

# Women at the Forefront of Social Development: An Analysis on the Roles of Gender, Acceptance and Trends.

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## Abstract

This paper aims to reflect upon a deepened analysis based on the roles of gender in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of World Development. A shifted in the paradigm of global development, with countless of emerging movements and activism patterns towards “women empowering,” an intriguing consensus how roles of gender brought “equality” matters to the world as it has been trusted to help progress and develop. Reasons on both acceptance, and trends within the subject of “gender equality,” as it has been heavily discussed, led by both the world’s leaders together with their citizens’ to “*opt-in*” general concepts that person(s), regardless of their gender should be able to live comfortably, be treated fairly, thereby, developed the nations onto better directions. Concluded with options in development scenarios; “gender neutrality” as forefront concept, suggested patterns of sustainable development may suit the needs of an overall “equality treatment” among global citizens moving forward.

**Keywords:** Women in Social Development, Gender and Development, Gender Equality, Gender Movement, Gender Neutrality, SDGs

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## Introduction

It is undeniable we are now entering a new sphere of development through an era where women can stand upfront as leaders, to manage, administrate countries, and some even, becoming an influential individual promoting impactful organization. Females, nowadays, are able to receive acceptance, and admirations to lead nation(s) in the Western world, they can receive both utmost respects, and honored to stand forefront *unlike* in the past era of pre-development days. *But* it is definitely too soon to firmly conclude that, there were no hindrance and will never be, since progressing the development of the 20<sup>th</sup> onto the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially with the objective to promote women gender as part of “*Equality for all People*”, and letting them advanced their roles, and lead alone blindfoldedly, an act of hindrance, quite similar to a quote, “*add women and stir*”, as described by Todaro & Smith (2014) upon feminist development economists”, often used as a reflection upon strategies in some of the development programs where a deeper knowledge, and challenge basic assumptions are required in addition to a willing, to promote equality stances for women in gender especially in the area of development. In general, in order to encourage people, at first, one must trust, and understand that, human beings or the global citizens, surely, deserve better living condition, an equality, whether in treatment as well as equal access to available resources. An important fact to first considered, as people, regardless of their gender should be able to voice their opinions, influence positive drives to better first, their own lives, then the surroundings. And with participation specifically, for women, “*...the design of development policy underscores the importance of integrating ‘Women’ into development programs (they) must be drawn into the economic mainstream as it would entail increasing female participation rates* (Todaro & Smith, 2014). As interesting as it can become, this paper intended to discuss and analyze upon those underlying outcomes based upon gender approach towards social development, *not* necessarily focusing solely on women but with an assumption that; effective leaders in the forefront of social development area will not be needing nor preferred specific background or gender to prove their motivation, leading qualities, and assurance that *he/she/they* can bring in equality treatment, started reforming development structure, one that is with a promise, suits best in leading the world sustainably, and for certain, to its best condition.

## Content

### Evolution of Gender Movement: WID, WAD, and GAD.

Much ado and with encouragement to promote an ideal concept within the field of social development through “*quality of life*”, as well as, to realize the importance of “*human capital*”, an effective factor to successfully implement and carried out any plans in development programs. The world’s social development, during the period post-Cold War, attempted first, to start a process of recovery by; 1. reconfiguring nations’ cultural Lines, 2. building identities, and with utmost trust relying heavily to the direction of 3. an economic development. As promising as it may seems at the time, an idealized concept came from the (*wealthy*) First World nations, with offered directions, inclusive of *equality treatments* shown by resources sharing, and in *human capital*, expressions shared by female writers, an economist even, as they have voiced their opinions and concerns to the public. Resulted as an absurd, and truly presumptuous act, a forbidden act of a female by many countries in other parts of the world back then. A relatively new global path, perhaps an outrageous promising look in retrieving idealized concept for a better living led by both changes in development, and transformation in human capital through gender equality, involved extensively with deep thoughts, and with perspectives towards women, a gender seems inferior *but* can become a solid foundation, no matter in economic development, and others, that is, if granted with equality and in rights same as men. The early 1970s, claimed a historical milestone for an advanced progress in female development, a period illustrates some continuities in thinking on women/gender and development that link the early “*Women in Development*” (WID) arguments of the 1970s to the analyses of gender and structural adjustment put forward by a number of neo-classical economists in recent years (Miller & Ravazi, 1995). Some may call it a thinking revolution, a shifted in the paradigm from a one-dimensional focus towards “women-specific” projects (*linkage between women and poverty as described by Todaro & Smith, 2014*) to mainstreaming women/gender at the programme and policy level; significantly, from a reliance on top-down planning to an emphasis on a bottom-up or participatory development strategies (Miller & Ravazi, 1995). Perspective upon women during the time

