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Women and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

The roots of colonialism grew incredibly deep in the continent of Africa. Despite the claims of what people believe to be concerted efforts to tear those roots out of the African soil, they still remain incredibly deep and influential. Gender roles, extraction policies, racial biases, and more are all a part of the legacy left behind by colonialism. Considering the early stages of development programming were created by the same people as who instilled colonialism policy, the two strategies held immense similarity. The early stages of development were not tailored to African culture. Instead, they were based on Eurocentric ideas of 'successful' development. The patriarchal nature of western civilization was transferred into and took root in African society through colonialism and development programs. Capitalist and extractionist policies were ingrained into development programming despite the tradition of subsistence techniques in Africa. Many of these European strategies displaced Africans and made many African women specifically worse off. Due to the exclusion of women in early development programming, current development policy must acknowledge the past failures to make strides to bolster women productively in the economy of Sub-Saharan Africa through education programming and committed entrepreneurial development.

There were many assumptions held in the stages of early development strategy. These assumptions were primarily surrounding how development would affect the members of a society. Development strategists believed that economic growth is gender neutral, wealth and

poverty will be distributed equally throughout a society and the western model of a household can apply to all societies (Anunobi, 43). These assumptions created an inherently biased policy and approach toward development in Africa. Education programs, entrepreneurship programs, societal and political ideologies and the allocation of aid funds all were ingrained with deep biases. The earlier attempts at development in Africa were highly centered around introducing commercialized agriculture. Men were granted practically all benefits by European development leaders. They were given technology, education, aid and subsidies whereas women were left completely behind. Their livelihoods were taken from them considering they had traditionally been the cultivators of the land where they practice subsistence farming. Many women maintained agricultural positions in rural sub-Saharan Africa, however, these areas received incredibly small shares of investment. Not only were African men given advantages when entering into the 'developing' economy, they also gained access to political power as well. This often resulted in colonial and local men working together in order to further a patriarchal agenda. Many of the male leaders were commonly dependent on the western aid funds. Therefore, whether or not they agreed with the agenda of western powers, they had to oblige.

Around the late 1990s, development and human rights organizations began to realize the exclusive nature their policy held toward women. Although this was an important realization, the assumption that the western idea of a traditional household was still applied to the policy these committees created. Organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank began to create committees meant to be dedicated to women's development. This seemed like a large stride forward, but most of these programs were only created to help women with household duties (Anunobi). Therefore, rather than creating an open door for women to enter into the economy to support their household, they furthered a patriarchal agenda. The assumption was that the male

of the household would provide money, and these committees only needed to help women with domestic 'duties'. It should have been apparent that excluding half of a population from economic development strategies would slow the intended process down. Even if this was apparent to women's 'development' committees, patriarchal values were too strong to overcome their own biases. These committees also failed to acknowledge the incredible insecurities women face inside the household. They did not strategize to ensure the money went to the woman of the household. This was harmful considering much of the aid money given to men of the household was diverted for personal interest. There is also evidence that if women are receiving or making more money than their male counterparts in the household, the likelihood that they are on the receiving end of domestic abuse rises. This kind of attitude toward women's development works to emphasize sexist gender roles which causes more harm. It gives value to the idea that women's place is inside the household rather than in the entrepreneurial economy. These committees could have taken this opportunity to be inclusive toward women at an early stage, however, this approach left women in the same position if not placing them further back.

The lack of inclusivity toward women in politics ultimately left no representation for women's rights when establishing independent Africa. The early strategies developing politics in sub-Saharan Africa established solid barriers to women. This has been one of the greatest failures of development policy. The assumption of the western "household" assumed that women would directly benefit from the development of men. However, just as aid funds are often diverted to personal interests of the man of the household, so was the money made in business as well. This left women with the only option of entering into the informal economy. The informal economy is an especially dangerous place for women to compete. They face sexual harassment, attacks, corrupt tax regimes, volatile wages and more (Vossenberg). The lack of inclusivity in

development strategy increased the population of the informal sector which is a constant challenge to formal development. A study performed in 2005 found that sixty-six percent of those in the informal sector and the numbers have only doubled in the last two decades (Johnston-Anumonwo & Doane). Therefore, the patriarchal nature of only providing men with the education, tools and skills to enter into the formal economy has been harmful to the development of Africa as a whole.

