

GENDER MAINSTREAMING, A PANACEA FOR QUALITY SERVICE AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: AN INSIGHT INTO THE POLITICAL SYSTEMS IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

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Abstract

We would like to in this presentation begin by asking a simple question. Which of the sexes has the responsibility to govern? At this time, we believe our readers are divided into factions. While many people opine that the males are more responsible because they alone have the natural propensity to govern, there are those who believe that females can as well be given the responsibility to govern, except that they do not have such qualities as the males. Yet again there are those who will belong to the group that says that females should be made to handle less tasking political positions because they are by nature “weaker” than the males. Which school of thought do you belong? While we allow you to ponder on the above, however, this presentation seeks to analyze more comprehensively the need for gender mainstreaming in good governance and seeks to answer the following questions; Is being the President of a country or the Governor of a state, or the Chairman of a local government area a ‘Sex role’ or a ‘Gender role’? Thus, while we disabuse your mind, this communication forms part of the on-going movements on the need to encourage more participation of females in government to enhance quality service and good governance for effective development in any political system.

Key words; Gender, Sex role, Gender role, Gender mainstreaming and weaker sex,

Definition of some key terms: we will only for the sake of this study attempt a definition of just a few of these key terms

- Gender role: roles that each cultural society assigns to either the male or the female gender
- Sex role: reproductive roles given to the male or female sex by nature
- Gender mainstreaming:
- Development: a means of ensuring that there is participation of people in the production, growth and wellbeing of the community
- Camerounaise : A female Cameroonian, used in this way to lay emphasis
- Gender aware urban planning: policy and planning that takes into consideration the issues bothering all irrespective of gender

Introduction

The concept of Sex and Gender roles as already stated above, gender roles are regarded as those roles that each cultural society assigns to either the male or the female gender while sex roles are considered the reproductive roles given to the male or female sex by nature. In the course of our research and investigations somewhere in Yaoundé, we ran into a family where a little francophone girl Sophie out of amusement related

to us some differences she had noticed in the roles played by men and women in the village and what she noticed on her short visit to the city, ‘les grandes villes’ as she preferred to call it:

au village, les hommes ne font pas de la cuisine, mais j’ai constaté à la grande ville au Nigeria où j’avais passé mes vacances avec ma tante, que le papa de nos voisines Rajunor et Razine fait de la cuisine pour ses petites, alors que la mère des deux jeunes filles qui est infirmière travaille (in the village men do not cook, but I noticed in the big city in Nigeria, where I spent my holidays with my aunty that the father of my neighbors Rajunor and Razine cooks for them while the mother who is a nurse works) (Except otherwise indicated, all subsequent translations in this paper are ours).

As a matter of fact, the mother of Rajunor and Razine was a nurse whose job required that she ran a shift-basis. So in circumstances where she could not be at home to attend to the feeding-needs of the two girls, the father who was equally working but whose job was not really time consuming as that of the mother, took up the responsibility to cook for his kids and the family in general.

For Sophie, it was shocking to see a father, the man of the house, ‘la tete de la famille’ as she referred to him, cook in the kitchen since in her village it was almost a taboo for a man to be found in the kitchen let alone found cooking. In some cultures, most fathers would not be found in a situation like that of Rajunor and Razine’s because it was an offence and there was a penalty for transgressing. First, as Sophie revealed to us, the male culprit will be made to appear before the council of women-elders to apologise and beg for forgiveness, after which he was asked to pay a fine in the form of tubers of yams, bunches of plantain, goats or in monetary form depending on the gravity of the offence. From our study we discovered that Sophie’s dilemma was a logical one, the kind that confronts many people in Africa with respect to the tension and confusion that arises due to the uncritical reflection on the question of the difference between ‘sex roles’ and ‘gender roles’ in African communities. As such, whereas we may regard Sophie’s contra-experience as “Sophie’s paradox”, we could as well logically represent it as follows:

1. Mr A is my father; I never saw him cook in the kitchen
2. Mr B is my mother and she always does the cooking
3. Mr C is my friend’s father and he never cooks in the kitchen
4. Mr D is my friend’s mother and she does the cooking
5. No father cooks in the kitchen, only mothers do

