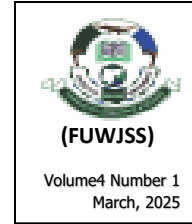


FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Although 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 fora; yet, millions of women around the world, most especially in Nigeria continue to experience discrimination. Thus, this study probes factors that militate against gender equality in Nigeria. The Eager's Model of International Norm Construction theory formed the theoretical lens that guided analyses in the study. Data for the study emerged from both primary and secondary sources. Findings show that low literacy rate in Nigeria has consistently slowed the pace of progress in promoting the rights of women and negatively impacted the enjoyment of their rights. Likewise, weak institutional capacities and inappropriate prioritization of resources undermine the effectiveness of existing laws and efforts in achieving gender equality in Nigeria. The study concludes that women in Nigeria are in less powerful positions to challenge exploitation when it occurs, as they often face gendered forms of exploitation such as the demand for sex in return for particular services or resources. The study recommends that the Nigerian government should collaborate with traditional rulers in Nigeria and other stakeholders to ensure that all harmful and traditional practices which target only women are abrogated.

Keywords: Empowerment, equality, gender, harmful practices, United Nations

Introduction

Women represent over 70% of the World's poor due to unequal access to economic opportunities (UN, 2020). Increasing female participation in the workforce and the development of the female human capital will not only help to reduce poverty at the household level, it will also radically enhance national security. The global economic recession and the gulf between job creation and the growth in the numbers of job seekers have worsened the employment situation for women and men alike. But women face greater vulnerabilities in the labour market because of their relative lack of

education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, childbearing and childcare, which restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities (Kemi & Jenyo, 2016).

However, African women have made significant strides in the political arena over the past years. The continental political body of the African Union (AU), took a major step by promoting gender parity in its top decision making position in 2003. Five women and five men were elected as AU commissioners. In 2004, Ms. Gertrude Mongella was chosen to head the AU's Pan-African Parliament, where women make up 20% of the members. Another AU body, the African Peer Review Mechanism entrusted with the task of overseeing Standard for good governance, was led by Ms. Angelique Savane. African women have also successfully promoted agreements that advance their rights. By the end of 2004, 51 out of the 53 AU member countries had ratified CEDAW adopted in 1973 by Un General Assembly. In 2003, Activists persuaded their heads of state to adopt a protocol on the rights of women (UN Women, 2017).

Despite all these achievements and progress made, African women have also encountered challenges and obstacles such as; the primary development of policies in many countries known as poverty reduction strategies, who still do not take into account the differences in income and power between men and women, hampering efforts to finance programs that reduce inequality. Moreover, majority of African women are still denied education and employment. African Union (2017) in its logical framework for achieving gender equality and women empowerment in African, Aspiration on leadership states that "Equal participation and demonstrated influence of women and girls in all leadership and decision-making positions". Furthermore, African Union commission developed 6 key pillars for Gender Equality and women's Empowerment (GEWE) to ensure the inclusion of women in Africa's development agenda. The agenda include; (i). Women's Economic Empowerment and Sustainable Development (ii). Social justice, protection and women's right (iii). Leadership and Government- increasing the opportunities for the participation of women in leadership of nations (iv). Gender management systems- providing access and investing sources (v). Women, Peace and Security- ensuring that women's perspectives are included in these issues (vi). Media and ICTs- giving women a voice in African media and access to technology for knowledge (UN: <https://www.un.org>).

According to a review made by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) 2023, 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 40

per cent of all positions in the public sector (Gender in Nigeria Report, 2023). 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 59 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, 2023).

Nigeria continues to demonstrate and reaffirm her commitment to the implementation of the principle and provisions of CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), the Outcome of the twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly, the MDGs and other United Nations Resolutions that galvanized international efforts for the advancement of women. The development of the Nigeria seventh and eighth CEDAW report was highly participatory and inclusive with system wide efforts to generate inputs from government MDAs, State counterparts, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Development partners, while the Committee's Recommendations on the sixth Country Report was made a reference point. Since the defence of the last report, the Nigerian Government has taken a variety of measures to address constitutional and legal stereotypes and discrimination against women (customary law inclusive). One of such critical steps is the review of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 to conform to international best practices and standards.

