

GENDER EQUALITY MAINSTREAMING: IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY REDUCTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ABIA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Gender mainstreaming is a process to achieve greater gender equality and reduce the marginalization of women. Unequal gender relations distribute the burden of poverty disproportionately on women. This probably perpetuates poverty among women and girls. There is an urgent need to address the unequal relations both as a cause and intensification of poverty. Empowerment of women when pursued beyond mere rhetoric and instrumentation, it will improve their wellbeing, self esteem, resource allocation, political voice and increased productivity generally. The objective of this paper is to critically assess the extent to which gender has been mainstreamed into the development programmes, making women and men needs, concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. To do this, the paper adopted the descriptive method to evaluate the problems of gender inequality and prospects of engendering to realize development objectives. The paper observed that the prevalence of harmful and discriminatory gender-based cultural practices acts as casual factors to worsening poverty situations; that gender inequality causes and perpetuates poverty and vulnerability, especially for women; that greater gender equality can help to reduce poverty and vulnerability and contribute to pro-poor growth. The paper concludes that gender equality when mainstreamed into local situations, women's and men's needs, concerns and experiences will become an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction programmes in all social and economic spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated .

Keywords: Gender Equality Mainstreaming, Poverty Reduction, Sustainable Development .

Introduction

Three key terms, gender equality mainstreaming, poverty reduction and sustainable development are central to the detailed understanding of the purpose of this paper. The analysis of these key terms would not only show how they are

interconnected, but their proper understanding required for harmonizing gender equality and poverty reduction in Abia State of Nigeria.

Gender equality is critical to sustainable development. This development, Oluleye et. al (1991) defined as the totality of man's capacity to broaden his own consciousness, his power over himself, his environment and society with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence, starvation, disease, ignorance among others. Critical to this definition is the fact that true development must be people centred.

Development enables both men and women to unfold their creative potentials and realize their dreams and aspirations; enabling them to improve their conditions of living through the use of available resources. Again, this people centred development promotes the enhancement of men's personality to make him/her more creative, organized and disciplined. This process can be described as the moving force behind the socio-economic transformation of any society.

The contribution of women to national economic development is too great for them to be neglected. Women contribute more than 51 percent of food and 67 percent of the rural farm labour force (Okonkwo, 1991). In spite of these enormous contributions by women they are still discriminated against. The social and economic indicators for countries especially Africa, have consistently shown that women are the beast of burden that bears the brunt of hardship in poor countries. In these countries, the women's rights are denied, they are discriminated against, they suffer economic inequality, and they lack access to education, lack access to credit facilities, lack access to titled land for farming, lack opportunity to take reproductive health decisions, they suffer violence and above all, they have no voices.

Statistics abound that lend credence that poverty wears a female face. For instance, in sub Saharan Africa, 20 percent of women are under weight, 80 percent live in rural areas, about 60 percent are without tertiary education and 70 percent of women are without jobs or are under employed (UNDP, 1998.73). In Nigeria, figures from Federal Office of Statistics suggest that 70 percent of poor Nigerians are women; only 21 percent of women are employed as non-farm wage earners, female enrolment as a percent of male enrolment (gender parity ratio) is 77 percent and women percentage in parliament is only 7 (2011 Population Reference Bureau). Women in Nigeria suffer discrimination occasioned by traditional and religious beliefs that tend to suppress their God-given talents and innovative capabilities. These women spend most of their time bearing and rearing children, doing other menial household work that are hardly measured or calculated as part of the national domestic product (GDP) and so less appreciated. But these women Calaven et. al (1995) observed must be recognized as agents of sustainable economic development for equity and efficiency reasons. The women for reason of equity have the right to enjoy the benefits of development activities. For the reason of efficiency, it is argued that since women make significant contributions to the economy at both household and national levels, which increase the potential for national economic growth, there is need to transform partnership based on equality between men and women so as to achieve people-oriented sustainable development. In order to ensure this required fairness, gender equality measures must

be pursued to compensate for historical and social disadvantage that prevent women and men from operating on a level- playing ground (CIDA, 1999).

