

Forum: Special Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Issue: Closing the social, political and economic gender gap of Sub-Saharan Africa

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Introduction

Closing the social, political and economic gender gap of sub-Saharan Africa communication to give women their rights. A gender gap is the difference of money or opportunities between the men and female. Sub-Saharan Africa is a group of countries from the southern side in Africa. There are many challenges in sub-Saharan Africa especially in the gender gap, one of them is women doesn't have a job. Another problem is in sub-Saharan women are not allowed to participate in a government or have an opinion on something. An African woman faces a 1 in 31 chance of dying from complexity due to pregnancy or childbirth, compared to a 1 in 4,300 chance in the developed world. In sub-Saharan Africa it is hard for women to finish school they either enroll from secondary or primary because from poverty or family issues like tradition, culture, religion or other beliefs. Often girls are not sent to school so they marry before the age 18 and becomes housewives or work in a farm or be a mother at a small age, some girls die from pregnancy or from not able to provide the child needs.

In sub-Saharan Africa women are less than men. Women have poor access to legal rights, were men have more benefits than women. Women's voices remains limited, they don't have freedom of speaking or freedom of movement. Women are used in Sub-Saharan Africa only to bring children and work in the house for a little amount of money. Obviously the inequality in Sub-Saharan Africa is very clear between the men and women. Currently there is an organization called Africa Regions Gender Innovation Lab and it is working on more than 40 impact evaluations in 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa to reduce Gender Gap. Closing the Gender Gap between men and women will increase the job and the economic growth in the country because there will be more jobs provided. Basically the education should change the society thinking and make it a better place for people to live in.

The education gap is a serious issue, but in sub-Saharan Africa there is in an adequate level of education for women. Women in sub-Saharan Africa have disadvantages and they grow with limited money. Women in sub-Saharan Africa cannot own a land or any other property like farm, house or a shop, they don't have any control in the country neither benefits. Women are 55% likely to have human immunodeficiency virus HIV if they have experienced intimate partner assault. Women in Africa mostly die from poverty, hunger, pregnancy, and violence. It is a serious issue that must be decreased as soon as possible because every woman in the world must have her human right, health care and have the opportunity to communicate, work and have money.

Major Countries and Organisations involved

Rwanda

Rwanda is actually a country that is an exception to most of the other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa when it comes to the social, economic, and political gender gap. Rwanda is in fact 5th in the world when it comes to World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index ratings, with a high rating of 0.8, beating out countries such as Canada and France, and being just behind the Scandinavian countries of Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. It is clear that Rwanda is an example for other Sub-Saharan African countries to follow, considering, while it isn't the an advanced country in terms of Human Development Index, it has a comparatively small divide between men and women on most frontiers.

Chad

Chad is a Sub-Saharan country that has a Gender Gap Index rating of 0.587, one of the lowest in the world. The literacy rate of females in Chad is only at 32%, an extremely low value, and similarly only 31% of females enrol in secondary education. A UN report in 1995 stated that 60% of women in the country had been subjected to genital mutilation, a heinous act, with 80% of the women subject to it having had it occurred between the ages of 5 and 14. Female children are also subject to trafficking, often forced into labour and/or prostitution, as well as being forced to marry. Action should be taken in countries like Chad to improve the living conditions of women in that country, and for them to be given the full human rights they deserve.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender Gaps

Refers to the disproportionate disparity between sexes in opportunities, statues, attitudes, etc...

Political gender gaps generally refers to a disproportionate ratio in political participation and the lack of representation of a particular gender – typically the female.

Educational Attainment index

Educational attainment index is the measure of the tangible output of education systems along with a measure of their success. The level of Educational Attainment is defined according to the International standard classification of education (ISCED). The educational attainment index helps compare education statistics around the globe

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is the area of Africa that lies south of the Saharan Desert. There are 44 countries that lie in Sub-Saharan Africa – such as Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Zambia – and many

of them still promote male dominance. The social, political, and economic gender gaps vary in extent; however, in general the gender inequality is quite noticeable.

