

**EMPOWERMENT OF THIRD WORLD
WOMEN AGAINST AIDS:
SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA**

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EMPOWERMENT OF THIRD WORLD WOMEN AGAINST AIDS:

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines various ways in which women in the developing countries can be empowered to fight against HIV/AIDS. The paper is organized into three broad sections. The first section outlines the prevailing trends of AIDS transmission in Africa. The second section examines the theoretical perspectives which explain economic dependency and gender inequality in the developing world; It links gender inequalities to heterosexual transmission of AIDS. The third part examines various ways in which women can be empowered at micro, mezo and macro levels. Most of the examples and statistics cited in the paper are from in Kenya - a country with among the highest AIDS cases in Africa.

Today, Africa faces an Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. The most affected countries are in Central and East Africa, with a few West African countries. The First AIDS cases were diagnosed in Kenya in 1984 and by the end of 1993, there were over 39,000 AIDS cases in Kenya; The reported cases represent the visible part of the disease and thus by 1993, there were about 110,000 people who had contracted AIDS in the country (National Development Plan 1994-96:261). Most of those infected fall between 20-40 years of age (Kibwana, 1992). The Kenya Ministry of Health has estimated that 1.7 million adults will be infected with HIV by 1996 and that there will be 300,000 AIDS orphans (Ministry of Health, 1992). The main mode of HIV transmission is heterosexual contacts and the rate of infection is higher among females (Kibwana, 1992; Nzioka, 1993; National Development Plan, 1994-96).

Despite this bleak situation, Kenya has not yet formulated an effective program of AIDS prevention. There has been substantial rhetoric on avoiding multiple sex partners and using condoms, which are distributed in health clinics. Neither strategy has been effective because most men with multiple sex partners do not use condoms. An alternative strategy entails empowering¹ women to have control over their own sexuality, for example, to refuse sex or to insist on the use of a condom. The high rate of AIDS infection will not be reversed until women are empowered. Thus, my central research question is: How can African women be empowered in the fight against AIDS?

This broad question can be examined through three related sub-questions, each of which addresses the issue of women's empowerment in an African context.

(1) What are the effective methods of empowering women?; (2) How do we ensure that women get access to the resources required for empowerment?; and (3) How do we facilitate men's support and collaboration in the efforts towards women's empowerment?

For the first question on effective methods of empowering women, three possibilities should be examined. First, greater economic independence would enable women to achieve more power. Women in Africa work very hard and are responsible for many outstanding accomplishments, yet they remain economically dependent on men. Thus, research must be conducted on how to empower women to pursue economic enterprises that create greater independence. Second, greater cultural independence would enable women to achieve more power. African women live in a male-dominated culture which mandates their subservience

¹ This paper defines empowerment in its simplest way - giving ability to. A woman becomes empowered when she is given the ability to choose her life-course, to have responsibility of her destiny, hence to have control over all action concerning her life. She then has the ability/possibility of acting instead of being acted upon. Alternatively, women are empowered when barriers that bar them from actualizing their maximum potential are removed.

to husbands and boyfriends. Thus, research must be conducted on how to empower women to go against cultural norms when these violate women's sense of individuality and fairness. It may well be that early childhood socialization of both girls and boys is a key to breaking down cultural norms that disempower women. For instance, it is important to teach boys and girls that they have equal rights and that a girl has the right to say "No" to unwanted sexual attention. Third, education would provide women with some of the skills and tools required to live independently in society (e.g., capacity to gain employment). Thus, research must be conducted on appropriate education that caters for women's needs.

The second question concerns how we ensure that women get access to resources. Empowerment of women through education, programs for economic and cultural independence require substantial resources. Unfortunately, however, Africa has a severe shortage of resources due to its economic crisis. Moreover, history shows that during economic crisis, women derive even fewer resources. This means that societies must find a way to re-allocate scarce resources in a way that ensures women access to programs that empower them. Remedial egalitarian policies and legal reforms may be required to enable women to have access to the limited resources.

The third question concerns how we facilitate men's participation in women's empowerment. Research shows that it is crucial to educate men about women's concerns if AIDS is going to be combatted effectively (Schoepf et al. 1991; Worth, 1990). To reach men, future programs could focus on education in schools, health clinics, and the work place. Women's empowerment is enhanced by support rather than opposition from men. These issues will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

THIRD WORLD UNDER-DEVELOPMENT and WOMEN'S DEPENDENCY

In order to understand Third world women, it is imperative that we situate their dependency within the Third World economic dependency as well as within the wider gender inequalities. In other words, we must show how Third world women are disadvantaged by virtue of a) being women (living under patriarchal systems) and b) living in under-developed economies.