The literature review demonstrates that scholars have examined the topic of gender from various research perspectives. Earlier researchers, mostly focusing on factors responsible for gender inequality and discrimination against women in Nigeria, emphasized a culture that promotes women liberation. Conversely, recent studies reveal that gender inequality is a plague that remains manifest within the socio-political and economic frontiers in Nigeria. The divide created between earlier and more recent research underscores the importance of engaging in this research on factors militating against gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria (2015-2023). The paper is structured into discussing united nations' mainstreaming of gender equality and women empowerment, implementation of gender equality goals in Nigeria, theoretical framework, research methodology, factors militating against the successful promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria, united nations and Nigeria government response to the challenges militating against the successful promotion of gender equality on empowerment in Nigeria, then conclusion and recommendations follows.

United Nations' Mainstreaming of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization tasked to promote international co-operation and to create and maintain international order. The United Nations has four purposes, to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations among nations, to co-operate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations. The organizations formally came into existence on 24 October, 1945, with 51 countries considered founding members. It has six main organs viz; The General Assembly, Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and the secretariat. Nigeria featured on top as a preferred candidate that would represent Africa (UN, 2020).

United Nations is a universal organization that represents the whole population of the globe, and it is not limited to any specific or geographical territory. The organization is a blend of Wilsonian idealism and post-World War II realism. A one-time United States President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt first coined the term United Nations to describe the allied countries. The term was officially used on 1-2 January 1942, when 26 governments signed the declaration (United Nation, 2020).

The United Nations, its land and buildings are international territory. The United Nations has its own flag, its own post office and its own postage stamps. Six official languages are used at the United Nations namely, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The United Nations Day is celebrated on 24th October each year. The United Nations has six organs namely, the General Assembly, Security Council, Secretariat, ICJ, ECOSOC and the Trusteeship Council. The United Nations also has some smaller, more specialized agencies that deal with specific needs. These agencies are over 15 in number and they include the World Health Organization (WHO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations High Commission For Refugee (UNHCR), International Finance Corporation (IFC), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Bank For Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Development Agency (IDA), General Agreement on Trade and Tariff (GATT), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The United Nations has since inception in 1945 made remarkable achievements especially in

terms of maintaining international peace and security, promoting democracy, ending apartheid in South Africa, promoting women's rights, promoting human rights, etc (Alvarez, 2018).

Gender inequality is a situation where there is structural discrimination, differential or unequal treatment on the basis of sex which is often rationalized by culture, institutional and administrative rules. When such kind of situation happens, access to resources, incomes and opportunities of particular sex may not be possible. Gender equality refers to the goal of achieving equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of human, men, boys and girls. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same, but that their rights responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality is not a woman's issue, but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Achieving gender equality requires that the interest, needs, priorities and contribution of both women and men are taken into consideration.

Ulterhalter (2013) opined that gender equality means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and to benefit from the result. From the above, it means gender equality is a state or condition that affords women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, socially valued goods, opportunity and resources. Gender equality also means expanded freedoms and improved overall quality of life for all people. Furthermore, gender equality entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give men and women equal opportunities (Elegbede, 2020).

Culturally, Nigeria is gender stratified. The importance of gender of a person is a real issue in Nigeria and very much determines one's place in the educational, economic, social, political, religious and religious strata. There is glaring inequality in almost every aspect of the Nigerian society. It is an existing reality that cannot be easily ignored, both in the family, social, religious and economic institutions as well as in governance. There is severe imbalance in the educational, workforce and leadership opportunities in the country. Enough women are not empowered educationally and given opportunity in the labour market and worse still, in the area of leadership. A statistics conducted in 1990 revealed that a very minimal percentage of women were professors, about 1.8% of all the professors in Nigeria, furthermore, only 11% of women participate in the Nigerian economy as against 30% of men (Olonade, 2021). Likewise, a study conducted by Omoregie and Abraham (2019) on the statistics of male and female genders enrolled for studies at every level of education, it was discovered that there is a persistent gender inequality in the education sector of Nigeria. The

research also revealed that the reason for the inequality is fundamentally due to the historical, cultural, and patriarchal structure of the traditional Nigerian society.

The concept stresses the differences between biological sex and gender as a role. Gender empowerment is a significant topic of discussion in regard to development and economics sustainability in measuring gender equality in the state. It is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing the impact of individual towards human capacity development. Conclusively, Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is an index designed to evaluate gender equality. It is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that attempt to measure the extent of gender inequality across the countries, based on estimates of women's relative economic income, participations in high-paying positions with economic power, and access to professional and parliamentary positions. It was introduced at the same time as the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) but measures topics like empowerment that are not covered by that index (Johnson, 2016).

Empowerment refers to increasing the personal, political, social or economic strength of individuals and communities. Empowerment of women and girls concerns women and girls gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. The core of empowerment lies in the ability of a person to control their own destiny. This implies that to be empowered women and girls must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment), but they must also have the agency to use these rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make strategic choices and decisions.

