

# Nigerian Gender Inequality: The Effect on National Development



Ezeji Onyedikachi C.E

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## Abstract

This paper is a survey of issues in gender inequality in Nigeria with consideration on the effects on national development. Gender inequality has been a topical issue in academic debate in Nigeria. In spite of the extensive discussions in various conferences, academic debates on the issue of gender imbalance and poor women participation in national development is still very low. The phenomenological, sociological and historical methods have been used in this research work. The data for this article were collected from published works, websites, seminar papers, newspapers and journals, etc. The aim of this paper is to stimulate more women into active participation in politics for social, educational, religious and economic development of the nation. The role of women in national development cannot be overemphasized as women have proven themselves to be efficient and effective in their various careers. The paper identifies the constitutional frame work and the patriarchy nature of the society as the reasons women tend to be in a disadvantaged position towards contributing to National development in Nigeria. In the light of the identified constraints this academic work seeks to proffer solutions to these constraints and call for active participation of women in national development.

**Keywords:** Gender, Inequality, Effect, National and Development

## Introduction

Gender inequality is the social phenomenon in which people are not treated equally on the basis of gender. This inequality can be caused by gender discrimination or sexism. The treatment may arise from distinctions regarding biology, psychology, or cultural norms prevalent in the society. Some of these distinctions are empirically grounded, while others appear to be social constructs. While current policies around the world cause inequality among individuals, it is women who are

most affected. Gender inequality weakens women in many areas such as health, education, and business life. Studies show the different experiences of genders across many domains including education, life expectancy, personality, interests, family life, careers, and political affiliation. Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures and also affects non-binary people.

### **Definition of Terms**

In this section we shall define our key terms in this discourse which

are: (1) Gender (2) Inequality (3) Effect (4) Development (5) National

#### **(1) Gender**

Gender refers to the economic, social, political, biological, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being women and men. The social definitions of what it means to be a woman or a man vary among cultures and change over time. Gender is a sociocultural expression of particular characteristics and roles that are associated with certain groups of people with reference to their sex and sexuality.

#### **(3) National**

National is an adjective that refers to something or someone that belongs to a nation or country. The word national describes anything that is common to, shared by, or represents a group of people or a place that is considered a nation, like the national anthem.

#### **(5) Inequality**

Social inequality is the condition of unequal access to the benefits and rights of society. In a purely equal society, every citizen is equally able to contribute to the overall wellbeing of that society, and they are equally able to benefit from their membership within that society.

#### **(7) Effects**

A change that results when something is done or happens: an event, condition, or state of affairs that is produced by a cause.

#### **(9) Development**

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediate, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.

### **The Effects of Gender Inequality on National Development**

While current policies around the world cause inequality among individuals, it is women who are most affected. Gender inequality weakens women in many areas such as health, education, and business life.

Therefore the effects of gender inequality in the development of the Nigeria society shall consider under the following: (1) Social (2) Economic (3) Education (4) Political (5) Religious

### **The Effects of Gender Inequality on the Social Development of the Nation**

Discriminatory Culture and Norms:

Agbalajobi 2010 postulates that the cultures of many societies are based by subjugating women to men, and undermining their self-esteem. Women are typically associated with domesticity.

According to Abiola in Lanre (2003), Gender inequality remains pervasive in many dimensions of life, the nature and extent of the discrimination very considerably across countries and regions. In Nigeria, the female are discriminate, even in the families. Consistently, men were trained not to partake in most domestic chores such as cooking, sweeping, fetching water and firewood, which are exclusively left for women.

In favor of this, Ihimodu (1995) agree that women were relegated to the domestic sphere that were not renovated or valued.

In line with these, Ogwu (1992) observed the implementation of gender differences are created and sustained by society through its traditional customs, conventions, norms and regulations. Obikeze (2006) posits that family responsibilities and child bearing to women makes women not to feature in public matters as they are likely to be away on maternity leave and other house hold matters and that are likely to take them away from the scene of politics.



Actually, the tradition or cultural beliefs in Nigeria as a typical patriarchal society see women as property of her husband who has moral right to decide the actions which the woman will take, whether she will come out to join in social activities is a matter which the man will decide since the tradition has ascribed the headship of the family to the man.

