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The World Bank on Empowerment in Liberian Project Evaluations

A Desk Review on Women's Economic Empowerment in Liberia

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Abstract

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The World Bank is a key actor within development, continuously funding projects on women's empowerment in countries world-wide; Liberia being one of them. Women and girls have been particularly affected by previous conflicts in Liberia, strongly impinging on their participation in the labor market still today (UN Women 2014). Research shows that one of the foremost issues for women today is the fact that they do not participate in the labor market equally to men (Vintges 2017, p.14), and Sida describes this as key behind the progress of both women's empowerment and the goal of eradicating poverty (Sida 2016). When women partake in the labor force, it leads to economic growth and whole communities thrive (UN Women 2014). This study can be connected to goal number 5 of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development; "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (Global Goals 2017, p.3). The methodology of the study is a desk review based on a gender-analysis framework, analyzing three different projects of the World Bank on women's economic empowerment in Liberia from a feminist perspective. Results show that the feminist perspective needs to be taken into account to a broader extent and that project evaluations of the World Bank commonly portray women as victims in need of rescuing rather than as agents with the power to change their own lives. For any change to appear and be established, the starting point must be viewing women and men as equals.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Liberia, Labour market, Feminist perspective

Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction.....3**
- 1.1 Significance of the study.....3
- 1.2 Aim & research question.....5
- 2. Background.....5**
- 2.1 The World Bank on empowerment.....5
- 2.2 Women’s empowerment in Liberia.....6
- 2.3 Project descriptions.....7
- 3. Methodology.....8**
- 3.1 Research design.....8
- 4. Theoretical framework & theories.....9**
- 4.1 Gender-analysis framework.....9
- 4.2 Empowerment.....10
- 4.3 Victimhood versus agency.....10
- 4.4 Labour market.....11
- 5. Analysis & result.....12**
- 5.1 Introduction of analysis.....12
- 5.2 Empowerment.....12
- 5.3 Victimhood versus agency.....14
- 5.4 Labour market.....17
- 7. Conclusion.....19**
- 8. References.....20**

1. Introduction

1.1 Significance of the study

“When we promote true equality- including equal pay for equal work- we all stand to benefit, because better educated mothers produce healthier children, and women who earn more invest more in the next generation” (World Bank 2015, p.1). Plenty of actors agree with the words of Jim Young Kim, President of the World Bank Group. The question is, however, how this is actually implemented in practise when it comes to equal pay, equal rights and equal education world-wide.

Women all across the world face numerous obstacles when it comes to participating in the labour market, having fewer opportunities for education and training, less access to credit, more domestic responsibilities as well as less independence and control over their own lives (World Bank 2014). This further entails difficulties finding and keeping jobs or starting businesses (AGI 2013). Around half of all the women in the world in working age participate in the labour force, in contrast to three-quarters of all men (Sida 2012). Karen Vintges (2017) describes this as the key issue for women today; not partaking in the labour market to the same extent as men (Vintges 2017, p.14). According to Sida (2012), this has got to do with both unequal opportunities for skills training and education as well as unpaid work caring for children and households. Women have an important role when it comes to contributing to peace and stability in countries of conflict. If women are given the opportunity to invest, they will most likely put it towards businesses which benefit the local economy. Women’s economic empowerment increases stability. Nonetheless, in order to strengthen women’s economic development, men must be involved (Sida 2012).

Sida further describes women’s participation in the labour market as key behind the progress of women’s empowerment as well as the goal of eradicating poverty (Sida 2016). UN Women (2016) adds to the importance of empowering women by participation in economic life, stating that this will lead to improvement not solely for women but also for children, men and whole communities. Additionally, this will result in stronger economies and achieving international goals for development and sustainability already agreed on (UN Women 2015). The aid organisation “Episcopal Relief & Development“ further states that providing women with opportunities for social and economic empowerment results in an increase in decision-

making in the household and self-confidence along with enhanced respect in the community (Episcopal Relief 2017).

With regards to the situation of girls and women in Liberia, it is particularly challenging. The civil war ruined the infrastructure and institutions of the country and a whole generation of young people was left with very low levels of both job training and education. In 2003, around 60% of young girls and 40% of young boys in Liberia had no formal schooling, strongly affecting their chances of partaking in the labour force (Sida 2011).

