

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN NIGERIA AND THE QUEST FOR GENDER EQUALITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Prof. Elijah Okon John
&
Ndifreke Archibong Akpan
Department of Philosophy,
University of Uyo
Phone: 07032878732; Email: elijahjohn@uniuyo.edu.ng

Abstract

This work critically examines the role gender mainstreaming plays in the Nigerian polity in the quest for gender equality and sustainable national development. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), women represent over 49% of Nigeria's population, yet they occupy less than 7% political portfolios. This depicts a situation of inequality in a retrogressing male-dominated political system. The objective of this work therefore is to critically examine the impact which gender mainstreaming will have in the quest for gender equality and efficiency in the Nigeria polity. Theoretically, the work will be very relevant to scholars in the field of gender studies, management, politics and philosophy; practically, it will be of utmost relevance to policy makers and administrators. Given the population of women in Nigeria vis-à-vis their enormous potentials and the gross underutilization of these potentials, this work justifies the agitations for gender equality and inclusiveness globally. Content-wise, the work involves aspects of management, politics, international relations and philosophy; geographically, it focuses on the Nigeria's polity. It uses analyses and critical interpretative exposition to assert that a deliberate and structured involvement of more women in Nigeria's political system will bring about equity and the needed efficiency in the system that will trigger the realization of sustainable development.

Keywords: Gender, Sustainable Development, National Development, Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming.

Introduction

Women have been playing important roles in the lives of men right from creation when Eve played a pivotal role in „opening“ the eyes of Adam to see that he was „naked“, making it look like she led him to civilization, many will argue. That however is a debate for another discourse. What is surprisingly incomprehensible here is the domination of men over women in contestably every spheres of life all over the world, what feminist will love to call gross suppressions of women's rights globally, not until recently, women were not allowed to vote and be voted for in many parts of the world. The inequality is so pronounced in some cultures and religions such that women are not permitted to give opinion in public and or religious gatherings. The questions seriously begging for answers are: (i) Were women created inferior to men in terms of reasoning capacities and intellectual makeups“; (ii) Do they have lower IQ to men“; (iii) Are the brains of men

more advanced than those of women“; (iv) Is there any proof that men are better managers than women“; (v) Why do we have very few renowned female philosophers“ If the answers to these questions are negative, why then the inequalities“ If the answers are positive, one may ask, is that enough reason to relegate them to the background, violate and or suppress their rights“ I don't subscribe to the insinuations that this gross inequality is well planned and orchestrated agenda by men, my doubt however is on the competitive nature of women, are they as competitive as the other sex“ Since there is no empirical fact to this effect, it is difficult to rationally convince people that they seem to appear weaker competitively, perhaps the reason for the wide gap, but this gap is not helping the world, considering the untapped potentials begging to be harnessed. Scholars have argued that these inequalities contribute greatly to the advancement of poverty and consequently impediment to development globally. This is why The World Bank Group (WBG) in evaluating the objectives of their gender policy maintains that: “The objectives of the Bank’s gender policy is directly relevant to the Bank’s mandate of poverty reduction and economic development” (WB).

This shows the global concern that gender inequality has a direct link with poverty and development. Not involving half of humanity in core decision making is an impediment to developed. It is a gross violation of human rights as feminist would love to put it. This is why the United Nations General Assembly in Paris, on the 10th of December 1948 announced the universal declaration of human rights thus “Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (UNESCO). The United Nations, in laying the foundation for the eventual declaration of human rights alluded to the existed inequality between men and women globally. Hence, the declaration in the Article 1 & 2 states:

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. (UNESCO).

This declaration further accentuated the existing feminist and gender movements round the world, there were more agitations and demands for gender equality and inclusiveness globally. This is why in 1997, following the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing, which advocated 30% affirmative action. the United Nations adopted the first resolution on gender mainstreaming to guide and support member States in the implementation of global commitments related to gender equality and the empowerment of women. On that occasion, member States unanimously agreed to

assess the differentiated implications, for women and men, of any planned action, including legislation, throughout the entire cycle of policies and programmes right from the design phase, to implementation and evaluation process.

