

Full Length Research Paper

Towards a transformative reconstruction of gender: A critical review of women in the international space

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This is a phenomenological, philosophical and positional paper that seeks to provide a transformative view of gender, with a particular focus on the role that women play in the international space. The author illuminates the role of women since their documentation was left out in the past due to their already existing position of being socially and educationally disadvantaged. The author argues that the role of women is very critical and needs to be re-branded by illuminating gender roles by incorporating a combined ethnographic, Christian perspective is that gender is not seen as all about hardened men and women who do not have any role to play except in their homes and church arenas. The purpose of the paper is to illuminate gender roles as inclusive of both men and women in the international space. This transformation begins with gender blindness, awareness and sensitivity to gender issues where a call is made for transformation of gender as spaces occupied by both men and women. Based on a combined methodological framework of phenomenological, Christian perspective and a feminist standpoint, the author argues for a more comprehensive and inclusive way of reconstructing gender to include both men and women in the international space. Women need to personally experience their dynamic role in gender issues, critique works for both men and women, and based on their perceptions, reconstruct gender for the whole purpose of bridging gender gaps globally.

Key words: Christian perspective, women, gender, policies, international.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is often misconstrued at referring to women because during the early stages of the global winds of women in development, women were disadvantaged. The liberal approach to integrating women as part of the development processes globally did not succeed because improving the mental characteristics of women did not earn them the same platform with men especially given the odds of unjust patriarchal and capitalist societies. Since the Women's Conference in Beijing, there was a transformed realization that men must be brought on board to effect gender transformative policies that would address the practical and strategic needs of both men and women to bring about gender parity. The author argues that the failure of the global gender movement to include the phenomenological feminist Christian perspective is one of the selected reasons for distortion of the role of women generally and in the international space. A transformative reconstruction of

gender roles with a particular reference to women in the international space is overdue. The author explores trends that culminate in providing a philosophical overview of great strides that Botswana has made in bridging gender gaps in education over the last three decades from 1980, when the Women's Affairs Unit was formed, to date. The author borrows extensively from a combined methodological framework of gender as an analytical tool, theoretical, empirical and interventive research on the transition from the women in development policy to the gender and development approach (GAD) implemented through the national gender framework of 2000 (Women's Affairs Department, 2000) Over the last 45 years, Botswana has made a gradual transition from gender blindness to awareness and sensitivity. The model of transition from gender blindness to awareness and gender sensitivity describes a holistic process which led to the current status of and

expected outcomes of the transition and the need to reconstruct gender through sensitive transformative policies and programmes.

The gender movement is usually perceived as the province of aggressive, hardened and un-submissive women who would like to usurp male power, take over, dominate and render men helpless as heads of households. The author argues that, if the gender movement in Botswana and globally is expected to receive audience from other societal groups, there is a need to add the phenomenological Christian feminist dimension to illuminate the important role that both men and women play in the global arena from the time of creation to-date. However, men's roles are already illuminated in sporting activities but nothing substantial is documented about women, yet women are key partners to men even in the international space. The paper therefore calls for documentation of women's history as having contributed towards the World Cup alongside their male counterparts. The paper is informed by a biblical perspective, and a critical phenomenological feminist standpoint (Holy bible, Women's Affairs Department, 2005).

A combined phenomenological, Christian perspective and feminist standpoint would transform the negative connotations of gender roles and give a healthy and transformed perspective that would give both men and women an opportunity to develop a broadened knowledge base, positive attitudes to appreciate the spaces that women occupied globally during the 2009 World Cup.

Gender and its relevance to MDGs 3

MGD 3: Promoting gender equality

Consistent with Millennium Development Goal 3, Botswana has made strides in promoting gender equality. There are progressive laws and policies that promote gender equality. Examples include abolition of marital power, setting up of minimum wage, and challenging socio-cultural practices that discriminate against women and the girl child. Although a lot had been achieved in laying the groundwork for programmes and activities that raise awareness on gender parity, lack of political commitment to signing the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Protocol poses a big challenge to commit to gender issues (MDG Status Report Dissemination seminar, MFDP/UNDP, 29th March 2011).

Women's role: Selected biblical references

It is important to interrogate the role of women briefly from the point of creation as attested by the Old Testament. Women are special, made from Adam's rib, as indicated in the book of Genesis. Men by contrast,

though the first to be created, were made from clay and water. The first man, Adam, was given dominion over all living creatures, plants and animals. He was, furthermore, given a directive to enjoy the Garden of Eden, except, the fruit in the middle of that garden.