Recognizing the need for this level playing ground, the United Nations (General Assembly) in 1979 adopted the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which came into force in September, 1981 and ratified in June in 1985 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Out of the thirty articles of this convention, articles 1-16 specifically talked about the actions that governments are to take. While article 1 defined what discrimination is, article 2 is state's policies to be adopted by countries to ensure that discriminatory practices against women either in the public or private spheres are repealed. Articles 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 emphasized equality between women and men in all spheres of life ranging from right to life, right to political and public life, to work, to education including career guidance, scholarships, access to services, inheritance rights, access to credits, loans and mortgages to reproductive rights.

After three decades of adopting CEDAW, it has become necessary to access to what extent the articles have taken effect in promoting gender equality in participating and benefiting from Development activities in Nigeria. Thus the general objective of this paper is to show the relationship between gender equality mainstreaming and poverty reduction and sustainable development. The specific objectives include. To highlight the extent to which both gender are participating and benefiting from development activities; to show how gender equality mainstreaming can bring about poverty reduction and sustainable development; to highlight the extent mainstreaming gender empower women to reduce poverty and ensure sustainable development.

Equity in Gender Participation, Poverty and Sustainable Development

Gender equality mainstreaming has been identified as a crosscutting issue in development programme activities. To achieve development objective, there is need for giving opportunity to all to participate in and benefit from development activities. Equal participation of male and female is an important factor in the development of any society.

In Abia state and Nigeria in general, women are actively involved in development especially rural development activities ranging from agriculture to community development programmes. For example, out of the 95% small scale farmers who actually feed the nation, 55% are women (Olawoye, 1997). These women are erroneously perceived as farmer's wives and not farmers themselves (Wombo, Agbulu & Ekoja, 2008). These women account for half of the rural population and spend about two third of their time on food production activities (Ajieko, 1986). Despite these enormous contributions to economic development by women in Nigerian communities, they are observed to be the most impoverished, they are relegated to the background, their rights are denied, they are discriminated against, they suffer economic inequality, lack opportunity to take reproductive health decisions, suffer violence and above all, they have no voices.

Majority of these women are impoverished because of the unequal resource allocation. These women suffer unequal resource allocation because of the unequal

access to productive resources and benefits from the use of these resources. This unequal access to resources is sustained by prevailing cultural norms, traditions, discriminatory laws, religion, economic structure and unwritten laws.

Culturally, women cannot inherit land in rural communities in Abia State. Not only that they cannot inherit land, even to buy land, they need a male brother as next of kin to help them. This no doubt affects women economically. In Abia State, about 75 percent of the women are engaged in agriculture (at subsistence level) where they earn only about 25 percent income (CSDP Baseline Survey, 2011). The resultant effect of this practice is the perennial impoverishment of the women members of the communities, manifesting in their poverty and low standard of living.

Based on the cultural provisions, the women are excluded in decision-making process even in matters that affect them. These women not only take up the entire domestic tasks which are unpaid for, they are not involved in the well paid jobs outside the home. For example, it is pointed out by IIRR (1998) that the women produce 60-80% of domestically produced food, provide more than half of the farm labour and shouldered 90% of the domestic responsibilities but get only 10% of the benefits of the total income from their labour due to their being excluded in the decision-making process.

In spite of their agri-business and domestic roles, the women are neglected in the planning process (Ijere, 1991; Hudson, 1998; Longwe, 2002). It is observed that female-headed households experience difficulties in accessing loans and also less likely to belong to farmers' or credit Clubs that are the major beneficiaries of financial capital services. The women depend on group based micro-finance services or on informal credit at high interest rates (Arrehag, De Vylder, Durevall and Sjobolom, 2006). The micro-credit is a relief for the existing gender biased credit policies. The micro credits give opportunities to the poor especially women who own little or no assets. This no doubt has been identified as an effective policy tool for poverty alleviation in almost every country of the world (Okojie, 2002; Bagshaw, 2006).