From the presentation above, numbers 1 to 4 are the premises that arise from little Sophie’s experiences in the village; whereas, number five (5) is the conclusion that she had once deduced from those premises. Furthermore, the experiences in the village allows her to draw the conclusion that since she never saw any father living with his wife or wives cook, therefore, all fathers living with their wives generally do not cook. For her, the role of cooking in a family belongs exclusively to the mother. Thus, encountering a contrary experience of a father (living with his wife) cook, was somewhat scandalous to her. Thus, this instance of a single contrary experience altered something in Sophie’s cultural belief-system with respect to this particular gender role. Before her contra-experience, she had always thought that cooking in the kitchen was for mothers because they are women, therefore, cooking is a ‘sex role’ for women. But, thanks to Sophie’s urban experience, she had come to understand that cooking in the latter is simply a ‘gender role’ that is decided by the cultural patterns of a particular society and can be reversed if the need arises.

Like the little Sophie, many of us who will come in contact with this paper may have had similar shocking experiences of conflicting gender roles during our interactions with people outside our cultural setting.

Problem statement

In this presentation, we are going to look at ‘Sex role’ and ‘Gender role’ and how it affects gender mainstreaming and good governance in Francophone Africa in general and in Cameroun in particular

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the level of women participation in economic development in Francophone Africa. Following the summaries from the United Nations (UN) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) statistics as stated by Huizer (1983), the author observes that “women form half of the world’s population and one third of the official labor force; they fulfill almost two thirds of all hours worked...(104)”, and as observed further by the same author, women receive only one tenth of the world’s income. It is worthy to note here that the case of women in Francophone Africa is not far from the author’s observation. The struggle for gender balance can be dated as far back as 1935 with

several conventions by both the UN and ILO. These conventions have been drawn up by these organizations to protect the rights of women and reduce to a great extent if not eradicate the gender marginalization faced by women.

And furthermore, in an executive summary in the Beijing Declaration adopted in 1995 by the Fourth World Conference on Women, participating Governments expressed their

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commitment “to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of humanity”. To assess whether these goals are being achieved, ‘The World’s Women’ is produced by the United Nations every five years, as called for in the Beijing Platform for Action

Research methods

This study is essentially interview based and also relies on data from journals, philosophical ideologies, books and government publications.

Gender imbalance: A Philosophical background

Gender and gender issues will continue to take the center stage in both local and international researches. . In this section of the study, analysis will also be based on literatures from some great philosophers like Plato, Aristotle etc. on gender issues According to Nwagbara and Ering (2009), “It is only true that in most societies women are most vulnerable when it comes to social bias based on gender”(86). Going back to the question earlier posed in this study thus ‘is being he President of a country or a Chairman of a Local government a sex role or a gender role?’ Now, if it is a sex role, is it that of a male or a female? If then it is the exclusive sex role of a male to be a President of a country or a Governor of a state, it therefore implies that it is absolutely impossible for a woman to participate in such a role.

Nevertheless, history and reality has proven otherwise as there has been a considerable number of female presidents in some countries of the world since the mid-20th century. We have also recorded a good number of female state governors, ministerial appointees, senators, mayors of local governments etc. So, to say logically, it is a fallacy to say therefore that political governance in contemporary society is an exclusive male sex role because evidences abound on the contrary that women have been voted or appointed into such offices. In this regard, it can logically be established that since both sexes can, and have successfully served in various political capacities, even in developing countries, it is no longer a question of possibility whether a woman can head a country or a state or a local government.

Thus, the responsibility of governance is not necessarily a sex role, but rather is is a gender role: which therefore means that the exclusion of women from the rights to hold political offices as sensitive as being the President of a country or a Governor of a state is just a product of societal construct and not necessarily a law of nature and that is why Nwagbara and Ering(2009) maintain that “Culture and mores of many ethnic and tribal groups in Nigeria have continued to play significant role in re-enforcing this obvious anomaly” (86), according to the authors, there is a disproportional access to resources between the male and the female gender, and from our survey, women in Francophone Africa especially in the Cameroun are agitating for equal access to education and other fundamental human rights. According to a post on camer.be web posted on the 8th of march 2014, while addressing women in Cameroun on the 2014. ³Mother’s day celebration, Mr. Maurice Kamto the National President of MRC urges the ‘Camerounaises’ thus:

Chères mamans, femmes et filles du Cameroun, mes chères compatriotes. Dans quelques heures, vous allez célébrer, comme à l’accoutumée, la journée internationale de la femme. C’est une journée qui vous est entièrement consacrée, un jour spécial pour mettre en exergue la lutte pour vos droits et faire entendre vos voix. Par conséquent, ce jour ne saurait être uniquement consacré à la réjouissance;

¹ Huizer, Gerrit, “The Role of Peasant Women’s Organizations in Rural Development; Case Study of Women’s Participation in Cooperatives in Zambia”. In SID, innovative Approaches to Rural Development, report of policy dialogues, held at Rome, 24 26 June, 1983, pp. 104.

