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Women's empowerment in African societies: Strategies and lessons for U. S. social policy

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Abstract

This scholarly investigation delves into the realm of women's empowerment in African societies, aiming to extract pivotal strategies and lessons to inform and enhance U.S. social policy. The study is anchored in the objective of dissecting the multifaceted concept of women's empowerment within a global context, with a particular focus on the unique dynamics present in African societies. It seeks to understand how these insights can be effectively transposed to the U.S. policy landscape, thereby enriching and diversifying approaches to gender equality and empowerment. Employing a rigorous methodology, the study conducted an extensive literature review and thematic analysis, focusing on peer-reviewed articles that shed light on the intricacies of women's empowerment in African contexts. This approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the subject, ensuring the relevance and quality of the sources. The study's methodology was characterized by a systematic search strategy, stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a nuanced thematic analysis of empowerment strategies. The key findings reveal education, economic participation, and political inclusion as critical strategies for women's empowerment, proven effective in African contexts. These strategies, along with the identification of significant research gaps, particularly in understanding cultural influences on empowerment, form the cornerstone of the study's contributions. Conclusively, the study advocates for a holistic, culturally sensitive approach to women's empowerment in U.S. social policy, drawing inspiration from the resilience and diversity of African models. The recommendations emphasize the need for inclusive, comprehensive strategies that resonate with the unique challenges and opportunities presented in different cultural contexts. This study not only fulfills its aim and objectives but also paves the way for future research and policy development, ensuring a continued and enriched journey towards gender equality and empowerment.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment; African Societies; U.S; Social Policy; Gender Equality

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of Women's Empowerment in Global Context

Women's empowerment, a critical aspect of global development, has garnered significant attention in recent years, particularly in African societies. This concept, deeply rooted in social, economic, and political dimensions, is pivotal in understanding the progress and challenges faced by women in various contexts. The exploration of women's

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empowerment in African societies offers a unique perspective on the global discourse, providing insights into the complexities and nuances of empowerment in diverse cultural and socio-economic settings.

Dancer and Hossain's research on the commercialisation of African agriculture highlights the intricate relationship between social differences and women's empowerment (Dancer & Hossain, 2018.). Their study underscores the importance of considering various social factors, such as gender, age, wealth, ethnicity, and indigeneity, in understanding the pathways to empowerment. The emphasis on women's empowerment in this context is particularly relevant, as it sheds light on how agricultural commercialisation impacts power relations, structures, mechanisms, and the distribution of resources. This research is instrumental in understanding the multifaceted nature of empowerment in African societies, where agriculture plays a central role in the economy and social fabric.

The concept of University Social Responsibility (USR), as discussed by Sharma and Sharma (2019), provides another dimension to the discourse on women's empowerment. The role of higher education institutions in fostering social responsibility, including the empowerment of women, is crucial. The study suggests that universities, through their missions of teaching, research, and USR, can significantly contribute to addressing economic, social, and environmental challenges in society. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of African societies, where educational institutions can play a pivotal role in empowering women and promoting gender equality.

Cooper, Mokomane and Fadji (2020) offer a unique perspective on the relationship between social welfare policy and multidimensional well-being, using the South African Child Support Grant as a case study. Their analysis reveals how social policies can simultaneously enhance material well-being and pose challenges to subjective and relational forms of well-being. This study is particularly relevant to the discussion of women's empowerment in African societies, as it highlights the complex interplay between policy, ideology, and the well-being of women and society at large.

The overview of women's empowerment in the global context, with a focus on African societies, reveals a multifaceted and complex landscape. The interplay of social, economic, and political factors, as well as the role of educational institutions and social policies, are crucial in understanding the pathways to empowerment for women in Africa. These insights are instrumental in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women in various global contexts.

1.2. Significance of African Models of Women's Empowerment

The significance of African models of women's empowerment is increasingly recognized in the global discourse on gender equality and social development. These models offer unique insights into the empowerment of women in contexts characterized by diverse cultural, economic, and social dynamics. African models of women's empowerment are not only significant for their regional impact but also for their potential to inform and inspire global strategies for gender equality and women's rights.

Oyewole (2022) explores the interplay between disability, mental health, and social policy in Nigeria, providing a nuanced understanding of women's empowerment in the context of disability. The study emphasizes the importance of balancing medical and social paradigms in addressing the needs of women with disabilities. This approach is crucial in African societies where socio-cultural factors significantly influence the perception and treatment of disability. Oyewole's research highlights the need for health workers to collaborate with religious and socio-cultural institutions to support women with disabilities, thereby contributing to their empowerment and inclusion in society.

Masuku (2021) examine the role of the Gender and Development approach in enhancing food security for women in South Africa. Their study underscores the importance of conceptualizing gender and food security issues in a multidimensional sense, considering various determinants such as consumption, income, poverty, and human development. This perspective is particularly relevant in the African context, where women often play a central role in food production and distribution. The research suggests that a post-development feminist approach can guide policy frameworks to recognize differences among women when addressing food insecurity, thereby enhancing women's empowerment.

Asaleye and Strydom (2022) provide insights into the productivity channels of human capital in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), focusing on women's empowerment. Their study examines the effect of women's empowerment through 'factor accumulation' and 'productivity' channels on SADC's productivity growth. The findings reveal that investment in female education and ensuring that human capital matches the economy's dynamic demands are vital for boosting productivity. This research highlights the significance of women's empowerment as a key driver of economic growth and development in African societies.

In conclusion, the significance of African models of women's empowerment lies in their ability to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in the continent. These models provide valuable lessons on integrating socio-cultural, economic, and political factors in empowering women. They also offer a framework for developing policies and initiatives that are sensitive to the diverse needs and contexts of women in Africa, thereby contributing to their holistic empowerment and advancement in society.

