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Knowledge Networking for Africa's Development

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Strengthening African Networks on Gender and Development
for Policy Implementation

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**STRENGTHENING AFRICAN NETWORKS
ON GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT FOR
POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.**

Preliminary Draft

Regina G.M.Karega

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1.0 Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and an essential condition in the process of transforming African economies from being fragile and in poverty reduction measures being undertaken by most African governments. Publications from research in have proliferated, testifying to the opening up of a vast new field of research and to the generation of a new body of knowledge that focuses on gender relations in the household, at the community, and in the wider society. Gender research has also highlighted issues in relation to economic cultural and political development. Studies on women in Africa conducted by African women have emerged more recently, in the 1980s' Since the implementation of the Beijing platform of action there has been more research on gender issues. This paper argues that it is fundamental for knowledge generated through gender research, to influence policy on gender concerns, at country and regional level, especially with the impacts of Globalisation of the economy. This further suggests a strong case for networks to facilitate both the cross- fertilisations of ideas on issues of gender as well as sharing experiences in the implementation of gender policy and concerns.

2.0 Trends Gender Research in the African Diaspora

In 1997 Association of African Women in Research and Development (AAWORD) was founded. African feminists who sought to institutionalise their presence and therefore also articulate the agenda of African feminism by facilitating feminism and activism by African women scholars. Despite these promising beginnings AAWORD has not been very successful in achieving its goals or in bringing together the African women scholars involved in gender research within and beyond the region (Amina Mama 1996).

In the absence of a viable regional forum, a series of Nationally-based initiatives have given autonomous voice to African Women Scholars, amongst these:

The Women's research and documentation center at Ibadan University, the Development and Women's studies group at the University of Ghana Women's Research and

Documentation Project at the University of Dar-es Salaam, and at Makerere The Gender unit at Eduardo Mondlane University of Mozambique to mention a few.

Most of the ongoing research in the African Diaspora is not shared among scholars and policy makers. The need to share such valuable information is pertinent especially now so that it can influence policy, nationally, regionally and well as in a global economy. This paper is a think piece on some of the possible ways such information could be shared.

3.0 Measures to Strengthen Networks for Gender Research

Centre for collaborative Research on Gender

Given the above situation, this paper proposes that there is need for the establishment of a centre for collaborative research on Gender to strengthen research capacity on gender issues in Africa. The centre will also be in a position to harmonise research through disseminating information researches done on its website to avoid replication but also to allow for comparative studies, nationally, regionally and in the Diaspora.

The key objective of the proposed centre would be to enhance the contribution of knowledge to the key challenges of economic development in Africa by giving long term support to gender research partnerships in the Diaspora. Specifically, the centre will:

- help in support of co-ordinated policy debates based on empirical findings, so as to avoid duplication of research
- create a critical mass of gender research capacity in key areas for economic recovery in Africa especially in areas where there is no adequate data for instance in violence against women, the trade unions and gender equality etc.

The centre for collaborative research in gender would have operate through four zonal centres, one in Eastern Africa covering Kenya Uganda Tanzania, the great lakes region and the horn of Africa; the second zone would be Southern Africa, the third would

include Central Africa including Cameroon, Zaire, Gabon etc. The fourth would be West Africa, including Senegal, the Gambia Ghana etc.

Linking knowledge to Gender Responsive Policy

A recent research (IDS 2001) quotes examples from African countries and points out that National Women Mechanisms (NWM) put in place by governments have weaknesses of actually incorporating gender in to development, because they are suffering from a male backlash.

The suggested Centre for Collaborative research on Gender in Africa will have to play a major role in the sensitisation of government officials that gender issues cater for both men and women and are not there to threaten the set structures except in instance where gender issues are not taken care of.

Further, the knowledge generated should be seen to be influencing policy within the countries of research. This calls therefore for stronger networks between governments and the research institutions. A relation of trust between governments and researchers will need to be encouraged. This will help open up governments to greater gender responsiveness in development and research projects. Further, the researchers will be in a position to inform the government through ICTs and discussions on key policy debates related to gender and development.

Linking Knowledge to Gender Responsive Governance

Knowledge generated on gender issues must also be seen to be influencing gender responsive governance especially in the implementation of the Platform of Action at country level. The knowledge on gender issues will need to be used in the processes of governance in relation to leadership, to governance in institutions especially in the implementation of affirmative action, in addressing poverty and engendering development. The proposed centre for collaborative research in gender will be a major

focal point in networking and in bringing together researchers who will push respective governments to implement good governance practices that are gender responsive.

Creating Strategic Partnerships

The proposed centre for Collaborative Research on Gender will also be charged with the responsibility of initiating strategic partnerships between institutions that deal with gender research in the African Diaspora. The Centre which should work in partnership with ACW and University faculties/ departments dealing with gender research find a central point for linking as well as sharing and disseminating research findings on gender from various African countries and regions.

Strengthen human capacity through ICT in Institutions of Higher Learning

Strengthen the ICT institutions of higher learning and the gender centres at the national level so that there is wider usage of ICT in searching disseminating and sharing information on research on gender can be enhanced. This can be achieved through use of already existing institutions which have some capacity to communicate and network using ICT to a central organ and provide information and updates on gender research.

Create a Website on Gender Research in the African Diaspora

The proposed Centre for Collaborative Research on Gender will have to initiate a website on gender research for the African Diaspora where research can be posted and accessed and further encourage African researchers to display their own work for sharing this information with others. The website can be maintained by ACW.

A research Data bank

Within the website there is need to create a data bank, that carries all information on researches/ publications, which will be accessible through the website. This data will be easily accessible to African scholars and could even be purchased at a fee, which could be affordable to African scholars and researchers in even those countries where the purchasing power of scholars is extremely limited.

Directory of individual and institutional experts

The same website could be used to comprise of a directory of individual and institutional experts in various disciplines relating to gender issues in the African Diaspora. The website would need to continuously updated. The directory will be of benefit to donors, and will enable cross fertilisation of ideas among researchers on gender issues especially for purposes of networking and collaborating on cross-cutting issues, for comparative studies, especially longitudinal researches.

Strategies for Policy Research: A role for African Think Tanks

The Centre for collaborative gender research in Africa having all the information on research carried out should be in a position to point out areas in which further research on gender issues is needed, especially policy research. Thus the need for think tanks that will establish in which areas this further research is needed and then proceed to commission such. The think tank should also provide advice to governments on making informed decisions that address the gender divide. Increase interaction among networks across the continent and establish a networking mechanism for information exchange and co-operation among African researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

The think tanks will also encourage research in areas where information and statistics are lacking. There is a need to encourage research and gender-desegregated data and indicators where statistics and data is lacking on sensitive gender issues such as; violence, reproductive health etc.; and for concrete targets and progress indicators at both macro and sectoral levels. Further funds for such research needs to be established so that those researchers in these areas can get the financial assistance for these processes.

Pilot in a few countries.

These suggestions require enormous funds but there is need to pilot with a few countries and a few institutions before a wide scale implementation. There is also need to facilitate

short term training for such awareness, with the human resource persons who will be used for these partnerships. Further, this thinking calls for the creation of strategic partnerships with institutions that can handle the ICT website nationally for the research network.

Before embarking on these activities, there is need to establish which organisation's in each of the pilot countries have information on gender and development, create contact and interest for sharing such information through ICT. It is also important to establish which organisations have some ICT infrastructure and are willing to be involved in such activities.

References

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