Patriarchy Relations

In most of Africa, women suffer due to ideological forces which cause gender subordination such as patriarchal ideologies that assert the superiority of males and enforce it in all domains of social relations. Klugman (1992:5) states that on the whole, women's lives are framed within patriarchal assumptions and practices, so that both in the family and in society at large, women live in terrain which is both defined and controlled by men.

Patriarchy as an ideology excludes women from the main sources of power, privilege and prestige within their societies by defining men (husbands and older sons) as household heads in charge of generating income for the family while women are defined primarily as mothers, a charge which helps maintain job segregation and low wages for women.

Patriarchal practices such as payment of dowry, inheritance practices, perpetuate gender inequality. This is noticeable in education of children which for most African families depends on availability of funds. When funds are limited, boys are educated and girls are expected to help with domestic chores and hope for a good marriage (Begarra, 1986:66). The decision to educate boys and not girls arises from the African tradition whereby girls get married and become wards of their husbands. They no longer assist their

maiden homes but become fully integrated into their husband's family. On the other hand, boys marry and bring their wives to assist within their homes. Furthermore, parents expect their sons to take care of them in their old age and therefore invest in their education. As a consequence girls' education is not considered a family priority. They are not included in their family's will and therefore inherit nothing (Makhubu, 1993:33). This practices are perpetuated across generations because males and females are socialized to perceive the ideological construction of exclusion as biologically determined, divinely ordained or rational and voluntarily chosen (Kabeer, 1994).

Third world Dependency

Dependency theorists trace Third World underdevelopment to colonialism and subsequent capitalist development. They state that penetration of capitalism underdeveloped Third world economies as it developed the industrial countries. Underdevelopment in the Third world was not an original state but a consequence of the negative impact of capitalism (Gunder, 1966). From the dependency perspective, integration of Third World economies into the world market resulted in unequal exchange whereby the developed countries produced industrial goods (that are highly valued) while Third world economies produced (cheaply valued) primary goods geared mainly for export rather than local consumption. Production of cash crops rather than manufactured goods resulted in an unequal exchange whereby industrial countries monopolized the power to determine the volume and price of goods they imported - making developing countries economically dependent².

² Prebisch (1980:5) defines dependence as the 'relations between centers and the periphery whereby a country is subjected to decisions taken in the centers, not only economic matters, but also in matters of politics and strategy for domestic and foreign policies. The consequence is that ... the country cannot decide autonomously what it should do or cease doing.'

Production of cash crops for export robbed African economies of their ability to be self-sufficient in domestic food production and by the 1980's, many African countries were dependent on food aid from industrial countries.

Capitalist development focused on the climatically favorable and agriculturally productive regions of the periphery such as the Kenyan highlands (formerly known as White Highlands) while it exploited the raw materials in the rural areas leaving these regions underdeveloped. This resulted in uneven development whereby productive (and urban) regions experienced development in the midst of massive underdevelopment Chilcote (1984). Present day urban bias is a reflection of this legacy of uneven development.

To help govern the colonies, colonialists co-opted indigenous Africans (men) into positions of leadership through provision of western education. Christian missionaries assisted in provision of western education with the aim of converting the Africans from their heathen traditional ways. Thus, the educated Africans (most of whom converted to Christianity) in the name of modernity forsook their traditional customs and became westernized. Upon achievement of political independence, these African elites took over the running of African economies. It is significant to note that these elites maintained most of the oppressive male biased structures they inherited from the colonialists. Thus, unequal development is still rampant in African countries, massive underdevelopment exists in the rural areas; Policies which favored males at the expense of females still exist as will be shown through-out the paper.