However, more recently, gender mainstreaming has gained a new momentum with the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which we are going to look at later in our discussion. The new development agenda underscores the importance of systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in its comprehensive implementation since the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a decisive contribution to progress in all the Goals and targets. The 2030 Agenda assert that “The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of the humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities” (UN: Women...n.p).

Member States were encouraged to ensure that development is implemented in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of States under international law. Nigeria, a member of the United Nation and affected by this declaration has a poor record of women involvement in decision making that directly affects their lives. In a paper by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) - Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics in Nigeria, it is observed:

In Nigeria, the extant National Gender Policy (NGP) recommended 35% affirmative action instead and sought for a more inclusive representation of women with at least 35% of both elective political and appointive public service positions respectively. The under representation of women in political participation gained root due to the patriarchal practice inherent in our society, much of which were obvious from pre-colonial era till date (NBS: Monitoring...n.p).

Nigeria’s population in 2020 is estimated at 290 million people, women constitute about 50% percent of this. From the available data with the National Bureau of Statistics, sex ratio now drops from 103 men in 2006 to 102 per 100 women. In 2020, percentage of women enrolled in secondary schools increased from 45.3 percent in 2010 to more than 48 percent in 2020. Females enrolled in primary school increased from 45.7 percent in 2010 to about 50 percent in 2020, Females enrolled in tertiary institutions increased from 44.9 percent in 2010 to about 47.3 percent in 2020. However, Labour force participation rate is 64.5 percent of the total women and 70.3 percent of total male, whereas in politics, where the actual decision makings take place, the data bellow shows that women in Nigeria are lowly represented. Let us take a look at the following statistics:

House of Representatives

In 1999 – 96.4% male and 3.6% female; in 2003 – 94.2% male and 5.8% female; in 2007 – 92.5% male and 7.5% female; in 2011 – 93.1% male and 6.9% female; in 2015 –

94% male and 6% female, and; in 2019 – 97.2% male and 2.8% female.

Senate

In 1999 – 97.2% male and 2.8% female; 2003 - 96.3% male and 3.7% female; in 2007 – 91.7% male and 8.3% female; in 2011 – 93.5% male and 6.5% female; 2015 – 93.5% male and 6.5 female, and; in 2019 – 93.5% male and 6.5% female (NBS).

Moreover, it is common knowledge that religion, traditions, customs, sexual stereotyping of social roles and cultural prejudice continue to militate against the attainment of full participation of women on an equal basis with men in national development in Nigeria. Though there are discrimination in Nigerian national and state statues, mainstreaming gender has been recognized as a cross-cutting issue in our national development agenda. As evidenced in the above statistics, limited female participation in structures of governance where key policy decisions are made and resource allocation decided often has negative impact on their political, economic and social opportunities. To this end, this paper seeks to critically examine the impact that gender mainstreaming can have in Nigeria’s polity towards the realization of gender equality, inclusive society and sustainable national development.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender: The distinction between sex and gender according to Bunnin and Yu, in their work, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* is a “central feature of recent feminist thought” (278) While sexual distinctions between male and female have been understood as being biologically and anatomically determined, especially with respect to reproductive roles, gender, to Bunnin and Yu “has been understood as a variable social construction, with gender difference determine socially and culturally” (278). This sums up the cliché that Sex has to do with facts, while gender has to do with values. To Wikipedia gender is:

the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between femininity and masculinity. Depending on the context, this may include sex-based social structures (that is, gender roles) and gender identity. Most cultures use a gender binary, having two genders (boys/men and girls/women); those who exist outside these groups may fall under the umbrella term on-binary. Some societies have specific genders besides "man" and "woman", such as the hijras of South Asia; these are often referred to as third genders (and fourth genders, etc.) (Wikipedia, Gender, n.p).

From the above, it is agreed at least for now that gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. For example, in our elementary reader’s books, you often see the male child playing football while the female child will either be skipping or helping her mother in house chores. From, this age there is the mental picture that playing football is for men, cooking is for women, etc. The beliefs and social constructs about womanhood and manhood to a very great extent when not checked create gender systems which

determine women and men's roles, responsibilities, activities, access to and control over resources, and decision-making opportunities. These systems are socially created and change over time. Yet, they establish resilient norms regarding what is expected, allowed and valued in women, men, girls and boys, shaping their socialization. Gender however, does not refer to women, but to relations between and among women and men. Therefore, both women and men experience relations of gender although they experience these from radically different positions of personal, social, economic, and political power.

