

## Deconstructing Discourses for an Effective Implementation of Gender Equality Policies in Cameroon

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### Abstract:

Despite the numerous international and national frameworks put in place for its implementation in Cameroon, gender equality still witness slow progress. Using a descriptive research design and a sociocognitive approach to study, this research investigate common ideologies Cameroonians attached to gender equality and the correlations of these patriarchal discourses on the slow implementation of gender equality in the country. Data in this study are analysed quantitatively. It is shown that since 1997, the Cameroonians State has provided some legal framework for equal opportunities; however, more than twenty years after, there is still gender discrimination in many social domains. A posteriori trend demonstrates that a good number of Cameroonians, cutting across the formally, informally, poorly or highly educated often misconceive or partly misunderstand the term gender equality. This jeopardises efforts to boost gender equality implementation. For a better comprehension, this study elucidates the necessity of women's empowerment as a sine qua none condition to sustainable development. To ensure sustainable development, a more effective and objective gender equality is strongly advocated. This somewhat onerous task falls on the shoulders of government and gender scholars, but its needs to be accompanied by the population.

**Keywords:** gender equality implementation, patriarchal ideologies, women's empowerment, Cameroon

### Introduction

For more than thirty years, the Cameroonian State has been putting in place strategies for the implementation of gender equality. To ensure respect of rights of women and men, Cameroon has ratified most international and regional instruments for the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights, notably those specific to women's rights. Cameroon has always taken part in major international gatherings on development issues, most of which have addressed gender concerns. Among the most important are: the Mexico Conference (1975), the Copenhagen Conference (1980), the Global Summit on Social Development (1993), the Beijing World conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium (2000). During an introductory class on "Gender Language and Power", I have come to realise that there is a common misinterpretation of what gender equality is. People mostly look at gender equality as something women used in challenging cultural and patriarchal ideologies. Atanga (2013) said, "Popular interpretation of feminism in Cameroon and Botswana often refers to actions by women negatively directed against men".

Based on this observation, one understands why gender equality defenders are seen as anti-men, anti-child and challenging the natural state of the family. What could have been the causes of such an interpretation? As a sociolinguist, I would question people definition of what gender equality is, and I would study common conceptions to bring out the different meanings they attached to gender equality. I will come out with the relationship between these conceptions and the slow evolution toward a gender impartial society. Using the descriptive research design and sociocognitive approach (SCA), this study attempts to look at the meanings of gender equality and the possible consequences of its implementation in the betterment of the Cameroonian society.

SCA is interested in the interconnections between cognition, discourse and society. It looks into correlative relationship between personal and socially shared knowledge and the significance of these correlations in social practices. According to Van Dijk (2014, 2015, 2018) discourse is socially conditioned and it influences the functioning of the society.

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The Socio Cognitive Approach is interested in the study of mental representation and the processes of language users when they produce and comprehend discourses and participate in verbal interaction as well as in the knowledge, ideologies and other beliefs shared by social groups. Discourse is seen in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a way of representing aspects of the material and mental world. In his researches, Van Dijk states that ideologies are the ideas and beliefs system of a particular group of people defined from the multidisciplinary ways involving social, cognitive and discursive aspects. Social actors involved in a discourse do not exclusively make use of their individual experiences and strategies; they rely upon collective frames of perceptions, called 'social representation' (Van Dijk 2018). From this assertion, it is understood that a discourse is made up of a number of constituted social elements coming from a society, which are social beliefs, modes of representation of actors and actions. This means that discourse has its origin in society and talks about society. Cognition is then evoked when a mental process is required in organising constitutive elements of the society in a specific way to form one's discourse. Even though there is no direct relationship between discourses structures and social structure, SCA affirms that they are always mediated by the interface of personal and social cognition. For Van Dijk, cognition is the missing link of many studies which fail to show how societal structures influence discourse structures and precisely how societal structures are in turn enacted, instituted, legitimated, confirmed, or challenged by text and talk.

SCA will help us to deconstruct certain misconceptions of gender equality; these deconstructions will help us for a better implementation of gender equality policies and recommendations. The reticence of both men and women when one refers to gender equality led to examine the society understanding of gender equality concept. This work consists of three main parts: the situational analysis of gender issues in Cameroon at the moment of our study, the popular definitions of gender equality and the possible links between those popular approaches and the almost stagnant situation of gender equality policies and lastly the importance of gender equality for better development.

