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REVIEW ARTICLE



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Gender and Development: A Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper explores the literature on gender and development. Achieving women development requires the considerations of various aspects. Education is an important factor of development but it must be tailored to meet the needs of the target group. In developing countries one of the main barriers to women development is early marriage, which prevents further education, physical growth and power of decision; thus leads to more disparities between men and women. The interpretation of religious beliefs is another factor that legitimates inequalities; organizations have to understand its meaning and find ways to implement development programs in faith-based environments. They also have to advocate change in institutions that sustain disparities for the creation of unbiased policies.

Keywords: Gender; Development; Education; Marriage; Inequalities; Developing Countries.

Introduction

There have been many discussions and theories over time about the concept of development with no consensus about its meaning and a unique way to achieve it. Development takes different meanings that vary according to agencies involved, areas of focus, environments, etc. (Simon, 1997). Our purpose in this paper is to review the literature related to gender development per theme or area of concern. Achieving women development requires the considerations of various aspects. Education is considered to be an important factor of development but it must be tailored to the needs of the target group. In developing countries one of the main barriers to women development is early marriage, which prevents further education, physical growth and power of decision; thus leads to more disparities between men and women. The interpretation of religious beliefs is another factor that legitimates inequalities; organizations have to understand its meaning and find ways to implement development programs in faith-based environments. They also have to advocate change in institutions that sustain disparities for the creation of unbiased policies.

Development agencies have been using different theories and methods to eradicate gender disparities, but whatever area of focus organizations have, in order to create good programs and implement them successfully, they must find specific indicators to assess the needs and evaluate programs by involving all the actors; staff members and the community for whom the program will be designed for.

Achieving Gender Development through Education

Education is one of the keys towards the reduction of gender disparities. There have been many projects implemented by organizations such as the United Nations to enhance women's education. The UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) that focuses on promoting gender equality and empowerment of women aimed to achieve equal access to school for girls and boys in primary and secondary school by 2005 and in all levels by 2015 (www.un.org/millenniumgoals as cited in Aikman, Underhalter, & Challender, 2005). A report from the Millennium Development Project 2004 showed that in order to reach this MDG, in terms of education, increasing girls' enrollment in school is not enough because there is still a high rate of dropouts due to aspects such as poor educational system, early pregnancies and many other difficulties that girls encounter. Aikman et al. (2005) state that unless a focus is made toward the educational system itself, not only the number of girls vs. the number of boys in school, but what is taught and how it is taught to the two groups, this MDG cannot be fully achieved by 2015. In other words the school systems in countries concerned have to be revised; the curricula and pedagogies have to be redesigned to fit the education of girls.

Aikman et al. (2005) conducted a research through the evaluation of two international seminars on education and gender equality, and a case study about sexual abuse of girl pupils in Northern Mozambique. The research was conducted through design, and critique of pedagogy and gender equality related scenarios in Mozambique, Dakar and Beijing. In reviewing the curriculum, governments, policy-makers, NGOs and other related organizations have to consider what is being taught to girls, the expectations of girls and their parents in getting education. They have to consider the needs and specificities of girls, according to their backgrounds, and also make sure the curriculum and educational institutions allow girls participation in the learning process. In order to make this process successful, women have to be involved in the design of the curriculum; they have to be informed of the social policies so as to make decisions that promote gender-based education. There should also be a significant number of female teachers so that the girls can have role models they can look up to in the school.

After reviewing the curriculum, the pedagogies have to be considered, in other words how the teachers are applying the curriculum into the classroom. Teacher-female student interaction in the classroom school should not be gender-bias, the consideration given to boys in terms of subject, feedback, school activities, such as sports, public speaking should be given to girls too. Girls' capacities and cognitive competences are most of the time in some societies underestimated. The teachers play an important role in the classroom settings, they can make sure girls and boys understand that they can do well for instance in mathematics as well as in family care.

