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**Title:** Malawi proverbs in Chichewa language: Empowering or disempowering for women/girls.

**Rationale for research:**

- The rationale behind this study is to analyze the proverbs and examine how they can empower or disempowering women and girls and its impact on the achievement of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number three gender equality.

**Research questions**

- How do Malawi proverbs portray women, and effect on gender identity
- Are the meanings in the proverbs empower or disempowering women and girls.
- What are the implications of proverb messages to education and to the achievement of MDGs and Education For All goal five of gender parity.

# OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Brief description of Malawi, Chichewa language and cultural representation of women.
- Significance of proverbs to Malawi culture
- Conceptual framework
- Methodology on research design and data collection
- Findings and discussion.
- Conclusion
- recommendations

# INTRODUCTION

- It is a general concern throughout the world as to how nations can address the issue of gender inequalities which challenges the achievement of Millennium Development Goal number three.
- Debates have been carried out and questions have been posed about the role of education in promoting gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.
- Education alone can not answer the questions since there are other contributing factors beyond its control such cultural aspects
- Language is one of the major factor since it lacks gender balance
- Proverbs are one of language component which perpetuate gender inequality
- Malawi use proverbs in socialization process that is formal or informal

## **INTRODUCTION CONT'D**

- i.e initiation ceremonies, social interactions, in religious set ups (preaching or counseling and solving conflicts).

### **Significance of proverbs to Malawi and African culture**

- Proverbs are reservoirs of societies wisdom, they mirror peoples a way of thought
- proverbs function in defining social parameters between hearer and listener
- Proverbs justify actions that would ordinarily be contested (Matiki, 1996)
- Paper tries to analyze the role of proverbs in empowering or disempowering women and girls.

# **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF MALAWI, CHICHEWA LANGUAGE**

- Malawi is in Southern part of Africa, it borders Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania.
- It is a multilingual country with dominant language Chichewa as a national language.
- Chichewa was previously known as Chinyanja up until 1968.
- It is a medium of instruction in all primary public schools from std one to four.
- Among the syllabus topics in curriculum, proverbs are one of them.

## **Cultural representation of women.**

Women still regarded as minors, depend on fathers later by the husband

Women still regarded as domestic worker and care givers, men as head of houses and providers.

# DEFINITIONS

- **Proverbs:** these are linguistic signs with literal and indirect meanings which are regarded as reservoirs for cultural wisdom (Matiki, 1996).
- **women empowerment:** adding women's power and power means having or gaining control, having a say and be listened to, being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole social change, participation, capacity building( Karl, 1995).
- **Empowerment:** a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, greater decision making power and control and to transformative action.
- **Gender inequality:** Differences experienced between men and women in terms of roles, decision making, participation, health and education issues.

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Paper adopted the framework for language dominance by Lakoff, Zimmerman and feminist theories of the Radicals.
- Are in agreement that language patterns are interpreted as manifestation of patriarchal social order and it institutionalize the male dominance over women.
- Different words and proverbs describe men and women in a different way though they refer to same behavior eg growing ball under skirt for a woman who shows interest in power position while no equivalent is there for men people just praise them (Zimmerman, 1975).
- It is the same in proverbs, they function as instruction manuals for warning young women/girls, of powerful assertiveness but encourage the same in men and boys.

## FRAMEWORK CONT'D

- Proverbs mirrors society expectations of different sexes such, also used by men to exercise their physical power while describe women's mental and social weakness (Lakoff, 1975)
- Proverbs portray society in men's perspective. Few proverb describe women in desirable and favorable manner.
- Proverbs have a sense of fulfilling power and men assert their power and social parameters.( Matiki, 1996).
- The gender inequality in the use of proverbs is a manifestation of patriarchal social order which prescribe hierarchy between men and women result in denying rights, privileges' and power between sexes.
- Patriarchy create an ideology which define men as natural owners of intellect, think rationally and have power to rule. Women regarded naturally as submissive, passive and willing to be led. Language is openly used to discriminate, oppress and subordinate women. This may hinder realization of meeting development al goals since there is resistance.



