



CHAPTER 8

Social Diversity, Gender, Equity and Public Policy

Betty Akullu Ezati

INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights some select issues of importance to policy makers arising from the discourse on social diversity, gender, equity and public policy. In particular, this chapter explains key issues in the discourse on social diversity, gender and equity including vulnerability and exclusion, multiculturalism, social accountability in pursuit of equity and citizen participation in public policy making. It also examines socio-cultural challenges to inclusive policies and legislations and policies on fairness. This chapter draws examples from the African continent as well as global contexts where necessary to illustrate the existing social diversity, gender and equity issues. The examples are meant to prompt readers of this chapter to reflect on the context of their countries and be able to analyse and seek ways to address discriminatory practices that hinder inclusivity in our very diverse societies.

B. A. Ezati (✉)

Department of Foundations and Curriculum Studies, School of Education,
Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

e-mail: betty.ezati@mak.ac.ug

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SOCIAL DIVERSITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

The word “diversity” has multiple meanings and connotations depending on the context. Coleman and Anjur (2017) define diversity as the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Laurencin (2019) noted that diversity was initially used to refer to race, gender and sexual orientation, but it has been expanded to cover physical appearance, belief systems, thoughts, styles, socio-economic status, rural/urban geographical locations and disability, and it continues to expand.

As a descriptive term, “diversity” is often used interchangeably with words such as heterogeneity, variety, variegated, multiplicity or multifarious. A diverse situation is typically contrasted with uniformity, homogeneity, sameness and standardization. Alternatively, “diversity” is sometimes used as a prescriptive term advocated as a policy principle or criterion, particularly in relation to the practices of specific institutions. For example, the achievement of a more diverse staff is often advanced as a desirable goal within both public and private sector organizations. Diversity has been promoted as an important criterion for the selection of students by many leading universities (Bowen and Bok, 1998; Mdepa and Lullu 2012) and in the workplace (Zulu and Parumasur 2009; Arubayi and Tiemo 2012).

In recent times, “diversity” has increasingly been used as a shorthand way of referring to *social diversity* (Wood 2003). Social diversity means co-existence of different social groups within a given geo-political setting. It is the differentiation of society into groups. The other terms that are commonly cited as synonyms of social diversity include “plurality”, “multiculturalism”, “social differentiation”, among others.

In short, social diversity refers to differences seen in a particular society with respect to religions, cultural backgrounds, social status, economic status, and so on. Social diversity is regarded as something that makes the universe more liveable and attractive (Young 1994). Many African countries are known for their diversified nature in aspects such as faith, rituals and customs, geographical differences, linguistic elements and other social aspects.

Social diversity should be considered a normal and healthy response to the pressures of the globalizing marketplace. It only becomes dangerous when it is mobilized and manipulated to serve selfish interests. The most important

policy question for accommodation in pluralist societies, therefore, becomes how to promote an inclusive sense of social diversity without simultaneously losing a feel of belonging and attachment to one's own social group. (Young 1994)

Many times, people make assumptions about others based on their membership in a group. Keefe, Marshall, & Robeson (2003) explain that people in diverse societies tolerate differences by generalizing individuals into groups and this is communicated in word and action to families, communities including young children. Such groupings create a culture of prejudice. In such cases, social diversity becomes negative and this results into social differences, inequality and division.

Social differences are distinctions and discriminations that occur between or even within different social groups in each society based on social, economic and racial inequality (Shannon 2018). Although many social differences are generally based on the accident of birth, for instance, the difference between males and females, heights and complexion, caste, tribe/ethnic groups and region, few are not attributable to birth, for example, being God fearing or atheists. These differences are voluntarily or involuntarily chosen by the people themselves.

Social differences need not be taken in a negative sense as it is natural and integral to the existence of any society (Young 1994). However, there is a tendency to sort people by the most salient category such as age, gender and race (Shannon 2018). The way people are sorted does not only determine how they are treated in the community (Lareau 2015) but also determine how they relate amongst themselves and the upbringing of their children. This in turn perpetuates the differences and inequality. For instance, Calarco (2014, 2019) in a study shows that middle-class parents provide direct and forceful coaching to their children, teaching them how to intervene in schools, whereas working-class parents admonish their children not to pester the teacher or engage in any potentially annoying behaviour. Likewise, Streib (2011) reports how day-care teachers create dynamics that often privilege the verbal skills of middle-class children compared to their working-class counterparts. These affect the performance of the children of the middle- and working-class parents and perpetuate inequality. In such cases, social differences become negative and cause social inequality.

Social Division: When social differences become acute and one community is discriminated against because of inborn or artificially crafted

differences, it becomes social division. Social division is the segregation among the members of a society that are based on factors such as religion, race, caste and language. It is therefore important to take time and learn about other people and ensure inclusivity in public policy.

Social inequality is a corollary to social differences. It refers to the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions or statuses within a group or society. Social inequality has several dimensions including income and wealth, power, occupational prestige, schooling, ancestry, race and ethnicity. In addition, there are persistent inequalities of income and opportunity within and across countries and regions. For example, while some countries have abundant resources, in others the population live in deprivation (Mahembe and Odhiambo 2018). Baldry (2016) study shows difference in employment between blacks and whites in South Africa. The findings show that differences in race and socio-economic status were the major indicators of unemployment in South Africa with Coloured, Indian/Asian and white graduates five times more likely to be employed than black African graduates, and the upper three of four socio-economic status groups more than four times as likely to be employed than those in the lowest socio-economic status group.