of WID influenced by the resurgence of significant women movements as such in northern countries in the 1970s and the work of Danish economist, Ester Boserup (1919-1999), her published theses work – *“Role in Economic Development”* (1970) challenged the assumptions of the welfare approach and highlighted women importance *not only to the agricultural economy but also* highly appropriate and profitable for development assistance directed towards women to remove inequalities (Ravazi & Miller, 1995). For Boserup, WID is equality between men and women in both wisdom and productivity therefore, women should have more equal access to resources. Boserup’s work and critique, *however* challenged the commonly held notion that women’s status and their rights automatically improve with modernization. And despite her path in breaking contribution to the field of women in development, it has led to a great deal of debate and controversy, labeled as the *“Decolonization of the Mind”* or in other words the issue of development and the politics of knowledge (Sahara et al., 2018). Lacking in claims and evidence that they (*women*) enjoyed equal status or greater power in relation to men. Boserup’s thesis work got criticized as it may have accepted the capitalist model of development as give, and that her work was “essentially empirical and descriptive... lacked a clearly defined theoretical framework” (Beneria & Sen, 1981 as cited in Sahara et al., 2018). Women in Development Approach, even with limitations, proven to be “*a first try*” success in gender development history as it did help secure a prominent place for women’s issues at the United Nations (UN), and other international development agencies. The *“Decade for Women,”* UN has declared from 1975 to 1985. Although WID made demands for women’s integration in development, the overall social structure or economic system remains unchanged, exclude even, from the path. Concentrated narrowly on the inequalities between men and women and ignored the social, cultural, legal, and economic factors that give rise to those inequalities in society. WID tended to focus on women almost exclusively and assumed that women were outside the mainstream of development (Muyoyeta, 2007).

Came a different perspective of *“Women and Development”* (WAD), an approach arose in the latter part of the 1970s. Proponents of approach are mainly activists and

theorists from the South and few from the North, they argued that women (*unlike WID perspective*) would never get their equal share of development benefits unless patriarchy and global inequality are addressed, more critical view include and assumed that women's position will improve once international structures become more equitable. According to this perspective, women were not a neglected resource but overburdened and undervalued (Sahara et al., 2018). WAD, in summary, has its focus in contrary to its predecessor, and that sole focus was on the interaction between women and development processes rather than purely on strategies to integrate women into development. WAD (*adopting a Marxist feminist approach*) saw benefits of wealth from the global economic structures distributed evenly between the gender due to disadvantages of class, the integration of women into development was to their disadvantage and only made their inequality worse, *global inequalities*, instead, have become the main problem facing poor countries and their citizens. Position of women will improve when international structures become more equitable (Muyoyeta, 2007). Boserup (1970) called for a focus on *Women in Development*, to acknowledge the contributions of women's often invisible labor. Frustrated with its slow progress, other approaches emerged and criticized the approach as being one of simply '*add women and stir.*' Came the *Women and Development* approach emphasized the need for structural changes in the global political economy (Abebe, 2015). With realization, benefit of wealth and a better living condition, acceptance of the society even, can be fairly distributed towards development work of *fair and equitable global social structure*, has nothing to do with specific focus on Gender Development particularly in a gender specific area.

Last but truly not the least, the "*Gender and Development*" (GAD), the beginning of an *era for International Women Development*, followed by the roles of gender, provided with spotlight, and focus on global agenda, for it has much to do and linked with human capital in social development. GAD as explained by Abebe (2015), *aiming* on larger inequities and unequal relations. Movements and call for gender equality through a few international agreements, regional platforms, and conferences. Historical record of

the most influential conference to date, the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), alliances and the United States (*as major leader*) establishing mechanisms to promote women's rights – including national action plans, gender strategies and legal frameworks. Development path has been following through since the year of 2000 (*UN – Millennium Declaration*) until the most recent adoption of *global development effort in 2015 - the Sustainable Development Goals* - next generation development framework (Abebe, 2015). While women are yet to conquered equality in treatment nor fully supported by the help of forefront leaders of the same gender. But we cannot really argue to the fact that social movements and politics are very much on the rise to the development work on both Human Rights and Gender Equality, therefore, *human (with their non-binary status)* shall be *treated equally* and as the most influential capital to prolong a global lifespan of development together with other related aspects.

