



Gender, Social Justice, and Leadership in a Changing World

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Abstract:

One of the most urgent needs in today's world is for the practice of justice. Justice is the center of God's purpose for life because it is closely related to worshiping the living God. Women around the world are fighting for equality and justice against issues that are affecting them such as affirmative action, breaking the glass ceiling, gender based violence, forced marriages, access to education and other opportunities, ability to be included in key decision – making and negotiating areas, female genital mutilation or FGM, salary negotiations based on qualifications and equal work and other issues such as their role in the home and the general perspectives of what a woman should be and how they should behave in social or cultural settings. The purpose of this paper is to discuss: (1) women and the struggle for social justice (2) moral and ethical perspectives on social justice regarding women, and (3) different international instruments that are available globally to assist women in their fight for social justice.

In the book the Justice Project by McLaren, Padilla, Seeber, 2009, one of the central themes of the Bible is justice. Justice is the center of God's purpose for life because it is closely related to worshiping the living God. The main words for justice in Hebrew is Mishpat and Sadiqah and in Greek Dikaiosune and Krisis which occurs several hundred times in the Bible. This is significant to the action that God is a God of justice. He takes the side of the weak and those in need. God's justice is a corrective, remedial, and restorative justice. One of the most urgent needs in today's world is for the practice of justice. Women around the world are fighting for equality and justice against issues that are affecting them such as affirmative action, breaking the glass ceiling, gender based violence, forced marriages, access to education and other opportunities, ability to be included in key decision – making and negotiating areas, female genital mutilation or FGM, salary based on qualifications and equal work and other issues such as their role in the home and the general perspectives of what a woman should be and how they should behave in social or cultural settings.

This paper discusses women and their social justice, moral and ethical perspectives on social justice regarding women, and the different international instruments that is available globally to assist women in their fight for social justice.

In biblical times, depending on the station in life a woman occupied, whether she was single or married, childless or widowed, her social significance varied considerably; and this is reflected in the use of the words dealt with." (Chakkuvarackal, 2004). Women's role in the church is said to be as old as Christianity itself. New developments in recent years have made the issue of women's fight for justice to be on the rise especially in women's leadership. In congregational life, women are claiming new roles. Patriarchal habits are still being challenged. Women, expand their understanding of the human community, and even of God because women have experiences that lead them to understand God as community and to share an ethic that measures strength in terms of relationships (Zikmund, 1987). Many women are mostly known to have moral and ethical perspectives in their fight for social justice. Several authors such as Bentham, Kant have defined morality and ethical perspectives of what makes one happy and the duty and rights of how to achieve both in their earlier works.

Keywords: *Changing world, Community, Gender, Leadership, Social Justice*

1. Moral and Ethical Perspectives on women and social justice

In the study of Utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham discusses that moral actions depends on the greatest happiness principle. As opposed to Libertarians such as Kant, Utilitarians believe that morality is the greatest happiness principle. Also, moral actions depend on the consequences it brings about. Bentham in Sandel (2009) further discusses that we should not think about consequences when we act morally because duties and rights should command our respect independent of reasons of social independence. Happiness of everyone is what Utilitarians value (Sandel, 2009).

When discussing women and social injustices, one needs to put in perspectives not only the ecumenical perspectives of women in places of profession, or their role in the church, but also the moral and ethical concerns for their role in the society, and how the struggle for justice discuss many of the issues going on in the world should include women in the dialogue as women are mostly know to be caring about global issues and injustices since those affect women and children more than men. Ethics of care, is also known as “care ethics” or “feminist ethics” which came out of the feminist movement. Care ethics has three main points: 1) It considers values, and supports human beings as having caring relations, 2) It recognizes the moral values of emotional feelings which are evident in caring relationships, 3) It recognizes the moral value of relationships such as those in the family, and those we are close with.

For this reason, many cultures view women from the perspective of a home maker or in their traditional roles and many of the issues of women inequality is based on cultural values and norms. This can be said to be part of cultural relativism which is the criteria of what is right or wrong and is determined by individual culture and not universalism (Xiaorong, 2007). Cultural relativists believe that decisions relating to human rights, justice, equality or freedom are culturally relative and not universal. For example, some of what is meant as equality or human rights in one culture may be seen differently in another (Forsyth, O’Boyle, & McDaniel, 2008). In cultural relativism, it is believed that a person’s culture determines their view of human rights and equality (Rodoljub, 2009).

2. Women’s fight for social justice worldwide

Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women, including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men. Likewise, the under representation of women in decision-making positions in the areas of art, culture, sports, the media, education, religion and the law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions (United Nations, 1995, Para 183).

Drinnan (n.d) on “The mobilization of shame: women’s worldwide plea for equality” discussed women’s issues in many countries and the steps in which women are taking worldwide regarding social justice. For example, Drinnan discussed the issue of women’s fight in the United States for equal pay for equal work and how women earn wages which are significantly lower than that of males. Other issues on women’s fight for social justice include violence against women, and women trying to break the glass ceiling in the United States. In the United States, there has been the argument for Affirmative Action and discussions on whether it justifies the inclusion of women and other groups in leadership and other positions. Proponents of Affirmative Action argue however that with the program which is not available in many countries, women can break the glass ceiling and attain educational and leadership positions.

3. Write section on Nigerian women and social justice

In China, the issue of early marriage and forced one child policy where women who have more than one child have the other children especially when they are females removed forcibly from the mother.

