

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR SYSTEMATIC INEQUALITY ACROSS AFRICAN CULTURES

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Abstract

Discriminations against women have been a major global concern and the 21st century has witnessed unprecedented rise in systematic discriminations against women especially in Africa where women are historically unfairly treated. The concept of inequality is a complex and multifaceted one that has over the years proved difficult to resolve due to cultural barriers. Gender parity though, a societal goal has remained an unrealizable global dream despite universal efforts. Women historically have been discriminated against in various contexts in African cultures including pay and employment. The World bank estimates that globally about 2.4 billion women of working age do not get equal economic opportunities compared to men. The entire world is struggling to tackle the challenges of gender inequality which remains one of the most persistent social issues across cultures and societies and continues to undermine sustainable development of societies.

The main premise of this descriptive research is to examine the factors responsible for gender inequality across cultures in Africa and explore how cultural, economic, political, and social institutions contribute to its persistence. The study utilizes data collected from scholarly articles, books and international reports. Consistent with expectations, findings indicate historical cultural systems and beliefs, gender roles, economic dependency, limited educational opportunities, and discriminatory legal structures and traditional gender norms significantly influence gender inequality across different cultural contexts in Africa. These factors interact with social institutions such as family, religion, education, and political systems to aggravate and reinforce unequal gender relations. The study concludes that gender inequality is a deep-rooted social problem aggravated by historical, cultural, and structural forces that requires urgent integrated social, economic and policy interventions to address.

Keywords: Gender inequality, factors, women, Africa, across cultures,

Introduction

Historically, women have been discriminated against and in extreme cases results in sexual abuses which are often neglected and unreported. With passage of time, African

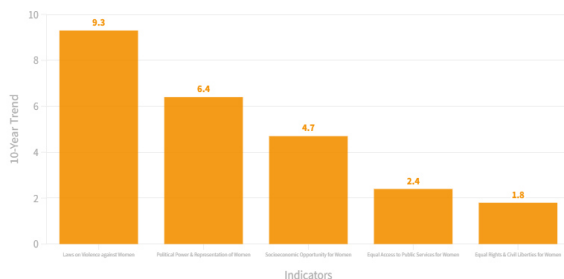
societies have been reconstructed to be male dominated and this paradigm has not shifted in social and societal contexts. The implication is that gender inequality will continue to thrive regardless of what policy makers think and what international instruments say and this forms the background of this research. The fact remains gender equality and inclusivity in Africa are two major conversations considered pertinent to human sustainability and peaceful coexistence and these is need to move these conversations to realizable levels for the broader good of the society especially when exclusion breeds resentment, divisions and hostility while inclusion fosters belonging. When citizens both sexes feel valued, they become stakeholders in national peace and progress rather than spectators of governance Gender inequality in effect refers to the unequal treatment or perception of individuals based on their gender. In this context, women have always been targeted and subjected to performing domestic responsibilities and deprived opportunities to contest these assigned roles. Gender inequality as a concept manifest in various aspects of life including access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, political participation, and decision-making power. The findings of the Africa Gender Index 2023 Analytical Report indicated that **women** in Africa score just 50.3% in equality across economic, social, and public spheres. Women's Equality has experienced a substantial improvement on average

across the continent between 2012 and 2022. The 2026 UN reports on gender equality, released as part of celebration of International Women's Day (March 8), highlight that no country has achieved full legal equality, with projections suggesting it could take 286 years to close the global rights gap. The major findings indicate that women have only 64% of the legal rights of men and legal systems are failing to protect women from violence with 54% of countries lacking consent-based rape laws and 44% failing to guarantee equal pay. Moreover, there is failure of the legal and justice systems with the UN Women report revealing that laws in many nations are failing to protect women, with 3 in 4 countries still allowing child marriage. In global political representation, women remain underrepresented, with only 28 countries led by a woman head of state. Women equally hold 27.5% of parliamentary seats and only 22.4% of cabinet positions, which is a decline from 2024, showing a reversal in progress. Thus, there is a disturbing trend on contentious attitudes towards gender equality. Gender inequality or discrimination against women is not uniform across societies; rather, it varies depending on cultural traditions, social structures, and institutional arrangements. Research shows that gender inequality is maintained through complex interactions between social structures, cultural beliefs, and institutional practices.

These structures influence how societies define gender roles and distribute resources and power between men and women. Traditionally, women often face barriers that limit their participation in economic and political activities. These barriers are frequently justified through traditions and cultural norms that prioritize male authority and leadership. Understanding the factors responsible for gender inequality is essential for developing effective strategies to promote gender equity worldwide. Gender inequality has today been recognized as the most important factor that inhibits collective creativity and innovation in society. Gender inequality is always viewed as psychologically and culturally constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society considered appropriate for men and women. This and the related power relations are a social construct – they vary across cultures and through time, and thus are amenable to change. The particular economic, social roles and responsibilities considered appropriate for women and men exist in many societies' illiterate and non-educated. These do not exist in isolation, but are defined in relation to one another and through the relationship between women and men. The cultural and historical manifestations of gender discrimination and weaponization of deeply entrenched systems and practices against women is visible in African societies regardless of modernism and sophistication. Against this background African societies

must leverage modernized local tools, international instruments and universal obligations to advance the cause of women and work towards long term gender equality and parity for achievement of human sustainability goals where everyone regardless of gender has an equal opportunity to participate in national development and human capital development ambitions. In all these, societies must tackle historical and cultural obstacles that hinder gender equality in order to achieve the goal of gender parity.

