

## GENDER EQUALITY: A PANACEA TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Gender refers to social differentiation or cultural distinction between males and females and the attribution of certain roles on the basis of that differentiation. Gender is a social and cultural construct that differentiates women from men and defines the ways in which women and men interact with each other. Gender refers to the roles that men and women engage in and the power relations that place either sex at an advantage or disadvantage over resources. Nigeria is a highly patriarchal nation where men dominate all spheres of women's lives. Women are in subordinate positions at local, state and federal levels. Male children are preferred over the female children. Gender Equality is very important in order to create a balance society where males and females will have equal access to resources and opportunities. This work will anchor its theoretical framework on Radical Feminism theory. Gender Equality is an essential thing for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.*

**Key Words:** Gender, Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, Panacea, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

According to Haralambos and Holborn (2004) gender equality also known as sexual equality or equality of the sexes is the state of equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision making and the state of valuing different behaviours, aspirations and needs equally, regardless of gender. According to Iffih and

Ezeah (2004) gender equality means that women and men, girls and boys enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. Aniche and Onyia (2008) stressed that gender equality requires that girls and boys or women and men be treated alike.

On a global scale, achieving gender equality requires eliminating harmful practices against women and girls, including sexual violence, gender wage gap and other oppression tactics. As of 2017, gender equality is the fifth of seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG 5) of the United Nations. Gender is measured annually by the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Reports. According to Ogbuke (2013), Onodugo et al (2019), gender equality means that there is no discrimination on the ground of a person's sex in access to rights and privileges. Men and Women are equally treated. Thus, gender equality is the idea that every one regardless of gender, has equal access to resources and opportunities. These include access to education, economic participation and independence, political participation and representation. According to Farley (2021), this means that gender is irrelevant when it comes to valuing different behaviours, aspirations, needs and opinions equally. The idea of gender equality also extends to the legal, social and political rights, freedoms and protections that a state must offers to all citizens regardless of gender.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper will anchor its theoretical framework on Radical Feminism perspective. Radical Feminism from Radical Feminists view point, women are of absolute positive value as men. Women are everywhere oppressed by the system of patriarchy. Ritzer and Douglas (2003) is of the view that patriarchy is perpetrated through the use of violence. Men use force to dominate and subjugate women. For Radical Feminists, the only way out of this problem is to radically change women's consciousness so that they no longer see themselves as members of weaker sex. Women should begin to recognize and value

themselves. Women must be united in sisterhood to destroy patriarchy. According to Ogbuke (2013) Radical Feminists focus on destroying patriarchy system in the society in order to achieve gender equality.

### **Gender Equality Issues in The Society**

According to Akubukwe (1994), gender equality issues arise where an instance of gender inequality is identified and recognized as undesirable or unjust and that something should be done to resolve the problem (Nwonye et al, 2023). What are the main issues of gender equality. According to Farley (2021), the major causes of gender inequality that led to agitation of gender equality are: (1) uneven access to education (2) lack of employment equality (3) job segregation (4) lack of legal protection (5) lack of bodily autonomy (6) poor medical care (7) lack of religious freedom (8) lack of political representation (9) racism and (10) societal mindset.

**UNEVEN ACCESS TO EDUCATION:** Around the world, women still have less access to education than men. According to Barsh (2019) one over four (1/4) of young women between 15 to 24 years could not finish primary school. That group makes up 58 percent (58 o/o) of the people not completing that basic education. Of all the illiterate people in the world, 2/3 are women. When girls are not educated on the same level as boys, it has a huge effect on their future and the kind of opportunities they will get.

**LACK OF EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY:** According to Lombardo (2020) only six (6) countries in the world give women the same legal work rights as men. In fact, most economies give women ¾ the rights of men. Studies show that if employment become more even playing field, it has a positive domino effect on other areas prone to gender inequality.

**JOB SEGREGATION:** One of the causes of gender inequality within employment is the division of jobs. In most societies, there is an inherent belief that men are simply better equipped to handle certain jobs. Most of the time,

those are the jobs that pay the best. This discrimination results to lower income for women. Also, women take on the primary responsibility for unpaid labour, so even as they participate in the paid work force, they have extra work that never get recognized financially.

