

GLOBALIZATION AND KENYAN WOMEN

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Globalization, a system of domination and disempowerment or the reconstructing of world economy in the interest of capitalist class whatever it means to a person, is certainly a driving force behind the imposition of severe economic reforms under the structural adjustment program in the developing countries.. However for many in the Third world countries instead of gains it has resulted in worsening their conditions. From slavery to colonialism, from colonialism to neo colonialism and now globalization, the road to outside penetration is thus not new to Africa which has had a negative impact on its integral development. Each transitional period heightened the gender disparities. While framing and implementing macro economic policies gender analysis is hardly taken care of. Economic reforms driven by globalization have seriously affected the gender relations in Kenya making them more complex.

Discrimination against women ensures cheap labor and the flexible labor relationship necessary to keep the global economy running. The trade imbalances associated with globalization had meant Kenyan African women to work hard for less income¹. It has resulted in broadening up of their role. As consumer they buy products and as producers they work as laborer. They are also community manager, caretaker and home manager². They work hard to be the part of food production system and economic development process and thereby enhancing Kenya's development process by proving their own position³. They have been constantly contributing to national economic development.⁴ They suffer the worst working conditions, paid poorly, their working hours are longer; they have been forced to take an increasing burden of unpaid work in caring for the sick, obtaining food and ensuring the survival of the family more generally, have to care for children and other dependants 'and this is enough to make them 'boldest and most unmanageable revolutionaries'.⁵

Colonialism resulted in the loss of political as well as economic status of African women. Men and women relationship became both unequal and asymmetrical. However the African woman did not take the loss passively. For e.g. In different parts of Kenya, women used different tactics to respond to the devastating economic changes brought by colonial power. While their husbands went to work as contract labor to White Highlands, they introduced labor saving crops, adopted new implements and made trade and marketing regular part of their lives and thus supported their families. Today about 80% Kenyan women in labor force is employed in agriculture. They are still responsible for 70% of food production, 50% of domestic food storage, 100% of food processing, 50% of animal husbandry and 60% of agriculture marketing.⁶ Their working hours are longer. In some parts Kenya they work for 16 hours a day caring for children preparing and raising 60% to 80% food for the family.⁷ Data that is available in Kenya shows that women spend one-third of their working hours preparing for food and child care, which means working 13-14

hours. Most women spend 3 hours a day fetching water.⁸ In urban sector man is head of the family in name only actually it is woman who pays the bills, pays the maid, buys food etc. Even then their role in society is considered of lesser value as compared to man.

Globalization has doubled the workload of women of the countries like Kenya and left many women redundant because of their outdated skills or declining industries. The gains of globalization have been concentrated in the hands of women of the developed world or well off women of the poor countries. It is also true that whereas the modern technology has reduced the work of women with higher level of education, with greater ownership of resources and access to capital, it has made their lives more stressful. Undoubtedly social inequalities have imposed hardships on women who comprise 70% of world's poor.

Globalization has greatly affected the role of women in the traditional agricultural society. In Kenya 80% women contribute vitally in agricultural production.⁹ Of the active female population in Kenya 69% work as subsistence farmers as compared to 43% men.¹⁰

In access to land men gets a priority. In Kenya, women rarely hold land and even if they do their holdings are small and less fertile than their counterpart.¹¹ A study in 1997 on land titles in Kenya illustrated that women held 6 per cent of land title deeds while men held 64.6 per cent of title deeds.¹² Due to gender biases, access to credit for women is also virtually impossible even for those few women with title deeds.¹³ Women have often bargained with men to increase what they get in exchange for the labor they expend on family field.¹⁴ The introduction of cash crop production has further ousted women in the cash economy. In Kenya women have unequal property rights to those of men. International organizations have identified women's insecure property rights as contributing to low agricultural production, food shortages, underemployment, and rural poverty. The agricultural sector, which contributes a quarter of Kenya's gross domestic product and depends on women's labor, is stagnant. If Kenya is to meet its development aims, it must address the property inequalities that hold women back.¹⁵

Besides land and labor, marketing, agricultural training, debt servicing, credit technology are the other areas where women in Kenya are sidetracked. Shortage of working women's hostels, lack of crèche facilities keep women away from jobs in the organized sector. Women constitute a substantial portion of laborers 90% of which are marginalized. In the factories they are exposed to hazardous and stressful working conditions and sexual harassment. Women workers are discouraged from spending time with each other, even during breaks. Pregnancy tests are imposed on women to be sure that the companies do not have to pay maternity leave. Jobs of a permanent character are being given out on contract or workers are being hired on a daily or casual basis.