Implementation of Gender Equality Goals in Nigeria

In her thesis, "Leaving on one Woman Behind: An Exploration of Gender Equality in Nigeria", Osinaike (2018) explores the gender equality policy framework in Nigeria with qualitative methods which was done in the form of interviews with some women in Nigeria and with some experts who knew how gender inequality was been handled in Nigeria. Osinaike investigated the extent to which the policy and legal frameworks in Nigeria can contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development goal on gender equality. She also investigated the factors that impact gender equality implementation in Nigeria and she came to the conclusion that even though women in Nigeria face a lot of challenges they still have the power to fight against the gender inequality that the society make them face and they are

doing everything within their power to make things right so that not just women but also girls do not face the same situations when they are grow up. Secondly, she concluded that gender inequality in Nigeria is multidimensional and that there is no tangible solution to gender inequality in Nigeria and that to make progress towards a coherent gender equality policy framework requires a multipronged approach.

Ndupu and Akwara (2019) in their work patriarchy and emergent gender equality in Nigeria: a lingering issue in Nigeria nation building. To them, patriarchy is a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. It has been said that there can be no gender equality without gender equity. Nigeria institutions are no doubt experiencing certain conditions that are common with their counterparts in other nations of the world but there are peculiar issues confronting their development in terms of productivity, welfare, growth and competitiveness (nation building). The issue of patriarchy and gender inequality on the productive development of Nigeria in these present times is the focus of the paper. Thus, patriarchy is a determinant factor in gender equality and as such should be eradicated. The paper concludes that there can sites where patriarchy can be attacked like domestic production, paid employment, culture and religion, sexuality, male violence, state. Etc. It was recommended that there should be equal participation of women and their men counterpart in the society, eradicating socio-cultural delineation of the female gender, participation of women in the political institution and also strict adherence of policies in eradicating discrimination of women. The problems militating against the successful promotion of gender quality by United Nations on empowerment in Nigeria were not discussed in the study.

Therese (2022) examined Gender Issues in Nigeria: Women in Elective Positions. The study adopted historical and analytical research methods. The study argued that scholarship is replete with researches that suggest that women are not generally given equal opportunities with men especially in leadership roles in a world that is predominantly patriarchal. However, despite many initiatives undertaken to address these inequalities, there seems to be little improvement especially with regards to the disproportionate distribution of elective positions. This phenomenon is a reality in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. Thus, promotion of gender equality in Nigeria has remained a little explored area in scholarship with many inconsistencies and ambiguities yet to be attended to. The study recommends an inclusive method of electing candidates into leadership of the nation. Women's potentials could be recognized and adequately utilized in building the nation and also be well represented and given opportunities to participate in making decisions affecting their lives and the entire nation.

To attend the feat of full equality and participation in Nigeria's political sphere, the first step ought to be to create a level playing field in the labour sectors, allowing equal access to all in the leadership roles in the different institutions. Breaking down socio-economic walls barring a section of the society's population from partaking in the political activities of the nation. This is possible if gender mainstreaming is employed as well as targeted policies. Going beyond the mentality of the social constructs and gender roles as well as social stratification which prevents a greater percentage of the nation's population full participation in politics. It is very obvious that women are the most disadvantaged in this situation. The United Nations and Nigeria government response to the challenges militating against the successful promotion of gender equality on empowerment in Nigeria were not investigated in the study.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Eager's Model of International Norm Construction propounded in 1994. The theory believes that in life, nothing is static rather, everything is in perpetual flux and the only thing that is permanent in life is change. The theory holds that normative change largely depends on change in the international community or state priorities and interests. From a constructivist view, state or non-state actors who propagate a new norm, do so based on their interpretation of social reality (Eager, 2018).

The theory argues that gender inequality is a way of classifying humans into first, second or third class citizenship which is naturally wrong and it is not in any way reflecting the mind of the creator of both man and women. The theory posits that in societies where only the men are allowed to work either as civil servants or hold political positions and their female counterparts are denied such rights and privileges, such policies are bound to have negative consequences on its economic growth and development in general as it is not scientifically proven anywhere in the world that breadwinning is an exclusive preserve of any gender or sex.

The theory maintains that complementary efforts in production will succeed more than any one thing else, for example, it will yield greater harvest, that will translate into self-sufficiency, wealth creation, non-existent of poverty eliminates dependency and brings about better standard of living (Eager, 2018). Three key concepts in the topic require theoretical appreciation to define parameters with which the chosen. The theory applies to Nigerian situation because the entity called Nigeria was born in 1914 after the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates. It was a by-product of fraudulent social contract and of a negotiated will of diplomatic imperialism. The whole exercise was borne out of a savage colonial

commercial and economic interest of capitalism in its phases of expansion and dominance on a world scale.