² Nwagbara, E N and Erring, S O. “Disproportional Access to Resource and Marginalization of Women: A case study of Feminization of poverty in Nigeria”. Journal of Cultural Studies. Vol. 2 Calabar (2009), 86

³Nwagbara, E N and Erring, S O.(2009), 86

il doit également être un moment d'intenses réflexions sur la condition de la femme.

Dear mothers, women and girls of Cameroun, my dear compatriots. In a few hours, you are going to celebrate as customary the 'international mother's day'. It is a day completely consecrated, a special day set aside for the struggle of your rights and for your voices to be heard. Consequently, this day will not be entirely consecrated for celebrations; it must equally be a moment of sober reflection on the condition of the woman.

There is no gain to say that gender balance is far from being a reality in Francophone Africa especially in Cameroun, the President revealed that francophone women and in particular the 'Camerounaises' (as Camerounian women in this paper) in particular are marginalized politically, educationally, religiously etc. by their male counterparts and the society in general. His speech is therefore seen in this study as a clarion call on all 'Camerounaises' not to see the 'World International Mother's' day as a day for celebrations, festivities and merriments, but rather, an occasion to examine the place and roles they have played in the development of the economy and ensure that their rights as citizens are accorded them and their voices are heard in the decision making of the country. It is an occasion to reflect on the general condition of women in Cameroun.

One may ask "why is the question of gender inequality often channeled towards advocating for equal opportunities for women and not men?" The answer is simple, it is due to the fact that there has been a long history of women suffering what we will refer to in this study as 'gender exclusion' and later 'gender marginalization' from relevant sectors of societal life so much so that for centuries, religious beliefs as well as some philosophical ideologies have been proffered and practiced to justify the position that the female sex is inferior to the male counterpart.

For instance, in one of the songs commonly sang at nursery schools in (Nigeria) many decades ago the theme revolved around great Western personalities such as Aristotle, the Greek Philosopher

Yet some of Aristotle's ideas seemed to degrade and marginalize the female gender. In *The Politics* (1962), Aristotle states that males are by nature superior to females and they are to rule over females because the later are not complete human beings since they lack something which the males have, namely, the deliberative faculty. Aristotle states that males are by nature superior to females and they are to rule over them because females are not complete human beings since they lack something which the males have, namely, the deliberative faculty. This statement has even in our society today made men see their wives as inferior beings and as such a wife is just to some men a thing lesser than man and does not deserve any form of regard nor respect. Again, Spelman in her, *Who is who in the Polis*, (1997), acknowledges that Aristotle considers women to be both biologically and intellectually inferior to men, (99). Generally, these assertions have gone a long way to affect people's impression of the female gender in many societies of the world. In another instance, he claims that a woman's deficiency can also be attributed to her inability to produce semen. According to him, a woman is considered an infertile male, without considering the fact that a woman is able to carry and fertilize a semen and finally produce a baby because she is fertile. This is a role as fertile as Aristotle's man is, he cannot play.

Women participation in francophone politics

In Nigeria for instance, existing literatures have shown that women participation in politics in the early 1920's was insignificant, for instance as stated by Attoe (2008), "it is interesting to mention that women did not play any significant role in the establishment and subsequent activities of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), in the early period"(119). This can be seen as a fallout from Aristotle's explanation on who a citizen is. In ⁴⁵chapter one of *The Politics*, Aristotle observes that the woman should remain silent for silence in the society is a woman's glory. Citizenship for Aristotle is meant for the most superior kind of human beings. Males he claims are naturally superior to the females, hence, they are the only qualified sex for citizenship. Women on the other hand according to him (Aristotle) are firstly inferior to males and then to their husbands, and cannot constitute the citizenship class for in their natural inferiority to the males, they can neither act justly, virtuously or courageously like the males. Politics is for the brave,

⁴ Spelman, Elizabeth V. "Who's Who in the Polis." *Engendering Origins*. Ed. Bat-Ami Bar On. New York: State University of New York Press, (1994), 99

⁵ Attoe, SNigerian Women in Top Political Positions 1923-2007 : The Journey so far". *Calabr Journal of Liberal Studies*. VI. 11. No. 1 Calabar (2008), 119

just, courageous etc. and going by this great philosopher's statements, the 1920 women were not seen as qualified and fit to play significant roles in the politics and decision makings of their communities.