This study will contribute with further research on how empowerment is conceptualised by the World Bank by looking into three different project evaluations conducted in Liberia with focus on women's participation in the labour market. There are plenty of agents and projects focusing on women's empowerment, however, this research will focus on three specific projects by the World Bank, which is a leading agent within the area of development. With the power and influence of this institution on projects and inhabitants world-wide, it is of utter importance to critically analyse its work and project processes. The World Bank has long been questioned and problematized from different angles concerning its work on poverty prevention and since this is strongly linked to women's empowerment, it is of equal importance to look into what ways the institution is implementing a feminist perspective on its projects. As to the definition of empowerment, there are several understandings of this. The chosen definition for this study is that of Naila Kabeer and will work as yard stick for understanding the bigger perspective of women's empowerment in the world. Kabeer describes empowerment as; "The expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer 1999, cited in Upadhyay & Karasek 2010, p.1).

The lack of women's empowerment is an issue often heard about, yet, based on the reads of plenty of project evaluations of various agents, researchers are struggling with how to interpret this and those who do so tend to base their evaluations on Westernized ideas and mindsets. While gender empowerment is viewed as an important factor in development, there is still an immense lack of research on this topic. Since this is an internationally well-known issue, it deserves more attention than it is currently given along with a wider perspective to entail a broader understanding of the concept.

1.2 Aim & research question

The research question of this study is;

How does the World Bank conceptualise empowerment in Liberian project evaluations with focus on women's participation in the labour market?

The aim of this study is to analyse in what way the World Bank is implementing a feminist perspective in relation to three specific projects conducted in Liberia concerning women's economic empowerment. Furthermore, it aims to shed light on gender equality and alter destructive opinions on women's participation in the work force and in leading roles in Liberia. This goal can be connected to goal number 5 of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development; "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (Global Goals 2017, p.3). One of its sub-goals is: "Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws" (Global Goals 2017, p.3). The relevance and significance of this study is described by the UN Women, explaining that when women work, economies grow and leads to a positive impact on both men and women (UN Women 2015). It can further be described by Madeleine M. Kunin; "When women do well, everyone does better" (Kunin 2014, p.1).

2. Background

2.1 The World Bank on empowerment

The World Bank is an investment bank which borrows from investors and offers loans to recipients with the official goal of ending extreme poverty. Another main goal is to promote women's economic empowerment (Driscoll 2017). According to the World Bank, the situation for women in the labour market is slowly changing (World Bank 2017). Nevertheless, UN Women state that above 60% of women world-wide in comparison to men are still contributing but as unpaid family workers (UN Women 2015). The World Bank has received plenty of criticism, particularly concerning the fact that they do not consider individual circumstances for countries when it comes to granting loans. Therefore, they often fail to resolve the economic problems within the countries in need of assistance (Bretton Woods Project 2017).

The World Bank defines empowerment as follows; “Empowerment is the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals or groups to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes” (World Bank 2015, p.1). In contrast to the definition of Kabeer, it does not involve previous denial of the possibility to make strategic life choices. There are substantial amounts of resources and projects conducted within the World Bank for advancing women’s empowerment. “World Bank Data” is currently showing 3,947 projects on empowerment and 934 projects related to gender issues in Africa (World Bank 2017). As an example of the spending on this issue, in April 2016 the World Bank Group decided to invest US\$2,5 Billion during five years for empowering young girls (WBG 2016).

2.2 Women’s empowerment in Liberia

The inhabitants of Liberia have gone through decades of violence and civil war. The conflicts and political disruptions have led to pervasive disruption to public services, infrastructure and the economy, which the country is still recovering from (BBC 2017). In 2014, Liberia was rigorously affected by the Ebola outbreak and communities are still dealing with the consequences. Young people in particular have met large employment shocks because of this, whilst the whole population faced vast implications for peace and stability (Episcopal Relief 2017). World Health Organization (WHO) state that Liberian women play crucial parts in society as mothers, farm workers, wage earners, cabinet members, doctors, senators and president (WHO 2017). Liberia is currently ruled by the first elected female President in Africa; H.E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Along with Leymah Gbowee, she has inspired women all across the country and continent with her work on women’s empowerment, nevertheless, the changes are insufficient (BBC 2017). Among young women aged 15- 24, the unemployment rate is 8 percent, which is double the rate of that amongst young men. The numbers of women in highly visible positions are continuously increasing, but even so Liberia is far from achieving gender equality (WHO 2017).

