



Prospects and Challenges of Gender Equality in Nigeria: Matters Arising

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Abstract

This study seeks to broaden understanding of concepts and issues on gender equality as espoused by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2006. It revealed the government policy goal in collaboration with some international bodies and organizations on gender issues such as: African Union Solemn Declaration for Gender Equality, African Protocol on People's Rights of Women (APRRW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The study identified hindrances that were encountered by Government in an attempt to build a nation devoid of gender discrimination and suggested strategies for developing a nation that places premium on the protection of all women and men in Nigeria. Secondary data were used for the study and analysed appropriately. The results of the analysis revealed that Government of Nigeria although committed to building a nation guaranteeing equal access to political, social and economic wealth creation opportunities devoid of gender discrimination. Yet there persists discrimination in national, state and local statutes, customary and religious laws. As a result, the study canvassed for the abolition of traditions, customs, sexual stereotyping of social roles and cultural prejudices that militate against enjoyment of right and full participation of women on an equal basis with men in national development.

Keywords: Gender, Inequality, Discrimination, Government Policy, National Development

Introduction

In a general perspective, gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men which is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in the society and in public and private life of the people. It is the state of being male or female and typically used with reference to social and cultural differences of the people rather than biological ones in the society and appears to manifest as hierarchical relations with men above women and women being regarded as

inferior and less valuable in family and other social relationships in African states.

According to Roland and Tony (1979), the gender hierarchy is manifested in different form. It may be from inheritance laws of the society, customs, traditions and other socio-cultural engagement of the people that reflected in the decisions making power of the government, society, family, working place, religious and other cultural institutions. Such hierarchy is generally accepted by both genders and not normally questioned within its cultural context in most

of African societies. Gender is a matter of culture which refers to the social classification into masculine and feminine. However, its cultural perspectives in the society bring forth the issue of its inequality in contemporary African society. This inequality had consistently positioned womanhood in disempowered cultural, social and economic hierarchies that seem to impede them to realize their rights in the society (Oakley, 1972).

In Nigeria, the issue of gender inequality have become a recurring decimal because of the general believe that womanhood is a mere infidel and a second-class citizen in the society and suppose to be best placed in the Kitchen and the bedroom of their husbands. Makama (2013) observed that this trend has brought about tremendous misrepresentation of women right at the level of the family down to the circular society. The Nigerian society although, patriarchal in nature is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women and discriminated upon women on socio-economic related issues, acquisition of formal education in some cases, attainment of political desires and contribution to religious matters in the society.

With this development, an average Nigerian woman is therefore seen as an available object for prostitution, forced marriage, street hawking, instrument of wide-range trafficking and a misfit personality towards socio-economic development in contemporary society when compare to some advanced countries of the world. Makama (2013) further stated that this development gradually promotes gender inequality between men and women in formal and informal sectors of our society.

The growing acknowledgements of gender rights and equality, all over the world, is juxtaposed against increase in reporting of various forms of violence against women such as rape, trafficking, assault, social segregation in Nigeria which run contrary to

the general convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly which was tagged “Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW, 1979). The discrimination according to CEDAW (1979) is defined as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex either in the civil, cultural, political, economic, social, or any other related matters in the society.

With this development, Nigerian women had been subjected to series of gender discrimination and had been made to be relevant to commercial engagements at micro level thereby limiting their abilities to contribute graciously to socio-economic development of the country. In the party system, women are not giving chance to occupy the political leadership position in Nigeria, their roles are always restricted, as it was once noted by Ojo (2013) that women occupy politically non-significant positions in political parties because, Nigerian political system is patriarchal in nature, and most of the parties are established by men who merely accommodate the women. Also a lot of the women do not have the financial capacity to operate in most of these political parties, because our political system has been highly monetized (Vanguard, 2013).

However, the nature of Nigerian politics discourages women’s participation in political process. Political meetings are often held late at night on an ad hoc basis, making attendance difficult for women, who face greater personal risk in travelling alone at night and often have to arrange for assistance to care for their families. Women who do attend such meetings have, according to numerous anonymized sources, been labeled as prostitutes. More generally, politics is considered to be a ‘dangerous’ pursuit in Nigeria and female politicians are frequently considered of dubious moral character, given their desire to be involved in this profession (Denney, 2011).