Gender Mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming is the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for people of different genders of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes, in all areas and levels. Mainstreaming essentially offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among people of different genders. (Wikipedia). The concept of gender mainstreaming was first used at the Third World Conference on Women, which took place in Nairobi in 1985. As a strategy, gender mainstreaming was adopted by the Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in 1995 in Beijing, to include a gender perspective in legislation, policies, programmes and projects. However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines gender mainstreaming as "taking account of gender concerns in all policy, programme, administrative and financial activities, and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation" (UNDP).

Similarly, according to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat "Gender mainstreaming is a good governance issue – making government more efficient and effective at producing policies and services that will strengthen the social and economic wealth of a nation. It is about rights – women's and men's rights to equal opportunities, equal recognition and equal rewards within societies" (CARICOM). Meanwhile, The United Nations Economic and Social Council, through its agreed conclusions in 1997 provided a clear definition of gender mainstreaming as:

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (UN ECOSOC, 1997).

Gender mainstreaming starts with the recognition that gender equality is a basic development goal and a key objective of development planning. It is therefore a strategy that ensures that both women and men have access to, and control over resources, decision-making, and benefits at all stages of the development process in ways that promote human rights, gender equality and social justice. Its goal is to complement and facilitate women's empowerment and autonomy. Strategically, it ensures that goals,

such as poverty elimination or economic development, also advance gender equality. Gender mainstreaming was adopted mainly to address the perceived failure of previous strategies such as women-specific projects to bring about significant changes in women's status. There was widespread consensus that the failure of women-specific projects in the 1970s and 80s was due to their marginalization. Gender mainstreaming was designed to overcome this marginalization and to bring gender equality issues into the core of development activities. It should however be noted that gender mainstreaming goes beyond integrating women to create gender equality. The ultimate goal is not achieving women's equality with men, but transforming unjust structures of power in all its forms to promote women's empowerment in relation to opportunities, rights, freedom, decision-making and social justice. As such, mainstreaming gender into national development plans is a strategy for enacting the Gender and Development approach.

Sustainable National Development: Sustainable development refers to the conservation, reservation, usage and management of resources so that what we do to improve life and living standard today does not compromise future use of such resources and improvement in the quality of life for all people. It is the continuous and sustained qualitative improvement in overall standard of living of people in a society or nation and the structural transformation and changes in the productive and distributive input and output systems of the economy. To Wikipedia, it is:

An organizing principle for meeting human development goals while simultaneously sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services on which the economy and society depend. The desired result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used to continue to meet human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural system. Sustainable development can be defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Wikipedia, sustainable...n.p).

Sustainability goals, such as the current UN-level Sustainable Development Goals, address the global challenges, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. As the concept of sustainable development developed, it has shifted its focus more towards the economic development, social development and environmental protection for future generations. However, a nation or community could be said to have attained or be on the part of sustainable development when members of that community or society could boast of improved condition of living on a continuous basis over a reasonable period of time. Sustainable development as a goal therefore entails the eradication of poverty in terms of physical and non-physical needs; and quality of life beyond mere sustenance which implies human dignity and liberty. World Commission on Environment (1987) defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs". These needs

include food, housing, clothing, health, education industrial and agricultural development, preservation and protection of the environment to enable people to live a comfortable life. In recent time, gender equality has been linked with sustainable development in economic literatures. According to Pathania, (2017) sustainable development depends on an equitable distribution of resources and it cannot be achieved without gender equality. Gender Equity is the process of allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex...and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females (Pathania, 2017).

Gender Inequality in Nigeria

The issue of gender inequality in Nigeria has generated a lot of debates and calls for a more gender sensitive and balanced society. It is influenced by different cultures, beliefs and religion. In most parts of Nigeria, women are culturally subordinate to their male counterparts. Makama, GodiyaAllanana in her work *Patriarchy And Gender Inequality In Nigeria: The Way Forward* opines:

“In Nigeria, it is observed that the womanhood is reduced to a mere infidel and a second-class citizen, hence, there is the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the „Kitchen“. This trend has brought about tremendous misrepresentation of women right at the level of the family down to the circular society. The Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women” (115).

