

Chapter Eight

AN APPRAISAL OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

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Abstract

Since the Implementation Plan of Action on Nigeria Gender Policy lapsed in 2013, it appears that few studies have undertaken an appraisal of the policy and its achievement. This study attempts an appraisal using reports from empirical studies, international index and rankings. Preliminary findings suggest downward ranking and insignificant achievement of the objectives of the policy. These findings call for urgent remedial actions that should commence with a re-examination of the Gender Policy using Jenkins's characteristic factors for viable policies.

Keywords: *Nigeria, Gender Policy, appraisal, achievements, re-examination*

Introduction

A giant step towards achieving gender equality and equity was taken in 2006 when the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria approved the National Gender Policy for the nation. This approval was followed by a bolder step in 2008, when the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development under its National Gender Policy Strategic Framework (Strategic Development Results Framework) launched its Implementation Plan, an exercise that took eight months to complete. The timeline for the implementation was given – 2009 – 2013. The Implementation Plan mandated among others, the Federal Ministry of Education and the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) to produce school curricula for primary and secondary schools that will reflect the changing gender roles. Since 2013, it appears, to the best of my knowledge there has been no empirical appraisal of the policy and its implementation. Thus in this chapter we attempt an appraisal of the policy using published research works, national and international indexes and rankings. This chapter is divided into three main sections: a recap of the policy, a review of appraisal of studies, rankings and indexes and the way forward towards achieving the set goals of the gender policy.

2.0 Nigeria National Gender Policy and the Implementation Plan

Nigeria is signatory to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women), UN Millennium Goals, Commonwealth

Gender Equality Plan, EFA (Education for All by 2015 and their statements and objectives which include bridging the gender gap and entrenching gender equality and equity in government and non-governmental activities, programmes and sectors. By its signatory to these treaties and goals, Nigeria commits itself to pursuing gender equality and equity among its citizenry irrespective of ethnicity, class, and sex. It must be added that the Federal Constitution of Nigeria provides for equal rights of male and female – “women are to be treated in the same manner as men...” (Section 2 of the Constitution). However, the lack of clearly and practical government and nongovernmental activities and programmes geared towards achieving gender equality might render the entire venture a bold paperwork. This observation informed the bolder step of developing a national gender policy with a well-articulated implantation plan. Thus in the year 2006, the Federal Executive Council, which is the highest authority in the nation’s government formally, approved the National Gender Policy for Nigeria thus empowering the relative and appropriate ministries and parastatals, agencies of the government including private institutions and bodies to embark on meaningful implementation of gender equality policy, plan and programmes that are built on laudable core principles that will provide ample platforms for private and public bodies, through programmes and activities, to pursue gender equality.

The principles are:

- (i) making gender analysis an integral part of all policy articulation, implementation and evaluation undertaken by not only by Government at all tiers and within all arms, but also by all stakeholders;
- (ii) making all stakeholders, including government, the private sector, civil society organisations, and community based organisations, development partner, and individual women and men have a role to play in the achievement of gender equity and equality;
- (iii) instituting a gendered culture that brings about cooperative interaction between women and men, recognising the human rights of all persons through a culture which respects women’s and men’s capabilities and entails cooperation and interdependence;
- (iv) allowing a cultural re-orientation that will be supported by policies and programmes of gender education, sensitisation, dialogues, incentives, motivation and responsiveness, rather than only through legislation;
- (v) putting in place transformation of the policy environment within which gender equity programmes are to be implemented, supported by resources – financial and technical, demonstrating political will
- (vi) reforming of the existing structures of the national gender management system with a view to strengthening their capacity for a more robust mandate

- (vii) promoting the empowerment of women through the bridging of existing gender gaps will be considered integral to the achievement of gender equality, and using policies and legislation of affirmative action if necessary and would no way be deemed discriminatory;
- (viii) the Policy builds on existing structures and practices as well as draw from international experiences and practices.

It might not be out of place to profile the set objectives of the National Gender Policy (henceforth NGP), at this point. To profile the objectives of the NGP are to:

- (i) create an enabling policy environment for translating government commitment to gender equality in the reality;
- (ii) established policies, programmes, structures and mechanisms to empower women and to transform gender relations in all aspects of work at all levels of government as well as within the broader society;
- (iii) ensure that gender considerations are effectively integrated into all aspects of government policies activities and programmes;
- (iv) establish an institutional framework for the advancement of the status of women as well as the achievement of gender equality;
- (v) strengthening the voice of women in society, in Parliament and in other legislatures who have already made visible impact by challenging gender blind laws and policies;
- (vi) enhancing the work that is already being undertaken by ministries at the national, state and local government levels and those of other development agencies committed to issues of women empowerment, gender equality and equity for all;
- (vii) and guide the development of the National Action Plan
(Source NGAP G6:10 cited in Kura and Yero, 12, 13).

