

A Call for the Fundamental Inclusion of Women in Development: Hear them Sing

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Abstract

The debates around African development remain focused on modernization, dependency, and world-system theories. Thus, current approaches to African development stems from them. Few development agendas have proved successful and others provide superficial solutions to African dilemmas. However, none of these focus on including women in the creation of development practices and often perpetuate adverse conditions for women. Although various programs focus on women, women are merely treated as instruments in the greater Western development agenda. The results have been disillusioning, yet each new practice continues to focus on modernization or dependency. This paper includes a systematic examination of the flaws in current development. It subsequently draws on four women's organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa to explore the ways in which African women may provide strategic insights for reforming of development.

1. Introduction

As the development paradigm took shape, Sub-Saharan African (SSA) development was quietly undertaken by the Western world as a means for neocolonialism. Development in the SSA context refers to investment in human capital and socio-economic improvements. Development theories posit various explanations for the state of Sub-Saharan Africa and some prescribe ways for improvement. Development practice refers to on-the-ground projects that have or are being undertaken to bring about development. Although practices should mirror theory, they often do not. Development practitioners in African include the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and various other governmental and nongovernmental organizations. SSA's development rarely drew the attention of those outside of Western governments and Christian missionaries, until the 1970s when the idea of development grabbed the attention of the Western public-conscience.

The approach to development is driven by competing world views and moral codes. The uniting factor is that development policies and practices have continually been created by Western powers and maintain Western hegemony. Development has eluded the African continent thus far because it has been fundamentally misconceived in both theory and practice. In order to evolve from a top-down approach into a bottom-up approach, development requires a radical restructuring of the formation of policies, practices and discourse in order to evolve from a top-down approach into a bottom-up approach. Within SSA, a bottom-up approach views women as fundamental to sustained development and integrates the interests of these women into the major development policies and practices.

2. Research Questions

What are the current conceptions of development? What are the critiques of these conceptions? How have they effected women? How have women been incorporated into development practices? How can women's organizations influence development theory? How is a new approach to development structured around gender sensitive practices, with an emphasis on women's interests?

3. Operational Definitions

3.1 Modernization Theory

Modernization theory posits that SSA can overcome 'underdevelopment' if the African nations abandon their backward ways and adopt new, namely Western characteristics. Modernization attempts to transform traditional society into one with social orders, economic systems, and political institutions of the Western world¹. Much of modernization agendas include the spread of capitalism, industrialization, westernization, and nation building². Modernization is further classified as "highly interventionist in policy"³, this is seen in conditionalities placed on SSA nations that require them to adopt Western-styled institutions. Modernization practices externally introduce new cultural practices, political structures, and economic policies that are based on abstract ideals of Western systems.

3.2 Dependency Theory

Dependency theory is based on relationships between the core and periphery (West and non-West). It operates under the belief that the core dominates and extorts the periphery through various unequal trade policies and investments. It emphasizes the "mechanisms through which the international capitalist order distorts the economies of developing countries"⁴. The core creates a system of trade in which the periphery provide raw and agricultural exports at relatively low prices. The core manufactures goods that the periphery buys. The peripheral countries do not earn enough from their exports to reinvest in their economies; therefore they are always dependent on the core and unable to achieve self-sustained economic growth.

3.3 World-Systems Theory

Wallenstein introduced the World-Systems theory in the 1970s. It is closely related to dependency theory. According to Wallerstein, this system is based on a division between the center and periphery. The center, Europe and North America, accumulated capital at the expense of the periphery⁵. The core gained advanced technology, industrialization, per capita incomes, and stability. The periphery did not progress as the West which created an unequal division based on the interests of the West. The World-Systems theory deviates from dependency theory as it traces continued patterns of exploitation. Wallerstein allows for movement between the various stages of development, allowing the periphery to gain socio-economic standing in the world economic system⁶. Development based in this theory may include aid or programs that help African countries gain a foothold on the development ladder.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Critique of the Predominant Development Theories