For women in post-conflict countries, such as Liberia, physical and economic security is often intertwined. If women and girls are self-sufficient, they are possessed with a stronger ability to walk away from abusive situations. Concerning the conflict in Liberia, women and girls were particularly afflicted, suffering extreme poverty and high incidences of sexual violence affecting women’s participation in the labour market until this day (UN Women 2014). The consequences of the conflicts along with the average income in Liberia being among the

lowest in the world, in 2009 it was measured to US\$0,38 per day, proves the importance of extending focus on empowering the women of Liberia (UN 2017).

2.3 Project descriptions

The project evaluations which will be used for the analysis are all based on projects conducted in Liberia with focus on women's empowerment connected to participation in the labour market. One of them is called "Liberia Economic Empowerment of Adolescent Girls Project" and is referred to as EPAG. This project is part of the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative (AGI) and was implemented by the Government of Liberia in 2009 with the goal of increasing the income and employment of 2,500 young Liberian women. This was accomplished by practical training in job skills, life skills, business development skills and entrepreneurship with focus on sectors in high demand. The program consisted of six months of classroom training followed by six months of placement and support with women 16-27 years. Interview questionnaires for different control groups were used for the methodology of the project (AGI 2013, p.1).

Another one of the projects is called "Striving for business success: Voices of Liberian women entrepreneurs," referred to as SBS. It was prepared under the World Bank program "Fragility and Conflict, Lessons on Gender Inclusion: Improving Women's Access to Rights, Resources and Voice" by the World Bank Group (WBG) and implemented 2011- 2013. The project stems from a collaboration between the Government of Liberia, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the World Bank Institute (WBI). The evaluation describes the purpose of the program as to improve the understanding of gender role issues in connection to conflict and fragility in order to reach a suitable policy and operational approaches for peace and reconstruction. It further contains insight on the opportunities for women entrepreneurs to be able to participate in the economic growth of Liberia, including challenges which they may face when operating their businesses. As for the methodology of the project interviews were conducted (WBG 2013, p.3).

The third project which will be analysed is called "Liberia youth, employment, skills project" and it referred to as YES. It was implemented 2010-2013 and its aim is explained as to respond to the youth employment crisis by creating temporary employment through activities connected to community-based public work. The goal is, in more detail, described as providing employment support to around 40,000– 80,000 young women and men age 18-35 years with particular attention to women's participation, including key groups such as

pregnant women, women with small children and people with disabilities (World Bank 2016, p.3).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The methodology for this study is a desk review based on the analysis of three different projects of the World Bank on women's economic empowerment in Liberia from a feminist perspective. It assists in adding a critical perspective on the project evaluations in order to find both strengths and weaknesses with the reporting and thereby explore the meaning of empowerment. There are various beneficiaries regarding the use of secondary data analysis. Alan Bryman (2011) mentions cost and time, stating that secondary data analysis will provide the researcher with the opportunity to deepen and concentrate more on the analysis whilst saving time and money. In addition, he points out the values of high-quality data, the opportunity for longitudinal analysis and that a reanalysis may present new interpretations to data which has already been found (Bryman 2011, pp.313-315).

There are a wide range of data, projects and perspectives of relevance when it comes to researching women's empowerment. However, with the purpose of narrowing down the area of this study, various limitations have been made. This can be seen by the choice of using the World Bank as main agent behind the project evaluations as well as the decision of analysing the amount of three specific projects with focus on women's economic empowerment. This is a suitable amount of projects to look into considering the time and space allowed for the writing. These limitations may lead to a lack of broader perspective on the theme, however, it will contribute with greater focus on the topic and result in a more graspable analysis. Moreover, the chosen definition of empowerment will affect the outcome of the analysis in various ways, nevertheless, this is to clarify for the reader. Choosing the World Bank as key actor was decided early on since it is a dominant development agent, continuously influencing countries and people world-wide. The chosen projects of the study are all linked to women's economic empowerment in Liberia, which was selected with regards to its rich history on women's struggle. Also, it holds the first elected female president in Africa which has had a clear impact on its inhabitants, however, this claims to be insufficient. The reason for choosing women's empowerment as main theme is based on the significant part it plays when it comes to reaching global peace and equality (BBC 2017).