According to a post by the Moroccan world news on Saturday 7th march 2015, tagged "the importance of education for women's effective participation in politics", it states thus, Article 30 of the Moroccan constitution states that all citizens, male or female, have the right to vote and that voting is a personal right and a national duty". Furthermore, the Morocco's upcoming local elections are very controversial, and as the report states, some tend to say that women have to be present in the coming elections in different ways. For example, some believe that the language used in political campaigns must be reformed when referring to male and female candidates. Others assert that women must participate in working at polling stations and manage electoral processes, they observe.

These reports go a long way to justify the role women would play if given equal opportunity in the society and thus the need for gender mainstreaming for development in any society becomes apparent. It goes further to justify the fact that participation in decision making is a role for all citizens irrespective of the gender. And according to Kamto while addressing the Camerounaises he states thus, "avec plus de 50% de la population totale, la proportion des femmes est supérieure à celle des hommes dans notre pays", "with over 50% of the total population, the number of women are more than that of the men in our country". In Cameroun, women participation in politics is very insignificant, from our interviews, we observed that though the women outnumbered the men at about 75% of the gatherings where our interviews were held, Camerounaises seemed to be less interested about the political issues in their local areas, most of them even makes such remarks as 'cela, ce sont des choses pour des hommes'. La politique reste un affaire des hommes'. For a good number of them they would rather do business than go into politics.

Aristotle's discussion of politics is firmly grounded in the world of the Greek city-state, or polis. He assumes that any state will consist of the same basic elements of a Greek city-state: male citizens who administer the state, and then women, slaves, foreigners, and noncitizen laborers who perform the necessary menial tasks to keep the city running. From Aristotle's assumption above, we see the woman in a kind of exile from class, which Akpagu (2013) defines in his article 'The theme of Exile in Francophone Caribbean Literature thus' "Exile from class refers to people who have separated themselves and decamped from their class." (147). In the case of the francophone women in this study, the realities caused by nature and cultural bias have separated them and kept them in a class of their own.

It was also revealed to us that francophone women especially in typical villages in the Camerouns were not allowed to be involved in politics, public interactions with their menfolk on political matters were almost forbidden. Generally, women were exiled and generally considered as unintelligent, unworthy, incompetent in political matters. They were married at an early age the reason why our respondent saw no need in educating his girl child. From our assessment of about 50% of the Camerounaise we came in contact with during our survey, one could see them as timid, with low self-esteem and generally low status compared to their male counterpart.

iv. **Women in Social Mobilization and grassroots development**

It becomes obvious that Plato admires and likes the ability of women to reproduce and create something. He takes that idea and applies it to philosophy, giving male philosophers the ability to give birth to wisdom. However, it is just as obvious that Plato doesn't like other feminine characteristics. For example, Plato clearly sees women as overly emotional. In Book III of the Republic he states that guardians must imitate only "people who are courageous, self-controlled, pious, and free." (Plato, Republic, Book III, 395c) Therefore they should not "imitate either a young woman or an older one, or one abusing her husband, quarreling with the gods, or bragging because she thinks herself happy, or one suffering misfortune and possessed by sorrows and lamentations, and even less one who is ill, in love or in labor." (Plato, Republic, Book III, 395d) In other words, women have the tendency to not be courageous, self-controlled or pious in most situations. Plato makes other comments in his writing that suggest that women are overly emotional or at least have a weak character. (Plato, Republic, Book V469d)