Although programmes like Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BLRD), Family Economic Advancement Programme, (FEAP) were targeted at favouring women than men, most of the other micro credit schemes did not benefit women as much as men (Okejie, 2002). Analyzing the loan disbursement by the Nigeria Agricultural Credit and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB), one can see the obvious gender bias.

There is therefore the need to come out with policies that integrate the female gender in the development process by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social and political life of the state. Women are given greater opportunity to access micro finance and other poverty alleviation programmes so as to maximize their productivity and benefit from development activities.

Therefore to realize the goal of eradicating poverty and hunger by 2015, there is need to tackle the discrimination that sustains gender inequality. Poverty, especially among women will be reduced and there will be increased productivity when women own and control resources including time resource and have a good education behind them .

Concept Clarification

Gender While gender is not about women or the girl child alone, gender is not just about women. It is not about having women's wing in committees. It is not putting women in project committees to cook and serve food while men discuss. It is not increasing the work of women for no benefit. It is not self exploitation of women for the sake of their participation in the project. It is not getting the government to do projects for women alone. Gender is generally seen as what a given society accepts as normal male and female behaviour and type of work for girls, boys, women and men. Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed attributes and relationships associated with masculinity and femininity (Ezumah, 2005). These attributes and roles are not purely "natural" or biologically determined, but are rather dictated by norms and traditions. These attributes and roles are acquired through socialization. Since these attributes are non biological, they change over time and vary from culture to culture. So this gender differentiation concerning roles and responsibilities is a matter of tradition, customs, values and mores (Dinye, 2003). Though gender relations vary across cultures, gender inequality is seen as universal in most societies.

Gender Equality Mainstreaming

This is an arrangement that guarantees' equal opportunities to females and males in order to realise their full human rights and potential to contribute to cultural, economic and political development. Here, both males and females are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles, and the behaviour of both female and males, their aspirations and needs are considered, valued, and favoured equally. This implies a situation where men and women enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. Gender equality is not an attempt to turn women into men, It is not trick to overthrow men and give their positions to women, rather equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up business; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions.

Thus, Gender equality mainstreaming become necessary. This gender equality mainstreaming is all about engendering equality in meaningful and measurable ways; it is a process that involves attitudinal change in values, policies and practices. Gender equality mainstreaming is therefore the strategy or systematic process of making women and men's needs, concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. Thus, the ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality. It is a commitment to put the interest of girls, boys, women and men into consideration before taking decisions about laws, policies, and types of project, design, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, documentation and reporting of programmes or projects

It is all about making sure that the interest of all: girls, boys, men, women and those who are not able to help themselves or speak for themselves (like the blind, cripple and the mute) is considered in deciding what project to implement, how to implement it, where to site it, who to benefit from it and who to manage it. Essentially, here the goal of gender equality mainstreaming is to advance women's equal participation in decision making, to enhance the relevance, adequacy, efficiency, and impact of sectoral and gender equality policies, plans and programmes, to support women in the realization of their human rights, to reduce gender inequalities in access to and control over resources and benefits. It is hoped that gender equality mainstreaming will help reduce poverty and bring sustainable development.

Poverty and Poverty Reduction

Poverty is a multidimensional social phenomenon whose meaning and understanding in recent times have become deeper and broader. It is depicted by extreme lack of the basic necessities for the maintenance of human well being and decency. Poverty manifests itself in the deprivation of the lives of the people, which includes denial of opportunities and choices that are most basic to human development (Dinye, 2003).