As to the coding of the analysis, this will be done by evaluating in what way women's empowerment in the labour market is expressed in the project evaluations by looking into themes of empowerment, victimhood versus agency and labour market. These will be further analysed by examining each report's substance of equal pay, equal rights and equal education from a feminist perspective. In order to do this, the scholars of the theories will assist through their views on the different themes and as to how these are manipulated in the reports in accordance with empowerment. The theoretical framework will confide as basis for the theories. Regarding the progress of the writing, it consists of first collecting and reading literature relevant to the subject. Next, the information for the background section was established. After that, the coding was set and finally the section for the analysis was created. This includes reading the reports carefully as well as using key words for finding specific information relevant to the themes, such as *pay*, *rights*, *labour* and *equal*. The reports were analysed individually in accordance with the different themes and by the use of the feminist perspective in order to find both strengths and weaknesses with the reporting, which ultimately led to various conclusions on the topic. The analysis will further stem from the research question along with the basis of the chosen definition of empowerment.

4. Theoretical framework & theories

4.1 Gender-analysis framework

The study is based on a gender-analysis framework which includes the perspective of developing strategies to enhance equality between the sexes and will work as basis for analyzing the reports of this study. It further connects to underlying causes of aims to reach positive transformation for women (GDRC 2017). The chosen definition of empowerment will be used in connection to this including the intersectional perspective, views of the labour market and economic empowerment. The themes will be further analysed by looking into how scholars have discussed the concept of empowerment as well as how they have handled the debate on women's economic empowerment in relation to victimhood and agency. The intersectional perspective brings critique towards the feminist perspective, pointing at its lack of components in analyzing issues. According to Paula Mulinari and Rebecca Selberg (2011), it is essential to add an intersectional perspective when it comes to evaluating people's work life, stating that sole focus on gender relations will not fully present this. They mean that class belonging, sexuality and ethnicity must be included for a more precise view and wider approach on the concept of empowerment in general (Mulinari & Selberg 2011, p.75). This

approach along with the gender-analysis framework will work as basis of the themes presented below.

4.2 Empowerment

The definition of women's empowerment can be referred to various dimensions, Ushma D. Upadhyay and Deborah Karasek mentioning economic, familial, legal, socio-cultural, political and psychological (Upadhyay & Karasek 2010, p.1). Naila Kabeer and the World Bank defines empowerment similarly, however, Kabeer's is better suited for the purpose of this study. In connection to her definition; "The expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer 1999, cited in Upadhyay & Karasek 2010, p.1), Kabeer views agency and resources as main factors of empowerment, which is vital for enabling women's partaking in the work force (Kabeer 1999, cited in Upadhyay & Karasek 2010, p.1). Today's society is based on people providing other people power, showing the complexity of empowerment already at starting point. Therefore, there is an immense need for actors to search for equality. The feminist perspective of empowerment includes the way women see themselves as agents in the situation that they are in, including the ability to view themselves as being able to change their own lives. This is an essential aspect to look into when it comes to women's empowerment, which will further increase equality between the sexes (Stanford 2016).

4.3 Victimhood versus agency

Diane Enns (2012) brings up the concept of victimhood concerning women's position in society. She means that if sole focus is on the violence of women against men, we fail to address the more severe issue behind this phenomenon. She further states that white privileged women need to consider that women who are less fortunate and less powerful are more exposed to systematic oppression, whilst also pointing out the importance of not speaking for other women as mainstream group (Enns 2012, p.29). On this topic, she further describes the essence of understanding that it is an insult for those viewed as the victimized not to receive the same critique and be held responsible for the same demands as others (Enns 2012, p.31). On similar note, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) points out the importance of acknowledging the differences continuously made in portraying Western women and women in the Global South. She explains that women in the Global South are depicted as poor, ignorant, uneducated and victimized whilst Western women are referred to as modern, educated, domestic and with the possibility of their own decision-making (Talpade Mohanty

1984, p.334). Along with the lines of Enns (2012), she further states that simplistic formulations as these along with the view of men exploiting and women being exploited are ineffective when it comes to fighting oppressions since it only creates divisions between the sexes (Talpade Mohanty 1984, p.337). The critique of these scholars is useful for the feminist perspective and will be taken into account when analysing the reports.

