

A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON THE POTENTIALS OF GENDER PARITY IN SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The institutionalization of patriarchy in Nigeria and the majority of African societies has resulted in grave violations of human rights, including the severe and pervasive abuse of women's mental and emotional rights. This is a result of the sociocultural context in which many African and Nigerian societies appear to favour men's hegemonic superiority over women, who are frequently characterized as the weaker sex. The obvious cases of male dominance, prejudice, and subordination of the feminine gender in all areas of human endeavour, including politics, education, and even the home and community front, have prevented women from realizing their full potential and making significant contributions to the advancement of society. Interestingly, in more developed climes women play pivotal roles in governance, business, and several other fields of human endeavours which makes the continued subjugation of women a palpable aberration that is inimical to societal progress. This paper analytically investigates the indices of female subjugation in Nigeria with a view to unravelling the causes and consequence and the most plausible ways of curbing the trend for societal benefit. The paper submits that the continued subjugation of women is injurious to societal progress and advocates prioritizing gender parity so as to empower the female gender to maximally contribute their quota to societal development.

Introduction

An understanding of the Potentials of Gender Parity in Societal Development needs to be preceded by an understanding of the concept of women in Nigeria and many African societies. Bell Hooks and feminist historians and writers are among the scholars who believe that the socio-cultural, religious, and economic structures of many African societies, along with the patriarchal system, have shaped the way that women are perceived and act as the catalyst for the subsequent subjugation of women (Idowu 2013; Johnson 2005). In many Nigerian cultures, women are viewed as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, with the chief of the household—either the husband or the father—having authority over the domestic sphere (Wole-Abu 2018 p 1). As the provider and lord of his immediate family, he has the unquestionable right to rule over them and manage all household affairs. Consequently, women who are mothers are viewed as the caregivers for the home while their husbands earn a living. She is responsible for housekeeping tasks like cooking, cleaning, and childrearing (Egbo 2). Because of the way the patriarchal systems were set up, women were seen as less important than men and men as superior. Cultural norms dictate that women should be modest, chaste, obedient, and devoted to their husbands. Regarding authoritarianism and control over domestic and community affairs, they are less constrained by cultural norms regarding extramarital affairs. (Idowu 2013; Adichie 2012). The women in a patriarchal society are socially, economically and culturally short changed and deprived of fulfilling their full potentials as citizens capable of contributing to societal development. This does not in any way obliterate the importance of women in the scheme of things. Since most African and Nigerian societies recognize the numerous important and active roles that women play in society, the Anglocentric conception of women as voiceless, marginalized, and frequently helpless and hapless does not enjoy consonance. Mothers play a central role in raising children, as they are typically the ones responsible for their moral, social, and cultural upbringing. Mothers interact with their children more than fathers do, who spend more time earning a living outside the home. They provide assistance in the head of the household's occupation, such as farming, fishing, and so forth. They are seen as diligent and hardworking because they work in a variety of fields, including fishing, food processing, weaving, pottery, cloth weaving

and trading. They also served as birth attendants, priestesses and goddesses (Wole-Abu 2-3). It is for these reasons many Ibo children venerate mothers with the names like “Nneka” meaning mother is supreme. In the case of Nigeria, Julie Okoh catalogues several legendary women who stood up in defence of their communities and those who have featured prominently in Nigerian history. These women include the Inkpi of Igala, Moremi of Ile Ife, Queen Daura of Daura, Queen Amina of Zazzau, Queen Kambasa of Bonny, Nana Asma’u of Sokoto, Iyalode Efunseta Aniwura of Ibadan, Omu Okwei of Osomari, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Madam Ransom Kutu. Aduni Oluwole, The Queen Mothers in Benin City, leaders of the Aba Women’s Riot, the Omu of Western Igboland, the Iyalode and Iyaloja of several Yoruba communities among others (26).