This situation amounts to an extreme lack of the basic necessities for human well-being, characterised by want and inability to meet up with the basic personal needs. In Nigeria, perceptually, the inequalities between men and women are seen to help to perpetuate poverty. This poverty is seen in the non economic connotations as can be seen in Orjiako (2003), to include low level of education, poor health; inability to work. It also includes women's right, freedom and safety as well as social participation (Slatter, 2004). All these affect women and predispose them to poverty than the men. Relatively, women lack resources to maintain the living conditions and amenities widely approved in society, they lack access to adequate medicare, no adequate employment. The women are severely affected by poverty. This feminisation of poverty shows that compared to men, women have higher incidence of poverty; compared to men, women's poverty is more severe; and compared to men, the incidence of poverty among women is increasing, and feminisation of poverty throws more insight into the various ways in which women are made to be poorer than men especially within households (UNDP, 1998).

Poverty Reduction on its own is the strategy involving the efforts of different levels of government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Corporate Bodies and individuals to address poverty. It includes those acts and measures adopted to assist men and women improve their livelihood and welfare and participation in decision making.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is that process of development that involves the improvement of the quality of life for all of the world's people without increasing the use of our natural resources beyond the earth's carrying capacity (United Nations, 2002). Though sustainable development may require different actions in every region

of the world, the efforts to build a truly sustainable way of life requires the integration of actions in these three areas; economic growth and equity, conserving natural resources and the environment and social development.

Sustainable development is also defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN, 1987). This definition contains in it two key concepts

- i. The concept of "needs", in particular, the essential needs of the world's poor, that is usually given priority, and
- ii. The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. Thus, sustainable development can be conceptually broken into three constituent parts – environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability.

Sustainable development generally ties together the concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity. These three – economic development, social development and environmental protection - the United Nations World summit, 2005 referred to as the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development.

Therefore, development is not just a matter of growth in per-capita income. It is very possible to record a high growth rate in per-capita income while the masses of the people continue to be in abject poverty and lacking in basic necessities of life. So sustainable development is that development that not only record economic growth but spreads the benefits of economic development to the bulk of the population both men and women who experience improvement in their standard of living.

Theoretical Framework

This study is of the opinion that development goes beyond improving living standards to embrace the expansion of people's opportunities, choices and capabilities to live in freedom and dignity. However, Amartya Sen's Development as Freedom Theory is selected because it bears directly on the study and helps to give a clear perspective to the paper.

According to Development as Freedom Theory by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen, development is described as a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy. From Amartya Sen's perspective, freedom is germane to development for two reasons. First, he argues that development progress should best be measured by the degree to which various human freedoms have been enhanced. These human freedoms include freedom to satisfy basic needs for food and shelter, the freedom to live safe, free from fear and violence, and the freedom to participate in the social economic and political life of one's community. Second, Sen argues strongly that the free agency of people is the major moving force of development. To him individual freedom and overall social development are inextricably linked. Concluding, Sen is of the opinion that freedom is both the end goal of development and the major means of achieving it.

Relating this theory to the main thrust of this paper, if development progress is best measured by how well the freedom of people have been enhanced, then gender-disaggregated statistics shows that due to the deep-rooted cultural barriers and the patriarchal mode of allocating the resources of the society, women in Abia State are not free to participate in decision making, and benefiting from development activities; and as such their poverty is perpetuated.

Gender Equality Mainstreaming and Programme Effectiveness

Gender equality mainstreaming is the strategy or systematic process of making women and men's needs, concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

