

Gender Equality/Inequality and Sustainable Development

B. N., Awulor-Hephzibah

*Department of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education,
Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria*

Abstract

The social relationships between individuals and communities can either promote or constrain sustainable development. This paper is concerned that no sustainable development stride can be achieved in the face of the enormous gender challenges in the country. Using secondary data, the author observed that strong political will, monitoring and evaluation, among other factors, are lacking in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria. This paper tries to provide a critical perspective on the current sustainable development paradigm and tries to integrate a human rights approach too. In the Beijing Platform for Action, governments agreed that Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace.

Keywords: *Environment, Gender Equality/Inequality, Human rights, Socio economic, Sustainable Development.*

Corresponding Author: B.N., Awulor-Hephzibah

Background to the Study

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In fact, sustainable development refers to a development process which enhances peoples' capacity to create and consume wealth on a lasting basis. Gender equality is a broad concept and refers to it as

A situation in which both women and men are granted equal opportunities to develop their personal abilities and to make choices without being constrained by gender roles, it does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their behaviour and aspirations are equally valued and that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on their gender.

This paper tries to provide a critical perspective on the current development paradigm and tries to integrate a human rights approach across all subject areas. This is also done by wherever applicable referencing important UN human rights conventions and resolutions, on which the world community could build when devising possible pathways to sustainable development. In the Beijing Platform for Action, governments agreed that Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered sustainable development. While UN member states acknowledged at the Rio+20 Conference, that:

Gender equality and effective participation of women are important for effective action on all aspects of sustainable development.

Women's experiences of development in different parts of the world are different. Women from a number of countries have chances to work hard to promote sustainable development in their communities but women in some other countries do not have opportunities or possibilities to officially involve in sustainable development process. Generally speaking, there have been a number of improvements to women's lives in the past twenty years. For example, female life expectancy is increasing; more girls are going to school; more women are in the paid workforce; and, many countries have introduced laws to protect women's rights. However, the gender divides remain. There has been no breakthrough in women's participation in decision-making processes and little progress in legislation in favor of women's rights to own land and other property.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality. Gender Equity is the process of allocating resources, programmes, and decision fairly to both males and females without any form of discrimination and addressing the imbalances in the benefits available to males and females (Pathania, 2017). To have a strong family and a viable society in this rapidly changing world there is need for partnership and equality between men and women. Across human history, women have been consistently excluded from decision-making in the society. In governance and all social groups, women are

systematically discriminated against and this allows the domination of few social groups in governance at the expense of others. This power structure caused further imbalance, marginalization, suffering and conflict.

Gender equity is very essential in achieving sustainable development because none of the three ingredients of sustainable development can be achieved without ensuring gender equality. For instance, to achieve green environment, women must have the knowledge of their relationship between natural and environmental resources and their roles in resource planning and management. Also economic objective cannot be achieved without putting in place strategies that are gender sensitive. More also, social objective cannot be achieved without gender equality. Sexism, racism and ethnic, religion, social status, political opinion and sexual orientation based on discrimination rising in the society are clear indicators of social inequity.

In Nigeria, despite the changes in the approach used in addressing social, economic and environmental issues in Nigeria, the achievement of developmental goals still remain a mirage. The problem of poverty, flooding, ethnic crisis, environmental pollution, corruption and inequality in income distribution has been on the increase (Adejumo and Adejumo, 2014). In 2004 Nigerian profile showed a relative poverty of 54.4% which increased to 69% in 2010. In 2012, Nigeria experienced the worst flooding (Adejumo and Adejumo, 2014). A review of existing literature on gender and sustainable development indicates a lack of consistency in their interpretation because of their incomplete perception of the problems of poverty, vulnerability, environmental and natural resources, environmental degradation, sustainability and participation. These weaknesses have affected policy making specifically in the context of international trade, agriculture, and forestry. It is against this background that this study was motivated to examine gender equality and sustainable development in Nigeria.

The act for promoting equality between men and women has provided the legal framework to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex in a number of areas such as employment, education and vocational guidance, discriminatory advertising for employment and sexual harassment at the workplace among others. To provide equality among men and women all sectors of society have a role to play to improve the quality of life in three key areas, namely:

- (a) Economic growth and equity,
- (b) Social development and
- (c) Conserving natural resources and the environment. Their balance cannot be achieved without solving the prevailing problems of gender inequality and inequity.