Thus rapid economic restructuring, economic insecurity, changes to social safety nets and distinct patterns of migration has adversely affected the health of the most vulnerable section and the most marginalized segment i.e. women. In Kenya women working in Sisal plantation often have no choice but to resume work very soon after delivering a child. They often carry their child on their back while working which is officially not allowed because of presence of pesticides and other chemicals harmful not only to the mother but more to the child.¹⁶ Adverse health outcomes, depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress, gender based violence, dangerous religious norms, heavy workloads, high birth rates, socio cultural factors, all compel them to take less diet, leave aside the balanced diet. The spread of HIV is also the result of increased globalization and impoverishment of women. It is the women in Africa who suffer more from HIV infection 59% of all cases in Africa are women.¹⁷ Around one million are affected in Kenya and the rate of infection is highest among

women. According to UN report 2006 Kenyan women were six times more likely to get AIDS than Kenyan women.

Globalization has also created the condition for violence, particularly trafficking and prostitution, against Kenyan women. Buying and selling of women is becoming global, transnational and highly income generating business today. With education becoming expensive, male child education is given preference. When girls drop out of school because of pregnancy¹⁸ or not being able to pay the fee, they may end up in an unsteady relationship or even become a prostitute.¹⁹ In Kenya illiteracy among women is 30% as compared to only 14 % for men.²⁰ Triple workload of paid work, housework and child care i.e. Reproducer, producer and community manager, makes it difficult for them to learn computers. Studies in Kenya indicate that the “cost-sharing” policy, introduced as part of the structural adjustment programs in the mid-1980s, which shifted the cost of education from the government to families, has had particularly adverse effects on girls' education.²¹ The following Table²² shows the unequal pattern of gender representation in academics in Kenya.

Table 1: Academic Staff Representation in the Five Kenyan National Universities by Designation and Sex, August 1994

Designation	Male	Female	Totals
Full Professor	69	3	72
Associate Professor	155	14	169
Senior Lecturer	347	46	393
Lecturer	924	243	1,167
Assistant Lecturer	135	40	175
Tutorial Fellow	135	43	178
Graduate Assistant	141	61	202
Total	1,906*	450*	2,356*

Not only have this multinational companies also introduced new food and new tastes at the expense of wholesome traditional nutrition. Impoverished families have been persuaded by their sales tactics to spend their hard-earned money on junk food they do not need. The importation of cheap clothes from Europe has forced many women out of their businesses. In Kenya, the women in the making of ‘kiondos’ (sisal bags) were negatively affected when these bags came from Japan in bulk and were sold in East Africa and the neighboring states at much cheaper prices. In 1998 more than 2000 workers in textile and leather industry lost their jobs and were mostly women.

The global marginalization of women has led to the increased activity of local, national and International women’s movement in wake of better communication. Issue of women’s equality has been the focal point in conferences of UN like the Environment conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the Population conference in Cairo in 1994. In Africa the challenges of globalization has resulted in women to organize themselves. Organization of

Women's and various other organizations are coming forward though at a slow pace. For e.g. in Kenya the National Commission on Status of Women, the Education Centre for Women in Democracy and the Collaborative Centre for Gender and Development and the League of Kenya Women Voters founded in 1992. Women workers in Kenya like in other countries are fighting for their rights through these organizations.

There is no doubt that this Globalization is not without marginalization. It has marginalized women. Benefits of it are gender neutral. There is a need to find alternatives to SAP. But it is not Globalization to be blamed entirely for women's position in Kenya. Africa, and as such Kenya is full of natural resources to fight against poverty but due to greed, corruption and poor governance it has not been successful in eradicating poverty. African women are the biggest loser in this conflict. There is need to overcome their own divisions along ethnic, religious and class lines Globalization is only adding fuel to fire. Poverty reduction, social advancement and economic sustainability have yet to materialize for Kenyan women.

Discriminatory cultural and traditional practices have also negatively impacted on development policies. This has affected women in Kenya more than men as in any other third world country. Economically disempowered women remains underrepresented in politics also. Participation in national politics is increasing yet their low percentage in decision-making position hampers their effectiveness in initiating changes for women²³. Only 7.6% of the total legislators and mere 9.7% of total cabinet members is the women's representation in the country²⁴.

There is a need to establish gender equality in all policies at all levels. There is a need for more active participation of women in decision-making for more balanced equitable development. For this NGO's and women organization should be involved. There is a need to build globalization from below, which will have more positive implications for Kenya and Kenyan women in particular. Including women's rights in the international human rights, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979, Vienna Conference on Human Rights 1993 and Beijing Conference on Women 1995, does not seem to have gained anything much for them. The reason being that only states come under the preview of human rights law and not the non state actors such as MNC's, IMF, world Bank, WTO etc. which are the main agencies of globalization.²⁵ There is a need to translate women oriented plans into action programs and fight for alternatives by criticizing the power structures, providing education, health and other social services and fight WTO policies that are responsible for vulnerable position of women. There is a need to launch an Africa Women's Movement to protect and promote economic rights of women. Unless women fight for them, marginalization of women cannot be stopped and Globalization cannot be transformed into pro women process.

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