In Afghanistan, under the Taliban, it was almost impossible for women to obtain primary education before the age of 8 years old and also, women were forbidden to work outside of the home to support their families. In Switzerland, women are fighting for extended maternity leave and salary increases, in India, dowry related violence and arranged or forced marriages are very prevalent. In many parts of Africa, many women continue to face issues of Female Genital Mutilation or FGM, gender based violence and other human rights violations (Drinnan).

Average female representation in parliaments is less than 8 percent in Africa, and many of the women are nominated, not elected. In 1995, less than 25 percent of elected members in parliament or ministerial positions, in two African countries of Seychelles, and South Africa were about 30 percent of the minimum recommendation in the 1995 Human Development report (African Recovery, 1998). Today however, many countries are striving to meet the “fifty-fifty” requirement stated in United Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security that was adopted in October 2000, exactly five years after the Beijing 1995 conference.

Recently in Liberia, West Africa, the first democratically elected female president is the head of the national government. Rwanda also has made many improvements in her national legislatures giving about 40-50 percent of the parliamentary seats to women. Regardless of some of the changes that are currently underway in many African countries to increase the number of women in economic and political participation and decision-making within their legislatures, the process is still very slow and women are still encountering many acts of discrimination. In many other countries such as Argentina and Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, women have been presidents or Heads of States. In Nigeria, many women are beginning to hold higher levels of leadership but the number is still significantly below that of men.

4. International instruments and social justice

The United Nations (1995) reported that, “women in politics and decision-making positions in governmental and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues” (p. 187). Women in most parts are more selfless, humble, nurturing, and are often more flexible than their male counterparts in resolving some of the many social problems facing certain aspects of the country keeping in mind their roles as social change agents in the society (Majekodunmi, 2007).

Despite many of the articles that the Beijing Platform for Action call for, and also the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, most communities have found out that “women in politics and decision-making positions in Governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender-specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues” (United Nations, 1995, Para 187).

With the substantive representation of women in key leadership and decision-making positions, women employed in areas such as education, health, business, and other professions receive superior attention. Women trained both formally and informally on leadership and professional skills are more apt to commit to leadership goals (Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005; Igunbor, 2005). Below are some of the international Instruments available at the United Nations which have been ratified and signed into law calling on countries to implement these laws towards the advancement and equality of women in their countries.

5. Convention on All Forms of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): addressing the role of women on an international paving the way for economic, social and political

rights of women on a global scale (United Nations, 1981). Many countries around the world have welcomed CEDAW and are making strides in its implementation even though there is still a lot of work to be done. In class, it was discussed that the United States however is the only developed democracy which has not yet ratified CEDAW because it is believed that doing so will undermine the US constitution or US law.

6. Beijing Platform for Action (BPA)

This is a document that came out of the Beijing women's conference in China in 1995. Often called the "bible" of women's rights, this comprehensive document was established, giving attention to issues that affect women all over the world, and recommendations that to world governments on how to improve those issues (United Nations, 1995). In order to address some of the pressing problems facing women such as political, economic and other issues, a conference was convened in Beijing China from the 4-15 of September 1995. At this conference, a document for action called the "Beijing Platform for Action" was launched.

The Beijing conference held in China in 1995 which shed tremendous light on issues affecting women and recommendations to reach equal development growth as that of men, the gap between the two genders continues to widen up till today even though some changes have been made in many national and international legislatures. Through active community, grassroots, and the continuous pressing of national and international bodies, many women all over the world particularly in Africa are now able to organize many forums and activities promoting their equal rights and decision-making in political, economic, and human rights.

7. UN RES 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

In October of 2000, the United Nations adopted a resolution giving full rights of political and economic participation to women in all spheres of decision making at all level of government. The Resolution 1325 of women, peace, and international security was widely applauded by many women around the world as a legal binding document that held governments accountable for the provision or equal rights for women whether political, academic, economic, health, and so on. United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (United Nations, 1325): a mandate that was passed by the United Nations in 2000 mandating world governments to give 30 per cent of elected seats to women in government or leadership positions and also to include women in key positions to give them equal, full participation, and decision-making rights (United Nations, 2000). So far, Rwanda is the only country to have reached the target of including at least 40 percent of its elected legislative body as women.

8. UN Women

In January of 2011, the UN women or the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was formed. This new entity in the organization merged four existing women agencies at the UN to become more effective in working on women's issues as well as gathering support for already existing programs in terms of budgeting. With this new entity, it is hoped that the issue of women around the world will continue to gain support and be a stronger voice for women's worldwide plea for equality.

9. NGO 1325 -Working Group on Women, Peace and Security

In 2001, an NGO working group was formed which up till today monitors the resolution and its implementation by UN member states and other civil society. The NGO working group on women, peace, and international security has held many programs and workshop educating other civil society and governments on the benefits of implementing this resolution into their national plans. From 2000 to 2004, I was a member of the NGO working group and I have been passionate about continuing the work on issues affecting women especially in the areas of political and economic development. Naturally, my area of interest is on women in Africa and in general, all women all over the world.

Currently, I am a part of UN Women New Jersey Chapter and also on the African Women's Caucus of the Commission on the Status of Women. This is an annual conference held at the UN in which women from the grassroots to international organizations convene to discuss ways in which to advance women's agenda.

10. Conclusion

The key to enhancing women's status and improving their leadership capabilities is to ensure that women have greater influence in social, economic, and political affairs, particularly in the areas that affect them most. Achieving this will require the collective action of women from the grass roots to the national and international levels as well as overcoming gender stereotypes and institutional discrimination. When women are involved in higher levels of leadership, the process for peace and solving some of the world's social injustices such as AIDS, child mortality, education, food security can be achieved collectively for the happiness and the common good of humanity, which should be the underlining force in women's fight for social justice around the world.

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