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IS GENDER RELATIONS CHANGING IN THE 21ST CENTURY? WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF CHANGE AND FACTORS DRIVING IT.

**WHAT IS GENDER RELATIONS?**

The relations between men and women, both perceptual and material, based on attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person’s biological sex. It is not determined biologically but constructed socially. A central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution’ (FAO, 1997). Most times, it is often misunderstood as being the promotion of women only. Gender relations in many non-Western societies are complicated by an intermingling of custom and religion in the law of personal status that governs gender relations. In nineteenth century British debates around numerous gendered practices in colonized regions, the agenda of rescuing non-white women from the barbarity of the culture into which they had the misfortune of being born played an important role in justifying the imperial project. With the intensification of global cosmopolitanism from the 1980s onward, local gender relations have increasingly been required to justify themselves in dialog with alternative modes of being. Gender equity norms symbolize the advance of the human rights agenda. Society is powerfully structured by gender relations that conspire to render women less powerful than men. (The entry on gender defines what the term means and the importance of recognizing its social construction.) These social relations, which are explained variously by reference to class and to patriarchy, result in different, and hierarchical roles for, and opportunities available to, women and men, and structure their relationship with the environment, as well as with each other. Whilst these relationships have persisted, little has changed in structure, if not magnitude, through time.

**IS GENDER RELATIONS CHANGING IN THE 21st CENTURY?**

There is a gender power shift in the making, but it is happening more slowly than necessary to benefit both individual men and women and the business world. Gender segregation of jobs remains a major stumbling block to equality. Millions of women are still concentrated in low-paid and often insecure “support” jobs. There are other vast divides, too, such as the lack of Internet access faced by many women in the developing world. Such divides present challenges as well as opportunities for governments, societies, and companies to address together through investment in higher skills, stronger persuasion, and imaginative breakthroughs. By giving women financial and educational opportunities, both societies and economies derive great benefits. In the current generation of 21st Century, gender is often misunderstood as promotion of women who have taken more active role in different sectors and careers despite some traditions still hold women inferior in their society like numerous cases reported in Indian cultures women still come from traditional strict households, they have accepted their roles and feel comfortable in their decisions or lack thereof. Feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960’s and 70’s in the United States together with other Human Right groups that advocated for equal rights among all genders in recent centuries after observing women gender being domesticated by cultural norms, religious believes, traditional marginalization yet for the few women who were out speaking role models showed great hope. Gender roles in communities changed lately whereby women now play equal role as men in owning lead large companies, very active in their families and communities, own personal businesses, manage big organizations, head political groups, earn higher academic degrees from all sectors equal to men, to mention but few as compared to early centuries. Both genders actively attend sporting events; go to bars and all other outdoor activities that were dominated by men alone. The 21st century demonstrates equal participation of both genders in different activities as compared to early centuries that kept women behind by being responsible for domestic chores. Gender being a central organizing principle of society in social construction which governs the process of production, reproduction where consumption and distribution are elements in that setting, gender has remained a critical and major focus of society despite equal rights. Young genders both males and females are groomed up with knowledge of man being head of family. Religions across all denominations still hold believe of man being a superior being from woman gender. This naturally has left a gap between the two genders where by man still carries weight of being the head of the household though women headed families also perform equal roles but the family still remains incomplete without a man due to title, security, and other duties that women can’t perform. Gender influences the nature or type of work/tasks that men or women perform, and those roles may vary per country, group or generation. Those defined roles may thus confer specific opportunities, challenges, and status for individuals (Blackstone, 2003). In developing countries, the gender differences in livestock production activities mainly arise from customary or traditional roles that view certain activities as more suitable for males or females (Walugembe, 2017).

**WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF CHANGE?**

**Marriage Proposals**

Marriage proposal in early centuries, men typically propose to women which was traditionally their role but in the 21st Century, women are stepping up by proposing to men as they get down on their knees. They have boldly come out elaborating men initiative proposals that can’t wait any longer for men to propose. Sometimes cultures term them as taboo breakers who boldly ask their future husbands to be hand in marriage. Men traditionally take head the process of proposing for marriage but this has changed in the 21st century where women now take bold action in dating and propose for marriage. This has left some traditional cultures thinking of women proposing as prostitutes desperate for marriage. However, todays women can propose for marriage. According to Chicago Tribune Article on marriage, more women are proposing than ever before. Some are giving men engagement rings and also women now pay bride prices to the families of who they want to marry, proposing to a man is gradually being normal but it would take longer effects in developing countries

**Dress code**

Culturally dress code for men and women are defined by norms and expectations that relate to an understanding to tell difference between man and woman. The dress has the most direct contact with the human body and is therefore considered an integral part of the self. Garments influence and shape the appearance with significant impact on the construction of social identity (Tseelon 1989). Dress codes differ from culture to culture, religion to religion, tribe to tribe, some people use different dress code for different settings for different gender (marriage parties, church/mosque, offices, etc) for example the easiest identified dress code is men put on trousers and shirts while women put on skirts and blouses. However in the 21st century, the trousers are worn by both genders. Women dress on trousers, shirts and neck-ties like men while men as well take part in women dresses, skirts and blouse though not widely in public. This has been associated with gay proactive men. Meanwhile Brighton College in Britain is the first school to scrap uniform policy so all children can wear skirts or trousers (Mirror online by Steve Robson. January 20th 2016). In Islam women are required to wear modest forms of attire which covers from head to toe. Therefore all this depends on the traditional cultural environment either in rural or urban though in most urban settings adapt any kind of dress code. In other words the world of clothing is changing as new cultural influences meet technological innovations.