According to a post on the Colbert factor blog on Wednesday, March 18, 2015 titled "2015 International Women's Day: Cameroon Government Commends, Recommends Irena Njinikom Toilet Project", Gwain Colbert the professional blogger reports that; the Irena Toilet Project appears to be proof positive that 'if the woman is not the future of man, then she is the man of the future', as one time female French Prime Minister once said. This camerounaise, is a product of Plato's woman who is seen as an exceptional female who has been able to against all cultural and societal odds reproduce and create something distinct for the growth and development of her native Njinikom village . According to the post, the North West Governor and official spokesperson for the central government in the region, Adolph Lele Lafrique has been speaking of the positive contribution of women and girls in making Cameroon an emergent

nation by 2035. As part of activities marking this year's women's international day, he singled out some outstanding women in various fields to commend. The women who were officially recognized last March 8, 2015 at the Bamenda ceremonial grounds came from the fields of politics, economy, development and education. While these categories received but certificates of recognition, Irene Njuakom, a Cameroonian-American who recently performed a feat in her native Njinikom village by wholly constructing, equipping and handing over an ultra-modern toilet to the Njinikom population, was honoured with an official visit to the structure by North West Governor, Adolph L. Lafruge.

The above report shows the positive contributions the female citizen is capable of making in her society if given the opportunity. It goes further to show that social mobilization is not a gender role distinctively for men. Irene Njuakom, has proved to her male counterpart that the future of the development of the Cameroun community does not lie only in the hands of the male gender but as Joshua Cohen (1996) states, "political citizenship which is the right to vote and hold office, is a cornerstone of democratic theory and practice" (535-552). Cohen's words refer clearly to rights of citizens, irrespective of gender. This alludes to the idea that a society where individuals, whatever their gender, have a voice, have a right and can affect their society positively to the best of their capability.

vi. **Access to resources and marginalization of women**

"Socrates claims that his purpose is to help young men give birth to wisdom just like his mother (who was an actual midwife) helped women give birth to a child. However, Socrates claims that his task is greater than that of his mother's and the labor the young men go through is much worse than that of a woman". (Plato, Theaetetus 151a-e). If we have to in this study analyze the claims of this great philosopher to justify the main objective of this paper, we would first of all commend the great philosopher Socrates for appreciating first the positive and significant task of the woman (his mother) for her ability to give birth which is a distinctive task. Secondly, to try to justify which is greater between giving birth to a child and to wisdom, we would in this paper ask what is wisdom without a child? Can wisdom exist without a being?

So as not to deviate from the aim of this study, the discrimination faced by francophone women by their menfolk which we have mentioned in this paper has placed the Camerounaises in a class of their own without allowing them get economically empowered. Francophone women have suffered marginalization due to socio-cultural and religious beliefs which tend to place the women permanently at the background. There is a common saying "women first", but today a typical Camorounais would add "après les hommes", meaning "women first, after the men".

These constrains have made it almost impossible for the "Camerounaises to have equal access to the resources and basic services available for community empowerment. That is why in his speech, kamto insists that "le Camerounaises need to receive adequate education as their main counterpart. Our survey showed that in every 20 Camerounaises, only about 5 (five), had access to education as the families would rather prefer to educate the male children rather than the female children. One of our respondents on the issue of educating the girl child responded as follow, " Ce n'est pas la paine d'eduquer les filles. Elles vont plutot quitter pour le mariage. Pourquoi donc gaspille de l'argent". For him, educating the girl child is a waste of resources because she will soon end up in a man's house as wife.

Responding to the question of equal access to political participation through education, we got this "If we are determined to organize elections that are free and fair in Cameroun for instance, all individuals must be aware of the electoral processes. And the best way to achieve this is through education. We need to educate all women, and they must understand the importance of participating in politics". This position is a testimony to Fahimi and Moghadam who state convincingly that "educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them".

Thus, access to education for both sexes will ensure that a case of illiterate women being compelled by their husbands, brothers, fathers, male friends or even colleagues to vote for their candidates will be eradicated. Women will be better informed and will exercise their rights to vote for the candidates of their choice to achieve their own personal objectives

Gender mainstreaming; appreciating the need for support

The issue of gender mainstreaming therefore arises with urgency today because as we have already discussed in this study, many of us both individually and collectively still hold unto the erroneous philosophy of exclusion which we also see in his study as exile and marginalization. This, we do when we think that

