Implications of Gender Stereotypes on Community Development Initiatives in Dadaab, Garissa County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the implications of gender stereotypes on community development initiatives in Dadaab region of Garissa County in Kenya using data collected for an MA Thesis. The paper has been motivated by increased perceptions that gender stereotyping has continued to bar development especially in developing countries such as Kenya. The Specific objectives of this study were; to examine how socially-constructed gender norms influence community development in Dadaab Sub County, to explore how religious beliefs on gender influence community development, and to assess the influence of cultural beliefs on gender in community development in Dadaab Sub County. The study adopted correlational design which engaged 293 men and women respondents selected through Convenience sampling. Social role and gender schema theories were used to explain behavior of men and women based on societal expectations and the process of gender construction and maintenance through cognitive organization and interpretation. Data was collected using focus groups and interview schedule. The study found out that men and women had divided roles where responsibilities for men in the families included; protecting the families from danger, decision making, funding for the family as a bread winner, transportation of animals from one place to another, disciplining the children, fencing, digging wells and boreholes and ensuring the woman does not struggle to work in order to feed a family. Additional findings show that the community in Dadaab believes that gender equality is demeaning to men by affecting their roles in the family. The inequality has also deprived women of opportunity for employment hence, reduces the household income in the long run. The study found out that the cultural belief in the Somali community in Dadaab adopts a patriarchal framework, where the man is expected to be the breadwinner and head of the household with an obligation of providing the family with steady and reliable income. The study recommends deconstruction of the patriarchal nature of the Somali community that downplays the role of women in society by way of policy to manage stereotyping of women and advocate for gender equality and social inclusion and participation of both for sustainable development.

Keywords: Community Development, Gender Stereotypes, Social Inclusion for Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

This study examined the implications of gender stereotypes on community development initiatives in Dadaab region of Garissa County in Kenya. Stereotyping occurs when a person is viewed as a member of at least one category that stereotypes may apply to and generalizations can be made from. Research on categorization states that people's experiences are clustered into mental structures for categorizing people, animals, things, events, and groups, and are then used to guide social interaction through generalizations for quick, efficient information processing (Schneider, 2004; Moskowitz 2005). According to Schneider (2004) and Moskowitz (2005), people have a tendency to automatically form impressions of others based on previous experiences with a person's or people within a similar category's, conduct.

On a global level, relative to men, women’s lives are more centered in the home, a fact which is immediately related to observed gender bias. In less developed nations, this domestic specialization effectively excludes women and girls from society at large. The exclusion can be externally imposed, as in some developing or Arabic countries, or internally by the women’s own choices. Societal norms and rules may exclude women from types of paid employment or leadership positions. On the other hand, men may be excluded from childcare and the home sphere, which is considered the woman’s territory. This traditional division of labor within the household makes some of the stylized facts that follow understandable (Ferber...
& Nelson, 2003).

Economists have long tried to understand why some countries are poor and some rich, and why some develop and grow while others remain stagnant. The literature and its prominent authors are currently moving towards explaining the growth discrepancy between the poor and the rich nations with factors like social infrastructure, values, trust, religion or other aspects of the culture (Nelson & England, 2002). Gender hierarchy is manifested in family relationships, inheritance laws and customs; valuations of women’s work and its general invisibility; and the power to make decisions in society, the family, work place, religious and other cultural institutions. It is apparent in the relative opportunities available to women and girls for development, education, health and nutrition and in the pattern of violence between the sexes (Weil, 2005).

Women have become an increasing part of the labor force over the past 30 years. According to the World Bank Statistics, women’s labor force participation as a ratio of men has increased from 50 percent to about 80 percent in the high-income countries. In the low-income countries this ratio has also increased, from 60 to 70 percent, while remaining stable at about 60 percent in middle-income countries. The extreme gender segregation in the European Union labor markets is portrayed in women comprise about 80% of the total employment in the service sector but less than 20% of the industrial sectors in all of these countries (Miles, 2005).