In contrast to victimhood, it is crucial to look into the role of agency and what it implies in this context. Arturo Escobar (2004) is not a feminist scholar per se, however, he adds some valid angles to the feminist perspective. He brings up the discussion on how development studies have made a shift from focus on political economy to now also include areas such as gender relations and environmental studies, yet, structural and economic approaches are still dominated and supported by key actors of development, such as the World Bank. The World Bank has stated how women should not solely be seen as beneficiaries of public support but mainly be referred to as economic agents. Viewing women in the Global South as able workers is vital when it comes to economic development, however, ignoring women's other roles in the home and society does not. This has resulted in the World Bank becoming unable to cohere with people's actual lives and is therefore failing to create long-term changes, which demonstrates the complexity behind the economic agency of women (Escobar 2004, p.208). The debate on victimhood and agency is essential for key agents of development such as the World Bank, and will determine the outcome of women's empowerment and global equality.

4.4 Labour market

Women world-wide commonly have lower positioned jobs and lower wages in contrast to men, showing the power of gender within the labour market (O'Donnell 2015, p.147). In relation to this, scholars of Marxism from a feminist perspective examine the work force in regards to equality between the genders. They investigate why the work force is produced, how to produce equality and the role of gender, including analysing how women are oppressed by capitalism. According to scholars of this theory, women can solely reach liberation by reforming the current capitalist economy. A frequent query is in what way women's movements which challenge male domination can result in common grounds concerning ethnicity, race and class (Stanford 2016). Rosa Luxemburg (1912) describes fighting for equality within the labour market as essential for reaching liberation for workers. Through Marxist feminism she explains how the struggle for gaining political equality is solely one part and that reaching liberation in general requires reaching equality on all levels

(Luxemburg 1912). Heidi Hartmann (1979) brings up a contrasting point, indicating the necessity of analyzing and understanding capitalist societies whilst also looking into the combination of patriarchy and capitalism (Hartmann 1979, p.1). Adding a wider range of perspectives and components is essential for fully grasping the obstacles faced by women within the labour market in the patriarchal system of society.

5. Analysis & result

5.1 Introduction of analysis

The project evaluations will be analysed in accordance with the themes brought up in the previous section; empowerment, victimhood versus agency and labour market. To understand empowerment, these themes will be further examined by looking into each report's substance of equal pay, equal rights and equal education from a feminist perspective. The analysis in all will stem from the research question; "How does the World Bank conceptualise empowerment in Liberian project evaluations with focus on women's participation in the labour market?" along with the basis of the chosen definition of empowerment; "The expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer 1999, cited in Upadhyay & Karasek 2010, p.1).

5.2 Empowerment

The project evaluations handle the concept of empowerment in different ways. The EPAG evaluation expresses how results of the project show improvements in empowerment measures concerning access to and control over financial resources, such as savings. It further brings up that the project led to improvements in various subjective outcomes, such as measures of life satisfaction, worry, self-confidence and self-perceptions of social abilities. This fits somewhat with the chosen definition of empowerment, however, the measurements are vague and there is no mention of a follow-up on the project to see potential long-lasting changes in the lives of the women. Moreover, the EPAG evaluation mainly ignores components such as sexuality, class and race, brought up by Mulinari and Selberg (2011). Given that these components are often underlying reasons to destructive disparities between the sexes, they would have been beneficial to consider for reaching a more prominent outcome of the project (AGI 2013, pp.1-3).

Regarding the YES evaluation, empowerment and equality is emphasised by aiming the public activities to promote equal participation of men and women and target 50 percent

participation for each category. However, the evaluation is, yet again, excluding intersectional curriculums. Moreover, asking the project participants what they require for increasing equality and empowerment amongst the women is not considered, although this would have been a prominent way of empowering from grassroots levels and not top-down, which is often done (World Bank 2016). In addition, it is worth mentioning that since all three project evaluations are written by staff of the World Bank, it adds a certain bias to the texts.

The SBS evaluation brings up recommendations for the economic empowerment of women entrepreneurs in Liberia. Here, women's leadership is mentioned, something which has been neglected in the other two project evaluations, despite being an essential factor for reaching equality between the sexes. The SAS evaluation further includes personal stories from the lives of Liberian women, however, yet again they are rarely asked what they personally believe that they require in order to reach equality and if they are, this is not implemented in ways which could result in a greater change in the lives of the women (WBG 2013, pp.1-4).