⁶ Joshua Cohen (1996, 95 "Political Citizenship and Democratization: The Gender Paradox". Eileen MacDonagh. American Political Science Review. The American Political Science Review, Vol. 96, No. 3 (2002), 535

women are not naturally fit to hold certain political offices that have been reserved for the males, for instance being the President of a country, even in Nigeria today, the only female contesting for the seat of the president is given no recognition at all even amongst her fellow women, to all is a big joke. Or when we neglect to empower women simply on the grounds related to the prejudices of sexism. This issue is relevant to all of us because back home we hold positions in various levels of our endeavors, could even be political or such as local government chairmen, counsellors, Heads of department, DVCs etc and we are or expected to be familiar with life at the grassroots. It is worthy to note here that such familiarity is necessary for good governance and for decision making such the benefits are felt by the people at the grassroots. This familiarity should include our acquaintances with the traditional practices and belief systems of the various ethnic or tribal communities which we serve as chairmen or civil servants

In the capacity.org web Heinz Greijins (2010) observes the following and draws our attention to these issues; In rural areas, few women own lands, this reduces their access to income from agricultural produce. (1)

This is the case in the Cameroun, our survey showed that lands were owned by men and so whatever farm produce were gotten from such lands were the sole income of the men. The women had little or no access to these resources. She further notes that, "...a cultural factor also caused the discrimination of education for the girl child which we have mentioned earlier on in this study".

This unequal access to education diminishes the career opportunities of the females in Cameroun. Similarly in many African cultures power is wielded by men and as such the women enjoy little or no freedom, even within their households, we can bet that 90% of the men seated here today can testify to that fact and some are even guilty as a good number of them abuse this power. Unfortunately, some of them even extend this character outside their household and see every other woman as an inferior citizen.

In 2005, the world health organization published its 'Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women. It focused on 24,000 women in 10 countries and reveals that depending on the country, between 15% and 71% of women aged 19-49 are physically or sexually⁷ abused by intimate partners. Women are under-represented in political offices due to a lack of income, education and freedom, not to mention gender division of labour. Male-dominated leadership often lacks the political will to address gender imbalance, making it a vicious circle that is difficult to break. Gender imbalance in developing countries like the focus of this study, is one of the key factors hampering wealth creation, poverty reduction and the attainment of the Millenium Development Goals. While international policy has made some progress towards addressing gender imbalance, it needs to be converted into concrete changes on the ground, especially at the local level (3)

These underpinnings underscores the shortcomings that have necessitated gender mainstreaming in the direction of redressing gender imbalance in Francophone Africa and in Cameroun in particular. Let's take a look at the following observations made by the United Nations Human Settlements programme (UN-HABITAT):

Following a series of international mandates contained in the Beijing Platform for Action and United Nations Economic and Social Council Resolutions 1997/2 and 2006/36. Gender mainstreaming was introduced as a process for assessing the implications of legislation on men and women's concerns and experiences. It became an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation policies and programmes in the political, economic and social sphere of countries around the world. Gender mainstreaming seeks to address gender inequality, and looks at both women's and men's roles in the society and their needs in development intervention. This has entailed changes to policies, institutional cultures, resource allocation and design of programmes and projects. Gender mainstreaming does not replace government policies on gender inequality (11)

To reiterate the point, although gender mainstreaming programmes should have in mind the needs of both sexes; more emphasis should be on the female sex because it is recognized and as already revealed in this study that women in Cameroun have not have not been given equal opportunities and status as their

⁷ Heinz Geijin. Local Government for gender Equality. A Gateway for Development. Capacity.org issue 40 (August 2010), 1

male counterpart in the society. There is the need thus which is the focus of this study to redress this issue. There is also need to focus Cameroun women participating in politics and access to resources and basic services in their communities.

It is worthy to note here that even as the pace of urbanization quickens, compared to developed countries, very few local government areas in Cameroun have developed into urban centers. Majority of these areas are still in their rural states. Unfortunately, the challenges faced by both rural and urban dwellers range from poverty, inadequate water supply, unemployment, illiteracy, tribal and religious intolerance to unjust distribution of wealth and economic resources, violence against women, widows and the girl child.

Gender mainstreaming in most countries of the world today, is emphatically about gender imbalance, women empowerment, women safety and security, abuse, terrorism just to mention but a few. Thus, the way and manner the administrators and government of various countries handle this issues will determine to a great extent how well a particular administration has succeeded in demonstrating good and effective governance.