Still in dealing with the educational environment of girls, the case study conducted in the research process for this article by Aikman et al. (2005) in northern Mozambique shows how Oxfam GB, a nonprofit, in cooperation with the government and AMME (a Mozambican

Association for Gender and Education) fought against the sexual abuse of girl pupils. Oxfam in Mozambique was able to pressure the government into making policies that punish any student sexual offender in the school system; teachers themselves committed most sexual abuses. After the first known case was settled with the help of the community, other girls got the courage to speak up against the abusive teacher. This case shows that sexual abuse in Mozambique is one crucial cause of girls' dropouts from school, and this may be the case in many other countries where the MDGs are being implemented.

In order to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women policy-makers and government officials have to create institutions that are "fair to women and men". The curriculum has to be designed to meet the needs and expectations of all the social groups; teachers have to be trained to deal with gender-related issues and to apply the curriculum without bias. The community must be sensitized and involved in the promotion of gender equality and struggle against any such act or policy that jeopardize the development of the community as a whole. To implement all these resolutions there is a strong need for resources, supervision and evaluation of different programs to see what is done, what is not working and why. Curriculum and pedagogy redesign is a promising solution toward the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women (Aikman et al., 2005).

Early Marriage as a Barrier to Gender Equality

The younger girls get married, the less educated they are likely to be, the less they will take part into the decision making process, the less they can achieve self-development and the more they are exposed to birth complications, diseases and poverty (Otoo-Oyortey, & Pobi 2003).

"Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses" and "Men and women of full age... are entitled to equal rights as to marriage..." These statements derive from Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 'Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Associated Recommendations' is set to 15 years by the United Nations Convention of 1962 (Jensen, & Thornton, 2003). According to the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the 1990 African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the minimum age of marriage is 18 years (Jensen, & Thornton, 2003). However many girls in developing countries still get married as soon as they reach puberty without their consent or with an alleged consent, under the pressure of parents who arrange and decide when their daughters have to marry and to whom.

This practice is illegal since children cannot give consent (Jensen, & Thornton, 2003), but the legislation is not fully applied on the issue. Early female marriage has multiple negative consequences. Girls who marry at a very young age do not physically develop enough to give birth, which result in complications; they are most of the time married to elder men, so they are intimidated and don't have the power to decide their fate. Getting married at an early age also means, dropping school to devote to marital and familial duties, which are not well fulfilled because the girl lack knowledge about how to take care of her personal hygiene and that of the child (Jensen, & Thornton 2003, Otoo-Oyortey, & Pobi, 2003).

Jensen and Thornton (2003) conducted surveys on 15 to 49 year-old women in different countries, focusing particularly on women who are 25 years and older and found out that 16 is the lowest average age of marriage in South Asia, 20 the highest average in South East Asia, in West Africa 15 the lowest and 19 the highest, in Latin America the average is 20 and higher. After analyzing the results, they concluded that in whatever developing country it is, the earlier the age of marriage the less likely girls are to achieve education, the more they get physically affected and exposed to diseases such as HIV/AIDS (Evans, 2002); and the less they will have any power of decision. Marrying girls at a young age is a violation of human rights. Policies need to be developed and implemented in order to protect girls at risk, promote women's access to education, their full physical growth and development (Otoo-Oyortey, & Pobi 2003).

Religious Factors in Gender Development

"Gender inequality, faith and development" are related (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006). Religion has a strong influence in peoples' lives. It shapes norms, regulations and institutions in developing countries, which can be a barrier to women's development, especially when it mixes with traditional patriarchal customs (Para-Mallam, 2006). In some parts of Nigeria for instance where

the Sharia Law is applied women are confronted with many rules and restrictions legitimated by religion such as domestic violence, total submission to spouse and land ownership restrictions. Although in rural areas women sustain families, their access to fertile lands is limited (Davidson, 1993).

These rules shape women's status, rights and duties, their access to education, decision making, and development. This situation needs to be changed, but it is difficult since there are not effective policies to do so, and most women are not or are barely challenging it because they consider those practices quite legitimate (Para-Mallam, 2006).

