

Socioeconomic Status of Women in Lesotho

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Abstract: This paper explores the socio-economic situation of women in Lesotho. Based on secondary data obtained from Bureau of Statistics, Land Administration Authority, country analytical annual reports ministerial reports as well as Lesotho government website; it analyzes the status of Basotho women with regard to access and control over economic opportunities. Main indicators discussed include access and control of resources like in education and land ownership, participation in decision making e.g. political participation. The issue of women and discriminatory laws is also addressed. This study is restricted to the relevant and available data and information on access on August 2015. The statistical data in this paper suggest that female is a dominating gender as far as land ownership is concerned. With regard to economic decision making and political participation, there is gender imbalance with men as a dominating gender. Women have been victims of discriminatory laws which denied them opportunity to own or inherit land and immovable property and hold senior positions in companies. These laws were later amended although gaps still exists. The finding shows that Lesotho has relatively high literacy and net primary school enrolment, but with a reversed gender gap signifying discrepancy to the advantage of girls. Gender related policies should be formulated and implemented so as to increase women's representation and inclusiveness in political participation and economic decision-making. Given the responsibilities of women, improvement of women's socio economic status in all sectors will not only be of essence to women alone, but also families and communities as well. This will also enhance women empowerment and contribute to inclusive sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty and social injustices and other forms of inequalities. Measures need to be developed to improve access to education for boys so as to ensure a balanced human development outcome. Amendments on Laws of Lerotholi should be a well understood public knowledge.

Keywords: Socio-economic status of women, gender equality, women's empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Before the launch of African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the economy of Lesotho relied heavily on the South African mining industry as a source of employment for a majority of the country's citizens, particularly men. By then, many women in Lesotho were uneducated. As such, most of them engaged in activities that were not gainful to the economy, such as taking care of their households and engaging in subsistence farming, while a few who managed to find jobs occupied low income paying jobs, such that the high income paying jobs were occupied by educated men.

Nevertheless, following the inception of AGOA, the economy then shifted to relying mainly on the manufacturing sector (textile), with the industries employing predominantly women. Even though their participation in economic activities increased, their contribution remains insignificant due to the low salaries that they obtain whose benefits cannot be accrued to a wider population. Therefore Lesotho like most countries in the world has a large number of women participating in the formal economy, but facing salary discriminations, and low promotion rates. Therefore a gap between men and women's economic participation has to be bridged.

Gender inequalities can be attributed to limited access and control over resources, access to finance, inadequate access to education, lack of skill and thus limited access to technology, cultural impediments and other constraints limiting employment options, independence and participation in decision making. These factors basically constrain women's ability to effectively and efficiently participate in and benefit from economic development. Women are subject to gender

inequality and discrimination associated but in the wake of ignorance and maintenance of status quo, they consider this as acceptable norms. This paper therefore attempts to critically evaluate the challenges and difficulties hampering equal economic participation of men and women in Lesotho, and provides ways in which women's economic status can be improved.

2. THEORETICAL LITERATURE

There are considerable differences in women's and men's access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are practically absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay, hence resulting to insignificant women's economic contribution to the economy. This according to Jain et al (1997:39) results from the fact that before most countries gained independence, women were prey to many repulsive customs, traditional rigidities and immoralities due to which their status in the society touched its lowest point.

Social and cultural norms also constrain women from having an equal participation in economic activities as men. Such norms have long encouraged men towards productive roles, namely, economically active roles, while women have been confined to the reproductive role. Thus, men are viewed as the principle breadwinner in the family, and women are viewed as the principle homemaker. These gender roles in society have not been radically challenged. Women who work outside the home are expected to do so in addition to their tasks as homemakers, often without additional support, (UN, 2012). This additional work burden is unpaid and limits women's capacity to engage in income-earning activities. Furthermore, the nature of tasks, such as caring for children and elderly household members, requires women to stay near the home, thus limiting options to work for a wage.