The Nigeria state therefore emerges as a colonial state for colonial interest where the metropolitan political elites controlled the economy to reflect only their own values and interests. Then the colonial state did not make genuine effort towards developing the economy for self-reliance, no effort was made to integrate the various groups towards genuine nationhood. Also from the time of Lord Lugard the first colonial administrator in Nigeria to the time of Clifford, Macpherson, Richard, and Oliver Lyttleton and to the last of the colonial administration in Nigeria, gender equality was not an issue. This legacy is still manifesting today with all its attendant consequences (Lawal, 2019). The relevance of the theory to the study is that it reveals the negative effects of gender inequality by explaining that societies where only the men are allowed to work either as civil servants or hold political positions and their female counterparts are denied such rights and privileges, such policies are bound to have negative consequences on its economic growth and development in general.

Research Methodology

The overall research design that used for this study is the qualitative research design. The target population of this study is comprised of staff from the United Nations office in Abuja (UN-Women), Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Centre for Advancement of Development Rights, Abuja, Department of international cooperation -Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja, Sustainable Development Goals Head office, Abuja, National Center for Women Development and Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON). The purposive sampling strategy was used in this study. Seven (7) Individuals from the various institutions mentioned above (one each) were purposively chosen to offer relevant data for the study. All the survey respondents were purposively chosen. This is informed by the need to ensure that only respondents with useful and valid knowledge about the study focus are engaged.

Data for the study were collected from two main methods: primary method and secondary method. Information was qualitatively gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with respondents who were selected purposively. Secondary data was collected from existing literature in journals, books, newspapers, magazines, television interviews and other relevant publications on United Nations and promotion of gender equality on empowerment in Nigeria. Furthermore, government documents related to women empowerment were utilized to complement KIIs.

This research used the descriptive content or textual analysis. In content analysis the textual analysis or contextual analysis which involves the use of

the texts contents to analyze the study was applied. The researcher adopted content analysis due to the fact that it makes for critical reading and observations of information contained in texts and in-depth interviews on a bit to understanding the data from the literature and to arrive at a more valid conclusion. Quotations from interviews were paraphrased along thematic lines. Codes were also employed to designate the respondents in order to protect their identity.

Factors Militating against the Successful Promotion of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria

P1 posited that low literacy rate in Nigeria has consistently slowed the pace of progress in promoting the rights of women and impacted the enjoyment of rights negatively. Patriarchy also constitutes a very big hurdle in this pursuit and is reflected in the slow pace of legislative reforms with respect to laws affecting women, poor enforcement mechanism, trivialization of corresponding laws due to lack of understanding especially among the legislators. The problem of gender inequality in Nigeria is further compounded by weak institutional capacities and insufficient prioritization of resources which undermine the effectiveness of existing laws and efforts. Therefore, in terms of the link between gender equality and national security, empowerment of women and girls needs to be prioritized in national and regional development agendas (January, 2024).

In addition to traditional rules and practices that treat men preferentially (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021), the country's male-dominated Parliament has repeatedly rejected or failed to act upon proposed legislation to promote women's rights. Most recently, in March 2022, the National Assembly voted down five bills aimed mostly at increasing women's political leadership opportunities, prompting public protests in several cities (Premium Times, 2022).

P3 stated that realizing the growing need for gender equality is also germane to the survival and development of children and the building of healthy communities, societies and nations. the problems militating against the successful promotion of gender quality by United Nations in Nigeria, however, is the action dilemma by the Nigerian government that is typified by misgovernance, lack of political will, the prevailing patriarchal culture, false public investment and the absence of adequate productive capacity that will create the opportunities for women empowerment and development. This problematic explains the inevitability and imperative of a pragmatic action-based approach that will translate gender equality programs into concrete reality (January, 2024).

P2 lamented that:

Women who marry early often find their earning potential limited. In the early years of marriage, women are often expected to bear and raise children as well as take on new household chores. Women marrying young, therefore, have less time to develop skills, experiences, and relationships significant to employment, example, less time to go to school, learn where to buy goods to sell at the market, etc. As a result, their life-long earnings are likely to be lower than those of women who marry later. This reduces their ability to save, invest, and take loans (January, 2024).

The above agrees with the submission by Kemi & Jenyo (2016) which states that women represent over 70% of the World's poor due to unequal access to economic opportunities. Increasing female participation in the workforce and the development of the female human capital will not only help to reduce poverty at the household level, it will also radically enhance national security.