Ogunabayo (2011) added that Marriage institutions are still in the hands of the males, many sons after the death of their fathers try to push away their mothers from the property and also a woman have no custody of the children from her marriage in the events of divorce, making the women in question an object of caricature and of unimportance to the society. In some culture the choice of life partner is not made by the girl child rather the parents. Young girls are denied the right to choose their husbands, or even forced into early marriage, into the life of a man whether love is there or not. More so, some practice polygamy in order to have a male child because families without a male child are deprived some rights and privilege. Furthermore, women are being restricted from access to sources of power both economically, politically, socially and otherwise.

Conversely, the women in Igbo land are forbidden from being where men are discussing issues concerning landed property. Moreover, in Nigerian society, the role of men and women are socially constructed in such a way that the women occupy an inferior position in the scheme of things.

There are many obstacles and prejudices that prevents women from participating in the social activities or even owning properties, the society regards women as things to be possessed, as objects of rights rather than regards them fit. Take for instance, women are not allowed to bail somebody out of the police cell or to stand as a surety for somebody. In Nigeria, women ought to inherit their late husband's property. Often, these rights are being violated due to one reason or the other.

Therefore, cultural norms are unfavorable to the women folk. So, women need to embark on education as the only inspiration to redress their flight.

### **The Effects of Gender Inequality on the Educational Development of the Nation**

Educational Factors is another constraint that hampers women from equal access to society or obstacle restricting their quest to participate actively in the society.

Afolabi (2003) specifiably states that most women in Nigeria are illiterate despite the facts that they constitute half of the country's population. Regardless, of the vital key roles they perform in the

society; mother, producer, home manager, community organizer, social-cultural and political activities.

Anifowose (2004) postulates that most families prefer to send their male child to school, irrespective of the fact that female children are more important to attend school. In the words of Jonathan (2011) “Train a boy, you have trained a nation” in the same vein, Alita (2011) emphasis that parents prefers to send their son to school instead of their daughters whom they feel will after, get married and thus get incorporated into another family.

Therefore, the girls’ education is not pertinent as they are expected to marry, bear children and stay at home to nurture their children and the young girls are to nurture their siblings and to be married off at tender age.

Gaub (2004) analyses the report of the United Nations that women constitute 70% of the world’s illiterate. Gender gaps are spread in access to educational opportunities. Achieving literacy education is the most crucial step to enabling literate women to take control over their lives to participate as equals in society. Education gives women a sense of belonging in the society, as it will encourage them to make a positive impact in their chosen carrier.

Makinnen (1989) affirms that this marginally increases illiteracy in women and stiffen their competition with their male counterparts in the society. Invariably, lack of education makes women ineligible for either elective or appointment position. Professionally empowered, she will make use of her endowment in a positive way.

### **The Effects of Gender Inequality on the Economic Development of the Nation**

Lack of economic incentives is one of the factors preventing women from participating to actively in the development of the Nation. Historically, women experiences discrimination that put them at a disadvantage economically.

Agbalajobi (2009) emphasis that lack of finance brings hindrance to effective female participation in national development. Similarly, large portion of the Nigerian female population is not as financially strong as their male counterparts, which also affect their participation. Political campaigns are expensive and require solid financial backing for success. Only a few affluent women have the financial economic power to enroll in political campaigns. Consequently, political financiers or sponsors of politicians prefer male candidate to female one, Anifowose (2004).

Life for women is on the average not only hard and poorly compensated, it is dangerous due to

sexual division of labour and job opportunities offered on sex basis has given men productive gender roles enabling them to possess more purchasing power over their female counterparts. Discrimination plays out in the preferential treatment within the job economy. Presently, economic system, which is based on acute competition everywhere in the world, is always a very expensive project, while men are willing to take risks, including taking loans or selling their properties to finance their business. Women are averse to taking risks, or lack tangible properties to take off. Women national development aspirations have been grossly incapacitated by lack of financial bedrock to subsist their endeavors.

### **The Effects of Gender Inequality on the Political Development of the Nation**

According to Anifowose (2004), the perception that democracy would automatically boast gender equality in political participation has not been vindicated after years of return to civilian rule in Nigeria. Specifically Kira (2003) infers that women are unjustifiably discriminated against irrespective of the fact that world over today; democracy has become a vital tool for attaining sustainable development. The impact of democracy remains elusive for women. Political participation, which is a sine-qua-non of democracy allows for diversity of opinion and participation of both men and women into political gathering. The constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria states that human beings are equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life.

