

WOMEN CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIO- ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

Albert Abiodun Adeogun

Department of Political Science and International Relations
University of Abuja

Abstract

This library-based study examines the critical role women play in Africa's socio-economic and political development, despite facing numerous challenges. Through a comprehensive analysis of secondary data, this research identifies the key barriers hindering women's contributions to development, including discriminatory laws, cultural norms, and institutional biases. A thematic analysis approach was employed to analyse the secondary sources, which comprised existing literature and empirical evidence from various African countries. The study highlights the importance of recognizing and valuing the contributions of women to socio-economic development in Africa. The findings of this study inform numerous recommendations for governments, policymakers, and stakeholders to create an enabling environment that fosters women's empowerment and unlocks their potential for driving development in Africa. The study also suggests inclusive policy reforms, education and awareness programs, and community engagement initiatives. Overall, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on women's roles in Africa's development and provides a framework for promoting gender equality and empowering women in Africa.

Keywords: Gender equality, Women's empowerment, Development, Participation, Barriers

Introduction

The participation of women in socio-economic and political development is a critical aspect of Africa's growth and development. Despite their significant contributions, women in Africa have historically faced numerous challenges, including limited access to education, cultural barriers, and discrimination. These obstacles have hindered their ability to fully participate in the development process, thereby undermining the continent's potential for sustainable growth and development (Asiimwe, A. 2018). The importance of women's contributions to development cannot be overstated. Women are the backbone of African economies, accounting for a significant proportion of the workforce in agriculture, trade, and industry. They are also primary caregivers, responsible for the wellbeing and education of their children. However, despite their vital roles, women in Africa continue to face significant disparities in education, healthcare, and economic opportunities (Ekejiuba, F. 1995)

This paper examines the evolution of women's roles in Africa, from pre-colonial to postcolonial periods, and explores the factors that have hindered their contributions to development. By analysing the intersection of gender, culture, education, and politics, this research identifies strategies for empowering women and unlocking their potential for driving development in Africa. The paper also highlights the progress made in recent years to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa. It examines the role of governments, international organizations, and civil society in promoting women's rights and opportunities. Finally, the paper

provides recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to support the empowerment of women and promote sustainable development in Africa.

Literature Review

The contributions of women to economic development in Africa have been a topic of increasing interest in recent years. Despite their significant contributions, women in Africa continue to face numerous challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. One of the key factors hindering women's contributions to development is their subordinate status in society. Anuobi (2002) argues that women are denied equal access to education, job training, employment, healthcare, ownership, and political power. This subordinate status is perpetuated by cultural and societal norms that view women as caregivers and subordinates to men. The gender gap in education is a significant obstacle to women's empowerment. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in 2019, 34% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa did not complete primary school, compared to 24% of boys (UNESCO, 2020). This disparity in education has significant implications for women's economic opportunities and their ability to participate in the formal sector.

Furthermore, women's access to healthcare is also limited. In many African countries, women have limited access to reproductive healthcare, including family planning and maternal healthcare (WHO, 2020). This can have significant implications for women's health, wellbeing, and economic productivity. Despite these challenges, women in Africa have made significant contributions to development in various areas, including agriculture, trade, and industry. For example, women are estimated to account for up to 70% of the agricultural workforce in some African countries (FAO, 2011). Similarly, women are increasingly participating in the informal sector, including trade and commerce (ILO, 2019). In addition, women's participation in politics and decision-making is critical for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. According to the African Development Bank (AFDB), in 2020, women accounted for only 24% of parliamentarians in Africa (AFDB, 2020). This underrepresentation of women in politics has significant implications for policymaking and the promotion of gender equality.

In order to fully realize the potential of women's contributions to development, it is essential to address the underlying factors that hinder their participation. This includes promoting education and training opportunities, improving access to healthcare and economic opportunities, and addressing cultural and societal norms that perpetuate women's subordinate status. Some studies have highlighted the importance of empowering women through education and training. For example, a study by the World Bank found that every additional year of schooling for girls reduces the probability of teen marriage and childbearing, and increases the likelihood of formal sector employment (World Bank, 2018).

Other studies have emphasized the need to address cultural and societal norms that perpetuate women's subordinate status. For example, a study by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that in some African countries, women's participation in decisionmaking is hindered by cultural norms that view women as subordinate to men (UNDP, 2019). In conclusion, the literature highlights the significant contributions that women can make to economic development in Africa. However, it also emphasizes the need to address the underlying factors that hinder women's participation, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, as well as cultural and societal norms that perpetuate women's subordinate status.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The emergence of gender-bias and the subordination of women in Africa can be attributed to the historical context of colonialism and imperialism. The introduction of Western values and norms during the colonial era contributed to the erosion of traditional African values and the subordination of women. Feminist theories provide a useful framework for understanding the experiences of women in Africa. Liberal feminism emphasizes the importance of individual rights and equality, while radical feminism focuses on the root causes of women's oppression and advocates for the dismantling of patriarchy. Socialist feminism examines the

intersection of capitalism and patriarchy, advocating for a social revolution. Post-colonial feminism highlights the impact of colonialism and imperialism on women's lives, emphasizing the need for decolonization and indigenous feminism (Crenshaw, K. 1991).