Women's dependency

Women's labor accounts for two-thirds of the world's work hours, yet they receive only ten percent of the income and own less than one percent of the property (United Nations, 1980:7). The feminization of poverty is increasingly typical of both richer and poorer countries. But among all those who live in poverty, women in the Third World are the most disadvantaged. They work the longest hours yet are the most likely to live in poverty. Third World women enjoy the fewest human rights of anyone in the World. The majority of them are illiterate; and we know that wherever illiteracy exists, it goes hand in hand with poverty, whether as a cause or a consequence. Recognition of women's disadvantaged status led the United Nations to declare 1975-85 the "Decade for Women". Despite international conventions that passed resolutions and formulated plans for enhancing women's well-being, to date the goals of the decade for women remain largely unfulfilled (Tiano, 1987:216).

Recognizing this trend, Tiano (1987:216-8) poses important questions: Have women always and everywhere been disadvantaged or is gender inequality a product of the contemporary world? Leander (1985:22) adds, is socioeconomic development the solution to women's problems, or does it merely subject them to more "modern" forms of oppression? Tiano rightly notes that exploring the above questions requires information about women's role in international development and proceeds to do so using three perspectives, namely: (1) the integration thesis, (2) marginalisation thesis and (3) exploitation thesis.

The integration thesis holds that development leads to female liberation and sexual equality by involving women more centrally in economic and political life. According to this

perspective, as women get integrated in the world economy, they become liberated and attain sexual equality with males. Women get integrated into the world economy through education (education capital). Education integrates women into the world system by equipping them with the necessary skills needed for formal employment. Women working in the formal sector receive wage which empowers them financially, thereby freeing them from male dependence. The perspective links economic development to liberal values, such as egalitarian and achievement-oriented norms. These norms increase women's power and eventually breakdown repressive patriarchal systems of gender subjection.

According to the marginalisation thesis, capitalist development isolates women from production and political control by transferring household production (controlled by women) to the formal sector (controlled by men). Men are drawn into the labor force to produce commodities in exchange for wages, while women are relegated to domestic and subsistence activities within the household (Kuhn, 1978:48). This results in women depending on men economically; their autonomy and access to cash, property, and other resources become limited. Thus, despite the ideology of egalitarianism, development generally increases women's economic and social marginality and exploits their labor (Boserup, 1970; Leander, 1985; Mazrui, 1990:180).

The exploitation thesis is consistent with Marxist feminist analysis of women's role in capitalist societies. It assumes that development often makes Third World women more central to industrial production but their involvement is more harmful than beneficial (Fernandez-Kelly, 1983:192). Women provide cheap and easily expendable labor. As in any field which does not require education or specialization, the intense competition for the jobs

available to women keep wages low. Discriminatory hiring practices, sex-segregated labor markets, and inadequate preparation weaken women's position within the labor market. These barriers are particularly pronounced in the Third World where dependency exacerbate gender inequalities. Thus, modernization creates a female proletariat supplying low-wage labor for accumulating capital. Leander (1985) states that for women, replacement of oppression at home often means oppression in the labor market.

Contrary to the integration thesis, integration of Third World women into the world capitalist system has eroded their status relative to men of their social class. Specifically, in traditional societies, men's and women's roles were separate, specific and functional, and therefore complemented each other Makhubu et al (1991). Men owned land and women had usufructuary rights to it. With colonial governance which introduced the system of individualized land tenure, men's ownership of land acquired a new capitalist meaning. Men were given access to credit facilities, ownership of land and other privileges as the African economic base moved from subsistence (women's domain) to cash crop production (men's domain). Women's hitherto important role as decision makers in food production was taken over by men. Thus women were robbed of their economic power and became wards of their husbands. The gender inequality that pervaded colonialism proved a harbinger for most of Africa's post-independence development policy and for the poverty that dis-proportionately affects African women today (Boserup, 1970).

From the above evidence from Africa, I concur with Tiano (1987) who states that capitalist development has not improved women's lives, both absolutely and relative to those of men in their society. On the contrary, capitalist development has developed the industrial

countries at the expense of the periphery, urban areas at the expense of the rural areas and men's lives at the expense of women. As a result of this biased development, the disadvantaged groups (comprising mainly of women) have found their subsistence woven into their relationships to those in power (men). It is against the above background that we situate the rapid transmission of sexual related diseases.

THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S DEPENDENCY AND AIDS

Capitalist development and colonialism resulted in an urban bias, whereby urban areas were developed at the expense of the rural areas. This forced many rural men to migrate to towns for wage labor, while women and children remained in subsistence production. In addition, the African customary patterns of partitioning land among sons shrunk land holdings so much that they no longer could support households. This further exasperated the rural-urban migration. Long separations from families resulted in many urban males having sexual relationships with prostitutes.