Ushma Upadhyay and Deborah Karasek (2010) highlight the importance of including socio-cultural, economical, legal, familial, psychological and political dimensions when it comes to evaluating women's empowerment, adding a broader perspective to the ways of empowering women. Regarding empowerment in the lines of education, the EPAG evaluation explains how the basis of the project was to help poor and marginalised women know and access their rights, solely through education. It is further stated that if this is being taught, then women's rights will be respected (AGI 2013, p.5). This is a simplified way of looking at the ways of reaching equality. A more complex understanding of the issue would be beneficial, for example by including Kabeer's definition of empowerment (Kabeer 1999, cited in Upadhyay & Karasek 2010, p.1) along with additional components, such as class, ethnicity and sexuality, in accordance with Mulinari and Selberg (2011); components which is rarely seen in neither of the project evaluations.

The SBS evaluation explains that education and business management training were crucial tools for achieving productively and navigating the women into the business world. Also, it brings up that the participants who did not receive the education view this as a great obstacle later on in their business path (WBG 2013, p.29). This result shows the significance of empowering women through education as preparation for entering the labour market, however, to facilitate long-term changes, other perspectives need to be included as well.

As regards to the YES evaluation, 30 percent of the project income was spent on education and 25 percent on different types of investments, entailing that the program was not only achieving short-term impacts but also anticipated to have some longer-term impact on the targeted households. However, this is unclear and vaguely stated. The evaluation further explains that one of the project outcomes show that lack of education and skills will likely result in women ending up in low-productivity low-wage jobs, once again confirming the significance of the correlation between women's education and partaking in work life (World Bank 2016, p.31). An improvement would have been to consider empowerment from additional angles and added curriculums.

Women generally have less access to power, security and resources than men. To be able to achieve equality between the sexes, men need to be engaged in the process of change just as much as women. On this point, all three projects are missing out. The evaluations are mainly written by men with focus on extending women's empowerment, yet, the actual partaking of men in the projects is neglected. Excluding an understanding of power relations and gender in relation to any project can lead to the local situation becoming worse off than it was before. This theme deserves a greater part in all three reports than it is given, since it contributes with a wider understanding of the issue and could have led to more long-lasting changes for the women. Furthermore, the goals stated in the reports are somewhat vague and often fail to include the perspective of the women. In addition, the project evaluations bring up empowerment in the lines of equal education and equal pay; however, the acknowledgement of equal rights is mainly left out. Gender equality from a human rights perspective aims towards ensuring that everyone, regardless of gender-belonging, has equal opportunities, rights, responsibilities and control of their lives (Forum Syd 2015, p.7). This is the basis of equality affecting people in all aspects of life, making it an immense requirement to consider on this topic. However, this is mainly ignored in the project evaluations.

5.3 Victimhood versus agency

The reports are describing their targeted groups, often women, in various ways. However, the general portray is depicting them as victims in need of rescuing. For example, the YES evaluation illustrates the agency as main actor for changing the life circumstances of the women whilst the people targeted for the project are rarely put on equal levels, often portrayed as helpless and unable to change their own life situations. For example, it states;

“Implementation of the program would expand opportunities for poor and young Liberians to access more income opportunities” (World Bank 2016, p.6). Here, potential ways for the women to create personal changes could have been added but is neglected. In this way, the World Bank is ignoring how the people viewed as the victimized could empower themselves.

The SBS evaluation includes short interviews with women, however, the opinions, requests and actual needs of the women are neglected in the improvement recommendations, which entail a top-down perspective after all. Also, the EPAG evaluation includes the essence of the agency having to come rescue the women for any change to emerge. This can be connected to the theory of Dianne Enns (2012), expressing the importance of looking into whether and if so how women see themselves as agents in the situation that they are in as well as the importance of not talking for groups which are capable of doing so themselves (Enns 2012, p.29). The World Bank fails to consider both these aspects. For example, an abused woman is not solely that. Not acknowledging her other roles is neglecting the whole spectrum of strengths that the woman possesses. Here, the project evaluations can be linked to the theory of Escobar (2004), concerning the World Bank not acknowledging the numerous positions of women in society. For extending women’s economic empowerment, this is a crucial concern; women must be portrayed as everything that they are. A simplified portray is untrue and will not lead to a lasting change. For example, the SBS evaluation describes women as follows; “Women are an important and powerful economic force. They make critical contributions as political leaders, entrepreneurs and employees” (WBG 2013, p.1). Here, women are referred to as encompassing various positions, however, plenty of positions are neglected and neither considered later on in the report, for example being a mother, a manager and a woman. Shortly after this quote, the discussion turns into portraying the women as poor and vulnerable. This results in establishing a false reality of women and failing to actually empowering them. In the reports, the women are currently victimized by the World Bank and seen as passive agents waiting to be rescued more than as productive actors of society. In this way, they are exploiting the situation and possibility for women to actually reach extended empowerment.