# METHODOLOGY

- › Data was obtained through document analysis and authors own experience as a native speaker of Chichewa.
- › Proverbs were sourced from a book written by Chakanza (2001) with the title Wisdom of the people, 2000 Chinyanja proverbs.
- › Historically Chichewa and Chinyanja are one and same language it keep on changing name due political influences. From 1968 during Hastings Banda was named Chichewa,
- › From 1994 after his office the government tried to revert to Chinyanja but it brought mixed feelings. This is the time that Chakanza published his book.
- › Research is going on by neighboring countries those who speak the language to harmonize the name and orthography.

## Methodology cont'd

- The meanings in Chakanza book on proverbs were literal. His justification was to bring the unfamiliar audiences closer to Chinyanja and it was more less translation.
- In my paper I discarded the meanings since I was looking at critical and underlying meaning of the proverbs. The meanings are modified.
- The proverbs extracted were only those referring to women/girls, those carrying messages referring to women and the one which illustrate issues which are less empowering to women. This is so because some proverbs used are not explicitly refer to women but their interpretation shows that they are addressing women.

### **Research design used.**

- Used ethnographic design since the study was aimed at studying genre, ethnic group social life and practices such as customs and language.

## DATA/PROVERB ANALYSIS

- Paper also followed qualitative approach in its analysis of proverbs. Information is analyzed in a descriptive manner since it captures peoples experiences (Cresswel, 1998).
- The author used hermeneutic interpretative orientation. This is a philosophy of human understanding and interpretation of a text (Gross-berg, 1991).
- The interpretative orientation used entails that texts reveal their significance not on the surface of images and representation but in the complex ways produce, transform and shape meaning structure. Three things were considered.
- Interpreting the general meaning embedded within proverbs
- Explaining the social contexts through which the proverb is used and its underlying meaning
- Analyzing the implication of the proverb

## ANALYSIS CONT'D

- The proverbs will be presented in the following manner
- -Women as worthless, weak, inferior and as objects.
- -women in specific roles or situations as domestic workers, as wives, care givers.
- -women as talkative/gossipers

**NOTE:** The proverbs in italics are the Chichewa while glosses for the proverbs are in parenthesis.

### **Findings and discussions**

#### **A. Proverbs that portray women as inferior, worthless and weak.**

- (i) *Akazi ndi maluwa sachedwa kulakatika.* ( women are flowers that blossom nicely in the morning but wither /die quickly in the afternoon).

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS CONT'D

**First interpretation** (women as worthless, weak, lack confidence, not taking challenges)

- **Context.** Proverbs used to warn men and boys in social interaction and during socialization not to take women's actions seriously as they are weak like flowers.
- **Meaning:** Proverb also mean women are worthless, are only there to shine nothing to offer.
- people who lack confidence and can not take challenges as try quickly withdraws as flowers do by withering when hit by the sun.

### **Implication:**

Women are marginalized, discriminated in issues of decision making, participation, resource distribution, policy formulation and in politics because of the prejudices.

## ANALYSIS CONT'D

- People blame women for lacking confidence instead of looking at the structures which are put in place that nurture and perpetuate the so called women's weak behavior.
- Society justifies inequalities by finding defects in the victim rather than looking at contributing factors.eg social and economic

### **Second interpretation.**(women as objects)

- Women portrayed as objects which is to be used for beauty and can be used and thrown away.
- Implication- girls and women waste time with trivial things to make themselves look beautiful and attract men while men/boys are engaged in more serious issues that progress their lives. But what people forget is flowers plays a role to a plant likewise women bear and nurture children but the work is unvalued.

## ANALYSIS CONT'D

- The proverbs are outdated because there are women who are assertive that they hold high positions in labor market, politics and others are very successful in business.

### **Implication to education**

- Teachers teach the proverbs without questioning without considering the silent message impact it causes both to boys/girls.
- The learners internalize and bring about stereotypes
- It may kill the spirit of hard working in girls and reluctant to do challenging tasks at school
- This may bring parity in subject choice as boys dominate in sciences and girls in arts and this may lead to parity in labor market.
- It may lead to drop out due to early pregnancies and substance abuse as boys/girls construct their masculinity.

