

GENDER, LAND OWNERSHIP, AND DEVELOPMENT: A SOCIAL RELATIONS ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN IGBOLAND, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Gender inequality remains a major impediment to inclusive development worldwide, and Nigeria and Igboland in particular exemplifies this reality in complex ways. Although the nation possesses abundant human and natural resources, systemic gender disparities have hindered its socio-economic transformation. This article uses the Social Relations Approach (SRA) to examine how gender inequality in Igboland, Southeast Nigeria, limits socio-economic development, with a focus on women's access to and ownership of land. Despite Nigeria's legal frameworks, such as the 1978 Land Use Act, which offers gender-neutral land ownership rights, traditional customs in Igboland favor men in land inheritance. The study highlights how institutional frameworks—state, market, community, and family—reinforce gender disparities, often overlooking the structural inequalities that prevent women from acquiring land. At the community level, customary laws rooted in Igbo culture further limit women's access to land by favoring men in inheritance and land-related rituals. The research also reveals how these gender-based barriers extend to economic and political participation, limiting women's financial independence and decision-making power. Using Kabeer's SRA framework, the study suggests key reforms, including restructuring policy implementation, training, advocacy, and promoting gender redistributive laws. It emphasizes the role of collective action, grassroots organizations, and community engagement in challenging gender-insensitive cultural practices. The article argues that addressing these systemic barriers will not only improve women's access to land but also advance broader socio-economic development in Nigeria by fostering gender equality in critical sectors.

Key words: *Gender inequality, Gender redistributive policies, Land ownership, Social Relations Approach (SRA).*

Nigeria: Geographical, Socio-economic situation with special reference to the Igbos of South eastern Nigeria.

Nigeria, is a nation of immense diversity, complexity, and contradictions. It is the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populous in the world, with an estimated population of 237.5 million (World Population Review, 2025). As a federation comprising 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse nation, home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, traditions, and socio-political structures (The World Bank Group, 2023). Despite its vast human and natural resource wealth, Nigeria grapples with profound socio-economic and political challenges, including poverty, gender inequality, ethnic tensions, and governance deficits.

Nigeria is situated in West Africa, bordered by Benin to the west, Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast, and Cameroon to the east, with the Atlantic Ocean forming its southern coastline.

Covering approximately 923,768 square kilometers, Nigeria's geography is highly varied, featuring coastal plains, tropical rainforests, savannas, and semi-arid regions in the far north (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2023).

Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups—Hausa-Fulani (north), Yoruba (southwest), and Igbo (southeast)—compete for political and economic dominance. Religious divides (51% Muslim, 46% Christian) further complicate national cohesion (Pulse newspaper (2025)).

The southern region, particularly the Niger Delta, is characterized by mangrove swamps and dense rainforests, which support agriculture and oil exploration—Nigeria's primary revenue source. Moving northward, the landscape transitions into the fertile Middle Belt, known for its agricultural productivity, before giving way to the arid Sahel and Sahara Desert in the extreme north.

Nigeria's climate varies from the tropical monsoon in the south to a hot, dry Sahelian climate in the north. The south experiences heavy rainfall (up to 4,000 mm annually), supporting cash crops like cocoa, rubber, and palm oil (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022). In contrast, the north faces recurring droughts and desertification, exacerbating food insecurity and farmer-herder conflicts.

Environmental degradation, particularly in the Niger Delta due to oil spills and gas flaring, has devastated local ecosystems and livelihoods. Climate change further intensifies these challenges, with rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, and flooding displacing thousands annually (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2023).

Nigeria's population is not only large but also rapidly growing, with a fertility rate of 5.3 children per woman (World Bank, 2023). This demographic explosion strains infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems. Urbanization is accelerating, with cities like Lagos (Africa's largest metropolis), Kano, and Port Harcourt experiencing overcrowding, housing shortages, and unemployment.