### **Situational Analysis of Gender Issues in Cameroon**

Gender equality, which is a real challenge in the search for social justice and respect of human rights, is a major concern to the national and international community. Apart from international instruments, there are national ones adopted by Cameroon, which generally or specifically take into account the principles and values that underpin gender equality, human rights and social justice. National policies and strategies for women's empowerment include the Women in Development Policy, the National Population Policy, the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper and the National Gender Policy. In Cameroon, despite a marked improvement in the situation of women, gender disparities and discrimination persist in many areas of national life.

#### **1.1) Cameroonian Legal Provisions for Gender Equality Implementation**

In 1997, the Cameroon government designed and adopted its first policy on women's empowerment, a document that defined government priorities and strategies in this area. The seven areas of intervention in this document stem from the twelve points selected with the framework of the Beijing recommendations. The seven areas of intervention include improving living conditions of women, improving the legal status of women, developing female human resources in all vital sectors, ensuring effective participation of women in decision-making, protecting and promoting the girl child, fighting violence against women, and improving the institutional framework for effective integration of women in development. Five years after, in 2002, following the 1994 ICPD (The International Conference on Population and Development) and the Millennium Summit on September 2000, the national population Policy Declaration was updated. This policy establishes the gender approach as a development approach and notably aims to reduce gender disparity in all sectors of economic and social development. Adopted in August 2009, the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP), which is a revised version of the poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), has set out guidelines for gender equality in the following sectors: rural infrastructure, industry services, governance, education, social and health services. The GESP is the springboard of all development activities, including the National Gender policy, which is based on its guidelines.

With a view to creating an environment that is conducive for equality between men and women, Cameroon has found it necessary to adopt a National Gender Policy Document (2010). The purpose of this document was to promote an impartial and egalitarian society for women and men in order to ensure sustainable development. Its general objective was to contribute to systematic elimination of inequalities between women and men at all levels. About twenty years after the Women in Development Policy and at the closing of the National Gender Policy, one observes that despite some slight amelioration, gender inequality is still rampant in the Cameroonian society. In spite of some laudable goals, there is room for improvements in many domains of life. Cameroon has high level of discriminations against women in social and public institutions.

## 1.2) Gender Overview in Some Social Domains

At the social level, men and women roles largely depend on the traditional society's perceptions. These perceptions differ whether we are in the rural areas, influenced by traditional beliefs, or in urban areas, inclined to modernity. Generally, men are considered family heads and women as mothers and wives. Power relations and authority within families are based on these statuses attributed to women and men. This differentiation is inculcated in children in the process of socialization. In these societies, which are basically patriarchal, life in households is based on the subordination of women and supremacy of men. Thus, the man embodies authority in the household, sets the pace, fixes rules, manages and controls family assets, takes major decisions and provides for the livelihood of household members. Furthermore, motherhood is the core of family and community life. Fertility is valued by society, the woman is supposed to "bear children for her husband, preferably boys", failing which she could face social stigma. A woman has value only if she is married, fertile, humble and docile, dignified and a good housewife. Moreover, some religious and traditional beliefs confine women to their homes and do not tolerate their presence in public places.

As earlier said, in urban setting, both women and men are exposed to new lifestyles and practices that contrast with traditional habits and beliefs. Faced with the prevailing changes, some women, who have become more aware of issues relating to power relations, assert themselves and are less subjected to male dominance. For some women, this has led to the transformation of their social, legal, economic and political status. In the area of education, according to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2016, the number of women without education is more than 1.7 times that of men in a similar situation. There is growing inequality between girls and boys as we move up the educational ladder (91 women at primary level, 79 at secondary level and 44 at tertiary level, respectively per 100 men). In conclusion, it is important to note that the Cameroonian woman is still a victim of discrimination and oppression. She is still confined to socio-cultural beliefs that hinder her full development. She hardly enjoys her rights in a strongly patriarchal society and is therefore burdened with the sole responsibility for family care and early childhood education. She is still regarded as the weaker sex, in a traditional society that has been structured to favour men with access to and control over resources.

