

Factors of the feminization of poverty

[Sociology](#), [Poverty](#)



Over the past decades there has been growing concern regarding the growing gap between men and women and men living in poverty. This has come to be known as the feminization of poverty. A notion that women are more likely to be poorer as compared to their male counterparts. Poverty can be said to be the other side of wellbeing which is not only concern about income, but rather it encompasses the inability to own a piece of land, have access to credit, health care service, quality education, exposure to violence, external economic shock, natural hazard, voicelessness and social exclusion. Development Assistance Committee (2001) states that poverty comprises of various dimension of denial that is associated to human abilities, consumption and availability of food, health care, quality education, rights, good job, protection and dignity. Richard and Sonja (2008) reports that poverty is not only limited to the inability to have access to material resources, but entails inability to access quality health care, education, quality shelter. Poverty results in hunger lack of health care, sanitation and poor shelter, sanitation and living standards. The causes of poverty range from low income, lack of education, lack of assets, lack of opportunities and lack of an enabling environment for one to improve their welfare.

As a result of the feminization of poverty, for decades poverty has been seen as a women issue. Jawaharlal Nehru the first prime minister of India said “ you can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women. Hence, there have been a lot of critics and contrasting views on the fact that poverty wears a women face. The feminization of poverty is a characteristics that is common on most of the under developed nation, of which one over two of the world. Population is women who account for 70% of those people

living in poverty in the whole world. Women make up about 80% of farmers in Africa and with over 40% illiterate women without formal education in Africa. It has been stated that poverty is a multidimensional issue and some causes of this problem affect both men and women while others just specifically affect women more than men.

Social exclusion

Poverty is mostly associated with social exclusion. Women living in poverty find it very difficult to participate in the social and political activities of the community. This is because they lack the self confidence due to the negative self confidence created by poverty. Social exclusion not only affects the welfare of women in poverty but also reduces the prospect of these women escaping poverty.

Women unfair access to social, resources and opportunities arises from the demerit situation they found themselves in form of class, race and gender in any given society. Class can be referred to as a social relationship on having the chance to use and possess resource together with means of production, distribution, exchange and consumption of products. Gender has to do with social functions, behavior, hopes and expectation as they exhibit in their cultural and social beliefs, as shown in the interaction between men and women in the communities.

It is a well established fact that women status in the communities is determined by their access to positions and roles in paid jobs and their status gave them domestic and reproductive role. Therefore it is the explanation of social roles and responsibilities based on gender and that

gave room for inequality the women are facing in all societies. The existing culture and tradition and social values is responsible for the consideration of women in the society as less important, which is not only shown in the behaviors and attitude as can be seen every day, but also exist in policy making and legislative organs of government. Culture and society look at women social role mainly as the care giver and care taker in connection with their production function, while, men are seen as the bread winners' as explain by their productive role.

It is as a result of this discussion of responsibility that gave birth to the believed that men's are more important than women most especially when it comes to the contribution and maintenance of the household or rather the family. African women inability to have basic services and resources together with lack of equity in the right of the family, unfairness to household resources, such as livestock's, land etc. This justify why rural women in Africa are not only poorer in their family, but rather in their communities and the state at large, as well as explain the reason of their poverty level and the nature they are which is more than that of men. Hence, women in Africa are prompt to subjugation and discrimination in their home and outside their home.

Women do depend more on social services and reduction in expenditures will have great effect on women's plenty roles. The reduction on social expenditure and the resultant reduction of the services given by the state will raise women's care taking and reproductive responsibilities or tasks. These scenarios give way to feminization of poverty instead of socio

economic empowerment and lifting the standard of living of women. The above indicate that the black women working class, gender and race access to opportunities and resources, together with the present changes in the economy leads to inequality and poverty and hence, contribute to the reduction in their socio economic position. This shows clearly and openly the reasons for African rural women as being the poorest of the poor, and the reason for experiencing poverty and lack of fairness in a different way as does the men and the reason for the variation in the changes on their socio economic impact.

Since having opportunities and access to resource depend on class, gender and race, women will be more prompt to inequality and poverty than men. Geisler and Hansen (1994) conclude that, since men take charge of productive resources such as labor, credit, housing, tools and land, women's prospects may be different from that of men's, most especially when there is economic pressure. For this vicious cycle of poverty to be removed from the society, good Policies as regard gender equity and reduction of poverty most give consideration to the plenty roles women play in the society and their relevance to socio – economic and informal contribution to the growth and development of the nation.

Gender and property rights

The custom and laws of majority of African countries those not allow women to possess own and take care of land. This scenario expose the poor African women to be vulnerable economically due to their inability to have a defined right to property, such as cattle's, land in their countries. Evidence has shown that, women are 80% of the agricultural labor force and only 5% of

them are registered owners in Kenya. In Africa the major issue of women weak property rights can be seen vividly when a women is divorce or in a widowhood situation, where the right to properties such as land of the husband are been collected or taken over from them, even though they have been using for years. These incidences deprive the women from their source of income as a means of livelihood.

The poverty cycle keep on widening or rather continue to increase as the children of the women who are denied access to their husbands land must leave school to search for a job to earn a living and hence, making their future to look so dark. Despite effort by many African countries to enact laws to care for women's lack of land rights, the laws are rather not enforce, partially may be because they are not in agreement to the customary laws of their land and so become ineffective. For example, Kenyan's constitution outlaw gender discrimination and also uphold customary laws on inheritance and marriage and divorce. Therefore effort is required to address gender issue in the enforcement of new legislation.

Government policy

The problems of governance and corruption are more prevalence in Africa than the rest of the world. Governance is regarded as the way in which the power of a nation is exercised and corruption as the used of power given for personal gain or advantage. It is pertinent to note that poor governance and corruption deter a nation from growing and developing and hence, the poor and those who lack connection are mostly affected. While good governance can benefit and change the condition of the poor for a better most especially

women who are the larger portion of the poor in Africa. Poor governance lead to civil war in a state and that contribute to increase in poverty.

Gender and time

The issue of time use adds an important dimension to the gender and poverty paradigm in Africa. “ Time poverty” impacts particularly poor women and girls, who are required to contribute time and labor to various tasks and as a result forgo education. Contrary to the argument that the poor have a lower opportunity cost of time, because of their unemployment and underemployment, African women in rural areas suffer from extreme time scarcity. Not only is time scarcity more severe for women during “ normal” circumstances, but it is further aggravated in conflict situations, in which women and girls as young as 10 are forced to handle all the time intensive activities necessary to sustain daily life for the male combatants.

Women are susceptible to poverty due to the nature of jobs that are mostly available to them. Despite the increase in the education and employments rates for women, they more likely than men to work for lower pay. They make up the majority of the workers in the lower wage workforce Women generally especially in low income countries tend to be take up low wage employment. Even across the global women get lower wages compared to their male counterparts. One trend that seems to be consistent is that regardless of their education level, marital status, race or ethnicity women generally dominate the low pay work force. According to Oxfam this will take at least 70 years to close the wage gap. Oxfam further states there 700 million fewer women than men in employment. According to Oxfam 75

percent of women in developing countries work in the informal sector where they do not have contracts, legal rights and social protection.

Women of all races are generally over-represented in the lower wage in jobs that pay less than \$10 per hour. A good example is the labour utilised by most multinational corporations such as Nike and Adidas that have factories in Asia that commonly referred to as sweat shops because of their harsh working environment. Most of the jobs in these factories are taken up by desperate young women who get less than \$10 dollars and are subjected to work for long hours with poor working conditions. These women are subjected to verbal and physical abuse from the employers and also have to struggle to complete high quotas each day. These women are subjected to inhumane working condition yet the wages they get are not enough to sustain their families. The employers of these women also force them to take birth control pills to prevent them falling pregnant so they do not have to pay maternity leave costs.

This also entails they do not have health care and pension schemes. The wages in this sector are not enough for these people to improve their overall welfare and very few employers in the sector meet the statutory minimum wage set by legislation. This make difficult for most women to escape poverty. In addition women have to perform other unpaid work in the form of household chores, childcare, cooking. According to Oxfam the perform these duties as high as 10 times as men and the value of this work is estimated at \$10 trillion which is equivalent to one-eighth of the world GDP.

Another factor is that contributes to feminization of poverty is that employment segmentation. Women are generally classified as caregivers and caretakers whose roles are restricted to cooking raising children, household chores and lower wage jobs such as maids, cleaners, teaching and working in textile factories. This kind of employment subjects women to harsh working conditions and lacks job stability, security and high wages. In addition these jobs do not have social protection in terms of health care and pension schemes.