Modernization theory assumes the backwardness of African nations. It places African culture into a subordinate position. Critics of the theory have "challenged the reductionism, universalism, and emphasis on Western concepts of rationality"⁷ within modernization. It is criticized for being highly interventionist, enabling "the 'free world' to impose its rules and engage in 'structural imperialism'.... It did so in the name of the forces of endogenous change such as nation building, the entrepreneurial spirit and achievement orientation"⁸. Modernization became equated

with Westernization—recreating Western institutions within Africa. The theory is further associated with “the spread of universalism”⁹. This approach is undertaken primarily at the macro-level, which in turn marginalizes the poor, especially women. The modernization paradigm failed to find ways for generating development in Africa because the theory refused to recognize the historical backgrounds of African nations, existing power structures, or the variety of cultures and experiences of the various peoples.

Dependency theory emphasizes that the exploitation of African nations has led to their dependency on the Western world. Friedmann and Wayne believe dependency theory provides “a useful starting point for analyzing structural changes, particularly the changing class structure, created within an underdeveloping nation or region, it’s difficulties become apparent once one moves beyond these historically observable consequences of the dependency relation within individual satellites or dependencies”¹⁰. Further the theory only accounts for exploitative relationships between the core and the periphery, it does not account for internal problems or geopolitics of several underdeveloped nations. It explains a historical occurrence, of how the core developed, without allowing room for the situation to change. Dependency theory and later the World Systems theory give explanation of the statuses of African nations, but not of what ought to be done. Never does it provide a comprehensive solution to the problems that the periphery faces.

4.2 From Women in Development to Gender and Development

In the 1970s, as the women’s movement gained momentum, women’s based development theories evolved mainstream development theories. Women in Development (WID), was the first of these to emerge. It spawned from modernization theory. Similarly, WID was centered on Western feminist ideals. WID also included an emphasis on the basic needs of women such as health, education, and training. It argues that these would “increase women’s effectiveness and productivity at work, thus assisting both economic development and women’s lives”¹¹. This approach did not include women in decision-making, empower them politically, or challenge their status. Women in development believed that if ‘Third World women’ became more western by adopting western roles and attitudes, the ‘Third World’ would develop. Further, WID based policies on the view that women were not but must be integrated into national economies. This concealed and devalued women’s “existing roles in informal economic and political activities and household production” such as their work in subsistence production, informal markets and community and household work”¹². WID ignored women’s work in the informal spheres and once again adopted the view that women have to move out of the traditional sector, into the modern sector. Rather than offering an “alternative approach”, WID “remains wedded to existing mainstream development frameworks”¹³.

Women and Development emerged (WAD) out of the reaction against WID’s resemblance to modernization theory. It draws on dependency theory’s concept of exploitation. This approach focuses on the relationship between the development process and women, while maintaining that women are inherently a part of development simply by being a part of African communities. While women’s economic activity in their societies was previously ignored, WAD recognizes them as economic actors in the public and private spheres. Although WAD convincingly highlights the ways gender is embedded within “structural and socioeconomic factors,” it neglects “household-level relations”¹⁴. This overlooks women’s informal work and lives—such as childrearing or household duties, while remaining preoccupied with formal economic activity. Further, the theory “implicitly assumes that women’s position will improve if and when international structures become more equitable”¹⁵, while only recognizing class inequalities and ignoring patriarchy—which does not allow for significant changes in women’s overall status.

The more recent movement is that of Gender and Development (GAD), which evolved in the 1980s. GAD focuses on gender relations and all aspects of women’s lives. Women’s productive as well as unproductive work are considered. Theorists identified that the basis for women’s oppression stems from the social construction of production and reproduction¹⁶. GAD considers gender relations in all contexts in order to acknowledge the economic and political concerns of women that have previously been ignored by mainstream theories. This movement also adopts a more positive view of men by considering gender relations; where previously men were depicted only from a negative perspective, GAD acknowledges men as potential supporters of women¹⁸. GAD further seems to view women as active agents of change. This approach closes the gaps left by WID and WAD.

5. Discussion

Development practices are still influenced by modernization and the Women-in-Development approaches. Theoretical work has progressed, but development still lacks the integral component of incorporating women.

Development practices in the areas of economics and agriculture simply disregard women. Women's centered programs prescribe roles and needs for women and women as instruments. This results in a variety of self-help programs, such as micro-finance. Development programs are based on Western interests that create further inequality in Africa. Self-help programs are then expected to correct this inequality. In the current development paradigm, "women end up working *for* development"¹⁹. When women are not manipulated for development, they are excluded from it. It seems that development practice only maintains interests in women if their work matches Western ideas of what is appropriate.

5.1 Economic Modernization: Impediments on Women's Participation

Development policy is fixated on the modernization of economies. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other such development agencies have offered "neoclassical market-oriented solutions" such as structural adjustment or liberalization plans designed to recreate western economies²⁰. The policy's inability to move forward from this line of thought melts into their practices. The World Bank and IMF have heavily relied on structural adjustment programs (SAP) in the last two decades. SAP gives African nations loans to address debt as these nations shift their emphasis to "free market forces and private sector development"²¹. This includes removing subsidies and reducing the state sector, which is harmful to African farmers and businesses. Women tend to lose the limited access to the formal sector that they have. SAPs fail to acknowledge the African reality, including the prevalence of subsistence endeavors, low levels of productivity, and "a narrow, disarticulated production base with ill-adapted technology, deficient basic and social infrastructures and undeveloped human resources"²². The outcome of SAPs includes high inflation, a fall in real wages, and often the collapse of infrastructure. As is the case with too many development approaches, SAP's does not consider individual African economic and political situations which does allow for such a simplistic model to produce success.

Liberalization of trade, investment, finance, and industry, is another favorite approach international agencies widely recommend and attach as conditions for African economies. The economic and political structural changes imposed by international lending and development agencies, "have further widened the gender gap in these countries"²³. Deregulation and privatization of national industries is promoted, but the consequences are destructive to the people, particularly women. Such policies cause competition between giant agribusiness and small farmers (again, namely women). The people lose in this competition. Without protection for African enterprises, domestic producers are threatened by foreign imports. These practices are inspired by modernization concepts and closely resemble colonial rule. Trade liberalizations distort markets and undermine the "ability of developing countries to achieve sustained economic growth, promote development and eliminate poverty"²⁴. Additionally, "trade liberalization has the potential to erode women's fragile economic base"²⁵. The existence of small farms is crucial because they function as sources of employment, provide food, and sustain families and communities. In the Sub-Saharan region, where 96 percent of farmers work less than five hectares and two thirds having less than a single hectare, liberalization policies are inappropriate. Outside agriculture, the effects on markets by liberalization is deregulation, "withdrawal of protective labour legislations," and the "weakening of the bargaining of trade unions"²⁶. Women predominately fall into the informal sector because liberalized markets are biased against women. Women are classified by the lack of "formal educational qualifications, their supposed lower job commitment and because capital-intensive skills tend to be considered male skills"²⁷. Liberalized markets do not lend themselves to the needs of women, who by default must turn to work based in the home or flexible work with terrible conditions. Western ideologies and practices that create female dependence are inflicted on African societies through current development practices. Current policies and programs avoid addressing power structures and often add to the already heavy burden of women. Rather than promoting economic prosperity, development practices are perpetuating poverty.

5.2 Agriculture in Development: Men are Farmers

The prime examples of how women are excluded from policy lie within agricultural programs. These programs are intended to promote economic growth in Africa, but rather impose Western practices and hinder the status of women. They fall within modernization practices. African societies are predominantly agrarian in which women complete most of the work. Women are responsible not only for food crops, but also for domestic food production. Beginning under colonialism but continuing in today's policy is the commercialization of farming. This shift transfers farmland once controlled and farmed by women to male ownership. Commercial farming also employs men rather than women. Aid programs, limited as they may be, focus on providing men with improved technologies

and scientific knowledge, while women's farming activities continue with rudimentary tools. As study by Carney and Bernal also found that in Gambia, "the targeting of assistance in land development primarily to men meant in many cases that women lost secure use rights to their traditional rice land"²⁸. This trend is also visible in Cameroon, where women's activities include the entire process of farming, especially the labor intensive ones²⁹. As credit, training, and heavily subsidized mechanical services and inputs are aimed at men, these projects weaken the economic power of women³⁰. These shifts do not provide women with agriculture-based aid, as is provided for men. Development agencies and governments further marginalize female farmers by promoting cash crops, which are controlled by men³¹. Women also tend to farm much smaller plots than men, disqualifying them from the World Bank's loan program for farmers³². Development continues to push towards modernization and commercialization of agriculture, depriving rural women of their labor functions and ultimately reducing women's political influence and power³².

5.3 Microfinance: A "Women's Centered" Program

Development organizers tend to "impose Western biases and assumptions on the South, and the tasks performed by women in the household, including those of social reproduction, are assigned no economic value"³³. This notion has led to the explosion of microfinance programs for women. Within these programs, women are made to bear both the burden of living in poverty and the responsibility of trying to fight it. The duty of "household survival"³⁴ falls disproportionately on women and microfinance adds to this. It is a WAD-type approach that fails to challenge the actual status of women. It is a superficial solution to a larger problem that women face. It does not change women's overall access to economic activities or institutions. It also devalues subsistence and informal work. Women's work is intensified by combining microloan based, low wage work with household duties. Microfinance creates a situation in which women must juggle various responsibilities while dealing with "weak labour market links, lack of support for care work and long term security"³⁵.

6. Case Studies

Women's organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa reflect the ways in which women negotiate their own interests when development has failed them. These groups include The Agabagaya Women's Group, Ntankah Villiage Women Common Initiative Group, the Coalition of Women Farmers in Malawi, and Emang Basadi. Women's organizations emphasize the interests of women. The four women's organizations provide insights into the nature of these interests and specify how each organization accomplishes their mission. These organizations indicate where development practitioners should focus their efforts.

6.1 The Agabagaya Women's Group

The Agabagaya Women's Group is in the Kihande village of Uganda. Kihande is outside of the town of Masindi, in a Western district which is named for this major town. The area is extremely rural. This region is fairly dry; however it does support the agriculture on which the population relies. There is not much wealth in the district, and the residents of this district are mostly poor. The Agabagaya Women's group originated with five friends who came together to help each other. They began pooling resources and sharing knowledge. Their goal was to support themselves, and later their communities. The women had very limited access to formal economic activity. The women range in age from 25 to 67 years old. All of them have children or care for orphaned children of their extended families³⁶. There are various religious affiliations throughout the group. All are married, with one identified as a widow. The group contributed money to their cash co-operative regularly with the goal of providing income generating opportunities for themselves and their community, as well as providing educational opportunities³⁷. Much of their weekly activity consists of conducting informal workshops and discussions in order to share knowledge. Most of it is related to economic activity, particularly agriculture and farming information and skills about planting and caring for crops. This is particularly valuable to the group because their livelihood is agriculture based. The women sometimes use loans, provided by pooling money, to pay for their children's education as well as to sponsor economic activity for the community.

6.2 Ntankah Village Women Common Initiative Group (NVWCIG)

Ntankah Village Women Common Initiative Group (NVWCIG) was formed in Cameroon's rural Northwest Province in 1990. The group predominantly engages in joint farming or farming activities, but is not limited to such. Their mission is to improve the socio-economic conditions of women³⁸. They assist each other as necessary, including farming activity and financial assistance. The women do joint input harvesting, uniting their labor to reduce time and costs. The group has even carried out joint projects in piggery and poultry. Financial and physical support are given when members fall ill or lose family members, and for various traditional ceremonies and celebrations such as birth, marriage, or death³⁹. NVWCIG encourage their community members to obtain birth certificates and follow vaccination programs⁴⁰. They assemble women to challenge property rights and gender inequalities. The group also ensures that there is a clean water supply, which allows women to save time. Much of their concern lies within women's agency and rights, as these are key to the wellbeing of their community.

6.3 The Coalition of Women Farmers in Malawi

The Coalition of Women Farmers in Malawi includes rural farming women who want to move away from subsistence farming into commercial farming. They believe that this will allow them to become economically empowered. The group works to gain rights to own land and control production. Women are often barred from landownership while doing 80 percent of the farming in Malawi⁴¹. One of the group's women stated in an interview, "If you are not educated, you are illiterate. So men take advantage of it"⁴². She provides the example of tobacco. Tobacco farming requires a license, yet because women are illiterate, only men have been able to farm it. The group stresses literacy as a part of their farming. This allows them to take loans, earn incomes, and reinvest their income. Women are slowly able to gain control of the land and are able to escape the poverty circle.

6.4 Emang Basadi

Emang Basadi is a women's group in Botswana. It started in 1983 with informal meetings of professional women in the country to discuss the status of Botswana women. As the group grew, their goals began including activism to achieve equity for women, particularly by changing legal rights of women in the country and thus challenging their status⁴³. The group also concerns itself with women's human rights. Braimoh et al records that Emang Basadi projects include "the 1984 public debate over legislation which discriminated against women; Commercial Sex Workers Project 1993-1995; Women's Economic Empowerment Project" as well as creating a legal aid and counseling center for women⁴⁴.

7. Findings

Each of these organizations came into being as the result of women's needs being neglected by development work or their societies. Each of these women's organizations reflects the unique interests of African women, which vary from those prescribed by Western women's organizations and development agencies. Women's interests reflected through these organizations include adequate access to economic activities, financial institutions, as well as legal rights and protections. Further, women's organizations unite women across age, ethnicity, and religion. While women are not a homogenous group, promoting their various interests has the ability to cross these boundaries. These women's organizations work to improve the current socio-economic status of women, which ultimately leads to sustained development for the communities.

Development agencies struggle to provide the local safety nets for women that multiple organizations have illustrated are crucial to African women. The poverty that women are faced with creates the inability to withstand economic shocks that have the potential to devastate. Economic shocks include any negative event that impacts economies, such as droughts. By having access to socioeconomic safety nets, women can cope with economic shocks, allowing communities to maintain their wellbeing and even sustain development. Every one of these organizations provides women with safety nets, whether financial or legal. The women of Agabagaya had very limited access to economic activity or credit. Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, women obtain half the credit that men

do⁴⁵. Together, the women help each other by pooling cash, allowing them to make investments whether in agriculture, education for their children, or to address crises. The women become an informal financial service for saving and borrowing, without attaching business requirements to loans. Women's groups are also more likely to provide the necessary support such as day-care, recreational and informal education, or skills-training programs since these are perceived needs of the members. The Coalition of Women Farmers in Malawi and Emang Basadi create legal safety nets for their members. Since women are more often illiterate, they often also lack documentation and collateral. This group works to remedy laws in order to give women the capacity to farm and become economically stable and independent. Emang Basadi predominantly works in activism and advocacy for women's legal rights. Their work centers on challenging the status of women and their human rights in Botswana. These groups provide women with safety nets that allow them safety and stability, which in turn allows for community development.

Women's rights to access resources and own land are also deemed necessary to the sustained wellbeing and development of African communities. Ntankah Villiage Women Common Initiative Group and the Coalition of Women Farmers in Malawi reflect the importance of ensuring women's access to land and resources in order to foster community development. Resources include physical resources as well as capital and technological inputs. Currently, few women have title or control of land yet they are tied to subsistence production. The ability for women to be integrated in agriculture programs that would allow them to market produce and will result in increased economic self-sufficiency. Women constitute half of the population, giving them the power to greatly assist community development through their activities. Correcting land and resource access "would result in increased incomes in developing countries, leading to global economic and social gains, including additional demand for imports of benefit to everyone"⁴⁶. Agencies such as the World Bank, who coerce nations through the conditions of loans, can begin influence the protection of legal rights and access for women as part of loan agreements.

Development practitioners must account for the informal work in which women participate along with their formal work. Women participants of the women's organizations demonstrate the various tasks that women must complete daily. African women have heavy work-burdens, albeit mostly in the informal sector. The types of work that women participate range drastically, therefore policies must account for these. Women carefully balance household duties with income generating activities. They must avoid denigrating the domestic or household duties women perform. They should alleviate the difficulties women face in trying to perform these duties and help them to save them time. These groups show that women lack the formal support for farming to which are privileged to. In areas where women are the predominant farmers, practices should not target men. Women's contributions are central to the household and their community. Still, current project planning techniques for integrating women into development projects continue to restrict women's involvement because projects primarily remain externally operated and controlled⁴⁷. If the efforts of women in food production and trade are strengthened, then African nations' conversion to self-sustaining development can be achieved. Development agencies would achieve greater success if they assist women's own enterprises, rather than imposing projects that do not match women's priorities or needs.

Women's desire for political and economic emancipation transcends myopic identities of ethnicity, religion, or even age. The Women of Agabagaya Group consists of Muslims, Christians, and various other religions. Each group's members range in age, tribal affiliation, and marital status. Some women are widowed while others are raising children that are not their own. As they are faced by problems created by market systems, women seek tangible solutions. Women unite to pool resources for farming or education when they have previously been limited by lack of access and resources. On a continent plagued by conflict, civil wars, and genocides this unity is invaluable. They do not allow for factionalism due to superficial differences—ethnicity and religion—when they are faced with such threats to their livelihoods and wellbeing.

8. Conclusion

This improved approach to development builds off of the ideas expressed in the African Renaissance Theory, but with an emphasis on the role of women. African Renaissance theory is "founded on African values and norms that are the very building blocks of African life"⁴⁸. The theory focuses on the social order and value systems of the ordinary African people. This improved approach to development will focus on the local levels of societies and allow policies to be shaped at these levels. As women constitute half of the population and majority of the poor, women will become part of leadership, decision making, and expression needs at these local levels. African Renaissance theory also formally empowers women and their organizations, because they are already actively supporting their communities. Larger institutions must support these women's organizations whose work is integral

to community development; producing food, income, childcare, and lobbying for legal rights. As the survival of families and thus communities depends on women, their increased land rights and safety nets allows for increased income and agricultural productivity.

Securing women's ability to access economic opportunities, land rights, and resources allows for the sustained development of entire communities. The right for women to own land and access resources allows them to meet the needs of their families and support their communities. Further women's abilities to unite across various boundaries is invaluable to greater development work. Africa's factionalism has been devastating to development and aggravates poverty. Investing in local women's organizations that bond various factions is the most basic level of promoting unity. Promoting further unity must be undertaken with the assistance of local village and district leaders as well as at the macro-level. The ability for practitioners and governments to promote high levels of unity within and between nations will further allow sustained development as they take on joint ventures and trade flourishes between them. As these groups reflect, no social, economic, or political issue stands alone. Women's interests exist at the heart and center of all other problems and concerns. New development agenda will no longer isolate issues such as farming, women, or macro and micro economics as these exist jointly and simultaneously affect each other. Sub-Saharan African Development must become "about reclaiming the African identity and African values"⁴⁹.

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