The Old Testament

The power of the first woman made Adam disobey his covenant with God regarding the Garden of Eden. When Adam fell short of the glory of God after eating the forbidden fruit, he blamed Eve for his lack of obedience. It is important to note that Eve never had any covenant with God about the Garden of Eden; hence it was not her business to account to God for Adam's sinful nature. The author would not like to speculate on whether or not Eve was of stronger character not to break the covenant, had it been there was one between her and God. However, that she manipulated Adam is indicative of the strength of her character, as compared to Adam's.

As a strong believer in the assumptions of adults' maturity, responsibility and sense of independence, the author argues that Adam should have known better not to disobey God. Regardless of reasons behind his action he (Adam) remains up to this day, accountable for breaking the covenant. Given his age, being the first one to be created, and the way God entrusted in him with the covenant, possibly based on assumptions of Adam's strength and wisdom, one would have expected better results, which were never meant to be.

Possibly realizing a woman's strength and the need to give her equal opportunities, in the book of Proverbs 31, God entrusted a woman with characteristics and roles that were so enormous that, as a young high school girl in a Bible class, the author wondered exactly what would be the role of men if all women were to be like the capable wife described in Proverbs 31. The author of this paper points out that she read this book so many times that she got inspired to be like the woman described in it. She, however, never stopped wondering 'What then is the role of a man, if a capable woman is entrusted with all this? Isn't a man now a boy grown tall and likely to resort to delayed truancy and belated delinquency if someone is there toiling for his glory? This is food for thoughts. This description of women as portrayed in Proverbs 31 suggests that women are worthwhile, wonderfully made to succeed, based on existing role models in all aspects of civic life.

The New Testament

In the New Testament, Jesus empowered the Samaritan woman by dialoguing with her on many things she did not know. Through this enlightenment as empowerment, the Samaritan woman realized her worth. Globally, women

need to notice that the gender movement can not succeed without a supernatural source of power. Women need to re-read the Bible and see for themselves, not other people, in terms of our purpose in life. If this happened to the 1st woman on earth, in the Garden of Eden, this can happen to all women who believe that there is a supernatural being that provides strength and security for women to beat the odds of unjust societies in which they live.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender roles as relations of power

Botswana National Vision 2016 drafted by the Presidential Task Group on a long term Vision for Botswana (1997) and the MDG Status Report Dissemination seminar, (2010) comprise statements of intent to achieve gender parity. Gender roles at household, community, national and international levels are relations of power. At household level, generally, men particularly in Botswana and generally in the African context have a final say where major decisions that are to be made. At community and national levels, men still predominate as major decision makers. Women are expected to be subordinate, and submissive. What is known is that gender roles as relations of power illuminate men and Chief Executive Officers while women do mainly unpaid work that is not reflected in official statistics of most governments of the global world. This article fills the gap that Christian women also play crucial roles in the international space.

Power, which is also a function of engaging in acquisition of knowledge, is the ability to coerce, and dominate. Power is a function of sex and gender roles. Gender is very important to audit in all fronts because it illuminates socio-cultural roles and responsibilities of both men and women in any society, and reasons why the world is as it is. Power determines social status, economics and participation in education and other public sectors.

Gender is a lens commonly used by different streams of feminist actors who would like to bridge gender gaps by launching a political struggle against women's oppression and subordination by either improving the existing systems or structural changes within the context of the supernatural being as the maker of all, within and outside the Christian church and other belief systems. For instance, the Islamic religion relegates women to household level and not to any meaningful role in the international space. Women who rebel against the teachings of Islam are free to join other women and regain their dignity as human beings worthy of recognition in the international spaces that they occupy on merit. Others who were oppressed have reportedly abandoned abusive relationships and operate as independent free thinkers who successfully run their homes and take

up international jobs for which they qualify.

Gender analysis also indicates that reproductive health involves participation of both males and females at different levels. While they are both "implicated" in sexual and reproductive health, women and girls are recorded victims of rape, defilement, domestic violence which are linked to poor performance at secondary school, low self-esteem, increased HIV infections, unwanted pregnancies, baby dumping, unsafe abortions, sterility mobility and morality compared to men, have a lot of strength of character that is often overlooked. There is a need to reconstruct gender by adding the Christian dimension especially in countries where Christianity is the dominant religion and Christians form the majority in relation to people of other religions. The significance of a feminist standpoint in articulating women's positionality in the international space is crucial to redress the plight of the gender previously left behind by women.