Appraisal

Reports, studies, local and international rankings and index are used for the appraisal. Interestingly, the reports of some studies readily highlight the successes or otherwise of the set objectives of the Gender Policy. Amongst them are Bakari, 2009; British Council, 2012; Mustapha, 2012; Kura and Yero, 2013 to mention four works since. For example, National and International Gender Equality Rankings, Social Institutions and Gender Index, Global Gender Gap Index among others have empirical submissions. In this section (3.0), I shall review some their submissions.

Bakari, examined gendered inequalities in Nigerian secondary schools covering areas such as education system, process and practices - school and class environments, school management, teachers, students, textbooks and learning materials and classroom processes, he found that:

both institutional (school-related) and societal factors have a strong influence on the preservation, refining and transmitting of gendered beliefs and practices in the schools surveyed. The schools appear to be erecting powerful barriers to females' entry into the world of work. This is being done through the inculcation of the belief that boys should be prepared to dominate their physical environment, while girls should be prepared for marriage, child rearing and playing second fiddle in society. ...apart from deliberate discrimination against girls in the types, forms and processes of education provided for them, their personal integrity is also at times attached in schools. (257).

In fact, Bakari reported that the education managers that were interviewed in his study are gender-unaware "...because they feel strongly that gender issues should not be considered or infused in the preparation of curricula themes, schemes of work or lesson delivery, because there is no glaring gender disparity in the current uniform practices" (247).

The Commonwealth of Nations also sponsored gender analysis research in seven countries, namely, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Samoa, Seychelles, and Trinidad and Tobago in 2007. The rationale for the research was based on the question of access to schools in developing countries. The report of the research on this subject indicated high levels of gender disparity and inequality in selected Commonwealth countries. According to this research report edited by Page and Jha:

the three least developed countries, India, Pakistan and Nigeria were found to have much lower participation rates of girls at secondary level, due to a variety of factors including affordability and parental expectations. Boys were found to be under-performing in the other four countries, in the Seychelles and in Samoa by 15 per cent, according to exam pass rates studied (cited in Rowe, :35).

The research tends to emphasize gender parity (quantitative education) rather than gender equality (qualitative education). In the same vein, other hidden areas where the school system or education process engenders gender inequality were either partially addressed or excluded from the researchers' undertakings. However, their report is significant in their assessment of the implementation of the Gender Policy since one of the objectives is related with providing equal opportunities for all the citizenry.

It must be noted that this study was carried out before the Implementation Plan of 2009 although the researched came on after the approval of the policy in 2006. In what follows, we shall examine studies, ranking and index that fall within the Implementation period 2009-13 and after 2013. The British Council examined gender issues in Nigeria with the sole aim of improving the lives of girls and women. It reported that Nigeria population of 165 million then has a magnitude percentage of women estimated to be 49% while observing that any discussion about Nigeria's future must necessarily entail consideration of girls and women, the role they play and the barriers they face in making the future. According to the report of the research, women are Nigeria's hidden resource...(therefore) investing in women and girls now will increase productivity in this generation and will promote sustainable growth, peace and better health for the next generation. What happens here to women and girls matters, not least for realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Amongst its key findings are:

- (i) women and girls have significantly worse life chances than men and also their sisters;
- (ii) excellent policies and intentions have not translated into budgets or action to make the changes required if women are to contribute effectively to Nigeria's development;
- (iii) the National Gender Policy has yet to bear fruit, while implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has stalled;
- (iv) only 9% of those who stood for election in Nigeria's April 2011 National Assembly elections were women...which is below the global average and well behind South Africa and Rwanda;
- (v) women are under-represented in all political decision-making bodies and their representation has not increased since the inception of democratic rule;
- (vi) more women than men register to vote, but women are excluded from decision-making at all levels - by male dominated patronage networks.

These findings do not only indicate the rating of Nigeria in terms of gender equality among other nations of the world but also highlight the failure of its gender policy and intention which according to the report "... have not translated into budgets or action to make the changes required if women are to contribute effectively to Nigeria's development". Although this research revealed useful statistical facts and other findings that should provide the platform for the next plan of actions that should be geared toward achieving gender equality, it appears even 2019, the uphill movement towards gender equality is turning downhill. In fact, it appears

that certain core areas of gender mainstreaming such as learning materials used for those who attend school, learners who drop from formal schooling and/or do not pick up formal job or become members of decision-makers are not accounted for or thought of in their investigation. Again, the oversight is understandable because gender bias in learning materials, children who are out or dropped out of the school system have not been given due attention. In fact, the role that learning materials play in socializing the child's gender identity which might promote either gender in/equality is hidden to some stakeholders. However, the state of gender equality and equity in Nigeria is evident in the report. In the next section, we shall examine studies on learning materials, learners and the others.