Nigeria like other countries in the world is responding to the clear request calls made variously by the United Nations societies of all forms of discriminations especially gender based discriminations. Nigeria indeed has tried to respond to this development from the international arena by articulating policies and programmes that seek to reduce gender inequalities in socio economic and political spheres, however, the success of bridging the gap between men and women is farfetched.

Economically, they constitute the majority of the peasant labour force in the agricultural sector, while most of the others occupy the bottom of occupational ladder and continue to be channelled into service and domestic occupations. The consequence of the unequal status between men and women is high level of economic and political powerlessness among women, and powerlessness in turn retards development of any level, politically, economically and socially. Gender based discrimination is an all pervasive global problem which has occasioned intense gender inequality in many countries of the world. It existed from the dawn of civilization and has continued over centuries. Gender discrimination has created wide gender gaps in many countries of the world, with very devastating social, economic and, health consequences on the members of the female gender, who have been intensely marginalized, and subjugated to the background. The world, for the past few decades, has witnessed a resurgent interest in feminist jurisprudence. This interest has culminated in the emergence of numerous global strategies geared towards women empowerment and emancipation.

However, a study by Vanner (2017) shows that despite the effort of the Federal Government to put a stop to the menace of gender discrimination against women both in the public and private sectors of the economy, the ugly practice still persists. Sex discrimination and subordination against women by their male counterparts highly limits women's access to the

acquisition of the forces of production as well as opportunities to high status and job positions, educational qualifications notwithstanding. Instead, they are largely employed in lower status jobs even in the Nigerian universities than their male counterparts in spite of their large population size and enhanced educational qualifications. Commenting on the origin and reality of gender discrimination against women in management, politics and social affairs, it was argued that although the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for non-discrimination and equality between the sexes, in reality the gap between the law and the practice is quite wide and seemingly parallel.

The Nigerian culture perceives and treats men as superior to women, this is well manifested in the “son preference syndrome” that is prevalent in Nigeria. Male children in Nigeria often enjoy preferential treatment, like exemption from house chores; they enjoy unlimited right to education, while the girls are trafficked by some greedy parents for economic gains in the home. The culture equally disinherits wives and daughters. In the home front, women are subjected to all sorts of inhuman and degrading treatment. Our culture strictly restricts women to the stereotyped role of home keeping, childbearing and childrearing. She is to be seen and not heard (Interview with P6: January, 2024).

P5 has rightly observed that this subordination of women by our culture knows no boundaries or barriers, and is not dependent on the social, educational or economic status of the Nigerian women. Consequently, one finds that uneducated and poor women in the rural community suffer as much subordination as educated and rich women in the urban centre. Another worrisome aspect of this cultural marginalization of women in Nigeria as observed earlier is its deep rooted nature in the Nigerian system (January, 2024).

P4 expressed that corruption is the foundation of and the gateway to mis-governance. She emphasized that: Corruption which is the misuse of entrusted power for private benefits, has become commonplace in Nigeria to the extent that it has become the culture. Although corruption is not the only dimension of mis-governance, it is at the heart of and therefore central to bribery, extortion, fraud, manipulation and different shades of malpractices. Corruption has become so systemic, institutionalized and structural that it has a holistic effect on governance principally due to the fact that it pollutes politics, undermines economy, biases government spending away from socially valuable goods such as education, employment and diverts public resources from infrastructure investments that are critical to the actualization of government programs and activities, particularly gender parity or balancing and women empowerment types. As a consequence, there are glaring distortions to the extent that clear discrepancies between government

or public investments and actual government programs, projects and goods or services have become an enduring permanent feature and an integral part of the Nigerian culture. This brings into fore the issue of huge, fraudulent and false public investment which is an evident constraint to a system-wide pragmatic approach to gender mainstreaming by government especially as the establishment and strengthening of appropriate institutional and operational frameworks that are expected to serve as a nexus between the macro-policy environment and the micro sectoral levels where the interface between men and women is characterized by gender inequality manifestations is an imperative (Interview with P13: January, 2024).