Social inequalities are often associated with aspects such as age, gender, ethnicity and race. In relation to age, studies show increasing ageing generation and large numbers of the youth—shrinking working-age populations and rapid populations ageing amidst rapidly changing family structures and declining family support systems. These have implications for policy in terms of labour supply, old-age support, social security, healthcare systems, protecting older people's rights and interests and associated development strategies. Population dynamics, particularly in the context of persistent inequalities, will have major influence on development processes and on the inclusive and balanced growth and outcomes. Thus, taking stock of the existing inequality in a particular society is important in planning for interventions.

Similarly, increasing urbanization will continue affecting the demography and this is likely to impact policy. Africa is experiencing increased urbanization (Korah and Cobbinah 2017) and this is expected to continue. Urbanization, if well planned, has the potential to improve people's access to education, health, housing and other services, and to expand their opportunities for economic productivity. However, urban population growth also presents challenges for urban planning and good governance, particularly when that growth is rapid and countries and localities

are not prepared for it (see Akinyode 2016; Korah and Cobbinah 2017; Oluwatayo and Ojo 2018).

Another issue affecting demography is migration and displacement. Primarily driven by economic disparities, political instability or conflict, natural or man-made disasters including environmental degradation or chemical or nuclear disasters and famine or even development projects are also likely to continue in many African countries. Moreover, migration is not without hardship and struggle of what a newcomer thought was going to be a new life with new opportunities (Bellino and Dryden-Peterson 2019). Newcomers are constantly confronted with difficulties to access a country's resources including public housing, healthcare benefits, employment support services and social security benefits because they are seen as "undeserving foreigners". From instance, in South Africa, refugee children can only access education after presenting birth certificates (Perumal 2015). This in essence excludes most of the children who when fleeing leave their documents in their country of origin.

Social exclusion is the process in which individuals are blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group and which are fundamental to social integration and observance of human rights within that group, for example, housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation and due process (De Haan and Maxwell 1998).

Alienation or disenfranchisement resulting from social exclusion can be connected to a person's social class, race, skin colour, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, educational status, childhood relationship, living standards or appearance (De Haan and Maxwell 1998). Such exclusionary forms of discrimination may also apply to people with disability, minorities, different sexual orientations, drug users, elderly and the young. Anyone who appears to deviate in any way from perceived norms of a population may become subject to coarse or subtle forms of discrimination and social exclusion (Young 2000).

The outcome of social exclusion is that affected individuals or communities are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social and political life of the society in which they live. This may result to a resistance in form of demonstrations, protests or lobbying by the excluded people (Young 2000).

VULNERABILITY AND EXCLUSION

Vulnerability is a broad concept that not only incorporates being individually exposed to physical, psychological or emotional harms but also incorporates a social dimension that refers to the inability of people, communities or societies to overcome the effect of stressors to which they are exposed and are at risk of not realizing their potential to achieve positive life outcomes (Morese et al. 2019). Vulnerability can have its roots in poverty, social exclusion, ethnicity, disability or simply in disease or specific developmental phases in life. There are many groups that are prone to vulnerability including the elderly and youth. Similarly, there are places that are disposed to landslides and other natural disasters (Korah and Cobbinah 2017). This could explain why recently, there has been a surge of interest in vulnerability and different measures have been gradually developed to capture a country's proneness to shocks and its ability to recover from shocks. It is, however, difficult to identify and assess vulnerability both at individual and community level, not only because of the different composite measures available but also because it involves a longitudinal perspective and tracking the well-being of a particular person, household or community over years (Morese et al. 2019).

Assessing vulnerability among adolescent is complex because adolescents do not always act to serving their own best interests (Parker et al. 2014) but also frequently underestimate the risk associated with actions or choices. Vulnerable youth are often at risk of developing problem behaviours and outcomes that increase the potential to hurt themselves and their community. In this context, effective preventive or prompt interventions are necessary. Policies to stem vulnerability require conceptualizing, measuring, evaluating the burden of adolescent vulnerability and identifying factors that potentially protect or can buffer youths from its effects (Parker et al. 2014).

Similarly, old age, usually associated with fragility, increases vulnerability to stressors due to decline in the ability to maintain homeostasis, impairments in multiple systems and decreases in physiological reserves (Boston, 2006). Old age is linked to restrictions on mobility, reduced social networks, loss of confidence and self-esteem, access to political and civic processes, infrastructure, lack of opportunities to keep up to date with technological changes and information. Likewise, loneliness, social isolation and reduced participation in community activities have been associated with physical decline of the elderly. However, Valtorta and

Hanratty (2013) caution that individuals may feel lonely without being socially isolated, experience loneliness and isolation equally, or be socially isolated without feeling lonely. Conversely, a strong social network has a protective effect (Boston, 2006). Active involvement of the elderly in their communities can bring economic and social value through the contributions they make and the opportunities they create as volunteers, workers, informal careers and consumers. Community involvement can also help maintain their motivation and sense of feeling valued, thus avoiding social isolation and many of its associated problems and risks. For these reasons, policies should be designed to provide support and create the conditions that enable the elderly to participate fully in the life of their communities (Boston 2006).