Women can only take up their rightful spaces internationally if they are well prepared to meet the challenges and pride in themselves as women and not objects to be pitied by men. Only then can they truly be women fit to be part of the key actors in the international space.

Gender is globally advocated as a relational concept that includes both men and women from all walks of life regardless of educational status, level of gender sensitivity, race³ geographical location, and other characteristics through different historical epochs.

The voices of role models who are active in the global gender movement, church and Christian women, women in paid and unpaid work, commercial sex workers, women with or without children must be heard, documented and locally and internationally through the role models of women and men in the local and international spaces. Only then can the global community work towards a transformative, balanced and inclusive reconstruction of gender in reference to both men and women and the roles they play in society.

The government of Botswana developed the National Gender Framework as part of the efforts to guide integration of gender issues in development planning. Increasing access to disadvantaged groups, including women, is one of the main objectives of national development as stipulated in the National Vision 2016. This poses great challenges for development leading to development of skills, knowledge and positive attitudes towards self-employment and general progression of women in all aspects of national development. Christian women in particular do not have first hand experiences of disparities in gender issues. They do not have their voices heard on the gender movement because gender transformative lobbying roles are usually associated with the circular world and women who are not God fearing. There is a subtle marginalisation of women in the gender movement, yet the fight for gender transformative policies, where progress is made, benefits all women regardless

of their contribution to the struggle.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is informed by a combination of one major component of qualitative methodology and two strategies of data collection. The tradition of qualitative methodology, namely phenomenology, is very crucial for informing this study. Furthermore, a desk review of policies and the author's relevant documents on gender research, and gender activism informed the paper. This work which includes serving as a gender researcher since 1991, a lecturer on gender courses, serving as a facilitator in different workshops on gender, gender mainstreaming, HIV/AIDS, poverty and identities as gender based problems. The author captured ideas of fellow gender activists during the 2009 World Cup celebrations, 16 days of activism against gender based violence commemoration with Gender Links, Botswana in 2011, and the USAID 21 days of activism that subsequently followed the routine 16 days celebrations. The sub themes echoed the need for transformative policies and programmes that will, amongst others, bring an end to gender based violence and make the world a better place to be. Sadly, over 100 women attended the two sessions while only 10 men featured as supporters to the gender movement in both functions. This further strengthens the argument that women are the best to articulate gender roles and disparities to bring the already privileged men on board.

Phenomenology is concerned with understanding the essence, first hand experience, and interpretation of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced them (Merriam, 2001). Phenomenologists agree that a rich, full understanding of any human phenomenon requires a deep examination and probing of people's lived experiences. The author have deeply observed and made interpretations of their lives as living examples of women who have experienced Botswana as a nation working under gender blind policies. As time went on, and with the influence of globalization, the gender movement spread from the north to the south. Moustakas (1994) captures the meaning of phenomenology as follows:

The challenge facing the social science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection. The process involves a blending of what is really present with what is imagined as present from the vantage point of possible meanings; thus a unity of the real and the ideal (p. 27).

The authors' view is that all human experiences are interpretive. Their interpretive stance framed the task of articulating the transition from her own existentialist experiences as a Motswana woman and from the experiences of others from the rural, urban and remote area backgrounds that sail the same boat of moving from gender blindness to awareness, and to gender sensitivity and requisite steps towards lobbying for gender transformative policies. In reconstructing this transition from the author's personal perspectives, a combined theoretical and methodological approach was the most appropriate. A Phenomenological approach within qualitative methodology argues that only those with existential experiences and meanings of what it means to have moved from gender blindness to awareness, and gender sensitivity in Botswana as a nation, can best articulate and give a holistic description and understanding of the transformation.

Secondly, the author's relevant documents on gender research and gender activism from 1991 to date informed this paper. A recollection of the author's publications based on gender research suggests that there has indeed been a movement from gender

blindness, to awareness and gender sensitivity which reflect a gradual twist in efforts to redress gender issues and upgrade the status of women and the girl child not only in terms of access to education but designing policies that promote inclusivity in all fronts.

Thirdly, the conceptual framework based on a combination of gender, a feminist standpoint, theoretically, empirically and interventive research on gender and gender mainstreaming as the expected output in the model of best practice as suggested in the conceptual framework section informed this paper.

