



Gender Equality and Its Implication for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Gender equality, a contemporary issue well talked about in our society today, has been seen in different perspectives. Some have the perspective of equality of women with men in all aspects while some see it as a way for women to pursue some of the fundamental human rights that will better ensure their worth. Gender is a social and psychological characteristic associated with being female or male. In any patriarchal society, it is believed that men are far superior to women in all aspects of life and maybe that has been the reasons why they have been marginalized in politics, social, economic and religious sectors among others. In this paper, attempt is made to locate gender equality as an instrument that should be sharpened and developed to enhance the worth of women to enable them make meaningful impact in the society. Some concepts will be defined such as gender equality, inequality, and sustainable development. Based on the conclusion, some recommendations were made for national development; stressing that the nation should be gender sensitive and live above gender biases and marginalization for sustainable development.

Keywords: Gender, Equality, Inequality, Sustainable Development. Patriarchal

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1. INTRODUCTION

The huge development sustained by some developed nations of the world is not unconnected with the dedication and commitments of their citizens. Both men and women development in these nations was achieved through the participation and collaboration of their members either male or female. It therefore shows that the development of any nations is with inclusive partnership, a situation whereby all members, both male and female are given equal chances to contribute to the development of the nations in which no member is thrust out. According to the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, Sections 14 – 21, development objectives are provided to the effect that they are pursued for the good of all.



These are promotions of democracy and social justice, national security and social welfare, increased citizen's political participation, national integration, harnessing national resources towards an efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy among others. These outlined objectives constitute the driving force for the activities of governments in our society. The productive forces in any nation are males and females or men and women who, through their dedication and commitment, contribute to its development. Citizens play different roles in the development of their nation and these roles are shaped by the prevailing values in the society. Since the society consists of males and females, the roles they play and how they are played are germane to the development of the society. In this case, all citizens should be given opportunity to take part in the process.

Development can be defined as representing the changes by which an entire system tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system (Todaro, 2008). Ogujiuba and Ikejiaku, (2015) highlighted development as all the result of the capacities of members of a nation. These indicators of development are increased economic efficiency, expansion of national economic capacity, technological advancement, changes in social structure, attitudes and motivation, increase in economic and industrial diversification and adaptability which, according to them are necessary conditions for development. It is expedient to say that national development, which Walter (2009) defined as the acquisition of "an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations", cannot be actualized without the citizens whose capacities would be needed for it.

According to Olorunsomo (2020), development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental and social components. These changes occur at every stage of the society. It can refer to systematic, organized increase of a country's industry and wealth (Unido, 2018). On the other hand, sustainable development can be defined as the ability to meet the present needs without compromising the ability of future generation. This simply means the kind of development in which the basic needs of the present generation are met in a way that does not affect the ability of the future generation to meet their needs. For total development to be achieved in any nation, it must be a joint effort of male and female.

Gender equity is the process of allocating resources, programmes, and decision fairly to both males and females without any form of discrimination and addressing the imbalances as regards the available males and females. It is on this note that this study is to find out the implication of gender equality on sustainable noble development in Nigeria.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Gender

Gender can be referred to as masculine, feminine and neutral which means the conditions of being a male or a female (International Dictionary of English). Gender also means the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men, social relations between them, in a particular historical and social economic context. The relationship cuts across other social relations based on variables such as class, age ethnicity and race (Awosika, 1998).



Generally, women are known to be tender or weak, kind, timid, loving and caring unlike men people believed to be strong, aggressive, independent, adventurous and assertive. This is very obvious in any patriarchal society. This cultural bond concept usually result into gender stereotype that can generate disparity in careers responsibility and leadership position.

2.1 Gender Equality

Firstly, equity or equality simply means equal opportunity, equal share, equal access, equal roles and equal position of responsibilities. That is to say, equal treatment for all and this is the solution to imbalance in any social society. Gender equality is the absence of disparity between the female and male members of the society as far as social roles are concerned. For sustainable national development, there is need for the inclusion of the male and female gender through their equally important roles. There should be no prejudice as regards this as the roles of both genders are essential to the development of any nation.

Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligation in all spheres of life (Juru, 2002). A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus of identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Experience has shown that addressing gender equality and women's empowerment requires strategic feminist organizational interventions at all levels of programming and policymaking (Kerr, 1994). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (UDHR) provides in Article 27 and that everybody has the right to participate in cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and share in scientific advancement and its benefits (UNICEF, 2007). This is repeated in similar words in Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 and Article 17(2) of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACRWC) and adopted in 1981 (SADC, 2005). In Nigeria, where there exist broad cases of gender inequality, there is no other time than now to advocate gender equality for sustainable development in our nation.