The assumption regarding development being gender neutral or blind still holds value in some development policy today. One incredible failure of development strategy has been the attitude of complete ignorance to the informal sector of the economy. Even in the informal sector men still hold advantages regarding education, business skills and access to resources and funding. This gives them access to higher paying and less volatile careers whereas women are left to petty trading, street vending and other lower paying services (Johnston-Anumonwo & Doane). Economists often ignore activity in the informal economy because they believe it to be invaluable to development statistics. However, when there is a one gender majority within the informal sector this points to biased under-development which harms overall development. The number of women in the informal sector can directly contribute to the rising number of impoverished Africans. This has resulted in a sort of feminization of poverty in Africa (Johnston-Anumonwo & Doane). Development strategy today must acknowledge the insecurities it has created for women in Africa in the past in order to create inclusive growth for the future.

Inclusive development has become a new 'buzzword' for development agencies today. The term inclusive development claims the definition, "Development that includes marginalized people, sectors and countries in social, political and economic processes for increased human wellbeing, social and environmental sustainability, and empowerment" (Vossenber, 2). Modern

development agencies want to assert that they are making an effort to create inclusive policy. Despite these claims, the only way for these kinds of statements to hold any value is if they acknowledge the wrongs of the past. As development has progressed, patriarchal values have taken deeper root in the economy of Africa. Therefore, there must be efforts toward systematic change rather than solely creating surface level opportunity. Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) has been the new term created to bolster women in Africa in their personal businesses. Programs created that attempt to align themselves with WED, such as Enterprise Development Intervention (EDIs) agencies, claim to be gender blind in their approaches to development strategy, however, biases are still apparent. Instead of continuing to try and remain gender blind, African development strategy needs to become more gender-aware.

Enterprise Development Interventions have the desired outcome of providing a 'missing ingredient' for entrepreneurs to be successful. This 'missing ingredient' is most commonly finances, however, it is not limited to solely funding entrepreneurs. Specifically regarding WED, they aim to provide women with whatever 'ingredient' they need to 'unleash their business potential' (Vossenber). This kind of terminology is harmful in the first place due to the underlying implication of an African woman having the necessity for a white, western savior in order to be successful. The greatest failure of enterprise development interventions is that they fail to acknowledge survivalist entrepreneurs. The majority of women entrepreneurs take on the survivalist surname. This means they are not in their business for great profit or even interested in growth. Survivalist entrepreneurs normally reside in the informal sector of the economy as well. They are looking for a means to an end and money to provide for themselves and their families. This failure makes EDIs inherently biased. This also reveals that enterprise development intervention initiatives are not acknowledging the harm of economic development

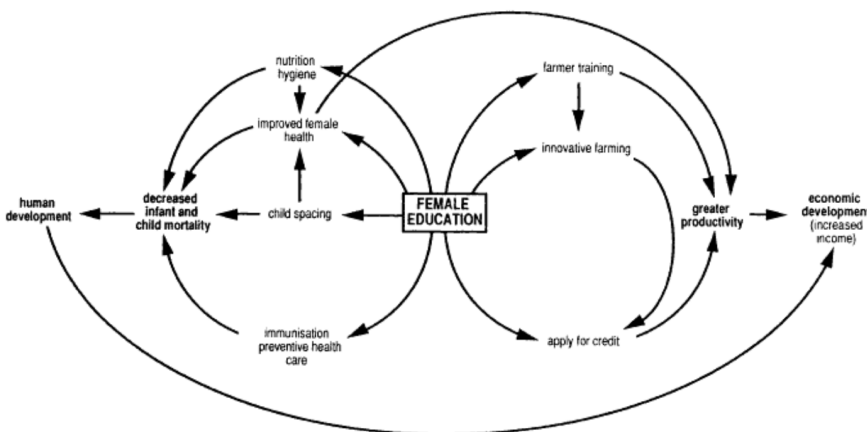
strategies of the past. These agencies are failing to recognize that women are in the informal sector due to the exclusive and patriarchal nature of development strategies in the 1980s and nineties. Women have become the majority in the informal and domestic economy because they have historically been excluded from the formal, wage economy. Now, development initiatives like these are attempting to force women to enter into the capitalist economy that is still overwhelmingly biased toward them. The economy they are trying to put women into was specifically set up to be a male-dominated environment. Instead of forcing women into an uncomfortable and biased economy, development agencies and operations could use this opportunity to develop an economy around the skills women have been developing over the past decades. Colonizers and early development strategists placed them into a position where developing domestic and informal skills was the only option they had. Not only did they force African women into this position, but then went further to devalue their work in the economy. Despite informal work being vital to a society's survival, such as providing food, caretaking, cleaning services, there is no money in this work for women in Africa. Ultimately, the strategy of EDIs targets only growth-oriented entrepreneurs which happens to be only small groups of male entrepreneurs (Vossenbergl).