At the political level, the Cameroonian ministerial cabinet has 39 members, including 6 women and 33 men. All four ministers of states are men. In territorial administration, disparities are still very noticeable with over 360 Divisional Officers, 15 women and 345 men, 02 women Senior Divisional Officer of all the 58; 0 female Regional Governor of all the 10. The council executive (2020-2025), which is also unfavourable to women, includes 374 mayors, including 39 women against 343 men. There are only 61 women in the 180 members of the lower house of parliament and the senate has 26 women against 74 men. The administration of the National assembly bureau for the 2020 legislative year comprises 16 men and 7 women: one (01) male speaker of the House, one (01) male deputy speaker of the House, 5 Vice-Presidents, including 1 woman and 4 men, 4 Questors, including 1 woman and 3 men, 12 Secretaries, including 5 women and 7 men. With regard to the nine (9) Committees, there is only two (02) female Chairpersons as against seven (07) for men. In the senate, the executive Bureau consists of 17 members: 12 men and 5 women (see the IPU's Open Data Platform). The low representation of women in the Parliament does not enable them to influence national decisions on developmental and gender equality issues.

In conclusion, the above statistics roughly indicate that there are still few women in decision-making positions. Despite the fact that there is some improvement compared to 2010, we are far from achieving the 30% benchmark advocated at the Beijing Conference. The little presence of women in the management of public affairs and politics, as well as in the family and the community, is due to a number of factors. These include the patriarchal system of society that restricts the woman's access to some decision-making spheres in the family and in the community in favour of the man, persistent sexist prejudices and socio-cultural values, the woman's lack of independence, the lack of a woman/man quota policy in the choice of representatives for elections and appointments. The contribution of a large segment of the population is thus neglected, causing a negative impact on national labour productivity and undermining the country's development. Among the different causes, we also wrong conceptualisation and understanding of what gender studies and gender equality are.

### 1) Common Conceptualisations of Gender Ideologies and Gender Equality's Slow Implementation in Cameroon

In defining gender and gender equality, women's issues generally seem to preponderate; the reason is that the sociocultural allocation of gender characteristics has been largely detrimental to women (see Wariboko 2018). Gender mainstreaming focuses on women empowerment. That-notwithstanding, gender, broadly speaking is not about women alone but also about, about women, about masculinity and femininity. Bradley (2013) posits that gender is a "lived experience".

It is therefore necessary to evaluate gender as a lived experience in the contemporary Cameroon to understand people's actual perception of the term gender equality and how it has or has not been applied to daily life and in social institutions. What comes to the mind of an average Cameroonian for instance when gender equality is mentioned is "that concept that creates altercations between men and women"; the broad meaning of the concept seems to be a preserved of only the academics who deliberately study it and perhaps a few of other learned Cameroonians. For this reason, gender issues are greeted with a lot of scepticism domestically, politically, culturally and religiously.

### **2.1) Patriarchy**

In many communities, the subordination of women to a man or a group of men is natural; if masculine domination does not constitute a historical invariant, it represents a communitarian one. In order to avoid that, women who have the natural biological privilege of procreation should present the said privilege as social power, communities have invented myths, rites and institutions that portrayed women as dominated with a negative identity. Work division based on sexes removes women in spheres of power (Ngono 2007) and construct them as belonging to the domestic sphere. The society then functions as a huge machine that legitimates masculine domination; men are more for public spheres and women for private ones. Therefore, any women's endeavour to get in the 'masculine' sphere is considered as provocation and it will meet a fierce resistance.

Challenges and resistances to change of gender perception in Cameroon are founded on many ideas and philosophies maintained by civilisations and cultures. In many religions, there is the anchoring of a male chauvinist symbolism such as God regularly discusses with men about things to do or decisions to take for humanity's happiness. Women are excluded from decision-making positions, as they are, according to these religions, a creature derived from an original model. Besides, with colonisation, more domination tools were given to men via education, financial resources, trade and public administration. Moreover, there has been a decline of matriarchy and a systematisation of patriarchy. Africans, who were matriarchal affirming that women continue the creative work of God by giving life and by perpetuating human species, are now defending that children come only from men as they inject the seminal liquid in women's wombs. Progressively, the ideology of women as having a relation with God to perpetuating humanity is been replaced by the ideology of men as life's holders and women as life's mediums (see Achola and Madina 1979). In addition to this dynamic analysis of African societies, Mazrui (1977) and Friedl (1978), tenants of the biologist theory, justify women's absence in public sphere with biological constraints and children's care. The conclusion drawn from this theory and conveyed in the society is that women are naturally inapt to exercise power, to appear in public spaces because of they are unavailable.

