

## AFRREV LALIGENS

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 2 (2), Serial No 6, May, 2013: 97-103

ISSN: 2225-8604(Print)

ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)

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### **Gender Equity and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Philosophical Perspective**

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#### **Abstract**

*Gender equity is a sine qua non for sustained national development at all times. The paper maintains gender equity should be enthroned by all especially at the basic social unit in society – the family from where it will translate to society. The paper further examined gender equity from the perspective of philosophy; it further examines challenges to gender equity and sustainable development.*

#### **Introduction**

Gender is “the sex-role identity used by humans to emphasize the distinctions between males and females” (Microsoft Encarta, 2008). It refers to the roles

which are assigned to male and female on the basis of their anatomical differences; the system of roles and relationships between men and women that are determined not by biology but by the socio-political and economic paraphernalia of life. Gender embodies the relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, political structures, as well as in the household, and reinforced by custom, law and specific development policies (Meena, 1992). Therefore, it is something that is constructed and acquired by people.

Gender is not the same thing as sex. While sex is biological, and is determined from the moment a child is conceived, gender is socio-cultural and fluid (Kirby, et al. 2000). In other words, sex is a biological factor similar in all societies and cultures, while gender is a socio-cultural and historical construct which varies from culture to culture, and over time within a culture.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. It is meting out fair and equal treatment to men and women everywhere in the family, in the workspace in resource allocation and in political and social issues. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to ensure that women and men operate on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. As Reeves and Baden (2000:10) point out, gender equity recognizes that women and men have different needs, preferences and interests and that equality of outcomes may necessitate different treatment of men and women.

### **Gender Equity**

One's sex alone does not create inequality. Inequality is created by people who were socialized from birth to hold certain attitudes and values about what were appropriate activities for men and women and how these various activities should be valued and rewarded. The differentiation of this socially-induced creation of expectation about men's and women's roles, capacities and potential from the definition of sexual characteristics through biology gave rise to the concept of gender. Thus, there are sex roles and gender roles. Pregnancy and breast feeding are clearly sex roles, which are based on biology, and are roles which only women may assume in all societies and cultures. On the other hand, and in many societies, child rearing, housekeeping, and other so-called "women's jobs" are gender roles for women; while the men are expected to be the family's breadwinners, heads, custodians of the family name, etc, which are all socially constructed. These

social categorizations have, over the centuries, consistently reduced women to second class citizens, and have denied them equal opportunities to the fortunes of life (Ogbujah, 2012:25).

### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development, according to the Brundtland Report (Wikipidea, 2008) is “Balancing the fulfilment of human needs with the protection of natural environment so that these needs can be met not only with the present but in the indefinite future”. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (2008) also defines sustainable development as that: “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This simply infers that the concept of sustainable development operates on the principle of need fulfilment both for the present generation and the generations unborn.

The International Institute for Sustainable Development categorizes the concept of sustainable development into two main principles namely;

- a) The concept of need (in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor).
- b) The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet the present and future needs.

Sustainable development can simply be referred to as a situation where an individual finds expression in him/her supported by a string social economics stability to engage his/her resources in a productive venture which will invariably uplift his/her well being. The effectiveness of any sustainable development programme could be measured by the human development index obtained in such a society. This includes the comparative average of life expectancy, literacy level, and quality of education as well as standard of living of the people. Where there is a remarkable improvement in the people’s areas of need, it could be adjudged that there is an effective sustainable development programmes.

To make the process sustainable involves the participation of all segments of the population and requires the development of skills, capacity and institutions to ensure effective use of resources and enhanced productivity. In this regard the involvement of women is crucial to the achievement of

sustainable development in the country. Gender equality will therefore lead to the sustainable development.

It is change designed to be both horizontal to meet the present day needs and also vertical to make allowance for the needs of future generations to be met too.

### **Philosophy and Sustainable Development**

Philosophical aspects of gender equity refer to interpersonal responses which we acquire in the course of male-female, human relationships in diverse social contexts. The social contexts could be in the workplace, in schools, in the family or home. The interpersonal reactions are usually feelings, thought patterns attitudes, perceptions, to mention a few. They help to determine what people do and how they think and behave. Critical thinking in philosophy can be seen in education, political, economic, culture and so on. However, in this paper, the focus is on the social contexts from where the critical examination of life flows. In this paper especially as it related to sustainable development.