Development strategists must lose the assumption that economic progression will trickle down to all members of a society. It also must lose the assumption that economic development will decrease inequality. Women continue to face incredible challenges they must overcome in order to participate in the formal economy or maintain a successful business. Holding onto these biased assumptions will only further a harmful agenda toward development. One of the greatest challenges posed to women is the lack of access to middle or higher level education. A study performed in 2014 found that in Uganda and Nigeria forty-six percent of the adult female

population had completed secondary education and only thirteen percent of female business owners had a college degree. The Global Entrepreneurship Development Institute (GEDI) on Female Entrepreneurship Index found that, “...women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa are mainly challenged by low levels of educational attainment” (Vossenber, 7). Despite the challenge to access education, the number of female entrepreneurs has only been growing, therefore, economic development strategies should mirror this.

Scholarly literature regarding the necessity of education in a society in order to increase human and economic development has been around for quite some time. The idea has been there, however, the initiatives have historically only been targeted toward men. In the late nineties international organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations recognized that human development is a direct catalyst to economic development and therefore should be at the center of development policy. It had been discovered that female education not only increased overall education rates but also improved hygiene, infant and child mortality rates, as well the health of their entire household (Browne & Barrett). One of the greatest challenges regarding female education is access, but also maintenance rates are incredibly low. Women can often not attend school during harvest seasons and their dropout rates are incredibly high. This poses an interesting connection to the discussion of women and their duty to perform domestic work. Women are not able to maintain an education because of their domestic duties where they are coincidentally not receiving a wage. If women were to be educated, there is a potential for increased personal economic growth and innovative farming practices, which could translate to a

majority of business practices, to create a sustainable wage from their domestic labor. The



graph above shows a cyclical nature of how female education can result in human development as well as economic development (Browne & Barret, 277). Therefore, education could play a role in aiding women in the informal economy to enter into the formal sector of the economy and it could bolster human development.

Until very recently, efforts to increase education rates in Sub-Saharan Africa have consistently put the education of girls as a second priority. Just as economic development policy needs to be increasingly more gender aware, as does educational programming. USAID created an “Educating Sub-Saharan Africa” program in 1997. This program did create an outline for governments on how and why they must support the education of girls in their societies. However, the conditionality tied to the donor funds was overwhelmingly weak. USAID stated that their primary concern was to educate all young children, therefore, a more fine-tuned gender lens on education statistics would have to be a secondary priority. The program specifically uses the word “encourage” rather than other vocabulary most likely to portray they are not making a specific or concerted effort to influence the local government leaders to implement strategies to ensure girls are included in these education programs (Tietjen, “Educating Girls”). International development agencies stemming from the United States and other western countries stripped women of their positions of power decades ago and replaced them with only men. Men were the only ones given the opportunity to participate in politics due to the European notions of male dominance. Considering these agencies made a definitive effort to remove women from development programming, it seems they should have an obligation to explicitly reverse the damage done in the past. Attaching conditionalities to education funds that specifically lay out directions on how to increase girls' education and how to maintain the numbers of educated girls in society could directly increase numbers. The expectation that encouragement will work solely

on its own in convincing a government to practice inclusivity like they have never done before seems unproductive.

