the parity target of 50% in 2004 are South Africa (45.9), Botswana (43) and Ethiopia (40.6). Namibia scored 48.8 in 2000 and may have reached parity if such trend has been sustained. The major challenges affecting the achievement of gender parity in formal employment include the low educational level of women and girls; lack of skills; labor laws that still disadvantage women in most countries and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, childbearing and childcare, which restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities (UNESCO 2006).

Political Participation

Women's representation in the national parliament has improved in the majority of African countries. This section reviews the participation of women in decision-making at different levels: the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. Recent data collected by the Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) provides a summary of the overall presence of African women at the highest levels of national level politics.

Several countries have significantly increased the level of women's representation in parliament, with one country reaching an impressive 49% (Rwanda) and four at 30% or more (Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Burundi). Africa has the highest reported rate of progress over the period 1990 to 2007. But the story is not altogether cheerful as 17 countries have shown only a slight improvement over the period 2003–2007 (UNECA 2008).

Women are under-represented in all political decision-making bodies. In Nigeria, the participation of women in politics still falls short of the desired 30% by international standards and 35% as entrenched in the National Gender Policy 2006. Current statistics indicate that in the 2007 election, only 516 women sought elective positions to state Houses of Assembly, the National Assembly, Governorship and the Presidency. In 2011, however, 921 women contested elections to these offices and the percentage generally increased, although only by just 8.4% during the period. Although African countries have made some progress in women's representation and participation, it is important to note that this higher representation of women has not yet systematically led to adequate budgets, institutional frameworks and policies for implementing gender programs for gender equality (UNECA 2007). The major challenges affecting the effective political participation of women, according to Olurode (2013), can be located at two levels. These are the level of ideas and social values, that is, ideology, and at the level of material relationships.

Education

In spite of the efforts of national and international organizations in developing countries, gender inequality still exists. The considerable importance that has been attached to education in Africa is based on the assumption that education plays a crucial role in promoting social and economic development (Nwomonoh 1998; World Bank 1988). Education also enables one to make informed decisions in such areas as health and nutrition, family planning, water and sanitation, food production and its management. The education of girls and women in particular has cascading benefits, including helping to decrease poverty, prevent disease, eradicate violence and deter political instability. It is also a means of securing intergenerational transfers of knowledge, and providing the substance of long-term gender equality and social change. Sub-Saharan Africa has registered profound change in both participation and educational expansion in all levels of education since independence.

The number of children enrolled in primary education grew from 12 million to almost 61 million (excluding South Africa) between 1960 and 2000 (UNESCO 2009). The net enrollment ratio (NER) for primary education climbed from 56% in 1999 to 70% in 2006. In 2006, more than 23 million of the region's children entered a classroom for the first time—an increase of some 7 million over the level in 1999 (UNESCO 2009). The region accounted for the world's highest increase in total primary enrollment, which rose by 42% between 1999 and 2006. This increase enabled countries such as Botswana, Cape Verde, Congo, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo and Zimbabwe to achieve a primary gross enrollment rate of 100% (UNESCO 2008). While the number of primary school aged children out of school has dropped by 10 million since 1999, 35 million children of primary school age were still not enrolled in 2006, about one-third of this area's population. The region accounts for 47% of the world's out-of-school population, with 54% of this being girls (UNESCO 2009). The average primary school

completion rates for boys stands at 56%, but only 46% for girls (low in both cases). Countries such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, Madagascar, Mozambique and Niger have less than 15% of girls completing primary school. Girls make up more than half of the school-age population in most Sub-Saharan African countries and accounted for only 44% of primary school enrollments in the 1980s.

At the secondary level, enrollment increased by 15 times between the 1960s and the 1990s. The number of students enrolled jumped from almost 800,000 to 12 million in the same period. Girls accounted for 34% only of secondary school enrollments in 2008, and few African countries will achieve the gender parity target by 2015 at the secondary level if the current trends continues (UNESCO 2008). Tertiary enrollment increased by 20 times with the number of those enrolled rising from 21,000 to 600,000 between 1999 and 2006 (UNESCO 2006). Females comprised 21% of university level enrollments in the 1980s. They constituted less than two-fifths of the population, with only 38% enrolled in tertiary education in 2007. Furthermore, those female students enrolled in postsecondary education were concentrated in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, with a weaker presence in scientific and technological subjects. For example, female students constituted a mere 40% of total enrollments in Sub-Saharan Africa in technical and vocational education in 2005 (UNESCO 2009).

The factors behind the gender inequity and inequality in education in Africa are driven by socioeconomic and political factors that include political instability and violence, poverty and economic challenges, negative cultural values, attitudes and practices that foster female genital mutilation, early marriage and sexual harassment. These are some of the leading contributors to gender inequity and inequality in education. There is also a lack of gender responsiveness among teachers and in the curriculum, teaching methodology, teaching and learning materials, school management systems and the overall school environment (Ombati and Ombati 2012).