Despite the active roles that these women play, many people in African society still view women as voiceless, marginalized, and frequently helpless and unfortunate in certain circumstances due to the social and cultural boundaries that define roles for men and women. The early idea of women as oppressed as seen through the eyes of western feminists is festered by the concentrated attention on these cultural distinctions. But as modernity advanced and women were exposed to education and the West, the conventionally accepted subservient roles that women played in relation to men started to shift. This led to women's agitation for gender parity. Women are becoming more and more important in society, and the socioculturally imposed subjugation of women is decreasing as a result of their inclusion in many spheres of human endeavor and the shifting paradigm of men as the only providers. It is important to remember, though, that despite significant progress, gender inequality still exists in a number of domains, including politics, the economy, education, and other fields where men still have a strong influence. This stance fuels the feminist movement, which originated in the West, has expanded to Nigeria, and is rapidly gaining traction. If women could achieve much in the past, it is a wonder that they are discriminated against today and schemed out of things when it comes to contributing to national growth. This paper therefore looks at the potentials of gender parity as a sinquanon for societal development. The paper will examine the concept of gender parity, development and show how gender parity can help in national development.

Framing Gender parity

The term Gender Parity bespeak of an existing disparity between the different gender. Gender equality has long been defined as equal rights, opportunities, and power for men and women, as well as for girls and boys. Gender equality is a notion that is closely related to the human rights agenda both nationally and internationally. It is also used to designate the objective of the global women's movement's fight for women's rights. Gender equality encompasses nondiscrimination, equal rights for all, and the empowerment of women, all of which have transformative implications. It adopts a multifaceted, intersectional perspective on the disparities that exist between girls and boys as well as between women and men. It suggests that gender-based power relations need to change in both the public and private spheres of society. Focused on needs and benefits for women and men, girls and boys, gender equity emphasizes justice and fairness. When we talk about equity, we're talking about the equitable distribution of resources according to the needs of various groups of people. Examples of these sectors include education, health, and humanitarian. In this context, gender equity means that these needs must be gendered because they may differ significantly for boys and girls, as well as for women and men. Gender equality is sometimes used as a means of distancing gender equality from the human rights agenda and avoiding discussing the human rights of women and girls. Conservative actors have taken it up, emphasizing the complementary nature of men and women, advocating for "separate but equal" relationships, and delving deeply into the case for the roles and responsibilities that men and women are biologically assigned in society. The definition of "gender equity" that has been adopted only partially supports the objective of gender equality is due to this interpretation of the term. Binavot et al (2016 p2) opines that even with advancements, gender parity is still not attained in every nation on the planet. Throughout the years 2000–2015, there have been increasing national and international commitments to achieving gender parity in education, despite international conventions supporting gender equality. Gender inequality is still pervasive, especially in secondary education. Not all kids and teenagers have even been able to exercise their right to an education, either. The least fortunate kids, especially girls, have a higher probability of never enrolling. Therefore, the primary causes of the inability to attain gender

parity are poverty and the direct or indirect costs of education. In fact, despite the promises made by governments, child labor continues to be a significant barrier to children's education, especially for girls. Gender equality in education is still a distant goal because of enduring obstacles and deeply rooted discriminatory social norms and traditions. The lack of progress can also be attributed in part to the concept's limited understanding and its measurement and monitoring challenges. This has resulted in a predominate focus on gender parity, which is important but only one step toward achieving gender equality. (15)

Conceptualising National Development.

The potentials of gender parity in national development will require a conceptualisation of the term national development as used in this study. Development entails raising people's standards of living and bringing about positive social change (Okafor et al., 2007).

The term development suffers definitional pluralism as a concept. Consequently, it is fraught with definitional complexities. Nonetheless, intellectual pundits have attempted to conceptualize development which will be analysed in this study. According to Gboyega (2003), development is the concept that encompasses all efforts to enhance human existence in all of its manifestations. It requires that poverty and unequal access to the good things in life be eliminated or significantly reduced. It also implies an improvement in the material well-being of all citizens, not just the wealthiest and most powerful, in a sustainable manner so that present consumption does not endanger future generations. Chrisman (1984), (cited in Lawal and Oluwatoyin 2011) development is a process of societal advancement in which robust collaborations between all societal groups, corporate entities, and all sectors of the economy lead to improvements in people's well-being. It is reasonable to assume that development encompasses all facets of societal life and is not just an economic endeavor. It also involves socioeconomic and political issues.