## **WOMEN IN SPECIFIC ROLES: B. THE PROVERBS REFER TO WOMEN AS DOMESTIC WORKERS, WIVES AND CAREGIVERS**

- Mleleni bwino aiwale kwawo. (keep the husband well so that he may forget his home.) wife/caregiver
- Mkamwini ndi mlamba sachedwa kuteleleka. ( a husband is like fish it slips off quickly). Wife/Care giver
- Mwamuna kumamuyang,ana pamimba. (the wife is supposed to check the husbands tummy to make sure he is well fed.) wife/caregiver
- Mkazi opusa apasula banja ndi manja ake (unwise woman destroys her marriage with her own hands)
- Mkazi sanyanyala mbolo. ( a wife does refuse her husbands penis)

**Context:** during marriage counselling, solving conflicts, initiation ceremonies.

They explain the role that a wife is expected to do in caring, securing the marriage



## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

- Women as subordinated group
- Women are brainwashed and come to accept their role a domestic worker
- This brings division of public and private sphere and encourages dependence syndrome hence women not empowered
- Patriarchal defines women such that their full and wholesome existence depends on marriage, producing children and caring.
- Women construct this gender identity and defend it and are relegated to second class citizens
- Patriarchal uses tool such as culture and language to safe guard private sphere and women are discriminated
- Women hate fellow women who tries to challenge the societal ideologies

## **IMPLICATION TO EDUCATION**

- Gender parity will continue in higher and tertiary education due to early marriages since girls do not see reasons of higher education if their destiny is already prescribed as a wife, domestic worker.
- Girls will still cluster in subjects like home economics which is closer to their future roles as a result women will be less represented in science oriented fields(Stromquist and Fischman, 2009).

### **C. Proverbs that oppresses and marginalize women**

Mkazi mmodzi diso limodzi, mkazi mmodzi diso lohinya , akazi awiri maso awiri ( having one wife is like having one eye or looking with one eye but two women means two eyes.)

**Context:** social interaction between men

## ANALYSIS CONT'D

- **Meaning:** a real man is supposed to have more than one wife

### **Intepretation:**

- hegemonic masculinity which encourages control and oppression of women.
- Socialization that reflect men as superior and entitled to unjust behavior and victimize women
- Promote differential power relations between men and women and encourages polygamy.
- Proverbs deny women rights over their own health issues in this era of HIV/AIDS
- Balogun(2010) express that proverbs on women reveal women's safety, well being and rights are of little interest to the male counterparts.
- Women' dignity is compromised with the use of these proverbs
- Millennium goal three of Gender equality can not be achieved in this situation
- If schools teach these proverbs children will grow up as perpetrators of issues of inequalities since education is a life long experience

## PROVERBS THAT SILENCE WOMEN

- Mkazi wa mfumu asamati mlomo tolotolo ataya mudzi ( A wife of a chief should not be talkative she will destroy the village)
- Mkazi wa mfumu asamati khutu petupetu (a wife of a chief should not listen to gossips/roumers )

**Meaning:** The wife of a chief should pretend to be dumb and deaf.

### **Interpretation:**

- The society expect a woman to be passive and submissive even in terms of problems.
- This is disaster preparedness proverb to protect the chief in case he misbehaves.
- The proverb work as a shield to men as they romanticize that women builds the village.
- Despite the fact that women are being regarded as pillars of the village, the underlying meaning may not be of advantage to women and girls.
- In Malawi marriage problems are private issues, so the proverbs are there to safeguard this.

## **IMPLICATION TO EDUCATION**

- Boys and girls interpret it wrongly to the expense of boys dominating class activities like presentations.
- Girls remain passive in class and are not empowered to participate
- Teachers perpetuate it through comments
- This brings unequal empowerment to boys and girls as teachers engage boys frequently than girls
- This might be the reason why female representation in parliament is low in most African countries . The speaking skills were suppressed.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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- Women construct this gender identity and defend it and are relegated to second class citizens
- tools such as culture to safe guard private sphere and women are discriminated
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# ACHIEVEMENT OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL THREE

## Conclusion

- Paper identified gender gaps and invisibility of women issues in the use of proverbs,
- Discriminative proverbs will slow the achievement of development goals
- It has to be noted that socialization plays a vital role
- Declaration at International, continental, regional level compliment each on addressing issues of gender inequalities
- This can only be achieved only if discrimination, oppression, subordination, invisibility and dependence of women to men is addressed
- Deal with the problem not the symptoms (socialization and change of mind set)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Need to eliminate or re-conceptualize some of the proverbs which reinforces gender parity
  - Reform the language to suit need of the society
  - Revisit education curriculum to make it more gender sensitive
  - Teacher training to integrate issues of gender so that teachers are equipped with gender issues and teach in a more gender sensitive manner.
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