Many countries that are poor today have cultural norms that exacerbate favouritism towards male. In many African countries, there is patrilineality. In patrilineal system, names and properties pass to the next generation through male; this system puts sons on higher footing than daughters. Many social discourses are developed in the Cameroonian society that contributes to the legitimation of this patriarchal organisation. The above reasons could justify the difficult integration of women in political spheres. In collective minds, this classic schema of women as wives and mothers called to care for husbands and children is still well anchored that is why gender equality is contested by many.

### **2.2) Gender Equality as Challenging the Natural Order**

Many Cameroonians challenge and threatened the discourse on gender equality; most of them (men and women) refers to it as reversing the natural patriarchal division of the society. Defendants of women's rights universalization postulate that the amelioration of women condition due to the acquisition of some rights might be a driving force for social progress. All over the world, fights for gender equality arouses passions, particularly when it comes to promoting women's presence in decision-making circles, formerly reserved to men. Most gender scholars agree on that definition of gender as refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, including class, race, poverty level, ethnic group, sexual orientation, and age. In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Equality is ensuring that conditions, privileges or rights are the same. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same, only that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by their sex (Facio and Bryan, 2009).

In Cameroon, gender equality is commonly constructed as a challenge to the patriarchal (natural) order; it challenged the following traditional discourses: women are made to be caretakers and domestics, women as wives, women should not intervene in public affairs. By encouraging women to go out for paid work and have equal job opportunities with men is contested by some Cameroonians. The main reason is that, men who “are not made for households works in many Cameroonian cultures, will also be call to participate in domestic chores. OECD (2014) acknowledges that women spend between three and six hours on unpaid care activities, while men spend half an hour to two hours per day. It encourages men to be more involved in unpaid care work as it both an important aspect of economic activity and an indispensable factor contributing to the wellbeing of individuals, their families and their societies. However, many Cameroonian men are reluctant to it as according to them it goes against the culture. In addition, many parents are not willingly to send their girls further in education especially in the Northern regions of Cameroon. Their main arguments is that “it is difficult for an educated to find a husband”; in fact, it is commonly said that an educated girl has high expectations she wants to see in her husband in opposition to a less educated or uneducated one. According to many, educated girls tend not to be submissive to their husbands; they will like to understand their husbands’ decisions, to justify themselves rather than only obeying and respecting their husbands. In most Cameroonian cultures, women are not call to question their husbands’ opinions and decisions. Therefore, when gender equality promotes education as a tool that “can play a key role in challenging gender based violence and transforming patriarchal societies into ones that value equality, inclusion and justice” (Global Campaign for Education 2020), many Cameroonian parents (men and women) are not really opened to it. They look at education as going against the ideology of women as wives and something that aims at destroying the traditional society.

In many African cultures, women are not call to participate in decision-making spheres; men, and with sometimes old women, are the ones to decide for the community. There is a common say that “women do not talk where men are talking”; thus advocating for women integration in decision-making sphere is difficulty accepted in Cameroon, as it is regarded as reversing the cultural order. The 48<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women recognised that men and boys can and do contribute to achieve gender equality. Men should no longer see the act of dismantling patriarchy as a win-lose proposition. In Cameroon, more women have entered the workforce in recent decades. They however still face a segregation in occupations and glass ceilings, with over-representation on low paying jobs and underrepresentation in senior positions. UN women 2014 Report explains slow progress on the MDG3 as emanating from failure to address fundamental issues such as violence against women, inequalities of unpaid care work, and the unequal participation of women in private and public decisions beyond national parliaments. Low representation of women may be explained by a combination of unfavourable gender ideologies, less effective institutional frameworks and limited political will. As discourse analysts, we should help the population to deconstruct and challenged those unfavourable gender ideologies.