The Millennium Development Goals also show narrowing gaps with rapid increases in girls' primary school enrollment, and significant increases in female life expectancy. Even though there are variations in nature and degree, significant gains have been made globally with respect to women's economic participation. In spite of the progress, gender gaps remain. Women continue to be disadvantaged in terms of labour market outcomes, and sustainable livelihood options. The World Economic Forum data signifies that while health and education gaps are closing, only 59 % of the economic outcome gap has closed. Women are disproportionately engaged in vulnerable forms of informal employment and their economic contribution has largely remained under-valued.

2.1 Empirical Literature:

There is mounting empirical evidence indicating that women's extent of economic independence and decision making is limited. The study conducted by Basu (2006) on Microfinance and Women Empowerment reveals that of 200 women interviewed, over 75% of women reported that they do not operate any income-generating activity of their own and 78% of women reported not having independent income that they could use at their own discretion (without consulting their husband). A sizeable number (42%) of women reported that they do have their own independent savings, and if they did, husbands were aware of these savings 91% of the time. Wives expressed having a low level of control over these savings, with 85% saying that they were unable to decide autonomously how to utilize them. Less than 3% of women in the sample replied that they would borrow from moneylenders.

The findings of Moepeng et,al (2008) of village case study conducted in Botswana on The Socio-Economic Situation of Female Heads and Poor Heads of Households in Rural shows that female heads of households are more likely to be poverty stricken than male heads. The incidence of poverty of household heads was shown to increase with the size of the household, and the relationship is more marked for female-headed households than for male-headed households. Unemployment was identified as a major source of poverty in the village and female heads of household were found to be more likely to lack paid employment than male heads of household. When asked about the main reasons for poverty in their village, most household heads attributed this to unemployment. The survey reveals that the incidence of unemployment is much higher for female heads of household than for male heads of household. Sixty of the 218 female heads (27.5 percent) reported that they were unemployed compared to 13 of the 112 male heads of households (11.6 percent). This means that the female heads were more than twice as likely not to have market employment compared to male heads.

In addition, there was study undertaken by Kenyan Institute of Economic Affairs in 2008 on Profile of Women's Socio-Economic Status in Kenya to assess status of women in Kenya and provide baseline data and information on profile of women in the economic processes. The study used both qualitative and descriptive techniques in analyzing secondary data and information on gender issues in Kenya. Available and relevant sex disaggregated statistics on both the women demographic and their access to and control of resources was also compiled. According to the findings of this study, women have a lower literacy rate (74%) than that of men (85%); more men (63%) transit to universities than women (38%); HIV & AIDS is more prevalent among women (8.7%) than men (4.6%) and more men (53%) tend to access credit than women (47%) and this was claimed to be attributed to various factors ranging from social, economic and cultural constraints. The findings also indicate that some traditional practices governing land and livestock ownership, access and control over land, and benefits accruing to land produce tend to favor men compared to women. This to a large extent disadvantages women in accessing credit especially when collateral is required.

This is also the case in Brazil, in which, Agenor et.al (2011) pointed out that, notwithstanding the significant economic achievements in Brazil in reducing poverty and income inequality, and the remarkable gains in female education, gender disparities between the economic lives of women and men remain high. They also indicated that even though female labour force participation increased by 20 percentage points over 20 years, gender gaps in access to formal employment and market income still persist. The proportion of women with formal jobs increased from 42 per cent in 1999 to 49 per cent in 2009; however it is still lower than that of employed men by 4 per cent. The unemployment rate for females consistently exceeds that of males by an average of 4-5 percentage points.

2.2 Women and Discriminatory Laws in Lesotho:

Women in Lesotho have been victims of discrimination that can be traced through several laws that were promulgated which had provisions that expressly discriminated women. These laws include Laws of Lerotholi, legislation addressing land acquisition, Companies Act 1967 and other legislation that will be discussed in detail below. This section examines the provisions of those laws that were discriminatory to women, how they were later amended and the gaps that still exist in the legislation.

