**INTRODUCTION**

There is widespread concern regarding the failure to achieve gender equality and relations at either an institutional or societal level. It is in such a context that a range of actors are rethinking and reimagining how to tackle and resist persistent gender relations, these include: civil society groups; political parties; governments; supranational institutions; the media; and individual citizens. Addressing gender relations requires innovative and creative approaches not least in light of the fact that some of the more incremental approaches have not proven entirely successful. Consequently, there are conceptual, empirical, and methodological challenges that need unpacking.

**What is gender?**

**Gender** is a state of being a male or female. In most cases, it’s typically defined with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological differences. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) defines it as ‘relations between men and women, both perceptual and material’ It is not determined biologically as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution’ (FAO, 1997).

**Gender relations in the 21st century**

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 relations 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.

**Areas of change in the 21st century**

### **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 for example in my Iteso Culture, men take lead in proposing for marriage but when woman proposes, man shy’s off in fear of mockery and insults from fellow men or woman might be having HIV/AIDS as to why she boldly took men role of proposing for marriage and men prefer traditional marriage proposals or weddings. This happens in rural villages. 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.

### **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. 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. 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.

**Factors driving the change**

Gender has for the past experienced many challenges that have led to massive advocacy for equality with specific promotion of women to equate with men. This has always varied from country to country. Most activists in developing countries focus on more basic issues like combating violence against women and equal access to other services like education, health care, job opportunities etc which men have dominated. Below are some challenges faced by gender;

**Domestic violence**

The violent confrontation between genders in families, at work, in public etc which involves physical harm, sexual assault. More than 40% of domestic violence victims are male according to World Development Report, 2012 by MIT’s Esther Duflo. Victims of domestic violence are men dominating while number of women is always left battered and bruised. Men assaulted by their partners are in most cases ignored by police according to reports on equal treatment.’ This is where gender challenge is embraced despite equality advocacy.

**Decision making power**

Despite the fact that women hold positions of influence in both social, political, economic and religious levels, their decision making power still remains significantly lower than men gender. Decisions range from self-management to public management. At family levels (Married couples), money related decisions, women ability to visit friends and family, even managing own self still remains more powered by men gender. In Cultural settings, women are less powered to head tribes, clans or any cultural structure though Queen is recognised but the King has more decision making powers than Queen. For example in some other cultures like Bantu tribe in Uganda who have the King and the Queen. If the King dies, the Prince has to be crown as King. King Oyo of Toro in Uganda ascended to the throne in 1994 at the age of 3 years after his father’s death though his mother was alive. Therefore this limits women gender from having equal decision making powers than men gender in society.

**Inequality**

**T**his has always been challenging in the sense that naturally genders are not equal in all forms. Physical, mentally, socially, economically, biologically despite demands and adjustments made towards equating both genders. In many references, man gender and woman gender differ which has persistently left the gap in between despite bridging efforts of equality which has led gender being misunderstood as women empowerment though it’s the most affected gender. This discrimination and barriers prevent women gender from equating with men gender at all levels and through attempts on equity in both genders, it has in most cases exposed both genders to violence because socially accepted gender norms and values about what constitute acceptable behaviour and interpersonal relationships are instilled since childhood and to be more specific, girl child is raised to be more submissive while boys are raised to be more controlling, dominant and aggressive as per traditional gender roles of what they should be in their maturity age of becoming father and mother.

**Limited education and Exposure**

Limited understanding and experience limits more opportunities because opportunities that seem to be good today may not be good tomorrow or in near future. More exposure will lead to new ways of thinking and new opportunities that are much better the ones now. In most cases both genders have limited understanding and exposure that limits them to a confined specific area of understanding that they feel comfortable. For example different genders that grow up in typical traditional cultural setting in rural areas on in specific believes that are strict with gender roles and responsibilities always find it hard to introduce new tradition of equality between the two genders. Like Moslem tradition and believe, Christians etc. Gender in this case finds challenging for the limited understanding to their tradition comfort zone of their culture.