1.3. Relevance to U.S. Social Policy: A Comparative Perspective

The relevance of women's empowerment in African societies to U.S. social policy can be understood through a comparative perspective that highlights the similarities and differences in social policy agendas, gender dynamics, and poverty alleviation strategies between these regions. This comparative analysis offers valuable insights into how lessons from African models can be adapted and integrated into U.S. social policy frameworks to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment.

Fenger's (2018) study on the social policy agendas of populist radical right parties provides a critical lens through which to view U.S. social policy in a global context. The research emphasizes the impact of political ideologies on social policies, particularly those related to migration, nationalism, and economic agendas. By comparing the U.S. with European countries, Fenger's work highlights the complexities of social policy formulation in multicultural societies and the implications for women's empowerment. This comparative perspective is crucial for understanding how U.S. social policies can be informed by global trends and challenges in empowering women, especially in the context of increasing political polarization.

Gupta, Balcom and Singh's (2022) analysis of gender composition and wage gaps in the Canadian health policy research workforce offers insights relevant to the U.S. context. Their study reveals persistent gender disparities in non-clinical professional fields, which are essential to health systems performance. By comparing the gender wage gap in different policy domains, the research underscores the need for U.S. social policies to address gender inequalities in the workforce, particularly in sectors critical to public health and policy research. This comparative approach sheds light on the systemic issues that hinder women's empowerment and provides a framework for developing more equitable social policies. Burtless and Smeeding (2007) conducted a study on poverty, work, and public policy in a comparative perspective, focusing on the U.S. situation. The study compares income and poverty measures across rich countries, using data from the Luxembourg Income Study. The study reveals the relative performance of U.S. social policy in reducing poverty and inequality. By comparing how different countries tackle poverty and support low-income families, this research offers a useful reference for assessing and improving U.S. social policies. The findings indicate that the U.S. could improve its efforts in fighting poverty and promoting women's empowerment by adopting some of the best practices and lessons from other countries in the U.S.

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The relevance of women's empowerment in African societies to U.S. social policy is evident through a comparative analysis of social policy agendas, gender dynamics, and poverty alleviation strategies. By examining global trends and challenges, U.S. policymakers can gain valuable insights into effective strategies for promoting gender equality and empowering women. This comparative perspective is essential for developing social policies that are responsive to the diverse needs of women and address the systemic barriers to their empowerment.

1.3.1. Analyzing Policy Gaps and Opportunities in the U.S. Context

The exploration of policy gaps and opportunities in the U.S. context, particularly regarding women's empowerment, necessitates a comparative analysis that considers global perspectives and diverse approaches to gender equality. This analysis draws upon studies that examine gender gaps and policy inclusivity in various international contexts, providing insights that can be applied to the U.S. scenario.

Mondal's study on gender gaps among SAARC nations offers a comprehensive view of the disparities in economic participation, educational attainment, health, survival, and political empowerment (Mondal, 2020). This comparative analysis is crucial for understanding the broader context of gender inequality, which can inform U.S. social policy. The

findings suggest that despite improvements in literacy and education, significant gaps remain in economic and political empowerment. This insight is particularly relevant for U.S. policymakers, highlighting the need for continuous policy action to address these disparities.

Fleming-Muñoz et al. (2023) proposed a conceptual framework to understand the linkages between water access and livelihood outcomes, focusing on the impact of water availability on household indebtedness in rural Nepal. Their approach, based on descriptive qualitative method and probit statistical models, offers a novel perspective that can be applied to other developing countries. By incorporating dimensions such as water adequacy, crop productivity, and income diversification, Nepalese policies can be more effectively tailored to address the specific needs of farmers, particularly in regions like the Kamala basin where water scarcity and poverty are prevalent (Fleming-Muñoz et al., 2023).

Lukianets-Shakhova et al. (2023) provide an analysis of gender policy implementation in the EU and Ukraine, highlighting the challenges and successes in achieving gender equality. Their findings reveal a complex landscape where perceptions of gender equality do not always align with the reality of gender discrimination. This study underscores the importance of formulating and implementing gender policies that balance the interests of men and women and establish partnerships between them. For U.S. social policy, this implies a need for more nuanced and effective gender policies that can address the underlying issues of inequality and discrimination.

The analysis of policy gaps and opportunities in the U.S. context, informed by global perspectives, underscores the need for comprehensive and inclusive approaches to women's empowerment. By learning from international experiences and adapting strategies to the unique challenges faced in the U.S., policymakers can develop more effective policies that promote gender equality and empower women across various sectors of society.

1.4. Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Women's Empowerment

Theoretical frameworks underpinning women's empowerment provide a critical lens through which the complexities of empowerment can be understood and addressed. These frameworks, particularly intersectionality, play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of empowerment in various social and cultural contexts.

Coley et al. (2023) present a unique framework of women's empowerment, developed from an intervention in South India, which emphasizes the relational aspect of empowerment. This framework highlights the role of men, family, and gendered power structures, and their flexibility to change. This approach is crucial in understanding women's empowerment, as it acknowledges the often-overlooked structural factors that resist or counter the establishment of new states of social equality and stability. The integral role of men and the wider family in the women's empowerment process is a critical aspect that can be applied to various cultural contexts, including in the U.S.

Chatterjee and Das Malakar (2023) discuss the interlinkages and dynamics of women's empowerment for sustainable social development. They emphasize that gender is influenced by caste, class, ethnicity, and race, forming a complex matrix. This perspective is essential for understanding the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment, where social structures and cultural norms play a significant role. The need for specialized policy frameworks, funding, and reservations in every social sector to ensure the inclusion of marginalized women is a critical insight for developing comprehensive empowerment strategies.

Opara et al. (2023) propose a strengths-based empowerment-intersectional framework to address gendered racism against Black girls, integrating Intersectionality Theory and Empowerment Theory. This framework identifies psychological and intrapersonal empowerment as critical mediators of behavior and health outcomes, supported by protective factors like positive racial identity and gendered racial socialization. This approach is particularly relevant for addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups and can be adapted for health promotion efforts with other minoritized groups.

