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Review

Cultural adherence and the nexus between women empowerment and millennium development goals in Africa

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African traditional values determine the roles of men and women in the society and by implication restrict women from family life and exempt them from public service and productive activities that engender development. Over the years, Africa has tried to facilitate economic growth but seems far from attaining the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG). A major impediment to sustainable development remains its reluctance to confront the menace of gender inequality and deterrents to women empowerment. The study utilizes liberal theory of gender to broaden the intellectual exposition on feminism and the attempt to strengthen women capacity as instrument of development in the region. In the light of this, the study examines a series of African cultures that incapacitate women attempts to accept responsibilities in public domain and professional endeavour in selected African countries. The study found that many African traditional values are antithetical to women empowerment, curtail their education and political participation, and constitute impediments to the region's effort at achieving MDG.. The unproductive lifestyle of African women, attributed to cultural restraints, has worsened the plight of the already downwardly mobile masses. The study concludes by reiterating the urgent need for policy makers, national government and womenfolk to accept only those African values that conform to global drives for the realization of MDG and abolish those harmful to women's participation in decision-making and developmental activities.

Keywords: Africa, culture, development, feminism, gender.

INTRODUCTION

"It is good to swim in the water of tradition but to sink in them is suicide." Mohanly (2001)

Africa is very rich and diverse in its culture, and its

cultural activities mostly center on the family and ethnic groups, while art, music, and oral literature serve to reinforce existing religious and social patterns. The West, influenced by European culture and Christianity, first rejected African traditional culture, but with the rise of African nationalism, a cultural revival occurred (African Guide, 2003). Africa, despite the colonial onslaught on its culture, has been able to sustain many of her cultural practices. Most of the contending issues in Africa revolve

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around the influence of culture in its developmental efforts. Religious and customary laws support the denial of women's right and empowerment that have continued to weaken the continent's economic productivity. That Africa is lagging behind in global drive for universal attainment of economic development is no longer the issue, the real contention centers around unraveling series of factors that have withered down its developmental efforts. African leaders and policy makers started contemplating the necessary strategies to facilitate development immediately after independence.

The search for a bail-out from the shackles of impoverishment re-ignited the view that African culture was antithetical to socio-economic advancement (Njoh, 2006). The economic malaise in developing world and the need to increase the welfare of humanity led world leaders to adopt the Millennium Declaration, tagged Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the year 2000. One of the core prerequisites for the attainment of MDG is women empowerment. The Millennium Development Goal 3 (MDG.3), which promotes gender equality, is recognized not only as a goal in itself but also as an essential step for achieving all other goals (Yeshiareg, 2007). It was soon discovered that gender inequality would hamper the realization of United Nation's target for development across the globe. There arose a global realization that failure to pay closer attention to the differentiated positions of women and men in society (resource allocation, rights, and opportunities) in formulating policies and designing projects can have adverse impact on development outcomes.

It is true that African development could be provoked from within its cultural boundaries up to the global level just like China has done, but it becomes important, bearing in mind African "acceptance" to be part of the global village, to reveal some African culture that encourage gender imbalance, which dissuade moves for genuine development in the continent. It becomes consequential to ask how would there be women empowerment when all around Africa, baby girls are raped and murdered; and school girls are abducted and forced into the armies; and under-age girls forced into marriages as full house wives at the tender age of twelve? Or how would a full *house wife* contribute to national development? How would women folks compete with men when the society regards them as inferior and deny them equal opportunities? The study therefore focuses on the link between African culture that affects women empowerment and the attainment of MDG in Africa. In weaving a common thread through these concepts, the paper would refrain from being entirely radical and legalistic but dwell on those aspects of feminism that seem culturally founded and anti-developmental within the paradigm of neo-liberal political economy. It is pertinent not to be drawn into intellectual exposition on the acceptance of western culture as the sure path of development in Africa nor hold on to the

opposing argument that African developmental efforts must reflect its culture.

