

Wilfred Subbo (2002)

The Conceptualisation of Gender, perspectives on gender discourse:

Gender and constitution making in Kenya

The term gender became popular in the late 1980s as a replacement for women and development. Gender is a social construct that asserts that the expectations and responsibilities of men and women are not always biologically determined. Advocates of the gender approach point out that the term easily accommodates race, class, ethnicity, and male and female power relationships. (Snyder and Tadesse 1995: 14).

Gender role differentiation is structurally and culturally defined in ways which create and reinforce relationships of male dominance and female subordination.

For instance, ideas of what patterns of behaviour and activities are appropriate or inappropriate for women and men are largely social and cultural in origin and they are acquired through the socialization process. From the time children are born, they are socialized into different roles on the basis of sex. They are rewarded when their behaviour is seen as sex appropriate and ridiculed or reprimanded when they deviate from the established culture norms (Were, 1991:1).

This paper examines the concept of gender from an African perspective, indeed, it aims at highlighting those issues that influence the lives of women and men particularly those that serve as constraints in enabling women and men to realise their full potential. It argues that the concept of gender needs to be redefined. As it is now, gender seems to be associated only with women's issues.

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