

An analysis of Gender inequality and National Gender Policy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Despite the existence of constitutional provisions and commitments to regional and international human right treaties and conventions, the right of women and girls are grossly violated and devalued in Nigeria and many African countries.

In the light of the above, this paper critically analyze the issues of gender inequality giving emphases to the issue of the concept gender, the rationale behind national gender policy, situation analysis and framework, guiding principles of the national gender policy and above all, the critical areas of gender gap.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is the word used to describe social and personality differences between women and men; it refers to that which society defines as masculine and feminine (Webb,1991) Attempt have been made in Nigeria to addressed the issue of women's right, responsibility and discussion in the early 80s with a view to improve the socio-economic and political lots of Nigerian women as a whole, but the guiding principles and the framework adopted then was weak, this due to the feet that Gender issues have gone beyond the largely women empowerment approach and the narrow women in development (WID) concepts to a more and all embracing approach of gender and development (GAD)

In Nigeria, not until recently, an important document emerged to redirect gender equality, improved standard of living, and build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness fee fall potentials of all social groups, regardless of sex or circumstance that can give both men & women equal voices in decision making and policy implementation. The attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end in it itself and human right issue, but as a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. Hence this paper will attempt to explain the concept gender, an overview of previous attempt, the rational behind the emergence of NGP as well as explaining it aims and objectives, guiding principles and the

framework within which it operates, conclusion and recommendation will be equally given,

THE CONCEPT GENDER

Gender should be distinguish from the term "sex", this is due to the fact that, most atimes, the concepts are use interchangeably, the word Gender is used to describe social and personality differences between men and women, it refers to that which society defines as masculine and feminine while sex on the other hand refers to me term that is used to classify species into either female or male, female alone can give birth and breast feed while male hormonal and genital structure differ from that of female Webb (1991).

Understanding the difference between gender and sex or between men and women is determine by nature and that which is socially defined as been appropriately for men (male) and women (females). Sex is all about the biological difference which is obvious and can be seen physically from conception and the way in which they live their lives; this can be well described in biological differences from the two, just like the existence of social difference between males and females (Webb1991)

Unlike gender, sex is universal term that describes and differentiate males from females and conversely due to its relativity, stable features; gender is a more variable concept defined differently between societies and within the same society over time, this is because it focuses more on social

and personality difference that exist among males and females as well as between them, hence inequality wife regard to treatment of the two either economically, politically and educationally hinder growth and development, because the essential biological differences that exist have tended to separate society unequally in terms of women and man's labour, power roles and expectations (Webb 1991),

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Dorothy Smith, the originator of the "stand theory", she uses the notion of standpoint to emphasize that what one knows is affected by where one stands (one's subject position) in society. We begin from the world as we actually experience it, and what we know of the world and of the "other" is conditional upon the location (Smith 1987), yet, Smith's argument is not that we cannot look at the world in anyway other than our given stand point. Rather, her point is that (1) no one can have complete, objective knowledge; (2) no two people have exactly the same standpoint; and (3) we must not take the standpoint from which we speak for granted. Instead, we must recognize it, be reflexive about it and problematise it. Our situation, everyday experience should serve as a "point of entry" of investigation (Smith 2005:10).

Put it in another way, the goal of Smith's feminist sociology is to explicitly reformulate sociological theory by fully accounting for the standpoint of gender and its effect on our experience of reality. Interestingly, it was Smith's particular standpoint as a female in male-dominated world, and especially as

simultaneously a wife and mother and a sociology graduate student in the 1960's that led her to be the formulation of her notion of standpoint. By overtly recognizing the particular standpoint from which she spoke, Smith was bringing to the fore the extent to which the issue of standpoint has been unacknowledged in sociology. Sociology was explicitly set out as the "scientific" and objective study of when it first emerged as a discipline in the nineteenth century, but because its first practitioners were almost exclusively men; it implicitly assumed and reflected the relevancies.