Sow (2003) states that in this era of globalization, modernity and human rights debates, there are constant conflicts between being a Muslim woman and being modern. Being Muslim or Christian does not prevent people from practicing traditional beliefs. Women used to play an important role in those practices as priestesses and healers. With the rapid rise of Muslim groups/brotherhoods and more radical Islamic ideologies, where men are always put up front, women started to lose their prestige as traditional leaders. The conditions of women in Senegal are not so crushed by Islam because there are policies that protect the rights of women and used to forbid polygamy. Polygamy has become legal because the government could not prevent the majority of the population to not fulfill their religious beliefs (Muslim men are allowed to marry up to four wives). Christian women in Senegal are still protected by the legislation in terms of marriage, child custody and other related family issues, but Muslim women, even those who are educated are subject to the Quranic law (Sow, 2003). When the Quranic law falls into the narrow views of fundamental groups, and when religious and traditional beliefs create a critical environment for women's development it becomes detrimental to women and difficult for organizations to implement gender related programs (Sow, 2003).

In this respect, in 2004 and 2006 Oxfam GB organized workshops in which members who work in different religious-influenced environments met in order to discuss and exchange way they can better implement their programs in those areas, in particular Muslim countries (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006). The authors assert that participants discussed the concept of "Muslim contexts" in order to find out the similarities and differences in the way they deal with gender equality issues and how the religious, political and others aspects of the environment influence their work on gender equality. During the discussions, the participants recognized that religion is most of the times used to justify inequalities in all societies, so Islam is not the only religion with gender inequalities. There are in fact many different groups of Muslims and practices vary from one area to another; so gender issues in the Middle-East may not necessarily be the same as in West Africa for that reason development agencies should consider each area with its specificities. They also have to learn more about the specific religion in order to understand the behaviors of the people they want to help, and take appropriate measures (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006).

The Oxfam agents in Yemen for instance have realized that marriage at an early age perpetuates the cycle of poverty (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006). Most girls in Yemen get married before the age of 18, which means that they do not reach a certain level of education, to be able support themselves, care for their health and that of the children. The role of the agents in Yemen is to negotiate the case of women between their cultural and religious beliefs. Through their experiences these agents realized that they cannot ignore the cultural and religious beliefs of the community they are working with and how those beliefs can shape and influence politics and policies regarding gender equality (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006).

In 2006, during the second workshop by Oxfam staff-members, the participants raised the issue of some change in the political environment that affected their presence in those areas and also how they can intervene in women conditions. Western military presence in some Arab countries such as Iraq increased fundamentalist groups' antipathy about any western organization, so dealing with gender issues has become more challenging because of political and social systems totally dominated by narrow religious male views of women. In such environments Oxfam staff members realized that instead of openly advocating that women should have the same rights as men, they have to learn more about Islam and discuss it with the people. Some of them used the fact that Quran says that men and women should be educated, and used the higher religious leaders to promote that idea among their followers. It worked in a village in Pakistan. Some other staff members used women's health issues, especially when they are pregnant, to convince men to give women more consideration and discretion (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006).

To achieve gender equality actors of development should not stay aside of the beliefs and traditions of the people they are working with, but rather try to embrace and understand those beliefs, target influential religious leaders and cooperate with them (Hopkins, & Kirit, 2006).

Institutions and Gender-Related Policies

Rao and Kelleher (2003) assert that development organizations cannot achieve gender equality unless they negotiate with the very institutions and social groups that sustain gender disparities and bring change. Institutions are the rules that define social and economic behavior; they frame the decisions regarding individuals' lives; women's conditions are deeply subject to those rules. Organizations play an important role in changing institutions. Whenever organizations raise an issue about institutions, they can either choose to change or support it. There are still reluctances about women holding certain positions in the decision-making instances; organizations too are subject to those biases, in a less apparent way though. So in order for organizations to change institutions that hinder gender equality, there must be some change within organizations. Women in organizations must be empowered and involved in the decisions making process. Rao and Kelleher (2003) suggest two approaches to bring about this change within the organization: gender infrastructure approach and organizational approach.

Gender infrastructure change approach promotes the empowerment of women within the organization with training, more responsibilities concerning women issues, and creating women-friendly environments and policies on the job. This approach is also known as "gender mainstreaming". It promotes women leadership within organizations, but records show that this approach has not been fully supported (Rao, & Kelleher, 2003).