Conceptual Clarification

To the anthropologists, culture is the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings and transmitted from one generation to another. Culture, a term from the Latin word *cultura* stemming from *colere* - "cultivate", has different meaning. Culture is regarded assets of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution, organization or group. Culture is the integrated pattern of human behavior and attitude that includes thought, speech, action, artifacts and depends upon the human capacity for transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations (This is available at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/medical/culture>). It is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a religious or social group. It is also the vector that orients and ascribes meaning to all existence and practices. Fischer (2007) argues that:

culture is not a variable-culture is relational, it is elsewhere or in passage, it is where meaning is woven and renewed, often through gaps and silences, and forces beyond the conscious control of individuals, and yet the space where individual and institutional social responsibility and ethical struggle take place-I name culture as a set of central anthropological forms of knowledge grounding human beings' self-understanding (Fischer, 2007).

The term empowerment has different meanings depending on the socio-economic, political and cultural context in which it is presented. Overall empowerment can be perceived as a process or as outcome/goal and can take place at different levels (individual and community. In discussing the relation between empowerment and poverty reduction for example, World Bank defines empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and actions and increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affects one's life (Yeshiareg, 2007). Women empowerment is a process through which women gain the ability to take ownership and control of their lives. Women empowerment is the development of mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favorably level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status. Long and Clark (2005) capture the essence of women empowerment by saying:

For a woman to be empowered, she must have the ability to first recognize her own self-interest, and then act on it by choosing and negotiating a path that will

take her beyond the constraints that gender identity has imposed on her. For these changes to be sustained, behavioral shifts will have to become routinised and be accompanied by support from informal and formal institutions (Longwe and Clark, 2005).

Empowerment could also translate to the power to choose on matter relating to their lives, husband, where to work and bear children. They need access to material, human, economic and social resources like money, land, and instruments to make their choices. Much, but not too much have been written on development and its numerous variants; economic, political and socio-cultural development. The development that directly has to do with improvement in the financial life of society remains economic development, which is the central thrust of MDG. This study recognizes the argument for and against this assertion, but that is not the interest here, the concern is the increase in the Gross National Product (GNP) of African states.

Economic development is a program, group of policies, or activity that improves the economic well-being and quality of life of a society. It is the process by which nations increase the economic, political, and social wellbeing of their people. It focuses on the institutional changes made to promote economic betterment. It involves the social and organizational changes geared towards growth in an economy. Economic development is measured in terms of job provision income, improvements in human development, education, health, and opportunities: these factors are central to the objectives of MDG. Therefore the Millennium development Goals (MDG) was declared by United Nations in 2000 to spare no effort to free the human race from abject and dehumanizing conditions of abject poverty, which more than a billion people are subjected to (Ackon, 2009).

Theoretical framework

Over the years, scholars across the globe have been divided along the modernization school of thought and dependency theory positions on the impoverishment of developing economies like Africa (Ake, 1981). The modernization school of thought, as advanced by the western scholars, posit that development occurs in stages. The high rate of poverty in Africa for example, rests on internal contradictions and impediments to development, which ranges from corruption, bad leadership, low per-capital income, political instabilities, and more importantly, un-democratization. Development economists like Watt Rostow reveal the difficulties of Africa to develop without abandoning its cultural or traditional practices and assuming Euro-centric cultural values, beliefs and ideology (Njoh, 2006). The \

dependency theorists link the poor state of African economy to the integration of African economy to the economy of the advanced capitalist countries during colonialism. The granting of political independence did not 'immune' African nations from neo imperialism with its antecedent's exploitation of Africa's resources (both material and human) by the developed states.

Feminist theory focuses on the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse, with the aims to understand the nature of gender inequality, and gender role. A gender role means a set of perceived behavioral norms associated with males or females, in a specific social group or system. Liberals generally hold that individual sovereignty is a fundamental value, and that the just state ensures freedom for citizens. Liberal feminists share this view, and insist on freedom for women. There is disagreement among liberals about the idea of freedom, and thus liberal feminism takes are divided into classical liberal or libertarian feminism and egalitarian liberal feminism (Baehr, 2007).