The failure to recognize the particular stand points from which they spoke not only left sociologists unaware of the biases inherent to their position. In addition, by implicitly making the discipline of sociology a masculine sociology - that is, by focusing on the world of paid labour, politics and formal organizations (spheres of influence from which women have historically been excluded) and erasing or ignoring women's world of sexual reproduction, children, household labour, and affective ties - sociology unwillingly serve as a vehicle for alienating women from their own lives (Seidman 1944:212 - 3). This is the issue mentioned previously; at the same time that sociology emerged as a provocative new discipline dedicated to explaining the inequalities and systems of stratification at the heart of various societies, (especially apparent for instance, in Marx and Weber), it created its own version of domination by shifting attention almost exclusively to one particular dimension of human social life — the masculine -

donated macro level public sphere - at the expense of another (the world of women).

In short, Smith underscore not only that the stand point of men is consistently privileged and of that of women devalued, but that the standpoint of the (white) male upper-class pervades and dominates other world views. This idea, that not all stand points are equally valued and accessed in society, clearly reflects Smith's critical /Marxist roots. As she pointed out in her writing "the Feminism and Marxist" (1977), Smith explicitly link her feminism with Marxian. She explains how "objective social, economic and political relation ... shape and determine women's oppression" (ibid: 12). She focuses on "the relations between patriarchy and class in the context of the capitalist mode of production" (1985:1) and emphasizes how the inner experiences which also involved our exercise of oppression against ourselves were ones that had their location in the society outside and originated there (1977:10).

THE RATIONALE BEHIND NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

The national gender policy emerged due to the permissive nature of gender discrimination world wide. Accessibility to and control over resources in both economic and political sphere is widening, hence, promoting gender equality is crucial if not necessary, a contributing factor to development. The progress of a nation is being determined by people, both women and men alike to escape poverty and improve their standard of living. Based on that the attainment of gender

equality is not only seen as an end, but as a necessary requirement for the achievement of sustainable development, that is the more reason why the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment has continued to remain a topic of discussion in global treaties, conventions and declarations.

In 1948, it was globally expressed at the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the guiding principles of the secular state & human right culture whereby almost all the countries of the world agreed to a basic common standard of human rights, while also prohibiting discrimination on ground of race, religion or sex.

Even though the human right exists in national constitutions, it continues to encounter many impediments in relations to culture and religious practices which overpowers patriarchal societies and pre-date the regime of global human rights imperatives.

Other issues beside the human right debates, is now the fundamental issue of global and national development which is intricately tied to the "woman question", while the status of women becomes an important variables in understanding the wealth of the nation. Interest in the position of women in societies has gone beyond seeing women as "the problem" of development, and for as a "subject of analysis", to a focus on gender role/power relations, thereby focusing on men and women in an interactive ways, as they both shape and are re-shape by development process and practices. The shift from the human right approach to a development oriented frame

work in analyzing and understanding the role of men and women in development comes from the back drop of seeing gender equality not only as an issue of social equity but also has led to changes in which ways that the institutions of development function and understand the gendered nature of social and economic processes and their outcome.

African countries remain pervasive towards violation of human rights in the areas of marriage, inheritance and divorce, as a result of coexistence of statutory, religious and traditional systems. At the national level, there are weak structures to support litigation, implementation and reporting mechanism for the protocols (NGP 2006:F7),

Despite, the existence of constitutional provisions and commitments to regional and international human rights treaties and convention the right of women and girls are grossly violated and devalued in Nigeria and many African countries. This is known in the overall low Gender Development Index (GDI) for the country, and manifested in low participation of women in paid employment, politics, leadership and decision making and equally high rate of physical and sexual harassment and assault, trafficking, marital rape, early/force marriage, and different phases of harmful traditional practices against women and the girl child. With the exclusion of equal opportunity commission is the country, and weak legislature structures to protect the right of women, development opportunities continue to elude women. To aggravate the situation, the available or existing

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Based on the experience, of the past years have led to the conclusion that a different approach is needed to adhere the empowerment of women, that although the empowerment of women remains critical to the achievements of gender equality, gender equality policy initiatives must focus on imbalance of power relations between men and women and institutional transformation,, as a means of social justice empowerment and poverty reduction for all.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF THE NATIONAL GENDER POLICY (NGP)

A policy is a course of action that is geared toward achieving targeted goal, hence every policy should have a guiding principle and framework that will guide the smooth running of it plans so as to achieve the rationale behind its establishment. The national gender policy is not an exception, the general vision and mission for & implementation of its laudable plans emerged from the perceived priorities from the situation analysis, field findings from stakeholders during national and zonal consultation, and in accordance with other global, regional as well as national best practice. The achievement of a just and gender equitable society where men and women will contribute their maximum quota to development at all levels of governance are the main focus of the policy.