The Effects of Gender Inequality on African Development

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa still often lack access to the same chances for economic success as their male counterparts. While there has been some progress on the third Millennium Development Goal to "promote gender equality and empower women," as indicated in the 2013 Millennium Development Goals Report, there is still a long way to go when it comes to equal education and economic opportunities for women. The African Human Development Report (2016) found that economic and social discrimination against women cost African countries more than US$100 billion per year. The report finds African women across the board are denied the same kind of economic, social and political opportunities men enjoy. It says women lose out when it comes to education, work and health. It notes that fewer girls than boys go to school, women earn less money than men for paid labor, harmful traditional practices affect their health, and certain cultural norms act as a hindrance to

women moving ahead in society. A complete picture of how discrimination against women is affecting national development may not be available but some issues are stated below (UNESCO 2010b):

- Owing to the lack of women in decision-making positions, there is low investment in sectors such as health and education that are crucial to human development outcomes.
- The limitation of women's choices and options is hampering the achievement of economic growth and development.
- Women are reluctant to take on responsibilities in politics owing to a lack of economic empowerment to actualize their ambitions.
- The increasing incidence of insecurity, violence and crime such as armed banditry, kidnapping, prostitution, child trafficking, cultism, increasing culture of begging are the result of poverty in society, which women's empowerment could ameliorate.

The African Gender and Development Index

After over 15 years since the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, African states have certainly become more aware of the need to eliminate gender inequality. This is evidenced by the numerous legal, policy, institutional, communication and other programmatic initiatives which have evolved over the years. Nevertheless, governments have found it difficult to assess the actual extent of gender inequality in their societies, whether progress is being made and if so to what extent. The African Gender Development Index (AGDI) is a composite index made up of two parts. The first, the Gender Status Index (GSI), measures relative gender inequalities based on readily available quantitative indicators of education and health: income time use, employment and access to resources; and formal and informal political representation. The African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS), which is the second, measures progress in women's empowerment and advancement. To facilitate an effective monitoring mechanism on gender equality and women's advancement, the ECA introduced the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), which is designed to measure the gap in the status of women and men in Africa and to assess the progress made by African governments in implementing the gender policies they have developed World Women Report (2016).

As an index, it gives a clear political message and allows for easier comparison between countries. The AGDI is constructed as a tool for women's empowerment and gender equality and is based on an analysis of gender gaps and the underlying gender relations in Africa. Effective gender policies can work towards greater gender justice and equality. Gender equality does not mean same-ness of men and women, but refers to equality of rights, participation, opportunities, voice and access, and control over resources. Gender relations are relations of social inequality. They are present in all aspects of life. Gender is related both to the use of public space and the domestic domain.

The Interface Between the MDGs and the AGDI

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) form the world's major commitment to the promotion of an action agenda which emphasizes sustainable human development as the key to fulfilling social and economic progress. All 191 Member States of the United Nations have pledged to achieve these goals by the year 2015. Addressing poverty and the other goals outlined is only possible if a holistic, gender-sensitive approach is adopted. Although only one goal explicitly addresses gender equality and women's empowerment (MDG 3), and MDG 5 addresses maternal mortality, gender issues are key to achieving success on the other MDGs as well. For ease of appreciation of the interface between the AGDI and the MDGs, the latter are listed as follows:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal mortality
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

These goals are accompanied by concrete targets and indicators, both in a direct sense, where indicators such as income, education, child health and HIV/AIDS are concerned, but also in a more holistic way, where issues such as violence against women and customary laws in which gender inequality are entrenched, are addressed. Women, half of the world's population, can only be empowered to participate fully in the immense effort needed to eradicate poverty and ensure environmental sustainability when they can act in an environment without fear and are provided with access to adequate resources.

Progress Made So Far in Achieving Gender Inequality in Africa

The Millennium Declaration of 2000 resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combating poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulating sustainable development. By implication, it recognizes the centrality of gender equality and empowerment of women to the achievement of all international development goals and also has a goal specifically addressing gender equality. In 2005, the UN World Summit recognized the importance of achieving MDG3 through gender equality in education, non-agricultural employment and participation in decision-making. In addition, the Summit reiterated the importance of promoting women's right to own and inherit property; ensuring tenure of property

and housing, and equal access to productive assets and resources, including land, credit and technology; ensuring universal access to reproductive health; and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. The Summit noted significantly that failure to make any meaningful strides in these areas would not only result in imbalances in the distribution of the opportunities and benefits of development, but also hamper the achievement of all the MDGs.