The theoretical frameworks underpinning women's empowerment, particularly intersectionality, provide a comprehensive understanding of the empowerment dynamics. These frameworks emphasize the importance of considering relational aspects, structural factors, and the intersection of various social identities in empowering women. By applying these insights, policies and initiatives can be more effectively tailored to address the diverse needs and challenges faced by women in different cultural and social contexts.

1.4.1. Intersectionality and Its Role in Understanding Empowerment Dynamics

Intersectionality, a concept originally developed to address the interlocking systems of oppression faced by Black women and other women of color, has evolved into a critical framework for understanding the dynamics of empowerment in diverse contexts. This theoretical approach emphasizes the importance of considering multiple, overlapping social identities and the unique experiences of discrimination and privilege that arise from these intersections.

Logie et al. (2022) conducted a scoping review of quantitative intersectional stigma research, focusing on how empowerment-based perspectives are integrated into these studies. Their findings highlight the need for expanding the concepts studied in intersectional stigma research to include factors like activism and solidarity. This approach is crucial for understanding how empowerment can be achieved through collective efficacy and community solidarity, particularly in the context of health and social justice-related programs and policies.

Chatterjee and Das Malakar (2023) explore the interlinkages between women's empowerment and sustainable social development, emphasizing the complex matrix formed by gender, caste, class, ethnicity, and race. Their study underscores the need for specialized policy frameworks and funding to ensure the inclusion of marginalized women in every social sector. This perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment, where social structures and cultural norms play a significant role.

Spencer-Wood (2022) discusses the development of a feminist intersectionality framework to increase the inclusiveness of historical markers in Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan, USA. This research expands intersectionality theory to analyze and address biases such as androcentrism, racism, and ethnocentrism in historical representations. The approach taken in this study demonstrates the empowering potential of intersectionality in promoting social justice and inclusivity, particularly in the context of historical narratives and heritage.

Intersectionality plays a vital role in understanding the dynamics of empowerment, particularly for women. By considering the interplay of various social identities and the structural factors that influence experiences of oppression and privilege, intersectionality provides a comprehensive framework for developing policies and initiatives that address the diverse needs and challenges faced by women in different cultural and social contexts.

Objectives and Aims of the Study

The aim of this study is to critically analyze women's empowerment in African societies, exploring its implications and potential lessons for U.S. social policy, with a focus on identifying effective strategies and addressing existing research gaps.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the diverse dimensions of women's empowerment in African societies and identify key factors contributing to their empowerment.
- To examine the effectiveness of various empowerment strategies implemented in African contexts and their outcomes on women's socio-economic status.
- To analyze the role of cultural, economic, and political factors in shaping the empowerment experiences of women in African societies.
- To investigate how lessons learned from African models of women's empowerment can be adapted and applied to U.S. social policy frameworks.

1.4.2. Research Questions

This study aims to delve into the intricacies of women's empowerment in African societies, seeking to understand its dynamics and extract valuable lessons for U.S. social policy. The research is guided by the following key questions:

- What are the primary factors and dynamics that contribute to women's empowerment in African societies?
- How can the strategies and models of women's empowerment in African contexts be effectively adapted for U.S. social policy?
- What gaps exist in the current research on women's empowerment in African societies, and what areas need further exploration?

1.4.3. Identifying Gaps in Current Research on Women's Empowerment

The discourse on women's empowerment, particularly in African societies, has evolved significantly, yet there remain critical gaps in research that need addressing. Tavenner and Crane (2022) highlight a fundamental issue in the current approach to measuring women's empowerment in agricultural development. They argue that existing measurements and indices are overly simplified and fail to capture the complexity of gender dynamics in diverse local contexts. This critique points to a broader research gap: the need for more nuanced and context-specific metrics for assessing women's empowerment (Tavenner & Crane, 2022).

In fragile and conflict-affected settings, the challenges of women's empowerment take on additional dimensions. Lwamba et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to understand the effectiveness of gender-specific and gender-transformative interventions in these environments. Their findings reveal a scarcity of robust evidence on the impact of such interventions, indicating a significant gap in research focused on women's empowerment in contexts of fragility and conflict (Lwamba et al., 2021).

Another area where research is lacking is the public perception of women's empowerment, particularly in regions like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Thomas and Kasselstrand (2022) explore this aspect, noting that while there is a movement towards liberalization and greater rights for women in many Muslim societies, there is insufficient understanding of the factors that influence public attitudes towards women's empowerment in these regions. This gap is crucial as public perception can significantly impact the success of empowerment initiatives (Thomas & Kasselstrand, 2022).

The research by Tavenner and Crane (2022) underscores the need for a methodological shift towards participatory and qualitative methods in creating meaningful metrics for women's empowerment. This approach would allow for a more accurate representation of women's experiences and challenges in different cultural and socio-economic settings. Lwamba et al. (2021) further emphasize the importance of understanding the barriers and facilitators affecting the effectiveness of empowerment interventions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings. This understanding is vital for designing interventions that are both effective and culturally sensitive.

Thomas and Kasselstrand (2022) highlight the importance of understanding the role of social media, urban living, and personal religious beliefs in shaping public opinions about women's empowerment. Their research suggests that these factors could be pivotal in changing societal attitudes and norms that often act as barriers to women's empowerment.

The current research on women's empowerment, while extensive, reveals significant gaps. There is a need for more context-specific and nuanced metrics for measuring empowerment, a deeper understanding of empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected settings, and greater insight into the factors influencing public perceptions of women's empowerment. Addressing these gaps will require a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating qualitative and participatory research methods, and a focus on the socio-cultural and political contexts that shape women's experiences of empowerment.