Despite economic potential, poverty remains pervasive. As of 2023, 40% of Nigerians (approximately 83 million people) lived below the poverty line, while another 25% (53 million) were classified as vulnerable (The World Bank Group, 2023). The World Bank projects that by 2024, an additional 7.7 million Nigerians will fall into extreme poverty, driven by unemployment, inflation, and inadequate social services.

On the socio-economic realities, Nigeria's economy is the largest in Africa by GDP, yet it remains heavily dependent on crude oil, which accounts for over 90% of export earnings and 60% of government revenue (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). This over-reliance on oil has stifled diversification, leaving sectors like agriculture and manufacturing underdeveloped.

The informal sector dominates employment, with over 80% of Nigerians engaged in small-scale trade, subsistence farming, and artisanal work (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). However, informal workers lack social protections, fair wages, and job security. Youth unemployment stands at 42.5%, fuelling social unrest and migration (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023).

In addition, education disparities persist across regions and genders. While literacy rates have improved to 62% (UNESCO, 2023), northern states lag behind due to cultural resistance, inadequate infrastructure, and insurgency (e.g., Boko Haram's attacks on schools). Girls' enrolment remains low in the north, where early marriage and patriarchal norms prevail.

Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) ranking is 163 out of 191 countries (UNDP, 2023), reflecting poor healthcare access, malnutrition, and high maternal mortality (512 deaths per 100,000 live births) (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023).

Gender disparities in Nigeria are stark. The Global Gender Gap Index (2023) ranks Nigeria 123rd out of 153 countries, a decline from 94th in 2006 (World Economic Forum, 2023). Key issues include:

- **Economic Disparities:** Women constitute 60% of Nigeria's informal workforce but earn significantly less than men (British Council Nigeria, 2012).
- **Political Underrepresentation:** Only 3.6% of parliamentary seats are held by women (UN Women, 2023).
- **Education Gaps:** Girls in northern Nigeria have a 47% secondary school completion rate compared to 77% for boys (UNICEF, 2023).
- **Health Inequities:** Maternal mortality is exacerbated by limited access to healthcare, especially in rural areas.

Nigeria operates a federal system, but power remains centralized, exacerbating ethnic and regional tensions. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has oscillated between military rule and fragile democracy.

The Igbo, predominantly in the southeast, have historically been traders, entrepreneurs, and educators. Pre-colonial Igbo society was decentralized, organized around village republics (Ofo title system) and age-grade governance (Afigbo, 1981). However, British colonialism imposed centralized structures, disrupting traditional systems.

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), sparked by Igbo secession (Biafra), left deep scars. Post-war policies like the "Abandoned Property" decree marginalized Igbo businesses, while structural imbalances persist in federal appointments and infrastructure allocation (Nwogu, 2015).

Despite these challenges, Igboland thrives commercially, with cities like Onitsha (West Africa's largest market), Aba (manufacturing hub), and Enugu (administrative center) driving regional trade.

Today, Igboland has an extensive network of urban centers like Enugu, Aba, Onitsha, and Owerri, known for commerce, education, and manufacturing. Despite this, economic development has often been hampered by infrastructural neglect and political marginalization, which also reflect broader patterns of inequality—especially gendered inequality.

From the foregoing it is evident that Nigeria's geographical diversity, socio-economic challenges, and complex political landscape present both obstacles and opportunities. While

the country possesses immense potential, systemic issues, poverty, gender inequality, ethnic tensions, and governance failures, hinder progress.

Coming to gender inequality, “women in Nigeria face several challenges because of social, cultural, and institutional factors” (British Council Nigeria, 2012). Gender inequality can be seen in employment, mortality rates, school drop-out rate and the proportion of women in elected and appointed posts in government.