While one may disagree with her in some positions, like the womanhood being reduced to a mere infidel and a second-class citizen, this may not properly represent the present situation, however, it is difficult to fault the second position that there is a commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the „Kitchen“. who can forget President Buhari’s 2017 chauvinistic gaffe – “I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room”. This is perhaps one of the biggest public admissions of how little respect is placed on the political opinion and participation of women in leadership in Nigeria. The implication of this is that it widens the poverty gap. According to the World Poverty Clock, the number of Nigerians who are extremely poor – those living on under \$1.90 a day is now 94m and rising, making the country the poverty capital of the world. Startling as this data may be, the true scale of the problem of poverty in Nigeria only becomes more apparent when you consider the fact that women, who make up about 50% of Nigeria's population, account for more than 70% of those in extreme poverty. This is why poverty is currently seen as a gender issue. Writing for *New African Magazine.com*, OnyedimmakachukwuObiukwu in his work, *Gender Equality: Nigeria must Mind the Wide Gap* maintains:

When you look at the 17 action points of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is the most comprehensive global roadmap to shared

human progress, it is impossible to overlook the centrality of its call for gender equality and reducing inequalities. Indeed, it is improbable that the world could attain significant success in almost any action area of the SDGs – from ensuring quality health care, education and sanitation for all to reducing poverty, ending hunger, providing productive employment or enabling strong institutions – without achieving strongly in gender equality and reducing inequalities. (Gender Equality...n.p).

This is even scarier for Nigeria, where the gender bias is not only keeping women down, but also restraining the country from nearing its massive potential. Obiukwu observes that “Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) could grow by 23% – or \$229bn – by 2025 if women participated in the economy to the same extent as men.... Forty per cent of girls are out of school in Nigeria, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and even those who make it into school have an average school life expectancy of 9 years, as against 17 years in the developed world.” In health care, Nigerian women are heavily short-changed in their reproductive rights, and they suffer one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. In finance, nearly 7 in 10 women are unbanked, with more than half of them financially excluded. And across the legal institutions and family structures, socio-cultural determinants continue to lead to the treatment of women as being inferior to their male counterparts. The great thing is, Nigerian girls and women are already excelling in all of these areas, demonstrating how they can be the springboard Nigeria needs to fulfil its socioeconomic potential.

The Place of Women in Nigeria's Constitution

Gender gaps in Nigeria constitution can be seen through the language of the Constitution. The language in which the Constitution is written betrays its seeming desire to continue with the patriarchal tradition of our society. The pronoun “he” appears in the 1999 Constitution 235 times (FGN Constitution, 1999) and the word women is used only two times. See section 26(2)(a) and 29(4)(b) (1999, Constitution). In terms of indigene-ship, there is a continued ambiguity about the “origin” of women who marries a man from other ethnic or geographical area to hers. In their work, *Gender Mainstreaming and Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals: Does Nigeria Have the Political Will to Successfully Work the Talk*, E. P. Archibong, et al, observe that “The reality of most women in this category is that they lack any definitive claim to the area they left or that to which they married into. In some instances, women have been denied their rights to appointive or political positions due to the fact that they can no longer claim their original place of origin or that of their husbands” (23). Furthermore, speaking of the right to dignity of womanhood, section 34 of the 1999 Constitution generally speak to right of dignity of human persons, however does not touch on the specificity of women's rights to be free from harmful traditional practices which includes traditional practices which includes widowhood practices, female genital cutting, force marriages and others which have constituted a continuing threat to the lives of women in Nigeria. Other aspects of the 1999 Constitution that are injurious to women are in the aspect of the political rights, right to inheritance and many more.