Links Between Social Exclusion, Poverty and Vulnerability

From the above discussions, vulnerability is closely related to the concept of social exclusion. Social exclusion is a result of personal risk factors (age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, social status, education and political affiliation); macro-societal changes (demographic and geographical location, globalization, immigration, economic and labour market developments, technological innovation, the evolution of social norms); government legislation and social policy; and the actual behaviour of businesses, administrative organizations and fellow citizens (Sen 1998; Hadjetian, 2008; Gerring, et al, 2018). These have potential to contribute negatively to one's access to resources and services.

Chambers (1989) explains that vulnerability is not a synonym for poverty because poverty means lack or want and is usually measured using income or consumption while vulnerability means insecurity, defencelessness and exposure to risk and shocks. Literature shows that exclusion in any form leads to poverty and poverty could also lead to exclusion. The result of discrimination is deprivation which leads to poverty and social exclusion. This relationship is shown in Fig. 8.1.

Social exclusion theoretically emerges at the individual or group level on four correlated dimensions:

- insufficient access to social rights,
- material deprivation,
- limited social participation and
- a lack of normative integration.

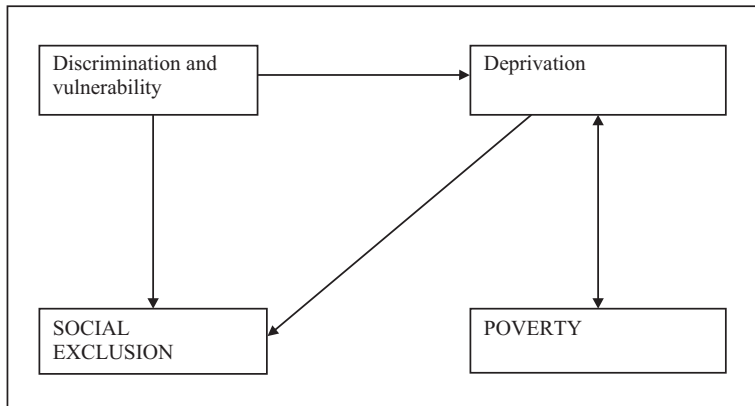


Fig. 8.1 Relationship between exclusion factors and poverty. *Source: Authors construct*

Individual Exclusion: This results into an individual being excluded from meaningful participation in society (Hadjetian, 2008). For instance, individuals with disabilities may be excluded from the labour force because they jeopardize productivity, increase rate of absenteeism and create more accidents in the workplace (Genevieve, 2011). The marginalization of individuals with disabilities is prevalent today (Kisanji 2006), despite the existence of legislations intended to prevent it in most countries, and the academic achievements, skills and training of many disabled people.

Community Exclusion: Many communities experience social exclusion, such as racial, for instance, African American, Native Indians in the United States, Aboriginals in Australia, the Untouchable or Low Castes in India and some ethnic groups in African countries. For instance, because of colonialism, Aboriginal communities lost their land, were forced into destitute areas, lost their sources of livelihood and were excluded from the labour market. Additionally, Aboriginal communities lost their culture and values through forced assimilation and lost their rights in society (Gerring, et al, 2018). Today various Aboriginal communities continue to be marginalized from society due to practices, policies and programmes that “met the needs of white people and not of the marginalized groups themselves” (Genevieve, 2011). Reports of exclusion have also been made of English-speaking Cameroon, in Pre-1994 Rwanda, Darfur in Sudan (Agbor and Njeassam 2019).

The World Bank 2019 World Development Report on the Changing Nature of Work suggests that enhanced social protection and better investments in human capital can improve equality of opportunity and social inclusion. The report also calls on countries to extend opportunities to people who are disadvantaged because of their identity to take part in society and to respect their dignity. Sen (2000) has stressed that what matters is not what people possess, but what they are enabled to do. Capabilities are absolute requirements for full membership of society.

MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

The term *multiculturalism*, in everyday usage, is a synonym with “ethnic pluralism”. The two terms often used interchangeably to refer to context in which various ethnic groups collaborate and enter a dialogue with one another without having to sacrifice their identities (Boofu, 2012; Wessendorf 2013). Multiculturalism describes a mixed ethnic community area where multiple cultural traditions co-exist (as in many urban centres) (Genevieve, 2011; Wessendorf 2013).

As a sociological concept, multiculturalism is the end-state of either a natural or artificial process (e.g. legally controlled *immigration*) and occurs on either a large national scale or a smaller scale within a nation’s communities. On a smaller scale this can occur artificially when a jurisdiction is established or expanded by amalgamating areas with two or more different cultures—for instance, the French Canada and English Canada (Wotherspoon and Jungbluth 1995; Tieney, 2011) and English- and French-speaking Cameroon (Agbor and Njeassam 2019). On a large scale, it can occur as a result of either legal or illegal *migration* to and from different jurisdictions around the world (e.g. *Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain* by Angles, Saxons and Jutes in the fifth century or the colonization of the Americans, Africans and Asians by Europeans from the sixteenth century). Thus, the term multiculturalism as used in reference to Western *nation-states*, which had seemingly achieved a de facto single national identity during the eighteenth and/or nineteenth centuries.