Laws of Lerotholi

Section 11 of the Laws of Lerotholi discriminates against women in inheritance. Furthermore, according to customary law, a woman is a perpetual minor. A woman before marriage is under the guardian of her father even when she has legally attained the age of majority. She remains a minor even upon marriage, except that she is placed under the guardianship of her husband, and upon his death her guardianship is transferred to his heir.¹

Under the laws of Lerotholi a woman could also not acquire land as she was considered a minor whether she is married or not. Nor could widows be in full control of their joint estate after the passing of their husbands. Control over the estate passed to the husband's heir.

The Deeds Registry Act 1967

Section 14 (3) of this Act provided that immovable property could not be registered in the name of a woman married in community of property except where the property are a result of a bequest or donation. It restricted women from having a title to land and therefore it was expressly discriminatory.

Companies Act 1967²

Under this Act, women could not become directors in a company unless consent was obtained from their husbands. In terms of section 144 (1) (b) in terms of disqualification for appointment as a director, a woman married in community of property could be a director in a company if her husband gives his written consent.

¹ K Matashane-Marite. Women's Rights and Participation- Including Women's Access to Land and Inheritance, and the Role of Lobbying and Grassroots Organisation in Lesotho, a paper presented before the Expert Group Meeting of the United Nations Division for the advancement of women. Bangkok Thailand. 8-11 November 2005, 3.

² Act no.25 1967

However, those laws that were discriminatory against woman have been amended to meet the needs of women and to remove the discriminatory effect. Such amendment has been made through certain legislations. Change was brought about by the following legislations.

Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act, 2006³

Vast change was brought about by this Act as it offered amendments to a number of Acts that discriminate women such as The Deeds Registry Act 1967 and The Marriage Act 1974. It repeals marital power in its Section 3. It removes the following restrictions which marital power place on the legal capacity of a wife are removed include entering into contracts on her own, registering immovable property in her name, acting as a company director, and performing any other act which was restricted by any law due to the marital power.⁴

Land Act 2010⁵

Women can acquire land under this Act. Section 4 (3) provides that customary practices that are inconsistent with this Act are inapplicable and that the Act shall prevail. Furthermore, section 6 of the same Act states that women are now entitled to hold land by providing that a citizen of Lesotho (either man or woman) can hold title to land.

Companies Act 2011⁶

This Act repeals the provisions that denied women the right to be directors of companies without the consent of the husband in the old Companies Act. Section 57(2) of this Act provides that despite what is contained in customary or common law, a person married in community of property can become a director without the consent of the husband.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study analyses Socio Economic status of women in Lesotho. The basis of the analysis is processed data obtained from Bureau of Statistics, Land Administration Authority, country analytical annual reports as well as ministerial reports.

3.1 Scope of the study:

The study provides the insight on socio economic status of women in Lesotho. Main indicators discussed include access and control of resources like in education, land participation in decision making e.g. political participation. This study is restricted to the relevant and available data and information accessible on August 2015.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The study analyses the social economic and demographic characteristics of women using the secondary data obtained from Bureau of Statistics, country analytical annual reports as well as ministerial reports which allowed for extraction of core themes related to the objectives and overall goal of the study. Processed data was subjected to tabulation which enabled categorization of socio-economic characteristics of women, including access to and control of resources for economic production like in education, land ownership and participation in decision-making e.g. political participation among others. Analysis was restricted to the relevant information available on the selected indicators.

4.1 Economic Decision-making Participation and Political Participation:

Table 4.1 indicates the current national involvement of women relative to men in economic decision making. Men are dominant in economic decision-making in a public sector as demonstrated by 57% relative to 43% of women representation. This gender imbalance implicates inequality in participation of economic policy formulation and implementation. Low women representation ultimately translates to limited access of women to enhance gender economic planning that advocates for women economic empowerment and well-being. With regard to political participation of 2015 election, out of the 1,117 candidates contesting the elections, 780 were men while 337 were women and there are 27 women in 120 seats of national assembly amounting to 23% representation rate. This rate is down from 28% of the 2012 polls. Both 2012 and 2015 elections failed to achieve gender parity representation in parliament.