The Buhari's Administration and Women in Power

Nigerian politics is one of the areas in dire need of gender-focused inclusion. According to a feature on women in politics in Nigeria, published by UN Women just before the country's 2019 elections, the country has one of the lowest rates of female representation in parliament across Africa. Globally, Nigeria ranks 181st out of 193 countries. In the national polls held shortly after, only 5 out of 73 candidates running for President were women. Women comprised just 12% of the candidates for senatorial seats and were only 560 in number, as against 4139, in the race for places in the House of Representatives. The results after the elections were even worse; only 62 women came out on top, constituting a meagre 4% of elected officials, according to the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). However, in President Muhammadu Buhari's new cabinet, only 7 women made the cut, making up a little above 16% of the federal ministers. For a country where more than 49% of the population, over 90m people, are women, such under-representation should trigger a concerted collaborative effort to correct matters. But when a president says "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room", what do you do. E. P. Archibong, et al, maintain that "The legacy of misogyny, chauvinism and suppression of the voice of women permeates human history" (22). However, several countries in Africa have since taken remarkable steps to address gender imbalance. Unfortunately, not Nigeria, where it is still a great privilege for millions of girl-children to access basic education, where underage marriage remains rampant and permitted under law, just as gender discrimination and domestic abuse hardly ever register any legal proceedings despite their pervasiveness. It is hard to imagine active political participation from such women. At the moment, civil society groups are the frontbenchers in this cause, but only with greater commitment across every level of government and a sustained engagement with the public can anything change in this regard.

Gender Mainstreaming in Nigeria

It is common knowledge that traditions, customs, sexual stereotyping of social roles and cultural prejudice continue to militate against enjoyment of rights and full participation of women on an equal basis with men in national development in Africa. And although there are discriminations in Nigerian national and state statutes, mainstreaming gender has been recognized as a cross-cutting issue in our national development agenda. In this recognition, a national gender policy (NGP) has been developed in Nigeria to replace an erstwhile National Policy on women, to actually; eliminate all such bearers; advance gender equality and reduce poverty levels; not only economically empowering women through income earnings, but also consciously empowering them to own production assets. For effective implementation of this policy, a national gender strategic framework (NGSF) was developed.

The NGSF outlined explicit implementation, monitoring and evaluation guidelines for achieving measurable targets and enhancing accountability to gender equality and

women empowerment. The objectives of the NGP are highlighted below as they constitute the driving force behind the strategic framework: (i) Establish the framework for gender responsiveness in all public and private spheres; (ii) Develop and apply gender mainstreaming approaches, tools and instruments; (iii) Adopt gender mainstreaming as a core value and practice in social transformation, organizational cultures and in the general polity in Nigeria; (iv) Incorporate the principles of CEDAW and other global and regional frameworks that support gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria's laws, legislative processes, and judicial and administrative system; (v) Achieve minimum threshold of representation for women in order to promote equal opportunities in all areas of political, social and economic life; (vi) Undertake women and men specific projects as a means of developing their capabilities, and; (vii) Educate and sensitize all stakeholders on the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment to the attainment of overall national development. (NBS)

As a nation, we are challenged by values, and we are using global standard instruments to formulate and assess our progress and achievements. These instruments are goals in themselves and tools for raising standards and informing the way policy and institutions work on the issues of gender equality and women's empowerment. According to the NBS, "Nigeria has made significant and satisfactory progress in the overall advancement and empowerment of women, particularly in the area of school attendance rates of girls, literacy rate of women and labour force participation rate of women". However, this is not the case in political participation. Although women make up about half of the electorate in Nigeria, and have attained the right to vote and hold public office in all the states of Nigerian federation, they continue to be under represented as members of National parliament. The importance of women's political empowerment has been recognized within the frame work of MDGs, one of the indicators for monitoring goal 3 which is on promoting gender equality and empowering women, being the proportion of seats held by women in both the lower and upper houses of the National assembly. Here is a clear indication that the trend of our women political participation has been that of serious deterioration and marginalization.