In 2021, the United Nations Agency for International Development (UNAID) partnered with UNESCO, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women to form the ‘Education Plus’ Initiative for women. The primary goal is to focus on secondary education for adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa. The UNAID initiative identifies that educating females in secondary education primarily and beyond will decrease the likelihood of a girl acquiring HIV and/or becoming a child bride. However, it increases the opportunity for them in the economic and social community regarding securing a job as well as making a higher income or wage. The UNAID initiative even admits that this program is ‘long-overdue’. They plan to leverage the influential political position of the UN to force local governments to enact policy that promotes women’s education. They are also aiming to integrate specific women’s leadership groups, think tank groups, and set up efficient data hubs to track the progress of this initiative (“Education Plus”). The plan has consistent check ups, a commitment to transparency, and a gender-aware outline for progress. Therefore, this may have potential to succeed in increasing education rates in secondary schools for young women. Considering the program has just begun, the next four years will help determine if this sort of approach is productive and successful. However, there should be emphasis on just how overdue this sort of commitment to women’s education is considering research arguing that women’s education has the potential to constitute human and economic development has been around for the past two decades.

The lack of inclusivity toward women in education could also contribute to a potential brain drain within sub-Saharan Africa. Education in general is limited to women in Africa, and even further specific education opportunities, such as STEM education, is limited. A professor at

the University of Nigeria, Professor Okeke, has recently been attempting to create awareness about the consequences of not educating women in STEM. Due to patriarchal gender roles that were introduced by western and European powers, African women are commonly discouraged to pursue education that brings them beyond domestic work. This has resulted in many women being discouraged to study STEM in African universities, if they are even able to reach the point of higher education. Oftentimes women are not even given the basic freedom of making the decision to receive an education in the first place. Professor Okeke believes this will result in a harmful brain drain for Nigeria and Africa as a whole. She discusses how there has been an extreme challenge to receive funds to support women and their research with the STEM field (Okeke). A brain drain due to the lack of effort to educate women could be extremely harmful to African development. The STEM field has the potential to make groundbreaking discoveries through research that could spur influential development for many of the countries within sub-Saharan Africa. Including women and making STEM research increasingly diversified and collaborative will make that goal much more attainable. Efforts to bolster women in STEM or women who desire to be in STEM could spur the development of equitable gender roles. This could put women in a place of influence regarding research and innovation which could help to divert from men being continuously dominant in these fields. Allowing women to become influential in the academic world could make waves of influential women appear in the economic economy as well.

Regarding productive economic development, there has also been a lack of initiative to ensure that programming targeted toward women's development into the economy is productive. A group named Practical Action Consulting took a hands-on approach to discovering what creates sustainable hygiene development in three different countries in sub-Saharan Africa. They

performed the study in Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The assumption of the study follows, “Water, sanitation and hygiene are essential for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and hence for contributing to global poverty eradication. This thematic paper contributes to the learning process on scaling up poverty reduction by describing and analyzing three programmes in rural sanitation in Africa: the national rural sanitation sector reform in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Lesotho” (“Practical Action”, 1). It is important to note here the lack of gender focused programming. However, each head organizer for their respective country assignment was given the opportunity to formulate an outline plan for implementation. The aim was to install Ventilated Improved Pit, also known as Blair Latrines, in order to create a sanitary place to discard human waste. The approach toward Zimbabwe and South Africa versus Lesotho were very different. In Zimbabwe and South Africa, large subsidies and direct donations of funds and/or cement were granted to individual households without emphasis on who is receiving the aid. There was little to no interaction between the organization and the recipient or the aid organization and the country’s respective government. Investors were not encouraged to interact with the recipients or oversee the project. This resulted in faulty latrines being built, funds were often diverted by the head of household, most commonly male, and overall sanitation was not improved in either country. In Lesotho, the approach was much different. Aid organizations and investors were highly influenced to interact with the government of Lesotho as well as those in charge of building the latrines. Women were outlined as the dominant target for who is to be in charge of the latrine. The idea was that there would be an opportunity to create an industry for the construction of these latrines that women would be able to participate in and be formally paid for. No large subsidies were granted and donations were prohibited. Women were personally trained to build these latrines and the government also approved. Ultimately, overall