The organizational change approach on the other hand focuses on the 'the organization's capacity to challenge gender-biased institutional rules (Rao, & Kelleher, 2003). In other words, empowering women to raise their voices and challenge any injustice toward them, and making sure the organization is accountable to internal and external women clients. This approach has been experimented within Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), an organization that works with over two million women in Bangladesh. The result was that, in two years, women obtained more consideration and involvement in the decision-making process within the organization, which allowed better communication among all the members and a smoother management. However the results achieved in BRAC has not been proven to influence women conditions in the rest of the area (Rao, & Kelleher, 2003).

Changing institutions and organizations in order a achieve gender equity is still a challenge since within the organizations there is still some work to do toward the achievement of representative hierarchy and power sharing between men and women. Female staff should be trained to leadership positions within organizations (Greet, 1994).

Outside development organizations women have to be trained to political leadership if they want to achieve equality and reduce disparities between genders. Women have to be part of the decision-making process in order to design women-friendly policies and ensure their implementation (Abdela, 2000). That can be done only if women are trained and qualified to be leaders which is not an easy process.

Abdela (2000) asserts that women are not involved in politics because there are several social beliefs and biases that set women aside from decision making. Such beliefs as women are not interested in politics or cannot be political leaders. She suggests development organizations to invest in training women and preparing them to hold leadership positions in order to be able to design policies that will bring a positive change to the lives of women.

Research Methods in Gender Development

Gender-related policies and programs need consistent monitoring and evaluation in order to be successful (Hochfeld, & Bassadien, 2007). There have been various research methodologies on gender issues with the main methodologies being Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) (Beetham, & Demetriades, 2007).

WID's main argument is that women are excluded from the economic development process; they should be involved in the process so as to reduce gender disparities. This approach is a western view of women's development and does not consider other settings and situations of women in developing countries (Beetham, & Demetriades, 2007). WID brought Global South

women to question its reliability since it does not apply to rural settings (Jain, 2005 as cited in Beetham, & Demetriades, 2007).

From the critiques was developed the GAD approach which assumes that apart from the exclusion of women from the economic process there are many other factors to be considered in order to achieve gender equality and women's development from the men-to-women power relationship in the household to high level institutions such as the state level (Beetham, & Demetriades, 2007).

In order to address women development issues the programs to be created should consider all aspects of the issue and have methods and tools that are specific to each environment to measure quantitatively and qualitatively the needs and changes, and evaluate program's effectiveness (Hotchfeld, & Bassadien, 2007). These authors recognize that developing gender-sensitive indicators is challenging. They conducted research for the Family and Marriage Society of South Africa (FAMSA), a social service nonprofit, in order to develop measurement indicators. The process went as follows:

An "expert-led" approach which consisted in interviewing the organization's staff members to find out what they know about gender disparities in the locality and what they think would work; and a 'participatory approach' which consists in including all the "stakeholders" of the program in the research process (Chambers, 1997 as cited in Hotchfeld, & Bassadien, 2007). So the data collection consisted in getting information from staff members and the community members as well, educators, religious leaders and administrators, about the issue and evaluation of services provided to them by the organization.

It resulted that the participatory approach was more efficient in providing quantitative and qualitative data for the development of indicators to measure the FAMSA program (Hotchfeld, & Bassadien, 2007). This is to say that in order to develop efficient programs all the parties should be included in the assessment of the needs, the budget process and use of funds allocated, the monitoring and evaluation of changes (Budlender, 2002). And in gender development women have to be at the center of the process (Greet, 1994).

Conclusion

Defining the concept of development is not easy, but there have been many approaches and methods that help to assess it. In the area of gender development, approaches such as Women in Development and Gender and Development are used in the research process in order to assess the needs, create, monitor and evaluate programs. To achieve women development, organizations focus on various aspects that influence women's lives positively and/or negatively. One of the UN Millennium Development Goals focuses on providing equal access to education for girls and boys, but research shows that it is not enough to send girls to school, policies have to be designed for their retention in school and also the curricula have to be reviewed to fit girls' education. Organizations have to consider the traditions and beliefs of their working environment; there are religious aspects that form barriers to gender equality. So organizations have to negotiate with different formal and informal institutions that promote inequalities. Since women are the target population in gender development, they have to be fully involved the process by being trained to leadership positions in order to be part of the decision making process and be able to design policies that bring change for a consistent reduction of gender disparities and inequalities towards women.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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