Gender Mainstreaming and Sustainable Development

It is close to impossible to talk about sustainable development when half of humanity is not considered in core decision making areas. How then can one consciously involve every part of humanity in the scheme of things without gender mainstreaming" It is somewhat impossible, hence the urgent need to mainstream gender in our various policy making processes. E. P. Archibong, et al, opine that "Gender mainstreaming analytically connotes the use of two hands by individuals when clapping or washing. It is very obvious that one cannot clap with one hand; neither can one effectively wash only one hand without rubbing both hands and/or the two together" (33). This simple analogy of the functionality of both hands found in the human body essentially illustrates the importance of gender mainstreaming in human society. In other words, making both men and women equally relevant in the scheme of affairs in every society is the right step in the right direction to sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming implies

including women and men in all spheres of decision making and development programmes as a policy issue. In short, it is a strategy for bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society to ensure gender equality and sustainable development. This strategy was established and brought to limelight in the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men's views, contributions as well as gains are equally represented without discrimination (World Bank). The importance of equal opportunities and participation in all spheres of life and endeavours has been advocated at all levels of society, because without this, sustainable development will be difficult to attain. Scholars and feminist theorists in all academic spheres have in recent times, created awareness concerning the nature and ills of gender inequality to include impediment to sustainable development amongst others.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or Global Goals are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs were set up in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly and are intended to be achieved by the year 2030. They are included in a UN Resolution called the 2030 Agenda or what is colloquially known as Agenda 2030. The SDGs were developed in the Post-2015 Development Agenda as the future global development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals which ended in 2015. The 17 SDGs are: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Reducing Inequality, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, and Partnerships for the Goals.

Though the goals are broad and interdependent, two years later precisely in July 06, 2017, the SDGs were made more "actionable" by a UN Resolution adopted by the General Assembly. The resolution identifies specific targets for each goal, along with indicators that are being used to measure progress toward each target. The year by which the target is meant to be achieved is usually between 2020 and 2030. For some of the targets, no end date is given. (Wikipedia, Sustainable...n.p).

The Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

The world leaders present at the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, took another historic step when they adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development envisions a present and a future that is economically sustainable, socially inclusive and environmentally resilient. This is expressed in the framing of the 17 SDGs, 169 targets and 230 key performance indicators. Stated simply, the SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty,

safeguard the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by the year 2030. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Nigeria began to implement the SDGs almost immediately. First, it established institutional frameworks at the national and sub-national levels to support effective implementation. With this early head start, several strategic initiatives were implemented between 2016 and now, while others are still ongoing. Nevertheless, just as Nigeria commenced the „Decade of Action“ for the SDGs in January 2020, the outbreak of COVID-19 took place, thus challenging the prospects of achieving the SDGs in Nigeria. (Archibong, et al.). However, if Nigeria is really serious and sincere in bringing in mainstreaming gender, the same effort geared towards arresting infectious diseases like Ebola, Covid - 19, etc should be given to mainstreaming gender.

General Principles Guiding Gender Mainstreaming

The realization of gender equality is a goal that needs to be achieved across international and global spheres. Gender equality does not mean that women and men have become the same, but that their behaviour, aspirations, opinions are equally valued and that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on their gender differences which is a social construction of identity. Equality means that men and women are able to enjoy equal status, entitlement, rights, access to assets, services without limitation imposed by gender norms and stereotypes. These gender norms or roles define how, who, why, when women and men should hold positions of power, how they access resources, what decisions are made regarding reproduction, sexuality, family planning, marriage, labour within household. (E. P. Archibong, et al:23) Recognizing and understanding these facts, therefore, go a long way in addressing the underlying cause of women's right violation and may provide guidance towards minimizing constraints to equal rights, choices and opportunities of women and girls. UNESCO derives the following eight guiding principles for its gender-mainstreaming policy:

Recognition: Gender issues permeate all aspects of international co-operation, its management systems, personnel policies, organizational culture and working methods and the issues it addresses, from policy planning, programming and implementation to evaluation. Acknowledging this fact is necessary to tackle the systemic barriers to gender equality.

Diversity and Intersection: Policies, programmes and projects affect women and men differently but not all women and all men experience the same form of genderbased discrimination and marginalization. Sub-groups of men and subgroups of women may experience specific gender inequalities that must be acknowledged and documented to be adequately addressed.

Equality: Gender equality requires the protection and promotion of human rights for all: the rights of young and adult men and women, boys and girls; Equality also implies ensuring equal opportunities;

Equity: Specific measures that favour the most disadvantaged sex must be designed to

eliminate disparities between the sexes, sexist-stereotypes and discrimination. Equity compensates for unequal opportunities and guarantees the fairness of our programmes.

