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Gender discrimination and its impacts on women's empowerment in the development process in Boajibu, Simbaru Chiefdom, Kenema District

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Abstract

Gender discrimination is the manifestation of unequal treatment towards individuals based on their gender. This insidious issue significantly impacts human lives, especially when opportunities are unjustly denied due to one's gender. It is distressing to witness such discrimination persist in our society, as gender should never be a determining factor for one's access to opportunities. Regrettably, women continue to face egregious discrimination, impeding their empowerment. This study delves into the pervasive problem of gender discrimination and its adverse effects on women's empowerment globally. By examining the plight of discriminated women in our society, particularly in rural areas, this research sheds light on the entrenched biases that prevail. The prevalent discriminatory attitudes are evident, especially towards girl children, perpetuating inequality. Employing a quantitative research approach and utilizing a questionnaire for data collection, this study underscores the enduring presence of gender discrimination in our society. Women bear the brunt of this discrimination, particularly in rural settings, where it severely hampers their access to basic education. Addressing the fundamental issue of inequality necessitates a shift in societal perspectives to eradicate gender discrimination comprehensively.

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Introduction

Gender discrimination is the consequence of persistent inequality between men and women in all spheres of life. The dimension and degree of discrimination against women manifests itself in different culture, politics, race, region, countries, communities and economy differently. However, gender discrimination is considered as a tremendous constraint towards development process and it is found as a causal factor of violence against women in many nations including Boajibu community in Sierra Leone, Kenema District, Simbaru Chiefdom, Eastern Province. Different approaches or strategies had been adopted in the past few decades with the view to promoting the advancement of women and gender equality as a whole but in the course of time, the existing approaches have failed to address gender issues in a proper manner and could not improve the status of women as expected. For instance, the 30% quota of women representation in parliament (17 November 2022), Hands of our Girls (December

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2018) and the Early Marriage policy Act (2024) have failed to reduce gender gap to 50% in the study area and Sierra Leone.

Mahatma Gandhi argues that “Man and woman are unparalleled duo; supplementing each other, each aiding the other, such that without one, the existence of the other cannot be imagined and, therefore, it follows that anything that impairs the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of both”. Men in various contexts, through their roles in the household, the community, and at the national level, possess the potential to bring about change in attitudes, roles, relationships and access to resources and decision-making which are critical for equality between women and men. In their roles as fathers, brothers, husbands and friends, the attitudes and values of men and boys impact directly on the women and girls around them. Men should therefore be actively involved in developing and implementing legislation and policies to foster gender equality instead of discrimination and in providing role models to promote gender equality in the family, the workplace and in society at large Kofi Annan – Report of the UN Secretary General.

Despite presence of numerous local, national and international laws concentrating on development, equality, and human rights, despite many reports of positive change in action and attitude on the part of governments, religious institutions, and other entities, it is still necessary, when examining the key development issues, to view them through gendered lens - looking at how development decisions and practices affect both men and women without any form of discrimination.

In addressing gender and development issues, it is usual to look at the relations between women and men (social, political and economic), focusing on global inequalities, always keeping in mind, however, that we all play a part in supporting inequality and discrimination no matter where we live in the world. We look at issues of power, (Marxist feminism) which can prevent development and which can hinder participation and opportunities for involvement in one's own community. There are many commentators who argue that taking a separate gender focused view is wrong in that development is all encompassing and by its nature benefits all equally (or not as may be the case). To date, however, development has impacted differently on women and, generally speaking, they have not benefited as much as men.