Classical liberal conceives of liberty as freedom from coercive interference. It holds that women, as well as men, have a right to such freedom due to their status as self-owners. It posits that coercive state power is justified only to the extent necessary to protect the right to freedom from coercive interference (Baehr, 2007). Some (equity feminists) prefer a nonpolitical role for feminism and support every other opportunity for women advancement. Cultural libertarian feminists, on the other hand are classical liberals who hold that the culture of societies is patriarchal and a significant source of oppression of women. Cultural libertarianism is a form of classical liberalism that is:

concerned about constraints on individual freedom from government as well as from traditionalist, family, religious, and community institutions-the same civil institutions that conservatives see as necessary for ordered liberty to thrive" (Young, 2007: 5).

The second variant, egalitarian liberal feminism conceives freedom as personal autonomy, living a life of one's choosing, and advocates for political autonomy. It holds that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women's lives, or that social arrangements often fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other elements of women's flourishing. Their needs and interests are insufficiently reflected in the basic conditions under which they live, and that those conditions lack legitimacy because women are inadequately represented in the processes of democratic self-determination. Also that autonomy deficits like these are due to the gender system (Okin 1989), or the patriarchal nature of inherited traditions and institutions, and that the women's movement should work to identify and remedy them.

MDG and Cultural Impediments to Women Empowerment

Every society all over the world is attached to a particular pattern of behaviour, values and belief system which make up its culture; hence, Africa is no exception. There is nothing crude or barbaric about African culture; neither could one ascribe perfection or excellence to any culture. In Africa, women rely more on tradition in their life cycle than men do. Stages of puberty, marriage, childbirth, and child rearing are mired in myths and traditions which leave many women complying with traditional and often subordinating practices (Chitiga, 2008). Africa culture frowns at rebellion, especially from women folk. There are sanctions for rebellion, which include violence and ostracisation. There are further sanctions for those who do not choose to suffer in silence. The communities isolate victims of gender-based violence who choose to report. Gender inequality has therefore been used to preserve a social order. African society in its bid to survive strives for predictability and reproduces prototypes of men and women.

Individuals learn their behaviour and roles from society, which expose them to cultural ideals of masculinity and femininity. This process of socialization is almost invisible and multidimensional. It is hardly affected by programmes for gender equality, unless it is frontally confronted. In Nigeria for example and according to Afonja, the Yoruba culture remains one of the most liberal and gender free in the world, yet women are culturally subordinate/autonomous to men (Marian, 1995). Women are denied of property rights among others, and widows are most times denied the right to lay claim to spouse properties. Men superiority is based on nature-culture explanation of inequality. Women are closer to nature by virtue of biological reproduction and that men, as creators of culture are inherently superior since culture is superior to nature. Traditional practices have turned Nigerian women into powerless crippled humans in the hands of the male and sometimes, law of the land. According to a study (Coker, 2007) two-thirds of women in certain part of Lagos State experience physical, sexual and psychological abuses daily; and he generally posits that:

Due to the disinterest of politicians and policy makers, our carefree cultural attitude towards abuse, and our women lack of awareness on what constitutes abuse, the exact numbers of affected women cannot be properly documented. Yes, our culture fuels the illtreatment of women by failing to provide adequate support for abused women and by encouraging gender inequality. Our culture supports this practice by making it socially acceptable to batter a woman and by expecting a woman to silently endure any ill-fate that befalls her in her matrimonial home...our culture prevent the woman's parent from helping her (Coker, 2007).

In some parts of Nigeria, customary laws founded on religious practices support denial of women's right on sexual relations and this tends to criminalize women more than men. One could still remember the popular case of Sefiat in Nigeria, who was impregnated by a man, and the community nearly stoned her to death, without any penalty for the man that impregnated her. Until recently, women have been exempted from politics. Women that participated in politics were seen as wayward with unsettled family, and there were allegations of women being used as sex slaves by male politicians. In Rwanda, the government passed a law in 1999 giving women inheritance rights equal to those of male (Berhane, 2008). This overrules traditional norms which gives right of inheritance to male and allows female orphans of the 1994 genocide to secure land. Similarly, the South African constitutional provisions guarantee among other basic rights, gender equality. This right is enforced through a number of legislations and policies. One of such legislations is the Promulgation of the Employment Equity Act (1998).