It is in the light of this phenomenon that this paper seeks to broaden our understanding of associated issues impeding gender equality in Nigeria and its implications on social-economic development in the country. The paper begins with general introduction, followed by a theoretical framework and conceptual discussion of related literature to the topic under review. The paper also appraised the national gender policy in Nigeria's fourth republic and its level of implementation across all levels of government while the concluding part suggests some basic techniques of achieving gender equality in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Gender

The meaning of gender vary across cultures, social groups and time because, nothing about the body including women's reproductive organs, determines univocally how social division could be shaped when talking about gender stratification. According to Dickson, Aloba and Inyang (2014:2), gender can be generally refers to as the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, influence and relative power which the society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. It is an acquired identity that is learned, and it could change over time. It varies where biological sex is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, widely within and across cultures that is embedded in all social processes of everyday life and social organizations.

It is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity that depending on biological sex (i.e. the state of being male, female or an intersex variation which may complicate sex assignment), sex-based social structures (including gender roles and other social roles), or gender identity while some

cultures have specific gender roles that can be considered distinct from male and female in the social gathering (Kelechen, 2014:4).

Gender elucidate the primary differences to justify individual conduct that relates to issue on cross-cultural, literary and scientific evidence that is socially constructed to justify gender stratification in the society. According to Miller (2001:12), gender can be view inform of economic, social and cultural segregation that differentiate between male and female towards providing social justification for their existence and constitutes one of the determinants of how poverty is experienced and how wealth creation, rights and entitlements of men and women to opportunities, resources and decision making are based on socio-cultural norms rather than on human rights or the respective development capability of men and women.

Scott (1988:2) sees gender as a system of roles relationship between women and men. These roles are determined not biologically but by the social, political and economic context. It is the social organization of sexual differences which does not means gender reflection or implements fixed and natural physical differences between women and men rather it is the knowledge that establishes meaning for bodily differences.

From these definitions, there are two major observations of what the gender is all about. Firstly it is for the state of being male or female which is typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones in social setting while the second is the array of socially constructed roles and relationships that discriminating against the women in the society contrary to Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) which Nigeria was also a signatory.

Understanding Gender Inequality, Gender Equality and Gender Analysis

Gender inequality can be expressed as unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender which arose from differences between socially constructed gender roles in the society. It is a system that promotes inequality which manifest in different forms of daily engagement. Whereas, Kay (2008) observed that gender equality is a condition where women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including the area of economic participation, decision making, and process through which the needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured.

It is a critical understanding of all gender biases which perpetuate gender inequalities in all sectors of the society. It is a systematic approach of looking at the different impacts of policies, programmes, legislation and development that reflect on women and men. Vainio-Mattila (2001) observed that gender inequality elucidate major differences in women's and men's lives circle, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women and applies this understanding to policy development and service delivery process of the society.

However, various studies revealed that gender equality allows men and women to make their choices and develop their personal abilities to the fullest without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices. Adeniyi (2012) argues that gender equality could be regarded as different behaviours, aspirations and consideration of the needs of women and men, valued and favoured equally. In understanding gender equality, it does not mean that women and men have to become the same in nature, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities would not depend on whether they were born male or female but to stress the principle of equality in application of gender related policy in the

state. This study is of the opinion that no matter the circumstances, men and women must be equally treated in any society because discrimination based on sex is highly unjustified for societal development.

Gender analysis on the other hand is a type of socio-economic studies that uncovers how gender relations affect a developmental problem of the society. It indicates how gender relations probably affect the basic solution to identify problems or to show how it affects the solution and what could be done as a remedy. Elizabeth, Bruce and Sonomi (1998) concluded that Gender analysis frameworks provide a step-by-step methodology for conducting detail observation of gender issues globally.

Gender Empowerment: A Foundation to wards Gender Equality in the Society

The term Gender empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination towards measuring gender equality of the people irrespective of sexual stratification in the society. Johnson (2016) argued that gender empowerment aim to enable individual irrespective of gender basis and socio-political ideologies to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority. Therefore, gender empowerment as action refers to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence in the state.

Kandiyoti (1988) believed that gender empowerment entails the process and outcome of actions taken by men and women towards taking control of their lives, it involves setting of goals or agenda, gaining skills, increasing self-confidence, solving problems and developing self reliance. In this context, empowerment of women is an essential process in the transformation of gender relations including

division of labour. The process addresses the structural systemic and underlying causes of discrimination and subordination through increased women's capability to make strategic life choices

The concept stresses the differences between biological sex and gender as a role. Gender empowerment is a significant topic of discussion in regard to development and economics sustainability in measuring gender equality in the state. It is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing the impact of individual towards human capacity development. Conclusively, Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is an index designed to evaluate gender equality. It is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that attempt to measure the extent of gender inequality across the countries, based on estimates of women's relative economic income, participations in high-paying positions with economic power, and access to professional and parliamentary positions. It was introduced at the same time as the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) but measures topics like empowerment that are not covered by that index (Johnson, 2016).