Development commentators and practitioners have also been forced to recognize that dealing with the relations between women and men in a development context is an integral and vital element in 'getting development right. Reaffirming that gender equality is of fundamental importance for achieving sustained and inclusive economic growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions and United Nations conferences, and that investing in the development of women and girls has a multiplier effect, in particular on productivity, efficiency and sustained and inclusive economic growth, in all sectors of the economy, especially in key areas such as agriculture, industry and services, (Women in Development, United Nations Resolution adopted by the General Assembly)

As more evidence of links is seen between gender equality, economic growth and sustainable development, the interest in investigating the determinants of women's empowerment has grown. According to the World Bank under-investment in women restricts economic growth and poverty reduction. Empirical evidence shows a positive correlation between women's

earnings, their productivity and poverty alleviation. The 2019 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (UN DESA, 2019) verifies that there are positive multiplier effects for overall social and economic development when women, in the same extent as men, access economic and financial resources. This is seen through poverty reduction, children's increased welfare and increased household efficiency. Robust evidence shows that women's access to resources has a stronger impact on child survival, welfare and education, than when men have access to similar resources (UN DESA, 2019).

Amartya Sen states that when women participate in economic activities the society as a whole benefit. Social benefits are provided through women's enhanced status and independence. Women are empowered through the reduction of gender bias and discrimination in household decisions and have the possibility to generate income and affect the reduction of mortality and fertility rates in the society.

Empowerment of women and girls is to be realized through sustainable development. Sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources and it cannot be achieved without gender equality. Gender Equity is the process of allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females. Diane Elson, an adviser to UN Women, argues in her contribution that "the disproportionate responsibility that women bear for carrying out unpaid work is an important constraint on their capacity to realize their rights. Both women and men need time to care for their families and communities, and time free from such care." Women's empowerment is a key factor for achieving sustainability. Sustainable development and sustainability have various meaning. Sometime it may be equitable distribution of resources and opportunities or living within the limits or sometime it may be defined as understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environment. Sustainable development is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights including freedom and equal opportunities for all. Sustainability cannot exist without equity in the distributional process. Women and girls are crucial contributors, implementers and beneficiaries of sustainable development. At the Sustainable Development Summit, UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality, discrimination and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030. Women's empowerment through gender equality is a cross-cutting development issue, and unless addressed in multidimensional way, and where discrimination exists, gender equality will not become a reality. Women's contribution to sustainable development must be recognized. Women have a strong role in education and socializing their children, including teaching them care and responsibility. In order to build women as catalyst for sustainable development, their role in family, community and society at large has to free from socio-cultural and religious traditions that prevent and discriminate women participation.

The World Bank Group gender strategy 2024-2030 puts forward the bold ambition to accelerate gender equality to end poverty on a livable planet in alignment with the World Bank Group Evolution Roadmap. The International Labor Organization Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment adopted in June 2019, aimed at eliminating violence and harassment at work. The convention recognizes that violence and harassment can affect all workers both men and women, and can take many forms, such as physical violence, sexual harassment,

psychological torture and more. In line with the African Union Women's Decade, the Bureau of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission in partnership with the UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa designed a new regional program focusing on "Building an Enabling Environment for Women's Economic Empowerment and Political Participation in Africa.

These gaps in productivity and wage levels are the result of long-standing inequalities in the "gender distribution of resources" that have placed women in a disadvantaged position relative to men. Around the world, women are often locked into positions of dependence, relying on men to meet some of or all of their basic needs (UN DESA). This is particularly true of developing nations, where a majority of women are excluded from the resources required to effectively participate in the processes of economic growth. In most African countries for example, women farmers produce lower-value products, on smaller tracts of land, with less access to capital, labor and chemical inputs than men.

The systemic discrimination (conflict perspective) of women as economic actors not only represents a grave injustice warranting international attention and remediation, it is also evidence of a huge misallocation and underuse of potential resources. This results in economic losses around the world. When women are excluded from economic sectors or their abilities are underused, opportunities for economic growth and development are bypassed. At a time when, more than ever, national economic success is contingent upon the extent to which nations are able to employ all of their available human resources to their full potential, the perpetuation of gender inequality is a huge cost to businesses, societies, and nations.