The act serves as a mechanism to advance gender equality in employment. Against this background, South Africa appears to have made much progress in the advancement of gender neutral society. However, these legislations have had negligible impact on the amelioration of gender inequality as there is still high level of unfair treatment and discrimination against women (SAHRC, 2012). The pre-modern Ghanaian society sees women as bearers of children, retailers of fish and farmers. Sending girl-child to school is remote because of household work, and since they would soon get married, thereby shifting their responsibilities to the husband. There is also the belief that girl's marriage prospects are dimmed when she became educated. Educated girls have better opportunities to get employed and earn higher wages, and participate in community life and decision-making. They tend to marry later, have fewer and healthier children that are more likely to attend school themselves (DFID, 2008). While it is true that there are no laws in Ghana that foster discrimination against women's participation in socioeconomic development, there still remain numerous areas where gender imbalances exist as a consequence of the conditions of women's work, cultural beliefs and attitudes, value systems and folklore (Amoako-Nuama, 1996). These give greater leverage in status through training and education, greater political and decision making power to men. Women in Libya are also restricted to household work, and could only constitute 7 percent (1980) of the state's work force.

In Morocco, there is high illiteracy level of women, which restricts their advancement and productive activities. The Millennium Development Goals remain a global response to the poor economic life of world population. The MDG encapsulate the development aspirations of the world as a whole: the project responds

to the world's main development challenges. The MDG are drawn from the actions and targets contained in the *Millennium Declaration* that was adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000 (UNDP, 2009). Since its declaration in 2000, each country has been working towards its attainment, but many developing countries are very far from meeting 2015 deadline. This prompted the United Nations' Secretary General, Ban Kimoon to declare thus (UN, 2009):

We have made important progress in this effort and have many successes on which to build. But we have been moving too slowly to meet our goals. Time is short. We must seize this historic moment to act responsibly and decisively for the common good" (UN, 2009).

The eight goals of the project are to; eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a Global Partnership for Development. The MDG is designed to achieve high income, plenty food, and encourage the eradication of poverty, but the concern is how these goals could be achieved when women are "prevented", mostly by culture to be economically productive. How would Africa develop when women are not allowed to secure job, and when they manage to do, they are constrained to take less-paying and less sensitive jobs? Almost one third of employed women in developing world are in vulnerable jobs as own-account or unpaid family workers (United Nations, 2008). They are denied property rights and this makes it difficult for banks to loan them money to engage them in productive business of their own.

It was discovered that some African cultures restrict women to household works, while some women remain full house-wives. Considering the huge women population as wives, denying them the right to work shifts financial responsibility of the home only on the husband. It was reported that 1.4 billion people in developing countries are living in extreme poverty in 2005, 26 percent of African population are malnourished, while poverty in sub-Sahara Africa remains 50 percent (United Nations, 2008). Efforts to empower women in Uganda led to the formation of Nakaseke Women Development Association (NAWODA) in 2001. It seeks to empower Uganda women by training them in the use of Information and communication Technology (ICT) and integration of these skills into their daily income-generating activities. African women continue to face discrimination in accessing ICTs due to difficulties ranging from illiteracy, socio-cultural attitudes and preconceptions about women's interactions with technology (Berhane, 2008).

Improving women's participation in the information economy would surely produce series of benefits, including increased creativity, expertise and competitiveness in the technology sector of a country. Below represents the working population in the following regions. The low percentage in North Africa reflects their cultural practices built on religion.

Table 1: Working Population of Women

Region/Sub Region	Percentage (%)
North Africa	22
Sub-Sahara Africa	55
Developed Region	64

Source: MDG Report 2008

In the area of universal education, the women folk have suffered more by the deprivation of women's rights to basic education. Some parents are reluctant to send girl-child to school and instead hurriedly marry them off as full house-wives at the age of 13 in northern Nigeria, claiming that *women's place is in the kitchen and part of husband's property*. In Ethiopia, there was low enrollment and high drop-out rates of girls, while gender gap more than 10 percent in primary education (Soul Beat Africa, 2009). Countries like Ghana Burundi, Ethiopia and Ghana have abolished school fees to encourage people to acquire basic education. A connection between universal education and eradication of poverty lies with the fact that poverty also keeps people from school. According to UNESCO statistics 31% of women in Nigeria are literate against 54% for men. Women made up to two thirds of illiterate adults, (Egunjobi 2005). The National literacy rate for female is only 56% compared to 72% for male, and in certain states the female literacy, enrolment and achievement rates are much lower, for example, girls net enrolment in Sokoto, is 15% compared to 59% for boys (UNICEF, 2002). However, in Nigeria today, there is progress in women education with the exception of northern Nigeria (Uduigwomen, 2004).