Finally, the author has served as a gender researcher and activist in running workshops on gender issues, the process of mainstreaming gender in Botswana Government Ministries, the vocational sector, and within the nongovernmental organization (NGO) communities in 2005. Amongst her classic works are study on a gender analysis of Botswana's water sector (1991), a study on Women, Poverty and Literacy (Raditloaneng, 2010), a chapter of Sociological input and gender analysis for Botswana's National Land Policy Study (Raditloaneng, 2003), and a report of the four series of national workshops on gender, HIV and AIDS (Modie-Moroka and Raditloaneng, 2008).

This paper is informed by a Christian Feminist standpoint. The space occupied by women since the time of creation has already been articulated above. Feminism is a political struggle to end forms of discrimination against women. Botswana as a nation is a party to the convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), the gender and development approach (GAD) and other international treaties, instruments and accords (Women's Affairs Department/Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, 2000).

Justification for a Christian feminist standpoint

A Christian feminist perspective is a brand of feminism that strives to politically launch a struggle against all forms of discrimination against Christian women. It is grounded on biblical teachings and what is expected of the roles of both men and women. Consistent with prescriptions of the Bible, both women and men were assigned roles to play to keep the marriage institution intact and useful. Women were assigned to be submissive, while men were assigned to love their wives and lead the households in a consultative and respectful manner. It was envisaged that men and women could only play their God intended roles when filled with the Holy Spirit to guide their operations. From a Christian feminist perspective, women need to be empowered in all forms so that they can intrinsically and extrinsically reclaim their rightful positions politically, spiritually, socially, culturally and economically in the global space. Women must have an internal propeller switched on for success, positive thinking and trust in their abilities as democratically change agents. The first task is for women to empower themselves and let people see them during their ongoing process of their growth as change and changeable agents. Women must move from their perception as dwarfs to giants or eagles, just like men.

Empowerment of women as a political struggle to end all forms of oppression began with Jesus himself in Luke 4:18; Acts 1:8. Women, through role models here need repeated words of encouragement, creativity and actions, need to acquire the knowledge, positive attitudes, and skills for best practices.

During the crucifixion, women of Bible times played an important role in witnessing what was to happen to Jesus. They cried for him and felt the pain of the cross. Mary the mother of Jesus was recognized as one of the women hard hit by the pain of seeing her son on the cross. "Mother, behold your son, son, behold your mother." From the time Jesus started his ministry as a savior of the nation, up to the time he was crucified, Joseph, the father of Jesus, was hardly mentioned. Failure to document his role, in contrast to

Mary's indicates that women are more powerful in character than men. During the resurrection, women were the first to see Jesus.

This paper borrowed extensively from a combined framework of gender issues, this is an ethnographic study based on the author's activism in the gender movement, theoretical, empirical and interventive research on gender globally and particularly in Botswana.

Gender relations and a feminist standpoint

Gender is a socio-culturally constructed notion of the roles of men and women in any society. It is an analytical tool, a lens and a set of social relationships defining people as masculine or feminine (Mbilinyi, 1996; Jagger and Rothernberg, 1993). Gender is about the psychological, social, cultural differences in access to vocational education between men and women. It is a conversion from biological basis to behavioral differences. Sex is biological while gender is a social construct. Women who develop from gender blindness to awareness and to gender sensitivity are the best to explain their phenomenological experiences of the role of women in the international space. As Third World Feminist actors argue, women need to define themselves, their roles and not wait for someone else to define the spaces they occupy within households and in the international arena.

Gender is a lens commonly used by different streams of feminist actors of liberal and radical traditions. A common thread binding all the feminist actors is that they launch political struggles to end all forms of gender-based discrimination in training, promotion, access to education, employment and work based-learning. Discrimination is mainly against women (girls) rather than men (boys).

In Southern Africa, particularly Botswana, the feminist movement has found its place although actors are not a homogenous group. Two main streams of feminist actors have emerged since independence. There is a camp that seems to have been greatly influenced by the Liberal Feminist stream, in that it calls for improvement of the position of women within existing structures (BCW, YWCA, Women's Church Groups). One of these groups is the Women in Development approach (WID) characterized by an intention to address constraints to assist women to be economically empowered by giving them an opportunity to access resources to earn or obtain a source of livelihood.