Empowerment and Agency: Individual and collective empowerment is central for boys, girls, young and adult women and men to meet their immediate practical needs as well as their long term strategic interests. It begins with consciousness-raising and leads to self-realization. UNESCO must support processes that increase women's and men's self-confidence, develop their self-reliance, and help them set their own agenda;

Participation and Parity: Equal participation of young and adult men and women as agents of change in economic, social and political processes is essential to achieving gender equality.

Partnership between Women and Men: Empowering women does not mean excluding men. It is about establishing partnerships between women and men that empower both sexes. This implies giving an equally pivotal role to men and women in creating more equal societies.

Social Justice: Though gender inequality breeds poverty, anti-poverty measures alone cannot redress gender inequalities. Poverty reduction efforts must be coupled with actions to eliminate gender inequality in order to be truly effective (UNESCO, 2007).

Policies and Programmes in Nigeria aimed at Bridging the Gender Gap.

The following policies and programmes were put forward to bridge the gender gap in Nigeria.

Better life for Rural Women (1987): This was launched by Maryam Babangida. A program aimed at empowering women through the development of skills that would improve the financial status of women amongst other things. This program targeted rural women. The goal was to enable women irrespective of their background, location or their level of education.

Family Support Programme (1994): This programme was created by Miriam Abacha as an empowerment programme not just to women but the family. FSP gave way for the establishment of the National Commission for Women affairs by Stella Obasanjo in 1999. This ministry was created to specifically deal with issues of empowerment and poverty alleviation of women and catering for and improving the wellbeing of women (Archibong, et al: 25).

Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP): This came in 1988 and was one of the programmes to handle the gender gap in the country. FEAP was a micro credit scheme whose primary goals were to create investment opportunities for economic development. The aim was to engender economic activities of the rural dwellers and provide opportunities for rural dwellers to generate more income to enhance their quality of life. This was to be done through promoting entrepreneurship. The overall goal was to

foster greater economic advantages to the poor in rural communities with the understanding that extending services to the rural areas would be beneficial to the women (Akintola, 2001).

The National Policy on women (2000): This was a programme formulated in the hope to ensure justice, freedom, basic human rights and most of all equality across gender.

National Gender Policy: This programme was adopted in 2006 by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. The major goals of this policy is to build or create a just society devoid of discrimination; also to harness the full potential of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstances, and to promote the enjoyment of fundamental human right and protect the health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all citizens in other to achieve equitable rapid economic.

Poverty Alleviation: This programme was established in 1999 and had provided an avenue for women to advance in the area of politics. This is because it is an institution created specially to facilitate the mobilization and involvement of women in National, State and Local Government Affairs (Archibong, et al. 26). Sadly, all these policies/programmes and others not discussed are yet to bridge the gender gap in a considerable manner, hence the urgent need for gender mainstreaming.

Challenges Affecting Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria

The challenges facing women are enormous, however, researchers have shown that the under listed are likely responsible for the huge marginalization of Nigerian women in politics.

Patriarchy: It refers to a society ruled and dominated by men over women, which in turn has given rise to women being looked upon as mere household wives and nonpartisans in decision making process in households not to talk of coming out to vie for political positions.

Stigmatization: following the way politics in Nigeria is played, it is being perceived that it is for individuals that have no regards for human right and are quick at compromising their virtue for indecent gains. Therefore, women aspirants who ventured into politics are looked upon as shameless and promiscuous.

Low level of education: The low participation of women in education is also part of the shortcomings. The National Adult Literacy Survey, 2010 published by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that the adult literacy rate in English in Nigeria is 50.6 per cent while literacy in any other language is 63.7 per cent (female adult age 15 and above). This explains why most women are least qualified for political offices due to low educational attainment. This is also an effect of colonialism and militocracy, where men were more favoured than women.

Meeting Schedules: The time scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out

political plans either for the pre or post- election periods are odd and is not conducive for responsible and family women. The slated time are often time which women are expected to take care of their children and family. This method of schedules is viewed as an attempt to side-lining women from engaging in political process

Financing: Competing for political positions in Nigerian requires huge financial backup. Most Nigerian women who seek these positions could not afford meeting the financial obligations therein, despite the wavers giving to women aspirants by some of the political parties. And so, they could do little or nothing to outweigh their male counterparts.

