

**Nena Thundu, Annamarie K. Kiaga, and Suzan W. Mwangi Omondi, (eds) Assessing Gender Policies in the East African Region: Case Studies from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, Development Policy Management Forum, Nairobi, 2008. Pp 289, ISBN 9966-7266-1-6**

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Comprehending issues of development in Africa cannot escape gender issues that have a strong bearing on the improvement of people's livelihoods, not only at continental and national levels, but also at community, household, and individual levels. For some time, a number of countries in Africa have attempted to craft gender policies that are largely meant to deal with gender imbalances that have negatively affected development. The book becomes a modest attempt to assessing gender policies in African countries, paying particular attention to countries in East African region, namely, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

The introduction, by Mildred A.J. Ndeda, puts the debate on gender issues into perspective. She provided the general background to gender issues and their centrality in development. Key terms that are central to the study and practice of gender were clearly defined, particularly terms like: gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and equity.

On Ethiopia, Hiwot Gebeyehu provided good conceptual and historical issues to gender mainstreaming, in general. Moving on to the case study, the author observed, "While Ethiopian constitution recognizes the equality of women and men, the traditional societal institutions keeps women in a vulnerable position" p.34. The author outlined institutional mechanisms that were put in place to address issues of gender imbalance that were bedeviling the Ethiopian society, and also outlined the key sectors, which had experiences with gender mainstreaming. Factors that affected the success of the policies were analyzed with specific examples being given. In the conclusion, the author gave an interesting

recommendation for the success of gender mainstreaming policies.

Contribution by Susan Mwangi Omondi on Kenya analyzed gender policies and made special reference to women's participation in politics. She traced the history of domination of women in Kenya and specific areas, education, economy, health, violence against women were alluded to. The author provided an analysis of efforts made by the Kenyan government to promote gender sensitivity and, in essence, the author noted, “Despite the traditional low status of women in Kenyan society, the Government of Kenya (GoK) tried to address issues around gender inequality...In law, women and men in Kenya have equal access to political participation, health and education, services, employment, and property ownership” p.94-95. During the last part, her contribution dwelt on women in politics providing a history of women participation, backed by excellent statistics. Factors affecting women's participation were alluded to whilst, at the same time, offering recommendation for the future of gender policies in Kenya in various spheres of human life.

The third contribution, by Ikhlas Osman, dwelt on gender policies in Sudan and specifically dealing with education of the girl child and the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). From on set, the author noted about the dominance of traditions as the main impeding force in realizing gender equality in Sudan. The contribution analyzed contending gender issues in health, employment, political participation, and women in conflict. Gender issues in the field of education were examined in detail and recommendations on reforming the education sector to take up the needs of women were alluded to as well. Institutional frameworks, which have been put in place, were highlighted in both governmental and nongovernmental sectors. In the last part, the author analyzed efforts that have been made to address issues of female genital mutilation and challenges that have been faced. In the conclusion, the author noted “Lack of political will, high illiteracy rates, and masculine ideology, among others, have played a substantial role in perpetuating FGM and the subordination of women in Sudan” p.154.

Dwelling on Tanzania, Annamarie K. Kiaga analyzed strategies and legislation that have been put in place pertaining to issues of gender. She acknowledged that, “...the past two decades have been marked by important policy shifts towards gender equality in policies, plans, development strategies, and actions in all sectors and at all levels. In the same period, Tanzania has witnessed a mushrooming of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), both local and international, and advocacy groups working

towards social transformation and gender equity” p.162. Central gender issues in Tanzania were highlighted. Legal issues and strategies for gender equality and equity were examined. Using the Gender Status Index, the author attempted to measure gender inequality in Tanzania and the challenges in using this measure. The contribution also examined the impact of gender policies and strategies and the challenges faced in assessment of the impact. Of importance, the author noted, “...the impact of gender policies and strategies is embedded in the economic, political, social and cultural situations of which they are part. It is, therefore, important to analyze the impact within these contexts” p.199.

For Uganda, David Magambe Mpiima analyzed Uganda’s experience with gender issues in various spheres. The first part dealt with the history of gender in Uganda. Currently, for the author “gender issues are fast gaining ground in Uganda as well as legitimacy as an essential and critical dimension of development” pp 206. The author examined Uganda's experience with gender issues in various fields; that is, health, politics, formal and informal sectors, access and control of resources, poverty reduction, law, cultural coordination, and gender violence. In the process of analysis, institutional mechanisms that have been put in place to achieve positive results were alluded to. The author provided a detailed analysis of gender issues in education from primary and secondary level to University level, with Makerere University being used as a case study. Makerere case study provided interesting statistics of information on students, teaching staff, management, administrative, and support staff. For Uganda, the author concluded, “Just like any other African and developing countries, Uganda is making strides in the promotion of gender sensitive and gender responsive legislations covering key national development sectors, like education industry, employment, and political participation” p 232.

In conclusion, the book offers quite interesting experiences with gender policies in East Africa's selected countries. The book is highly recommended for those involved in gender issues either as academicians or development practitioners in the field.

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