The subject of learners and their learning materials has been investigated under what many scholars in the area termed hidden or informal curriculum. For example, this hidden curriculum in the learning materials used for school children preoccupied Mustapha, (2014a; 2014b). He examined sex roles and gender representation in the learning materials for secondary school students in Nigeria. His findings amongst others show that "women are over-represented in roles confined to the home domain – childbearing, caring, and home chores, males are over-represented in roles in public sphere in highly professional skills. Thus his findings suggest perpetuation of sex stereotypes and traditional roles that reflect neither the current lived experiences of males and females in society nor support the objectives of the national gender policy that are geared towards achieving gender equality for national development. Similarly the representation study (2014b) also confirms his earlier findings where" males are rendered more visible in the public sphere than females; the latter are rendered more visible in the home sphere than males who are rarely represented in that domain. Thus the findings strongly suggest that the learning materials are gender-biased learning materials and would be inimical to achieving gender equality in and through education.

The literature on the importance of educational materials in achieving gender equality and national development is very robust. For example, Ullah and Skelton (2012:02) observe the significance of textbooks as a means of addressing some of the more stereotypical messages about gender conveyed in the teaching of curriculum. It has also been noted in another study that "textbooks present (a) key opportunity for closing the gender gap. It seems desirable to commission textbooks which redress the identified imbalance". For Wharton gender portrayal in children's books is important from a number of philosophical perspectives (238). It may be seen for example, as reflecting current social values and behaviour (Peterson and Lach, 1990) as constructing identities which are offered to children for them to aspire (Baker and Peter, 1989; Davies, 1993) and as impacting on relationships in society as a whole

(Adler, Laney, and Packer, 1993 Cited in Ullah and Skelton). For these important roles Ullah and Skelton note:

The knowledge presented in school textbooks and conveyed in the curriculum are imbued with issues of gender, culture and power (McLaren, 1989). That is why school textbooks have been identified as one important contributor to the formation of gender identities and reinforces gender discrimination and the dominant social structures of a society. Gender representation in children's books is important from a number of philosophical perspectives (2).

Although it is very crucial to have curriculum reforms, however, leaving educational materials that children use regularly at school and at home with gender biasness may not help achieve the goals that the reformed curriculum is set to achieve. Thus Treichler and Frabk (1989) argue that gender-biased depiction in textbooks might well affect children's choice of careers. Others have argued that students develop self-esteem and a sense of themselves in society when they see their "appropriately gendered role models" in books and other education materials (Campbell, 2010) just as Ullah and Skelton argue that:

gender biases in textbooks may have an adverse effect on both girls and boys; the implications for girls are that by restricting their reading to existing "female roles" and their part in patriarchal structures they are not being provided with opportunities to look beyond these. The concern being voiced here is that this marginalised and essentialist representation of females mean that "real" women's lives, women's wishes, their capabilities and interests are not being given space or acknowledged in any way in the school curriculum materials (9).

In the preceding paragraphs, we shall examine international rankings and index.

The Global Gender Gap Report which was first published in 2006 by the World Economic Body Forum has the 2012 report covering 135 major and emerging economies and indicates the Global Gender Gap Index. The report's Gender Gap Index ranks countries according to their gender gaps, and their scores can be interpreted as the percentage of the inequality between women and men that has been closed. Information about gender imbalances to the advantage of women is explicitly prevented from affecting the score. Nigeria is ranked 110th among the 135 countries in 2012 with 0.6315 as against 0.6011

in 2011. The report examines four critical areas (economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, health and survival) of inequality between men and women in 130 economies around the globe, over 93% of the world’s population

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_Gender_Gap_Report_30/10/2013)

A further examination of the Gender Gap index reveals the progress made in Educational Attainment. (See the Table below)

Rank	Score	Sample average	Female	Male	Female to male Ratio
Educational Attainment	125	0.809	0.9	20	
Literacy rate	122	0.69	0.86	50	72 0.69
Enrolment in primary Edu.	125	0.90	0.98	58	64 0.90
Enrol in secondary edu.	124	0.77	0.90	22	29. 0.77
Enrol in tertiary Edu	111	0.70	0.86	8	12 0.70

(Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2011)

The most recent evidence that corroborate the above results is the 2018 Global Gender Gap Index which ranks Nigeria 133 out of the 149 countries of the world with 0.621 this is the progress over time. This index offers a benchmarking tool to track progress and to reveal best practices across countries and subjects. The Global Gender Gap Report 2018 provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the global gender gap and of efforts and insights to close it. The summative remarks about Nigeria according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2018 reads thus: “Nigeria (133) continues last year’s downward trend, falling several ranks this year while this is partially due to newly available data revealing a larger-than-before gender gap among legislators, senior officials and managers, the country also sees some reversal of past progress on Educational Attainment and in healthy life expectancy (www.weforum.org , 27).