National development.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines "national" as a phenomenon that encompasses an entire nation. Thus, national development can be defined as the entire progress of a country or nation in terms of its socioeconomic, political, and religious aspects. National development, as defined by Okeke and Ifeagwazi (2018, p. 329), is the advancement of a nation-state on a national level and denotes the material well-being of a demonstrable majority of its citizens. While economic indices are a preferable indicator of national development, the two are not the same thing. Therefore, the gross domestic product (GDP) paradigm does not fundamentally indicate national development, Okeke and Ifeagwazi further argue that the occurrence of national development entails a process, which is indisputably in evolution, and once disputes begin to arise about the progress in this positive developmental movement, it is symptomatic of underdevelopment.

Massive rates of poverty are incompatible with the development of the nation. They reveal blatant vulnerabilities at the national level. The country's unemployment rate is another indicator of the challenges facing national development. Nigeria had a 22.6% unemployment rate in 2018. From 10.6% in 2012 to 22.6% in 2018, it grew at a 16.02% average annual rate (Knoema, 2019). Therefore, where there is extreme poverty and high unemployment, there cannot be national development. A nation-state's rising extreme poverty and depressing unemployment trends must reverse for positive social change for national development to occur (Idike and others, 2020). From the foregoing one can postulate that national development is an all encompassing phenomenon covering all aspect of nation hood from economy, education health infrastructure etc. Given this stance it will requires the wellbeing of not only the citizenry but he progression of every facet of the nation. For this to occur it will require the maximisation of the available human resources cutting across gender. Little wonder then that societies with gender inequality will be retarding speedy development of the nation.

Relevance of Gender Parity

It will be necessary to look at the relevance of Gender parity as it concerns national development. Examination of the myriad ways that Gender equality can promote economic performance and national growth will be done using some key factors for growth as a template These eight factors include education

and human capital development, physical capital, competitive markets, macroeconomic stability, infrastructure, openness to trade and investment, and increased agricultural productivity – are the most important conditions for ensuring that a strong economic performance will be established, and will endure, in a country. These areas shall be examined below.

Human Capital Development through Education

Increasing educational opportunities for women allows for a greater accumulation of skills and expertise in the labor force, which raises the growth potential of the economy. Better-educated girls and women can undertake higher-value economic activity. In patriarchal society where discrimination exist with regards to girl education the index of human capital will be reduced. Increasing the stock of human capital—which is defined as the abilities, know-how, and physical resources that enable the labour force to be economically productive—is one of the main ways that gender equality can support economic growth. Human capital has two dimensions: a quantitative one, meaning the number of workers; and a qualitative one, meaning that each worker possesses unique productive skills. Through education and gender parity, the workforce will be boosted and with quality education would be improved skills and knowledge for the boosted workforce. This will in turn impact positively on national development.

Economic growth

One of the biggest economic advantages of gender equality is the closing of the gender pay gap. For performing the same work, women are often paid less than men in these societies. Women often have lower incomes and fewer opportunities to improve their financial status as a result of this pay gap. Closing this disparity can benefit women's and their families' financial circumstances, which will ultimately spur economic expansion. (Darrah 2023 np)

Research indicates that economic growth is positively correlated with gender equality. Women's skills and abilities can contribute to economic growth when they have equal access to education and employment opportunities. For instance, a study conducted in India indicated that a mere 10% reduction in the gender gap in employment could result in a 4.2% increase in the nation's GDP.

Social Relevance of Gender Parity

Social development, As Darrah (2023) further observes, is significantly impacted by gender equality. It can enhance women's and girls', who are frequently marginalized in these domains, access to healthcare and education. Gender equality can contribute to the dismantling of gender stereotypes and the enhancement of women's and girls' skills, which will increase their empowerment and independence, by promoting equal access to education.