### **Gender Equality: a Key to Sustainable Development**

Improving women positions simultaneously strengthens African society as a whole as well as enhances the continent’s broader development. Michael Kevane (2004) says that gender and economic growth seem to have little to do each other. Nevertheless, according to him in reality, “African economies are poor because of high levels of corruption; men dominate African governments; therefore the solution is to encourage and campaign for more representation of women in African governments.” In addition, Koffi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations Organisation affirms, “Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building governance”

#### **3.1) Men and Women: the Wings for the Flight of Africa’s Development**

There is no chance of making poverty history without significant and rapid improvements to lives of women and girls in all countries (OECD 2015). The third Millennium development Goal is to “promote gender equality and empower women”; this goal signalled global recognition that gender equality is an important development in itself and a key to the success. The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon in its preamble declare that all Cameroonians, men and women are equal in rights and obligations. However, the injustice is flagrant between the intended equality for everybody and an equality shaped for some and could not continue. Gender equality effectiveness becomes incontestable for a balanced society. Many scholars acknowledged that women’s absence in decision-making positions could be one factor of Africa’s underdevelopment persistence in general and Cameroon’s in particular. The European Institute of Gender Equality (2014) declares that some key to address gender equality can be ethics, right-based approach and proven results. At the Ethical level, women represent about 52% of the Cameroonian population; secondly, women and girls represent the most disadvantaged social group across all other equality, thus the need to respect their rights. Lastly, it has been proven that investing in women increase the social welfare and economic growth of a society.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to strengthen advocacy for equality. Equality is addressed not only as a matter of fundamental rights, but also as an economic resource and a driven force of well-being. These advocacy strategies in Cameroon is mostly developed by Civil Society Organisations; the role of civil societies in advocacy need to be supported by the state and the population. As earlier said, we conceptualised gender equality as equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys. Gender Equality Policy Report (2017:4) emphasises that “Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities will not depend on whether they are born male or female” Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, a South African politician says that “without gender equality, there can be no development”. She insists on the argument that unless Africa invests heavily in gender equality, it will neither sustain its growth nor meet its development goals. Gender equality is posited as pre-requisite for sustainable development. Aspiration 6 of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 is “An Africa where development is people driven, relying upon the potential offered by people, especially its women.” For women to be a developmental force they need to be equally represented in all areas of decision-making at all levels, and be able to participate with impact through the removal of formal and informal barriers. Results of Africa Human Development Report (2016) confirm that Africa is failing to achieve its full growth potential because a sizeable portion of its growth reserve (women) is not fully utilised. Thus, the African development as a bird finds difficulties to fly with one wing.

### 3.2) Empowering women increases social welfare

African Development Report (2015) demonstrates that gender inequality is a double break on poverty reduction; it posits that the fate of African women determines the fate the continent’s future growth prospects. Increasing women representation and participation at all levels is essential for advancing issues of importance to women on national and local agendas. USAID (2020) defines women’s empowerment as “the state in which women have the ability to act freely in society, exercise their rights equally to that of men and fulfil their potential as equal members of the society, such as to determine their life outcomes, assume leadership roles and influence decision in households, communities and societies. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission to Strategy for gender equality and Women’s Empowerment, during the 32<sup>nd</sup> Summit of the Union said, “The road to achieving gender equality is certainly long and fraught with obstacles, but I am confident this objective is within our reach”. Aspiration 6 of the African Union’s Agenda 2063 is “An Africa where development is people driven, relying upon the potential offered by people, especially its women.” UN Women Report (2018) acknowledges the mutually reinforcing links between the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and the eradication of poverty. The Commission recognises the benefit of implementing family-oriented policies aimed, *inter alia*, achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in society.

In 2020, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) affirms that a prosperous and peaceful world is one in which women and men enjoy equal economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights; where they are equally empowered to secure better lives for themselves, their families, their communities and their countries. From this affirmation one understand no country can succeed if it excludes the talents and voices of its female population. Therefore, ensuring women and girls can reach their full potential in society is critical, not only to attain gender equality and women’s empowerment but also to meet sustainable development. Empowering women and reducing gender inequalities are two key objectives of development policy (Alkire et al., 2013). The fifth development Goal (SDG5) explicitly aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as global goals, were adopted by United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These are not only goals in themselves, but have been shown to contribute to improving productivity and reducing poverty.