Women need to be "empowered" in order to narrow the "gender gap" and to create an equal playing field between women and men before gender equality can be reached and maintained. All SDGs are talking about gender sensitizations in one or the other way. The contribution of women in all fields needs to be enhanced by ensuring their full economic growth. Gender bias is still deeply embedded in cultures, economies, political and social institutions in Sierra Leone. Women and girls face unacceptable levels of discrimination and abuse, which is not only wrong, but also, prevents them from playing a full part in society and decision-making. Yet women's empowerment must not mean simply adding to their burdens of responsibilities or building expectations of women as 'sustainability saviors'. To mainstream the involvement of women and girls in sustainable development, it demands a change in attitudes and behavior towards women and girls across all levels which are still problems in Sierra Leone.

In the same vein, ILO efforts are based on and are part of global consensus about achieving equality between women and men. Some relevant international instruments include the United Nations Charter and Declaration of Human Rights, numerous UN General Assembly resolutions, the Economic and Social Council's Agreed Conclusions on gender mainstreaming, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and its follow up. In 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and to meet all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These include especially Goal (5) on "Achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls"; Goal 8 on "Promote sustainable, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all"; and Goal 10 on "reducing inequality within and among countries". The ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality 2022-25 (Action Plan 2022-25) is linked to the SDGs in order to support a fair, inclusive and secure world of work for all.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict Theory

In the contest of gender, conflict theory argues that gender is best understood as men attempting to maintain power and privilege to the detriment of women. Being that men consider themselves as superior to their female counterparts, they construct the society for their own comfort. These excessive subjugation and oppression led the women to revoke against men's rules that retard the growth of women in every step of the way. With respect to this research, the study also commends men and women to have equal treatment as partners in development process. Although it is difficult for women to rise above men, as dominant group members create the rules for success and opportunity in the society (Farrington and Chertok 1993)

Functionalist Perspective

This theoretical framework views society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. When applied to gender, it provides insights into how gender roles are established, maintained, and function to support the structure of the society. If for any reason on part of the structure fails to function in line with societal expectations, it will affect the other parts. In this case, the theory is saying that women are not be outcasted to take part in any development planning.

The Causes of Gender Discrimination on Women Empowerment in Development Process

Gender discrimination against women is a continues challenge, despite a global commitment to gender equality. There has been no country on the planet that faces a zero-gender discrimination issue. Gender issues are recognized as a complex social engagement that affects everyone in conventional societies, people of all standards, ages, issues, origins, and extinctions. They contain areas of business, the public domain, domestic rights, professional fields of teaching, law, medical science, political science, philosophy, history, linguistics, and even areas of accessing properties. They also involve difficulties in working, lifestyle, and career forecasting; finance or the risk of living or serving and parenting; and the difference between trafficking and public safety.

Men outweigh women in all spheres of life. They have better access to education, politics, social and economic resources, labor markets and economic opportunities. Thus, these deprivations slow down productivity, economic advancement, technological progress and the institutional framework of production are adversely affected by all forms in which gender discrimination appears; and the root causes of gender discrimination on women empowerment in development process has been the way social relationships are structured. Thus, the following causes of gender discrimination are analyzed below:

Patriarchal Ideology

Male dominant has become historically constant in every human society, whether in the religious aspect, modern or traditional societies. In reality, male superiority over their female counterparts is a displeasure story in view of human right and for the protection of the female inherent dignity. Radical feminists require needs for a radical transformation of society to achieve equality for both sexes results from the assumption that gender discrimination

originates from patriarchy. The theoretical framework holds the view that patriarchy ideology legitimizes unequal and hierarchical relationship between men and women. Radical feminists also argue that no matter what measures to promote equality are taken, they only stem the tide of women's oppression while ensuring its continued and covert existence. None have worked, since the oppressive structure of gender discrimination has not changed. With mounting insight, liberal feminists have acknowledged its deep-rooted nature in everyday life, in business and management, law, education, politics, and the family. Women are equal partners in development process. They must have equal right to occupy prominent authoritative positions as compare to men. Even so, there should be strategies or provisions which will create room for women's rights to education rather reducing them to house chores. Many communities including the study area (BOAJIBU) entrust live change opportunities in the hands of men while limiting women to child bearing, early marriage, and farming activities. Thus, women remain to receive unequal treatment due to patriarchal ideology. This research recommends that our sexes should not lead to differences in accessing resources, holding chieftaincy positions, becoming political figures, restricted roles in decision making, and lower percentage of women's representation in parliament.

