

**WOMEN ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE
GENDER EQUALITY IMPERATIVE**

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Abstract

This paper is a disquisition on women economy, gender equality and the pursuit of sustainable industrial development in Nigeria. Women have been progressive in recent decades in terms of their number in participation and contributions to national productivity and growth. However, their optimal capacity to engage in the industrial sector and make greater impact is significantly undermined by the perennial influence of the shackles of gender inequality. This system of inequalities and discrimination, which is imbued in the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society, has over the years impeded girls and women from harnessing equal rights and opportunities that can empower their constructive efforts toward national industrial development. Given Nigeria's challenges to effectively pursue sustainable industrial development due mainly to her poor industrial and economic stance, it is an imperative that gender equality is achieved so as to allow women exercise their full potentials, particularly in the industrial environment, where they are largely engaged in the informal and small scale businesses. The paper posits that gender equality with its beneficial features of fairness and equity can provide the conducive and systemic equipoise for women's economic transformation with its impetus to generate forward industrial growth in Nigeria. It recommends that the citizens and Nigerian government should imbibe all-round equality and eschew discrimination against women; particularly through the efficient implementation/monitoring of the policy of Affirmative Action, gender mainstreaming and other instruments of gender balance, in order to optimize women's participation and contributions to national industrial growth for effective sustainable industrial development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender, Inequality, Equality, Sustainable Industrial, Development

Introduction

The roles women play in the different sectors of any nation's economy remains significant and imperative for greater economic growth and development. They are about half of the population in Nigeria and have continued to grow in different ramifications despite the limitations they seem to encounter from certain structural practices, particularly the system and structure of gender inequality. Isigwe and Onuoha (2015) observe that women play important roles and have particular skills that they have developed over the years as mothers, wives and caregivers for the family members and community. Their creativity, patience and capacity to love and build a consensus are qualities that make the female gender a valuable constituency. The roles women play in small and medium scale industries and in some high positions of authority and influence have continued to grow over the years. They are contributing noticeably to Nigeria's efforts toward concrete industrialization and industrial development (Ogunde, 2013).

Despite the increasing accomplishments and exploits of women in the Nigerian society, their number in participation and contributions to national productivity has not been at its optimal level. This is presumed, to be in part, the outcome of the undermining effects of the prevailing system of gender inequality perpetuated by the entrenched patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society. The system of gender inequality is the condition in society whereby there is unequal rights, opportunities, privileges and discrimination against the female gender. It is an imbalanced system that harbours unequal treatment between females and males in which the females are predominantly disadvantaged (Okoroafor and Iheriohanma, 2013). This practice of socio-economic inequalities have been alleged to be a major systematic factor working against the full manifestation of women's capabilities and capacity in the different sectors of the Nigerian economy, and particularly, in the industrial sector.

Women are increasingly acquiring education and competences that have continued to promote their level of participation and contributions to national industrial productivity and growth. But despite the dynamic roles of women in the economic sphere, the system of gender inequality seems to continue to significantly impede women's pursuit of economic transformation that can enable them engage more productively in the national industrial sector. This status quo cannot be favourable for a nation such as Nigeria that is seeking for rapid industrialization and pursuing the United Nation's sustainable development goals, particularly in the area of industrial development.

The paper, therefore, argues that for meaningful and constructive strides to be recorded in the realm of speedy industrialization and the attainment of some appreciable level of sustainability in industrialization, women must be encouraged to work on a level playing ground with their men counterparts. They seem to lack the gender balanced and friendly socio-economic space to exercise their inherent potentials. The fact that women have been improving both individually and collectively in their economic enterprise could be an indication of better performance if they experience equal opportunities and treatments. In consideration of need to change this prevailing gender biased atmosphere, the practice of gender inequality has to be dismantled and efforts put in place to ensure the prevalence of gender equality, which is being promoted across the globe as a pivotal factor for facilitating greater human productivity. The paper, basically, discusses the positive impacts gender equality can have on women's economic opportunities and growth as well as sustainable industrial development in Nigeria. Employing the documentary and library sources of information, it seeks to attend to the following issues and questions: to what extent does gender inequality undermine women's economic development in Nigeria?, how can women's participation and contributions in the industrial sector be enhanced by gender equality in Nigeria?, what measures can be put in place to engender women's economic development and gender equality for sustainable industrial development in Nigeria?