Although, the Nigerian Constitution states that all human beings are equal, obviously, the nation has not achieved equality of male and female in all spheres of leadership. Aluko (2004) stated that, for over a decade right from the time the country gained independence till date, men formulate policies and their decision favour the male folks.

Although the 1999 Census figure show the numerical increase of women more than men. Aluko (2000) infers that unless women strive harder, they may still have to remain the passive old self without having the chance to contribute meaningfully in the decision-making.

Attah (2011) states that women need to be involved politically in order to force their issues on the discussion agenda, even at the household level, women should be involved in family decision-making. To buttress these points further, Editorial (2011) put it that life is a challenge and we can only meet the challenges on our feet not on our knees. Women must not sit down hoping that men

will change their attitude towards them. Concrete effort has to be made positively on the part of women.

However as stipulated by Ibemere (2011) necessary barrier that impinges on women's right to participate actively in politics will assist the achievement of the societal peace and harmony in the scheme of national leadership. Women must be involved to contribute to the goals and aspirations of the nation. Women should be incorporated on the decision making at all levels both nationally and internationally.

Akpoveta (2011) suggests that the prospects of Nigerian politics will be bright if women are allowed to participate effectively in politics.

### **The Effects of Gender Inequality on the Religious Development of the Nation**

It is clear that gender roles are primarily constructed through religion, culture, lifestyle and upbringing. The status of women within Nigerian religions is of serious concern to so many in Nigeria and beyond. Aitchison (2007) posits "All world religions today maintain male social dominance within a social structure".

On the other hand, women are more inclined to participate in religious life. The role of God, or a creator of a religion, is always taken by a male and the woman is primarily valued as a mother, especially as a mother to a son. Her place is in the household, less so at religious ceremonies or in public positions.

In the history of religions, the voice of women is rarely heard, due to the patriarchal disposition of the societies in which these religions emerged, and which eventually stifled some of the changes in the status of women triggered by new religions.

The world religions all agreed on the respect for women and their crucial role in family life, especially with emphasis on women as mothers and wives. They do not, however, advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men.

According to Holm (1994) the most severe restriction apply to women during their menstruation and pregnancy, when, for example, they cannot enter the temple or touch the Quran. Male and female roles are therefore much differentiated and also unbalanced in the two major religions in Nigerian.

For example down here in south that is Christian dominated, Sibani (2013) posits that women minister still confront sexism in their churches and denominations. They may experience discrimination in access to leadership positions, ministerial assignment and responsibilities, and salary even if they have higher degrees and more seminary training than most male ministers.

This inequality that has characterized most Christian denominations leads one to wonder how church leaders can reconcile this discrimination with their professed concern for social justice.

The influence of women on the formation of religious norms and traditions is small, even though in certain quarters or spheres, it is clear that women have succeeded in having their normative views accepted, or men who advocated equal integration of women into religious ceremonies.

It needs to be stated that there exists a certain discrepancy between normative conditionality, which refers to what the given religion proclaims (equality of men and women before God) and practical conditionality, which involves the role of women in the religious communities and states societies in terms of everyday life.

Cowell (1994) and Steinfels (1995) holds that the Catholic has stood firm in its opposition to the ordination of women to the priesthood, with the pope saying that the issue is not even open to debate among the faithful. Church authorities argued that the priest act in the name of Jesus and represent him physically; therefore they must be men. They also pointed out that Jesus called twelve men to be his disciples, not twelve women. So also the Anglican church in Nigeria.

The real status of women in religion is more complicated, however religions in Nigeria (Christianity) have encouraged certain women who have risen to significant positions.

## **Conclusion**

The Nigerian societies have come of age where women are intellectually capable as men. Butler (1990) opines that woman had numerical parity with men in profession, where educational achievements are so important. In Nigeria today, professions, doctor, lawyers, accountant, teachers, research scientist and others about half are women.

The politics in our Nigeria society as it relates a gender places a serious discrepancy. Where male are given prominence and priority over the females.



The nature of high level of discrimination against women in African society is alarming and calls for religious intervention especially the church. A determined effort must be made to enable women play equal part in decision making in the church. Church leaders and local churches in various part of the world have already demonstrated what remarkable contribution they can make once they commit themselves to promoting integral human liberation of women especially widows who are marginalized with respect to property ownership (Luke 18:1- 8).

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