

**RETHINKING GENDER ISSUES AND EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL
OPPORTUNITIES AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS IN NIGERIA**

BY

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Abstract

The paper appraises the rethinking gender issues and equality of educational opportunities and the achievement of sustainable development goals in Nigeria. The paper provides insight that gender is a phenomenon that structures the type of opportunities, and betters the life chances for people in the whole of society today and even the state. The need for fair hearing on gender issues in Nigeria has been long overdue. Therefore, no sex should dominate the other; Women should be freed to discuss every available topic with their male counterpart devoid of exploitation, oppression, sexual molestation, class and race. There should be no attempt to restrain them just as they too should not attempt to dominate their men folk. Women should be seen as responsible individuals who are capable to work alongside with men in building the political and economic development on solid foundation which are said to be the bedrock of nations. Therefore, policies that will promote and enhance gender equality as well as sustainability should be put in place by the government, which are in conformity to international policies, so as to achieve overall global sustainable development goals in Nigeria. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should ensure that, the rights of women are in place and to ensure that the discrimination of women in the society be prohibited.

Keywords: Rethinking, Equality, Achievement, Sustainable, Gender

Introduction

Imagine a world that contains human beings who possess no sex (i.e. male or female), just human beings. In a world like that, rights and privileges would be distributed evenly/equally simply because they are “human”. There would be no gender issues i.e partiality or discrimination when exercising human rights regardless of the person's race, religion, size, etc. because before you possess any of those attributes, you are human. Now, let us examine the world as it is; there are

various human rights, privileges and opportunities that are taken away from some human beings simply based on their sex (e.g., because they are 'female'). There are also various expectations, discrimination, double standards etc. placed on both sexes, male and female (Boris, 2016). This imbalance is what gender equality fights against and aims to eradicate out of the human society.

Gender equality is the ability human beings have to exercise their rights and opportunities irrespective of their gender. It can also be defined as women and men enjoying the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured (Adichie, 2015). Gender equality can also be known as sexual equality or equality of the sexes. It is important to note that although advocacy on gender equality is mostly focused on females, males also experience various forms of discrimination and double standards due to what is called toxic masculinity (Salam, 2019). Masculinity is often stereotypically associated with characteristics like being tough, unemotional, and aggressive. Toxic masculinity therefore refers to the long established, conventional cultural masculine standards/norms that can be destructive to men, women and generally the entire society. It describes the narrow repressive type of ideas about the male gender role which defines masculinity as exaggerated masculine traits such as being violent, unemotional, insensitive, impractically tough, sexually aggressive etc (Morgan, 2018).

Women on the other hand, often experience more forms of discrimination due to their gender than men in the society such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, girl child marriage, female genital mutilation, deprivation of education in some states, job opportunities, political roles, voting, double standards, etc. This is why as the society evolves, feminism becomes more prominent. Its popularity has risen around the globe in recent years. (Para-Mallam, 2018). Feminism is a wide range of ideologies, philosophies and movements coming together; it advocates human rights on the ground of political, social and economic equality of both sexes. It is about females being able to make choices for themselves without anything standing in the way of that choice like someone oppressing them or hindering that decision because of their gender.

It should also be noted that as we evolve, there has been progress in promoting the rights of women and we now celebrate what is known as 'International Women's Day' annually on the 8th of March. International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parallelism (Otto, 2013). Now that we have discussed what toxic masculinity and feminism are, we are going to discuss how people tend to often mistaken feminism for misandry. Misandry can be defined as a woman's prejudice towards men. People often mistake feminists for bitter people who hate men. Meanwhile feminists are people (male or female) who publicly support 'equal rights' and opportunities given to women and men in the society while misandrists are women who hate men and believe that they are 'superior' to men. It is important to note that the advocacy of women's rights (feminism) is an act that can be practiced by both of the sexes. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the rethinking gender issues and equality of educational opportunities and the achievement of sustainable development goals in Nigeria. **Gender Issues**

Gender Issues is dedicated to publishing basic and applied research on the relationships between men and women; on the similarities and differences in socialization, personality, and behaviour; and on the changing aspirations, roles, and statuses of women in industrial and urban societies, as well as in developing nations (Credit, 2012). Gender Issues is committed to scholarship. It has no political agenda or ideological loyalty. It welcomes controversy, and it will publish argumentative pieces and public policy recommendations so long as they have a solid empirical basis. Gender issues include all aspects and concerns related to women's and men's lives and situation in society, to the way they interrelate, their differences in access to and use of resources, their activities, and how they react to changes, interventions and policies.

Gender Equality

Gender equality suggests a situation where males and females have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights with capacity to contribute to and benefit from everything their societies avail or possess. This suggests that there must be openness, parity and equity in every aspect of life especially equality in education (USAID, 2009). Though Nigeria has a national gender policy, there still exists significant gaps in all areas especially education, empowerment and decision making. Gender equality on the other hand which is fundamentally related to sustainable development and globally accepted as a necessity for the promotion of human rights must take into consideration, the physical and biological differences between the sexes, both of them must have the same opportunities in the course of their preparation.