³ Act no. 9 of 2006

⁴ Act no. 9 of 2006

⁴ Section 3(3)

⁴ Act no.8 2010

⁴ Act no.18 of 2011

Table 4.1: Women and men in economic decision- making

	NAME	MALE	FEMALE
Minister of Finance	<i>Hon. Dr. Khaketla</i>		✓
Minister of Trade, Industry and cooperatives	Hon. J.Setipa	✓	
Minister of Development Planning	Hon. M. Hloaele	✓	
Minister of Social Development	Hon. M. Letlotlo	✓	
Governor of the central bank	Dr .R. Matlanyane		✓
1st Deputy governor of central bank	Dr. M. Makhetha	✓	
2nd Deputy governor of central bank	MS. M. Makenete		✓
TOTAL		4	3
PERCENTAGE		57%	43%

Source: Government website, Central Bank of Lesotho website

4.2 Land Ownership and Gender:

There are traditional practices and norms in Lesotho that basically discourage land ownership and inheritance of women. These norms and practices are discriminatory and they have been on-going and acceptable by men and women without questioning them. Addressing ownership inequality is one of basic issues at heart of both domestic and international communities and Lesotho is not an exception. Lesotho implemented the 2010 Land Act 2010 which addresses gender inequality, providing for a leasehold system that streamlines land management. The Act has gender provisions that guarantee equal security of tenure to every Mosotho man and woman. It provides joint ownership of land to spouses married in community of property and ensures that every woman's name appears in the registration. The Act also grants for women to be part of land allocation structures.

Table 4.2 shows gender lease statistics of the past ten years (2004-2014).The statistic indicates the male dominance in lease ownership from 2004 to 2010. There has however been a drastic change since 2011 up to 2015 July as female lease ownership became dominant. Joint lease ownership also increased drastically since 2011. Drastic changes in both female and joint lease ownership may be as a result of 2010 Land Act 2010. The 2004 26% (147/565) lease ownership rate of female increased to 32% (3,213/10102) in 2014 while the male ownership rate of 66.5% (376/565) declined to 13.6% (1,375/10,102). The 3.7% (21/565) joint lease ownership of 2004 has also increased to 52% (5,299/10,102) in 2014. The 2010 Land Act has basically abolished male dominance and enhanced female dominance thus making Lesotho one of the few African countries with female as a dominant gender as far as land ownership administrations are concerned. Increase in the rate of joint lease ownership implicates that societies, families and husbands are inclusively engage women land ownership.

Table 4.2: Leases issued by Gender

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	JOINT	CO	OTHER	TOTAL
2004	376	147	21	21	0	565
2005	401	124	41	19	0	585
2006	283	111	43	23	0	460
2007	351	126	64	32	0	573
2008	359	175	55	2	28	619
2009	626	287	132	34	0	1,079
2010	562	318	256	0	0	1,136
2011	781	1,938	2,806	77	31	5,633
2012	629	1,010	1,929	195	36	3,799
2013	5,813	14,419	21,415	37	108	41,792
2014	1,375	3,213	5,299	31	184	10,102
2015(up to July only)	364	669	1,134	51	35	2,253
Total						68,596

Source: Land Administration Authority, 2015. Accessed August 2015.

4.3 Education and Gender:

Table 4.3 shows the current status, goals and progress on education in Lesotho. In 2011 the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Ratings ranked Lesotho number 9 in the world, implying a positive approach in trying to bridge the gender gap. Relative to most Sub-Saharan African countries, Lesotho has relatively high literacy and net primary school

enrolment, but with a reversed gender gap signifying discrepancy to the advantage of girls. However, it is one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that has at least attained equal balance in primary education; indicating almost equal numbers of males and females in school. Men are seen to be trailing behind women in a variety of academic performance measures, particularly in secondary and higher education. While the country is on-track for the indicator on equitable primary education, it is off-track on the indicators for balanced access to secondary and tertiary education. However, this also signifies a greater degree of women empowerment.