Africa: Women's Equality indicator trends (2012-2021)



Source: Source: ILAG 2022

Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to exposing gaps in theory and practice in gender inequality and contribution to better understanding of the cultural and structural causes of gender inequality across African societies. The study explores gender discrimination in depth and encourages the development of culturally sensitive strategies for promoting gender equity. It increases awareness of the importance of equal

opportunities for both men and women and contributed to enhanced appreciation of gender norms and beliefs. The study also identifies the shortcomings in addressing issues of gender inequality and discrimination especially in policy making and highlights the fact that greater efforts have not been put on exploring the root causes of gender inequality across Africa societies and has made recommendations on how to amplify efforts to achieve common humanity and equality. The research highlights how deep-rooted traditions and social institutions shape gender relations and opportunities crucial for identifying and dismantling systemic barriers that hinder human rights, economic growth, and sustainable development. The study made recommendations for direction of future research and will significantly contribute to the body of knowledge and policy.

This study is relevant because for the following reasons; It provides insight into the cultural and social mechanisms that sustain gender inequality. It contributes to academic discussions on gender studies and cross-cultural sociology. It assists policymakers and social organizations in identifying key factors that hinder gender equality. It explores gender discrimination in depth and encourages the development of culturally sensitive strategies for promoting gender equity. It increases awareness of the importance of equal opportunities for both men and women.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are namely; to identify the major barriers to gender inequality across cultures, to analyze discrimination on the basis of gender, to examine how cultural traditions influence gender roles in different societies, to analyze the role of social institutions in sustaining gender inequality, to evaluate the impact of economic and educational disparities on gender inequality and to provide recommendations for reducing gender inequality across cultures.

Review of literature

Gender inequality considered a euphemism for sexual discrimination has been widely studied in sociology, anthropology, and gender studies. People consider systemic gender inequality as a scare on human conscience especially when human area created equally. Scholars have identified multiple factors responsible for gender disparities and inequalities across societies in career advancement, in access to health, in entrepreneurship and education. Researchers and educational actors have suggested substantive measures to combat these general trends in view of the persisting bottlenecks and further observed that it is essential to improve the status of women and their rights within the family and society at large. Reviewed literature

highlights its persistence and deeply entrenched cultural norms, unequal power structures, and economic factors that are structured against women both at home and in workplace and even in political representation and education. Gender issues in Africa are characterized by significant, deeply rooted inequalities, including high rates of gender-based violence, limited economic participation, and restricted access to education for girls, exacerbated by harmful traditional practices like child marriage.

Despite progress in political representation, the barriers still remain. Improvements in gender equality in Africa, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Maputo Protocol, have been achieved through legal and institutional reforms aimed at promoting equal participation and access to opportunities.

However, as former Liberian President H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf pointed out in the 2022 IIAG report, in addition to clear laws, there must be “the political will to ensure [their] implementation”. These barriers are more visible in development nations than in advanced countries. One major factor is patriarchy, a social system where men hold dominant power and authority in political, economic, and family institutions. In Switzerland, in 1996, a paper advocating teacher training

in equality was published on the initiative of the Conference of Cantonal Directors of Public Instruction. *Egalité des chances à l'école* ("Equality of opportunity at school") (CDIP, 1996) starts from the premise that the education system reflects existing social relations and thus restricts opportunities for development and training available to girls. Vigneron, 2004, and Lentillon, Trotin in *Education et francophonie*, 2005 observed that there were prejudices about the weakness of girls and encouraged boys and girls to make choices in keeping with their gender characteristics, Anne Guison, 2004 in his dissertation observed that in Bukina Faso, a ten-year plan for the development of basic education has been put into effect and while education is seen as a means of improving the occupational integration of girls, poverty reduction measures are also regarded as a tool for improving their educational prospects. Patriarchal norms often restrict women's access to resources and opportunities, reinforcing unequal gender relations. Cultural traditions and beliefs also play a crucial role in shaping gender inequality. In many societies, traditional gender role attitudes influence employment opportunities and income levels. Studies have shown that such attitudes contribute significantly to wage disparities between men and women. Marinova, 2003 observed that society places more value on boys than girls at work place and in public life. Regrettably, this has led society to place greater emphasis and value on the role of men

and boys in public life even in unpaid community work. Another factor is the role of social institutions. Educational systems, legal frameworks, and family structures often reinforce gender divisions. For example, women are frequently excluded from political decision-making positions due to institutional barriers and societal expectations. Historical factors also contribute to gender inequality. In Africa, colonial policies disrupted traditional social systems and introduced patriarchal norms that placed men in dominant roles within economic and political structures. Psychological and cultural theories also highlight the role of sexism in sustaining gender inequality. The theory of ambivalent sexism explains how both hostile and seemingly positive attitudes toward women can reinforce gender stereotypes and limit women's social roles. Furthermore, gender inequality is reflected in areas such as health, nutrition, and survival rates. In some regions, preference for male children leads to unequal access to healthcare and resources for girls, contributing to demographic imbalances. These studies collectively demonstrate that gender inequality is not caused by a single factor but rather by an interaction of cultural, economic, and institutional forces.

Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive research design to examine the factors responsible for gender inequality

across cultures. The study uses a descriptive approach to analyze existing information and identify patterns of gender inequality in different cultural contexts. Data Sources The data for this study were collected through secondary sources, including Books, Research articles and Reports from international organizations, online scholarly databases. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods. Key themes and patterns related to gender inequality were identified and categorized into cultural, economic, social and political factors.

Results

The analysis of existing literature revealed several major factors responsible for gender inequality across cultures and are in conformity with the understanding that gender inequality is deeply entrenched and hinders women participation in governance. The findings revealed 6 major factors that entrenched gender inequality including traditional practices, gender socialization, poverty and discrimination in access to land, The prominent factors are as follows

1. Cultural and Traditional Norms Traditional beliefs about gender roles often define men as breadwinners and women as caregivers. These norms limit women's participation in public life and professional careers.

2. Patriarchal Social Structures Many societies operate under patriarchal systems where men control political, economic, and family decisions. This structure reduces women's access to power and leadership roles.

3. Educational Inequality In several cultures, girls have less access to education compared to boys. This limits their employment opportunities and economic independence.

4. Economic Dependence Women often face wage gaps, limited employment opportunities, and occupational segregation, making them economically dependent on men.

5. Legal and Institutional Barriers In some countries, laws and policies restrict women's rights related to inheritance, property ownership, and political participation.

6. Discrimination Attitudes against women is widespread across cultures.

Discussion

The findings suggest that gender inequality is deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and social institutions. The biggest challenge of nation states is how to ensure gender equality at home at work, in school and the work place. Results also revealed that social structures

constitute an obvious part of the systemic discrimination against women. Patriarchal traditions often assign specific roles to men and women, reinforcing unequal power relations. Economic factors also play a significant role as women are historically paid less compared to men in the work place. Women's limited access to education and employment reduces their economic independence and decision-making power. Additionally, institutional barriers within political and legal systems prevent women from achieving equal representation and influence. Cultural practices such as son preference, gender stereotypes, and traditional family structures further reinforce inequality across generations. Addressing these issues requires not only policy reforms but also changes in cultural attitudes and social norms.

Conclusion

Gender inequality continues to be a threat to societal cohesion and the practice has not brought dividends to facets of society. The present study is an attempt to deepen understanding and expose the challenges associated with discrimination against women. Findings reveal that women continue to be discriminated against due to deep rooted cultural biases and norms consistent with continued discrimination against women at work,

home, and politics and in promotions and appointment. As the practice continues in various forms in African societies, the danger of developing an unequal and unjust society becomes real. Findings from this study reveal that genders inequalities exist in many countries and are witnessed in Advanced and developing countries. Gender inequality remains a global challenge and rights issue influenced by cultural traditions, economic conditions, and institutional structures increases with each passing day. The study reveals that patriarchal systems, educational disparities, economic dependency, and discriminatory policies are major factors responsible for gender inequality across cultures. To reduce gender inequality, governments and international organizations must implement policies that promote equal access to education, employment, and political participation. Cultural awareness and social reforms are also necessary to challenge traditional stereotypes and empower women worldwide. Ultimately, achieving gender equality requires collaborative efforts from governments, communities, and individuals to create inclusive and equitable societies. Achieving gender parity is urgent and should resonate with leaders and everyone who seek a sustainable world Gender inequality. These barriers are deep-seated and systemic aggravated by patriarchy, stereotypes, and discriminatory structures that inhibit socioeconomic development and human rights of women. Achieving equality requires urgent, mandatory

policy interventions, such as enforcing legislation, anti-discrimination laws and equal pay, rather than voluntary measures.

Limitations of study

The present study is descriptive in nature and do not have rigorous empirical data.

The study is unable to establish firmly cause- effect relationship

The scope of study is African region and may not have convened experiences in all societies.

Recommendations

The following key recommendations are presented to promote gender equality

1. To holistically address discrimination and economic subjugation of women
2. To outlaw all forms of discrimination against women using appropriate instruments international and local
3. To ensure equal pay for both males and females and mainstream gender equality in offices
4. To formulate policies at international, national and regional levels to close gender gap.

5. To ensure affirmative action and quota for women in governance and entrepreneurship
6. To allow women equal access to science education, entrepreneurship and economic opportunities.
7. To allow equal participation and representation of women in politics and governance.
8. To implement women friendly policies and allow participation of women in decision making
9. To criminalize violence and sexual abuse against women.

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