In recent years, economic difficulties have resulted in a substantial number of females migrating to the urban areas. They regard towns as areas of expanded opportunities and resources. These women usually have little or no formal education. They end up in low paying jobs in the formal sector, while those who do not get these jobs eke their living in the informal sector. Majority of these females become domestic servants or bar maids and receive extremely low wages. Apart from economic exploitation, Kayongo-Male et al (1984) note that domestic servants may also be sexually exploited by their male employers. Similarly, bar maids become sexually exploited by their male customers. The inadequate salaries are usually supplemented by either brewing illicit beer or prostitution. In most parts

of Africa, bar maids are associated with prostitution. Thus, urban life often does not give females financial security.

Mbugua (1986) notes that most single women who leave their communities are more likely than men to have defied social custom by establishing independent households away from family roots. By rejecting traditional roles and breaking kinship ties, they escape the strict sexual restrictions exercised on traditional women. However, this 'freedom' is at the cost of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, such as AIDS. With neither family support nor the education and job skills that the urban labor market requires, many females turn to various coping strategies. These include formal marriage, co-habitations, or arrangements in which sexual relations are exchanged for money.

Larson (1989) explains that urban men manage more efficiently if they have a wife in the city and another who manages the land in the rural areas - an informal polygamy³. This is a practical way for the male to maintain his rural property while satisfying his sexual need in the urban areas. These practices are conducive to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (Obbo, 1980; Dawson, 1988; Hunt, 1989).

In East and Central Africa, reported deaths from AIDS are higher for urban than for rural areas. For example, the estimated seroprevalence for urban population in Kenya is approximately twice as high as that in the rural areas (National Development Plan 1994:262). According to Traore (1991:47), there are higher HIV infection rates in areas with high

³ Whereas traditional societies censured men from sexual relationships with women other than their formal wives, such censorship is absent in informal polygamy. The society does not acknowledge these urban 'wives' and so does not censure men for being unfaithful to them. Men desert their informal 'wives' whenever it suits them. Thus, instead of polygamous marriages we have a new situation of multiple semi-permanent relationships. These practices are conducive to the spread of AIDS.

socioeconomic status and education. Chirimuuta et al (1987) attribute the higher rate of infection in the urban areas to sexual intercourse of local people (mainly prostitutes) with HIV infected foreigners such as tourists and foreign workers. Barnett et al (1992:26) add that the high infection among the higher socioeconomic status group is associated with frequent sexual partner changes, and the ability to travel to other urban centers (of infection).

In Africa, travel of people between the urban centers and villages is high. Men travel to rural areas to be with their families and rural women make (infrequent) visits to urban areas to be with their spouses. Obbo (1980) calls this 'shuttling' because couples constantly move backwards and forwards between town and country. As a result of 'shuttling', AIDS is transmitted from urban to rural areas. In most cases, this has been from men to their rural wives. Like other sexually transmitted diseases, AIDS in Africa has been characterized as a disease of dependent development because it lurks in the path of migrant labor and urbanization (Hunt 1989).

Rural wives may be unaware of their spouses' extra marital relationships and the consequences of AIDS transmission. But even when they are aware, they lack the economic ability to challenge their spouses. Indeed, poverty and powerlessness makes women easy prey to exploitation and disease. Miria Matembe, member of the Ugandan Parliament and chairperson of action for Development reports, "The women tell us that they see their husbands with the wives of men who have died of AIDS. And they ask, 'What can we do? If we say no, they'll say: Pack up and go. But if we do, where do we go?' They are dependent on the men and they have nowhere to go. What advice can you give these women?" (Panos 1990:vi).

Available data in Africa shows that women are infected and die at a younger age than men. Specifically, the average age for AIDS for all Ugandan men is 32 while for women the average age is 27. Reports from both the Health Ministry in Uganda and Kenya shows that there are twice as many cases of AIDS among girls aged between 15-19 years old as among boys of the same age group. These numbers reflect the belief men hold that they are less likely to be exposed to the virus if they engage in sexual intercourse with younger women (Barnett et al 1992:33). The young women engage in sexual intercourse with older men mainly for financial favors. Some poor girls do so to get money for school fees - a high price to pay for education. Thus, sexual relations acquire an implicitly economic dimension, one which limits the ability of women to take control of their sexual decisions (Panos 1990). Indeed, the Director of the Global Program on AIDS rightfully stated, "We have to think of AIDS as a development problem, not just a health one.' (The Courier, March-April 1991).