According to World Women Report (2013), the following progress was recorded in an effort to achieve gender equality in Africa

- In developing regions, the proportion of people living on less than $1.25 a day fell from 47% in 1990 to 22% in 2010. About 700 million fewer people lived in conditions of extreme poverty in 2010 than in 1990. Over 2 billion people gained access to improved sources of drinking water. Over the last 21 years, more than 2.1 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water sources. The proportion of the global population using such sources reached 89% in 2010, up from 76% in 1990. This means that the MDG drinking water target was met 5 years ahead of the target date, despite significant population growth.
- Remarkable gains were made in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis between 2000 and 2010; mortality rates from malaria fell by more than 25% globally. An estimated 1.1 million deaths from malaria were averted over this period. Death rates from tuberculosis at the global level and in several regions are likely to be halved by 2015, compared to 1990 levels. Between 1995 and 2011, a cumulative total of 51 million tuberculosis patients were successfully treated, saving 20 million lives.
- The proportion of slum dwellers in the cities and metropolises of the developing world declined between 2000 and 2010. Over 200 million slum dwellers benefitted from improved water sources, sanitation facilities, durable housing or sufficient living space, thereby exceeding the 100 million MDG target. Many countries across all regions have shown remarkable progress in reducing the proportion of urban slum dwellers. A low debt burden and an improved climate for trade are levelling the playing field for developing countries. The debt service to export revenue ratio of all developing countries stood at 3.1% in 2011, down from nearly 12% in 2000. Their duty-free market access also improved in 2011, reaching 80% of their exports. The exports of least developed countries benefitted the most. Average tariffs are also at an all-time low.
- The hunger reduction target is within reach. The proportion of undernourished people in developing regions decreased from 23.2% in 1990–1992 to 14.9% in 2010–2012. Given reinvigorated efforts, the target of halving the percentage of people suffering from hunger by 2015 appears to be within reach. Still, one in eight people in the world today remain chronically undernourished. Gender-based inequalities in decision-making power persist whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households; women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives

Problems in Africa in Achieving Gender Equality

At their annual summit in 2014, African Union leaders declared 2015 as the Year of Women's Empowerment. After 20 years of intense advocacy for women's rights, there is a palpable feeling of disenchantment with the slow pace of progress on the challenges women faced in 1995 (UN Women 2015). The global body dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment pointed out that progress towards fulfilling commitments made in Beijing has been painfully slow and uneven. Although, the number of women in parliament has doubled globally in the last 20 years, in Africa only one in every five members of parliament is a woman, which is still below the 30% threshold for minimum representation from either gender. Although Africa has some of the top performers in women's representation, it also has the highest number of countries that are underperforming. In agriculture, about 70% of the crops are produced by women, yet they still own only 2% of the land. In addition, women earn 30% less than men for the same work. Violence against women has reached alarming proportions, with one in every three women in Africa experiencing some form of violence in her lifetime. Many girls still face the threat of female genital mutilation, early or forced marriages and unwanted pregnancies. Extremists also threaten to turn back the few fragile gains women have made. Despite these obstacles, important advances have been made, including bridging the gender gap in primary education, improving maternal health, fighting HIV/AIDS and new laws to fight discrimination and harmful cultural practices enacted. Between the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 1990, and the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals last year, the gap between girls' and boys' primary school enrollment was dramatically narrowed, the average rate of maternal mortality was almost halved, the ratio of women to men in the labor force increased so that it is now greater than in any other region of the world, and the average representation of women in national parliaments more than doubled—with Rwanda and Senegal topping the list of countries with the highest proportion of women in parliament (in Cabo Verde, gender parity at the cabinet level has prevailed for over a decade). Part of the reason for this progress is that countries all across Africa have turned the depressing statistics into a surprising advantage (African Human Development Report 2016).

Evidence from Africa also shows us that, sometimes, simply making the economy work better can disproportionately benefit women, even without an explicit focus on gender. Some recent experiences with land tenure reform provide one such example. Improving tenure security can increase incentives to invest in land by giving land owners greater confidence that they will reap the benefits of whatever investments they make. Evidence suggests that the impacts of such improvements are greater for women, who tend to have less access to land and weaker tenure security. This is an important issue for economic growth in Africa, where so much economic activity is concentrated in the agriculture sector. In Rwanda, improving land owners' tenure security caused women to increase investments in their land by 19% points, which had double the impact on men (African Human Development Report 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Achieving gender equality is key to releasing vital growth potential for the continent (IFAD 2011a; b). The empowerment of women and girls is a crucial element in Africa's quest for inclusive, sustainable growth and development. Africa must close its gender gaps in order to succeed. Many African countries have made great progress through the MDGs in the enrollment of girls and boys for primary school education and increased enrollment at secondary level. It is important to build on this good start and close the considerable gaps that still remain, including poor quality of education, teacher shortages and high dropout rates—especially amongst girls. Those dropout rates reflect the prevalence of forced and early marriages and teenage pregnancies; the confines of unpaid care work; and obstacles such as lack of feminine hygiene infrastructure for adolescent girls at schools.