Cultural/ Religion/Social Construct

According to Ralph Linton 1945, culture is the way of life of the people. This implies that people exhibit different characteristics in the social environment differ from others. Osman et al (2018) has also examined that women's role in governance is low than their male counterparts and reason behind their low contribution is the culture that exists in their environments. In lieu of this, gender discrimination has been culturally constructed rather than naturally given, and these oppressive roles are fundamental to patriarchy. Women have been relegated to subordinate and inferior positions as caretakers, homemakers, or sex objects (mothering, housewifery, and whoring) that are uninformed, uneducated, and powerless. Male superiority is culturally legitimized and promoted by widely disseminated ideological notions concerning the "natural" inferiority of women (that they are emotional, nurturing, dependent, passive, irrational, incapable of logical reasoning, and easily deceived), their higher moral standards (uncontaminated by sexuality, greed, selfishness, corruption, and cruelty), and their higher police-normal innocence. This results in oppressive and secret and public discrimination against women in society's socio- economic, political structures and institutions. The two ideal types of patriarchy are "caring" and "punishing" (as in twentieth-century totalitarian blogs like fascism and communism), both reproduced by the pervasive gender system. Social structures frame people's choices, but they are not fixed: through their collective actions, women and men can alter the structures that lead to women's subordination and exclusion. At the same time, attempts to change gender norms are contested and tend to be protracted, precisely because they are about the distribution of power and resources – changes which create losers as well as winners.

Riaz (2016) has suggested that if a country is Islamic country and women are beaten mercilessly and no one can say about this. In many Islamic homes they prioritize male children to acquire chances to life change opportunities while the female children are limited to low class opportunities that will only allow them to be answerable to their male counterparts. Since women as well as men are cultural transmitters of patriarchy and gendered institutions, breaking these down requires changing shared meanings of both femininity and masculinity.

This is because patriarchy is often hegemonic and therefore invisible, leading women to internalize and accept their subordinate status to men as the natural order of things – and vice versa. Even when women are exposed to new ideas about how society might be organized differently, they may consider that it is in their interest to participate in reproducing gendered institutions, even when these are harmful to their welfare; since social behavior conveyed by society are internalized by individuals in the process of socialization, via social norms- and deviation from social norms is a source of psychological and social sanctions, individuals comply to it, in spite of inefficiency. Identity constitutes an economic variable by defining the role of each individual according to his/her gender, economic opportunities and the sexual division of labor. Therefore, the origin of gender discrimination on women empowerment in development process is rooted from the initial social organization of society; and different socialization patterns in which boys and girls are socialized about their gender roles in society. Women's experiences of gendered institutions are extremely varied across the different domains of their lives and in relation to other groups of women and of men.

This study recommends that women in Boajibu community should have equal access to all opportunities as compare to men, and let their cultures do not lead to deprivation and discrimination.