It is a commitment to put the interest of girls, boys, women and men into consideration before taking decisions about laws, policies, and types of project, design, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, documentation and reporting of programmes or projects. It is all about making sure that the interest of all; girls, boys, men, women and those who are not able to help themselves or speak for themselves (like the blind, cripple and the mute) is considered in deciding what project to implement, how to implement it, where to site it, who to benefit from it and who to manage it (EU-MPP9, 2011). Essentially, the goal of gender equality mainstreaming is to advance women's equal participation in decision making, to enhance the relevance, adequacy, efficiency, and impact of sectoral and gender equality policies, plans and programmes, to support women in the realization of their human rights, to reduce gender inequalities in access to and control over resources and benefits. It is hoped that gender equality mainstreaming will help reduce poverty and bring sustainable development. It is important to mainstream gender into project development because it is hoped to lead to eradication of poverty and bring about sustainable development in the state and in Nigeria in general. The country has come to know that this can only be possible when development process involves and benefits girls, boys, men, women and the vulnerable. Again, there is need to mainstream gender because women and vulnerable groups suffer most when infrastructure and facilities are inadequately supplied, especially because of the cultural arrangement which put the burden of care on women often at the family level. For example, baseline survey in Abia State by the Abia State Community and Social Development Project(CSDP) (2010) revealed that in many communities, people cover as much as 2-5 kilometres in search of drinking water, majority of whom are women. Therefore, when gender is mainstreamed into project development, the interest/need of women including the location will be factored into the decision-making process.

To realise sustainable development, there is need to further mainstream gender into local situations. To do this, there is need to identify the gender gaps through gender disaggregated data e.g. male/female, low/high, economic status, age, etc. The findings will be used to advocate for gender responsive change. An example is

allocation through gender budgeting. Due to poor perception of gender concerns, programming and budgetary allocation hardly get the seriousness and commitment that it requires from policy makers. There is need to entrench a culture of gender mainstreaming in the budgeting cycle within all sectors through an institutionalization of gender responsive budgeting within the state. In this gender responsive budget, more money is expected to be allocated to women empowerment through building of skill acquisition centres across the 17 Local Government Areas in Abia State and empowerment of women through increased access to credit. As much as this is good, the solution is not in integrating women neither into the existing development process nor in empowering these disadvantaged women but in also transforming the unequal relations. The strategy is not in women's projects, nor in meeting the practical needs of women nor in increasing women's productivity and increasing their income, giving them access to social goods and services. As much as this is good, the better strategy is addressing the strategic gender needs of women. To achieve this, there is need for gender differentiation in development which considers the position of women and men in all spheres of society in order to identify their specific potentials, aspirations, practical and strategic needs. There will be need to analyze gender in all sectors, on micro and macro levels; in the context of the existing economic and socio-cultural structures to achieve equitable and sustainable development.

To reduce the proportion of people suffering from hunger, we mainstream gender in our agricultural and rural development sector. This will help subdue customs that forbid women from owning land, capital, credit facilities, technology, water and agricultural extension services. To enhance the chances of women to access credit, there is need for the formation of Farmers Cooperatives to enable small scale farmers especially women farmers to access loans.

Again, there is obvious need to mainstream gender in our health and reproductive services. Women, for both physiological and social reasons, are more vulnerable than men to reproductive health problems. Reproductive health problems, including maternal morbidity and mortality represent a major but preventable cause of death and disability for women in Abia State. Failure to provide information, services and conditions to help women protect their reproductive health constitutes gender-based discrimination and a violation of women's rights to health and life. However, beyond provision of information, the Abia State government through the Conditional Grants Scheme (CGS) of the Federal Government has upgraded the Primary Health Care infrastructure aimed at reducing maternal mortality in the state.

Though, between 2007 and 2009, the government constructed 200 Primary Health Centres across the 17 Local Government Areas of Abia State, the questions are: to what extent does this solve the health problems of women? Were the women involved in the process of decision-making? Were they involved in the choice of the location of these Health centres? On the average the answer to these questions is no. Consequently, this will affect the realisation of the set targets for goals 4 and 5 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Women account for nearly half the 33 million people living with HIV worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, and 76 per cent of the young people (aged 15-24 years) living