Philosophy has a distinctively important role to play in the imperative exercise of re-defining and re-directing the content of the technological worldview. As Sodipo (1973:3) notes,

Philosophy is reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles we use to organize our experience in morals, in religion, in social and political life in law, in psychology, in history and in the natural sciences.

The history of philosophy is in fact a history of man's critical attitude to life. Two important injunction of Socratic philosophy remain perennially relevant. "Man know thyself" and the other "the unexamined life is not worth living". Therefore the technological advancements though positive is a challenge to philosophy. It is for philosophy to critically assess the content of technological development vis-à-vis implications for social existence. It is for philosophy to bring to the awareness of the practitioners of technology the underlying assumptions involved in the language and model they use.

Philosophy's concern with knowledge and wisdom has been man's greatest catalyst for change and progress. As the history of science shows, many of

the spectacular discoveries of science originated from human centred studies. Sodipo (1973:4) notes that.

Philosophic and scientific thinking were born together in ancient Greece. And through many centuries, especially from the 17th century in Europe philosophic rejections has been revitalized by fresh contact with concepts, methods and standards of scientific inquiry. On the other hand, the history and development of science has shown that the greatest contribution for science has been made by these who possessed what is rightly called philosophic insight.

Philosophy then will be doing a great service to humanity and technology by helping create, nurture and sustain a sound and human scientific and technological culture (Oke, 1997:12). And as Schumacher (1974:139) opined, philosophy shall have to teach that:

Development does not start with goods, it start with people and their education, organization and discipline. Without these three all resources remain latent, untapped.

It's important to point out that sometimes, gender equity actually works against males. But, in the main, much injustice has been meted out to women in many areas of life. Indeed, because the injustice has gone on for so long, it is often difficult for some women to acknowledge that they have been wronged. The wrong thing appears normal to them no matter how much they hurt.

Scholars have linked gender equity and sustainable development. On March 8, 2008, the UN Secretary General said "As we know from long and indisputable experience, investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity and sustained economic growth". In 2007 a very intricately detailed study of the relationship of gender equality with sustainable development was presented by a group of Swedish researchers. It covered gender differences in lifestyle, mobility, use of time and environment. It was found that, indeed, there was a close relationship between gender equity and sustainable development in the area of education of girls and women empowerment and the relationship with the development. The results were found to be very positive and significant. Kofi Annan said, "Violence against

women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress toward equality, development and peace". Thus, sustainable development is tied to gender equity (Eke, 2009:3).

### **Philosophical Aspects of Gender Equity**

Here it is Germaine to share information and thoughts on cultural, social and philosophical complexities of gender equity. Unlike the other areas, the issues here are less tangible and quantifiable they are not issues in the home. The home or the family unity is the smallest and most powerful social unity of a society or a nation. Who we are and what we do is determined basically by what we have continuously been exposed to from childhood in the home. The different gender roles which were decided by custom and tradition in the society are interpreted and played out in the home. The husband and wife relationship is learnt by the children. The children's perceptions of how their parents interact and relate is usually carried into their own future homes, thus laying the foundations for sustainable future healthy boys and girls. The issue of wrong values are replicated from the homes whether wealthy or poor, all homes produce children.

When these children are exposed to aggressive, violent environments, they learn to be violent. Aggressiveness is actually coded into their nervous system. This is why violence in the home is absolutely undesirable.

In monogamous as well as polygamous family arrangements, care must be taken to produce secure atmosphere for intellectual wisdom to thrive. Therefore, it is important that the thinking, knowledge, wisdom and values passed on to the children and wives and children are future husbands and wives, mothers and fathers are such that would mould them positively in future. The risks are greater in homes with polygamous arrangement than in monogamous ones. In polygamous homes, children are conditioned to beware of 'those other children and their mothers' and the wives who may appear to accept 'sharing of their husband and their mothers' are actually in emotional turmoil. Mariama Ba has captured this so well in her book 'So long a Letter (Eke, 2009:4). The point being made here is that the philosophy of life being consciously and unconsciously passed on is carried into future generations, and they form the bases of wisdom and intelligence in the subconscious of the child.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has treated some philosophical issues of gender equity and sustainable development. Since gender equity is inextricably linked with sustainable development, it is time to start doing something no matter how little in whatever position we find ourselves. This is not championing the course of women; it is a matter of being concerned about the future generations as well and the future of our nation. It is about ensuring that both sexes contribute equally to the development and sustenance of the future generations. Only then can our society be truly developed. Indeed our approach should be wholistic if our present situation would be better, and the future much better than the present.

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