From above discussion, we note that AIDS in Africa is spread mainly through heterosexual intercourse. It is a disease that reflects dependent development, that is, the most dependent groups, (mainly rural wives, urban poor, prostitutes, young girls) are unable to avoid risky sexual behavior due to economic factors. Clearly, protecting women against AIDS necessitates their empowerment. Empowerment for these vulnerable groups of women means providing them with means of resisting unsafe or unwanted sex.

Empowerment of Women against AIDS

Women's empowerment against AIDS can be best effective if carried out from various levels; namely the micro level (individuals, small groups etc), mezo level

(organizations and institutions e.g, family, school, church, work place) and macro level (society or worldwide e.g, economic, political systems etc). Failure to deal with the problem at all these levels will result in incomplete solutions.⁴

Empowerment of women at Micro (Individual) level.

The most effective way of coping with the AIDS pandemic is to change individuals' sexual behavior. In Africa where AIDS is spread through heterosexual behavior, change in risky sexual behavior must address two issues, (1) usage of condoms and (2) practice of monogamous sexual relationships.

Studies carried out in various parts of the world show that usage of condoms is closely connected to education and economic status of women. In developed countries, prostitutes tend to have greater access to information and condoms. In the Third world, use of condoms among women in the sex industry may fail because of the practical difficulties of obtaining them. But even when condoms are freely distributed to the poor by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), two factors bar their usage. First, majority of Africans (especially the poor and uneducated) value large numbers of children. Indeed, a woman's status is elevated by the number of children she bears - especially male children (Kayongo-Male et al, 1984). Desiring children, many poor people reject condoms due to their contraceptive functions (Schoepf et al, 1991; Ulin, 1992). Second, even when conception is not desired, usage of condoms is reduced by the fact that this is a method over

⁴ Distinctions between levels are fuzzy because they deeply interpenetrate one another. For instance, interaction within the family, ostensibly a micro phenomenon, is shaped by general social definitions and expectations, by economic opportunities, by legal constraints, by racial/ethnic and class phenomena - that is, by macro and mezo processes and structures. Conversely, macro and mezo structures are, in a basic sense, abstractions derived from repeated micro interactions (Chafetz 1990:15).

which women inevitably have little control and which men dislike (Worth, 1980; Jennings, 1988; Schoept et al, 1991). Poor women who perform sex for commercial purposes lack the 'bargaining' power to force men to wear condoms. When too much energy is expended on basic survival issues, people tend to ignore a disease which might not materialize for years. Lack of economic options leads vulnerable women to concentrate on addressing the more immediate risks in their lives. For many of them, it is a matter of either possible HIV infection or survival for that day. Inevitably they choose survival at the risk of infection (Panos, 1990).

Usage of condoms can be prompted by: (a) promotion of female condoms which women would have more control over; (b) educating men to realize the dangers of unprotected sex; (c) empowering women social-culturally to have 'sexual equality' to force men to wear condoms; and (d) empowering poor women through provision of economic opportunities so as not to be dependent on men. Merely instructing women on usage of condoms without empowering them is futile. According to Worth (1990) relative sexual equality between men and women is essential for any AIDS prevention program which relies upon women's sexual decision making.

In regard to practice of monogamous relationships, Worth (1990) stresses the need to be empowered to make choices concerning their personal relationships, that is, to be able to have monogamous relationships⁵. Empowerment in this context means giving women the power to negotiate before marriage as to what unions they intend to have. That is,

⁵ This is a message that should be taught more to men than women because in the majority of cases, it is the men who get additional sexual partners and thereby introduce AIDS to their families.

empowering them to choose to marry those men who are committed to monogamous sexual relationships. Worth (1990) states that partners should be allowed to discuss monogamy expectations openly and explicitly, as well as alternatives available in the event these expectations are ever compromised by either partner. The notion of partnership is a good empowerment goal for it speaks against the African male-tradition of viewing women as commodities they purchase using brideprice.

Empowerment of women at organizational (mezo) level.

Empowerment of women at the mezo level incorporates several institutions (eg the family, education, economic, religious). These play a crucial (and complimentary) role in shaping individuals lives and choices.