Without full and equal rights to land, economic opportunity, finance, and services to help relieve the care burden, women's contributions to food security, development, and national—and personal—growth are inhibited. In Africa, most women's jobs are informal. As a result they are not covered by labor relations laws, have no minimum wage and no social protection, no maternity benefits and no old age pension. Ultimately, bringing new light and resources to the informal sector, strengthening social services, upholding women's rights and breaking access barriers will not only make economies work for women but will also benefit societies as a whole by creating a more sustainable future for Africa. Agriculture, in which almost all employment is currently informal, can be a key contributor in Africa to growth and poverty reduction. As a major employer, transformation of agricultural activities into a formal sector would be influential. Agricultural development should be seen as a priority for creative and innovative action by both governments and the business world. Women's productivity could be multiplied through the design of agricultural technologies that are specifically suitable for women and that free up their time, currently so constrained by infrastructural limitations such as water and fuel. Improved post-harvest storage facilities would preserve farm yields, and improved access to markets would allow more efficient distribution.

Business is a big part of the solution, with the power to pay equal wages, remove glass ceilings, and offer wages and opportunities for women in the work and marketplace that will help to reduce the 30% average gender pay gap for Sub-Saharan Africa (World Report 2013). Small and medium enterprises are vigorous engines of job growth in the world economy, accounting for 80% of jobs worldwide. Investing in women-owned firms will pay dividends in terms of job creation and development. New technologies such as mobile banking can be key facilitators and drivers of business development for women. Together, with clear leadership on these aspects from the business sector, we can ensure concerted investment in expanded employment options, with education, training and mentorship so that women are properly equipped to work, advance and excel in all sectors, including as entrepreneurs. Efforts to achieve a world of prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace will continue beyond 2015. The United Nations in concert with governments, civil society and other partners has built on the momentum generated by the MDGs to craft

an ambitious, yet realistic, post-2015 development agenda known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. The following recommendations are made in this regard:

1. **An urgent review of all gender discriminatory laws in Africa**
   African governments should collaborate with traditional rulers in Africa and other stakeholders to ensure that all harmful and traditional practices which target only women are uprooted. This could be advanced through dialoging with traditional rulers who are the custodians of culture; they should be made to outlaw all oppressive customary practices in their domain.

2. **Economic empowerment of women**
   It is high time African governments increased women's presence at the labor market. African governments should embark on initiatives to get more women into top jobs in economic decision-making. Furthermore, female entrepreneurship should be promoted by making loans available to women on lenient terms. Economic empowerment of women is imperative if any headway is to be made in this struggle for gender equality. An economically dependent woman is powerless and voiceless, and cannot assert her rights, not to speak of seeking legal redress in courts.

3. **Educational empowerment of women**
   Compulsory girl-child education is a useful strategy that should be adopted to bridge gender gaps in Africa. Currently, laws against the trafficking of young girls as domestic servants and prostitutes should be strictly enforced. Education of a girl-child, in the long run, would equip her for future participation in key decision-making in government and also enable her to influence gender-friendly policies.

4. **More political appointments for women**
   African governments should beef up their political appointive positions for women. The present appointments still fall short of the international expectation, that is, 35% of all political appointments should be reserved for women. The need to integrate women into the mainstream of decision-making in government can never be over-emphasized.

5. **Overhauling of social institutions**
   It is evident that inequalities are often rooted in social institutions. African governments should therefore endeavor to overhaul and reform all institutional frameworks that limit the development of women's potentials and skills. A leaf should be taken from Tunisia's book, where such efforts are paying off. In Tunisia today, 30 to 50% of judges, physicians and school teachers are now women. Similarly, in India, women have risen to the highest levels of politics and business in recent times. African governments should endeavor to review all gender discriminatory laws and practices.

6. **The role of the media**

African government media should devise more effective awareness raising programs especially at the grassroots level. The media should henceforth desist from portraying women in a negative and degrading manner such as 'sex objects' and 'housewives'.

7. **Establishment of more internet portals to foster dialogue for the promotion of gender equality**

The establishment of this portal will create an avenue of reaching out to the public by fostering dialog on the importance of gender equality. Websites such as Wikigender provide an open forum to share and exchange information on the situation of women and also encourage frank discussion on the factors that impede women's social, political and economic empowerment. It is believed that such forums will reveal people's personal experiences on gender rights violations, and will definitely help to deal with stubborn social attitudes and mind sets, while enabling policymakers to tailor their strategies to the specific situation in a country or community.

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