Additionally, gender equality can lessen discrimination and violence against women. Human rights are gravely violated by violence against women and girls, and it seriously impedes development. Societies can foster a climate of respect and tolerance through the advancement of gender equality, which will increase social cohesiveness and stability. Another significant social benefit of gender equality is the empowerment of women and girls in decision-making. Women can contribute to the creation of policies and programs that more accurately represent the needs and interests of their communities when they have equal access to decision-making processes.

Gender Parity and Political Development

In politics gender disparity is very prevalent. In some patriarchal system women are not privileged to view of some position which seems to be reserved for the male folk. This trend no doubt has impeded on the development of democratic governance and democracy as a whole. Interestingly Gender equality has significant political advantages. Improving the number of women in leadership roles can improve policymaking and governance. Decision-making processes benefit from the distinct viewpoint and experience that women bring to the table, resulting in increased diversity and better results.

Development of Healthy population.

Development of a nation is dependant on a healthy workforce with the knowledge skill and cultural and feonomic competence to contribute to societal growth. Research has revealed that children raised in clime with less gender bias do very well. When women are empowered to make their own reproductive decision, they provide better care for their children and with a better income they will be cater for their children better by providing good education, health care which will reduce infant mortality rates and ensure a healthier and more productive workforce.

Gender Parity and Poverty Reduction.

One of the index of underdevelopment is the poverty level of a nation. Nigeria which is ranked the poverty capital of the world is indubitably a patriarchal society where the male folks are priviledged and the women folks relegated to the background in several spheres. Men get access to social, cultural and economic capital. Paradoxically, nigeian women have been found to be industrious and capable of engaging meaningfully In one form of economic activity or the other. They engae in farming fishing clothmaking and the like. But they do not get equal access to investment opportunities like their make counterparts. This has in some way elevated the poverty level of the nation. Wher there is gender parity and equall opportunity are given not based on gender the standard of living will increase because women will be able to earn incomes that can sustain them and their families.

From the foregoing it is clear that gender parity is a key factor for societal development in every sphere of human endeavour and should be up held.

Summary and conclusion

This paper set out to investigate the potentials of gender parity in societal development. It looked at the concept of gender parity, national development and the relevance of gender parity in national development. The paper goes on to frame gender parity as the provision of equal access to opportunities for growth to all irrelative gender. It observes that the female folks bear the brunt o marginalisation in the area of education, access to investment opportunities, health care etc. which has impeding implications for national development. It highlighted that development is an all encompassing phenomenon requiring the input of both the male and female gender. The index of national development is hinged solidly on the several factors which include building human capacity necessary for improving the quantiy of the workforce and the need for skilling the workforce to be mor productive. This feat can only be achieved with gender parity. The paper concludes that gender parity is a siquanon for national development and the efforts shoud be made to ensure gender parity if the nation must develop.

Recommendation.

From the finding of the study the following recommendation are suggested for the quest national development to see the light of day

Gender disparity should be exchewed and gender parity should be cultivated in our male dominated society so that the potentials for women to adequately contribute to national development can be achieved.

It is advocated that structures that encourage gender discrimination should be pulled down to allow woman more participation in the social economic and political spheres. As this will ensure a healthy populace necessary for development to occur.

it is obvious that challenge remains in giving women equal opportunity or a level playing ground with men in terms of application of knowledge acquired in the public sphere for national development. This depends onthe extent of Government gender sensitivity. On the whole, increase in gender equity in education will result in corresponding increase in public revenue and guarantee the stability of the economy. Deriving from the findings, the study recommends a Cultural Rebirth involving educating our women and re-educating our men about women as equal stakeholders in national development. This can be done through the introduction of gender studies in all levels of our education system.

Today, reaching sustainable development is no longer feasible without the practice of taking women into consideration in every government policy as equal stakeholders in the plan and execution of national development plans and programmes.

Again, Education as handed down to us by the colonial system should be done away with. We need a transformed education system that is consistent with our social, economic and cultural realities; that relates to the life, needs and aspirations of Nigerians, thereby making it a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of personal, group and national goals. Such education system should be driven by entrepreneurial, scientific and technological innovation, which will produce free, independent and productive women for over-all national development.

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