**Women at the forefront of social development. A permanent stance or an emerging gesture of acceptance and trends towards gender neutrality?**

*“An understanding of women's power, relative to men, is therefore essential to overcoming disadvantage in many domains... people generally evaluate women more favorable than men and like them more. Conversely, men have higher level of experts and legitimate power than women do.”* (Carli, 1999 as concluded on her research of Gender, interpersonal power, and social influence). Advocates of gender equality focus on women's needs to elevate their social and economic status and bring about Gender Equality, *different gender* experiences in *multi-ethnic* societies are also shaped by class, ethnicity, race, religion, and other factors. Therefore, perspective on gender from different setting/communities make differences in power between *women* and *men*, highlighting the experiences of women is required solely because, relative to men's experiences, they have been largely invisible (Dennis & Zuckerman, 2006). *Modernization*, indeed, triggered a 'Western-style' economy, a path to an ideal of a fully developed nation, an economic stage where people of all gender live equally, and with enough resources to maintain both their health and wealth. Throughout the process, it must be backed, and therefore, supported by the help of *people with diversification in gender* and production strength

within the community. As per according to Rostow's (1960) theory of economic dimensions, lying within one of the Five Stages/categories: the traditional society, the preconditions for *take-off*, a stage drives to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption (as cited in Parpart et. al, 2000). Different gender played important parts through each of the stage, perhaps within the roles and in characteristics they were already used to, and proven to be particularly good at it, while the new roles, and prospect outcomes toward women, needed much encouragement, to be shown, with clear samples how they can become one great positive input to promote the nations' economic, surely for better living conditions to themselves, and their loved ones. **Women** – through a commitment of gender equality, an emphasis on women's empowerment, there is evidence that in expanding woman's opportunities, no matter in empowering or an opportunity of attending a higher education, decreases gender inequality, and accelerates development (Farré, 2013). To date, more organizations now recognize that *collaborative*, rather than *competitive behavior* creates more success, and as such, women are well placed to lead in this century, data also revealed in support, showing that women have all the right attributes including empathy, change catalyst, and in inspirational leadership (Young, 2016). ***But would the trend in development through aspirations of women empowering, accepting female as global forefront leader is here to stay?*** To address and firmly respond to the question, *depending on the speculation*, underlying outcome in both circumstances and given condition at the time. Women, with their "*femininity*," and "*nature to nurture*" instinct, their power and influence can be expressed and handle differently. Therefore, to administrate and lead in development, it is understandable and deemed appropriate to be fully aware that there is *no such thing* as a "***one gender fits all***" type of situation whether to lead nor to control. One chosen story as an excellent sample to portray the scenario of "*women at the forefront*" initiative is from this one crisis handling program carried out by UN - Women, a response solutions and approach to the Covid-19, with its underlying objective to leverage "*women-led*" solutions, there by mobilizing and strengthening the resilience of grass-roots women to engage in effective community-based social mobilization and

building on their pre-existing community networks to access *hard-to-reach* groups and overcome sociocultural barriers (Kaiser & UN Women, 2021). Through observations and knowledge utilization upon the subject of “*Gender Roles*”, differences in characteristics, and performances believe to either advanced or hinder in accelerating significant outcome of social development is to research and look upon the (*gender*) subject as an *Interdisciplinary Field of Study*, most of which can be tactfully put in a great use or adapt as an effective tool to progress development activities as part of planned policy and program. Several of research works based on gender illustrate that differences in cultural norms regarding gender roles emerge in response to specific historical situations and tend to persist even after conditions have changed, even distant past affects gender norms today, *persistence* tends to be stronger when the environment is very stable and therefore experimenting with new norms is less necessary (Giuliano, 2017). “... in the United States alone, hate crimes against the LGBTQ community have been rising the last three years, according to the FBI. An emergence to development activism gender *other* than men and women, stood out LGBTQ activists and linguists around the world (Berger, 2019). An existence of today’s “*non - binary*” or “*gender neutral*” approach gradually emerged and being added as part of “gender equality,” and “equality in treatments” topics as well as plans, already existed in broader development agenda. Given that human rights, a main field of development work, and its main working area thriving “*equality for all*,” might as well, staying against all forms of discriminations. Development plans and programs must quickly act and promptly response to the emergence, in order to raised *acceptance* for a fact that the world now, has *more than a binary concept of male and female in gender*.