Political Violence: Nigerian elections have always been characterized by one form of violence or another since the return of democracy. Female aspirants of various political parties cannot withstand political violence; therefore, women participation in politics is drastically reduced.

Religious and Cultural Barriers: Both Christianity and Islam do not accord women much role in public life, and same is obtainable in most cultural values, and other religions where women are seen culturally as quite submissive and image of virtue. However, they are not to be seen in public domain. And so it is a challenge to women participation in politics, more so, women found in the corridor of politics are not often religious in practice.

Recommendations

When the public and private sectors work together for a cause, change happens. The most recent evidence of this is Nigeria's eradication of Ebola, polio and even the efforts towards Covid-19. In the case of polio, while it may have taken more than three decades of sustained effort and over a billion dollars in what has been tagged "the largest global health intervention ever attempted", the biggest lesson from Nigeria's eventual eradication of the infectious incurable disease is the value of intra-institutional collaboration in facing up to any social issue. McKinney's report on the polio eradication effort describes it as featuring a "War Room Approach", whereby leaders of national and international organisations met regularly "to develop and execute eradication strategies, improve vaccination campaigns, and respond immediately to outbreaks". (Archibong, et al: 27). The fight for gender equality requires a similar such effort; multidimensional, intersectional and long-term, but with a singular focus on uplifting all women in politics, in the workplace and across social strata. If the government genuinely put up such efforts, gender inequality in Nigeria in no distance time will become a history.

Conclusion

From the discussions, it seems that Nigeria lacks the political will to successfully drive the process of gender mainstreaming and gender balancing in politics, economy, religious and cultural activities" Generally, women have not been fairly treated in all spheres of human endeavor and these challenges militate against effective implementations of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria. The problem of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria is more

worrisome given the numbers of policies and conventions endorsed by successive political leadership in the country that are yet to be implemented. This has contributed greatly to the reason why Nigeria is still poor and underdeveloped despite her abundant resources. Presently the body language of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari, does not seem to be in support of gender mainstreaming. The president's recently statement that his wife belongs to his kitchen, his living room and the other room! By extension, almost all women in Nigeria carry this burden of exclusion. Certainly, when confined in such obscure rooms in a man's house, scholars have argued that the talents and potentials of women to excel in the society will to a large extent be truncated. The subjugation and relegation of women to the background should be erased by a strong political will to mainstream gender, because it is going to fast-track our quest for gender equality, inclusiveness and sustainable national development.

Works Cited

- Akintola, A. E. "Current Status of Poverty in Nigeria". Paper presented at the Centre of General and Social Policy Studies, Ife: O.A.U. 2001.
- Archibong, E. P. et al, "Gender Mainstreaming and Attainment of Sustainable Development Goals: Does Nigeria Have the Political Will to Successfully Work the Talk?" in *Global Journal of Social Sciences* Vol 17, 2018: 21-29. Retrieved from <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjss.v17i1.3>
- Bunnin, N. & Yu, J. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*. Handback: Blackwell, 2004.
- CARICOM, <https://caricom.org/>
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (Nigeria), Act No. 24, 5th May 1999. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_and_development
- Makama, A. "Patriarchy and Gender Inequality in Nigeria: The Way Forward". *European Scientific Journal*. Vol.9, No. 17, 115-144, 2013. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2013.v9n17p%25p>
- NBS. *Monitoring Participation of Women in Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>
- Onyedimmakachukwu, Obiukwu. *GenderEquality:Nigeriamustmindthewidegap*, retrieved from <https://newafricanmagazine.com/19891/>
- Pathania, K. "Sustainable Development Goal: Gender Equality for Women Empowerment and Human Rights", *International Journal of Research*, 5(4), 1-15, 2017.
- UN ECOSOC. *Mainstreaming the Gender Perspective into all Policies and Programmes in the United Nations System*. New York: UN ECOSOC, 1997.
- UN women, *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohch.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages>
- UNDP, <https://www.undp.org/>
- UNESCO., 2007. *UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Resource Center*: Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/women>
- WCED, *Sustainable Development* retrieved from <https://sustainable.development.un.org/milestones/wced>
- World Bank, *Gender*, Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender>