

## The Interrogative Approach to Gender Mainstreaming as a Vehicle to Women Development in Africa

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### Abstract

*The gap between policy development and implementation is often wide. Governments and organizations develop policies which are attractive on paper and which are often not well implemented; one of such policies is on gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is an important strategy which can bring about the up-liftment of women if well implemented and monitored. However, systems in various organizations make it difficult for the successful implementation thereof. Laws in developing economies are not yet favourable to women. Women are still living in hard conditions and are often overlooked when employment opportunities arise. Fewer women have the privilege of moving up the economic and political ladders. Most women still face challenges in accessing education, credit, ownership of land and businesses. Therefore this compels one to interrogate the policies and strategies that are in place, and which were meant to uplift women, as to whether they are effective or not. The discourse in this article focuses on the implementation of gender mainstreaming as a means of achieving women emancipation and economic development in Africa. The arguments are presented under the précis that development and economic freedom are embedded in equal opportunities and access.*

**Keywords:** gender mainstreaming, development, strategy, policies and organizations

### 1. Introduction

O moyibo and Ajayi (2011:3730) state that the awareness of the importance of gender in the development agenda has grown considerably in many African societies. There is mounting interest to address gender inequality as a means of levelling the platform for development. This is due to the fact that equal opportunities and access to economic activities plays a vital role in development. Various governments in Africa have developed policies and shown commitment to gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving economic reform. Durojaye and Okeke (2012) state that at a Regional level, attempts made to address gender inequality and improve the status of women include the Dakar Declaration of 2002, the Solemn Declaration on Gender of 2004 and the African Union's 2005 Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women. Other declarations include the Continental Commitments to Gender Equity, the Africa Union Policy on Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development. However, not much has been achieved as transformation moves at a snail's pace. Nomcebo Manzini, head of United Nations in Southern Africa (2011: 6) argues that African countries have adopted numerous universal declarations and commitments; however the translation of these declarations into national policies has not yielded substantial advancement on gender equality on the ground.

The living conditions for women in some African countries still have to be improved. Most women are employed in the low paying jobs, have little access to business opportunities, and for those who are in the formal sector, few of them occupy senior positions due to the glass ceiling syndrome. Women are still the victims of various form of abuse and are likely to suffer most together with the children when wars erupt. They still face numerous challenges including, access to education, health facilities and ownership of land. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012:1) state that weak conditions of women in Africa hinder them to participate fully in political and economic activities. Furthermore, (UNESCO) United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2012:1) suggest that the weak status of women in the formal economy can be attributed to insufficient education and low access to health.

Women in many areas are still side-lined for important positions, very few of them are able to rise up to the most

senior positions in politics and other related fields. The election of women into major political positions is happening at a snail's pace. Nevertheless, Africa prides herself in women like Joyce Banda the former president of Malawi, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma who rose to the position of chairmanship of the African Union and many more. A quota of 50% of senior occupancy is still lagging behind in most organizations and governments across Africa. Simbane and Taiye (2011:74) stated that since 2011 elections in Nigeria, there has been a slight fall in the number of women in elected positions. This alludes to the fact that certain institutions are retrogressive in as far as gender matters are concerned.

The Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (2001) defines gender as the attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. Gender mainstreaming is therefore, universally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. It is the strategy that considers the concerns of both man and women whenever policies, programs or actions are to be taken. It involves bringing the contributions, perspectives and priorities of both men and women to the centre of attention in the developmental arena. It is a strategy which pursues other developmental goals and not an end in itself. Cillie-Schmidt (2012: 71) argues that gender mainstreaming is more effective in terms of ensuring gender equality as it does not rely on women-only programmes and institutions, but rather makes gender issues part of the main agenda. The process ensures that women and men have equitable access to resources; including opportunities and rewards

Equal participation in economic activities is vital for development. Most African women participate in the economy through informal market system where they sell their products in the open markets; goods that are normally sold include beaded works. Some are fortunate to be able to sell their products through the formal market system. Thus, women who failed to access the formal market systems end up losing confidence in their work and self. Martin and Barnard (2013: 10) observed that some women lack confidence and self-efficacy because many male colleagues undermine their capabilities.

Africa has a patriarchal history and culture has reduced the status of a woman to that of a child. Pogoson (2012:103) pointed out that patriarch explains how societies control women, who constantly had to fight for their rights and sometimes struggle just to survive without being threatened by the power and domination of men. Even to date, very few organizations have women as chief executive officers or in the top hierarchy of their organizational structures.

"Many more girls are going to school and living longer, healthier lives than 30 or even 10 years ago. But this has not translated into broader gains. Too many women still lack basic freedoms and opportunities and face huge inequalities in the world of work" (World Bank 2014). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to propose interrogative approach as a vehicle to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The approach is developed from extensive literature review.

## **2. Historical Background of Gender Mainstreaming**

The concept of gender mainstreaming was officially accepted in various conferences surrounding the issues of population development. Durojaye and Okeke (2012:3) state that the notion of gender mainstreaming gained international attention during the 1990s, particularly after deliberations at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994, and also at the fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Gender mainstreaming does not have a long history as it was developed in recent years when women rights issues were brought into the spotlight. The international community has thus committed itself to consider the concerns of both men and women throughout various activities and programs. Equal opportunities and participation in all spheres of life will have to be created for all. Nevertheless, societies and organizations are still biased towards men. For an example, even the game industry is prone to produce male oriented games to female oriented games. Cillie-Schmidt (2012:7) argues that the game industry is almost exclusively focused on a male target group; it is clear that gender mainstreaming is definitely not top-of-mind awareness of the designers of various programs. Martin and Barnard (2013: 2) maintain that organisations are still structured and function in ways that do not always support women.

The question remains, who has to drive the correct implementation of gender mainstreaming in different organizations and government programs?

## **3. Feminist Theory**

The theory underpinning this study is the Feminist theory, this is because the theory aims at understanding the nature of gender inequality in a variety of fields such as in anthropology, sociology, communication, psychoanalysis, economics, literature, education and philosophy.

The theory further explore the concepts around gender discrimination, objectification, patriarchy and stereotypes.

The Feminist theory has questioned, challenged and exposed the rhetorical approach of mainstream economics. Crossman (2014) argues that the Feminist theory is one of the major contemporary sociological theories which analyses the status of women and men in society with the purpose of using that knowledge to better women's lives.

The Feminist theory endeavours to give women a platform to interrogate their displacement in society and to find solutions to their circumstances. It further highlight the contributions that women have made to society and ways in which their meaningful existence can be improved. Agassi (1989: 164) argues that modern liberal feminist theories of gender equality are based on the assumption that in order for women to achieve equal status, all stereotyped social roles for men and women have to be abolished. This is because society has assigned women work roles which are unpaid such as childcare work and domestic responsibilities. On the other hand, society has given men roles that are prestigious and which are market related, and which give them economic acquisitions. Eagly and Carli (2014) maintain that men still have the benefit of higher wages and faster promotions.

Agassi (1989:166) argues that gender equality is both desirable and feasible. Furthermore, Cook (2014) argues that international human rights law has not yet been applied effectively to redress the disadvantages and injustices experienced by women solely because of their gender. Lack of understanding of women's rights and lack of different states to practice serious condemnation of discrimination against women, compound the problems of women in society. Hence, feminists advocate and fight for women's rights. Eagly and Carli (2014) have observed that many women are not only turned away as they reach the penultimate stage of a distinguished career, due to the glass ceiling, but that they also disappear in various numbers at many points leading up to that stage.

#### **4. Previous Research on Gender Mainstreaming**

Martin and Bernard (2013) initiated a study on the experiences of women in male dominated occupations. The purpose of the research was to clarify the challenges faced by women in male dominated environment and the coping strategies that the women had developed. In-depth unstructured interviews were used to collect data. The main findings included the following:

- Organizations are structured in such a way that they do not always support women's career patterns and their need to integrate work with family responsibilities.
- Organizations did not have policies or practices that aimed at improving the integration and accommodation of women in the workplace.
- Most policies benefitted the male employees
- Formal and covert organizational practices upheld gender discrimination.

Therefore, as the result of the above mentioned findings and other factors, women developed aggressive male behaviours so that they could cope in their work environment. The researchers believe that organizations need to legitimise women's characteristics, natural behaviours and values.

The research highlight the plight of women in modern society amidst good gender policies which are never implemented or if implemented never monitored. Thus, the transformational purpose of gender mainstreaming is not evident in most public and private organizations. Durojaye and Okeke (2012:6) observed that although Nigeria and South Africa have initiated measures towards realizing gender equality in all spheres of life, these measures have not wholly improved the position of women in these countries. More still has to be done to improve the perception of society with regard to women; there are individuals who still perceive women as being irrational. Dejo (2011:7) maintains that despite all efforts at establishing gender mainstreaming praxis in Africa, discriminatory practices against women continue. Most organizations are still comfortable with male leadership as opposed to women.

Thus, entrenched prejudices and stereotypes against women still have to be addressed in the correct forums if Africa is serious about development. The challenge is with the practical implementation of well documented declarations and policies. This is because normally there are gaps that exist between policy formulation and policy implementation. Conole (2012: 13) agrees that there is always a gap between the promises inherent in the policy rhetoric and actual use in practice. Therefore, the effective implementation of policies normally requires thorough consideration of inherent constraints and challenges.

Correct implementation and support of gender mainstreaming is likely to make a difference in the livelihood of women. This is because; most changes in the livelihood of women are superficial. Pogoson (2012:100) argues that just because women are allowed to vote, that does not mean that their positions, organizations or attempt to influence the quality of their lives is in line with democracy. Women still fight for their rights and sometimes struggle to survive. They are sometimes threatened by the power and domination of men in many aspects.

## 5. Gender Mainstreaming: Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality

The Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (2001) states that gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is a vehicle that ensure that equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities are equally afforded to all individuals irrespective of whether they are male or female. Equality in this context does not means that men and women will be the same or that they will have the same interests, perspectives or needs; equality in this context only mean that the different priorities of men and women will be taken into consideration.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2014) states that a strong, continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is one of the most effective means for the United Nations to support promotion of gender equality at all levels; and to ensure that women as well as men can influence, participate in and benefit from development efforts.

## 6. Different Approaches to the Implementation of Gender

### 6.1 Mainstreaming In Different Sectors

There are many approaches to the implementation of gender mainstreaming across different sectors and societies. However, for the sake of this paper only three approaches will be expounded, namely the cultural approach, woman's rights approach and consultation approach to gender mainstreaming.

### 6.2 Cultural Approach To Gender Mainstreaming

One of the factors that prevents the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming is the cultural approach. Most organizations approach the implementation of gender mainstreaming from the patriarchal cultural approach; whereby organizations decides on behalf of women as to what the women needs are. This is because we live in a patriarchal society that has reduced the status of a woman to that of a child.

Cook (2014) maintains that religion and cultures are often the sources of women's oppressions.

### 6.3 Woman Rights Approach

Women have tried in different sectors to have their interests considered whenever policies are developed. They have approached the implementation of gender mainstreaming from their own perspective of 'women rights'. However the approach has shown its short coming as men reacted by protecting their territories. This approach has not yielded much results, and it has in actual fact prevented men and women to understand one another in terms of gender issues.

### 6.4 Consultation Approach

The consultation approach to gender mainstreaming could have yielded much results if it was properly implemented. However, more often than not, this approach is superficially used as the consultation process are for window dressing. Women are not consulted on issues that matter the most to them.

### 6.5 Interrogative Approach

This study advocates interrogative approach to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. This is because the approach will give women the latitude of engaging with the policies as they are developed. They will have the latitude of evaluating the pros and cons as well as the implication for the implementation of such policies. Interrogative approach to the implementation of gender mainstreaming will enable women to earn respect in a public space. Their opinions will be considered where it matters the most. This is because their male counterparts have already been enjoying the prerogative of directing policies in their favour.

The responsibility for translating gender mainstreaming into practice should lie with all the people concerned. Durojaye and Okeke (2012:4) argued that addressing gender inequality goes beyond merely enacting laws and adopting policies. This is because gender issues are crucial to the achievement of organizational as well as national imperatives. Situations which undermine the governments' efforts and commitments to transformation should be effectively addressed.

Gender mainstreaming should be driven from the top level of governance and filter down to all spheres and levels of government. Durojaye and Okeke (2012:3) are of the opinion that gender mainstreaming be integrated into all aspects of human endeavour. Women and men should be equally consulted when planning for various programs has to be done. Cillie-Schmidt (2012: 70) maintains that gender mainstreaming is an important tool in ensuring that gender equality is considered when planning has to be done.

Government will have to impose and monitor the national quotas which seek to place measures to bring about 50% representations for women in decision-making positions by 2015. Hicks and Buccus (2012:37) pointed out that South Africa like most African states are signatory of the 2008 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which commits member states to put in place measures to realise the 50% quotas in women representations in all spheres of decision-making positions.

## 7. Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming is an important strategy that has been developed in the modern society to advance the interest of women. It is a strategy that if well implemented can yield results in as far as addressing the challenges that women face in their workplace and also in society in general. It should however be well approached so as not to cause gender divisions. The article has explored different approaches to gender mainstreaming as well as their short comings. Thus, the approach that is propelled in the study is the interrogative approach, which has many benefits and which can enhance the confidence of women in the public space. The approach is developed from the premise that the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming is a societal issue.

It is the responsibility of the society at large to ensure that the interests of women and girls are advanced. The government should on the other hand develop the relevant policies that should be well implemented and monitored. More often than not, strategies such as gender mainstreaming only exist on paper in some organizations; people do not make follow up on their implementation. Thus, women should be vigilant about matters that concern them the most. They should participate actively in the formulation and implementation of various programs that advance their interests and that gives them the opportunity to realise their potential.

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