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IRD 318

**IS GENDER RELATIONS CHANGING IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?**

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.

**GENDER IN THE TWENTY-FIRST 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 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.

**WHAT ARE THE AREAS OF CHANGE?**

**MARRIAGE PROPOSAL**

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 shys 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.

**DRESS CODE**

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.

**WHAT ARE THE 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.

**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 recognized 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**

 This 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. Biblical description differentiates both genders in that God created man in His own image (Genesis 1:27) and then the God made woman from the rib he had taken out of the man and brought her to the man (Genesis 1:22). 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 behavior 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.

**SOLUTIONS/CONCLUSION TO GENDER CHALLENGES**

**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.