**Work**

Traditionally, both genders have different roles and responsibilities whereby men were considered responsible for taking care of the family financially; guiding the family while listening to their spouse though they make final decisions while women are to take care of children and household duties. During the 20th – 21st centuries, there strengthened Gender inequalities in all areas that are rooted in social structures but also in attitudes, said Professor Gillian Robinson, of the University of Ulster. Many arguments have shown imbalance at work. Others defend men to be more burdened while others argue that women are more burdened with daily chores such as laundry, cleaning, cooking food, shopping, looking after sick relatives and carrying our repairs while men only show significant contribution by other services of mending faulty items around the house. Both genders to some extent perform equal domestic duties though tradition still holds some societies.

**Women’s Roles**

Women’s new social role is closely connected to their educational attainment. Aggregated data show that women have outperformed men in formal education in the past decades, and consequently they now have increasingly as much or more education as their partners, unlike in the past. The reversal of the gender gap in education has far-reaching implications for family dynamics and needs to be taken into account not only in studying behaviours relevant for demographic development and social relations but also in applying an adequate analytical approach.

**FACTORS DRIVING THE CHANGE**

**Speaking Out Together**

More male leaders need to take responsibility for driving change and women must help them by welcoming them into the debate. Many events and conferences about women in leadership are still organized and attended almost exclusively by women. Change will not happen without men being accountable too. Many men would like to see gender parity but do not feel part of the conversation, or do not see how they are part of the solution. Connecting male and female business networks is one important step, since it is an uncomfortable truth that people tend to look out for those whom they know and with whom they feel most familiar.

**Active Intervention**

Because leaders have typically been male, the image of the leader is still often associated with stereotypically male attributes. There is a prevalent view in many companies that the “ideal worker” is someone who is always available and present. Studies show that hidden bias against female job candidates—by both men and women—is deeply ingrained and persistent. Many big companies have instituted “unconscious bias” training to raise awareness and try to eliminate these tendencies that work against women. Other active interventions are needed, including quotas or targets, to force change where resistance is greatest.

**Transparency**

It is hard to make further progress without knowing where women are—and where they are not—inside an organization. Without clear data that no one can dispute, the arguments for action may not be taken seriously. Collecting the evidence is the first step. Calculating the very real risk of losing (or failing to make best use of) the talent that is available must then be the follow-up. Transparency is a powerful stimulus to change. Companies have focused their “gender diversity” efforts increasingly on top talent, and it has distracted attention from even bigger gender divides .Social media are playing a growing role as companies are “named and shamed” for having few or no women in their senior teams or boards. Yet the workforce and leadership of the tech sector itself is still heavily male-dominated. In mid-2014, Google published its data on women and ethnic minorities after pressure from activists, saying that it had to do better. In a blog post, the company admitted: “We’ve always been reluctant to publish numbers about the diversity of our workforce at Google. We now realize we were wrong, and that it’s time to be candid about the issues.”39 Other leading tech companies fell into line and published too.

**Tackling the Biggest Divides**

Gender segregation of jobs remains a major stumbling block to equality. Millions of women are concentrated in low-paid and often insecure “support” jobs such as cleaning, caring, and catering. Frances O’Grady, the first woman to head the British Trades Union Congress, has raised this as a serious moral issue, saying: “I sometimes wonder what it says about our economy and society when the skill of repairing a car is considered many times more valuable than that of caring for a child.”40. There are other vast divides, too, such as the lack of internet access faced by many women in the developing world. Some 200 million fewer women than men are online today. In many regions, this gender gap amplifies existing inequalities between the sexes. Such divides present challenges as well as opportunities for governments, societies, and companies to address together—through investment in higher skills, persuasion, and imaginative breakthroughs. By giving women financial and educational opportunities, societies and economies derive great benefits.

In conclusion, Gender Relations is changing in the 21st century, but it is a gradual process. Patriarchy runs the society but this can stop with various people coming together. In making this work it has to start from the root and encounter stereotypes through young generation in schools by mentoring them about gender at the earlier age, handling proper cultural transition from tradition to current generations, equal economic empowerment for both genders other than focusing women gender as the most affected, education and exposure of both genders for easy understanding gender from different perspectives in different environments.

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