
Editorial: A new journal on gender issues for developing societies is born

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Biographical notes: James S. Etim is a Professor of Education and teaches courses in middle grades education and instructional strategies and does research in these areas and gender studies. In 2012, on a Fulbright Senior Specialist Award, he collaborated in the development of a degree programme in women and gender studies at Polytechnic of Namibia. In 2014, at the invitation of the Directors of the Regional Institute on Gender, Ahfad University, Sudan and Institute of Gender Studies at Addis Ababa University, he ran workshops on publication in gender studies. He is currently editing a book on women and gender in Eastern Africa and the SADC Region.

International Journal of Gender Studies in Developing Societies is a new online peer review journal dedicated to the dissemination of research related to women and gender issues in developing societies. In the last 70 years, a lot has happened in terms of women and gender issues worldwide. In 1946, the Commission on the Status of Women was established by the United Nations to ensure the empowerment of women. This was followed by several United Nations led international conferences on women in Mexico in 1975, in 1980 in Copenhagen and in 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya all aimed at developing strategies and action plans to improve the situation of women (UNNGLS, 2009). The first conference in Mexico in 1975 titled First World Plan for Action called on governments around the world to develop, institute and implement policies that would eliminate gender inequalities and enable women to become part of economic development. In 1995, in Beijing, China, the Fourth World Conference on Women laid out 12 critical areas of concern that needed urgent action to improve the day to day living of women – the increasing and persistent burden of poverty on women, unequal access to education and training, unequal access to healthcare and related services, violence against women, the effects of armed conflict on women, inequality in economic structures and policies, inequality between men and women in the sharing of power, insufficient mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, lack of respect for and the promotion of the human rights of women, inequality of women's access to all forms of communication, gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and violation of the rights of the girl child (UN Fourth Conference on Women, 1995). Since this conference, many countries including those in Africa and Asia have been developing gender policies and taking action on some of the critical issues affecting women. The Economic Commission on Africa (2010) in a recent report on the status of women in Africa declared the following:

- All countries place poverty reduction high on their respective agendas. However, the crippling global economic downturn will result on more women losing their jobs.
- The institution of free and compulsory primary education in many countries has meant improved access to education for both boys and girls. However, the gender parity index is wider at the secondary level where free and compulsory education is not the case.
- 24 countries are implementing and monitoring gender aware health programmes. However, maternity mortality in Africa remains the highest in the world.
- Many countries are implementing policies on violence against women, female genital mutilation and female exploitation issues; however, in many countries, domestic violence against women is regarded as a private affair [UN Commission on Africa, (2010), pp.1–3].

In several countries in Asia, strategies have been developed to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. For example, Pakistan in a report (Embassy of Pakistan, 2010) indicated that there is more sensitivity by the government to women and development but noted several obstacles/challenges to the implementation of the Beijing Plan for Action:

- 1 Women and poverty – the feudal agrarian structure and lack of opportunities in access to resources.
- 2 Education and training – negative parent attitudes to female education and shortage of female teachers.
- 3 Violence against women – harmful traditions and customary practices and women’s low literacy levels.
- 4 Women and the economy – socio-cultural values and practices restrict females.

In a report to the questionnaire on the Implementation of the Beijing Plan for Action, the Government of India indicated that a National Policy on the Empowerment of Women was adopted in 2001 to bring about gender justice and to make de jure equality into de facto equality (AWID, 2008). Other areas in terms of the 12 areas of action that have been implemented in India include a Constitutional Amendment to make education free and compulsory for all children ages 6–14.

Volume 1 Number 1 of the journal contains seven articles in three broad areas as related to the Beijing Plan of Action – women and poverty, violence against women and women and the economy. In the first paper, ‘Trends in occupational gender segregation in India’, Agrawal and Agrawal analysed trends in occupational segregation by gender in India. In the analysis, they found that there was occupational segregation based on gender and this increased significantly in the urban areas.

In the second paper, ‘Women’s dominance in the informal sector in Gaborone, Botswana’, Batsalelwang and Dambe set out to find out why the informal sector in the urban areas of Botswana were dominated by women. In their analysis of data, they reported that women were disadvantaged by early pregnancy and drop out of school.

The third paper focused on violence against women. Sharma et al. in ‘Intimate partner violence with special reference to wife-battering’ examined factors that perpetuate

violence against women, especially wife battering. Findings revealed that women were battered daily and in 50% of the cases, victims lived under the threat of murder.

Medatwal in the fourth paper 'Evaluating efficacy of women's empowerment programmes: an empirical study of participants perspectives in Rajasthan' analysed empowerment programmes run by the Government of India for poverty reduction. The study found out there was a significant increase in women's empowerment as a result of these government run programmes.

In the fifth paper, Cruz and Cortez in 'Mexican gender policies in practice: two grad students' reported on two case studies where women made attempts to see gender discrimination policies implemented.

In the sixth paper in this volume, 'The commercial sexual exploitation of girls and young women in Namibia', LaFont analysed data on sex workers in Namibia and found out that girls and young women are entering into sex work at a younger age and that there was sex exploitation for these women.

In the final paper in this volume, we return to gender based violence with Mutanda and Rukondo's paper 'An analysis of the relevance of a grand strategy in order to reduce gender-based violence in Zimbabwe' In the paper, the authors indicate that rape is the dominant form of sexual violence in Zimbabwe and calls for the implementation of a grand strategy to solving the problem.

The seven papers in this issue introduce readers to conditions and challenges faced by women in five countries-Botswana, India, Namibia, Mexico and Zimbabwe in particular and in developing societies in general. Each paper makes recommendations as to how the situation could be mitigated.

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