Multiculturalism as a political philosophy involves ideologies and policies which vary widely but seeks to create a society that incorporates multiple cultures (Harper 2013). It has been described as a “*salad bowl*” and as a “*cultural mosaic*”, in contrast to a “*melting pot*” (Burgess 2008). The term is often associated with “identity politics”, “the politics of difference” and “the politics of recognition”. It is also a matter of economic

interests and political power (Wessendorf 2013). In more recent times political multiculturalist ideologies have been expanding in their use to include and define disadvantaged groups such as African Americans, LGBT, with arguments often focusing on ethnic and religious minorities, minority nations, indigenous peoples and even the disabled. The scope of the term and its practical use has been the subject of serious debate.

Historically, support for modern multiculturalism stems from the changes in Western societies after World War II. Wessendorf (2013) called it the “human rights revolution”, in which the horrors of institutionalized racism and ethnic cleansing became impossible to ignore because of the holocaust, the collapse of the colonial system and the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The collapse of the colonial system exposed the discriminatory practices of the colonial system while the Civil Rights Movement revealed how assimilation did not remove prejudices against those who did not act according to the Anglo-American Standards (Reitz 2009). Multiculturalism in Western countries was thus viewed as a strategy to combat racism, protect minority communities of all types and undo policies that had prevented minorities from having full access to the opportunities for freedom and equality promised by the liberalism that has been the hallmark of Western societies since the Age of the Enlightenment (Burgess 2008; Wessendorf 2013; Gunew, 2009).

The Canadian government has been viewed as the instigator of the current multicultural ideology because of its public emphasis on it through the Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Wotherspoon and Jungbluth 1995). In the Western English-speaking countries, multiculturalism as an official national policy started in Canada in 1971, followed by Australia in 1973 (Gunew, 2009; Tariq 2016), and it was quickly adopted as official policy by most member-states of the European Union. Since then, multiculturalism has been the official policy in several Western countries as many of the great cities of the Western world are increasingly composed of a mosaic of cultures (Harman, 2018; Nagayoshi 2011). Many nation-states in Africa, Asia and the Americas are culturally diverse and are “multicultural” in a descriptive sense.

Most debates over multiculturalism centre around whether multiculturalism is the appropriate way to deal with diversity and immigrant integration. The arguments regarding the perceived rights to a multicultural education include the proposition that it acts as a way to demand recognition of aspects of a group’s culture subordination and its entire experience

in contrast to a [melting pot](#) or non-multicultural societies (Bissoondath, 2002; Burgess 2008; Gerring, et al, 2018).

The supporters of multiculturalism view it as a fairer system that allows people to truly express who they are within a society, that is more tolerant and that adapts better to social issues. They argue that culture is not one definable thing based on one race or religion, but rather the result of multiple factors that vary as the world changes (Furlong, 2004). In this sense, multiculturalism is valuable because it uses several disciplines to highlight neglected aspects of our social history, particularly the histories of women and minorities and promotes respect for the dignity of the lives and voices of the forgotten (Burgess 2008). By closing gaps, by raising consciousness about the past, multiculturalism tries to restore a sense of wholeness in a [postmodern](#) era that fragments human life and thought (Wessendorf 2013; Gunew, 2009). This is corroborated by Tariq (2016), who contends that multiculturalism is most timely and necessary in the twenty-first century since it is the form of integration that fits the ideal of [egalitarianism](#) and has the best chance of succeeding in the post-9/11 period.

However, the opponents of multiculturalism doubts whether the multicultural ideal of benignly co-existing cultures that interrelate and influence one another, and yet remain distinct, is sustainable, paradoxical or even desirable (Reitz 2009; Furlong, 2004). They argue that multiculturalism makes the nation-state lose their cultural identity in trying to enforce multiculturalism and that this ultimately erodes the host nations' distinct culture. This could probably explain the recent move by several European states including the Netherlands and Denmark to reverse the national policy and return to an official monoculturalism (Harman, 2018). A similar reversal is the subject of debate in the United Kingdom, among others, due to evidence of incipient segregation and anxieties over "home-grown" terrorism. Several heads-of-state or heads-of-government have expressed doubts about the success of multicultural policies. The former Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, and the former Prime Ministers like David Cameron of the United Kingdom, John Howard of Australia, Jose Maria Aznar of Spain and Nicolas Sarkozy of France have all voiced concerns about the effectiveness of their multicultural policies for integrating migrants (Harman, 2018; Gerring, et al, 2018).

GENDER AND PUBLIC POLICY

Gender is often confused with sex, but gender refers to socially constructed roles, responsibilities, rights, principles, behaviours, characteristics, entitlements and exclusions assigned to males and females. The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) (2011) posits that gender refers to equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities of women and men, boys and girls. Gender is dynamic and contextual. It is “based on the idea that not only biological and physical differences between men and women are important, but also the social and cultural significance that society attaches to these differences” (Kayumova et al. 2018).