Theoretical Framework Feminism Theory

Feminism theory is used to explain the study on prospects and challenges of gender equality in Nigeria. Stanley and Wise (1983) stated that feminism theory is not only a set of belief but a set of theoretical constructions about the nature of women's oppression and the part this oppression plays within social reality. This theory states that women subjugation and exclusion lies within patriarchy and that it is manmade and it could be corrected. Feminist theory agree that something fundamental is missing in the treatment of women in the contemporary society.

According to Friendan (1963), Feminism is a diverse collection of groups aimed in one

way or the other at advancing the position of women because it agrees that something is amiss in the treatment of women. It points out that the difficult situation endured by women is grounded in the social system which accords to a man a higher status in the society than a woman. The feminist theory is used in the study in order to explain the aspect of women's vulnerability in Nigeria and its bases towards understanding the topic under review.

Methodology

This study was explanatory where efforts were made to expose the prospects and challenges of gender equality in Nigeria. The study was conducted through data that were obtained from secondary sources. The data collected were analysed using analytical and descriptive approaches.

1999 Constitution and Gender Policy in Nigeria

The principle of non-discrimination as enshrined in section II of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provided non gender discrimination on social related issues in the conduct of social transactions in both government and private establishments, but in spite of this constitutional provision, equal opportunities were not provided for males and females in Nigeria to advance socially, physically, educationally, politically and economically. Evidences abound that several negative aspect of gender relation such as gender based division of labour, disparities between males and females' access to power and resources, and gender biases in rights and entitlements in Nigeria is still pervasive both in term of political appointments at all level of government and placements in military and paramilitary organizations (The Punch, 2016).

Furthermore, the chapter 4 of 1999 constitution also makes adequate provisions for civil and political rights of individuals in

the country which are actionable in a court of law. Also, chapter 2 1999 Constitution advocates for women's economic, social and cultural rights which are not actionable and sections 43 permits both male and female Nigerian to own and acquire movable and immovable properties but in spite of this provision, Umar (2012) averred that large proportions of women in Nigeria are barred from owning landed property by customary laws of inheritance in the country.

National Gender Policy in Nigeria: An Overview

Perhaps as a result of the inadequacy of 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, a national gender policy was adopted in 2006 stating strategic implementation framework and plan as policy documents to guide the federal government of Nigeria in the implementation of various regional treaty, such as New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) African Union (AU), African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women (APPRW) and National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). It also includes the Global Commitment such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGS), and Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women. As a result, the National Gender Policy (2006) focuses on the following basic principles which aim at promoting gender equity in Nigeria. It includes:

- a. identification of gender mainstreaming as a development approach and tools for achieving social transformation, agenda for economic reform, value re-

orientation and evidence based planning,

- b. a realization that results and efficient focused policy implementation required from all stakeholder, a cooperative and comprehensive interaction,
- c. recognition of gender issues are central to and critical to the achievement of National Development Goals and objectives and a requirement for all policy to be reviewed to reflect gender implication and strategies as contained in the gender policy and implementation modalities specified in the National Gender Strategic Framework and,
- d. promotion and protection of human right, social justices and equity.

In order to achieve the objectives of the National Gender Policy, the following strategies were employed by the government:

- a. partnership, policy and programme reforms through mainstreaming of gender concerns at all levels;
- b. agenda of economic restructuring reforms for enhanced productivity and sustainable development, which addresses the needs of women and children, and other vulnerable groups;
- c. in an attempt to enhance required technical expertise and positive gender culture, the policy advocated for the provision for capacity building and gender education and,
- d. legislative reform to guarantee gender justice and respect for human right

Empirical Assessment of Gender Inequality in Nigeria

This study observed that it appears that the prominent process through which gender inequality is promoted in Nigeria among other factors may include:

- a. **Patriarchy Discrimination:** Various literatures suggest that Nigeria was a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women lives. World Bank report (2005) stated that at the community and household levels in Nigeria, women are put in a subordinate position while majority of the parents preferred male children over their female counterparts. While contributing Adeniyi (2012) observed that parents influence is highly significant in shaping and perpetrating patriarchy. At home front, the father demonstrates to sons what it means to be a man while the mother provides the role model for daughters. At other levels, particularly in societies where male are dominant, Nigerian women and men social relations and activities are governed by patriarchal system of socialization and cultural practice which favour the interest of men above those of women.
- b. **Gender Roles and Livelihoods:** Institutional practices and perceptions of gender roles also have an impact on the inequitable employment privileges and incentives in both urban and rural settings in Nigeria. For example, tax authorities generally ignore the existence of female headed households. The tax authority strongly assumed that male breadwinners bear the sole responsibility for meeting the financial and material needs of the family. Accordingly, male workers enjoyed tax benefit related to child care whereas female workers (including single mothers, married women who are family breadwinners and divorce women with children in their care, as a result of being denied access to this benefit, tend to pay relatively higher taxes (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2014). Gender-based norms also exclude men from the responsibility of carrying out tasks related to household activities such as, cooking, cleaning, caring for children and the elderly which is exclusively reserved for women and not diminish when women engaged in paid employment. The extra burden that is culturally placed on women sometimes prevents them from pursuing their careers as well as reaching management position in any organization.
- c. **Division of Labour and Career Progression:** In Nigeria, it appears that there is a sharp contrast between the two sexes in activities that are income generating. Example of this could be found in industrial sector where women's participation is 11% as compared with 30% for men. Women were predominantly engaged in informal and unregulated sector of the economy. About 87% of those employed in the service sector were women. There is lack of women's involvement in income generating sector that are predominantly characterized by intense manual labour, such as mining and quarrying (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In the Federal Civil Service, which is the largest single entity employer in Nigeria, 76% of civil servant are men whereas 24% are women and women hold less than 14% of total management level positions. In the medical field, men represent 82.5% of those employed while women represent 17.5%, the medical field involves highly skilled and relatively well remunerated work (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2014).
- d. **Economy Sector:** The major factor that contributes to uneven development and feminization of poverty is gender inequalities within the overall society, including all sectors, and this is reflected in the wide disparities between women and

men. Over 65% of women are projected to be among the 70% of the population estimated to be living below poverty line. The income and purchasing power for men is estimated to be US\$1,495 as compared to US\$614 for women. Men have greater access to a secured and high paying employment. In Nigeria, 76% of federal civil service workers were men while women made up 24% of the work force and occupied 14% of the overall management positions, and this is in spite of some women being appointed as permanent secretaries. Additionally, approximately 17.5% of medical doctors are women whereas 82.5% are men. The capacity of women and men to contribute to the economic growth of the country is affected by the above disparities. The reform agenda, and effort to reduce dependency ratio within family unit and achieve the desire value re-orientation goal of government. The extractive industry with annual business volume of over US\$42m has almost zero level participation of women. At 87% men with 11% women compared to 30% men engaged in the industrial sector disparities in gender inequalities is hereby demonstrated (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2014). In agricultural sector of the economy, Adeniyi (2012) believed that 50% women are involved in animal husbandry related activities while 60% of them involves in food processing. In essence, women are responsible for carrying out 70% of agriculture labour. However, their contributions are not valued or recognized, nor are they reflected in the National Accounting Systems (NAS) or given any prime consideration in Nigeria agricultural policy formulation and implementation. The issues and concerns of women employed in the

agricultural sector have been largely overlooked in programmes dedicated to the improvement of agricultural productivity.

- e. **Legal and Human Rights :** As in most countries, Nigeria is legally regulated by a body of laws that govern major public and private relationship, a good example is the institution of marriage which is regulated and can be contracted under several provisions of either Sharia law, statutory law, common law and customary law system. To Usman (2015), the manner through which such laws interpreted and applied frequently varies, highly inconsistent and in most cases is subjective to personal considerations, mostly in situations and cases where women seek redress against their spouses for violations committed. This could be complicated by traditions and discrimination against women and unwritten family law most especially in cases related to divorce, inheritance of properties and child custody. The major challenge for women's rights advocates and gender development practitioners is to ensure that laws and acts are formulated to protect the right and interest of women in the society.
- f. **Gender Based Violence:** In recent times, gender-based violence has become a major issue not only in Nigeria but in the whole African continent. This reflects the extent to which women rights are threatened. It equally results to a situation where women were not able to make a case on many issues concerning and affecting their lives. Violence, particularly domestic violence and rape against women as become a common occurrence in contemporary society, it is widespread and it has increased the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS. The cultural practice of female genital mutilation which is

a violation of basic rights and constitutes a major lifelong risk to women's health. This harmful traditional practice is meant to control women's sexuality but it has led to great suffering among women in Nigeria (Usman, 2015). The negative notion that women are inferior to men and that they are supposed to be treated as second class citizens within the community is the underlying force behind this behavior.