Conceptual Exposition: Gender Equality, Sustainable Development and Industrialization

Gender equality simply defines the direct opposite of the system of gender inequality. In other words, it is the system of equal rights, opportunities, privileges and balanced treatments between females and males in society. It also defines the absence of all forms of gender discrimination, bias, stereotype and general inequity against the female gender (Alaga, 2011). As a system and practice, gender equality may seem utopian but it is increasingly seen and considered by many people across the globe as an ideal phenomenon capable of facilitating human development because of its perceived benefits. The pursuit of gender equality is currently part of U.N Sustainable Development Goals targeted to be attained on or before 2030.

Sustainable development is a process that entails improving the conditions of life and well-being of the people of today and the generations of tomorrow (Anijah-Obi, 2001). It is a programme with the goal to transform the world, which is under growing and diverse challenges as well as stress (Barrow, 1995). On a classic note, Marshall (1998) citing Brundtland Report of 1987, defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable Development is a challenging process that demands concerted national efforts to effectively pursue and hope to make positive difference in any country. It could be said to be the part two of the millennium development goals agenda of the United Nations. While many countries particularly African countries seem to have performed poorly on the millennium development goals, it is expected that the sustainable development agenda will offer another opportunity for the

developing nations to exploit all their inherent assets and resources to achieve appreciable degree of sustainability in different facets of human and national development.

Industrialization, on a simple note, is the advancement of industries in any society or country on a wide scale. Investopedia (2020) defines industrialization as, “the process by which an economy is transformed from primarily agricultural to one based on the manufacturing of goods. Individual manual labour is often replaced by mechanized mass production, and craftsmen are replaced by assembly lines”. Again, industrialization is the building and growing of industries within an economy, which results in mass production, technological advances and other services. When an area or economy is industrialized or undergoing rapid industrialization, it experiences an increase in the standard of living, job growth, and more productivity as it sustains growth. As productivity in an area increases, there is so much more opportunity (EM Founders Group, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

The paper anchors its analysis on the structural- functionalist theory. As a theoretical guide, it provides the perspective for understanding society’s structural formation and contents that make it an entity with many different constituent parts that function complementarily for societal stability and progress. Structural functionalism is, basically, a theory that sees society as a complex system with individual parts that function or perform in unison in order to maintain and sustain societal requirements and advancement Ritzer (1996). The theory emphasizes the identification of each structure’s social functions and relevance, or consequences of the social pattern for the operation of society as a whole (Haralambos and Holbon, 2000).

Structural – functionalism suits this paper because it offers the right framework for understanding the imperativeness of the system of gender equality in Nigeria’s efforts and capacity to pursue the attainment of appreciable level of sustainable industrial development. This is the sense that women who constitute about half of the nation’s population will under a gender-balanced system and society harness equal rights and opportunities that can empower them economically. With economic transformation, women can be more productive and be able to freely complement the efforts of their men counterparts through their increased number in participation and contributions towards national industrial productivity. This is a pre-requisite for increasing the overall national productivity and growth that can support realizable sustainable industrial development in Nigeria.

Adverse Impacts of Gender Inequality on Women Economy in Nigeria

There exists significant level of inequality between men and women that has for a long time entrenched and created a wide gap between the genders in political, socio-economic and cultural dimensions. Women are not given equal opportunities and treatments like their men counterparts, especially when it comes to economic opportunities that can potentially transform their status and improve their level of productivity in the country. It appears there is an unwritten but structurally enforced notion that the men should always be at the top, thereby controlling and relegating the women to the background with impunity, backed by traditional values and practices (Ajibola, 2015). This is evident in all sectors of the national economy but more prevalent in the formal sector where the analysis of federal, state and local government positions of authority shows that they are mostly dominated by the men (Ogan, 2016).