By viewing the reports from a feminist perspective, it further becomes clear how the women are in various ways viewed as underestimated. In the YES evaluation, the targeted group is continuously referred to as *vulnerable*, entailing that they are in need of special care, protection or support. As for an example; “This component focused on activities that created short-term employment for vulnerable youth” (World Bank 2016, p.24). In contrast, the

EPAG evaluation uses the word *vulnerable* without ascribing it to a group; “Beyond the situation in their households, data indicate that the AGI respondents are economically vulnerable and are an appropriate target group for an economic empowerment intervention” (AGI 2013, p.13). The first quote depicts is a way of degrading women and lowering their position; ascribing them the state of being victims. The question is how to take women out of these victim roles if the goal is for them to become equals, especially if the starting point is always portraying women as in need of rescuing. In none of the three reports do women fully get to express what they personally require in order to be empowered. Instead, more influential actors are speaking for them. How will a beneficial change for these women appear if they are neglected the chance to vocalise issues concerning their pay, legal rights and right to education? Projects related to women’s empowerment are crucial for reaching higher levels of equality for all, however, they must be carefully monitored so that change is made in the right direction. Otherwise, it may lead to negative consequences for the people targeted and result in a situation worse than before the project was implemented. If projects are chronically victimizing women more than empowering them, it will not lead to a positive change for either the local women or other people in the community. The first step towards empowering women is by giving them equal rights, not solely a voice. Then, it is crucial to look into additional elements, since for example equal pay will not be reached on its own. Women must be provided with tools for empowerment to be able to enter the labour market. Portraying one actor as rescuer and one as victim is not presenting human beings as equals in society and will not accomplish this. The actual problem need to be addressed from the starting point; viewing all humans as equals. In addition, there are enormous amounts of funds being spent on projects aimed at empowering women, which may not actually do so.

As to women’s leadership, this is very briefly mentioned in the evaluations. Concerning the existing research on women’s leadership being beneficial for both society and family life, this should be considered to a greater extent when it comes to projects aimed at empowering women. Also, instead of solely providing information on women’s issues in various local situation, however important, more needs to be done on a structural level. For example, this could be done by targeting government policies to see wage and education gaps or look into law regulations hindering women’s freedom, which is a route more efficient both cost-wise and for actually reaching equality. Another query which deserves extended attention on this topic is how to, in a patriotic society, make women reach higher positions, such as head doctors, professors and managers of world-leading businesses. Considering the fact that the

World Bank is a key actor within development, this should be strongly considered in all their projects.

5.4 Labour market

The project evaluations present women's participation in the labour market in a variety of ways. In the EPAG evaluation, one of the findings was that if the women had the possibility at work, they would want to become leaders of the community (AGI 2013, p.6). Also, the value of equal pay is mentioned, however, not emphasised. The evaluation further discusses that women often face a double burden of responsibility when it comes to unpaid domestic work in addition to their work for money and that an economic empowerment program may result in an increase in their total work burden. This is a valid acknowledgement, showing that additional attention needs to be given to the concept of equality, which would result in men and women equally sharing the work burden. With the perspective of Rosa Luxemburg and her theory on capitalism and women's possibility for self-employment and equal pay, this does not quite fit with the reports since they mainly portray women as in need of aid rather than agents with power to form their own lives (Luxemburg 1912). Viewing others as victims is a destructive and degrading way of helping and will most likely have a more negative effect on the circumstances.