Gender inequalities remain prevalent in all sectors of the African societies (Elu 2017; Zawaira et al. 2018). Montgomery (2017) asserts that agricultural practices influence the origin of traditional gender norms and that societies that traditionally relied on plough agriculture have a higher degree of gender inequality. Similarly, Tibesigwa and Visser (2016) report that male-headed households are more food secured than female-headed ones.

All public policies impact on men’s and women’s lives in one way or another (Chapell, et al 2012). There are economic and social differences between men and women; hence, policy consequences, intended or unintended, often vary along gender lines. According to Abbott et al. (2018) notable differences between the gender include the following:

- a) *Violence experienced*—Literature show that more women than men experience violence (Fry et al. 2017; Ahinkorah et al. 2018). For example, up to 48% of women in Zambia, 46% in Kenya experienced physical and sexual violence (Fry et al. 2017). Similarly, the WHO (2013) found that the prevalence of physical (such as wife beating) and sexual violence is 23.2% in high income countries, while the percentage higher (24.6%) in Western Pacific region and highest (36.6%) in Africa.

High prevalence of violence among women requires formulation of policies that articulate measures of assistance and public safety, including the application of more effective sentencing and preventive measures. It also requires creation of programmes that serve women who are the victims of domestic and sexual violence, including complete attention (legal, psychological and medical) and the creation of shelters.

Similarly, there is need for recognition of the rights of girls and adolescents in situations of personal and social risk. Girls who are “in the streets” and those who are victims of sexual exploitation, living in prostitution and who are exposed to drugs require special interventions.

- b) *Healthcare*—Women’s healthcare needs vary from men’s (WHO 2013). There is need to plan to provide healthcare for all phases of women’s life, including care for mental and occupational health, actions to control sexually transmitted diseases, cancer prevention and family planning, to overcome the concentration on maternal and infant care programmes.
- c) *Education*—Education of women continue to lag that of men in Africa. Guaranteed access to education for women is necessary (Ahinkorah et al. 2018). There is need to revise textbooks and curricula to eliminate discriminatory references to women to offer an increased awareness of the rights of women. Training for men and women teachers to include a gender perspective in the educational process is also required, and the provision of day-care centres and pre-schools.
- d) *Generation of income (fighting poverty)*—Majority of people living in poverty are women (Ahinkorah et al. 2018). Women, young girls are at greater risk due to resource constraints or environmental degradation. People living in constraining environments—particularly in vulnerable families, remote and underserved communities—face conditions that tend to perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty, lack of education, ill health, low human capital, low economic productivity, poor reproductive health, high fertility, high infant mortality, maternal mortality and morbidity.

Productive projects aimed at training women for employment and to bolster their income should be combined with guaranteed access to credit for the creation or sustenance of small businesses and associations to overcome the prevailing sexual division of labour.

- e) *Childcare and employment*—Women continue to perform a central role in relation to the sphere of reproduction. Their “centrality” in the formulation and implementation of public policies in this sphere should be recognized. The value of non-remunerated work should be recognized. Its burden on women can be minimized by creating social facilities such as the creation of professional training programmes, ensuring access to home ownership, construction of

urban facilities that focus on women such as day care, healthcare clinics, housing and basic sanitation.

- f) *Land ownership*—Abbott et al. (2018) report that fewer women than men own land. This finding also agrees with that of Doss et al. (2013). Doss et al. found that 25% and 48% of women in Uganda and Ghana, respectively, own land. In Ethiopia 29% of the registered land was found to be held by women and 32% by men. The remaining 39% was held jointly. Lesser gender-equitable levels of landownership and management are found in South Africa and Niger (Jacobs et al. 2011; Niger 2008 cited in Doss et al). However, Doss et al. (2013) note that there is scanty literature on land ownership in Africa. The recognition of the relative rights of women in rural areas, in policies for land distribution, agrarian reform and agricultural credit in programmes to support rural production by policy makers would be important.
- g) *Empowerment*—In many countries, women have relatively weak negotiation and bargaining power in the family. Ahinkorah et al. (2018) in study of 19 Sub-Saharan African countries noted that Namibia (32.7%) had more empowered women while those in Mali and Malawi were the least empowered at only 5.5% of the women population. Women’s lower status in the community limits their access to information and resources—including access to adequate reproductive health services and information about reproductive rights, hinders their participation in decision making, restricts their physical and social mobility, and hampers their well-being and potential contributions to development.

Opening of decision-making spaces to women’s participation to guarantee that their active influence in the formulation and implementation of public policies will create conditions of autonomy for women. This involves changes in power relations in the various spaces in which they are inserted: domestic space, at work, and so on.

Abbott and Malunda (2016) found that majority of women benefitted little from government policies to promote gender equality and empower women. Yet, public policy has the capacity to either perpetuate or eliminate discrimination and gender inequality. By making gender a central consideration in the development and implementation of public policy, gender equality and women’s human rights can be enhanced (UNEG 2011). Abbott et al. (2018) call for incorporation of gender perspective in

all public policies. This should start with a gender analysis of policies to ascertain the differences and provide solutions (Chapell, et al 2012).