The sexual division of labour in the socio-economic and political landscape is often traced to the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. Their Western cultural notion of male superiority and dominance is reflected in their relations with Nigerians. The 1922 Sir Hugh Clifford’s Constitution disenfranchised women and limited the participation of adult male to the wealthy. This is not to say that there was no existing element of gender inequality in traditional state and stateless societies of Nigeria but that the colonial order made gender discrimination more pronounced (Mama, 1995). The issues of gender such as the various types of socio-cultural, economic and political inequalities, discrimination and bias manifest in the Nigerian society in many ways and ramifications. They are often observed in the form of visible, physical and psychological effects on individuals, families, groups and the larger society. They include unequal opportunities, rights and working conditions that influence women’s interests, careers and economic development. In the formal sector, it has been seen to affect women public servants in terms of their work attitude, work habits,

efficiency and productivity. In the informal sector, gender inequality has limited the means of women to gain equal access to credit facilities and financial assistance that could expand their businesses and ventures (Amadi, 2013). The female workers carry out their duties and responsibilities in mostly gender-biased environment that often requires special attitudes to cope with, although the increasing number of educated women is beginning to challenge this ugly status quo in Nigeria (Uchendu, 2014).

Gender inequality is a structural system that seems to persist despite years of civilization and human/societal development. It is a factor causing the underdevelopment of women in many societies, particularly in patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. Gender inequality stems from distinction, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed. Women are more than 50% of the world's population and they perform two-third of the world's work, yet they receive only one-tenth of the world's income (MasterWeb Reports, 2012). According to the United Nations Development Programme (1997), human development report, no society in the world treats its women as well as the men. It is unfortunately on records that this situation has not changed considerably judging from the perspective of Melroy (2016), which observed that despite efforts by world bodies, particularly United Nations and many countries, global inequality still prevails with untold sociopolitical and economic consequences. The instruments of affirmative action and gender mainstreaming aimed at minimizing or if possible eradicating gender inequality have not been effectively exploited to positively transform the state of disparity and inequity between the genders, both formally and informally in Nigeria (Elendu, 2015). It is obvious that a lot needs to be done towards the actual dismantling of the societal structures that propagate inequalities against girls and women in the Nigerian society and many other societies across the globe.

World Bank (2013) statistics reveal that only two countries out of 130 countries have achieved equality at all levels of education, 1% of global agriculture credit went to African women, 40% of wage-earning jobs in the non-agricultural sector were held by women in 2013. Women earn less than their male counterparts on the same job even in the United States of America and most European countries. In many work organization across the world, women often lose their jobs when they become pregnant, while in other countries they are restricted from their fundamental human rights of freedom to engage in normal human activities such as driving and some other social activities. This is presently the situation in Saudi-Arabia, Iran, etc. In India and parts of Asia, South America, some African countries and most recently Nigeria, they are often raped without justice. These are some of the manifestations of the unequal treatment, discrimination, bias and rights infringement meted on women in most societies across the world, including Nigeria. This scenario has not helped women in Nigeria to develop in their numbers nor be able to adequately contribute their own significant quota to the much needed national productivity and growth.

Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming: The Nigerian Perspective

Gender equality refers to a situation or condition in society where men and women have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potentials, political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit equally from the results. Furthermore, it entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities. Equality is therefore understood to include both formal equality and substantive equality and not merely simple equality to men. The issues of gender inequality against women have become a global core commitment because equality between men and women is just fair and right. To attain such a condition of societal balance entails that the underlying causes of discrimination and other issues of gender inequality such as unequal opportunities for training and development, unequal rights and unequal working environment, etc., are systematically identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities. This implies that equality is substantive equality, and not merely simple equality to men.

The attainment of gender equality is not only important as end to gender disequilibrium, particularly, in terms of human rights issues, but also as a prerequisite for the attainment of sustainable development. Ugwulebo (2011) posits that "favour of one sex against the other is against the tenets of gender equity and negates the spirit of sustainable development. It dictates who benefits from allocation of available resources including the economic and political benefits". In the gender literature, we often come across two concepts:

‘gender equality’ and ‘gender equity’. They are sometimes used interchangeably, but they do not quite refer to the same thing. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. In other words, gender equality refers to equal access to social goods, services, and resources and equal opportunities in all spheres of life for both male and female. When there is gender inequality, it is women that are more likely to be disadvantaged and marginalized, but we should not ignore the negative impact that gender inequality can have on men as well. For example, societal norms regarding the appropriate behaviour for men tend to put them under pressure as regards the need to provide materially for their family, and also deny them opportunities of being more nurturing toward their children and wife. Therefore, gender equality is the concern of all and changes must be brought about for both men and women. However, this is not to say that men and women are equally affected by gender inequality. Women appear to have the greater share of disadvantages (Adams. 2016).