Gender mainstreaming, the journey so far

As Mokweye(2013) observes in his article ‘Africa as a factor in francophone Caribbean literature, “Slavery had damaged the image of the Blackman all over the world and it was the declared objective of the exponents of the negritude movement to correct the wrong impressions created about the Blackman by the white race”(106), so also is the objective of this study to correct from the information gathered through interviews and other documents the impressions that have through either gender bias or sheer levity deterred the participation of francophone women in particular and African women in general from the economic development of their societies.

A country practicing democracy should understand that “Government of the people for the people and by the people”, should be a government that ensures the distribution of inalienable human rights equally among the people, who are basically a collection of the male and female sex. Such a government has the duty to ensure that these inalienable rights are protected and respected by all. And that those who trample on such rights are to be brought to justice. Thus, any government that fails in this right has failed in its ultimate objective of ever existing at all.

Unfortunately, In a periodical article on the Africabib.org web titled “Democratic transition in Francophone Africa”(1995), Martin Guy states thus’ “Among the many problems facing democracy in Africa today, some of the most salient are the lack of repentance of African⁸ autocrats, the ambiguous attitude of France, structural weaknesses inherent in the African democracy movement, and ‘the paradox of African democracy’, or the fact that African governments are subjected to heavy socioeconomic demands at a time when they are financially least able to deliver on them”. From guy’s observations, many francophone African writers have expressed through their literary works the attitude of African leaders towards the rights of their citizens. For instance Abang Gloria (2009) in her article “Manifestation de la dictature dans ‘En Attendant le Vote des Betes Sauvages d’Ahmadou Kourouma’, presents the deplorable situation suffered by blacks in the hands of their autocratic black leaders as revealed by Ahmadou Kourouma.

Furthermore, Kamto reveals in his speech that the female representation at state and federal constituencies in Cameroun is deplorable and very discouraging, he states thus,

Un rapport gouvernemental, initié par le ministère de la promotion de la femme et de la famille, publié en mars 2012 était assez éloquent à ce sujet. Ce document souligne que le Cameroun ne compte aucune femme gouverneur de région. Et jusqu’à cette date, seulement 4 sous-préfets sur 360 étaient des femmes. La faible représentation du sexe féminin est également perceptible à l’Assemblée Nationale et dans le Gouvernement. Ce rapport établit⁹ que 5 postes ministériels avec portefeuille sur 31 sont occupés par les femmes, pendant que 2 femmes sur 10 sont secrétaires d’État. Au total, dans l’équipe gouvernementale actuelle qui comprend 60 ministres et assimilés, seulement 7 sont des femmes, soit 12%. he

⁸ Mokwenye, Cyril. Africa as a Factor in Francophone Caribbean literature. Topics in Francophone Caribbean Literature. Benin (2013), 106

⁹ Abang, Gloria M. Manifestation de la Dictature dans ‘En Attendant le vote des betes sauvages’ d’Ahmadou Kourouma. Calabar Studies in Languages. Vol 15 No. 1 Calabar, 2009

observed that out of the 60 ministerial seats in the country, only 7 are occupied by females.

A report initiated by the ministry for women and family affairs, published in March 2012 was expressive on the subject. This document emphasized that Cameroun had no account of a single female governor. And until date, only 4 assistant commissioners out of 360 were females. The weak representation of females is also visible at the national assemble and in government. The report established further that 5 out of 31 ministerial positions were occupied by females, while 2 women were secretaries out 10. As a whole, out of 60 ministers and other similar officers, only 7 were females, being 12%.

Following the revelations above and the facts presented by the national president on his address to women on the international mother's day 2013, there are many reasons why the Cameroonian government should bother about gender mainstreaming especially with respect to ensuring equal opportunities for empowering women and ensuring their safety. These reasons as captured by Beall Jo (1996) are as follows:

- Women are often responsible for caring for children, the sick and the elderly; they often possess unique knowledge about the most efficient and effective ways of providing social and health care services. This knowledge needs to be understood and considered in the formulation of policies. Hence, women are supposed to be involved at the helm of such affairs.
- At the same time, because health and education are often considered “women business”, the needs and perspectives of women in the community may not be adequately considered by policy-makers when all of them are males.
- The rising number of female – headed households in both so-called industrialize and developing countries, combined with the fact that women are generally more active in informal community management, means that women's needs and knowledge must be taken into consideration when making decisions on house design, zoning and site layout.
- Similarly, because women are often responsible for household management, they have specific needs and unique knowledge when it comes to waste removal, energy, water supplies and other community services. Such a unique knowledge should be used as incentive to integrate them into local politics. Their expertise in these areas will improve the standards of services.
- Furthermore, men and women often have different transportation needs. Women tend to rely much more on public transport, since they are the ones who purchase and sell farm produce. Transportation planning needs to take these issues into consideration and women need to be fully represented in such affairs.
- Thus, women should be encouraged to participate fully in local politics as a stepping stone for national politics. This is to ensure balanced participation between men and women in local governance, which includes removal of structural and systemic barriers to women's participation to ensure that gender issues are integrated into decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of local governance initiatives.