It is also worth pointing out that gender intersects with other variables (such as age, disability, race, social class, among others), creating double discrimination for some women and men. A study by Ahinkorah et al. (2018) found that women aged 15—19 years were less likely to report having ever experienced violence compared with older women and that women who belonged to other religious groups and Christians were more likely to experience intimate partner violence compared to those who were Muslims. These call for a “focus within a focus”, such as focusing on adolescent women more than older women or women with disability more than those without.

Policy makers should be gender sensitive and responsive by analysing the gender situation in society when they make policies. It is also worth noting that gender equality does not mean men and women will become the same, rather women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female (UNEG 2011).

EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Equity refers to fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all while simultaneously striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups (McIntyre and Gilson 2002). Thinking about equity can help with decision on how to distribute goods and services across society. It means the state is responsible and to be held accountable for its influence over how goods and services are distributed in a society in its bid to ensure fair treatment for all citizens. This involves making hard choices and embedding discussions of distributive justice into domestic political and policy debates in national development discourse.

Although there is a broad and deep understanding of inequity and its causes, and on what works and what does not, equity remains low on the policy agenda in some countries, mainly due to lack of political will (McIntyre and Gilson 2002). Tackling inequities often requires working against the interests of national elites, challenging vested interests or dominant ideologies, or speaking for people who are excluded and ignored systematically by those making policy. As a result, the biggest challenge for promoting equity in developing countries is how to address the political

economy of change. It is crucial to strengthen political movements and coalitions, to challenge prevailing beliefs and misconceptions around equity and to encourage a representative public debate on practical issues of distributive justice.

While many developing countries do not need to wait for the development community to get its act together on equity issues, donors can play a crucial role in influencing development debates and in promoting equity through programme design and policy influence. Because donors are separate from national power structures that may reinforce social, political and economic inequalities, they can also have a disproportionate influence. Where policy discourses draw on neo-liberal visions of development, principles such as equality of opportunity may be seen as unimportant, thereby constituting ideological barriers to putting this agenda into operation. Donor agencies need to focus more strongly on transforming an equity-focused agenda into tangible action for the poor, backed by political will at the top levels.

Efforts to Address Equity Problems

The promotion of social inclusion and equity is at the heart of the UN post-2015 agenda as well as African Union Agenda 2063. Both call for inclusive social development. In this regard, social inclusion, as a key dimension of social development, and as an enabler of intercultural dialogue and the fight against poverty, should inform the development of innovative public policies in favour of the most disadvantaged groups.

Turner and Louis (1996) and Skrtic et al. (1996) challenge countries to rethink how to improve acceptance of difference and create communities inclusive of all members of society. Indeed, many African countries including those in Africa proclaim fairness in their policies and are signatories to many global pronouncements that promote equity. Additionally, many African national constitutions and laws aim at banning discrimination and assuring equal opportunities to citizens regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability or other characteristics. Social policies that aim to change the rules and provide advantages to groups that have traditionally been discriminated against have emerged. These social policies go beyond assuring equal rights to correct past wrongs (White 2003).

In line with the global pronouncements, various countries have attempted to address equity problems using different strategies as described below.

1. ***Providing Universal Public Services***: This is particularly common in services such as health, education and water. This strategy may involve putting in place policies to improve infrastructures to ensure that services are free at the point of delivery wherever possible, and where this is not possible, arrangements are made to ensure that poor people are not excluded. McIntyre et al. (2008) describe the introduction of user fee in health, with exemptions and waivers to reduce the economic burden of ill health on poor and vulnerable households and expand access to healthcare in South Africa, Ghana and Tanzania.

Examples above show that tackling inequity is crucial for developing country governments. Apart from being a valuable goal, improving equity reduces poverty as well as drive growth.

2. ***Targeted Action for Disadvantaged Groups (Affirmative Action)*** The public debate over positive/affirmative action policies has focused on social justice and economic principles. Proponents of these policies claim three main arguments:
 - a. *Compensatory justice*—past injustices need to be undone and compensation should be given to those who were disadvantaged because of discriminatory traditions or intentional policies.
 - b. *Distributive justice*—the social goods and wealth of a country should be distributed equally.
 - c. *Social utility*—everyone in a society has something important to contribute, and the common good is best served by everyone’s participation in the economic and social system.

Opponents of these policies present arguments that can also be classified into three groups, namely that

- i. *reverse discrimination* is another form of unfair practices that perpetuate discrimination, although it is now practised on a different group.
- ii. *preferential policies* go against the principles of individualism and interfere with the forces of a free market economy.
- iii. *preferential practices* may result in poor services and products because incompetent or unsuitable people may be appointed to jobs.

Through affirmative action policies, including quota system, governments can plan and provide for the disadvantaged regions or

groups. Affirmative or positive action policies originated from the notion that discrimination against whole groups that has been persistent, institutionalized and long term cannot be remedied simply by banning such actions. Although antidiscrimination legislation is essential, these policies emerged out of the recognition that such legislation may not be enough to create a work environment that provides equality of opportunities for all and may cement past inequalities.