with HIV are female (UNFPA Gender Word Pad). There is need to mainstream gender in HIV/AIDS policy – by addressing poverty issues in HIV/AIDS prevalence as well as HIV/AIDS related areas of poverty and also looking at the critical role that gender relations play in sexual and reproductive life, and how it affects HIV prevention. Indeed, looking at the gender and social inequalities that shape people's behaviours and limit their choices. For example, the discrimination and violence women face, and their relative powerlessness to refuse sex or negotiate safe sex, especially in the context of marriage make them more vulnerable. To dislodge these factors, there is need for the state through its Donor –Supported Agency for HIV/AIDS to embark on serious awareness and advocacy campaigns. To further address the realization of Goal 6 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the state embarked on the distribution of Insecticide Treated Nets and Environmental Campaign for cleanliness- Monthly environmental exercise. However, the results of these exercises are not commensurate with the huge financial resources expended.

Looking at MDG goal 2, the goal of universal primary education is seen as very attainable, but the constraint of limited routine use of gender-sensitive data. There is need to acknowledge the links between gender and quality of education. For instance, enrolment does not necessarily mean regular attendance or completion; high enrolment has often meant poor quality, inadequate infrastructure and ineffective education. However, there is need for gender disaggregated data to measure progress. For instance, though there is an increase in net enrolment from 81.1 percent in 2004 to 84.3 percent in 2005, a disaggregated data shows that in 2005-2011, the primary school completion rate is 68 percent for females and 83 percent for males. Only 27 percent of females enrolled into secondary school and 34 percent of males enrolled into secondary school in Nigeria (Population Reference Bureau 2011). There is therefore, the challenge of gender equality especially at the higher levels of education, and the need to reduce the cost of schooling knowing that "education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process." (Population Reference Bureau, 2011)

Though education is important for everyone, it is especially significant for girls and women. This is true not only because education is an entry point to other opportunities, but also because the educational achievements of women can have ripple effects within the family and across generations. Investing in girls' education is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty. Thus closing the gender gap in education is a development priority. It is generally agreed that education, especially for women, is a force for social and economic development.

To further reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development, there is need to mainstream gender equality through promotion of political empowerment. In Abia State, women's equality is undermined by historical imbalances in decision-making, power and access to resources, rights, and entitlements for women. By custom, women in Abia State still lack rights to own land and to inherit property, to obtain access to credit, attend and stay in school, earn income and move up in their work, and free from job discrimination. Moreover, women are still widely under-represented in decision-making at all levels, in the household and in the public sphere. There is need to address

these inequities through laws and public policy that way formalizing the goal of gender equality. Effective advocacy requires partnership and coalition building. Government agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) working together to address gender biases in laws and policies at the state level can be very effective.

In Abia state, serious gaps still exist in available data on women's economic and political activity and decision-making ability. For effective mainstreaming, there is need for works to fill gaps in collecting gender-disaggregated data that is needed to put benchmarks on or monitor policy and programme effectiveness.

Summary and Conclusion

In our culture, family, and socialisation, analysis of our local settings continue to show the prevalence of harmful and discriminatory gender-based cultural practices as casual factors to worsening poverty situations; that gender inequality causes and perpetuates poverty and vulnerability, especially for women; that greater gender equality can help to reduce poverty and vulnerability and contribute to pro-poor growth. Gender equality mainstreaming is seen as the answer to subduing customs that forbid women from owning resources especially land, capital, credit facilities and access to education especially higher education.

To realise this, there is need for women and men to enjoy equal conditions for realising their full human rights and potentials to contribute to national political, economic, social and cultural development and benefit from the results with equal access to and control over resources in "mainstream" development with Practical Gender Needs of women and men addressed and Strategic Gender Needs of women and men pursued. The paper is of the opinion that gender equality when mainstreamed into local situations, women's and men's needs, concerns and experiences will become an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction programmes in all social and economic spheres; thus women and men will benefit equally and inequality will not be perpetrated. This paper further concludes that without gender equality mainstreamed into programme planning in all sectors, no meaningful poverty reduction and sustainable development can be achieved.

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