When women do work for pay, they earn about 80% of the pay that men receive when working full time. Additionally, women work part time more frequently than men, which also show in their earnings. In terms of total working hours, including both the market and the household work, there is a widespread belief that women work more than men in the most developed countries (Bojer, 2005). Burda, Hamermesh and Weil (2007) however show that this belief to be untrue. They find that total working time of men and women is found to be on average almost identical in the richer countries. Economic development seems to be associated with more equal sharing of working time, even if the earnings gap has not equalized even in the richer countries. In Burkina Faso, six percent of output in agricultural production is lost because of inefficient factor allocation within the household: Plots controlled by women are farmed much less intensively than similar plots controlled by men (Dufo & Udry, 2003).

Esteve-Volart (2000) models labor market discrimination in the form of barriers to entry as a cause of both educational inequality and reduced growth. Gender inequality influences growth by reducing the pool of talented people whose ideas in turn lead to technological progress. The underlying entrepreneurial talents of men and women are assumed to be evenly and identically distributed. Discrimination is modeled by excluding women from the managerial positions, allowing them to be only workers. As workers they may choose more primary education to increase their productivity. Any further education does not benefit them because of the exclusion from managerial positions.

Lyness and Heilman (2006) examined the relationships of type of position and gender on performance evaluations/promotions using two years of archival data of upper-level managers. The researchers found that women in predominately male positions (i.e. line-job managers) received significantly lower evaluation ratings than men in similar positions or women and men in more gender-neutral or feminine positions. Furthermore, promotion findings showed that overall women had to meet stricter standards than men to receive promotions, suggesting that "women have to work harder to get to the same place, doing more and doing it better than men in similar positions.

Dadaab is a unique sub county in Garissa County in the sense that it hosts large populations of refugees mainly from Somalia. The refugees freely interact with host communities on issues such as trade, intermarriages among others. The sub county has three divisions and twelve locations. It is located approximately 100 kilometers from the Kenya-Somalia border. The remote location characterized by high temperatures, and limited natural resources make for harsh living conditions. Within Dadaab, the population is both refugees and Kenyan Somalis. Until recently, the local population traditionally consisted of nomadic Somali camel and goat herders. The nearest major town is Garissa, which is the headquarters of Garissa County. Women consist of over 60 percent of the total population of this world’s largest refugee camp and are perceived as the most vulnerable and marginalized group within the camp (James, 2012).

II. PROBLEM ANALYSIS

Gender stereotyping is an obstacle to achieving gender equality and often results in and/or reinforces discrimination against men and women’s status. While progress has been made by the human rights mechanisms to interpret and clarify the government’s obligation to address gender stereotyping and provide guidance on measures needed to meet this obligation at the national level, there remain a number of challenges and deficits. These challenges include: lack of coherence or consistent use of concepts amongst and between the mechanisms; the absence of data on good practices in addressing gender stereotypes/stereotyping. From the studies identified, gender stereotype and its implication on community development is a topic that has not been well studied in Kenya, thus limited literature exists to support or
criticize the objectives of the study. As a result of this dearth in literature, the study sought to address the implications of gender stereotypes on community development in Kenya’s Dadaab community.

III. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive cross-sectional research design was adopted. According to Baumgartner et al. (2002) such designs are preferred in situations where large amount of data is involved and also where the researcher has no control over the variables to be tasted. Convenient sampling was used to collect data. Further the design through the use of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) provided respondents with an opportunity to provide information about themselves, their attitudes and beliefs, demographics and other past, present and future behaviors (Cozby, 2003).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 293 respondents participated in the study out of the proposed sample size of 374 respondents. This represents a response rate of 78.3% which was sufficient for the analysis. This response rate was caused by low turn-out of participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) due to personal competing activities, natural disaster such as heavy rainfall and sand storms during the dates scheduled for the interviews/ focus group discussions. Security reports on suspected Alshabab operatives made up of suicide attackers and Improvised Explosive Devises (IED) experts sneaking into the refugee camps also caused a panic to some of the respondents. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) a response with more that 50% is adequate. In addition, Holbrook et al. (2007) support that a response rate with rates lower than 50% are less accurate.

A. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The basic information provided describes the characteristics of the participants of this study. The section describes the participants with regard to the gender, age, level of education and their occupation.

1. Gender of respondents

The results in Fig. 1 below show the gender of the respondents.

The results in Fig. 1 show that there was near parity in the distribution of gender in the study. Most of the respondents were male (51%) while females accounted for 49% of the participants. This was made possible by the need to get unbiased responses where feedback from both male and female participants was given equal weight. An equal number of FGDs for both men and women were conducted. The turnout in male FGDs was higher than that of the females implying that it was easy to access men to participate in the study.
2. **Age of respondents**

The study also sought to gather the age of the respondents. Below are the results:

![Age of respondents](image)

Based on Fig. 2, most of the respondents (27.3%) were aged between 51-60 years. This was followed by 23.7% who reported aged of between 41 and 50 years, and 20.1% who indicated that they were aged between 31 and 40 years. This age classification was important as the older generation narrated what has been the norm with regard to the study matters. The younger generations, on the other hand, gave their views on how they 'perceived norms' have impeded community development in the area.

3. **Level of education**

The figure below displays the respondents’ education level.

![Respondents' level of education](image)

Majority of the study participants demonstrated having accomplished the basic schooling levels (either primary, secondary or tertiary) while 47% reported no training at all by any stretch of the imagination. This mirrors the National census data (2019) where majority of the area residents had no form of formal education. With the help of locally selected and trained research assistants, there was seamless communication and the researcher was able to get the required results.

4. **Occupation of respondents**

The study participants engaged in various activities to fend for their families. These included small scale businesses for both men and women, untrained teachers, community leaders such as chiefs and headmen, housewives, and herders. Majority of the trained teachers were not from the local community-dadaab sub county. Most of them were from other parts of the country and few from other sub counties of Garissa County i.e. Fafi, Ijara, Garissa and Balambala sub-counties).

From the results, employed people accounted for 25% participants while business and casual laboring took 20% and 25% respectively. Moreover, 35% of the participants were unemployed thus raising the dependency rate. This is subject to the low standards of living since most people are livestock keepers as well as insecurities from the neighboring country Somalia.

**B. Socially Constructed Gender Norms and Community Development**

The first objective of the study sought to establish whether socially constructed gender norms influence community development. This was done in three areas; Understanding the roles of women and men in the community, the beliefs upheld by the community in Garissa on men performing household duties to earn a living, women to participate in decision making in the community and their honest views on women who
are branded as bread winners of their families.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The section is organized thematically, and presented as follows guided by the objectives of this study;

A. Socially Constructed Gender Norms and Community Development

As stated earlier, Gender stereotyping leads to gender inequality which is the obvious hidden disparity between individuals due to their gender. The study has revealed how Socially Constructed Gender Norms Influences Community Development. From the results, the core role of men included protecting the families from danger, decision making, fending for the family as the breadwinner, transportation of animals from one place to another, disciplining the children, fencing, digging wells and boreholes and ensuring the woman does not struggle to work in order to feed a family. Besides, women's roles included building manyattas, looking after the children, fetching water, cleaning, cooking, washing, making mats and ropes from sisal plant, taking care of elderly and sick people and nurturing. Therefore, the results showed men are superior to women in the share of roles at the household level. The results support those of Lyness and Heilman (2006), who examined the relationships of type of position and gender on performance evaluations/promotions using two years of archival data of upper-level managers. The researchers found that women in predominately male positions (i.e. line-job managers) received significantly lower evaluation ratings than men in similar positions or women and men in more gender-neutral or feminine positions. In households’ roles, Heilman and colleagues (2004) evaluated women working in mixed-sex groups in traditionally male domains. Results revealed that when there was ambiguity in how women performed, they were viewed as less competent and less achievement-oriented than men. However, when women's successes were made explicitly clear, there was no difference in men's and women's evaluation ratings.