Gender Gap/Inequality

Gender inequality primarily emerges from restrictive gender norms and societal expectations, transforming able women into disabled, dependent, and low-productive individuals, thus denying them access to rights as workers, citizens, and social beings. Empowering women economically is pivotal not only for the prosperity and well-being of women but also for families, communities, and nations. Correspondingly, promoting women's equality and empowerment and combating discrimination against women is prioritized under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. Gender inequality is a tool that has demotivated developmental progress in the world due to men's physicality, superiority, or ego inferiority they feel better than their female counterparts. This has led to many corrupt practices and violation of human rights. In Sierra Leone, women are only opportune to throw their support to men in terms of politics, especially when it comes to the idea of becoming a President. That aside, some secret societies like Poro, Wodeh and many others are means of creating gender gap of which women's rights are limited. This action has shown a high degree of gender gap in the study area. Women are used as a means of generating income for the family. They are forced to go into early marriages which limit their full potentials into academic pursuits. The quota in government, and NGOs employment is far below as compare to men. For instance, none of the prominent universities has appointed a woman as a registrar from 2018 to 2024. Employing women in educational sectors is significantly important. Giving women equal participation in development process is an inborn right to enjoy their basic human rights on equal basis.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) understands achieving gender equality as delivering on three interlinked areas for girls: health, education and safety (Brief,2019). Therefore, it can influence self-confidence and a greater future. This has been the key factor of ensuring development in developed nations (Al-Shuaibi,2014). Gender inequality has negative implications for how incomes are distributed within a society, and suggest that unequal distribution of income undermines growth (Sahay, R., Cihak., M., 2018) "Women in Finance"

Gender disparities can result into a greater vulnerability of women to poverty. The world over, women perform more unpaid job than their male counterparts, and their responsibilities are important factors in describing their work status, especially during childbearing. Majority of women in our world ordered today are single parenting which increases the risks of poverty compare to other family types. Single mothers take the burden of their homes without extra helps from other family members, this will result into vulnerability and make them dwell in poverty than men in similar situations. According to 2015 UN report in Europe, 64% of the elderly poor were women. Londa Schlesinger's book, "Has Feminism Changed Science? Suggests that "Married men with families on average earn more money, live longer and happier, and progress faster in their careers," while "for a working woman, a family is a liability, extra baggage threatening to drag down her career. This view point shows clear picture of how gender inequality vastly affects women's growth in development process.

Moreover, Robin and Douthitt opined in their articles "The Division of Labor Within the Home: Have Gender Roles Changed?" opined that (a) men do not spend significantly more time with children when their wives are employed and (b) employed women spend significantly less time in child care than their full-time homemaker counterparts. In our conventional societies, men suppress women even when they are in the working class to support the family by urging them to do domestic work and comply to their sexual urge. However, this research recommends that all secret societies intending to limit women are to be abolished.

Gender Stereotype and Marginalization

Gender stereotype is a negative bias view or specific belief about another person's gender. This social process begins from birth to adulthood assign certain characteristics to individuals according their sex. Gender stereotype can pose serious threat to achieving gender equality and can lead to gender discrimination. Sex stereotyping can limit the development of natural talents and abilities of boys and girls, women and men, their educational and professional experiences as well as life opportunities. Whereas marginalization occurs when someone feels he/she is reduced to certain lesser roles in the society. Gender stereotype can dictate specific roles to people which can affects both their social and psychological wellbeing. Therefore, it leads to social inequality resulting to gender discrimination. Men have been traditionally been viewed as superior, physically fit, wiser and skillful, while women have been viewed as care givers or relegated to household jobs. In this view, jobs held by men are economically sponsored. For instance, the men football players are receiving high salaries than women's players. This is so because the men's football teams are highly sponsored and watched by huge fan based the world over. Gender stereotype can affect women attitude to food, changing perceptions of food from source of food to source of shame. A 2017 Swedish study which interviewed (through focus groups) 25 adolescence girls and women aged 15-20 years were around sport., their bodies and social norms. The finding drawn from the results showed the effect of gender stereotype on food. Women are asked to eat less in order to complete their training exercise while men normally asked to eat more so that they can become healthy. This negative stereotype adds to eating and shame of eating too much. In the study area, they men are expected to eat more so that they can become strong and healthy to carry on mining and farming activities.

Madeline et al (2015) reviewed that in different ways gender stereotypes create obstacles for women in the workplace. These challenges are wide-ranging and troublesome, with descriptive gender stereotypes resulting in women not being seen as competent and prescriptive gender stereotype resulting in being seen as likeable. Prescriptive stereotype promotes the perception that women in male-typed jobs lack the requisite attributes for growth and success. Most of the social norms affect women than men. During burial or sacrificial ceremonies, women are asked to tie their hair while the male are not asked to do so with no constitutional justification. These negative stereotype towards women results into devaluing their status quo and autonomy.