Gender Inequality in Education in Nigeria

Gender inequality is not new in Nigeria, NGOs, stakeholders and educators have been talking about the fact that there is a high level of inequality in Nigeria, and this has resulted into inequality concerning the education of Women and the girl-child. The reason why the girl-child stand out the most is because in Nigeria, the male child's education is seen as more important than the girl-child education and for that reason, Organisations tends to speak more about the girl-child education in Nigeria. Gender equality is basically, providing equal opportunities to everybody irrespective of your age, sex, country, or skin color. We are all equal and we all deserve the same treatment (Nnachi, 2010).

The topic of gender inequality concerning education in Nigeria is very sensitive because people often misunderstand the meaning of gender inequality in education. People often think that it is about the fact that girls and boy are not attending the same schools, or that it is about the level of educational achievement of boys and girls or that it is about which of them can contribute more to the benefits of the family. In fact, gender inequality in education is none of the above. Gender equality in education is all about giving the male and the female equal rights to go to school and become educated.

According to the (Nigerian census population figures) (2007) the males are higher in numbers than the female in Nigeria. Ofoegbu (2009) in his research also found out that the males have higher literacy rate than the females especially in the Northern part of Nigeria and this is because of early marriages. Furthermore, Okoro (2012) asserts that 'as advocacy at all government levels are succeeding in getting girls to complete primary school, economic pressure appears to influence the early withdrawal of boys especially in Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Imo States.'

The Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria also talk about equality in education in Nigeria. Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria is about Quality of education, which is to ensure equitable and quality education for the promotion of long-lasting learning and education opportunities for both boys and girls. Goal 4 has a lot and promising targets which are to ensure that by 2030, All girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal 4 effective learning outcomes. Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations. Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women achieve literacy and numeracy. Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote

sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development (The Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. 2021).

Causes of Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Socio-cultural

The first problem that causes gender inequality in education in Nigeria is the sociocultural problem, where the males are always regarded as superior to the females. The idea of male superiority in turn causes the widespread operation of patriarchal systems of social organisation such as the customary of early marriage, whereby the girl-child is forced to get married early, it could be at the age of 12 years, At that age she is still a child, and she cannot do anything to defend herself and is forced to listen to her parents. It could also be of incidence of early pregnancy where she doesn't have any other choice than to accept early marriage, of heavier domestic and subsistence duties of females. These things all affect the female child in having a good education, Apart from these problems there is the problem of security in some areas and such long standing constraints result in a dearth of female role models that might be seen as challenge to the traditional one that is clearly acquired by both sexes. The only thing that can be done to completely stop the influence of these problems is to treat both sexes equally by giving both female and male the same opportunities in the society (Amin, 2015).

Health

According to Iguebe (2010) the effect of poverty and malnutrition on the health of school age children falls mostly on the girls more than boys and this is because boys are better fed. Girls always have very heavy domestic work and they are undernourished. Even if they would have the opportunity to go to school, only the fact that they are undernourished will highly affect their performance at school (Crosne, Monica & Glen, 2004). It is common that adolescent girls get pregnant early and have health problems and that has a negative impact on them. Another problem is the fact that there is no education on family planning in Nigeria, which affects the size of certain families in Nigeria. Hence this implies the need for sex or health education at school level. Therefore, health is a very big factor that causes gender inequality in education in Nigeria even though it is a very hidden factor that people do not talk more about it.

Economic factors

Finance is one of the most important reasons why there is gender inequality in Nigeria in the educational domain. This corresponds with the fundamental sociocultural bias in favour of males, which in turn affects the female participation in education, especially in rural areas. When the economy of the family is not suitable, the females will be able to be the ones suffering because the preferences will be mostly on males, which means that the males will be sent to school while the females will be at home. Or the girl child will be married out to a rich man so that the family will be able to raise a certain amount of money to sponsor the male's education (Dills, 2006). In a well-constructed society, the education of female is very important because of the environment they are, the parents invest more on the female child's education because it might be an advantage for them in the society. Which definitely increase the gap between the rural and urban areas (Miller, & Birch, 2007).

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 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.

Conclusion

Gender is a phenomenon that structures the type of opportunities, and better still, life chances for people in the whole of society today and even the state. The need for fair hearing on gender issues in Nigeria has been long overdue. However, rethinking gender issues enhance equal educational opportunities for all gender and aid the achievement of sustainable development goals in Nigeria. Therefore, no sex should dominate the other; Women should be free to discuss every available topic under the sun with each other be it exploitation, oppression, sex, class and race. There should be no attempt to restrain them just as they too should not attempt to dominate their men folk;. Women should be seen as responsible individuals who are capable to work alongside with men in building the political and economic development on solid foundation which are said to be the bedrock of nations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that;

1. Policies that will promote and enhance gender equality as well as sustainability should be put in place by the government, which are in conformity to international policies, so as to achieve overall global sustainable development goals in Nigeria.
2. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should ensure that, the rights of women are in place and to ensure that the discrimination of women in the society be prohibited.
3. Grassroots enlightenment campaign should be organised to change the negative attitude of most people to women in politics and as well as the society at large.
4. For meaningful development to take place, literacy must be entrenched. Federal government of Nigeria should do more to promote education if they truly know the meaning of the concept of SDGs and its impact in the development of a nation
5. Policies that will promote sustainability should be in place by the government of Nigeria, which should be in consistent with international policies, in order to achieve an overall global sustainable development
6. Economic empowerment of women should be vigorously pursued since it will provoke greater participation of women in public affairs within the society.

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