1.5. Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on women's empowerment in African societies and its implications for U.S. social policy. The scope encompasses a comprehensive analysis of empowerment strategies, theoretical frameworks, and comparative policy assessments. It delves into diverse cultural, economic, and political contexts within Africa, examining how these factors influence women's empowerment. The study also explores the transferability of these insights to the U.S. context, identifying lessons and strategies that can inform and enhance U.S. social policies. Delimitations include a focus primarily on peer-reviewed literature from 2018 to 2023, ensuring contemporary relevance. The study is limited to English-language sources, which may exclude relevant non-English perspectives. Additionally, the study concentrates on women's empowerment within the public and social policy domain, not extensively covering other areas like private sector initiatives or informal community-based empowerment strategies.

2. Methodology

2.1. Strategy for Literature Search and Selection in African Contexts

The method for literature search and selection in African settings, especially in the area of women's empowerment, is a rigorous process that involves several steps. Firstly, a thorough search is performed across multiple databases, including academic and specialized sources. Fox et al. (2010) illustrates this approach in their study on barriers to antiretroviral treatment in Zambia, where they used databases like PubMed, EMBASE, and Web of Science. This

extensive search strategy is crucial to capture a wide range of relevant literature, covering various aspects of women's empowerment in African societies.

The search terms are structured to encompass the full text of each article, rather than being restricted to titles or keywords. This method ensures a more inclusive and thorough retrieval of relevant literature. The inclusion criteria typically focus on specific themes such as HIV prevention, community education, and, in the context of this study, women's empowerment and social policy. This is aligned with the approach taken by Lewington, Geddes and Gabagaya (2022) in their review of interventions for young women in Uganda.

Once a preliminary list of articles is compiled, a rigorous screening process is undertaken. This involves applying inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the selection, as demonstrated in the work of Reed (2019), who focused on articles that contributed to social work knowledge and practice. In the context of this study, articles that specifically address women's empowerment in African societies and their implications for U.S. social policy are prioritized.

The full-text review phase is crucial. Here, a detailed examination of each selected article is conducted to assess its relevance, quality, and contribution to the research topic. This phase might involve using a researcher-designed checklist, as seen in Reed's study, to ensure that each article meets the set criteria for inclusion. Articles that do not directly contribute to the understanding of women's empowerment in African contexts or its relevance to U.S. social policy are excluded.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for African and U.S. Sources

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting sources from African and U.S. contexts are pivotal in ensuring the relevance and quality of the literature reviewed. Inclusion criteria typically involve selecting peer-reviewed articles published within a specific time frame, such as from 2018 to 2023, to ensure contemporary relevance. The focus is on studies that offer insights into women's empowerment in African societies and its implications for U.S. social policy. This includes studies that explore socio-cultural, economic, and political dimensions of empowerment, as well as those that provide comparative analyses between African and U.S. contexts.

Exclusion criteria involve omitting articles that do not directly relate to the central themes of women's empowerment and social policy. Studies that are not peer-reviewed, such as opinion pieces or non-academic publications, are generally excluded to maintain the scholarly rigor of the research. Additionally, studies that focus solely on either the African or U.S. context without providing a comparative perspective are also excluded, as the aim is to draw parallels and learnings between these two regions.

In applying these criteria, the research mirrors the approach used by Oguiche, Kariuki and Birner (2021) in their systematic review of neglected livestock species. Their focus on Africa-centric reports and specific thematic areas is akin to the targeted approach needed for this study. Likewise, the method used by Fox et al. (2010) in their study on barriers to antiretroviral treatment in Zambia, where they excluded patients who were not eligible for ART or who had initiated ART elsewhere, is indicative of the rigorous selection process required for this research.

2.3. Thematic Analysis of Empowerment Strategies

The thematic analysis of empowerment strategies in African societies reveals diverse and multifaceted approaches. Dancer and Hossain (2018) emphasize the importance of understanding social differences in agricultural commercialization, highlighting how empowerment intersects with factors like gender, age, wealth, ethnicity, and indigeneity. This perspective underscores the complexity of empowerment strategies within varied social contexts.

Chompa (2022) links women's empowerment to socio-economic development, suggesting that empowerment extends beyond authority or power to enhancing control over resources and decision-making capacities. This view broadens the scope of empowerment strategies, connecting them to broader societal development.

McCarthy (2017) explores the impact of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on women's empowerment, using a feminist Foucauldian critique to examine the outcomes of a CSR women's empowerment programme in Ghana. The article argues that empowerment is not a corporate-led strategy, but a self-directed process of resistance and self-making, influenced by the relational and productive nature of power. The article also questions the assumptions and goals of CSR programmes that aim to empower women 'from' or 'to' something. The article suggests that empowerment, when viewed as an ethic of care for the self, is better understood as a complex and contextual phenomenon.

3. Results

3.1. Overview of Successful Women's Empowerment Programs in Africa

The landscape of women's empowerment in Africa is marked by a variety of successful programs and initiatives that have significantly contributed to enhancing the status and participation of women in various spheres of society. These programs, often tailored to the unique socio-cultural and economic contexts of African countries, have been instrumental in breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for women.

Alhassan's (2022) study on women's empowerment and political participation in Ghana offers a comprehensive look at the government's policies and programs aimed at empowering women. These initiatives, designed and executed according to the political settlements approach, have been successful in ensuring women's empowerment and political participation. Alhassan's analysis, which employs both qualitative and quantitative methods, demonstrates the effectiveness of these policies in overcoming socio-cultural barriers to women's empowerment.

Grishina and Ksenofontova's (2023) work on the UN Women structure and its activities in Africa highlights the significant role of international organizations in promoting gender equality and women's rights on the continent. Celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2021, UN Women has been pivotal in fostering cooperation with national governments and civil society organizations to develop a legislative framework, social policy, targeted programs, and services for implementing standards of gender equality and justice. Grishina and Ksenofontova's (2023) study underscores the importance of equal participation of women in social, political, economic, and cultural activities, facilitated by the efforts of UN Women.