The Impacts of Gender Discrimination on Women Empowerment in Development Process

Gender discrimination refers to the treatment taken toward or against an individual in consideration based solely on gender. It involves excluding members of one gender from opportunities that are available to all members of the society. In our new world today, discriminatory behavior takes many forms, but they all involve the exclusion or rejection of individuals from achieving their full potentials. Thus, gender discrimination has some common effects on economic growth and social development, whatever the form in which the discrimination appears may have negative implications on the lives of people.

Gender discrimination significantly hampers the economic potentials and overall development of women worldwide. This manifests inequality in various forms, such as limited access to education and healthcare, wage disparities, and inadequate representation in decision making process. As outlined by the United Nations, there are clear inequalities in the Gender related Development Index (GDI), which measures aspects such as health, knowledge, and living standards between men and women. Gender discrimination stands as a significant violation of human rights, a barrier to development, and a constraint to the realization of a society's talent and potential. This matter tends to deny women their rights to health, education, economic opportunities, and participation in decision-making, aside from its harmful effects on women and girls. The impacts are economic, social, and inter-generational. Gender discrimination affects various areas that are essential to girls and women around the world. However, despite the visible impact of discrimination and violence against women and girls, female education, health, and general welfare are heavily deprioritized. As a leading advocate for children, UNICEF firmly believes that every girl and woman has the right to be treated with dignity and respect in all spheres of her life and that proper efforts must be made to address the inequities and injustices that surround them.

Women empowerment is basically the transformation of individual and collective relationships. This transformation occurs at the household, community, state, national, and international levels, and it can happen in political, social, and economic environments. Women empowerment assumes different meanings in relation to different individuals, and it is based on multiple overlapping and interlinked factors. For example, women who have experienced early marriage, domestic violence, poverty, or learning gaps, or who have not been able to access basic services or obtain citizenship status may have different obstacles to overcome in order to realize their rights. Moreover, women empowerment cannot happen in isolation of their relationships with men, as gender relations shape their lives and influence their empowerment contexts. Thus, to be fully effective, women's empowerment initiatives should not only benefit women and girls but promote gender equality efforts towards men and boys

as well, focusing on transforming social norms and advocating for positive changes in community views towards women.

An overall trend of gender discrimination is to exclude half of the population from economic opportunities, by restricting their civil liberties through restrictive norms, by reducing their productivity through damage to their physical integrity or limited access to health, by decreasing their human and physical capital accumulation via limited access to education and economic assets respectively, by restraining their bargaining power in the household, and by limiting their political and economic power.

The impact of gender discrimination is very twisting; and may possibly lead to misallocation of resources which affects growth; and it reduces the efficiency with which assets are being used to produce income. Adding to this, Malan (2014) mentions that most women in Africa are “culturally marginalized in terms of their basic human rights that include education, employment, property rights”, and this marginalization prevents women from entering or fully participating in the economy, amongst other things. As a consequence, they become heavily affected by unemployment, resulting in poverty. Also, women in developing countries are faced with lack of access to land. They struggle to attain rights such as access to credit and other productive resources. The inability of land ownership and lack of decision-making on land use by women is one of the constraints to women’s economic empowerment, as it is important and the main source of power, status, and livelihood. It is also a constraint in accessing credit and loans, especially for agricultural improvements. In cases where women are heads of households, they still lack power and control over the land they work and this is worsened by the fact that the existing rural credit policies are also blind to the existing discriminatory systems.