Addressing women empowerment programmes alone cannot solve the problems of unequal gender relations in the country, thus, the main thrust of the policy is the fundamental fact that drives the policy, women alone cannot be considered without the involvement of men, it is recognized that the nation cannot achieve any measure of sustainable growth and human development without removing gender gaps in productive of all economic agents, thus, to promote gender sensitive and gender responsive culture in National Policy making in general as well as promoting gender mainstreaming in all public and private policies in all organizational and community culture in Nigeria (NGP).

To establish a clear vision and framework to guide the process of developing laws, policies, and practices that will

ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres and structures of government as well as in the work place, the community and family - is the main goal of the national gender policy.

In view of the mandate given, the specific objectives of the national gender policy are to:

- (1) Create an enabling policy environment for translating government commitment to gender equality in the reality.
- (2) Established policies, programmes structures and mechanisms to empower women and to transform gender relations in all aspects of work at all levels of government as well as within the broader society.
- (3) Ensure that gender considerations are effectively integrated into all aspects of government policies activities and programmes.
- (4) Establish an institutional framework for the advancement of the status of women as well as the achievement of gender equality.
- (5) Advocate for the promotion of new attitudes, values and behaviour, and a culture of respect for all human beings in line with the new policy.
- (6) Strengthening the voice of women in civil society, in Parliament and in other legislatures who have already made visible impact by challenging gender blind laws arid policies.
- (7) Enhancing the work that is already being undertaken

by the ministries at the national, state and local government levels and those of other development agencies committed to issues of women empowerment, gender equality and equity for all.

- (8) Guide the development of the National Gender Action Plan - NGAP (NGP G6:10).

THE PURPOSE AND AIM OF THE NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

Nigeria embraces the gender policy in order to highlight the gender perspective in all aspect of planning policy, developing legislation and transformation activities. The aim of the gender policy is to focus on addressing the systematic inequalities between women and men in society without ignoring the fundamental difference between them. Empowerment of women being the major priorities as a way of achieving gender equality is base on the premise that gender inequality is about power relations between men and women. And as such the optimum benefit of both parties should be put into cognizance in any policy, plan or practices that seeks gender equality in other to balance these power relations.

The purpose is to incorporate gender policy statement that all national goals and sectoral objectives, by analyzing the ways and manner that gender in equality intervenes with the achievement of local, national, regional and global policy outcomes.

The national women machinery is not the only organ left with the responsibly of implementing the policy, stakeholder

are to also share the responsibility. The gender policy will articulate the problems, the challenges, the imperatives and there-from die vision, goals, commitments and outputs, strategies to achieve gender equality, as well as framework of Implementation and monitoring (KGP 06: P 08)

The gender policy is a holistic policy for total national re-orientation and transformation, towards poverty reduction and sustainable and equitable growth, the more reason why it is articulated within the framework of the nations extant policy framework, the National Economic Empowerment Development strategy (NEEDS), Gender equality will therefore address other important goals within the context of NEEDS, SEEDS, LEEDS, and their likely feedbacks.

Among other things, the gender policy will also work toward the development of a common set of ideas in all cultural socio-economic and spatial contexts, based on a common understanding of gender concepts as the policy, recognizes the variant and often conflicting views and perceptions of gender and gender equality from cultural, religious as well as contemporary western values of development. It will therefore figure out clear vision of what the nation aim to achieve through gender equality, deriving from our common vision as a country as well as within the evaluation of gender debates in the international arena.