At the family level, girls are socialized to believe that their value is attached to the men in their lives - fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. They are often socially ostracized if they disobey or displease these men. Makhubu (1991) states that there is need to socialize women to have self-esteem based on who they are and their own achievements. Such socialization liberates women from their socio-economic and psychological dependency on men, and enables them to avoid contracting abusive marriages. Socializing a girl to believe in herself from an early age is an investment into her future. Not only will she have the self-confidence required to compete with males in the education system, but her self-respect will motivate her to have higher goals than getting married at an early age before she develops a career.

Jennings (1988) notes that mothers play a very significant role in the socialization process of their children. They have the power to mould the future of their daughters by

socializing them to believe in themselves. They can socialize both their sons and daughters to respect themselves and each other. Mothers can socialize both their sons and daughters to assume equal responsibilities in the house, including house work. Most girls are expected to help with housework while their brothers are not. To be forced to undertake domestic tasks rather than their homework carries the message that schooling is not a serious undertaking for girls (Harrison, 1993; Lees, 1993).

Johnson (1992:228) notes that parents transmit two parallel dream tracks to their daughters - the traditional bride/mother dream track and the ambition/career dream track, each of which is build by the many messages that flow back and forth between parent and child during the growing years. The traditional dream track is transmitted naturally while the career track is mainly transmitted by literate mothers. It follows that education of illiterate mothers is necessary if they are to transmit career dreams to their daughters. This is not an impossible goal seeing that in many countries, women have shown the greatest interest in joining literacy classes (UNESCO 1990)⁶. According to the 1990 UNESCO report on EDUCATION FOR ALL, education may not necessarily impart women with skills for formal employment, but it erodes fatalism, improves self-confidence and changes the power balance within the family. Thus, to make women equal partners in the educational process is thus an absolute priority. Literacy of women should be a priority on grounds of equity, development of their families and most importantly their self-development.

⁶ It is mainly women, already overburdened with productive and domestic work, who have used their scarce free time to attend literacy classes, even when the timing was inconvenient and learning conditions inadequate. The fact that the majority of literacy learners are women has not usually been taken into account appropriately in designing literacy programs (UNESCO 1990:26). Empowerment of women requires correction of this structural injustices.

According to Jennings (1988), AIDS prevention can start as early as during childhood. Since women spend a lot of time with their children, they can give them basic AIDS education⁷. This may include the biological facts of reproduction and the concept of sexually transmitted diseases. Jennings (1988) further states that the best time to explain the biology of human reproduction to a child is before bodily changes of pubescence introduce teenage insecurity. He advocates for parents to answer their children's questions candidly. Candid sex education from a trusted person is more relevant than recitation of AIDS statistics. The need for African parents to give sex education to their children is underscored by the fact that school teachers are not able to teach it adequately. This is because teachers are inhibited by traditional norms against discussing sex with children, or they have no training on how to teach sex education.

Another educational issue is the need to have single-sex schools rather than co-education. Girls do better in single-sex schools than in mixed schools. There is evidence that young girls do not do well in mixed schools because they are sexually harassed and sometimes frightened by boys, and much of this violence is taken for granted by the girls and teachers alike (Thorne, 1993:178). Unfortunately, there are cases in which male teachers (who are meant to protect the girls) sexually abuse their students. Strict measures ought to be taken against such teachers. Indeed, school teachers ought to be positive role models for their students. There is therefore need for good school teachers who encourage girls academically,

⁷ In the traditional society, sex education was delegated to the extended family members such as aunts and uncles. Youth were also given sex education during rites of passage such as initiation ceremonies. It was a taboo for parents to discuss sex with their children. Westernization and Christianity altered these family roles and passage rites without replacing their functions. Today, many African youth grow up without adequate sex education, relying on peer education, western novels and mass media for their information (Kayongo-Male 1984:57; Kenyatta:1991).

and to participate in extra-curriculum activities such as debates so as to empower them to express themselves and make their voices heard.

Schools should also have good career counselors to assist girls make knowledgeable career choices. Begarra (1986) states that in hiring career counsellors, preference should be given to counsellors who have an agenda of empowering women otherwise counsellors who maintain traditional gender roles would do more harm than good if they are allowed to reinforce existing social conditioning.