Gender inequality continues to hinder global progress toward inclusive development, and Nigeria—particularly the Igbo-speaking south-eastern region—demonstrates this challenge in multifaceted ways. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality, deeply rooted cultural norms, economic disparities, and political exclusion perpetuate gender-based discrimination. In Nigeria, women face systemic barriers in education, employment, and leadership, with only 3.6% of parliamentary seats held by women (UN Women, 2023). The Igbo society, traditionally entrepreneurial and egalitarian in pre-colonial times, now grapples with patriarchal structures that limit women’s autonomy. For instance, land inheritance often favours male heirs, and women’s participation in governance remains minimal. Additionally, girls in rural Igboland frequently drop out of school due to early marriages or financial constraints. Economic opportunities for women are further restricted by limited access to credit and discriminatory workplace practices. While Igbo women dominate informal trade, their contributions are undervalued in formal economic metrics. Addressing these disparities requires legal reforms, gender-sensitive policies, and grassroots empowerment initiatives to dismantle structural biases and foster equitable development.

Objectives of the study

This paper will examine,

1. How institutions work and interact with one another to create, maintain, and reinforce gender inequality, and how this prevents women in Igboland, southeast Nigeria, from accessing and owning landed assets.
2. How policies and laws could be created to elevate women's status in Igboland in terms of property ownership.
3. Women's ability to challenge their subjugation collectively and the role of grassroots organisations in making this possible.

Theoretical Framework: Gender Inequality and the Social Relations Approach

Gender inequality is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a deeply entrenched consequence of historical, social, and institutional processes. Tackling this issue requires more than surface-level interventions that seek to empower women within existing societal frameworks. Instead, a fundamental re-evaluation of the political, economic, familial, and communal structures that shape lived experiences is necessary. One particularly insightful framework for understanding and addressing these systemic inequalities is the **Social Relations Approach (SRA)**, developed by feminist scholars in the 1990s, including Naila Kabeer.

The Social Relations Approach (SRA) shifts the focus from viewing women as passive beneficiaries of development aid to analyzing the institutional mechanisms that sustain gender disparities. Rather than advocating for the mere inclusion of women in development initiatives, the SRA emphasizes the need to transform the very institutions that perpetuate inequality (Kabeer, 1994; March et al., 1999; Razavi and Miller, 1995; Equilo, 2022). This perspective asserts that gender disparities stem from structural and systemic causes, meaning that meaningful change requires altering the social relationships, processes, and institutions that sustain women's subordinate status.

Moving Beyond Women's Inclusion: The Need for Structural Transformation

A critical limitation of conventional development strategies is their tendency to focus on integrating women into existing systems without questioning the underlying power structures. The SRA challenges this approach by arguing that if socio-economic and political institutions remain unchanged, women's participation may simply reproduce existing inequalities rather than dismantle them. True progress, therefore, depends on restructuring the hierarchies, power dynamics, and value systems that govern gender relations (Kabeer, 1994).

For instance, policies that encourage women's entry into the labor market without addressing wage gaps, workplace discrimination, or unpaid care responsibilities fail to confront the root causes of gender inequality. The SRA insists that institutions must be reimagined to promote equitable social relations, rather than merely accommodating women within flawed systems.

Key Concepts of the Social Relations Approach

1. Development as Human Well-Being

The SRA redefines development as enhancing human well-being, encompassing survival, security, and autonomy, rather than prioritizing economic growth alone (Miles, 2016). Social relationships determine individuals' roles, rights, obligations, and claims over resources, meaning that inequality is perpetuated through institutionalized norms and practices (Kabeer, 1994).

2. Institutions as Reinforcers of Inequality

Institutions play a crucial role in shaping social relations by either reinforcing or challenging inequality. According to Kabeer (1994), institutions "ensure the production, reinforcement, and reproduction of social relations," thereby sustaining social differences and disparities. The four primary institutional domains are:

- **The State** (laws, policies, governance structures).
- **The Market** (economic systems, labor relations).
- **The Community** (cultural norms, social networks).
- **The Family** (household dynamics, care responsibilities).