Transformation is the goal of gender equality, and like all process of change, it may encounter impediments in the form of interests of individuals, group and organization. However,

the National Gender policy for Nigeria is based on widespread consultation at all levels of National development and is packaged to undergo continues fine-tuning, based on an active communication strategy, continued sensitization and gender education as well as constant provision of facts and figures on gender status to promote evidence based gender plans,

CRITICAL AREAS OF GENDER GAP

The finding of the United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) revealed five important areas concerning the global patterns of inequality between men and women: namely:

1. Economic participation
2. Economic opportunity (National employment level)
4. Educational attainment
5. Health and wellbeing

Economic Participation

The participation of women in the workforce in both quantitative and qualitative is now accepted not only as important for covering the level inequalities of poverty among women, but also very essential towards raising household income and the overall economic development of the nation. To this end, the notion of securing women as a mere recipient of help is not accommading but rather, seen with a view strongly supported by an evidence of suggesting that the education, employment, and ownership rights of women has a great influence on their ability to control their environment

and contribute to economic development.

The remuneration on an equal basis is the major concern of economic participation of women not actual number of women participating in the labour force.

Women represent two—third of world's poorest people, as such, globalization has further intensified the existing inequalities and insecurities for many poor women, as a result of the generated opportunities for local producers and entrepreneurs to reach international market, (NGP 06: P: 61).

Economic Opportunity (National Employment Level)

Estimates of unemployment rate vary widely according to geopolitical zones, between rural and urban centre, as well as between women and men. In 2003, women accounted for about 41% of the national workforce (14 — 70years) and 45% of the unemployment while men account for 50% of the workforce and 55% of the unemployed.

From 2001 - 2004, women constituted 29% - 31% of the federal civil service workforce while men made up 69% - 71%. There is only an increase of 1% in the proportion of women in the federal civil service workforce from 2001 - 2004. Women are significantly under represented both in the entire national workforce and in the federal civil service in view of the fact that women constitute approximately 49% of the Nigeria population. (NGSB 06:61).

Political Empowerment

Political empowerment refers to the equitable

representation of women in decision-making structures, (both formal and informal) and incorporation of women views in the formulation of policies affecting their societies. The inter-parliamentary union reports a world average of only 15.6% participation by women in combined houses of parliaments. The statistics of region offer few surprises, ranging from less than 6.8% in the Arab States and African countries to 18.6% in the Americans and 39.7% in the Nordic states. While women are poorly represented in the lower levels of government, they are rarer still in the upper echelons of decision making. The absence of women from structures of governance inevitably means that national regional and local priorities (i.e. how resources are allocated) are typically defined without meaningful input from women, whose life experience gives them a different awareness of the community's need, concern and interests different from those of men.

In Nigeria, the participation of women in decision making is low due to impending factors like culture and traditions which generally have greater influence in authority, social status and opportunities to men and regards women's role mainly to that of the household keeping (family and child bearing; (06:P878).

Participation in politics at the three tiers of government, (local, state and federal) is still a male dominated affair. There is only a very slight improvement in the number of women elected into political positions in 2003 when compared with

1999 figures. In 1999 women make up only 1.2% - 3.6% of the elected members of Senate, House of Representatives and State House of Assemblies and in 2003, the number increased to 3.75 -5.8%. More women has also been elected into positions both at state and federal government levels. In 1999, there were 12 female state assembly members out of 990 members, 13 female House of Representatives members out of a total of 360, 3 female senators out of 109 members, However, in 2003, there wee 39 female state assembly members (compared in 1999), 21 female members of House of Representatives (compared 13 in 1999) and 4 female senators compared 593 in 1999). Despite the improvement, these figures are gross under representation of women, who constitute half of the population in Nigeria (INEC), (NGSB 06:P81).

Education Attainment

One of the most important organ of empowering women at all levels is educational attainment because without education, comparable and content to that given to boys and men, women cannot have access to and participation in all forms of socio-economic aspect of the society.

Under the national policy on education adopted in 1981, revised in 1995 and 1998, Nigeria operates a 6-3-3-4 educational system previously comprising six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, three years of senior secondary education and four years of higher education. Under the Universal Basic Education, the first nine

years of schooling up to the end of the junior secondary, now constitute the basic education component. The system also includes adult and non-formal education programmes as well as a teacher training and special education, especially for physically/mentally challenged children.