On the other hand, gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men (Acha. 2009). Women and men should not only be given equal access to resources and opportunities, but they should also be given the means of benefiting from this equality. This is where the concept of gender equity comes into play. Gender equity implies fairness in the way women and men are treated. The different life experiences and needs of men and women are taken into consideration and compensation is made for women's historical and social disadvantages. The lower status of women in society often constitutes a handicap and provisions should be made to redress this inequality before they can take advantage of the opportunities provided. Gender equity thus serves to level the playing ground between males and females and empower women to relate on equal basis with their men counterparts. Therefore, we can say that equity is essential to achieving true equality, the rights of women and girl children are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights (UN, 1902) cited in (Adams, 2010). Nigeria has the highest population of any African country. With a population of over 180 million, Nigeria is ranked the world's seventh most populated country, of this magnitude, forty-nine percent are females, some 90.2 million girls and women. Comprehensively, thirty-eight percent of women in Nigeria lack formal education as against twenty-five for men, and only four percent of women have higher education against the seven percent of their male counterparts. Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the Gender Equity Index (Elegbede, 2012). Also, Onwuka (2015) emphasizes that gender roles continue to influence crucial individual decisions; on education, on career path, on working arrangements, on family and on fertility. These decisions in turn have impact on the economy and society at large. It is therefore in everyone's interest to offer genuine choices equally for women and men throughout the different stages of their lives. Gender equality is more than just a slogan; it is our social and economic responsibility.

The 2012 Gender in Nigeria Report published by the British Council reveals that gender inequality not only exists in the country, but at high levels. There is a lack of gender balance in the economy, education, politics, health, access to justice and almost all areas of human development according to the report. Nigeria's 90.2 million women and girls have a significant worse life chances than men and also their sisters in comparable societies; 60 to 79 percent of the rural work force is women, but men are five times more likely to own land. In eight northern states of Nigeria, over 80 percent of women aged 20 to 29 in the North-West are unable to read and write and only three percent of females complete secondary school in the northern zones. Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index. The report went further to state that everyone must be involved in efforts aimed at advocating women's and girl's equal rights, combating discriminatory practices and challenging the roles and stereotypes, which promote inequalities and exclusion. Gender inequality, centered on human rights, is recognized both as a development goal on its own and as vital to accelerate sustainable development. There still exists cultural practices that perpetuate discriminatory practices against women and girls, as majority of women and girls in Nigeria, occupy the sidelines when it comes to decision making process. Sometimes, due to family set-ups, the girls are denied a chance to fully enjoy their childhood and education because they are given out in early marriage. Women find themselves excluded from decision-making process, whether political or otherwise. The 2011 and 2015 general elections held in Nigeria cannot be said to have recorded significant increase in the level of women

participation/activism or gaining political appointments. For example, recent governorship elections did not result in a female candidate winning any seat. In fact, the overall proportion of females in National Assembly has gone down.

Gender mainstreaming was first introduced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on women. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to achieve equality between women and men. It involves the integration of gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020). On the other hand, the Affirmative Action was enacted to provide underrepresented groups a more accurate representation within key roles in government, business and academic positions (Kenton, 2019). In essence, Affirmative Action is a policy that takes into account an individual's colour, race, sex, religion or national origin in order to enhance opportunities available for those who are underrepresented in a society. It aims to establish fairness and equity in terms of access to socio-economic and political opportunities in such a way that will reflect balanced demographic dynamics in the workforce. Gender mainstreaming and the Affirmative Action are no doubt well-intended and enterprising policies and framework for eliminating the structures of gender inequality and establishing fairness and equity between women and men, particularly in the formal sector of global economy. These policies have been adopted by the Nigerian government for more than three decades, yet in practice they seem to be in comatose. Recent studies indicate that women are still largely underrepresented and marginalized in the public service, particularly in the political landscape and at the top level of corporate management (Isigwe and Onuoha, 2015). These are positions where most far-reaching policies, decisions and laws that influence the apportioning of resources and opportunities are made. With women underrepresented in the national and state legislative assembly, their interests and ideas are excluded considerably. This signifies the poor implementation of gender mainstreaming and the Affirmative Action in the country.

