

An African Perspective on Some Gender-Related Cultural Practices that Violate Human Rights and Perpetuate Women's Poverty

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ABSTRACT The interplay between culture, human rights and women's poverty in Africa and the link between gender-related cultural practices and women's poverty, are discussed. The practices are linked to the unequal position of women in society, and limit/prohibit their access to property ownership, formal employment, and education. This paper reviews cultural practices and traditions in Africa – polygamy, payment of bride price, female genital mutilation (FGM), marriage by abduction, inheritance, and primogeniture. The role of governments and civil society in human rights education, public awareness campaigns and community mobilisation – in attempting to address, minimise or eradicate gender-related cultural practices that perpetuate women's poverty, is also examined. There are two schools of thought: efforts to end cultural and traditional practices harmful to women must involve and address men, and there should be systematic encouragement and support of collective action among women. Women's voices *must* be heard and useful cultural practices that traditionally protected women and girls should be considered in designing programmes to address gender inequality and to reduce women's poverty in Africa.