Gender Equality, which is the third goal, remains the high mark of other MDG. Women's economic and political empowerment was adopted as one of the strategies for advancing the agenda of gender equality at the IV UN Conference on Women in 1995 (Yeshiareg, 2007). It becomes imperative for African society to erode traditional culture that delineates the status of women and gender relations in Africa. Colonialism too played its part in gender inequality in Africa. Women were neck deep in agricultural production before colonialism, and were restricted to subsistence farming while men took over the production of cash crops. The introduction of voting system to Africa during colonialism also widened the gap between men and women in relation to empowerment as women were denied their right to vote and be voted for.

In Ghana for example, this and other gender imbalance led to the inauguration of National Council of Ghana Women (NCGW) by Nkrumah on September 10 1960 (Donkor, 2009). It was a feminist movement to help achieve government post-independence political, social, educational and economic development. Ten women were elected into parliament in 1960, and this made Ghana one of the first African states to introduce a quota system for women. Paragraph 58 of the World Summit Outcome Document of 2005 articulates the resolution of the world leaders to eliminate pervasive gender discrimination in primary and secondary education, property and housing rights, access to reproductive health, access to labor markets, sustainable employment, and labor protection, and representation in government decision-making bodies as well as elimination of all forms of violence against women and the girl child (Donkor, 2009). It goes further that currently, six African countries have attained 30% and above (Beijing goal) representation of women in national parliaments (Rwanda 48.8%, Mozambique 34.8%, South Africa 32.8 %, Burundi, 30.5 %, United Republic of Tanzania, 30.4% and Uganda 29.8 %). Women's participation in politics has gained modestly in Namibia (26.9%), (Tunisia 22.8%), Eritrea (22%), Senegal (22%) and Ethiopia (21.9 %).

The presentation below shows the percentage of women in parliament in the chosen regions. The low number of women politicians in North Africa rests on cultural adherence that prevents women in public life. Algeria, a Northern Africa country and an exception recorded higher percentage of girls' enrollment in school than boys, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage of Girls Enrollment in Schools

Region/Sub Region	Year 2000 Percentage (%)	Year 2008 percentage
North Africa	2.1	8.3
Sub-Sahara Africa	9.1	17.3
Developed Regions	17.5	22.8

Source: MDG Report 2008

The exclusion of women from politics provoke arguments by feminists that women access to power and decision-making in the public sphere was important to achieving gender equality, and sustainable development and security (Being the perspective of a lecturer in the School of Social Sciences, UKZN, Pietermaritzburg, June 25, 2012). The belief was that women would choose policies that would improve the status of women, impacting on gender power relations both in the private and public spheres, that women would promote justice, peace and equality in general, and that having a critical

mass of women in politics would transform the very nature of political power, by making it more honest and accountable. Women were therefore encouraged to enter formal politics and soon countries such as Uganda and Rwanda (48.8%) had large numbers of women political representatives. One of the limiting factors for women non participation in politics is attributed to lack of personal finance to contest election. It is then no surprise that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first democratically elected President in the history of Africa.