P8 added that corruption which drains public resources and takes much needed funds away from national economic development or social services, disproportionately affects women and the poor who are most dependent on them. Women may also be in less powerful positions to challenge corruption when it occurs. Alternatively they may face gendered forms of corruption such as the demand for sex in return for particular services or resources. Campaigns by women's movements on the right to information have provided valuable mechanisms for the collective empowerment of poor women in claiming accountability from institutions. There are significant ways in which the effects of corruption are particularly harsh on women. Considering the position of women in society, whereby women often face social, cultural, political and institutional discrimination, they are more likely to face even more repression in a corruption-ridden society. In other words if access to such institutions is restricted by gender considerations, corruption compounds this by making it even more difficult for women to access public goods, including services. Corrupt government is usually unable to give attention to the development of the social sectors – education, health, and infrastructures, with women bear the burden of such social dislocations and policy impropriety (January, 2024).

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 plethora of policies and conventions endorsed by successive political leadership in the country that are yet to be implemented (Interview with P7: January, 2024).

UN-Habitat, in its Country Program for 2017-2021, notes the lack of gender-sensitive legislation in Nigeria affected their previous urban efforts. Going forward, the agency has committed to mainstreaming both gender and youth perspectives in their programs by integrating these approaches in their normative and operational projects as well as using age and gender-

disaggregated data. It was stated further that they would apply a two-track approach consisting of mainstreaming and issue-specific projects in the execution and implementation of their projects.

United Nations and Nigeria Government Response to the Challenges Militating against the Successful Promotion of Gender Equality on Empowerment in Nigeria

P7 stated that Government has embarked on numerous programmes to boost women's economic empowerment. Some of these are the WOFEE and BUDFOW which are still making giant strides all over Nigeria. The FMWASD, in partnership with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Bank of Industry (BOI) have provided financial empowerment to women through their various initiatives, such as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund as well as the Agricultural Financing Scheme. So far over 5000 women have benefitted nationally and it is still work in progress (January, 2024). P12 revealed that Government has also put in place many other gender-specific economy boosting Programmes including: Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE P); YOU-Win; G-Win; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/SMEDAN technical and entrepreneurial skills programme among others.

Other instruments such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) also came in by encouraging state parties to take steps through international assistance and co-operation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, for the full realization of the rights of its citizens guaranteed without discrimination as to race, color, sex, religion, political or other opinion, origins, property, birth or other social stratification. This convention also sought, among other things, to protect the economic rights of people especially in the payment of just and favorable remuneration for employment and the provision of assistance for the family specifically in promoting family unification by providing that women should be afforded the right to be with their newly born babies for a period of time obviously to encourage bonding (ICESR, Article 10).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which Nigeria is also a member enjoined state parties to ensure the equal rights of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights including the right of men and women to freely choose their marriage partners and ensure that parties to a marriage must be capable of freely exercising their rights and responsibilities to the marriage during the subsistence of such marriage and at its dissolution with adequate protection given by the state to the parties at dissolution (ICCPR, Article 23).

In recognition of the ills of gender discrimination against women, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for non-discrimination and of equality between the sexes as basis for societal development (Gbose, 2017).

To further overcome the challenge of gender discrimination against women in the formal sector of employment, the Federal Government of Nigeria put in place strategies in its policy on women employment to include: sponsored training in the public and private sector institutions on gender sensitization programmes on the role of women in the development process in order to raise awareness of women in the society; sensitization of the public through mass mobilization campaigns about the need for women to be in formal sector employment in order to break traditional attitudes and stereotypes about women's work; encouragement of women's active participation in labour relations; and the review of labour laws to include more and better protective measures for women workers (Interview with P10: January, 2024).

P9 noted that although there is room for improvement, efforts are currently available for the enhancement of women's leadership skills. For instance, there exist in many states of the federation Forum of Women in Leadership and Forum of Spouses of Officials of Government. Such forums are designed to build the capacity of women in leadership positions and to improve social interaction and networking among them. The Forum of Spouses is also aimed at ensuring that the wives of key government officials are adequately motivated, taught and encouraged to be involved and active in life-improving activities within their localities (January, 2023).

P6 expressed that the Federal Ministry of Water Resources (FMWR) commissioned the Women Environmental Program (WEP) to implement its G-WIN Project. The FMWR's vision for the G-WIN projects is to build a cadre of women leaders in water management. This objective is being achieved through capacity building programs in water management, skills acquisition and livelihood support programs in water management. Other programs focus on the provision of water and sanitation facilities in public spaces and on improving the hygienic condition of the rural populace. Over 40 women and girls in each of the four pilot states have been trained in community-led total sanitation (CLTS), leadership and conflict resolution, slab construction, facility maintenance, and water and sanitation-related skills such as soap and detergent making, water pump repairs and the operations of water kiosks (January, 2023).