Achieving Gender Equality Challenges in Nigeria

In view of the Federal Government of Nigeria position on gender equality as expressed in National Gender Policy in Nigeria (2006). The study suggests that in order to overcome the challenges of gender inequality in Nigeria, the following steps must be taken:

- a. **Identity and Self Perpetuating Subordination:** Kandiyoti (1988) observed that the appearance of patriarchy differs in Africa from the form of patriarchy Muslim countries or Asia. Generally, gender hierarchy is not necessarily implied by gender specific role but gender hierarchy is rather restricted by perspectives and opportunities for the future that this specialization typically carries. As a result the exact characteristics of hierarchical gender valuations differ across tribes within the country but there is no doubt that hierarchy itself exists to different degrees in most cultures. Its existence can be more vividly seen when looking at cultures in which practices differ from our own. Therefore the identity and self perpetuating subordination is a base for achieving gender equality in Nigeria.
- b. **Policy Articulation and Execution:** In Nigeria it seems that there is growing evidence that gender

education has not permitted at all levels of the populace, even among the policy makers. According to Adeniyi (2012), there is an impression that gender issues are exclusively about women and negatively challenges accepted norms and values of marriage, family and religion is rife. The attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment goals is therefore threatened by a negative perception of the concept of gender by policy makers, who are charged with the responsibility for policy articulation and execution. But for the full attainment of gender equality in Nigeria, the policy makers need to develop positive attitude to gender issue and equally promote effective policy framework that will actively bring about prompt implementation of gender equality programmes across all level of government and in the private establishment in the country.

- c. **Recognition of Women Productivity:** The Federal Government of Nigeria should endeavor to accord the necessary recognition to women productivity capacity in all sectors of humanity in order to encourage them to see themselves as a major stakeholder towards nation's building in Nigeria.
- d. **Eradication of Cultural Discrimination Against Women:** Another dimension of gender-based marginalization can be perceived in the unwritten norms and traditions which shape and influence organizational culture and practices. Nigerian government must put appropriate legislation in place to address all the aspects of discriminatory cultural policies by all the ethnic groups in Nigeria so that the goals of MDGs, NEEDS\SEEDS and other international development projects targeting to encourage

women empowerment would not be impeded.

- e. **Rights of Enjoyment:** Women's rights have been systematically undermined by the Nigerian legal systems which made many legal instruments to be discriminatory and gender blind. Ranging from the customary laws of Southern Nigeria to the Sharia law of Northern part of the country and finally to the criminal code provisions of Nigeria constitution and local edicts. According to Usman (2015), the result of the tripartite legal system is the presence of numerous gender insensitive local laws that are not documented and therefore difficult to determine its module operandi. As a result the abrogation of such law is cumbersome, given the federal system with almost autonomous powers. Consequently, the existence of gender-sensitive provision in the Nigeria constitution may not enhance any progress at the level of state governance, suggesting that interventions focused on the state level may be more effective. This reality needs to be better acknowledged by programme planners and implementers.

Conclusion

This study attempts to broaden our understanding of the concepts and issues on gender equality with particular reference to Nigeria. The study examined federal government of Nigeria 2006 national gender policy. It identified major operational challenges of confrontation between traditional structures on gender insensitive that had become major challenges to women emancipation in the society while a new law that attempts to change the old attitude of the people from gender inequality failed to positively yielded require result.

However, the study revealed that many factors responsible for gender inequality in Nigeria ranging from patriarchy discrimination, diseases and health issues, gender based violence among others and the required adjustment to these challenges has not been quick or easy to rectify. The old patriarchal world where the functions of both sexes were distinctly different required a positive change because it makes women identity and their societal roles to center on child bearing and other domestic engagements against their economic value deteriorated family with divorce rates, large numbers of children growing up with only one parent, decreases in marriage rates.

Conclusively the needed suggestions were offered for the equal protection for all men and women in Nigeria environment in order to eradicate gender inequality in the contemporary world.

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