Formal education plays a very important role in empowering girls by equipping them with the skills needed to enter formal employment. Females who earn a good income have better control of their destinies; In sub-saharan Africa this only accounts for about 20% of the women (UN 1990). Unfortunately, many working women leave their jobs due to sexual harassment by their male bosses or colleagues. While forcible rape appears to be extremely rare, sexual harassment is reported to be common. Numerous women state that they are required to extend sexual services to employers as a condition of employment and promotion (Schoepf et al, 1991:191)⁸. This results in some husbands refusing their wives to work for wages; others become suspicious of wives who have good work relationships with their bosses and may refuse them to attend work seminars or to travel away from home. These restrictions interfere with women's work, and it is not surprising that many women do not get promoted. In some cases, men have taken over their wives salaries so as to make them dependent on them - a factor which defeats the goal of women empowerment.

⁸In the Philippines, women workers in export oriented industries claim that male managers give them the choice of "lay down or lay off" (AWRAN Report, 1985).

Empowerment of women necessitates the removal of sexual harassment at work.

Women need to form unions and lobby against sexual harassment. Third World women can learn from the advancement that their sisters in the West have made in regard to sexual harassment at work and at home.

Finally at the Mezo level, we note that the religious institution is highly respected and has a large following in Africa. Religious values have an undeniably deep influence over Africans. Religious leaders play a significant role in shaping people's moral standards. They have the moral authority and respect necessary to teach communities of all ages and gender on AIDS and safe sex. This is needed in Africa where condom use is stigmatized due to its association with prostitution. The religious institutions can help remove this stigma. Sex education is better accepted when given by trusted and respected representatives. Religious leaders can reach men (who refuse to attend AIDS courses and will not learn from their wives).

Unfortunately, the mainstream African religions have taken very moralistic views against secular sex education and promotion of condoms. For example, Christian religious leaders in Kenya attacked their government's efforts to have sex education in schools. As a consequence, AIDS education is taught in Kenyan schools under the 'social educational and ethics' curriculum. Sex education which many AID workers feel is essential in aiding teenagers to put what they learn about AIDS into social context is not taught. According to Kenya's leading newspaper, a top Vatican official in Nairobi asked the Government not to introduce sex education in schools as sex was a gift from God and only parents had the divine right to teach their children about it (Daily Nation, April 24th 1995). In Niger Muslim

leaders want the government to suspend family planning campaigns and stop promoting condoms. In November 1994, they destroyed billboards advertising condoms in Niger's capital, Niamey (AIDS ANALYSIS AFRICA, 1995).

It is crucial for all AIDS' educators to give consistent information regarding the spread and protection against AIDS. When religious information differs from that of secular NGOs and governments, individuals get confused and resort to risky behavior. This defeats the purpose of AIDS' education.

Efforts should be made to ensure that religious institutions work together with other institutions rather than against them. Religious institutions can join efforts with schools to promote AIDS prevention using peer education. This has been done in Zambia where religious institutions promote youth associations such as the Anti-AIDS clubs of secondary school which pledge chastity before marriage (Panos, 1990). Such groups play a vital role in empowering youth against AIDS due to the influence of peer education.

Empowerment of women at societal (macro) level.

This paper's conceptual framework indicated that patriarchy, colonialism and capitalist development were key structural forces that under-developed African economies and disempowered women causing them to be socio-economically dependent on men. For women to be empowered, it is not enough to alter their individual lives, social structures that marginalise women must be eradicated. Thus, women's empowerment at the macro level calls for structural changes within the society.

This can be done from the grassroots. Personal examples of influential people can

break down oppressive patriarchal practices by changing the customs which disempower girls. The educated, and those in positions of influence set examples in their society by educating their daughters and also bequeathing them property such as land. Unfortunately, marriage and motherhood are such an important part of African culture that girls drop out of school to get married. The marriageable age coincides with the time when girls should be in secondary schools or college. Leaders and those in influential positions can help change societal norms by de-emphasizing the norm that marriage is a women's only goal in life and stressing the importance of financial and emotional independence (Makhubu, 1993:33)⁹.

Structural changes can be effected through formulation and implementation of policies that ensure against individual and structural oppression of women. In many African countries, Legal reforms are needed to provide a constitutional basis for women's equality. This addresses the need to formulate, and more importantly to implement policies which eradicate gender inequalities such as sexual harassment at work.