Ajemba (2023) posited that the Women in Agriculture (WIA) policy was formulated in 1986 as part of the Agriculture Development Program (ADP) to facilitate female farmers to access inputs. The ADPs were in charge of grassroots extension and advisory services across the country. The overall

goal of the WIA policy was the integration of women farmers into the country's agriculture development through the mainstreaming of gender issues into the ADP system, to ensure they have equal access to inputs, credit, loans and extension services. The main goal of the 2016 agriculture policy was to encourage behavioral change that has resulted in negative outcomes for women and youth and to strengthen efforts to expand wealth opportunities for them. Since women farmers are financially hamstrung to purchase seeds and fertilizers, through the G-WIN initiative, two million female farmers were given cell phones to improve their access to and exchange of information. The cell phones enabled them to use the e-wallet system to facilitate mobile money purchases of agricultural inputs.

Table 1: Key Implementation Results

S/N	Ministry	Focus	Target	Achieved
1	Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	1. Provide training, starter packs and mentoring to young women farmers. 2. Register women on the E-Wallet agro database through which women receive subsidized inputs; 3. Provide, in collaboration with Ministry of Communication Technology, women with agricultural information through text/voice messages	500 women 2.Million women 500,000 women	3,500 2.4 million 100,000 identified
2	Federal Ministry of Communication Technology	1. Secondary school girls gain access to ICT tools and mentorship to prepare them for career in the ICT sector. 2. Young girls provided with 3-day general ICT training, the best 200 receive higher level training certification by Huawei and 200 certified provided job placement	1,200 1000	1,850 400
3	Federal Ministry of Health	1. Build management skills of health workers.	Nil	128

		2. Train Peer-to-peer health educators. 3. Train Out-of-school young people as peer Educators	4,600 girls Nil	4,497 1,200 youths
4	Federal Ministry of Water Resources	1. Train Women to set up and operate water management committees. 2. Train rural Women in slab construction. 3. Train rural Women and girls on entrepreneurial skills.	240 women (12 States) 360 (4 States) 480 (4 States)	76 women 120 (4 States) 160 (4 States)
5	Federal Ministry of Works	1. Train women and employ in road maintenance projects. 2. Train women in procurement processes. 3. FERMA Road Maintenance Training Programme involving production of hand craft and artefacts, at the Federal Ministry of Works Training School in Kaduna	229 women 50 professional women 50 rural women	1,500 women 50 professional women 50 rural women

Source: Federal Ministry of Finance (2023).

P8 submitted that barriers are constantly being dismantled thereby allowing women and girls to participate in some vocational jobs that have for a long time been considered the preserve of men and boys. For instance girls are now being trained in vulcanizing (vehicle tire repair), wheel alignment. Through the project women are trained to drive taxies and empowered with vehicles to run transport businesses. Government and NGOs are increasingly working in collaboration with Faith Based Organizations and traditional authorities to conduct awareness programmes. These programmes have ensured the gradual but steady dislodgement of the culture of male superiority. The increasing numbers of female clerics in both Christian and Muslim denominations attest to this (January, 2023).

To create the necessary awareness and sensitization, the Government has been supporting the fast growing film industry in Nigeria. Financial support and other incentives ensure that the film industry serves as a medium for promoting positive perceptions of women and girl with the ultimate aim of eliminating gender stereotypes. GWIN (Growing Girls and

Women in Nigeria) is an innovative programme that links government budgeting processes to specific targets to improve the lives of disadvantaged girls and women in Nigeria. The pilot phase is implemented by five ministries: Agriculture, Communications Technology, Health, Water Resources, and Works. The Ministry of Women Affairs monitors and evaluates the implementation (interview with P9: January, 2023).

Article 28 (2) adopted the impermissibility principle contained in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. It also states that a reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention shall not be permitted and may be challenged by other States parties. The Convention defines discrimination against women as “...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (CEDAW, 1979: Article 1).

The Convention provides the basis for achieving equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life including the right to vote and to stand for election as well as education, health and employment. State parties agreed to take all appropriate measures including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The Convention is the only human rights treaty which affirms the reproductive rights of women and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and the nationality of their children. States parties also agreed to take appropriate measures against all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of women. As such, ratification of the many international instruments on human rights principally the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) has inspired more positive responses within the human rights domain (Interview with P1: January, 2024).