Another constraint experienced by women in developing countries due to gender inequality is that of education. Most teachers in African countries also have different attitudes towards male and female students, on the basis that boys need careers and girls need husbands. They tend to be dismissive and discouraging towards girls and to give more classroom time to boys, who are usually more demanding. Even when girls are encouraged to pursue a career, they are expected to opt for the ‘caring’ professions, in other words teaching and nursing”. These “gender stereotyping in the curriculum portrays girls as passive, modest, and shy, while boys are seen as assertive, brave, and ambitious. This reinforces traditional gender roles in society, and acts to limit the kinds of futures that girls are able to imagine for themselves.

Women across the globe still remain relentlessly under-represented in education fields that are mainly growth-enhancing such as mathematics, science, engineering, and technology (Adema et al., 2014). Instead, they “are holed into these disciplines which groom them for traditional roles such as nursing, community service, or secretarial work. Very few women have access to institutions of higher learning and those who do, enter specific stereotyped fields” (Malan, 2014). Also, “policy makers often continue to see the benefits of educating girls and women in terms of improving family health and welfare, rather than preparing women for a more equal place in the economy and in society. Women’s lack of skills partly explains why they continue to be confined to the poorer paid and more casual forms of paid work”. In addition, “women’s disproportionate burden of poverty and landlessness that permeates developing societies, any improvements in their role and status through education can impact on breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and inadequate schooling”.

Domestic violence remains one of the most common forms of gender-based violence that women experience across the globe. Women experience a number of abuses, of which other forms go unrecorded; these include rape, domestic violence, amongst others. 'Such violence is a violation of human rights and economic costs, as it results in both short-term and long-term negative effects on the health and welfare of women and their children' (Nagaraja, 2013). Nevertheless, women lack autonomy in making choices regarding their health due to the pervasive patriarchal practices that are shaping gender roles as well as attitudes. According to Nagaraja (2013), "autonomy of women in control over decision making, freedom in sexual relations, freedom of movement and women's attitude towards wife-beating are considered as indicators of women empowerment by the experts". Violence against women is the main disadvantage to the well-being of women worldwide. Marital rape and sexual harassment are still not recognized by the society as much as domestic violence is. According to Nagaraja (2013), the "autonomy of women in refusing sexual intercourse with their husbands is a very forceful expression of women's control over their sexuality and control over one's sexual life is integral to women's well-being and autonomy".

Therefore, constraints related to gender "reflect gender discrimination and inequalities in resources and opportunities; though class, poverty, ethnicity and physical location may also create inequalities, gender tends to make them more severe" (Ogato, 2013). Poor people lack resources which makes it harder for them to meet their basic needs. It is always harder for women who live in poor rural areas or societies where gender inequality is sharp to embark on the empowerment process, as they are the ones who are disproportionately impacted by poverty. The promotion of women's participation in society is regarded as critical in poverty reduction efforts in policy circles. Thus, "gender equality is more than a goal in itself but a fundamental precondition if we are to rise to the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and addressing gender discrimination" (Department for Women, Children and People with Disabilities, 2014). In conclusion, addressing these issues within development programs is crucial. By recognizing women as individuals with economic potentials, development initiatives toward closing gender gap. The inclusion of women in all facets of development not only promotes gender equality but also enhances community resilience and economic growth, which can eventually benefit the women and the society as a whole.

Method

Research Design

Generally, the research design for this study was a qualitative or descriptive study because the research attempts to investigate and analyze the variables in a descriptive manner; for instance, the effects of gender discrimination for women empowerment in development can best be explain descriptively than analyzed quantitatively. Apart from being qualitative, the study was also based on empirical evidence because data was collected on first hand, analyzed and conclusions will be drawn from the available evidence. In specific terms the research design was a mixed design of both qualitative and quantitative designs because as a researcher I investigated the opinion, views and perceptions of women and other stakeholders as to what extent gender discrimination is posing a serious threat to women empowerment thereby serving as a barrier to development in Boajibu community. This research brought out measures required to reduce gender discrimination and promote peace, development and women empowerment in the study area.

