

# GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND ATTAINMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: DOES NIGERIA HAVE THE POLITICAL WILL TO SUCCESSFULLY WORK THE TALK?

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E. P. ARCHIBONG, G. E. BASSEY AND E. N. NWAGBARA

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## ABSTRACT

Since the 1995 Beijing conference, gender mainstreaming has become a topical issue internationally. The philosophy entails bringing gender issues at the centre of societal endeavors to ensure gender equality. Nigeria, among other nations, ratified the convention that gave rise to gender mainstreaming as a veritable strategy in societal development. At the end of 2015, the UN scored Nigeria low in the attainment of the eight core Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Attainment of gender equality was one of the core goals of the MDG which supposed to make women beneficiaries of the policies of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the same extent as men. Successive governments in Nigeria have articulated excellent programmes such as Better Life for Rural Women and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) to drive the process, yet none has significantly addressed the yawning gap of inequality between men and women in every sphere of life in the country. Women, compared to men, are significantly underrepresented in decision-making positions, access to education and economic resources. The paper is concerned that no sustainable development stride can be achieved in the face of the enormous gender challenge in the country. Using secondary data, the authors observe that strong political will, monitoring and evaluation, among other factors, are lacking in the implementation of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is often identified as a key issue in economic development of emerging economies. The world's worst countries for gender equality are observed to have consistently failed to provide the same opportunities for women that are available for men. Nigeria has been listed, ninth among the bottom 10 countries measured for equality by The World Economic Forum (WEF). The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap report (2013) measured the disparities between men and women in 136 countries (Sauter, Hess &

Frohlich, 2013). In the nations that scored the worst in gender gap, economic and educational opportunities, health and survival, political empowerment as well as political representation and health outcomes, were far worse for women than for men. According to the Global Gap Report (2016), Iceland (0.874) having 1.6 times the number of women over who progress to tertiary education in the country, was the best country for gender equality, while Yemen (0.516) was the worst. Countries scored worse by each measure when the gap between men and women for that measure was the widest (Pappas, 2013). Nigeria specifically scored 0.643, according to

**E. P. Archibong**, Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

**G. E. Bassey**, Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

**E. N. Nwagbara**, Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

report. The gaps between women and men on economic participation and political empowerment remain wide but only manage to narrow its gender gaps in secondary education enrolment and wage equality. There still exists a glaring fact that inequality continues to deepen in spite of all efforts globally and locally. Therefore requires greater need for awareness of the gender relations between men and women and the key role it plays in the attainment of sustainable development goals.

The relevance of gender mainstreaming to development issues is now under a spotlight with the emergence of studies on women's roles in development and to successfully address sustainable development issues, it is believed that projects in all levels of developments (including local, international and global) must recognize the role of women as primary resource managers in charge of daily budgets and commerce, among others. Since gender equality is fundamentally accepted as a necessity for obtaining an inclusive and effective management of resources, these projects or programmes need to integrate gender aspects in all phases of the project cycle and in turn increase their effectiveness.

UNEP (2014) in its World Survey developed some criteria to understand how gender balance relates to sustainable development by assessing (i) the likelihood of policy actions to achieve gender equality; (ii) assess support of women's capabilities and their enjoyment of right and (iii) the extent at which their equal and meaningful leaders and decision makers is embraced. Growing international debates such as United Nations Agenda for Elimination of Inequality and Discrimination Between Men and Women as well as Women and Development (WAD), among others now highlights the need to move economies and societies onto more sustainable paths by linking gender equality to sustainable development. According to Ekpe, Aloba and John (2014) this linkage is important for several reasons. On the one hand, it is a moral and ethical imperative to realizing a just and sustainable world. On the other hand, it is necessary to address the disproportionate impact of economic, social and environmental stress on women which undermine their vital roles in sustaining their families and communities. Again, it is important to build up women's capabilities to create better synergies, equality and development outcomes.

### **United Nations Conventions on gender issues**

The United Nations statistics reveals the global conditions of women to show that women make up over 60 per cent of the labour force in Nigeria and participate in about 90 per cent of all farming activities (Acha, 2012). In the same vein, the United Nation Development Programme UNDP (1995) observed in their Human Development Report that women are treated worse than men world-wide. This is evident in women's under representation in all developmental discourse throughout the world.