The reduction in child mortality and improvement in maternal health are associated with problem of poverty and abuse of young ladies into untimely marriage. In the rural area of northern Nigeria, where women find it difficult to take her child to the hospital without the consent and presence of the husband, there are high tendency of threats to maternal health and child mortality. It was recorded that more than 500,000 prospective mothers in developing countries die annually in childbirth or of complications from pregnancy (United Nations, 2008). Efforts to combat HIV/AIDS could not be successful in a society with high number of rape cases and very few reported cases, and where ladies are sometimes "forced" to engage in sexuality before securing jobs, and where a very accessible job is "marketing" that require "returns" *by any means*. Gender inequality, low socio-economic status of women, and gender based violence make female sex much more vulnerable to HIV infection (Being a comment of a student in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, who lost five (5) of his relatives, including his mother, to HIV/AIDS infection, June 6, 2012). As of December 2007, women make up 61 percent living with HIV and AIDS in Sub Sahara Africa, up from 57 percent in 2003 (Berhane, 2008).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As much as Africa accepts its shortcomings toward women empowerment and achieving sustainable development by 2015, these suggestions would help Africa in its developmental stride. The first area to be improved upon is the removal of all cultural constraints to girls and women basic education and intellectual advancement in the bid to attain gender parity. The study advocates for a large-scale alliance to abolish African traditional practices and promote women empowerment through mobilization of political will, enforcement of conventions, laws and policies and the linkage of those efforts with effective implementation strategies. Men should not feel threatened by women empowerment but increase their involvement in strategies to empower women. The starting point should be the readiness of *the powers that be* in international politics to appoint a woman as the UN Secretary-General, Presidents of IMF or World Bank.

The moderate achievements in all areas of women empowerment and achievement of MDG should be guided jealously and create conditions necessary for further expansion of recorded successes. African national governments need to accelerate the achievement of MDG that equally benefit and empower women and ensure their access to education and health services, full and decent employment, and equal political participation and decision-making in every sector. The enormous task to eradicate gender imbalance in society should not be left alone for nation-state; it is pertinent to engage the conscious efforts by every facets of African societies to remove discrimination against women. The enactment of laws on all forms of violence, discriminations against women and pay parity with men is necessary.

It also becomes imperative to support women entrepreneurship and productive activities, especially in rural areas through improved access to property and economic assets, and microfinance. It is in the interest of African economy if there is public awareness to reduce girl's domestic responsibilities and campaign against early marriage and pregnancy. Women's groups and reproductive health practitioners should do more to demystify the lifecycle of women. It is important to put resources toward programmes that address the special needs of women and to label them as such. That way society will be reminded on the need to achieve gender equality. Women too should strive to claim their rights and occupy sensitive positions in society instead of relying on men's goodwill or understanding in the fight against gender imbalance.

An effective strategy is necessary to develop a mechanism to change gendered roles and behaviours between men and women. Cultural change should not be a byproduct of programmes alone but should also be programmed as an end in itself. The methods for achieving this should be multidimensional, overt and covert and multilevel. The need for a cultural shift in Africa is imminent, as long as the region's political economy is still located within neo-liberal push for *internationalization* of capitalism. The paper advocates for a cultural shift towards the Westernization of Africans in the area of adherence to gender equity directed at developmental purposes. Since the promulgation of the Universal declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, progress in gender equality and women's advancement has been recorded, especially in the development of global and regional commitments on gender equality. African states have been signatory to and ratified most of the international conventions and many national governments have made commitments to address gender equality. As strong as these efforts and declarations are, progress has been very slow in overcoming gender disparity, which constitutes an impediments to the attainment of MDG in Africa.

The paper submits that a major bottleneck to

achieving economic progress is cultural attitudes and practices and tries to denounce thoughts on the destruction of African culture but argues for the transformation of cultural practices and traditional beliefs to meet contemporary development stride of African continent. There is compelling evidence that gender equality and empowerment of women are instrumental for achieving other MDG; hence, the goal of women empowerment should be directed towards restoring the dignity of womanhood as a sound and functional members of the society. Gender equality also requires that women have an equal role with men in decision making, especially at the pinnacles of economic and political power. African society is on the brink of reproducing societies that are hostile to women empowerment and advancement in the name of culture, which impedes African development.

Although, there were many conventions on the elimination of every form of discrimination against women, however, most African cultures are still susceptible to gender imbalance and women discrimination. The limited progress in achieving gender equality is a pervasive shortcoming that extends beyond the goal itself. Insensitivity to gender balance continues to thrive in some African society. The incessant hostility to feminism will continue to weaken African economy and jeopardize serious attempts to the attainment of sustainable development in Africa. Looking ahead to 2015, Africa can achieve the overreaching goal and put an end to poverty as long as there is a renewed effort to eliminate gender inequality by societal alienation from the shackles of cultural beliefs and practices that chain down the *iron walls* of African development.

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