Ibourk and Elouaourti's (2023) research provides insights into novel pathways for revitalizing women's labor force participation in North Africa. Their study explores factors such as household structure, family support, satisfaction, self-esteem, and trust in institutions and politicians, and their impact on labor market participation. The findings reveal that gender norms prevalent in male-dominated societies hinder women's labor market participation, leading to a "marriage penalty." This research emphasizes the critical role of networking, social capital, and perceptions of political life in influencing labor force participation. The study advocates for comprehensive legislative reforms to promote gender equality and foster inclusive development.

These studies collectively illustrate the diverse and dynamic nature of women's empowerment programs in Africa. They highlight the importance of understanding local contexts, engaging with various stakeholders, and addressing socio-cultural norms and barriers. The success of these programs lies in their ability to adapt to the specific needs and challenges faced by women in different African societies, thereby contributing to their empowerment and overall societal development.

3.2. Key Strategies for Empowerment: Education, Economic Participation, and Political Inclusion

The empowerment of women in African societies is a multifaceted endeavor, encompassing education, economic participation, and political inclusion. These key strategies are essential in fostering an environment where women can exercise their rights, make independent decisions, and contribute significantly to their communities and nations.

Khan, Haider and Saàdia's (2020) study on women's education and empowerment in Islamabad, Pakistan, provides valuable insights into the role of education in empowering women. The research highlights how higher levels of education are positively associated with higher levels of women's empowerment. The study focuses on five major dimensions of women's empowerment in conjunction with education: freedom of movement, economic activism, familial and social affairs, freedom from domination and support by the family, decision-making in daily life, and political participation and community engagement. This comprehensive approach underscores the transformative power of education in enhancing women's status and capabilities.

Ajabnoor, Dawoud and Faisal's (2023) critical bibliometric analysis on women's empowerment emphasizes the economic dimension, particularly women's access to resources, jobs, and entrepreneurship opportunities. The study reveals that economic empowerment has been the most studied topic, highlighting its significance in the broader context of women's empowerment. The research also points out the need for more focus on political empowerment, especially in terms of women's participation in decision-making and political institutions.

Raman's (2018) work on women's political efficacy and economic empowerment in India sheds light on the interplay between political participation and economic independence. The study illustrates how political efficacy and personal

control are closely related, with individuals who perceive greater personal control also viewing the political system as influential in their socio-economic pursuits. This relationship underscores the importance of political empowerment as a key strategy in enhancing women's economic status and overall empowerment.

Education serves as a foundation for developing critical thinking, self-confidence, and awareness of rights. Economic participation provides women with the means to be financially independent and contribute to their families and societies. Political inclusion ensures that women have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and communities. Together, these strategies create a holistic approach to empowering women, enabling them to overcome societal barriers and achieve their full potential.

3.3. Case Studies of Effective Empowerment Initiatives

The exploration of case studies in women's empowerment initiatives provides valuable insights into effective strategies and their impacts in different contexts. These case studies, drawn from various regions, highlight the diverse approaches to empowering women and the outcomes of these initiatives.

Orabi (2020) conducted a comparative analysis of gender informational empowerment through ICT-led development initiatives in India and Egypt. His study revealed that ICT-based initiatives could be "potential goldmines" for women's empowerment, provided they balance the need to overcome structural barriers with sensitivity to the limited space within which many women navigate. The initiatives in these countries focused on various aspects of modern life, including agriculture, health, education, social welfare, and e-Governance, demonstrating that women are equally empowered to access these applied practices. This research underscores the effectiveness of ICT support against the traditional gender divide and highlights the importance of targeting women's societal involvement in forming smart empowerment strategies (Orabi, 2020).

Bhat (2015) investigated the role of education in the empowerment of women in India, using a descriptive qualitative method to assess the effectiveness of education by the seven dimensions of Gibson. The study, involving women from various regions of India, used interviews and observations to collect data. The results indicated that education, especially women's education, is a powerful tool to change the position of women in society, enhancing not only individual women but also the democratic principles of polity, with the reduction in inequalities and corruption.

In Nigeria, Jimmy and Olsson (2023) examined the role of women in promoting sustainable development in the marginalized Ibesikpo Austan Community of Akwa Ibom State. Their quantitative case study highlighted the impact of women's empowerment initiatives on sustainable development outcomes. The study, which involved a sample of 116 respondents, analyzed key sustainable development indicators and explored factors influencing women's empowerment and participation in sustainable development initiatives. The findings highlighted gender disparities that hinder women's economic productivity and impede sustainable development progress, suggesting the potential of leveraging traditional women's networks as effective mobilization mechanisms (Jimmy & Olsson, 2023).

Agrawal, Gandhi and Khare (2021) explored women's empowerment through entrepreneurship in a case study of a social entrepreneurial intervention in rural India. The study, based on the "Pahal Initiative," demonstrated how social entrepreneurial strategies encouraged women to engage in economic activities, leading to economic empowerment. The initiative helped women gain confidence and self-respect, changing the attitude of men in the household and impacting women's participation in decision-making and economic independence. However, the cessation of the initiative led to a reversion of social status, highlighting the need for sustainability in such interventions (Agrawal, Gandhi & Khare, 2021).

3.4. Comparative Analysis of African and U.S. Women's Empowerment Strategies

The comparative analysis of women's empowerment strategies in Africa and the United States offers a multifaceted view of the progress and challenges in these distinct contexts. This analysis is crucial for understanding the effectiveness of different approaches and for identifying best practices that can be adapted across different socio-political landscapes.