## Summary

**“*Thrive and Drive*” leaders at the forefront. Gender neutrality and equality treatment, simplified.**

Attempting to reveal and concluded with reasons, how a shifting in the paradigm concerning a broader outlook of women *versus* an uprising of gender neutrality movement affected social development of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and forthcoming 22<sup>nd</sup>. The patterns, in

the end, as solid part of evidence, led by UN – SDGs, proven to be one leading support encouraging the work in building a transformational structure of development policies and activities best appropriate, and with high values, *to gain acceptance* in the issue of gender equality, and influenced *speculation of Trends*, tied in with both human rights, and equality in treatments of the global standpoint. As described by Dugarova (2018), a goal of gender equality, topic itself can be a catalytic policy intervention that triggers positive multiplier effects across the spectrum of development. Women (*since early WID approach*) contributed greatly to economic growth and in human capital development through global value and care chains (Yeates, 2018, as cited in Dugarova, 2018). *As well as in* transfer of ideas, knowledge, and technology. Therefore, numeral statistical research also, have found *greater gender equality and diversity* including at top management levels, improves business performance, 15 percent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians (Catalyst 2011; Credit Suisse 2012, 2014; ILO 2015a; McKinsey and Company 2013; Hunt et al. 2015, as cited in Dugarova, 2018). Women Empowering and countless of number of campaigns aspiring female, as they are for certain, deserve of positions to lead, and to stay at the forefront. To simply put, the act of empowering women, together with its related campaign movements, they are all taking parts of ‘a much greater’ development plans, inclusive with advanced mechanisms, to promote, drive and thrive gender equality. Plans to implement and reinforce legal and institutional arrangements on the agenda requires political will and stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration involving not only national and local governments, but also civil society, the private sector, academia, and the media. Gender Agenda and its related issues shall be acknowledged not only via SDGs (*towards*) 2030 but a wider range of understanding that it is *not just about transferring opportunities from men to women*, but about creating conditions where each person regardless of his or her gender has the right and ability to realize their human potential (Dugarova, 2018). As explained by International Labour Office (ILO), 2019, *given example of* significant definition on gender roles; what a society or culture constructs and prescribes as proper roles and characteristics affect power relations between gender can result in inequality in opportunities and outcomes

for some groups, it does not mean that gender (*men and women*) should become the same, but simply means they should have equal rights and equal opportunities in all spheres of life. (ILO, 2019). Women in association with femininity often suffer from barriers to participation therefore, gender inequality, gives rise to a number of barriers for women to participate fully in local economic development strategies. But discrimination, *however*, are more difficult to conquer, especially when people of gender neutrality faced with multiple forms of discrimination (based on ethnicity, religion, occupational status, migration status (ILO, 2019). And so, it is important to progress development globally no matter within this century *and/or* beyond, and one may start by removing *gender-based* discriminatory norms. Rest assured that for the very least, SDGs and its 2030'agenda goes beyond poverty and set to cover issues across the *three dimensions of development*: economic, social, and environmental. Suggesting of the holistic approach in order to address those challenges to the progress of sustainable development; *for instance*, prioritizes gender equality as a stand - alone goal (*SDGs goal# 5*), and a cross cutting issue helped recognizing the role of discriminatory laws, beliefs and practices in driving gender inequalities (Kaltenborn et. Al, 2020). And not just a woman or any gender in particular, *the goal in gender equality envisioned all dimensions of life!* Believing in ultimate redressing that which is unfair and unjust and challenging unequal privilege. “...*greater fulfillment of human rights, equality, wellbeing, and justice –Perhaps it is time to remove the mantle of acceptable euphemism that ‘gender’ has provided and to talk much more directly about equality, rights, and power.*” (Cornwall, 2007). *But which gender does it better?* In the field of social development as expressed and supported by both academic research, and former studies published prior. Women may be of a focus in world's development and placed first priority, when it comes to a “*better living condition*” and in retrieving “*quality of life.*” The first aim of human rights in social development, as it has progressed, and maintained its success rate through the execution of significant plans, provided gender guidance, and to act upon any given opportunities to promote an awareness of gender equality. For women, due to their nature, and from a compiling number of negative cases in the history (*through act of sexism*), tremendously provoked