Gender mainstreaming is now a recurring concept as a global agenda directed at dismantling the shackles of the system and practice of gender inequality. Subrahmanian (2004), Moser and Moser (2005), and Unterhalter and North (2010) seem to agree that the World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 gave an impetus to gender mainstreaming initiatives that had begun during the UN decade for women in the 1980s. In partnership with national governments, feminist agendas in development sought to challenge the gendered nature of public policies, the structures of organizations involved in government, and the implementation of policies at all levels and across sectors to alter them in ways that would improve women's lives significantly. Since gender mainstreaming was advocated largely as an organizational strategy, much of the literature on the experiences of gender mainstreaming has focused on organizational processes and the constraints in bringing about institutional change.

One of these organizational processes that readily come to mind is the gender training. Subrahmanian (2004) states that gender training is considered to be one of the most crucial components "to help organizations think more deeply about gender relations, away from the earlier 'add women and stir approach'. Again, Moser and Moser (2005) argue that organizations have invested in training, in particular, to sensitize staff about gender issues, to provide an understanding of basic gender concepts, and above all to use a gender lens in all their works. Three major obstacles continue to stand in the way of actualizing positive records on the pursuit of gender mainstreaming across the world and particularly in the developing nations such as Nigeria. They are in the forms of 'male resistance', 'cultural resistance' and a continuing lack of conceptual clarity with regards to the differences between sex and gender. The situation in Nigeria in terms of gender mainstreaming presents a narrative of failures of work organizations toward its application and implementation because negative attitudes to gender issues and relations persist at all levels of organizational structures (Akano, 2016).

In the developed climes, from where gender mainstreaming gained its origin, gender trainings have been perceived by staff members as irrelevant and unrelated to their work or ironically as additional sources of

income through allocations to attend gender training workshops (Tiessen, 2004). The narrative of the apparent failure of gender mainstreaming have been highlighted to indicate that the literature of gender mainstreaming implicitly expects an optimal level of organizational change with staff members being conversant and knowledgeable about gender issues, before changes at the level of field operations can be attempted. Such an expectation, they argue, is both unreasonable and undesirable as it serves to defer goals of transforming the lives of women in marginalized communities in favour of organizational change. They, therefore, stress upon gender mainstreaming as a process, which cannot be expected to yield instant changes in norms and values. Rather, they insist that the gradual accretion of such changes over time is much more likely to result in the bigger goals of cultural and social changes, empowerment and equality (Mehra and Gupta. 2006).

One persistent concern among scholars is the tendency of gender mainstreaming practices not to take into account the sociocultural contexts of institutions. On this point, Subrahmanian (2004) observes that “institutional change is often conflated with social change without considering the political economy and local contexts within which gender mainstreaming practices occur”. In consideration of this reality, gender mainstreaming as a concept and phenomenon needs to be contextualized for realistic social change to occur. In Nigeria, this implies and requires that organizations, particularly, the Nigeria Public Service, breaks down the ethos of gender mainstreaming into smaller organizational processes with the goal of understanding them and their peculiarities before applying them in our local context and to our overall benefits and progress as a developing nation.

Women’s Role in Sustainable Industrial Development in Nigeria: The Gender Equality Imperative

Development is a multifaceted phenomenon. In all its forms, it involves the positive transformation of all aspects of society, hence the relentless investment of efforts by all societies to achieve it. Achieving development generally, and industrial development in particular, requires the effort of everyone, including women, gender notwithstanding. For Nigerian women, taking up this all important responsibility has been more or less like swimming against the tide, due to the interaction of various social, cultural and biological factors (Etuk, Coker and Ogrimah, 2014). Development is conceptualized as a process involving changes in societal structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty (Todaro and Smith, 2009). There are many dimensions of development - industrial development is one of its dimensions and can be perceived as the progressive advancement and growth of a society's industrial institutions and structures such as the Nigeria Public Service and other work organizations.