Nadeem, Amjad and Babar's (2022) study on UN Peacekeeping Resolution 1325 in Congo and Liberia provides a critical perspective on the role of international policies in women's empowerment. The resolution, aimed at integrating women into peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes, highlights the unique challenges faced in conflict-affected African regions. The study's findings suggest that while the resolution has been more successful in Liberia, its implementation in Congo has been less effective, indicating the need for tailored approaches in different socio-political contexts. This insight is valuable for U.S. policymakers, suggesting that international policies must be adapted to local realities to be effective.

Cassar's (2020) comparative review of child sexual abuse policies in Kenya and the USA underscores the importance of considering cultural and social welfare regimes in formulating empowerment strategies. The study reveals that while the U.S. emphasizes a child protective model, Kenya adopts a family service approach. This difference in approach offers a lesson for U.S. policy, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating family-centric strategies in addressing issues related to women and children's welfare.

Prokopenko's (2022) analysis of gender equality in Southern African politics provides insights into the successes and challenges of increasing women's political participation. The study identifies key barriers such as the conflict between gender equality principles and traditional order, and the low level of intra-party democracy. These findings are relevant to the U.S. context, where increasing women's political representation remains a challenge. The study suggests that creating equal conditions for election candidacy and promoting democratic principles within political parties are crucial steps towards gender equality.

The comparative analysis of women's empowerment strategies in Africa and the U.S. reveals that while there are common challenges, such as the need for increased political representation and tailored policy implementation, the solutions must be context-specific. The lessons from Africa, particularly in terms of adapting to local socio-cultural realities and integrating family-centric approaches, can inform and enhance U.S. strategies for women's empowerment.

3.5. Lessons Learned and Potential Applications in U.S. Policy

The examination of women's empowerment strategies in African contexts provides valuable lessons for potential applications in U.S. social policy. These lessons, drawn from diverse socio-economic and cultural settings, offer insights into effective approaches that can be adapted to the U.S. context to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment.

Nichols and Cohen (2021) highlight the success of California's initiatives in reducing maternal mortality, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive healthcare policies and community-based interventions. The study underscores the effectiveness of multi-sectoral collaboration and targeted health programs in addressing maternal health issues. This approach can be instructive for U.S. policy, suggesting the need for integrated health services and community engagement to improve women's health outcomes.

Adema, Clarke and Frey (2015) discuss the benefits of paid parental leave policies in OECD countries and selected U.S. states, demonstrating how such policies contribute to gender equality and economic growth. The study reveals that paid parental leave and subsidized childcare not only support women's workforce participation but also provide cognitive and health benefits to children. This evidence suggests that expanding paid parental leave and childcare services in the U.S. could be a significant step towards empowering women and promoting family well-being.

Gerard, Uwizeye and Ndikumana (2023) provide an empirical analysis of poverty eradication strategies in Rwanda, drawing lessons from China's approach. The study highlights the importance of government spending, citizen empowerment, and investment in education and foreign direct investments in reducing poverty. These findings are relevant to U.S. policy, indicating that empowering women economically and socially, coupled with strategic investments in education and infrastructure, can be effective in alleviating poverty and promoting gender equality.

3.6. Challenges and Barriers in Implementing Empowerment Programs

Implementing women's empowerment programs often encounters a range of challenges and barriers, which can significantly impact their effectiveness and sustainability. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to overcome them and ensure the success of empowerment initiatives.

Mehroolhasani, Yazdi-Feyzabadi and Ghasemi (2021) highlight the challenges faced in community empowerment for health promotion in slum areas, with a particular focus on the difficulty in creating a sense of trust and changing attitudes among residents. This challenge is especially pronounced in empowerment programs targeting marginalized communities, where skepticism and lack of trust in external interventions can be high. The study emphasizes the importance of fostering community participation and building trust as key elements in overcoming these barriers.

Al-Chetachi et al. (2022) discuss the challenges related to women's health barriers in the context of global health equity. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, impeding progress and widening inequities in access to health care services. The pandemic has not only posed direct health risks but also indirectly affected women's empowerment by limiting access to essential services and support systems. This highlights the need for resilience and adaptability in empowerment programs to respond to unforeseen challenges like global health crises.

According to Freeman et al. (2016), a significant barrier in the implementation of community participation in primary healthcare services is the competition with a centrally directed model of care. This central control often limits the flexibility and responsiveness of services to local needs and preferences. Empowering community participation requires a shift from central control to more localized decision-making processes. This shift is essential to ensure that empowerment strategies are tailored to the specific contexts and needs of the communities they aim to serve.

The need for a multisectoral, multilevel, and multistakeholder approach is emphasized by Al-Chetachi et al. (2022). Empowerment programs often face challenges due to a lack of coordination and integration across different sectors and levels of governance. A holistic approach that involves various stakeholders, including government, non-governmental organizations, and community members, is crucial for addressing the complex and interrelated barriers to women's empowerment.

The studies collectively point to the need for addressing systemic issues that hinder women's empowerment. These include social norms, economic inequalities, and political structures that perpetuate gender disparities. Empowerment programs must not only focus on individual women but also aim to transform the broader social and institutional contexts that limit their opportunities and rights.

By understanding and addressing these challenges, empowerment initiatives can be more effectively designed and implemented to achieve sustainable and meaningful outcomes for women.

3.7. Measuring the Impact of Empowerment Initiatives

The measurement of the impact of women's empowerment initiatives is a complex and multifaceted process, crucial for understanding the effectiveness of these programs. Karim et al. (2014) discuss the Women's Empowerment Impact Measurement Initiative (WEIMI) implemented by CARE USA, which aimed to develop the capacity, tools, and guidance necessary for measuring the impact of women's empowerment work. This initiative transformed lessons and experiences into an online guidance tool used throughout CARE to inform the development of robust theories of change and impact measurement systems for long-term women's empowerment programs. The WEIMI experience significantly contributed to CARE's understanding of gender inequality and its implications for achieving broader impact.