Women's Contributions to Sustainable Development Are Undervalued

In most societies, women are predominantly responsible to care for children, the elderly and the frail, and spent at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, of which care work is an integral part. However, this work, which is essential for the functioning of

any economy, is hardly ever counted in any valuations of a country's economy and therefore remains largely invisible. According to article 156 of Beijing Declaration for Action, Women contribute to development not only through remunerated work but also through a great deal of unremunerated work. On the one hand, women participate in the production of goods and services for the market and household consumption, in agriculture, food production or family enterprises. Though included in the United Nations System of National Accounts and therefore in international standards for labour statistics, this unremunerated work - particularly that related to agriculture - is often undervalued and under recorded.

On the other hand, women also perform the great majority of unremunerated domestic work and community work, such as caring for children and older persons, preparing food for the family, protecting the environment and providing voluntary assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups. This work is often not measured in quantitative terms and is not valued in national accounts. Women's contribution to development is seriously underestimated, and thus its social recognition is limited. The full visibility of the type, extent and distribution of this unremunerated work will also contribute to a better sharing of responsibilities.

The Commission on the Status of Women (Fifty-fifth session) on 22 February-4 March 2011, regarding "gender equality and sustainable development" and Following-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". "While the relevance of gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development has long been established in intergovernmental commitments, such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and agenda 21, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it has become increasingly evident that women's contributions to sustainable development are both undervalued and underutilized."

Gender Inequality and Sustainable Development

Gender inequality can be regarded as the unequal treatment or perception of individual on the basis of gender. It is perspective in which members of a particular sex are not granted equal opportunities to develop their inert endowments and strengthen their natural capabilities to make choices without being constrained by traditional gender roles. Gender equality is promoted by human rights activists and United Nations values. Though the United Nations has adopted several conventions and declarations for "the equal rights of men and women" and pledged to advance gender equality in international for a, yet millions of women around the world, most especially in Nigeria continue to experience discrimination, gender-based violence, denial of their sexual and reproductive health rights, their role in peace and security and active participation in sustainable development.

According to a review made by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) 2012, Nigerian women and girls have significantly worse life chances than men compared to other societies of the world. Regardless of their educational qualification, they still occupy fewer than 30 per cent of all positions in the public sector, only 15 per cent of Nigeria's 80.2 million women operate bank accounts and is 3 times less likely than a man to receive bank loan, 5 times less likely to own a land than a man (Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012). This reveals the neglect of the Nigeria government in tackling the issues of gender inequality despite all attempts from various quarters to reduce its tenacity. The report also stated that women are Nigeria's hidden resource. Yet over 80 per cent of them are unable to read compared to 54 per cent of their male counterpart. In some states; majority of women are illiterate especially in the Northern Nigeria, more than two-third of young girls are unable to read and write (Gender Statistics, 2010).

Gender equality has also been articulated in the document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development entitled: "the future we want" adopted in 2012 which include recognition of the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment across the pillars of sustainable development namely; social, economic and environment (Department for International Development, 2012). There is a growing evidence of the synergies between gender equality and economic sustainability. For instance, when women participate in public administration, public resources, are likely to be allocated more towards investment in human development such as child, and women health, nutrition and employment (Buckingham-Hartsfield, 2013).

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2011), women's access and control over agricultural assets and productive resources is important for achieving food security and sustainable livelihood. This means that women's knowledge and collective action are central to building more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable strategies to manage local landscape produce food and secure water. Furthermore, certain aspect of gender equality such as women education, women full participation in decision making and employment have positive impact on economic growth (Agarwal, 2010) considering women's roles in the family, community and the environment where they live.

The United Nation World Survey (2014) articulates that standards on women's and girls' human rights and gender equality provide a solid basis for advancing action to strengthen the vital role of women in achieving sustainable development. Although inequality and discrimination are prohibited under the law and all major international human right instruments, yet discrimination is still preponderant and laws are not invoked against offenders. This paper is of the opinion that gender mainstreaming can respond to these concerns and bridge the gap that has existed between men and women over the decades.

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 (Elegbede, 2012). Equality means that men and women are able to enjoy equal status, entitlement, rights, access to assets, services without limitation imposed by gender norms. 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 and labour within household.

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 (Acha, 2016).

UNESCO derives the following Eight guiding Principles for its Gender-mainstreaming policy:

1. **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.
2. **Diversity and intersection:** Policies, programmes and projects affect women and men differently but not all women and all men experience the same form of gender-based discrimination and marginalization. Sub-groups of men and sub-groups of women may experience specific gender inequalities that must be acknowledged and documented to be adequately addressed.
3. **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;
4. **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.
5. **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 agendas.
6. **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.
7. **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.

