

Creativity and Innovation for Gender Empowerment: A Case Study of the Maasai

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Abstract

Gender empowerment has, for many years, been considered a political and human rights issue. To this end, gender issues were discussed mainly in political platforms. Recently, however, the focus has shifted from viewing gender equity through “political lenses” to considering it as “smart economics”. The aim of this study is to show how innovation (broadly defined to include indigenous creativity) has been added into the armory of the gender empowerment discourse in Arusha, Tanzania. The study focuses on Maasai Women drawing lessons from interventions by two organizations Afrika Friends eV and the Maasai Women Development Organization (MWEDO) from Germany and Tanzania respectively. Premised on legal aspects of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions TK/TCEs the paper interrogates the role of indigenous innovation in gender empowerment. It shows how open innovation, collaborative and free knowledge sharing (as opposed to conventional proprietary rights model such as copyright) is best suited to women groups among indigenous communities. The author calls for a shift in considering TK/TCEs as “folkloric” endowments to considering such heritage as economic tools for poverty reduction and gender empowerment.