Female entrepreneurs account for 41% of the total number of entrepreneurs in Nigeria. They are 20% less likely to have a bank account and 17% not likely to have borrowed formally. As per a 2016 World Bank report on female entrepreneurship, it was stated that Nigerian women entrepreneurs opened 162,372 new limited liability companies compared to 332,884 opened by men. In addition, women owned 33.6% (37,188) of new sole proprietorship enterprises compared to male ownership of 66.39% (73,478). Micro, small medium enterprises (MSMEs) employ 84% of Nigeria's labor force and contribute 48.47% to the country's GDP. Furthermore, 54% fewer MSMEs have female ownership than the entire sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

In comparison to SSA, Nigerian women owned 16.8% small enterprises and 12.2% of medium enterprises compared to the SSA average of 35% and 29% respectively. Additionally, while women own almost half of the existing microenterprises, their ownership of SMEs is far less. In 2013, FMWSAD in collaboration with the Bank of Industry and the Bank of Agriculture established two women-only microcredit funds: the Business Development Fund (BUDFOW) and the Women Fund for Economic Empowerment (WOFEE). As of 2012, these initiatives have provided funding support to an estimated 6,200 women business cooperative groups. In 2012, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) set up a N200 billion MSMEs Development Fund to provide cheap and long-term financial resources for the development of the sector. The CBN proposed that 60% of this fund will target women entrepreneurs. The Small Holders Women Farmers' Organization of Nigeria (SWOFON) was established by Action Aid in response to the demand for women to participate in emerging reforms and opportunities. SWOFON has enabled over 300,000 women to access agricultural inputs (World Bank, 2019).

Findings shows that low literacy rate in Nigeria has consistently slowed the pace of progress in promoting the rights of women and impacted the enjoyment of rights negatively. The problem of gender inequality in Nigeria is further compounded by weak institutional capacities and insufficient prioritisation of resources which undermine the effectiveness of existing laws and efforts. Patriarchy also constitutes a very big hurdle in this pursuit and is reflected in the slow pace of legislative reforms with respect to laws affecting women, poor enforcement mechanism, trivialization of corresponding laws due to lack of understanding especially among the legislators. This is in agreement with the report of UN-Habitat, in its Country Program for 2017-2021, which notes the lack of gender-sensitive legislation in Nigeria affected their previous urban efforts.

The study indicates that the Government has embarked on numerous programmes to boost women's economic empowerment. Some of these are the WOFEE and BUDFOW which are still making giant strides all over Nigeria. The FMWASD, in partnership with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and the Bank of Industry (BOI) have provided financial empowerment to women through their various initiatives, such as Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund as well as the Agricultural Financing Scheme.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing discourse, it is quite glaring that while significant strides have been made in many countries of the world to bridge gender gaps, and advance gender equality, in compliance with the demands of

international instruments on women's right, most countries like Nigeria are still lagging behind. The study identified major operational challenges of confrontation between traditional structures on gender insensitive that had become major challenges to women emancipation in the society while a new law that attempts to change the old attitude of the people from gender inequality failed to positively yielded require result. However, the study revealed that many factors responsible for gender inequality in Nigeria ranging from patriarchy discrimination, diseases and health issues, gender based violence among others and the required adjustment to these challenges has not been quick or easy to rectify. The old patriarchal world where the functions of both sexes were distinctly different required a positive change because it makes women identity and their societal roles to center on child bearing and other domestic engagements against their economic value deteriorated family with divorce rates, large numbers of children growing up with only one parent, decreases in marriage rates.

The study also discovered that insufficient rule of law, bad governance, and inefficient adherence to the Universal Conventions, Charters and constitutional provisions are contributed to the ineffective responses so far to bridge the gap of gender equality in Nigeria. The Nigerian society is inherently patriarchal. This is due to the influence of the various social vices such as religions and customs in many parts of Nigeria. Here, women are seen as the weaker sex and discriminatory practices by the State and society (especially by men) are condoned. Thus, it has been argued that "the traditions and culture of every society determine the values and behavioral patterns of the people and society... a culture that attributes superiority to one sex over the other exposes the sex that is considered to be inferior to various forms of discrimination. However, the responses to bridge the gap between men and women in Nigeria were effort in futility because despite the impacts by both National and International government to address the gender equality, the gender disparity still persist at higher rates in the country in many areas such as Political affairs of the state, Economic space and social-cultural segregation.

Based on the findings of this study, the discussions involved and conclusion thereafter drawn, the following recommendations are hereby proposed: The Nigerian government should collaborate with traditional rulers in Nigeria and other stakeholders to ensure that all harmful and traditional practices which target only women, are uprooted. This could be advanced through dialoguing with the traditional rulers who are the custodians of our culture; they should be made to outlaw all oppressive customary practices in their domain. Universal Declaration of human Rights, conventions, African Charter as well as National constitutional provisions should be strictly adhered and complied to. This can be achieved by

domesticating the laws and embedded into our societal law and custom as regards to promoting and respecting the women and children Rights in the country.

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