Since the introduction, of formal western education in Nigeria by the early church missionaries in the late 18th century, women enrolments in all three levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary) has continued to be consistently well below that of men because of Nigeria's cultures and traditions. This generally accorded greater authority/opportunities to men/boys and regards women's roles as largely compared to the family and child bearing. In 1992, for example, the percentage of the total female enrolment in primary, junior, secondary senior secondary, technical schools and universities were 4.1%, 45.1%, 45.3%, 16.8% and 42.6% respectively, these numbers only increased marginally by about 1% in 1999. (NGSB 06:P21).

HEALTH

One of the concepts that substantially differentiate between women and men is health and wellbeing, which concerns their access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and reproductive facilities as well as issues of fundamental safety and integrity of person. According to the World Health Organisation, 585,000 women die every year, over 1,600 die every day, from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth,

the Planned Parenthood Federation of America quotes that "of the annual 46 million abortions worldwide, some 20 million are performed unsafely resulting in the death of 80,000 women from complication, accounting for at least 13% of global maternal/mortality, and causing a wide range of long term health problem ".

The health of women is determined by a complex combination of various health determinants including income, social status, education, literacy, employment, working condition, social and physical environments, health, child developments and genetic endowment The Millennium Development Goal (MGDs) call for 75% reduction of maternal mortality ratio and 66.66% reduction of child mortality (children under 5 years by 2015) The challenges to the achievement of these objectives in Nigeria include teenage pregnancy, harmful cultural factors, poverty, illiteracy, lack of health personnel and infrastructures particularly in rural areas etc. (NGSB 06: P45).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Earlier effort to improve the socio-economic and political lots of Nigerian women from the early 80s does not meet expectations, this is due to the fact that, the earlier attempt have not address the problem of discrimination among people with regard to gender, the extant women empowerment approaches and concepts used previously has only dwelt on

rights of women, as the society changes, its goes beyond that, but also to the overall sustainable, all inclusive national development, this informed the emergence of the National Gender Policy.

The National Gender Policy mainly focused on gender equality and that refers to equal opportunity^ rights and responsibilities for women and men. It geared toward addressing the disparity In relations among all individual and groups in society. The underlying idea is the belief that all people are of equal value, regardless of sex, race, religion, ethnic origin, or social class, one of the cornerstone of equality is gender equality which this policy emerged to address.

UNIFEM has identified 5 crucial areas concerning the global patterns of inequality that ranges in the following aspect of development, economic, politic, health and education attainment, this inequality should be addressed in order to attain development, because both men and women are bait for development, thus, the main aim of the National Gender Policy is to promote gender equality and to bring a gender perspective into all aspects of planning policy, developing legislation and transformation activities in Nigeria. aspects of planning policy, developing legislation and transformation activities in Nigeria.

The approval of the National Gender Policy is the first step in accomplishing this vision of change and social transformation. It is envisaged that the National Gender Policy

shall be operated within the current structures of governance. However, to ensure that the proposed change is more enduring, and for long-term sustainability, it is important to reconsider the structure within which the National Gender Policy shall operate. A major challenge within the present arrangement is how to coordinate the gender mainstreaming efforts across sectors (public and private) without over-tasking the present structure,

Again, it is also important to clearly separate mandates for "women empowerment¹ and 'gender equality*', being the two pillars of the National Gender Policy. A solution is proposed through the creation of supportive institutions and/or institutional reforms. Some of these include the Equal Opportunities Commission, the creation of a Department of Gender Equality within the Ministry of Women Affairs and renaming the present National Centre for Women Development National Centre for Gender Equality and Women Development *National Centre for Gender Equality and Women development*.

Although all institutions (public, private and community level institutions) are to be involved in collecting and collating gender disaggregated data to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation processes, the Gender Equality Department shall be responsible for the overall coordination and assessment of progress on the implementation of the National Gender Policy, and shall be responsible to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.

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