2.2 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development can be defined as progressive and sustained qualitative improvement in overall standard of living of the people in the country (Ojobo, 2005)

3. GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality entails situations or practices whereby male and female gender are not in parity as regards the social construction of their roles which is greatly influenced by the prevailing values of that society where it occurs. Gender inequality, in this sense, makes a kind of gender superior or dominant to the other. Historically, from ancient times, there are traces that show the idea of male domination over their female folks in all indications. This, in no small measure, covered areas such as body, class, work, disability, the family, globalization, human right, culture, race and racism, reproduction science, the self sex work, human trafficking and sexuality (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014). Gender inequality, in all ages and cultures, shows women to be considered inferior to their male counterparts ranging from home as a girl child, or daughter, wife, and mother in the home, student in the school and so on.



In the case of Nigeria, like every other patriarchal society, the male gender is placed in a position of domination over the female gender. In a largely patriarchal society like ours, the social reconstruction of the society makes women permanently subservient to men domination socio-culturally, politically and economically (Awofeso, 2012). When women or the female gender are not allowed to be self-sufficient and empowered to take their place alongside the men or male gender, sustainable development anywhere and especially in Nigeria will be farfetched. There must be gender equality which will ensure that the female gender does not continue to be dominated as a result of the patriarchal nature of the Nigeria society.

3.1 Causes of Gender Inequality

Gender Inequality is not a novel topic in the history of man and it can be said that gender inequality had been wrongly seen, contrary to our cause here, as a factor that endanger development right from pre-historical times. Women have always been considered inferior to their male counterpart. This gender bias in favour of men is evident in all spheres of life. In the domestic sphere like the homes, women, daughters, wives and mothers are treated inferior in relations to their male counterparts. This extends to the public sphere as women are discriminated, marginalized and dominated through the combination of gender-based cultural norms and practices which are in favour of men. (Awofeso & Udokong, 2012).

The causes of gender inequality are not farfetched. The root of gender inequality is found in the cultural practices of society which are engendered to promote make superiority over the female gender in all ramification, political, economic, educationally and opportunity wise (Udokong & Awofeso, 2012). In Nigeria, some communities still approve such practices as preference for male child, payment of bride price, female circumcision or female genital mutilation FGM, negative attitude (to women) towards childlessness, defending widowhood practices and inheritance practices that discriminate against women giving away girls in marriage early and without consent (Enemu, 1999). These constitute the main causes or factors which promote gender inequality.

3.2 Gender Inequality and National Development

Gender inequality prevents sustainable developments in many areas. Both men and women have roles to play for the development of a nation and these roles can only be effective if played equally. In other words, only gender equality guarantees sustainable national development. Although three of the eight Millennium Development Goals that address gender issues, the global economic crises and economic marginalization have reinforced gender vulnerabilities. According to May (2000), this situation has led to an unequal distribution of wealth that does not favour the empowerment of the previously deprived, instead there is an increased productivity gap between the sexes.

In any situation, the financial collapse results in the withdrawal of the state from direct roles in social and economic development. The much needed efforts in eradicating illiteracy are also impeded. A case in hand is the recent global economic crisis which adversely affected women's agencies and organizations. Two organizations were hit hard, namely: The South African Self-Employed Women's Union and the Self Employed Women's association (SEWA) in Gujarat, India (Taylor, 1999). Such a development has the unavoidable effect of strengthening the prestige of men and lowering the status of women. In the end, the ant is pitted in a fight against the elephant.



Gender inequality impedes national development, for instance, some women are denied inheritance rights in some societies while men are not denied. This inequality reduces the development that can come to those societies due to the exclusion of women from owning lands and properties which could generate economic prosperity in that society. In the case of Nigeria where about half of the population is women, there would be slow development if women are not empowered and given equal benefits with men. Throughout the history of the development of Nigeria, few women stood out and when this is compared to the large number of men, the effects of gender inequality is heavily felt. Women like Professor Bolanle Awe, late Grace Alele Williams, late Dora Akunyili, late Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Dr. Okonjo Iweala and Mrs. Oby Ezekwesili have made their marks in national development (Oloidi, 2012). The participation of women in politics especially in the legislative process has scored some success to the feminist (May, 2000). The average proportion of women in National Assemblies increased from one assembly to another (Monro, 2005). The contributions these women made can be multiplied if gender equality is fully attained in Nigeria.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The implications of gender inequality for sustainable development in Nigeria are explicit:

- iii. It leads to imbalance in all ramifications of life. There will be political imbalance as men and women are unequally represented in politics. Decisions that are supposed to be jointly taken by male and female members of the society if taken by the male alone may not ensure a balanced result for the generality of the society because women's views were not taken into consideration in that decision. Sustainable development in Nigeria, for instance, is slowed down due to the exclusion of women from their rights and position they occupy in the society which is not inferior to that of men.
- iv. The denial of the girl child of quality education also has negative and untoward implications for sustainable development. An uneducated woman has every limited capacity to be a social change agent or to influence her children and family positively. It will be difficult for her to effectively inculcate societal acceptable values into her children. This is surely a clog in the wheel of sustainable development in Nigeria.

Women become economically deficient due to gender inequality and this impedes sustainable development as she may not be able to provide for the needs of her family especially if she is a single mother or make her contribution to the running of her home.

4.1 Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

The report from the United Nations (2005) shows that about half of the world's population of almost 6.5 billion people were women and about 49 percent of Nigeria's population of about 88 million people in 1991 were women. Despite the above, women are still being marginalized in all facets of life and this has in no small measure affected development. It is important to state, according to World Survey on the role of women in Development (2014), that gender equality is central and essential in achieving sustainable national development. The centrality of gender equality in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria cannot be dissociated from the realities of gender bias in the Nigerian society.



The centrality of gender equality has also been articulated in the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, entitled “The future we want”. Adopted in 2012, which included recognition of the importance of gender equality and women ‘s empowerment across the three pillars of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental, and resolve to promote gender equality and women’s full participation in sustainable development policies, programs and decision-making at all levels (General Assembly resolution 66/288), annex). Linking gender equality and sustainable development is important for several reasons. First, it is a moral and ethical imperative: achieving gender quality and realizing the human rights, dignity and capabilities of diverse groups of women is a central requirement of a just and sustainable world. Second, it is critical to redress the disproportionate impact of economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses on women and girls, which undermine the enjoyment of their human rights and their vital roles in sustaining their families and communities.

Third, and most significantly, it is important to build up women’s agency and capabilities to create better synergies between gender equality and sustainable development outcomes (World Bank, 2012). The attainment of sustainable development and gender equality potentially involves trade-offs that need to be openly discussed among different social groups (UNDP, 2011). In such negotiations, the social dimensions of sustainability – too often neglected – must be fully integrated, and states and other powerful actors must be held accountable for delivering sustainable development. An important element of sustainable development is the need to manage the natural resource base on which human activity depends. Due to the gender division of labour in society, women and men have different needs and uses for natural resources. The different responsibilities imposed by societies on females and males have implications for how they interact with their local environment (World Bank, 2012).

All human beings, both men and women have equal access to inalienable human rights and in the case of Nigeria; her citizens regardless of gender have equal access to their rights and privileges. All Nigerians, both male and female men and women, have equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in economy, society and political decision-making. Both the male and female genders in the Nigeria society equally have vital roles to play in achieving and sustaining national development. Also, both genders may aspire to and access leadership roles with no prejudice whatsoever.

5. CONCLUSION

Gender inequality has hindered development in Nigeria for so long. It is clear that in the Nigerian society, women are not given opportunities as much as their male counterparts. It is also obvious that there is no rational reason for this state of prejudice which pervades the Nigeria societies but cultural practices which promote gender inequality. In the world of today, it is known that development cannot be earned without the eradication of inequality in gender. The Nigerian society will ensure sustainable development by enforcing and embracing more than ever before, gender equality at all level of society. It is evident that gender equality is essential for sustainable development in Nigeria.



It is therefore incumbent on all important stakeholders in Nigeria to see to it that gender inequality is effectively eradicated because of its implication on sustainable development in Nigeria. The following recommendations are made to ensure that gender equality takes its full place for sustainable development in Nigeria.

1. The government should make policies that forbid any cultural practices that endangers gender inequality; that is, cultural practices that treats the female gender as inferior to the male gender.
2. The government should also make policies that ensure that male and female genders are given equal access to employment opportunities not only in the public service but also in the private sector.
3. All stakeholders including government and the private sector should ensure through regulations and public policies that the male and female gender have access to equal opportunities as regards education and self-empowerment.
4. There should be rigorous reorientation in all communities in Nigeria and also in religious circles about the need to eradicate practices which engender gender inequalities in those communities.
5. Sensitization of the populace about the need to do away with gender inequality should be consistent. At every forum, government and community leaders should create the awareness that male and female children have the capacities to contribute to the development of the society.

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