Affirmative or positive action policies have two goals: (a) righting past wrongs—compensating groups that have been disadvantaged in the past with better opportunities in the present; and (b) achieving social goals of increasing the representation of traditionally disadvantaged groups in more lucrative jobs as well as management and leadership positions (Chater & Chater, 1992). The rationale behind these policies is that they redress past discrimination by giving preference in hiring and promotion to members of groups that have been discriminated against in the past. Considering that for a long time these groups have had limited access to education, high-paying and prestigious jobs, networks of influence and promotion opportunities, they may continue to be deprived of these opportunities if not given such advantages until a more balanced representation can be achieved (Bennington and Wein 2000).

Affirmative or positive action means that employers must act directly and aggressively to remove all barriers that prevent women and members of minority groups from access to education, employment and political processes. Services targeted towards disadvantaged groups are crucial. These include education of girls, maternal and child healthcare, provision of clean water and access to employment. Governments around the world continue to legislate affirmative action in employment in favour of designated groups (Hodges-Aeberhard 1999). For example, South Africa and Namibia have both adopted legislation requiring employment equity through means that include affirmative action—the Employment Equity Act Bi, 55 of 1998 in South Africa and the Affirmative Action (Employment) Act No. 29 of 1998 in Namibia.

McIntyre et al. (2008) show how targeted strategies are used to address challenges with specific vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, children aged less than six years, the disabled and the elderly in South Africa, people with low income and specific diseases such as

leprosy and tuberculosis in Ghana and Tanzania. Targeting priority selected groups and health condition was reported as successful. Quota system has also been used by many countries to increase access for girls in higher education. But Dunne & Sayed (2002) observed that although increasing female representation is crucial, the review of organizational structures and practices must be a concomitant focus for supporting the disadvantaged group. Putting equity at the heart of development programming could potentially have practical value; the symbolic, normative and political dimensions of the concept promote the recognition of key challenges, foster empowerment and engagement, and promote deeper, more sustainable change.

Further, even among proponents of strong social policies, there is uneasiness with policies that may amount to “quotas” and outright reverse discrimination because they undermine the real achievements of members of underrepresented groups and perpetuate the notion that members of these groups intrinsically lack the characteristics for success in employment and will always need special assistance. The controversy around affirmative and positive action is reflected in the numerous challenges it faced in courtrooms throughout the world. It is interesting to note that despite the diversity of countries and jurisdictions, courts have generally supported the concept as an acceptable tool in the struggle to eliminate discrimination in employment. Many constitutions of the African countries sanction affirmative action. Chapter 10 of the South African constitution states that public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people. South Africa’s constitution notes that although objectivity and fairness must be applied, an important goal is redressing the imbalances of the past and achieving broad representation.

3. ***Social Protection.*** Another way of addressing inequity is through social protection. Provision of social protection can ensure that nobody drops below a minimum level of well-being, beyond which unmet needs will create cycles of disadvantage. Options include payments such as social insurance or basic income grants, conditional transfers to promote human development, minimum wage policies, guaranteed government employment programmes and labour market regulations to those in employment. However, social protection is not common in African countries.

Although social protection has been used to address inequity, scholars assert that social policies can also exclude individuals from necessities and support programmes. This is because in some cases welfare support programmes create injustices by restricting certain behaviours (Wilson and Beresford 2000), especially where the individual is forced into a new system of rules while facing **social stigma** and **stereotypes** from the dominant group in society, further marginalizing and excluding individuals (Young 2000). In this way, social policy and welfare provisions reflect the dominant notions in society by constructing and reinforcing categories of people and their needs (Wilson and Beresford 2000).

4. ***Progressive Taxation.*** This can be through increasing tax for those that have more income. Other priorities include lowering taxes on staple goods and applying taxes on property. Land reform is also crucial, and redistribution may be required to provide the poor with productive assets. Progressive taxation could help, if the additional fiscal space created is used to fund interventions that will support equity.

Inclusive Policies

Social diversity calls for inclusive policies. Inclusion involves all people having the right to be truly involved, to actively participate with others, to be valued as members of the society and to have access to a system that delivers quality services (Abbott et al. 2017). Social inclusion aims to create a society for all, a society in which no one is left behind, a society that guarantees human rights and promotes justice for all, increases the quality of life of citizens and improves individual well-being (Abbott et al. 2017). Inclusive policies are about listening to the diverse voices in society and empowering all members to develop an approach to development that is committed to identifying and dismantling actual and potential sources of exclusion (Slee 2018). Above all, it is about a philosophy of acceptance where all people are valued and treated with respect (Gillies and Carrington 2004). Indeed, Ballard (1996) argues that inclusion is unending, so that there is no such thing as an inclusive society. According to this notion, all societies can continue to develop greater inclusion whatever their current state (Ainscow and Messiou 2018).

The inevitable presence of difference among groups of people means that societies need to build inclusive communities that value diversity.

Communities in inclusive societies cooperate and collaborate for the common good of all, recognize and respect difference (Slee 2001). In essence, inclusive policies are about the politics of representation or how people can be given a voice in the construction of their own unique identities (Slee 2001). A study by Abbott et al. (2017) showed that Rwanda, Ethiopia and Namibia scored highly on social inclusion while Malawi, Zambia and Comoros had lower scores.