In addition to these feminist theories, other conceptual frameworks can be used to understand the experiences of women in Africa. For example, the capabilities approach, developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum in the 1980's and 1990's, emphasizes the importance of enabling women to develop their capabilities and achieve their full potential. The social relations approach, developed by sociologists such as Raewyn Connell, emphasizes the importance of understanding the social relations that shape women's lives, including the relationships between women and men, and between different groups of women.

The intersectionality approach, developed by scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes the importance of understanding how different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, intersect and compound each other. Understanding women's contributions to socio-economic and political development in Africa requires an examination of the artificial barriers created by foreign interests. These barriers have perpetuated gender-bias and the subordination of women, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

The feminist theories and conceptual frameworks provide a useful lens for analysing the experiences of women in Africa. However, it is essential to recognize that women's experiences are diverse and complex, and cannot be reduced to a single theory or framework. A critical analysis of the existing literature reveals that women's contributions to socioeconomic and political development in Africa have been largely overlooked. This oversight has resulted in a lack of understanding of the ways in which women's contributions can be harnessed to promote development. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining the ways in which women's contributions can be harnessed to promote socio-economic and political development in Africa.

Methodology

This paper is a library-based study that relies exclusively on secondary documents. The research design is appropriate for this study, as it allows for an in-depth analysis of existing literature on the contributions of women to socio-economic and political development in Africa. The secondary sources used in this study were selected based on their relevance to the research topic and their credibility. The sources include academic books, journal articles, reports, and conference papers. The selection criteria included the author's expertise, the publication date, and the relevance of the content to the research topic. To address the potential biases of secondary sources, this study uses a critical evaluation approach. This involves evaluating the credibility of the sources, assessing the methodology used to collect and analyse the data, and considering the potential biases and limitations of the sources. The secondary sources were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. This involves identifying and coding themes and patterns in the data, and then interpreting the results in the context of the research question.

The Role of Women in the Socio-Economic Development of Africa

Women have made significant contributions to socio-economic development in Africa, despite facing numerous challenges. This section examines the economic, social, and political contributions of women in Africa.

Economic Contributions

Women have always been active in agriculture, trade, and other economic pursuits in Africa. According to the World Bank, in 1985, women's share in Africa's labour force ranged from 17% in Mali to 49% in Mozambique and Tanzania. Women are also increasingly taking on leadership positions in the private sector, with some women leading commercial banks and other businesses. In addition, women are playing a crucial role in the informal sector, which is a significant contributor to the economies of many African countries. According to the

International Labor Organization (ILO), women account for approximately 70% of the informal sector workforce in sub-Saharan Africa.

Social Contributions

Women have made significant contributions to education, healthcare, and community development in Africa. Women's organizations have played a crucial role in promoting girls' education and healthcare, and in advocating for women's rights. Some notable women who have made significant contributions to social development in Africa include:

- i. Unity Dow, a lawyer and human rights activist from Botswana, who has worked tirelessly to promote women's rights and challenge discriminatory laws.
- ii. Meaza Ashenati, an Ethiopian women's rights activist, who has worked to promote women's empowerment and challenge traditional practices that discriminate against women.
- iii. Dr. Ameyo Stella Adadevoh, a Nigerian physician, who has worked to promote healthcare and challenge the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS.

Political Contributions

Women are increasingly taking on leadership positions in politics and governance in Africa.

Some notable women who have held leadership positions include:

- i. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was the president of Liberia from 2006 to 2018, and was the first woman to be elected head of state in Africa.
- ii. Sahle-Work Zewde, who is the current president of Ethiopia, and is the first woman to hold the position.
- iii. Joyce Banda, who was the president of Malawi from 2012 to 2014, and was the first woman to hold the position.

Challenges:

Despite the significant contributions that women have made to socio-economic development in Africa, they still face numerous challenges. These challenges include:

- i. Cultural barriers: Women in Africa often face cultural barriers that limit their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
- ii. Lack of access to education and healthcare: Women in Africa often have limited access to education and healthcare, which can limit their ability to participate in the economy and make informed decisions about their lives.
- iii. Limited opportunities for economic empowerment: Women in Africa often have limited opportunities for economic empowerment, which can make it difficult for them to support themselves and their families.

Policy Implications:

The contributions of women to socio-economic development in Africa have important policy implications. Governments should prioritize investments in education and healthcare for women, as well as provide opportunities for economic empowerment. Civil society organizations should also play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and promoting women's empowerment.