Across the globe, a major prerequisite for the transformation of any country to be regarded as a ‘developed society’ is its level of industrial development. Nigeria is up to today, categorized among the ‘developing society’ because of the country's level of industrial development, which is still at its nascent stage. Attaining industrial development in Nigeria has been a big challenge to successive governments in the country. It demands the efforts of every one if any meaningful progress must be recorded. Women with their numbers constitute up to half of the nation's population (Muftau, 2016), and therefore have a lot to contribute to Nigeria's development at all strata, particularly in efforts towards industrial development. Historically, Nigeria women play recognizable roles and help to add value to the nation's development process. However, their efforts are often challenged by a number of societal forces. Etuk et al (2014:55) advocate that:

Notwithstanding, the situation is not entirely hopeless, given that with the right measures in place, the determining societal forces can be fought off. There is thus need to provide necessary institutional backing for women at all levels to enable them surmount the daunting challenges society and culture place in their way. The role of government, women organizations and the media are of peculiar relevance in paving the way for the desired change. With structural supports from these institutions, women can secure more meaningful positions in the Industrial future and landscape of the Nigerian society

Todaro and Smith (2009) consider women participation in development as simply the degree of women's involvement in development policies and implementations in the society. It is not just a means of advancing

developmental objectives, but also one of the major targets of development itself. In Nigeria, like in many other nations of the world, women make up about half of the entire population and therefore, efforts and strategies targeted at development often have direct or indirect consequences on them. This is why women should have a say and also participate effectively in development. In fact, genuine and full participation by development beneficiaries minimizes setbacks and makes for the achievement of greater and better results in the development process. Since women are part of the beneficiaries of development, their roles are therefore central to the achievement of the overall goals of development. Although early theoretical thinking and debates did not assume this position, more recent developmental theorizing have been strongly supportive of women's involvement in development at all levels (Todaro and Smith, 2009).

In the Nigerian context, women roles are extremely important if the country's developmental efforts are to gather enough momentum at all levels. The fact that Nigerian women carry out the biological function of child bearing puts them at the centre of supplying the human population needed to initiate and sustain industrial development in the country. A key requirement for industrialization is a steady supply of human resources to form the needed labour force and human capital (Etuk, 2007). The special importance of human resources in development process is hinged on the fact that it takes humans to plot the direction of development and to harness other resources needed for the process. Since the supply of human resources and human capital depends very much on the procreative role of women, it therefore makes Nigerian women to be of invaluable relevance to the country's industrial development (Essien, 2005).

It is also pertinent to note the role women play in the production of food and in the feeding of the nation's population. It is not in doubt that without food, man's survival faces threat. The workforce that makes industrial development, let alone sustainable possible requires adequate nutrition to safe guard their health and supply the energy needed for work. Nigerian women (both rural and urban women) are major stakeholders in the area of food production and supply, as well as food security. Women form about 90% of the workforce in food processing business (Agbola, 1990). According to Mijindadi (1993), for rural women, they have limited options when it comes to means of survival. As such, for many of them, farming is the main occupation. They take the lead in the planting and harvesting of popular Nigerian food crops such as cassava, yam, vegetables, melon, pepper, okro, etc. Women are crucial in making food available and secure for Nigerians, and this is fundamental if the country must have healthy and energetic population that will continue to drive her industrial development efforts on a sustainable basis.