African Union (AU)

The African Union is a political union consisting of all 55 countries on the African continent. It was first established on 26 May 2001 in Ethiopia in hopes of “strengthening a people centered Union through active communication of programs of the African Union.” Their objectives include achieving greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and peoples; defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its member states; and accelerating the social-economic and political integration of the continent.

Background Information

Sub-Saharan Africa is not the worst region in the world in terms of the social, political and economic gap between men and women, however it is still on the lower end of the scale with an average gender gap of 32% among all the countries there, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF). The WEF gender gap index mainly takes into account economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. What should be considered however is the great variance in the gender gap index of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Rwanda, for instance, actually has the 5th highest gender gap index in the world, with a value of 0.8, and Burundi and Namibia are also in the top 20.

Educational Attainment is the worst factor contributing to Sub-Saharan Africa’s high gender gap, as the region currently holds the lowest education attainment index in the world. Infact, 8 out of 10 of the lowest countries for Education Attainment are in Sub-Saharan Africa, and only 7 countries in the region have closed the gender gap for tertiary (University level) education. Reasons for the lack of sufficient female education in African countries are the social norms. Women are responsible for 71% of the water collecting in African countries, often having to walk several miles a day to gather water. This process is very time-consuming, meaning that women often don’t have sufficient time for education.

Water-collecting also puts restraints on how long women can work a day. The female population in Sub-Saharan Africa is invaluable to the economy, with women occupying 66% of the jobs in the non-agricultural informal sector. Despite this, they only earn on average 70 cents for every dollar a male makes, and thus women are less likely to have access to a bank account and credit. Overall 61% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa are facing economic exclusion due to their jobs being undervalued and underpaid, and Sub-Saharan Africa has averaged losses \$95 billion USD yearly since 2010, potentially rising to \$105 billion, or 6% of the region’s GDP in 2014. If the economic gender gap in Sub-Saharan

Africa were to be closed, then the quality of life of the entire population of the region has the potential to dramatically increase from the windfall gained.

The state of women’s health in Africa is alarming. Due to many factors, including child-marriages, sexual violence, physical violence, and high maternal mortality rates. According to a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a rise in adolescent birth rates by a factor of 1% causes overall adult female mortality rate by 1.1%. Modern estimates put the percentage of women at reproductive age who have an unmet need for family planning at 26% globally, however the percentage of women in Sub-Saharan Africa who have an unmet need for family planning is at 40%. Because of socioeconomic and gender norms, women are more vulnerable to HIV in the region, with 58% of the population possessing the disease being female. 15% of women who are 15 years and older and possess HIV are in the 15-24 year old age group, while 80% of those live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Lack of education is a major factor contributing to the HIV epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, with only 26% of adolescent females having a comprehensive knowledge of HIV and its effects (compared to 36% of males). Anemia is also a huge issue affecting women in Africa. Of the 468 million anaemic women aged 15-49 worldwide, 48-57 percent of them live in Africa. Anaemia can be caused by a number of factors, poor nutrition, hormonal disorders, cancer, and malaria are some examples. Major symptoms of Anaemia include fatigue, weakness, dizziness, and lightheadedness. These symptoms further reduce the opportunities women who suffer from the condition have to work and get a sufficient education.

The gender gap in registration to vote in Sub-Saharan Africa is actually non-existent or very small in all of the countries in the region, however there is a larger gap in other forms of participation. For example in voting itself, there was a large gap reported in a study performed in Zambia in 1999. Men were also much more likely to contact political figures than women were, and the reasons for the political gender gap in Sub-Saharan Africa remain unclear, due to the insufficient amount of research being carried out in the region, however some theories point towards the fact that women are less likely to be educated, and that they are marginalised economically, as reasons why they participate less than men in votes.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
2014	The Ophthalmological Society of south Africa organized with the United Nations Development programme an event on the Africans women’s and girls’ theme. The event focused on issue of gender

	equality, women's empowerment including health care, women right, maternal mortality, female child education, violence against females and access to economic and employment opportunities.
2015	In Beijing, an event happened on Gender Equality, youth and a framework on Women Peace and Security in Africa. Developing and ensuring the leadership of Africa's Young Women and Girls.
2016	A high-level meeting on "Africa's year of Human with a focus on the Rights of women challenges and opportunities.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Since the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in the early 1990's, Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced much progress and improvement in closing the gender gap. The difference between girls' and boys' primary school enrolment rate was significantly reduced. The mean rate of maternal mortality was almost halved. The ratio of women to men in labor forces increased. Moreover, the average representation of women in national parliament more than doubled. Behind these progressive improvements are factors such as international protocols, support from financial institutions, and the collaboration of the African Union.

Firstly, the UN has implemented the protocol Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in addition to other new guidelines and policies, that attempt to minimize the social, political, and economic gender gaps. By accepting the convention, states committed themselves to undertake a series of measures to terminate discrimination against women in legal systems, tribunals, other public institutions, and etcetera. All members of the African Union, except two nations, have signed this international convention which greatly boosted enrolment rates of girls and labor participation of women in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The continental political body, the African Union, took a large step to minimize gender gaps by promoting gender parity in its top decision-making positions. In 2003, the AU elected 5 men and 5 women to serve in the AU commission. In the next year, Ms. Gertrude Mongella was elected to head the African Union's Pan-African Parliament. The AU has taken measures like such to promote gender equality in African politics and the African culture as a whole.

The African Development Bank launched the Affirmative Finance Action for Women (AFAWA), which help leverage \$3 billion for female-owned businesses, including women farmers. Moreover, the Bank introduced a women's mentorship pilot "Crossing Thresholds," which is a program that provides

females with a chance to develop their own career in a supportive and structured setting. Institutions like the African Development Bank has attempted to narrow the gender gaps of Sub-Saharan Africa with innovative, original approaches.

Although the previous attempts that are described above did help reduce the gender inequality, there are still many obstacles yet to be overcome. For example, education for women and girls is still very much disapproved and stigmatized in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is one of most inhibiting factors of the current situation. Yes, there have been some significant improvements in gender equality during the last 40 years since the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City. However, during the same 40 year time period, “men have gone to the moon and back, yet women are still at the same place they were – that is, trying to sensitize the world to the unwarranted and unacceptable marginalization of women, which deprives them of their human rights” (Mayanja). Further actions and innovative approaches are in desperate need to effectively resolve the issue at hand.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples, In June 1995, (AHG/RES.240) (XXXI).
- Declaration on the Critical Economic Situation in Africa, 3 December 1984 (A/RES/39/29)
- UN Resolution on Women, peace, and Security, on 31 October 2000, (S/RES/1325).

Possible Solutions

The UN could possibly work more closely with the governments of member states in Sub-Saharan Africa, and NGOs operating in the region, to assist in bringing education to more young girls and women in the region. This would be tackling the issue at its roots, as more women getting a proper education would mean that more women would be sufficiently skilled to take on jobs that require higher education, thus contributing to the closure of the economic gender gap in the region. All primary and secondary schools in Sub-Saharan Africa could also incorporate modern ideas of gender equality and feminism, in order to combat the archaic practices and attitudes towards women that are preventing them from having equality amongst men.

Governments should also be strongly encouraged to outlaw any violence against women where they haven't already (e.g. genital mutilation), and enforce this more strongly. Harsher punishment for sexual and physical violence against women would deter people from committing such acts against women. In a wider scope, these countries should make all discrimination on the basis of gender illegal, which should assist in closing the gender gap on all fronts. It should also be made clear to the population of countries in the region that they will be protected if they come forward about violence or discrimination against them. This is because many victims of violence or discrimination are afraid to report it because of the

potential repercussions, for example further violence against them from the perpetrator, or the prospect of potentially losing their job if their employer is discriminating against them. Hopefully, if such policies are put in place, then violence and discrimination against women will be largely diminished.

In addition to the aforementioned points, governments in Sub-Sahara Africa should be more proactive in attempting to close the political gender gaps in their countries. Local governments could launch campaigns that encourage women to vote, using the media to promote this, and news on politics could be provided in more simple vocabulary, so that women who aren't literately skilled can understand exactly what each political party/candidate is offering and other information about them (considering that the literacy rate for females in Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly low). Political parties should also be open to potential female candidates, which, with an improvement in female education, should increase in number. An increase in the number of women in office and parliament would do well to empower women, and also close the political gender gap.

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