8. **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 towards Bridging the Gender Gap

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

1. National Policy on Women (2000)
2. National Gender Policy (2006)
3. Establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (2019).

The National Policy on women (2000) is a policy formulated in the hope to ensure justice, freedom, basic human rights and most of all equality across gender. This policy was replaced with the National Gender Policy in 2006 adopted 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 set or circumstances, and to promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all citizens in other to achieve equitable rapid economic growth.

The establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (2009) most importantly, has 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 (Effiong, 2008). All these policies/programmes and others not discussed are yet to bridge the gender gap in a considerable manner.

Gender equality/inequality and the Nigeria Situation

The problem of gender equality/inequality in Nigeria will be discussed under two sub-heads:

1. The place of women in the constitution
2. Thirty-five percent affirmative action

(i) The Place of Women in the 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 was 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. 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 (Morley, 2012).

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 (Aminu, 2014).

(ii) The Thirty-five percent Affirmative Action

Although women constitute about half of the projected population of Nigeria, this numerical strength has never found a corresponding expression or representation in Nigeria's political public life. The Beijing conference of 1995 recommended 35 per cent allocation for women in political positions, power and decision making. This has not been the case of Nigeria where women can barely boast of five percent. However, the minimal rise in gender participation in the country has been attached to appointive positions having failed to produce women in elective posts (Conyok, 2015).

Available statistics reveal that out of 109 senators in the National Assembly, only nine (9) are women, while only 27 out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives are women. Besides, out of the 990 members of the state Houses of Assembly, only 54 are women (Fashola, 2015). The picture markedly depicts a lopsided membership of the legislative houses in favour of men and the story is similar at the local level, where only a few women function as chairpersons or councilors in local government councils. Though about two thirds of Nigerian voters are women, electoral and power sharing arrangements fail to consider the interests of the women, thereby rendering them largely politically powerless. Nigeria lags far behind in women political participation index on the African countries. For instance, Nigerian women have about the worst representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries such as Uganda, 34.6 per cent, South Africa, 43.2 per cent, Ethiopia, 27.7 per cent, Cameroon, 20 per cent, Niger, 12.3 per cent and Congo, 8.0 per cent (Olumode, 2011).

Conclusion

There are certain things a woman can do which a man cannot do and vice versa so both can never be equal. The advocates of gender equality should therefore tread with caution for sustainable development of the country. From the foregoing, Nigeria does not have

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 endeavour and this poses virulent challenges militating against gender mainstreaming in Nigeria.

The problem of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria is more worrisome given the excess of policies and conventions endorsed by successive political leadership in the country that are yet to be implemented. Presently the temperament of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria does not seem to favour gender mainstreaming. The president recently stated that his wife belongs to his kitchen, his living room and the other room! By extension, all women carry this burden of exclusion. Certainly, when confined in such obscure rooms in a man's house, the talents and potentials of women to excel in the society will be truncated. The subjugation and relegation of women to the background by male chauvinists and their female compradors (the so-called enlightened women) should be erased by a strong political will to mainstream gender. The following obstacles among others should be addressed in Nigeria constitution to ignite the political will for a successful gender mainstreaming. Therefore, there is need to reaffirm and reinforce commitments to ensure that women are given equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy and other spheres of national life. Finally, this paper will examine policies and programmes in Nigeria that will bridge the gender gap, examine gender equality/inequality and the Nigeria situation as it affects the place of women in the constitution.

Recommendations

Gender equity implies that women and men are treated fairly according to their different needs this implies the possibilities of adopting different strategies in order to compensate women for their historical disadvantages. As mentioned approaches that use gender equity should eventually lead to gender equality. The major inequality exist in labor market and best policy advice in this relation is from the International Labor Organization which some of them are mentioned here:

1. Re-skilling, training and unemployment protection, unemployment benefits and measures for women workers.
2. Initiatives for women to return to work after maternity leave, incentives for men to take paternity leave and more accessible childcare services.
3. Quotas for women in employment guarantee programmes targeted at the poorest households
4. Work-sharing schemes which include workers that do not have regular contracts
5. Cash transfer programmes for poor households Microcredit and micro insurance
6. Public employment programmes
7. Re-training of unemployed persons to new jobs which break gender stereotypes, especially for those with family responsibilities
8. Keeping/increasing minimum wages, as women are lower paid than men due to the gender wage gap.

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