What is worrisome is the downward trend in the global gender gap of the country which suggests that the zeal first recorded in the yesteryears has waned and urgent actions are required to arrest the situation. The submission of these studies and reports provide objective information for the implementation plan scorecard. However, rather than discredit the activities of the stakeholders (planners and implementers) which to certain extent are commendable at the early years of the Implementation Plan, the evidences from the scorecards provided by the above reports, studies, rankings and international index call for urgent attention as it appears that the achievements thus far cannot be labelled as part of the success stories of the planners and Implementation bodies. In fact, the downward trend is a clarion call for immediate remedial actions.

4.0 Remedial Actions

One of such remedial actions is that the planners and Implementers should overhaul their strategies. A reasonable point to commence this remedial action should be re-examination of the policy as a kind of bottom-top approach. In what follows, I shall suggest what in the policy should be re-examined.

The first milestone in the re-examination process is the proper understanding of what a pragmatic policy is so that we determine whether the policy is viable or otherwise. According to Jenkins policies are a set of interrelated decisions by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve. According to him, the formulation of a viable and productive policy requires taking into consideration the following factors:

- (i) The policy should be socially feasible, with clearly defined attainable objectives;
- (ii) There should be a well-defined programme for attainment of the objectives;
- (iii) Appropriate implementation organisations should be carefully identified;
- (iv) Each organization should be assigned clearly defined responsibilities; and
- (v) It should not be politically insensitive and its implementation must be properly timed.

The definition or description and the characteristic factors of viable policies are important and should be used to re-examine Nigeria Gender Policy. In other words, is the policy socially feasible and are the objectives clearly defined and attainable? Has it well-defined programme for the attainment of the objectives? Are there appropriate implementation organisations that have been carefully identified? Has each organisation been assigned clearly defined responsibilities? Is the policy politically sensitive and its implementation properly timed? Although these questions should be taken up in relation to Nigeria's Gender Policy in a separate undertaking in order to do justice to them, in what follows, I shall provide an examination to the first factor – social feasibility and clearly defined attainable objectives.

The subject of social feasibility is important because cultures and societies are not the same. In other words, gender policy of a non-African country cannot be imported indiscriminately into an African country. In fact, though Africans have some common-core cultural traits and values that should not be overlooked yet Nigeria as a country has its peculiar traits that should be given due consideration in setting gender goals/objectives since no two African countries are absolutely the same. Therefore gender policy that is not sensitive to the peculiarity of the Nigerian culture and people are bound to remain

powerful paper works. Gender policy objectives that are extraneous to the cultures of the Nigerian people might be very if not nearly impossible to achieve. For example, men and women have distinctive domestic roles in the African context which do not overrule sharing. However, a reversal of those domestic and communal roles as we see in other parts of the world would be out of place in Nigeria. This continental peculiarities informed some gender experts (Jane Sunderland et al) between 2008 and 2010 to organize a sequence of five seminars titled **Language and Gender in African contexts** in Leeds (UK), Botswana, London (UK), Dschang (Cameroon) and Ile Ife (Nigeria) with one of the objectives which was to “tease out some of the discourses on gender that characterise gender and language study in African contexts”. The seminars gave birth to a book titled *Gender and Language in Sub-Saharan Africa: Tradition, struggle and change*. In stressing the Nigerian peculiarities, it must be noted that its peculiarities that should be given attention in the Gender Policy must not be obnoxious to the global modern happenings since the country is part of the global village and the same benchmark would be used to measure its gender policy and implementation.

A due consideration and further re-examination of the social relevance of the objectives will help to determine whether the objectives are achievable. The outcome of this exercise would help to fill the existing gap between the objectives and their social relevance to Nigeria and to the rest of the world would.

Conclusion

This paper has profiled some existing reports, studies index and ranking on the achievement of the Nigeria Gender Policy. Its submission based on these sources suggests not a failing policy but a policy that demands overhauling in order to achieve its set objectives. The downturn in the success stories of the gender equality and equity programme calls for urgent remedial actions. And one of such actions is a sequence of actions that should re-examine the Gender Policy in the light of the factors that should be considered in formulating viable policies.

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