The results also revealed that very few men take up domestic work, and when they do, it is out of their wish or in certain circumstances such as illnesses. Therefore, this means that men don’t want to take up domestic chores to not look inferior among other men. The results differed from those of Kimmel (2008), who noted that males feel the need to suppress their ability to express compassion and empathy to achieve society-appropriate masculinity and not appear vulnerable or weak. Besides, the findings showed the women's role in decision-making in the community was only allowed to make a decision at the family level since the decisions that relate to the community were left under the custodian of men. The results showed that women were treated as less influential in the community. The results were consistent with those of Heilman and Haynes (2005). They found that ambiguity in women's contributions resulted in women being rated as less competent, less influential, and taking less of a leadership role than men.

Finally, the findings have indicated gender equality positively affecting the men in the society where it resulted in reduced roles and increased household income in the sense that it relieves men of some work, while gender inequality has affected the women because as they are not allowed to participate in any decision making, education and which lowers their chance to get employment in white-collar jobs. Okojie et al. (2010) and Ekensoye (2012) indicated that a historical account and analysis of women's poverty in Nigeria is mainly attributable to gender discrimination, resulting in the exclusion of women from mainstream economic endeavours–owning lands, large-scale agriculture and access to credit for business. This indicates there is a chance of women acquiring a better source of income.

B. Religious Beliefs on Gender Norms and Influence in Community Development

The study has revealed that various religious establishments in the Dadaab sub-county have gender beliefs that negatively or positively affect community development. In particular, the results showed the influence of religious beliefs, including human equality, flexibility and diversification in the community. Besides, the results indicated the majority of the women are allowed to participate in the religious leadership activities such as teaching the religious aspects to young girls, guidance and counselling of adults and young women, propagating ‘da’awah’ (missionaries) and spearheading the establishment of Islamic education centers. Further, women have engaged in leadership as they have taken up the clergy's roles in Islamic religions. Inconsistent, Wadud (2009) stated that Islamic leaders tend to emphasize that men and women have equal value but that they have very different roles in society. Muslim feminists, however, challenge this and demand women to be allowed a public role, whereas men should be more involved in the home and the family. In addition, previous research of Baden (1992) and Mir-Hosseini (2006) on women and Islam not only describes how women are using revisionist interpretations of Islam to press for gender equality, but Muslim women are also redefining Islam as a legitimate tool for engaging and tackling gender issues in Muslim societies.

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C. Cultural Beliefs on Gender Norms and Community Development

The study’s results showed men make major decisions in the community, especially on the customs laws as well as on the resources for community development. A minority of Women were also allowed to participate in the event where decisions that pertain to the community were made but only contributed to a limited level. Further, the findings indicated that the man has the role of being the breadwinner and head of the household with an obligation of providing the family with steady and reliable income while the role that the women played is a complement of that of men hence leading to the achievement of the community plans. Results further indicated that there was no gender equality as some of the important roles were handled by men and, therefore, they were totally in control because of their masculinity and the power given to them as heads in the community. These beliefs have negative effects and resulted in stagnation in community development projects as they hinder women's development who would be complementary in ensuring growth within the community. In support, Evie (2014) stated that men in developing countries generally have a lot of difficulties in competing with their male counterparts due to the following reasons. These constraints are due to heavy domestic and agricultural chores, the high costs associated with meetings and lost income, especially to women who are solely dependent on their husbands for financial aid and permissions. This means the women in the society have a high inability to challenge male dominance in an area due to a lack of literacy skills, finance and very low social status. In the Dadaab refugee camp, James (2012) carried out a study to explore the factors influencing the vulnerability of women in Dadaab. The study’s objectives were to determine the influence of culture, level of education/awareness, law enforcement mechanisms, availability of opportunities on the vulnerability of women in Dadaab refugee camps. Study findings revealed that culture, level of education/awareness, law enforcement mechanisms and opportunities influence the vulnerability of women in the camp. Another study conducted by Kakihara (2009) indicated a concern expressed by women since there was a concern that the residential implications of marriage systems contribute to poor participation in project implementation in the country.

The study recommends deconstruction of the patriarchal nature of the Somali community that downplays the role of women in society by way of policy to manage stereotyping of women and advocate for gender equality and social inclusion and participation of both for sustainable development.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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