Cameroon is a lower-middle income country, that is with a Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of 3,581 \$, with a population of over 25 million (World Bank data 2019). The Cameroonian poverty reduction rate is lagging behind its population growth rate. The overall number of poor in Cameroon increased by 12% to 8.1 million between 2007 and 2014; poverty is concentrated in the northern regions where 56% of poor people live (World Bank Report 2021). It is also in these regions that gender patriarchal ideologies persist and where gender equality is mostly contested. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranks Cameroon 153<sup>th</sup> out of 188 countries, according to the 2020 Human Development Index. These results suggests that social development in Cameroon is low in Cameroon compared with most countries in the world. Economic literature assumes a positive relationship between empowerment and household welfare. Empowering women is a multidimensional process with economic, socio-cultural, familial, legal, political and psychological dimensions (Mahmud et al., 2012).

In development economics, women's empowerment is the process of having and using resources in an agentic manner to reach certain achievements (Malhotra et al., 2002 and Swain and Wallentin, 2009). In other words, women's empowerment is defined as the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them (Kabeer, 2012).

According to the literature, women's empowerment contributes to improvement in economic efficiency, economic growth and enhanced development outcomes. In many developing countries, women face discrimination in labour markets and societal institutions; because they do not perform at their potential, competences of women are not efficiently used to activities. According to FAO (2011) Report, if women have access to the same productive resources in farm activities agricultural output will increase by between 2.5% and 4.0% in developing countries. The World Development Report-WDR (World Bank, 2012) concludes that eliminating all barriers preventing women from the job market will increase output per worker by 40%. By increasing their incomes and/or household incomes, economic empowerment gives women the capability to raise social investments or spending for the family. The WDR (World Bank, 2012) has shown that in several developing and emerging countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, Côte d'Ivoire, Mexico, South Africa), women's economic empowerment has increased social households' spending (such as children's health, education, and nutrition). Another dimension of women's empowerment is education. According to several studies, educated women invest more in goods and services, which improves the well-being of their families. Indeed, because they are the main caregivers for children and family, it is easier for educated women to get jobs and high incomes and increase investments on education, health. Using data for 219 countries from 1970- 2009, Gakidou et al. (2010) have shown a reduction in infant mortality by 9.5% due to women education; examining women's empowerment, he found that women's education is correlated with children's education, nutrition and health.

Some authors consider that women have different preferences and ideas than men. They show that incomes in the hands of women of a household have a higher impact on intra-household allocation (child health, larger expenditure share of nutrients, health and housing) than income in the hands of men. In other words, women with high bargaining power invest more in social expenditures (Garcia Penalosa and Konte, 2014). Mabali et al (2022) analyses the effect of women's empowerment on household. They came to discover that social expenditure realised by female-headed households are higher than those realised male-headed households are after controlling for observed characteristics. While female-headed households spend their incomes social sectors (education, food and education), those headed by men spend for temptation goods (alcohol and leisure). Women's empowerment stands here as a tool for social development; for policy makers, these results raise the issues of women's empowerment because there is a strong connection between household social expenditures and social development.

## Conclusion

African States in general face many difficulties in implementing gender equality. In this paper, we have investigated the effect of common ideologies on gender policies. We have come to acknowledge that discourses developed by the population stand as obstacles for equal opportunities for men and women. Our findings support the hypothesis that without a better understanding of gender equality by less educated as well as highly educated, gender equality policies will face difficulties to take off. Results show that one needs to elucidate the concept of gender equality for the population, not to look at it as a challenge to hierarchical order or as women's affairs only. Rather, people need to understand and recognise the role women's empowerment can play in fighting against poverty and reaching sustainable development goals.

We need to undertake innovative campaigns and continuous dialogues to transform social norms. Given that patriarchy is at the heart of gender inequality, a key focus in the coming years should be changing social norms. For a better understanding of what gender equality is, it is proposed to decision makers that gender issues should be introduced at all levels of education and not only Higher education as it now. The reason being that many Cameroonians, especially girls did not reach the higher level of education; they stop either at the primary or at the secondary level.

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