Sample Size and Selection Procedure

A total of eighty (80) respondents were chosen by purposive and quota sampling in Boajibu community in Simbaru Chiefdom. The eighty (80) respondents were drawn from the two genders (male and female) forty (40) respondents each; and of the forty (40) respondents a quota of twenty (20) formally employed males and twenty (20) none formally employed males, and twenty (20) formally employed females and twenty none formally employed females were selected within the study area to do holistic findings of this research. However, the eighty (80) respondents were selected based on informed consent and willingness to express their views and understanding of the research purpose. Their mental and psychological status were also taken into account in order to do accurate data presentation of this work.

Data Collection

The method of data collection for this study was a mixed design which involves both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data for this study was collected mainly by semi structured questionnaires; desk survey, focus group discussions and one to one interview. General challenges faced by all women in their development are obtained through focus group discussion. But for personal problems and barriers to women participation in development, I used one to one interview to solicit personal responses from respondents using an interview guide or interview schedule.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was collected by means of questionnaires. The responses from the questionnaire were studied and categorized into themes and then to variables. The data belonging to each variable was recorded and summarized using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics summarizes data and makes clear of any trends and patterns from the data.

Results

The study identified several key factors contributing to gender discrimination in Boajibu. Cultural stereotypes play a significant role, as traditional beliefs continue to reinforce male dominance. The social construct of gender roles limits women's participation in economic and decision-making activities, while religious beliefs further enforce female submissiveness. Differences in socialization patterns from childhood also shape unequal gender expectations, and biological distinctions between men and women are often used to justify discrimination.

Gender discrimination has widespread negative consequences on women's empowerment. It restricts their ability to exercise civil, social, economic, and political rights. Many women face limited access to education, employment, and leadership positions, which deprives them of opportunities for personal and economic growth. The misallocation of resources further deepens inequality, reinforcing the gap between men and women in terms of access to wealth, education, and decision-making power.

Gender discrimination is highly prevalent in Boajibu, with women facing exclusion from social, economic, and political participation. Unequal wages, lack of decision-making power, and restricted access to education are among the most common forms of discrimination. Women are often relegated to domestic and caregiving roles, with little opportunity for

advancement in leadership or professional sectors. These findings highlight the deep-rooted structural and cultural challenges that continue to hinder women's empowerment in the community.

Conclusion

The study deals with the impacts of gender discrimination on women empowerment in development process in Simbaru chiefdom, Boajibu, Kenema District. The results discussed, analyzed and interpreted clearly shows that gender discrimination has a strong impact on women empowerment in development process. From the investigation, it could be reasonably concluded that discriminating women in development processes may lead to backwardness of the nation.

Recommendations

Having given in summary discussion on the impacts of gender discrimination on women empowerment in development process in the Boajibu community, Simbaru Chiefdom, Kenema District, the following can be recommendations to the government, non-governmental organizations and the community working for improving the lives of women.

To the Government:

Government should embark on awareness raising campaign on equality and non-discrimination against women to maintain a national cohesion in the country at large; however, government should formulate a comprehensive policy frame work which could be treated with some amount of urgency. In that light such policy frame work for women should stress the importance of women inclusion and participation in developmental projects and programs. In formulating policy frame work, government should not also ignore the establishment of technical and vocational skill training centers at all regional level to build the capacity of women.

Government should formulate advocacy policies for the protection and promotion of women's rights.

Government should provide funding and skill training for women who are less privileged in the study area.

To Non-Governmental Organizations:

Organizations should be realistic and avoid generating false expectations that the situation of women is going to be vastly improved by means of development programs alone. A framework is also needed that is holistic and crosscutting, that reflects the importance of taking into account the necessity of working at multiple levels of society (individuals, households, communities) and that links programs that directly target women with those that benefit women directly.

Traditional and Community Leaders:

Traditional leaders should encourage women participation in decision making process and as partners in development and create a community that is easy for everyone to access resources. However, traditional leaders should create funding mechanisms for women in their communities and land holding procedure should not be too rigid especially agricultural land; and cultural reform on inheritance laws and attitudinal change towards women.

Declarations

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