Added to their reproductive and food production capacities, Nigerian women also have played and are still playing enterprising roles in the process of national industrialization and industrial development. Examples include: Ndi Okereke Onyiuke (who headed the Nigeria Stock Exchange Commission for ten years in a way that strengthened the Stock Exchange on the global level), Folurunsho Alakija Adebajo Omokehinde Sola David-Borha. Bola Adesola, Aishah Ahmed. Ononuju Irukwu and Osaretin Demuren - are all leading industrialists in Nigeria. Giddens (2006) claims that in the past century, women's participation in paid labour has risen considerably. As a result of this, in most countries, including Nigeria, they constitute a recognizable proportion of the labour force. In fact, some statistics have it that, there are more women than men in the Nigeria Civil Service since 2016. Etuk et al (2014) state that, in the case of Nigeria, as at 2010, women constitute 42.84% of the nation's workforce. This implies that across all occupations and industries, including the civil service, they also undertake industrial work activities like their male counterparts to facilitate industrial development. However, this is not without its challenging gender discrimination and inequalities. The efforts of Nigerian women in the area of handicrafts, such as pottery, tie and dye, black soaping production, etc., may never be matched by their male counterparts. Women dominate the micro, small and medium scale industries in most states if not the entire country. There are many Nigerian women who engage in petty trading, general sales, hawking, restaurant business, hair salon business, etc. There also are women who have distinguished themselves in the following areas: Benin pottery in Edo State. Akwaete cloth making in Abia State, and palm oil production in Imo, Anambra and other states. The roles of women in small and medium scale industries in Nigeria have continued to grow over the years that it contributes significantly to Nigeria's efforts towards concrete industrialization and industrial development (Ogunde, 2013). These are

testimonies to the dynamic roles women are playing in Nigeria's contemporary economy. Given the exploits and achievements of the womenfolk in the industrial sector and in the general sustenance of human and national needs, one wonders what their optimal performance can bring to national productivity and growth. The dismantling of the unfair and unequal bifurcated gender relations and access to economic opportunities can lift women's potentials and capacity to contribute optimally to national development.

The time is ripe for Africa to industrialize, and Nigeria cannot be left out. In fact, industrialization is key if Nigeria is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, particularly the SDG-9, which focuses on building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovations. Considering the reality that industrialization does not occur automatically, Nigeria needs to build on its existing economic structures, engage in interregional trade and integration, access newly available technologies and ensure the social and economic inclusion of women and the young (UNIDO, 2016). These structural development targets are issues that are in consonance with the ethos of gender equality. This is quite observable from the perspective of the need for the socio-economic inclusion of women. As Nigeria endeavors to achieve significant strides in the SDG's, it is imperative that the shackles of gender inequality should give way for an egalitarian and non-gender imbalanced society in order to eliminate women's discrimination, subjugation, domination, marginalization and economic exploitation. The practical reality that gender inequality exists in Nigeria and yet women continue to improve their participation and contributions to Nigeria's economic development suggests that they can do more exploits if given equal opportunities with their male counterparts. This makes achieving gender equality sine qua non for increasing women's economic productivity and growth, which on a progressive trend does not only foster industrial productivity and growth but also sustainable industrial development.

Conclusion

Women constitute at least half of the population in Nigeria, and therefore a constituency with immense capabilities and capacity to strengthen the nation's pursuit of laudable projects such as sustainable industrial development. They are increasingly acquiring education and other necessary competences that make them more productive and relevant in the economic and industrial sphere.

However, the system of gender inequality remains a major structural impediment to women's full actualization of their interests, careers and economic development. The dismantling of gender inequality and discrimination against women will create a more enabling, conducive and gender balanced socio-economic space that can allow women exploit their full potentials and contribute more towards industrial productivity and development. Gender equality possess the features that can guarantee women's increased participation and contributions to national productivity which in turn will support Nigeria's efforts toward attaining concrete sustainable industrial development in the country.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions and submissions of this disquisition, the following recommendations were made :

1. There is urgent need to prioritize the effective implementation of government policies, programmes and instruments that have been developed and meant for the dismantling of the structures of gender inequality, particularly, the policy of affirmative action and gender mainstreaming. These well-intended policies and instruments aimed at creating equality between men and women must be made to function optimally in order to empower women and institutionalize gender equality.
2. All right thinking Nigerians seem to believe in the need for Nigeria to intensify efforts towards rapid and sustainable industrialization, and therefore should uphold all-round equality at interpersonal, group, organizational and institutional levels. This will engender a more gender-friendly and balanced society in which all genders' attainable and full potentials can be exploited for sustainable development.

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