Another group is radical in orientation and makes a milestone by moving away from the WID to gender and development as a broader way of conceiving the root causes of women's plight and addressing them in a holistic way by looking at the relationship between men and women. This group seems to have articulate sentiments similar to global groups and international agencies that have and continue to advocate for more than just education of the girl child since the 1990s. The latter calls for gender transformative policies to redress the root causes of gender-based disparities in all fronts (Department of Women's Affairs, Emang Basadi, Women against AIDS/Rape, etc). As described earlier, feminist actors do not agree on the root causes of women's subordination and oppression. However, the common thread binding all feminist actors is that they challenge all forms of gender-based discrimination, especially discrimination against women in all fronts.

Another feature of research deals with visions and slogans articulated by different stakeholders. Within these visions and slogans is the notion of "Education for All" and Education for Work for All". These are slogans meant to portray a commitment to equity in access to VET, work based learning and meeting specific needs of the economy.

The author adopts a Third World Feminist Standpoint in articulating the content of the process of transition from gender blindness to gender awareness, and finally, gender sensitivity and reconstructing gender roles in the international space.

DISCUSSION

Global women and the relevance of the gender movement

While women celebrate their achievements annually during the International Women's Day and other globally recognized celebrations, women must not lose track of men and other partners in the journey. Men are very important to benchmark the spaces occupied by women. Initial feminist thinkers wrongly thought that changing the characteristics of women through training for the corporate world would give them equal status with their male counterparts. However, even in the corporate world, women are exploited, sexually harassed and sometimes have stunted growth as professionals. Women fail to beat the odds of unjust capitalist societies. Many flaws have been identified, which are associated with women's lack of professional growth under capitalism. The space they occupy is mainly the clerical and low level administrative pools where it would take forever, or never, to progress.

In Botswana, a twist from the women in development initiative, whose major aim was to integrate women in sustainable development, to gender and development, came into existence due to the realization that women could not make an overall through the provision of equal opportunities. Women thus did not exist in a vacuum. Men also populate the same world at a much higher level in terms of decision-making in civic life.

As of January 2011, Botswana and Mauritius were the only two countries that had not signed the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. In Botswana, failure to sign was prompted by the need to tone the legal language of the protocol to make it easy to understand before making a formal commitment. However, several programmes had been run, indicating the Government of Botswana as one of the pace setters in promoting Gender and Development as a basic human right. According to the Gender Department in Gaborone SADC office, there are critical areas identified as priority areas and education and training is one of 12 critical areas in SADC strategic plan. Botswana and other SADC States have made a commitment to equal representation of women and men in the decision making of member states and SADC structures at all levels. The target was not received except in the judiciary which reached a target of 30% by increasing the number of women judges to 3 by 2005. A critical question is "Are there any efforts towards meeting the targeted 30% in other sectors?" Monitoring and Evaluation (M and E) mechanisms are needed to ensure that the target is reached in the local government, public sectors and cabinet so that women can be well represented in paid work. Similarly, M and E tools are needed to continue the gains made during the World Cup, no matter how invisible they may be.

The pre-independence education in Botswana was

dominated by missionary activity, mission schools, gender gaps and socio-cultural stereotypes. Boys were better-off groomed for the labour force while girls were to be preserved for marriage and womanhood. The main thrust of education was for basic literacy essential for Bible reading and enhanced spirituality rather than bridging gender gaps.

The post-independence era is marked by growing gender sensitization and advocacy for education of the girl child. This came as a brainchild of responses to gender-based discrimination against women's access to education. Strategies focused not only on increasing women's access to income but to issues of redressing gender-based discrimination and oppression.

In post-independence Botswana, examples of institutions where gender mainstreaming was done and adopted as policy documents are the University of Botswana and the Women's Affairs Department. The Vision 2016 of the University of Botswana (2002:4-5) also envisions Botswana to be:

"A leading academic center of excellence in Africa and the world". Within the UB vision, we have values including equity, cultural diversity, social responsibility, accountability and transparent decision-making.

Celebrating women-2010 World Cup: Opportunities and threats

The achievements of women in sporting activities need to be recognized. Women have demonstrated intelligence from biblical times to date. Women have served in the world cup to officially open and close the event. Women have served as volunteers, athletes, pageants and models during the world cup. Although a transition from gender awareness to sensitivity suggests that modeling places women at risk of being negatively defined by men as sex objects, modeling decently as independent professionals, and not for commercial sex work, can take women to greater heights. The field of Adult and continuing Education as a profession discourages any programmes and activities that disempower the ability of women to progress as independent professionals.