Primary School Enrolment Rates and Gender Parity Indices as provided by the Millennium Development Goal report for 2011.

Table 4.3

	Gross Enrolment			
Year	Males	Females	Total	GPI
2000	118.1	122.6	120.3	1.04
2004	126.2	127	126.6	1.01
2005	126	126.3	126.1	1.00
2009	116.2	116.2	116.2	1.00
2012	111.6	108.8	110.2	0.97
	Net Enrolment			
Year	Males	Females	Total	GPI
2000	78	85.3	82	1.08
2004	81	86	83	1.06
2005	80.6	85.7	83.1	1.06
2009	78	83.2	80.9	1.06
2012	79	82.6	81.1	1.04

Off-track

	Baseline 2001	2003	2007	2008	2010	2011	2012	2015 Goal
Female-male ratio in secondary education	128	127	131	134	136	136	133	100

Female-male ratio in tertiary education	118	104	107	112	123	146	146	100
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The free primary Education policy passed in 2000 mandates equal access for boys and girls, and indeed Lesotho has progressed considerably on this front. However, according to the Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), between the years of 2000 and 2003 there was a marginal gender imbalance in favour of female, in which the female's enrolment rate was much higher than that of their male counterparts. In the year 2009, the country attained gender balance in primary education; indicating almost equal values for both genders, even though it took a different trend between 2010 and 2012, in which more males than females enrolled during that period in primary education. Nonetheless, the situation is different in secondary and tertiary education, in which more females still enrol at a higher rate than males. The girl-boy ratio in secondary school initially fell from 149/100 in 90s to as low as 126 in 2004, but it has crept back up to 136. While the female-male ratio for tertiary education has drifted around 110 females per 100 males during the past decades.

The impact of this pattern is evident in the long-term literacy and educational outcomes, whereby, 97percent of women between the age of 15 and 49 are literate compared to only 80 percent of their male counterparts. The secondary or higher educational status of women in Lesotho has been found to be 12 percent higher than that of Lesotho's males, following the fact that males' educational outcomes have been affected by several reasons, including that of herding livestock which increases absenteeism rates; those who complete their primary school level often migrate to cities for job opportunities or drop out to work in South African mines. Other reasons are the result of the high HIV/AIDS related deaths which has often forced young boys to become heads of household as they seek employment to support their siblings. In the nutshell, although Lesotho is on track for achieving a balanced ratio of girls and boys in primary education, it is still off-track for equitable access to secondary and higher education.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study presents socio economic analysis of women with regard to social, economic and political status. It provides relevant analysis and information that can influence design and implementation of gender related policies so as to abolish gender disparities. Statistics indicate that men are dominating economic decision making and political participation while women land ownership is dominant as opposed to men ownership. The study finds that the government 2010 Land Act is well targeted to assisting female land ownership. On the face of it, the act basically enhances both female ownership and joint land ownership. Lesotho is one of the few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa working towards equal access to education for females, as indicated by a consistently higher ratio of girls to boys at all levels.

There is a critical need to abolish gender disparities in economic decision- making and political participation. Gender related policies should be formulated and implemented so as to increase women's representation and inclusiveness in political participation and economic decision-making. Given the responsibilities of women as mothers, wives and care takers, improvement of women's socio economic status in all sectors will not only be of essence to women alone, but also men, children, poor and rich as well. This will also enhance women empowerment and contribute to inclusive sustainable economic growth, reduce poverty and social injustices and other forms of inequalities. Lesotho needs to develop measures to improve access to education for boys so as to ensure a balanced human development outcome. Measures should be taken to ensure that amendments on Laws of Lerotoli are well known and understood by all Basotho.

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