**Solutions to gender relations challenges**

In every problem that persists, there are always ways out of the problems. The world views gender in a more acceptable lens in the 21st century that there is a growing acknowledgement of diversity and differences where rights matter. This is evident in current government systems across the world through policy frameworks, economic incentives by corporations and programs by multinational organizations like United Nations. Below are some of the contributions towards re-enforcing other efforts in solving gender issues.

**Counter stereotypes through young generation**

It’s so challenging to erase gender stereotype from adults and old age. However, to counter the existing wide spread stereotype across the world on gender, there is need to start educating and sensitizing young generation in schools and out of schools. These are categories to be changed despite long period of time to realize positive results but its sustainable and very effective solution. A child’s imagination when paired with experimental learning opportunities can be a powerful tool to confront gender challenges. This is a proven fact that children once instilled in them on gender solutions, they will always remain and believe in the same unlike adults who will remain referring to past practices whether good or bad but will always say ‘we are accustomed to’ based on past practices. Therefore stereotype can be resolved through young generation.

**Cultural transition**

Adapting new culture especially in the 21st Century of technology which has taken young generation by surprise has led to frustrations and disenchantment with new things that are both positive and negative to gender relations. This can be termed as cultural shock that has brought hard time in handling proper transition from tradition to technological culture that has always created gap in between genders of male and female. There is need for proper and sustainable cultural transition from traditional culture to technological culture that would not harm gender in any way.

**Equal economic empowerment**

 This is a cornerstone of development. When both genders male and female have equal economic empowerment in a society, poverty will be reduced, economies flourish and the health improves among all genders as well as other service deliveries. Gender inequalities create gap for underdevelopment that is largely realized in developing countries despite strong efforts and campaigns on women empowerment by development agencies, there is need for both because some of the other gender (male) are incapacitated economically that has always created domestic violence. Therefore if women are more economically empowered may lead to vulnerability and can leave risks of high rate of divorce in families due to care and respect that male traditionally demand from their spouse. In women empowerment, there have been some improvements recorded in many reports like in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2015 report. Reports show that men spend much time on leisure each day while women spend more time doing unpaid domestic works which traditionally are her roles and responsibilities while men’s role is to provide for the family. Therefore leaving man out of empowerment may mean women take role of being heads of families whereby it may inject in serious rate of divorce that might call for another advocacy on equal treatment for men. However, there is need for equal economic empowerment for both genders.

**Education and Exposure for both genders,**

There is need for education of genders and expose them to different environments so they can know what happens in each part of the world. Despite massive explanations about gender but still remains as if it’s unheard from different parts of the world due to inadequate education and exposure of genders to different environments and cultures. For example the traditional approach of understanding gender in Africa may be far different from understanding of gender in Europe. This inadequate exposure and education leads to misunderstanding of gender in the current generation. Some traditions in Africa in viewing gender interpret it in terms of their tradition whereby it’s a taboo for women to wear trousers likewise men to wear skirts while in Europe, its normal for a woman to wear a trouser.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion despite other approaches in the 21st century in creating an understanding of gender, the way people view others of the same and opposite gender as well as they see themselves which is a necessary component of the society passes the message of sometimes miss understanding while sometimes understand what gender implies to others. In other words others misunderstand gender as women promotion in the current century. The following recognizes male roles and responsibility which currently being handled by both genders in current generation, marriage proposal was done by male gender before but now done by both genders, dress code is being shared by both genders in the 21st century. Many challenges are face by gender in the 21st century that include; domestic violence, language for genders, decision making power, inequality, transgender, gender imbalance, equality has increased divorce, limited education and exposure which have creating challenging moments to gender. However, in any situation occurs way out of it despite threats. The following are suggestions to the above challenging moments of gender. They include; 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. Through above solutions, I do agree that gender perspective by 21st century generation would create an understandable meaning for gender. Otherwise gender remains as a unique topic of discussion if not handled amicably.

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