and encouraged activism works, to heal those suffering from inequality treatments, and for some, may be suffered from a glass root cultural norms such as - *stereotyping in gender*. World's leading organizations (*UN, World Bank, and IMF*) adopted, and started implementing development plans, at the same time, continuously constructed and updates of their global agenda, the world's view, and outlook to best carrying out with appropriate budget, power to influence, and with campaign(s) to raise awareness which in the end, as their ultimate goal, a permanent removal of both "inequality" and "discriminatory act". Characteristics, also, as we try contemplating, through most recent Survey Research conducted by Zenger & Folkman (2020), women are better leaders during a crisis, for the section as to "*why are women leaders seen as more effective?*" the difference in engagement levels, we looked at the competencies that direct reports ranked as most important during the crisis. Notably, respondents put greater importance on interpersonal skills, such as "*inspires and motivates,*" "*communicates powerfully*" "*collaboration/ teamwork*" and "*relationship building,*" all of which women were rated higher on (Zenger & Folkman, 2020). Supported with another research on "*Rise of Women*" conducted while in condition of uncertainty, the world navigate the unprecedented public health challenges and economic disruption by the Covid-19 pandemic. Female leadership during the crisis, provide some profound context as countries with female heads of state – generally responded more quickly, empathetically, and decisively than those being governed by male leaders and have managed to have lower, proportional to population, (*Covid-19*) case counts and death rates (Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2020 as cited in Warrell, 2021). This same research, as well, added on top with explanations; despite significant advances for women over the last century and the increased value placed on the importance of gender diversity at top decision - making tables, a disproportionately small number of women are ascending the leadership ladder to sit at them. (Warrell, 2021). It is with despair that women, surely would stay at the forefront of the development field, but would they perform better as forefront leaders no matter in this century to in the future? Only time and situation will tell, as people, depending on their '*deep – rooted*' culture and whether they are in crisis and situation appropriated with qualities that certain

someone can obtain and take the lead, then that leader does not need specific gender to support of their influence and power. As we all should learn and know by now that the willingness *to accept* and *to follow* in the field of social development, and in global politics, certainly cannot be forced into. It is important for one to learn and stay open-minded, as historical events, movements, and repetitive occurrences based upon gender are often complexed, involved with many other fields of study to research altogether. For this final part of analysis, these are the ***five suggestive focal points to consider***, first, the turning point as declared (*as well*) by the 2012' World Development Report on gender equality: *acknowledging the intrinsic value of gender equality*, over and above any instrumental value it may have for the achievement of broader development objectives *by questioning the "growth is good for gender equality"* (Ravazi, 2012, p.11). *Second*, a refresher in knowledge is needed to revisit attention to the intrinsic value of gender equality, as it seems to have triggered some interest in gender equality as a political project. *Third*, to adhere that the '*role of women*' nowadays, surely has progressed excellently to lead at the forefront. But it is with utmost intention to stress the underlying value of gender in Social Development, that it is not only about "*agency/voice*" of individual women "*bargaining*" with men, but the *engagement* rather, in collective action and associations, and the role of women's movements in moving the equality agenda forward (Ravazi, 2011). *Fourth*, to address an emerging movement, *the rise of Gender Neutrality approach in the stage of global development*. As disruptions occurred, and people came to realize of self-value, quality of life, and the urge to received equality Treatment in a "*non-binary*" type of gender based as it has always been or feel accustomed to. *Fifth*, an awareness that gender considerations in development *could very well enhanced* sustainable development. And it is only fair to extend all aspects of gender (*men, women, and others*) contribution, and with human securities. Sustainable development demands that priorities of all gender and vision of development goals and approaches are clearly addressed, integrated, and promoted (Abebe, 2015). We shall embrace the fact that in the works of development, always involved with diversity of people, through an enhanced outlook towards gender as well ensuring the respect for

cultural diversity and pluralism, came an autonomous *participation*. Willingness to participate in policy dialogue and implementation deemed effective factors in leading any development programs to success. Also, a person whose discussing women *and/or* spoken on behalf of specific gender should not be labeled as ‘*Feminism*’ or any other term, similarly, movement(s) led by any gender, shall not be looked down upon, and fall under (*unnecessary burden or obstacle*) issue(s) with those fixed stereotype character nor they should be rejected from equality treatment. The world, as of now, needed more sensible, engaging collaborators, leaders (*regardless of their gender*), ones that listen, think ponder, promptly response in a tactful, and in most effective ways to successfully lead a sustainable development path in today’s compelling societies, and a more ‘gender - neutral world.

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