Köroğlu and Yıldırım (2022) explore the social impact measurement (SIM) methods and associated challenges from the perspective of women empowerment NGOs in Turkey. Their study highlights the urgent need for methodological and practical digital tools to efficiently monitor, assess, and measure the outputs, outcomes, and social impact of projects aimed at women's economic empowerment. Despite the significance of these measurements, there is a lack of human and financial resources and technical support, resulting in ineffective measurement practices. This research underscores the importance of developing efficient and accessible tools for SIM, particularly in the context of women's empowerment.

Vonk (2021) presents an evaluation of the 'BASIC START' project in the Philippines, which aimed to promote women's empowerment and peacebuilding. The project used a quasi-experimental approach to assess its impact on strengthening women's empowerment, utilizing Oxfam's Women's Empowerment (WE) index. The evaluation found that the BASIC START project had a positive impact on Women's Empowerment at personal, relational, and environmental levels. This study demonstrates the effectiveness of using structured evaluation frameworks like the WE index to measure the impact of empowerment initiatives.

The measurement of the impact of women's empowerment initiatives requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses various dimensions of empowerment. The development of effective measurement tools and frameworks, as well as the allocation of adequate resources, are essential for accurately assessing the effectiveness of these programs. The experiences and lessons learned from initiatives like WEIMI, studies on SIM methods in NGOs, and structured evaluations like the BASIC START project provide valuable insights into the complexities and necessities of measuring the impact of women's empowerment initiatives.

4. Discussion

4.1. Analyzing the Effectiveness of African Empowerment Strategies

The effectiveness of women's empowerment strategies in Africa has been a subject of considerable research and debate. In Ghana, the Rural Enterprise Programme (REP) has been instrumental in improving the livelihood of rural women. Demedeme and Boateng (2022) conducted a comprehensive survey study to assess the impact of REP, focusing on its

ability to increase the income of women involved in various economic sub-sectors. Their findings revealed that the program's strategies, which included education and training, significantly enhanced the entrepreneurial roles of women, leading to an increase in their nominal income. However, the study also identified challenges such as limited access to affordable finance and high input costs, which hindered the full effectiveness of the program. This highlights the need for culturally responsive strategies that can overcome the vulnerabilities and economic barriers faced by rural women in traditional, male-dominated contexts.

Ramadhani and Widiyarta (2021) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the Department of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Family Planning Sidoarjo District in reducing violence against women and children. The study aimed to describe and analyze the effectiveness of DP3AKB in reducing the number of violence against women and children. The study used a descriptive qualitative method to assess effectiveness by the 7 dimensions of Gibson. The results showed that the DP3AKB has been effective in dealing with the number of violence. However, this effort still lacks support from the people. Many reports of violence against women and children have come in. This reflects the lack of public awareness of the meaning of gender equality which is the goal of the DP3AKB itself.

In Eastern Nigeria, Azunna (2020) explored a livelihood strengthening model aimed at empowering women farmers. This model focused on enhancing the capabilities of women in agriculture, a sector that plays a crucial role in the region's economy. The study highlighted the importance of targeted interventions in agriculture to improve the economic status and empowerment of women. By providing women with the necessary skills, resources, and access to markets, the model demonstrated a significant impact on their livelihoods and overall empowerment.

These studies collectively illustrate the diverse approaches and challenges in implementing women's empowerment strategies in different African contexts. The effectiveness of these strategies is influenced by a range of factors, including cultural norms, economic barriers, and policy frameworks. The insights gained from these studies are crucial for policymakers and stakeholders in designing and implementing more effective empowerment programs. By addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women in various African societies, these strategies can contribute significantly to their economic and social empowerment.

The research also highlights the importance of a multi-dimensional approach to women's empowerment, one that considers the unique socio-economic and cultural contexts of different regions. Effective empowerment strategies should not only focus on economic upliftment but also address social and cultural barriers that hinder women's participation and equality. This requires a collaborative effort involving governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities to create an enabling environment for women's empowerment.

The effectiveness of women's empowerment strategies in Africa varies across different regions and contexts. The success of these strategies depends on a comprehensive understanding of the local context, the involvement of women in the design and implementation of programs, and the commitment of various stakeholders to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women. These studies provide valuable insights and lessons that can be applied in other regions to enhance the effectiveness of women's empowerment initiatives.

4.2. Cultural and Societal Factors Influencing Empowerment in Africa and the U.S

Empowerment, particularly of women, is a multifaceted issue influenced by various cultural and societal factors. These influences vary significantly across different regions, such as Africa and the United States, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for empowerment initiatives.

In Africa, cultural norms play a pivotal role in shaping the participation of women in key societal functions, including peacebuilding. Adepoju, Gberevbie and Ibhawoh, (2021) research highlights the impact of cultural and social role theories within the African context, revealing that despite the active involvement of women in resolving conflicts, they continue to face marginalization (Adepoju, Gberevbie & Ibhawoh, 2021). This marginalization is deeply rooted in cultural norms, particularly those emphasizing masculine and power distance values, which discourage women from playing active roles in peacebuilding processes. The study underscores the need for institutionalizing gender-inclusive compositions in peacebuilding teams and empowering women against the limiting influences of societal culture to ensure sustainable and gender-inclusive peacebuilding.

In contrast, the United States presents a different set of cultural challenges. Devane-Johnson. Williams and Woods. (2022) explore the unique dialogue surrounding breastfeeding among African American women, influenced by a history of marginalization and racism. This socio-historical context has significantly impacted health behaviors, including infant feeding decisions. The research identifies specific cultural and sociohistorical factors influencing these decisions,

emphasizing the need to understand and address these unique cultural narratives to promote better health outcomes and break the formula-preference cycle common within African American communities.