Some specific policy recommendations include:

- i. Increasing access to education and healthcare for women.
- ii. Providing opportunities for economic empowerment, such as training and access to credit.
- iii. Promoting women's rights and challenging discriminatory laws and practices.
- iv. Increasing the representation of women in politics and governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated the immense contributions of women to the socioeconomic development of Africa prior to colonial rule. Despite the reversal of these gains during the colonial era, women have continued to make impactful contributions in recent history. To fully tap into women's talents, skills, and entrepreneurial spirits, Africa must work to eliminate prejudices and subjugation. By supporting girls' education, promoting quota policies, and delegitimizing disempowering norms, Africa can unlock women's full potential and build a more equitable world.

The paper has also highlighted the importance of recognizing and valuing the contributions of women to socio-economic development in Africa. This requires a fundamental shift in the way that women are perceived and treated in African societies. It requires a recognition of the agency and autonomy of women, and a commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women.

To enhance women's contributions to socio-economic development in Africa, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Governments should provide free education to girls up to tertiary level, and ensure that girls have equal access to education as boys.
- ii. Revive the Beijing Declaration's 30% quota for women in appointment and elective offices, and enshrine this quota in national constitutions.
- iii. Implement quota policies to increase women's representation in politics and decision-making positions.
- iv. Launch campaigns to challenge traditional factors inhibiting girls' education, such as early marriage and female genital mutilation.
- v. Delegitimize norms and ideas that perpetuate women's disempowerment through advocacy and policy interventions.
- vi. Provide training and support to women entrepreneurs, and provide access to credit and other resources to enable them to start and grow their own businesses.
- vii. Promote women's participation in decision-making positions in the private sector, and encourage companies to adopt gender-sensitive policies and practices.
- viii. Support research and data collection on women's contributions to socio-economic development in Africa, and use this data to inform policy and programming.

Implementation:

The implementation of these recommendations will require a coordinated effort from governments, civil society, the private sector, and individuals. It will require a commitment to promoting gender equality and empowering women, and a recognition of the agency and autonomy of women.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

The implementation of these recommendations should be monitored and evaluated regularly, to ensure that they are having the desired impact. This should involve the collection of data on women's participation in education, employment, and decision-making positions, as well as data on the impact of policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women.

References

- Achebe, C. (2010). *The education of a British-protected child*. Penguin Books.
- Adedeji, A. (1999). *Comprehending African development*. Zed Books.
- Afonja, S. (1986). Women in African societies. *Journal of African Studies*, 7(2), 1-15.
- Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. Zed Books.
- Amin, S. (1972). *Neo-colonialism in West Africa*. Penguin Books.
- Ankrah, M. (1991). The role of women in African development. *Journal of African Development*, 1(1), 1-12.
- Asimwe, A. (2018). Women's participation in politics in Africa. *Journal of African Politics*, 7(1), 1-15.
- Bakari, M. (2017). Women's economic empowerment in Africa. *Journal of African Development*, 19(1), 1-12.
- Bentley, J. H., & Ziegler, H. F. (2003). *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*. McGraw-Hill.
- Boserup, E. (1970). *Woman's role in economic development*. St. Martin's Press.
- Chachage, C. (2017). Women's land rights in Africa. *Journal of African Studies*, 39(1), 1-15.
- Chazan, N. (1989). Patterns of state-society relations in Africa. In D. Rothchild & N. Chazan (Eds.), *The precarious balance: State and society in Africa* (pp. 1-15). Westview Press.
- Connell, R. (2009). *Gender*. Polity Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Diop, C. A. (1989). *The African origin of civilization: Myth or reality*. Lawrence Hill Books.
- Ekejiuba, F. (1995). Women's roles and responsibilities in African societies. *Journal of African Studies*, 16(1), 1-15.
- Elson, D. (1995). Male bias in macro-economics: The case of structural adjustment. In D. Elson (Ed.), *Male bias in the development process* (pp. 1-15). Manchester University Press.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1974). *History of education in Nigeria*. George Allen & Unwin.
- Fields, B. J., Barber, E. J. W., & Riggs, R. (1988). *The Women's History of the World*. HarperCollins.
- International Labor Organization. (n.d.). *Women in the Informal Economy*.
- Miles, R. (1993). *The Women's History of the World*. HarperCollins.
- Sen, A., & Nussbaum, M. (1993). *The Quality of Life*. Oxford University Press.
- Schmidt E. (1998); Men and Women and The Law in Colonial Zimbabwe 1890-1939: *Journal Of South Africa Studies*.
- Staudt, K. (1987); *Women Politics: The State and Capitalist Transformation in Africa* in Irving L. Markoviz (ED) *Studies in Power and Class In Africa (193-208)* New York, Oxford University Press.
- United Nations. (1995). *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.
- World Bank. (1989). *Women in Development: A Guide to the Literature*.