Over the years, the UN General Assembly has established conventions, resolutions and declarations on gender issues to reaffirm the centrality of gender equality to sustainable development such as the following:

1. Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974): This convention states that women and children who are often most vulnerable in wars and conflict situation must be protected via access to food, shelter and medical love in emergency situations.
2. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979: is described as an international bill of rights for women. It obligates parties to take appropriate measures to ensure full development and advancement of women.
3. The Beijing Declaration and platform for Action (1995) set a land-mark global agenda for women's human rights, gender equality and empowerment. It provides that achievement of equality between men and women is a condition for social justice and building a sustainable development society.
4. ECOSOC Agreed Conclusion 1997: The United Nations System is called on to ensure that gender concerns are addressed in all planning activities when setting priorities, allocating resources and identifying actions and activities.
5. 2005 World Summit Outcome of the United Nations Assembly: Emphasized gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality and consequently sustainable development. Nation entities were positioned to mainstream gender perspective in implementing, monitoring and evaluation

- of programmes and policies in all political, economies and social spheres.
6. Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003): this protocol guarantees comprehensive rights to women including the right to take part in the political process; social and political equality, control of women's reproductive health and ending female genital mutilation.
  7. Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2014): This convention creates a legal framework to combat violence against women and criminalizes domestic violence.

These various protocols, conventions and declarations outlined above, have some inherent short comings such as failure to consider literacy rate of specific nations, cultural systems of different societies, influence of religion, poverty level of different nations. These and many more definitely make conforming to international bench marks to constitute great hurdles to the achievement of gender equality.

These conventions to mention but few define commitment to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms; they provide the basis of realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to political, social, public life, including the right to vote, stand for election, education, health, employment etc. Countries that have ratified the convention become legally bound to put to practice the provision therein; and are to make reports on measures they have taken to comply with their obligations (UN Women 2014).

The consciousness to advance women's right and their place in society is ever growing. In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs undertook campaigns and advocacies to promote gender equality for sustainable development by establishing a National Gender Policy to engender gender mainstreaming (Dejo, 2011). Despite the above efforts, there is still need for gender-specific policy formulations and implementations as much is left to be desired.

### **Gender inequality and sustainable development**

Gender inequality can be regarded as the unequal treatment or perception of individual

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

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

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

towards investment in human development such as child, and women health, nutrition, employment (Buckingham-Hartsfield, 2013).

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

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

### **Enforcement of Gender mainstreaming for sustainable development**

Gender mainstreaming analytically connotes the use of two hands by individuals when clapping or washing. It is very obvious that one cannot clap with one hand; neither can one effectively wash only one hand without rubbing both hands and/or the two together. This simple analogy of the functionality of both hands found in the human body essentially illustrates the importance of gender mainstreaming in human society. In other words, making both men and women equally relevant in the scheme of affairs in every society is the right step in the right direction to sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming implies including women in all spheres of decision making and development programmes as a policy issue. In short, it is a strategy for bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society to ensure gender equality (Kanjere & Rachid, 2014). This strategy was

established and brought to limelight in the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 United Nation World Conference on Women.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, 1997:4) defined gender mainstreaming as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in any area and at all levels". It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men's views, contributions as well as gains are equally represented without discrimination (World Bank, 2014). The importance of equal opportunities and participation in all spheres of life and endeavours has been advocated at all levels of society. Scholars and feminist theorists in all academic spheres feminist have in recent times, created awareness concerning the nature and ills of gender inequality. They have also highlighted the various contributions that women have made to society and the need to empower them more to sustain or improve on their contributions to development. According to a study on the experiences of women in male dominated occupation carried out by Martin and Bernard (2013), findings revealed that organizations are structured in such a way that they do not always support women's career pattern and have no policies to integrate women's work and farming responsibilities. The researchers highlighted the plights of women in work places amidst good gender policies which are never implemented or monitored. Thus, the purpose of the policy on gender mainstreaming is not evident in most public and private organizations. Dejo (2011) maintains that despite all efforts at eradicating discriminatory practices against women in Africa, many stereotypes and prejudices against women still abound. Kanjere and Rachid (2014) argued that the challenge is with the practical implementation of well documented declarations and policies, as there exist gaps between policy formulation and policy implementation.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2014) states that a strong and continued commitment to gender mainstreaming is the only effective means of ensuring that women as well as men participate in and benefit from development efforts. They stressed that the success of

addressing gender inequality goes beyond merely enacting laws and adopting policies.