Women have served as volunteers for different tasks as there was a lot of preparatory work to be done for no pay. Women have played significant roles as primary caregivers and as parents to children of absentee fathers. Overall, women are accepted as 'whole' even as unemployed and poor single heads of households. Their perceived incapacity, which is socio-culturally constructed, is manifested when they are bereaved (loss of spouse or child) or need to go through the process of handing over their children in marriage. These are, amongst others, two occasions in which I have seen a dramatic twist in the lifelong strength of women to helplessness and disempowerment of the very people who do phenomenal

work in all other aspects of lifelong programmes they engage in as individuals, parents, community activists, professionals, and homemakers.

Women are of strong character in their own right, and rendered emotional, moral, financial and material support to their spouses, youth and children as athletes who attended or participated in the world cup. Women are underrepresented in incidents of suicide (indicating strong character and perseverance) but overrepresented in passion killings as victims. Women do pursue careers in Science and Technology-medicine and engineering, where there are role models to assist them to rise up to the challenge.

As aforementioned earlier, women have served in the 2010 World Cup, and will continue to serve in other endeavors. Women must harness the gains made during the World Cup, for further, programmes and actions that can advance global gender movement.

Illuminating the strong character of women would help change the mindsets that women are worthy of creation and recognition that they have value and strength. Women in Botswana are key actors in disseminating messages about HIV/AIDS and socialization of children to assume culturally appropriate gender roles.

Challenges faced by women in the international space

Women need to see themselves, rather than others, in the international space so that they can compete alongside their male counterparts. Women must work together with role models (both male and female) to break patriarchal and martrical structures of dominance where they exist as sources of empowerment for women. Women must be resilient, move out of the box so that they do not remain invisible in the international space due to their socialization that it is a male province. Women are affected by their multiple roles and are well represented in unpaid work as caregivers, wives, breadwinners.

Barriers to women's excellence

Women's socialization from early childhood to adulthood makes them see others in themselves, not vice versa. For instance, they are socialized to expect marriage, not to initiate it. They are socialized to have a man as a bread winner, not women themselves. Women believe and fight with other women that they label as 'commercial sex workers, hole diggers' who crumble their marriages, as if these sex workers and hole diggers do not have men as clients.

Gendered socio-cultural norms and customs disempower women and breed inferiority complex and dissection of some spaces as male or a female province.

Future directions

At a micro level, women need to work hard, carry out a Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of themselves and fill the gaps, work hard and occupy their spaces in the international arena. At a macro level is the need for commitment and implementation of the action plans based on international instruments and accords such as the SADC Gender Protocol, Global partnerships, unlearn and learn as part of the process of lifelong education and learning societies.

Hard work pays

If there was no word 'work' the world would be a very different place from what it is today. Both men and women need to work hard and earn recognition and spaces in the international arena. To succeed in the international space, women need to cluster and develop a clear sense of purpose in the midst of their multiple roles, and not claim the position of fragile objects that exist to be pitied by the rest of society.

Women must work hard and remain focussed on what is important. Women are often identified with trivialities and petty jealousies and individualism. They need to make a breakthrough by making an effort to see the big picture in terms of their educative experiences, rather than bicker on uneducative trivialities which make life difficult for not only themselves but others.

Strengths in women

Women must see strength in themselves by turning the mirrors inwards; as worthy of creation, and not accidents of history. Once they see their strengths, they can make a breakthrough in the different areas in which they are expected to function, including turning the mirror outwards to transform their socio cultural environments to be both inclusive and conducive. Basic principles such as access to information for informed decision-making is a 'must have.' Women must have dreams and concretize them to reality.

There are many groups of successful women. Celebrating women marks the beginning of a participatory process they must begin, to see and make steps to use the strengths in themselves and others that they know to move on to greater heights.

Weaknesses

Women must be aware of their internal weaknesses and work on them for success. Some of the weaknesses include lack of training in leadership, assertiveness and management. Women who are not properly empowered

and groomed to be leaders get easily offended and divided in occupying spaces in the political arena. For instance, the type of language used in political rallies is very rough and not easy for women to tolerate. Leadership involves developing capacity to have thick skin to survive the storms of competing in what is usually a male province.