Conclusion

Given that francophone women in particular experience and use the urban space in different ways from men, they have different priorities in terms of amenities, services and infrastructure. From our survey, with regards to transportation, les Camerounaises are more comfortable with vehicles that can transport large quantities of market products for instance transporting banana from the famous banana village to their various markets will need public transportation not considering luxury.

As stated by Beall earlier on in this study, in terms of housing, our survey also shows that Cameroun women have more ideas in terms of housing since they are often responsible for household management. In a typical francophone family were both male and female children grow up together, according to one of our respondents, “c'est la jeune fille dans la famille qui s'occupe de la famille, c'est elle qui range les choses, c'est elle qui sait comment designer les immeubles dans la maison”.

The remark of our respondent above shows that it is out of sheer bias that women are secluded from development and decision making in their communities, nature itself as well as culture from the remark above has already placed the responsibility on the female and so the question of sex role and gender role should have no place in economic development in our society.

In conclusion, we have in this study looked at the concept of sex roles and gender roles. We have been able to consider the philosophical approach of the concept and how it affect the image, place and role of women in francophone Africa. We have also discussed the role of women in politics and community development.

On the way forward, taking the fact that the use of urban space by both men and women vary, this study advocates the need for policy-makers to ensure that these issues are featured in urban policies and investments. Women should be part of the policy making process and whether or not a woman is at the helm of decision making in these regards, there is the need to be gender aware to ensure that the needs and interest of both females and males are adequately represented without bias.

In the Cameroun which is the main focus of this study, gender aware urban planning would go a long way to ensure that resources are equally distributed. Such a policy would be sensitive to increasing need for educating and empowering the girl child to bridge the gap between educated Camerounaises and Camerounais.

Recommendations

However, as already mentioned in this study, our intention is not to eradicate gender imbalance but rather to highlight possible ways of ensuring gender mainstreaming to ensure good governance. Thus by way of suggestion, while admitting that these recommendations may not be adequate; nevertheless, they could serve as a starting point for the alleviation of the inadequacies caused by gender imbalance in francophone Africa and Cameroun in particular:

1. Establishment of more gender sensitive organizations that are made up of both sexes. In the Cameroun today, our survey shows that in gatherings of any kind, women tend to alien easily and form groups with other women while men also do same. It is rare to see peer groups, age-grades etc. with both sexes coming together with a common interest, this is as a result of many underpinnings one of which is the large scale discrimination exhibited by the menfolk in terms of getting women empowered. From our survey, most Camerounaises are of the opinion that if these organizations are encouraged, it will be easy to monitor and allocate resources equally irrespective of gender.
2. Local Government Associations: There is the need to establish and encourage active local government associations in communities in the Cameroun where both sexes will have equal opportunities to address their needs. This will ensure that there are no gaps between the sexes and furthermore, these gender sensitive organizations will serve as entry points for the provision of gender mainstreaming trainings and awareness on gender issues
3. It is important and as a matter of urgency to organize in Cameroun communities gender sensitive trainings with men as the target audience. These workshops/trainings will throw more light on gender issues and educate rather than persuade men on the importance of women participation to ensure good governance. It is already an established fact that women are greatly discriminated by men either as a result of some cultural, religious and as we have highlighted in this study some philosophical claims. Thus, these sensitization workshops and trainings will be an entry point for men to purge out of their belief system the bias formed from these premises.
4. Collection and dissemination of best practices: Many local governments have implemented community based projects that represent excellent examples of gender mainstreaming. Oftentimes, these projects are sponsored by local governments in donor countries, yet the bilateral nature of these project relationships means that best practices are not always shared with other municipalities. Research on best practices or case studies followed by seminars or other means of disseminating and discussing the collected information can help raise awareness about these initiatives and generate ideas for their replication elsewhere.

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