Each of these domains interacts to either perpetuate or mitigate gender disparities, making institutional analysis essential for gender-aware policymaking.

3. Institutional Attitudes Toward Gender

The SRA categorizes institutional responses to gender into five distinct levels, ranging from ignorance to active redistribution of power (Kabeer, 1994; Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996):

- **Gender-Blind Institutions:** These institutions fail to recognize gender disparities, treating men and women as if they occupy equal positions in society. Policies from such institutions often inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities.
- **Gender-Neutral Institutions:** While these institutions acknowledge gender differences, they do not take active steps to address them. They apply uniform policies, assuming an equal playing field where none exists.
- **Gender-Aware Institutions:** These institutions recognize gender inequalities and incorporate measures to mitigate them, such as gender-disaggregated data collection and impact assessments.
- **Gender-Specific Institutions:** These institutions design targeted interventions for women or men, acknowledging their distinct needs and societal roles.
- **Gender-Redistributive Institutions:** The most progressive category, these institutions actively challenge and restructure power relations to achieve equity.

From the foregoing, the fundamental question is, why does institutional transformation matter? The SRA's emphasis on institutional change highlights a crucial insight: individual empowerment alone is insufficient if the systems governing social relations remain oppressive. For example, microfinance programs that provide loans to women may improve individual economic agency but fail to address broader market inequalities or discriminatory banking policies. Similarly, quotas for women in politics are ineffective if legislative structures remain male-dominated and resistant to gender-sensitive policymaking.

By focusing on structural transformation, the SRA provides a roadmap for moving beyond temporary fixes toward sustainable gender justice. This requires:

- **Reforming legal and policy frameworks** to eliminate discriminatory practices.
- **Redistributing care work** to reduce women's unpaid labour burden.
- **Challenging cultural norms** that reinforce patriarchal values.
- **Ensuring equitable resource allocation** in economic systems.

So, the Social Relations Approach (SRA) offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding and addressing gender inequality as a systemic issue. By shifting the focus from individual empowerment to institutional transformation, it challenges policymakers and activists to rethink conventional development strategies. True gender equality requires dismantling the structures that perpetuate disparity—moving beyond gender-blind or gender-

neutral policies toward gender-redistributive reforms. Only then can societies achieve meaningful and lasting change.

Analysis of the Four Institutions Shaping Gender Inequality in Land Ownership in Nigeria

Gender inequality in land ownership remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, shaped by a complex interplay of legal frameworks, economic structures, communal traditions, and household dynamics. While formal institutions such as the Nigerian Constitution (1999) and the Land Use Act (1978) purport to guarantee equal rights to land, customary practices and socio-economic barriers continue to disadvantage women, particularly in patriarchal societies like Igboland. This analysis examines how four key institutions—the **state, market, community, and household**—influence land ownership patterns, reinforcing or challenging gender disparities.

1. The State: Formal Legal Frameworks and Their Limitations

The Nigerian Constitution (1999) enshrines the principle of non-discrimination, asserting that every citizen has equal rights to property ownership, irrespective of gender. Similarly, the Land Use Act (1978), which nationalizes land ownership under state control, theoretically allows both men and women to acquire land through leasehold or purchase (Oriaghan, 2018).

However, these laws are gender-neutral rather than gender-transformative. They do not actively dismantle patriarchal structures but instead assume that removing overt legal barriers will automatically lead to equality. In practice, women face systemic obstacles in accessing land due to socio-cultural norms, economic marginalization, and weak enforcement of these laws.

Despite constitutional provisions, customary law often supersedes statutory law in rural and semi-urban communities. Courts frequently defer to traditional authorities in land disputes, meaning that even when women have legal rights, cultural norms prevent them from exercising them. Additionally, bureaucratic bottlenecks in land registration disproportionately affect women, who are less likely to have the financial resources or political connections to navigate these processes.

2. The Market: Economic Barriers to Women's Land Ownership

At the market level, institutions such as banks and land registries do not explicitly discriminate based on gender. However, women face structural barriers that limit their access to land financing and ownership:

- **Limited access to credit:** Women are less likely to secure loans for land purchase due to lack of collateral, as most family properties are registered under male names (Adegoke et al., 2016).
- **Lower financial literacy:** Cultural norms often restrict women's participation in economic decision-making, reducing their ability to engage in land transactions (Ajala, 2017).

- **Political exclusion:** Since land allocation in Nigeria is often politicized, women's underrepresentation in governance means they have less influence over land distribution policies (Oladokun et al., 2018).

Many women acquire land through informal means, such as family allocations or community grants, rather than formal purchases. However, these arrangements often lack legal security, leaving women vulnerable to dispossession, particularly in cases of divorce or widowhood (Chigbu, 2019).

3. The Community: Customary Laws and Patrilineal Inheritance

In many Nigerian communities, customary laws dictate land ownership based on ancestry, tradition, and male primacy (Idrisu, 2021). In Igboland, land is primarily inherited through **patrilineal succession**, meaning that sons inherit family land while daughters are often excluded (Enwerem, 2023).

The Igbo cultural practice of bride price (payment made by the groom's family) reinforces the notion that women themselves are property, further entrenching the idea that they cannot own land (Nwabude, 2022). This perception is compounded by traditional beliefs that women who marry outside their natal community lose their inheritance rights, as they are no longer considered part of their father's lineage (Lawrence-Hart, 2022).

Efforts to reform customary land laws face resistance from traditional leaders, who view gender-equal inheritance as a threat to cultural identity. Even educated Igbo women who challenge these norms often face social ostracization, discouraging legal claims to family land (Ezumah & Di Domenico, 1995).

4. The Household: Male Domination and Spiritual Exclusion

At the household level, land ownership is exclusively male-dominated. Men typically control family land, making decisions about its use, sale, or inheritance without consulting female members (Basden, 2013).

Also, inheritance or sale of land has a spiritual meaning with rituals which women cannot participate in Igboland. Widows, in particular, face the risk of land dispossession by male relatives, a practice justified under customary law (Odoemelam et al 2014, Ezumah & Di Domenico 1995).

Limitations of current Literature

Academic and policy literature addressing women's ownership and access to land in Igboland has historically exhibited a significant gap in gender sensitivity. Many of these writings either overlook gender entirely or adopt a neutral stance that fails to acknowledge the deeply entrenched inequalities between men and women. While some recent studies have introduced improvements in framing and analysis, they still often fall short of critically examining the structural advantages that men have long held in relation to land rights and property ownership.

In numerous cases, the literature treats land access as a universal issue, applying broad frameworks that do not differentiate between male and female experiences. This gender-blind approach assumes that all individuals face similar challenges in acquiring and controlling land,

thereby masking the unique barriers that women encounter due to cultural norms, legal constraints, and socio-economic dynamics. By failing to disaggregate data or analyze gender-specific outcomes, such studies inadvertently reinforce the status quo, where male dominance in land ownership is normalized and unchallenged.

Even when gender is mentioned, it is often addressed superficially—without a deep interrogation of the historical and institutional factors that have privileged men. For instance, customary inheritance laws in Igboland typically favour male heirs, excluding women from land succession and perpetuating their economic dependence. Yet many texts fail to critique these customs or explore their implications for women's autonomy and development. Instead, they may present land tenure systems as culturally fixed or inevitable, thereby sidestepping the need for reform or advocacy.

Moreover, the neutral tone adopted in some literature suggests an attempt to avoid controversy or cultural sensitivity. While this may be intended to respect local traditions, it often results in a diluted analysis that does not confront the real power imbalances at play. Neutrality in gender discourse can be problematic when it obscures the fact that men have historically enjoyed privileged access to land through both formal and informal mechanisms—ranging from legal recognition to community influence and political leverage.

This lack of critical engagement with gender disparities has practical consequences. Policies and interventions derived from such literature may fail to address the root causes of women's exclusion or may implement solutions that are ineffective because they do not consider the socio-cultural context. Without a gender-aware lens, development programs risk perpetuating inequality rather than resolving it.

To move forward, it is essential for future research and policy analysis to adopt a more gender-responsive approach. This means not only recognizing the historical disadvantages faced by women but also actively seeking to redress them through inclusive frameworks, participatory methodologies, and transformative advocacy. By highlighting the systemic privileges that men have held—and continue to hold—scholars and practitioners can contribute to a more equitable discourse on land rights in Igboland. Only then can meaningful progress be made toward empowering women and fostering sustainable development in the region.

Steps to be taken

In line with Social relations approach, addressing these inequalities requires multi-layered strategies:

1. Legal reform and enforcement of inheritance rights, anti-GBV legislation, and affirmative action measures at both national and sub-national levels.
2. Investment in girls' education, especially in rural areas, with targeted scholarship and mentorship programs.
3. Economic empowerment initiatives that expand women's access to credit, entrepreneurship training, and cooperative models.
4. Engagement with traditional institutions to reform discriminatory customs and amplify women's leadership in community governance.

5. Data collection and gender budgeting to ensure policies are informed by evidence and trackable metrics.

Through advocacy and networking with civil society organisations, academia, government ministries, we will sensitize policy makers (legislative, judiciary and executive arms of government) on the implications of gender neutral or gender-blind laws to the individuals and society at large (Kabeer, 1994, p.229).

All levels in government to explicitly enshrine, promulgate gender redistributive laws and policies and show law enforcement means to balance gender redistributive laws and policies (Kabeer, 2008, p.27).

Most of the government policies are either gender neutral or gender blind, but through advocacy and networking with civil society organisations, academia, government ministries, we will sensitize policy makers, legislative, judiciary and executive arms of government on the implications of gender neutral or gender-blind laws to the individuals and society at large (Kabeer, 1994, p.229).

There is need to facilitate each government parastatal to explicitly enshrine, promulgate gender redistributive laws and policies and show law enforcement means to balance gender redistributive laws and policies (Kabeer, 2008, p.27).

Private corporations should enshrine gender redistributive policies, laws and implement them like employing affirmative action towards women in job opportunities, capacity building, accessibility to financial services, remunerations and eliminating pay gaps, provision of incentives to boost women's active participation in businesses. The government should monitor and check regular compliance to these too.

On the community and household levels, enlightenment programs for community leaders, men, and women on the implications of gender insensitive cultural practices and customs will be organised. Engaging community stakeholders is crucial to dropping gender oppressive cultures (Kabeer, 2005, p.14)

Ultimately, it is women themselves who will be vanguards of this cause. Different programs will be organised to empower, train, educate and motivate women to live-out gender redistributive laws and policies themselves. Also, creating more opportunities to network with NGOs, Unions and Civil Society organisation is essential. This is so because, for Kabeer, to challenge gender inequality and diffuse its effects, empowerment, and collective action on the part of the disempowered, through which existing power relations can be renegotiated (Kabeer, 1999).

Conclusion

Gender inequality remains a central barrier to Nigeria's socio-economic development—and Igboland, despite its cultural vibrancy and economic vitality, is not exempt.

In Igboland, land remains a critical asset for economic security, social status, and cultural identity. However, access to and control over land is largely governed by patriarchal norms and customary laws that favor men. Women are often excluded from inheritance rights and

land transactions, particularly in rural areas where traditional practices dominate. Even when statutory laws provide for gender-neutral access to property, their implementation is frequently undermined by cultural resistance and institutional inertia. The notion that women are not rightful landowners is deeply embedded in societal beliefs, often reinforced by rituals and spiritual customs that bar women from participating in land-related ceremonies. This exclusion has far-reaching consequences, limiting women's ability to invest, build wealth, and contribute meaningfully to community development. Without secure land rights, women are less likely to access credit, engage in agricultural production, or participate in local governance—further entrenching their marginalization.

To address these entrenched inequalities, it is essential to adopt frameworks that go beyond legal reform and tackle the underlying social structures that perpetuate gender bias. One such framework is Naila Kabeer's social relations approach, which emphasizes the importance of analyzing institutions—such as the state, market, community, and household—not just in terms of their formal rules but also their informal norms and power dynamics. This approach encourages a shift from gender-neutral policies to gender-redistributive strategies that actively transform relationships and resource allocations between men and women. In the context of Igboland, applying Kabeer's framework would involve rethinking land governance systems, challenging discriminatory customs, and promoting inclusive decision-making processes. It would also require engaging with traditional leaders, religious institutions, and community networks to foster cultural change. By recognizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and political institutions, this approach offers a holistic pathway toward gender equity and sustainable development.

Empowering women through equitable access to land and resources is not merely a matter of justice—it is a strategic investment in Nigeria's future. Numerous studies have shown that when women have control over assets, household welfare improves, children's education outcomes rise, and communities become more resilient. In Igboland, where women are already active in trade, education, and informal enterprise, removing barriers to land ownership and financial inclusion could unleash a wave of economic growth. Women's participation in agriculture, for example, could be significantly enhanced if they had secure land tenure and access to credit. Similarly, enabling women to own property would strengthen their bargaining power within households and communities, leading to more balanced and democratic decision-making. The ripple effects of such empowerment would extend beyond economics, influencing social cohesion, psychological well-being, and even religious and political engagement. In essence, gender redistribution is a catalyst for comprehensive development.

Beyond economic empowerment, closing gender gaps also requires political inclusion and institutional reform. Women remain underrepresented in Nigeria's political landscape, with minimal participation in elected offices and policy-making bodies. In Igboland, traditional governance structures often exclude women from leadership roles, reinforcing the perception that political power is a male domain. To change this narrative, deliberate efforts must be made to promote women's leadership at all levels—from local councils to national assemblies. This includes implementing affirmative action policies, providing leadership training, and creating safe spaces for women to engage in political discourse. Institutional reforms should also address gender biases in public administration, law enforcement, and judicial systems to ensure that women's rights are protected and enforced. By integrating gender perspectives into

governance, Nigeria can build more responsive and inclusive institutions that reflect the needs and aspirations of all citizens.

Achieving gender equality in Nigeria, particularly in regions like Igboland, requires a multi-faceted approach. Legal reforms must be strengthened and enforced, ensuring that statutory rights override discriminatory customs. Economic policies should prioritize women's access to credit, land, and vocational training, while community engagement initiatives must challenge patriarchal norms through education and dialogue. Men must be included as allies in this process, recognizing that gender equality benefits everyone by fostering more stable and prosperous societies. International organizations, civil society groups, and the private sector all have roles to play in funding and implementing these changes. Ultimately, unlocking the full potential of Nigerian women is not just a matter of justice—it is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Only by dismantling systemic barriers can Nigeria harness the talents of all its citizens and build a future defined by equity, resilience, and shared prosperity.

It follows that, the Social Relations Approach offers a powerful framework for understanding and addressing gender inequality. It moves beyond simplistic notions of inclusion and instead advocates for systemic change. By focusing on the institutions that shape social relations, the SRA provides a roadmap for creating a more just and equitable society.

This approach challenges us to rethink development, not as a process of economic expansion, but as a means of enhancing human well-being. It urges policymakers, scholars, and activists to look beyond individual empowerment and toward the transformation of the structures that define our collective lives. Only by doing so can we hope to dismantle the deeply embedded systems of inequality and build a future where all individuals regardless of gender can thrive.

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