According to a study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) conducted in various countries, questions concerning opinions on women's doing were asked, with data from the 2017 ILO-Gallup Report; "Towards a Better Future for Women and Work: Voices of Women and Men." The report of Liberia shows that 57% of the women believe that women should work paid jobs, along with 52% of the men. Furthermore, 14 % of the women and 23 % of the men believe that women should care for family, whilst 26 % of the women and 22 % of the men believe that women should do both. Other data from ILOSTAT and the "Women at Work Trends 2016 Report" presents figures of women's employment trends in Liberia. It shows that 40 % of women work full time, 16 % work part time, 4 % are looking for work and 40 % are not looking for work. In connection to this, ILO states that the women of Liberia comprise the majority of smallholder producers, producing around 60% of agricultural products and carrying out over 80% of trading activities in rural areas. Yet, women are severely disadvantaged, partaking in the least productive sectors (ILO 2017).

Regarding the YES evaluation, wage rates are mentioned, however, not compared between the genders, hence equal pay is neglected. Similarly, wage rates are barely mentioned in the

SBS evaluation. Considering the fact that the projects were implemented in order to extend women's empowerment via extended participation in the labour market participation, this should have been a more developed theme within the reports. Naila Kabeer's definition of empowerment requires equal wages for equal work or equality will not be reached (World Bank 2015). As to the EPAG evaluation, it contains no critique or recommended improvements regarding the project outcomes. Instead, it portrays an optimistic picture of the work of the World Bank and the benefits of the project. For example, the extent of the results is described as *impressive* when compared to findings from other youth training programs in developing countries and that all effects of the project are long-lasting, which is, however, difficult to measure. Also, it is stated that; "If the high success rates found in the study are replicated for future groups, the EPAG program should serve as a model for policy makers in Africa and even the world; seeking to improve lives and livelihoods of all youth, both male and female" (AGI 2013, p.25). These are grand words for evaluating any project. Instead, it would have been beneficial for future projects to, for example, include potential improvements for reaching a higher number of female participation. Regarding the SBS evaluation, it expresses that nearly 4,500 young people were initially targeted but that the number to be trained in various vocational and technical skills was eventually reduced to 3,300 with 60 percent of those trained placed in employment settings. This is a fairly large drop-out and the evaluation lacks any further explanations as to why this might be (WBG 2013, p.6).

When it comes to reaching potential solutions for increasing women's participation in the labour market, the reports show a great gap. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that women's economic empowerment is a requirement for sustainable development and pro-poor growth, bringing up various solutions on reaching this. They state that achieving women's economic empowerment requires decent public policies, long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives integrated in the programs. In addition, they explain that women need more equitable access to assets and services, improved infrastructure and additional employment opportunities along with the acknowledgment of women's immense unpaid work. This further requires an increased dialogue amongst development actors and an improved collaboration amongst donors along with support for female leaders at both national and global level (OECD 2011, p.3). By mainly neglecting the solution aspect in the reports, this will most likely not lead to reaching an increased number of women participating in the work force.

It is fundamental for critical country situations as that of Liberia to gain assistance from development organisations, however, the organization needs to be familiar with the context in which they are planning to perform their program, whilst continuously monitoring how it could be achieved in the best possible way in order to more fully benefit the targeted groups and communities. This entails looking at the local situation, targeted groups and underlying issues from several aspects. Only by doing so will women reach equal levels to men. The former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, describes the issue of empowering women very well; “There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women” (UN 2005, p.1).

7. Conclusion

The project evaluations of the World Bank demonstrate some change concerning extending Liberian women’s possibility to make structural life choices, nevertheless, the reports show a way of victimizing the women and rarely bring up follow-ups to see potential long-term changes of the projects. Enormous amounts of grants are being spent on projects with goals of empowering women on a non-structural level, yet, these measures will not come to change their life circumstances on a long-term basis. The World Bank is currently presenting itself as an organisation fighting poverty through empowering women, however, this seems to be insufficiently accomplished. Taking into consideration the debate of scholars on victimhood and agency, the World Bank is missing out on the true meaning of empowerment. Empowering women means making women equal to men and taking them out of victimhood. The analysis shows that the World Bank is instead disempowering women and engages more with them as victims rather than agents. Victimized people who are claimed to be empowered is a paradigm which needs to be broken. Further research on empowering women through participation in the labour market is needed in order to better comprehend the progress and consequences of this. The analysis further shows a gap in considering the gender perspective of human rights in the project evaluations. This study makes a needed contribution to projects in Liberia and the essence of including several aspects from a feminist perspective when evaluating projects on women’s empowerment, which will lead to more long-lasting changes in equality world-wide.

8. References

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