Makhubu (1991) states that it is crucial to involve women in the policy process since they are the most directly affected by the policies. She adds that women should be included in the formulation and implementation of policies as both participants and as beneficiaries, so that their unique needs can be better addressed. If women do not speak up and act for their own empowerment, policies inimical to their development will be made and their interests will be conveniently subsumed under those of men. Unless women participate in senior level policy-making bodies, research and education focussing on their needs will continue to be

⁹ I do not wish to discredit the importance of marriage and motherhood in any way. On the contrary, marriage can be a key to fighting against AIDS if it ensures sexual fidelity. Therefore, marriage should be encouraged - as long as it does not disrupt women's education and economic empowerment.

under-resourced. Thus, it is crucial that women participate in high levels of policy-making.

Compared to men, African women are more likely to lack opportunities to assume leadership and decision-making positions. Yet when women do assume such positions, they can be highly effective in promoting programs and policies that are sensitive to women's interests in the profession. Makhubu (1991) cites an example in one African country where a female Commissioner of Education used her position to influence changes in budgetary allocations to the women's education unit of the ministry. Increased funding to this unit facilitated the provision of improved teaching facilities for teaching in girls' schools.

In the formulation and implementation stages, sensitivity to situations where changes in women's status make them vulnerable to violence is essential. This is why it is crucial for both men and women to participate in the process. Excluding men, as some women's NGOs have done has negative repercussions. It is not uncommon for instances of wife-beating to increase with increase in women's participation in such development projects. Men perceive that growing empowerment of women threatens their control, and the beatings are an attempt to reverse this process of empowerment (Carrillo, 1991).

That men are threatened by women who advance beyond the defined norm is not a new phenomenon nor is it unique to the Third World. The French philosopher, Rousseau proposed that women should be educated to be subservient and pleasing to men, for reasoning women are monsters who have lost their femininity. Wollstonecraft (1792) argued against this reasoning, for she saw education and development of reason as the path to liberation. She stated that she did not wish women to have power over men, but rather, over themselves. Women empowerment need not be 'power over men' which would merely be a

reversal of one group of oppressors over another. Men should be treated with respect, and kept abreast of women's development activities. Instead of marginalising them, efforts should be made to enhance the traditional gender relations in which men's and women's roles complement each other.

In addition to policy changes, women can be empowered through formation of women's organizations. Steady (1981:29) notes that even in male-dominated societies, women have a certain degree of autonomy which expresses itself in women's groups. Throughout Africa, women form associations which address their needs. In these groups, women derive encouragement from each other. They join their resources together and promote their own welfare. "Women's associations promote confidence, organize leadership and resources and thereby create leverage for women ... and although they may not invert the overall structural authority of men over women, they do redistribute power and resources in some very important way" (March et al, 1982:49). Indeed, the solidarity of women in rural African communities may be their greatest source of strength for coping with the AIDS epidemic (Ulin, 1992:64).

Despite their solidarity, women's efforts are limited or fail for lack of resources. For the most part, women know what to do, and may desire to do so, but are hindered by structural and financial constraints. Third world women recognize that the onus of determining their future lies in their hands, but existing structures such as those barring women from owning land constrain them. The government, international community and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can empower women by supporting activities that promote women. Where this has been done, women's economic lives have greatly

improved. It is noteworthy to mention that in many African regions, NGOs are doing a credible job of providing scholarships for education of women. In Kenya, NGOs and the government assist uneducated women with resources for professional training and career apprenticeships. Begarra (1986) advocates for women to be given loans for small business to assist them to become self-reliant. Structures which bar women from receiving bank credits unless given authority by their spouses should be banned.

CONCLUSION

The heterosexual spread of AIDS in Africa is rooted in patriarchal practices, Africa's history of colonial rule, capitalist development and urban-rural migration. The socio-economic dependency of African women (on men) is key to understanding their vulnerability to AIDS. To effectively empower women in the fight against AIDS requires the collaborative efforts of both women and men. Unless people perceive themselves to be at risk of contracting AIDS, they do not change their sexual behavior even when they have the resources to do so. Accurate and consistent knowledge regarding AIDS is crucial in raising people's awareness to the existence and danger of contracting AIDS. This calls for the joint input of all institutions especially the family, education, employment, religious, legal, political, NGOs and international community at the micro, mezo and macro levels.

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