There are a few challenges and obstacles to implementing inclusive policies. McIntyre et al. (2008) report that waivers directed at protecting the poorest people have proven to be ineffective due to the difficulties of identifying them, as well as a lack of awareness on eligibility criteria and the deterrent effects of excessive “red-tape”. Scholars suggest incorporating a more systematic understanding of equity and inequity into policy decisions, embedding equity in decision-making tools and procedures, and implementing pro-equity policies.

Social Accountability in Pursuit of Equity

Social accountability refers to “an approach towards building accountability that relies on civic engagement, in which ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability” (McNeil and Malena 2010). It encompasses a wide range of approaches, tools and methods, from information dissemination about user rights and entitlements to client exit interviews and participatory budgeting exercises.

Social accountability can be initiated by a wide range of actors from community members and civil society organizations (CSO) to government ministries, parliamentarians and media organizations. Some countries use scorecards. Interventions such as the community scorecard methodology can take place at village or community levels, while participatory policy formulation exercises tend to be more focused at national level. Social accountability initiatives can rely on diverse strategies, including monitoring, civic education, research, media coverage, advocacy and coalition building. They can be focused on the development of policies and plans, monitoring of budgets and expenditures, or oversight of service quality. Lastly, they can employ different forms of formal and informal sanctions like public shaming, judicial enforcement and public exposés in the media (McNeil and Malena 2010).

Social accountability can increase transparency, foster greater civic voice and participation in service delivery or support efforts to monitor performance and hold service providers accountable. For example, community scorecards can increase transparency (through access to information about entitlements), strengthen citizen voice (through the scorecard process and interface meeting) and support user monitoring and oversight (through the development and monitoring of joint action plans). Similarly, support for health user management committees can not only serve to mobilize user voice but also support oversight of drug stocks and health facility budgets.

Citizen Participation in Public Policy Making

Yang and Callahan (2005) define citizen participation as involvement of the public in the administrative decision-making process. This may include political participation and civic engagement such as the involvement in political processes like voting, campaigning (Denhardt et al. 2009) and volunteering in activities at individual or organizational level (Oliver, 2000).

In the last two decades, governments have been under increasing pressure to change the way they interact with citizens, open or increase access to services provided. An open government is increasingly recognized as an essential ingredient for democratic governance, social stability and economic development (Kirkpatrick and Jesover 2005). An open government means satisfying three basic principles (Kirkpatrick and Jesover 2005): *transparency*, meaning that governmental activity must be placed under public scrutiny; *accessibility*, citizens must have the possibility to access and use public information anytime and anywhere; *responsiveness*, capacity of governments to respond efficiently to new demands and needs coming from the citizens.

The concept of open government must be supported by a thorough public participation strategy that will embrace all governmental activity. Public participation can be viewed as a process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making aiming for better decisions supported by the public (Creighton, 2005). Another way to put it is that public participation is a framework of policies, principles and techniques which ensure that citizens and communities, individuals, groups and organizations can be involved in a meaningful way in making decisions that will affect them or in which they have an interest (Denhardt et al. 2009).

The main goal of public participation is about ensuring responsiveness of policies to citizen's needs and with a higher degree of public support. It is a planned process included in the routine processes of the institution and not something spontaneous, or a decision made on the spot by public institutions. The public should have a certain degree of influence on the final decision. Public participation is part of the inner mechanisms of representative democracy.

Public participation is the link between members of society and government, ensuring that the decisions taken by non-elected officials carry legitimacy by providing a form of dialogue and interaction between decision makers and the people who are affected by government's policies. The first reason in doing so is that policy proposals that have been discussed with the public have better chances to be accepted because the process build trust between government and citizens. Secondly, the quality of the decisional process is greater. It helps to clarify the objectives and requirements of a project or policy, results in considering new alternatives, increases the chances of success and can bring new information to light helpful in the design and implementation of the policy (Creighton, 2005). Another rationale for public participation is that it promotes openness and accountability, and in the process, advances fairness and justice (Callahan 2007).

Public participation has an instrumental value by strengthening the evidence base for policy making, reducing the implementation costs and tapping greater reservoirs of experience and creativity in the design and delivery of public services (Bourgon 2007). It is also a source of innovation, by opening new doors for government in service delivery. Ultimately, public participation can build social capital and cultivate mutual understanding and bonds of trust among the public, decision makers and governing institutions (Callahan 2007). Studies show that involving the public not only frequently produces decisions that are responsive to public values and substantively robust, but it also helps to resolve conflict, build trust, and educate and inform the public about the environment (Leach et al. 2002). In this light, the issue of public participation is of major interest in preserving legitimacy and accountability of decisions.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the world of public policy is increasingly complex, uncertain and unpredictable and characterized by diversity in terms of gender, age, race, disability and socio-economic status. At the same time the world

is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. For example, disease outbreaks can affect several countries simultaneously. These call for careful policy making processes to ensure inclusivity in society. This is especially important as the world is undergoing social transformations driven by the impact of globalization, global environmental change, and economic and financial crises, resulting in growing inequalities, extreme poverty, exclusion and the denial of basic human rights. These transformations require innovative solutions conducive to universal values of peace, human dignity, gender equality and non-violence and non-discrimination.

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