**General principles guiding gender mainstreaming**

The realization of gender equality is a goal that needs to be achieved across international and global spheres. Gender equality does not mean that women and men have become the same, but that their behaviour, aspirations, opinions are equally valued and that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on their gender differences which is a social construction of identity (Elegbede, 2012). Equality means that men and women are able to enjoy equal status, entitlement, rights, access to assets, services without limitation imposed by gender norms and stereotypes. These gender norms or roles define how, who, why, when women and men should hold positions of power, how they access resources, what decisions are made regarding reproduction, sexuality, family planning, marriage, labour within household.

Recognizing and understanding these facts, therefore, go a long way in addressing the underlying cause of women’s right violation and may provide guidance towards minimizing constraints to equal rights, choices and opportunities of women and girls (Acha, 2016).

UNESCO derives the following eight guiding principles for its gender-mainstreaming policy:

- i. **Recognition:** Gender issues permeate all aspects of international co-operation, its management systems, personnel policies, organizational culture and working methods and the issues it addresses, from policy planning, programming and implementation to evaluation. Acknowledging this fact is necessary to tackle the systemic barriers to gender equality.
- ii. **Diversity and intersection:** Policies, programmes and projects affect women and men differently but not all women and all men experience the same form of gender-based discrimination and marginalization. Sub-groups of men and sub-groups of women may experience specific gender inequalities that must be acknowledged and documented to be adequately addressed.
- iii. **Equality:** Gender equality requires the protection and promotion of human rights for all: the rights of young and adult men

- iv. **Equity:** Specific measures that favour the most disadvantaged sex must be designed to eliminate disparities between the sexes, sexist-stereotypes and discrimination. Equity compensates for unequal opportunities and guarantees the fairness of our programmes.
- v. **Empowerment and agency:** Individual and collective empowerment is central for boys, girls, young and adult women and men to meet their immediate practical needs as well as their long term strategic interests. It begins with consciousness-raising and leads to self-realization. UNESCO must support processes that increase women's and men’s self-confidence, develop their self-reliance, and help them set their own agendas;
- vi. **Participation and parity:** Equal participation of young and adult men and women as agents of change in economic, social and political processes is essential to achieving gender equality.
- vii. **Partnership between women and men:** Empowering women does not mean excluding men. It is about establishing partnerships between women and men that empower both sexes. This implies giving an equally pivotal role to men and women in creating more equal societies.
- viii. **Social justice:** Though gender inequality breeds poverty, anti-poverty measures alone cannot redress gender inequalities. Poverty reduction efforts must be coupled with actions to eliminate gender inequality in order to be truly effective (UNESCO, 2007).

**Policies and programmes in Nigeria towards bridging the gender gap**

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

- Better life for rural women (1987)
- Family Support Programme (1994)
- Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (1996)
- National Policy on Women (2000)
- National Gender Policy(2006)
- Establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (1999) etc.

Better life for Rural Women (1987) launched by Mrs. Maryam Babangida. A program aimed at empowering women through the development of skills that would improve the financial status of women amongst other things. This program targeted rural women. The goal was to enable women irrespective of their background, location or their level of education.

This program was followed by the Family Support Program by Mrs. Miriam Abacha. This was also an empowerment program not just to women but the family. FSP gave way for the establishment of the National Commission for Women affairs by the Late Mrs. Stella Obasanjo in 1999. This ministry was created to specifically deal with issues of empowerment and poverty alleviation of women and catering for and improving the wellbeing of women (Bola, 2005).

Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1988 was one of the programs to handle the gender gap in the country. FEAP was a micro credit scheme whose primary goals were to create investment opportunities for economic development. The aim was to engender economic activities of the rural dwellers and provide opportunities for rural dwellers to generate more income to enhance their quality of life. This was to be done through promoting entrepreneurship. The overall goal was to foster greater economic advantages to the poor in rural communities with the understanding that extending services to the rural areas would be beneficial to the women (Akinto, 2001).

The National Policy on women (2000) is a policy formulated in the hope to ensure justice, freedom, basic human rights and most of all equality across gender. This policy was replaced with the National Gender Policy in 2006 adopted by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. The major goals of this policy is to build or create a just society devoid of discrimination; also to harness the full potential of all social groups regardless of set or circumstances, and to promote the enjoyment of fundamental human right and protect the health, social, economic and political wellbeing of all citizens in other to achieve equitable rapid economic.

The establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (1999) most importantly, has provided an avenue for women to advance in the area of politics. This is because it is an institution created specially to facilitate the mobilization and involvement of women in National, State and Local Government Affairs (Effiong, 2008). All these

policies/programmes and others not discussed are yet to bridge the gender gap in a considerable manner.

### **Gender mainstreaming and the Nigeria situation**

The problem of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria will be discussed under two sub-heads:

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

#### **(i) The place of women in the constitution**

Gender gaps in Nigeria constitution can be seen through the language of the constitution. The language in which the constitution is written betrays its seeming desire to continue with the patriarchal tradition of our society. The pronoun "he" appears in the 1999 constitution 235 times (FGN constitution, 1999) and the word women was used only two times. See section 26(2)(a) and 29(4)(b) (1999, constitution).

In terms of indigene-ship, there is a continued ambiguity about the "origin" of women who marries a man from other ethnic or geographical area to hers. The reality of most women in this category is that they lack any definitive claim to the area they left or that to which they married into. In some instances, women have been denied their rights to appointive or political positions due to the fact that they can no longer claim their original place of origin or that of their husbands (Morley, 2012).

Furthermore, speaking of the right to dignity of womanhood, section 34 of the 1999 constitution generally speak to right of dignity of human persons, however does not touch on the specificity of women's rights to be free from harmful traditional practices which includes widowhood practices, female genital cutting, force marriages and others which have constituted a continuing threat to the lives of women in Nigeria. Other aspects of the 1999 constitution that are injurious to women are in the aspect of the political rights, right to inheritance and many more (Aminu, 2014).

#### **(ii) The thirty-five percent affirmative action**

Although women constitute about half of the projected population of Nigeria, this numerical strength has never found a corresponding expression or representation in Nigeria's political public life. The Beijing conference of 1995

recommended 35 per cent allocation for women in political positions, power and decision making. This has not been the case of Nigeria where women can barely boast of five percent. However, the minimal rise in gender participation in the country has been attached to appointive positions having failed to produce women in elective posts (Conyok, 2015).

Available statistics reveal that out of 109 senators in the National Assembly, only nine (9) are women, while only 27 out of the 360 members of the House of Representatives are women. Besides, out of the 990 members of the state Houses of Assembly, only 54 are women (Fashola, 2015). The picture markedly depicts a lopsided membership of the legislative houses in favour of men and the story is similar at the local level, where only a few women function as chairpersons or councilors in local government councils. According to Ezenlo (2011) Though about two thirds of Nigerian voters are women, electoral and power sharing arrangements fail to consider the interests of the women, thereby rendering them largely politically powerless.

Nigeria lags far behind in women political participation index on the African countries. For instance, Nigerian women have about the worst representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries such as Uganda, 34.6 per cent, South Africa, 43.2 per cent, Ethiopia, 27.7 per cent, Cameroon, 20 per cent, Niger, 12.3 per cent and Congo, 8.0 per cent (Olumode, 2011).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, Nigeria does not have the political will to successfully drive the process of gender mainstreaming and gender balancing in politics, economy, religious and cultural activities? Generally women have not been fairly treated in all spheres of human endeavour and this poses virulent challenges militating against gender mainstreaming in Nigeria.

The problem of gender mainstreaming in Nigeria is more worrisome given the plethora of policies and conventions endorsed by successive political leadership in the country that are yet to be implemented. Presently the temperament of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria does not seem to favour gender mainstreaming. The president recently stated that his wife belongs to his kitchen, his living room and the other room! By extension, all women carry this burden of

exclusion. Certainly, when confined in such obscure rooms in a man's house, the talents and potentials of women to excel in the society will be truncated. The subjugation and relegation of women to the background by male chauvinists and their female compradors (the so-called enlightened women) should be erased by a strong political will to mainstream gender. The following obstacles among others should be addressed in Nigeria constitution to ignite the political will for a successful gender mainstreaming.

Although gender mainstreaming has been discussed as a possible approach and critical tool in the achievement of the set goals whereby women and men are treated with fairness according to their different and collective needs; women are yet to be recognized to have vital roles and sufficiently supported to play these roles in achieving sustainable development. Therefore, there is need to reaffirm and re-enforce commitments to ensure that women are given equal rights, access and opportunities for participation and leadership in the economy and other spheres of national life.

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