Opportunities and threats

Globalisation has resulted in information exchange and rebuilding of global, regional and local networks of men and women who can work together. The major threats to women are lack of funding and their inability to join the global networks of men and women of substance who can give them an opportunity to grow and be competitive enough to occupy their international spaces.

Commitment to the SADC Protocol

The SADC protocol on Gender and Development sets priority areas that women need to rise up to the challenge of contextualising and use as a guideline. A lot of what has been achieved by other countries was possible within some form of framework.

Partnerships

Gender links and partnerships are also crucial because until we start working together, we remain individuals with a pull her down (PHD) syndrome. Together women can succeed. As a collective of women founders, women need baseline to set up baseline information, record women's history in the gender movement to know who is available for a particular type of work.

Unlearn to learn

Women need to unlearn the old ways and embrace change as suggested earlier. This study would like to spoil the broth but wish you the best in all your present and future endeavours. In this forum, and out there are many men and women of substance that can assist to empower women and take themselves to greater heights.

This presentation would be ended with two poems by women. These two poems are a cocktail from the International women's day celebrations. These two poems by *Rabindrath Tagor* and *Shreya koppaka* are dedicated to all the women here and around the global world:

By Rabindrath Tagor

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers

But to be fearless in facing them
 Let me not pray for the stilling of my pain
 But for the heart to conquer it
 Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield
 But to my own strength
 Grant me that I may not be a coward feeling your mercy
 in my successes alone
 But let me find the grasp of your hand
 In my failure.

Poem 2: Proud To Be A Woman by Shreya Koppaka

Now that I am eighteen, a mature person,
 I realize how lucky I am to be a woman,
 Because she is smart and an intellectual,
 And she deserves to be treated as an individual,
 Nobody has the right to push her around,
 Nobody can set rules, to which she should remain bound,
 She can take on the world and win all by her selves,
 She doesn't need support or approval of anybody else,
 She fits perfectly into any roll,
 She can make four walls into a home,
 She takes care of whole family with delight,
 When she is a homemaker the house looks bright,
 When she is a professional she brings energy to the
 place,
 The whole world revolves around her keeping her the
 base,
 There is nothing on earth she can't do,
 She can raise kids and run a company too,
 She has always been two steps ahead of him,
 But he chooses to be in light so dim,
 He does not understand that without her world won't
 work,
 He just doesn't agree and acts like a jerk,
 He won't admit that he needs her more than him she
 needs,
 Otherwise who'll wash his clothes and his mouth who will
 feed,
 Who will take the yelling and the frustration?
 And who will make him feel like the emperor of the
 nation,
 He needs a she in every aspect of life,
 So it is important for a man to have a wife,
 For the dependable and insecure man marriage is a
 precaution
 But for her it is not a necessity but just an option,
 For at all known fields than man she is better,
 It's her decision in the end that would matter,
 She is strong and cares a damn for the loose-talker,
 Because though she walks in a group she is also a lone
 walker,
 For she has proved that on any given day,
 Better than a man she can lead the way,
 So with all the goals dreams and determination,
 I can say that a woman is god's best creation.

Conclusions

A transformative reconstruction of gender is overdue and requires taking into account the crucial spaces occupied by women from all walks of life, including Christian women in the international space. Transformation requires the ability to bring about changes in the experiences of women as key stakeholders on the gender movement, expanded knowledge base, negative to positive attitudes and skills to, amongst other function beyond the household level.

Gender roles play a very important role in the socio-demographic processes. Both men and women qualify to occupy their rightful places in the international space. Women, compared to men, have a lot of strength of character that is often overlooked. There is a need to reconstruct gender by adding the Christian dimension especially in countries where Christianity is the dominant religion and Christians form the majority in relation to people of other religions. The significance of a Feminist Standpoint in articulating women's positionality in the international space is crucial to redress the plight of the gender previously left behind: women.

Women can only take up their rightful spaces internationally if they are well prepared to meet the challenges and pride in themselves as women and not object to be pitied by men. Only then can they truly be women fit to be part of the key actors in the international space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender must be globally advocated as a relational concept that includes both men and women from all walks of life regardless of geographical location, ethnicity, sexual orientation, occupation, class, religion and other characteristics.

The voices of all gender activists, church and Christian women, women in paid and unpaid work, single and married men and women must be heard, documented and rewarded locally and internationally through the role models of women and men in the international space. Only then can the global community work towards a transformative, balanced and inclusive reconstruction of gender.

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