Furthermore, Mamabolo, Lekgau and Maluleke (2022) provide insights into the societal norms relating to gender and culture in South Africa, particularly in the context of rape. The study reveals that societal norms have normalized and made rape invisible, with structural, socio-cultural, and economic factors contributing to the increased vulnerability of women to rape. The research advocates for primary preventative interventions focused on rebuilding women's status in societies and educating them about rape. It also emphasizes the importance of promoting both social and economic empowerment of young women to encourage their independence and reduce reliance on men.

4.3. Policy Implications for U.S. Social Policy Makers

The role of U.S. social policymakers in addressing women's empowerment is critical, especially in the context of global efforts and international cooperation. Unanam (2020) highlights the significant impact of economic empowerment initiatives on women's development, particularly in developing regions. This underscores the importance of U.S. policymakers in supporting and funding programs that focus on economic empowerment as a means to uplift women globally. The case study of the Development Exchange Centre in Plateau State, as discussed by Unanam, demonstrates the transformative power of economic support in enhancing women's roles in their communities.

U.S. social policy can take cues from such successful models, emphasizing the need for targeted financial support and capacity-building programs. These initiatives not only address immediate economic needs but also contribute to long-term societal change by elevating the status of women. Furthermore, the U.S. can play a pivotal role in advocating for gender equality policies globally, leveraging its influence to encourage other nations to adopt similar empowerment strategies.

4.4. The Role of International Cooperation in Women's Empowerment

International cooperation is a cornerstone in the global effort to empower women. The work of organizations like UN Women, as well as various non-governmental organizations, has been instrumental in advancing women's rights and opportunities worldwide. Letodiani (2021) discusses the challenges and progress in gender equality policy in Georgia, highlighting the importance of international support and collaboration in these endeavors.

The U.S., as a global leader, has the opportunity and responsibility to foster such international partnerships. By collaborating with other nations and international bodies, the U.S. can help to develop and implement policies that support women's empowerment across different cultural and political landscapes. This includes sharing best practices, providing financial and technical assistance, and advocating for women's rights in international forums. Such efforts not only contribute to the empowerment of women globally but also promote greater stability and prosperity worldwide.

4.5. Future Directions for Research and Policy Development

The empowerment of women is a multifaceted concept that plays a crucial role in the economic development and social policy of a nation. Arif and Bannian (2022) provide an insightful analysis of women's socio-economic empowerment in Pakistan, particularly in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 5, which focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment. They highlight the socio-economic challenges faced by Pakistani women and the legislative efforts made to improve their status. However, the study underscores the gap between policy formulation and its effective implementation, emphasizing that national development cannot be achieved without genuine gender parity and empowerment of women (Arif & Bannian, 2022).

The significance of female entrepreneurship in the advancement of a country's social policies cannot be overstated. Mažuolienė (2020) discusses the role of women entrepreneurs in Lithuania and the European Union, noting that despite political support, women still encounter significant barriers in establishing businesses, accessing funds, and achieving equality in the business sector. The study suggests that an integrated gender equality policy in the business sector should include equal access to business funding, improvement of the social security system, and promotion of women's participation in innovative business activities (Mažuolienė, 2020).

Carrasco-Miró (2020) calls for the decolonization of feminist development economics, arguing that the current discourse on women's economic empowerment often carries modernist and colonial assumptions. By examining economic patterns in contemporary Mesoamerica, Carrasco-Miró (2020) advocates for a reimagining of feminist economics and politics that extends beyond the confines of capitalist modernity. This approach involves recognizing the

diverse economic contributions of women and redefining empowerment in a way that is inclusive and culturally sensitive.

In the context of Nigeria, Azunna (2020) explores the empowerment of women farmers through a livelihood strengthening model. This study demonstrates how targeted interventions can significantly enhance the economic and social status of women in rural areas, contributing to broader national development goals. The research by Azunna (2020) underscores the importance of empowering women in agriculture, a sector that often remains overlooked in policy discussions on gender equality and economic development.

These studies collectively highlight the complex interplay between women's empowerment, economic development, and social policy. They underscore the need for comprehensive and inclusive approaches that address the unique challenges faced by women in different socio-economic contexts. The empowerment of women is not just a matter of social justice but is also crucial for the economic prosperity and sustainable development of nations. As these studies show, effective policies and interventions must be grounded in an understanding of the local cultural, economic, and social dynamics to truly empower women and achieve gender equality.

5. Conclusion

This study embarked on a comprehensive journey to explore the multifaceted realm of women's empowerment in African societies, with the overarching aim of extracting valuable insights and strategies that could be transposed to enhance U.S. social policy. Through a meticulously crafted methodology, encompassing a thorough literature review and thematic analysis, the study has not only met its objectives but has also illuminated the path for future policy directions.

At the heart of this exploration was the objective to dissect the concept of women's empowerment within a global context, with a specific lens on African societies. The study unearthed the intricate layers of empowerment, revealing how it is deeply intertwined with social, economic, and political fabrics. The African models of empowerment, characterized by their resilience and adaptability, provided a rich tapestry of lessons. These models, steeped in cultural specificity yet universally applicable, offered a new perspective on empowerment that transcends geographical boundaries.

The comparative analysis between African societies and the U.S. social policy framework was particularly enlightening. It underscored the universality of the challenges faced by women, while also highlighting the uniqueness of the African experience. This comparative lens not only enriched the understanding of empowerment strategies but also paved the way for integrating these insights into the U.S. context.

Key findings of the study include the identification of education, economic participation, and political inclusion as pivotal strategies for women's empowerment. These strategies, proven effective in the African context, hold immense potential for adaptation and implementation in the U.S. Moreover, the study identified significant gaps in current research, particularly in the nuanced understanding of cultural and societal influences on empowerment.

In conclusion, this study recommends a holistic and culturally sensitive approach to women's empowerment in U.S. social policy, drawing inspiration from the resilience and diversity of African models. The insights garnered from this study not only fulfill its aim and objectives but also lay a foundation for future research and policy development, ensuring that the journey towards gender equality and empowerment continues with renewed vigor and direction.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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