sanitation was improved in Lesotho in the years to come and the added bonus was creating an industry for women to compete in (Practical Action Consulting). Some key lessons that could be learned here is that aid organizations need to have the capacity to directly interact with recipients of aid funds. Aid organizations also must have direct contact with the respective country's government in order to ensure sustainable development. It is evident from this study that strong subsidies tend to have a reverse effect when attempting to constitute development.

This is incredibly important in the discussion of what kinds of approaches work to create productive economic development programming for women. As discussed earlier, the approach is to force women to enter a capitalist economy and environment, and they should leave behind their domestic work. The latrine construction programming in Lesotho worked to have a direct effect on women in creating an industry for them to compete in and receive payment for something they can apply the traditional domestic skills they have gained such as cleaning and maintenance.

One of the largest challenges for women's development is figuring out how to help the incredibly impoverished women without creating a system of dependency. In regards to the conversation of what works when discussing women's development it is important to explore capital in kind versus capital in cash. Solely cash as well as subsidies have shown to have practically zero effect on women's development. The movement of micro-credit and microfinancing often takes this kind of approach, however, there needs to be a more concerted effort. Microfinancing does not educate women on how to control their assets as their business may grow. And more importantly, it does not account for the dangers women may face in a society when they start making more money. Women are much more likely to be the recipients of domestic abuse when they become successful because it may threaten the ego of their male

household counterparts. This is another example of how even minorly gender-aware aid organizations are not acknowledging the insecurities women face outside of the business world. The approach needs to be much more well-rounded than assuming a little bit of cash or credit will ensure a woman's economic success. The assumption of the western household ideal still has some underlying influence within microfinance programming. The disruption of gender roles can increase violence for women. This is why programming must not only finance but also acknowledge and combat insecurities women face in the household due to the patriarchal nature of gender roles in Africa as a product of western influence.

There also needs to be recognition and differentiation in programming targeting women at different levels. Women who are survivalist entrepreneurs and who remain in extreme poverty will clearly need a more intensive intervention. This has been another great failure of development programs when creating their strategies. They fail to create policy that outlines intervention on different levels and is also gender-aware. Women in extreme poverty who remain survivalist entrepreneurs in the informal sector of the economy require financing as well as much more. There must be education programming and insurance that their success will not result in their personal and domestic demise. The outlook for women's development programming must be committed to long-term involvement rather than solely sending over funds or providing direction from an abroad location. Women's entrepreneurship development has shown some success rate in creating new job opportunities for women. However, there has been little evidence to prove that these jobs are being maintained and women are remaining in the formal sector (Vossenber). This could be due to the discrimination that women face once they do enter into the formal sector from co-workers, taxing, and much more. There is some evidence that programming that combines financing, business training and intensive follow-up technical

support that is tailored to the women's needs specifically works. This could create not only job opportunities but help women maintain a place in the economy where they feel comfortable to work toward growth - orientation.

The initial stages of development policy in sub-Saharan Africa established the formation of systemic bias ultimately excluding women from gaining the benefits of development. Biased assumptions were made regarding the nature of development and its ability to affect all members of society. Research has proven that strategic economic and educational development policy in the last century has been harmful to the status of women in sub-Saharan Africa. Development policy must continue to grow in its effort to be beneficial toward women in a way that is productive. Gender-aware approaches rather than assuming gender neutrality will be necessary in order to bolster women specifically. Policy must not only acknowledge the insecurities women face in schooling and the business economy but also at home and in general society. The systematic position of patriarchy in African society was introduced with the onset of western and European influence. Therefore, these must be the players to take responsibility for their actions and introduce solutions where African women can practice autonomy in their personal, professional and educational lives.

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