**LACK OF LEGAL PROTECTION:** According to research from World Bank (2003) , over one billion women do not have legal protection against domestic sexual violence or domestic economic violence. Both have a significant impact on women's ability to thrive and live in freedom. In many countries, there is also a lack of legal protections against harassment in the work place, at school, and in public. These places become unsafe and without protection, women frequently have to make decisions that compromise and limit their goals.

**LACK OF BODILY AUTONOMY:** Many women around the world do not have authority over their own bodies or when they become parents. Accessing birth control is frequently very difficult. According to World Health Organization (2000), over 200 million women who do not want to get pregnant are not using contraception. There are various reasons for this, such as a lack of options, limited access and cultural | religious opposition. On a global scale, about 40 o/o of pregnancies are not planned and while 50 o/o of them do end in abortion, 38 o/o results in births. These mothers often become financially dependent on another person or the state, losing their freedom.

**POOR MEDICAL CARE:** In addition to limited access to contraception, women overall receive lower quality medical care than men. This is linked to other gender inequality reasons such as a lack of education and job opportunities which result in more women being in poverty (Okorie and Anowor, 2017). They are less likely to be able to afford good health care. There is also less research into diseases that affect women more than men, such as chronic pain conditions. Many women also experience discrimination and dismissal from their doctors, broadening the gender gap in health care equality.

**LACK OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM:** When religious freedom is attacked, women suffer the most. According to Walklate (2021), the World Health Economic Forum emphasized that, when extremist ideologies (such as Boko Haram) come into a community and restrict religious freedom, gender inequality get progress worse. In a study carried out by Georgetown University, researchers were also able to connect religious intolerance with women's ability to participate in the economy. When there is more religious freedom, an economy becomes more stable as a result of women participation.

**LACK OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:** Despite progress in the political area over the years, women are still grossly underrepresented in government and the political process. This means that certain issues that female politicians tend to bring up such as parental leave and child care, pensions, gender equality laws and gender-based violence are often neglected.

**RACISM:** It would be impossible to talk about gender inequality without talking about racism. It affects what job women of colour are able to get and how much they are paid as well as how they are viewed by legal and health care system. Gender inequality and racism have been closely linked for a long time. African women's work was seen as labour, so it was taxable, while work performed by English women was seen as domestic and not taxable. The pay gaps between white women and women of colour continues that legacy of discrimination and contributes to gender inequality.

**SOCIETAL MINDSET:** The overall mindset of a society has a significant impact on gender inequality. How society determines the differences and value of men vs women plays a starring role in every arena, whether it is employment or the legal system or health care.

### **Benefits of Gender Equality**

When women are empowered to lead their lives, speak their minds and determine their future, everyone benefits. According to Booth (2002), history suggests that when we fight gender

oppression, societies are more stable, safe and prosperous, with happier, better educated citizens.

Investing in gender equality can have many benefits: Women and children health will be improved; it also encourages girls to marry later and have fewer children and leave them less vulnerable to violence. Bachman (2021) stressed that benefits of gender equality include:

(1). Gender equality prevents violence against women and girls: The best way to prevent violence against women and children is to promote gender equality. Gender inequality is a root cause of violence against women and children.

(2). Gender equality is good for the economy: Every day that we fail to deliver gender equality, we pay the price. Women do most unpaid care work. This has major costs – the unpaid care economy in Nigeria is nearly six times larger than the paid economy.

(3). Gender equality is a human right: Gender equality promotes human right between males and females. Nigeria has committed to equal rights for men and women to some extent through participation in Beijing Platform for Action. The commitments for gender equality and the empowerment of all women developed at the fourth World Conference on women in Beijing. Also 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. 17 goals to improve life for future generations by ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity etc.

(4). Gender equality makes our communities safer and healthier: Unequal societies are less cohesive. They have higher rates of anti-social behaviour and violence. Countries with greater gender equality are more connected. Their people are healthier and have better wellbeing.

(5). Where there is more gender equality, there is more peace. According to WHO (2021), gender equality is a more reliable predictor of peace than

a country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) OR level of democracy.

(6). Poverty Alleviation: Poverty can be reduced significantly when the burden of household income is shared between men and women. This will in turn result in better standard of living (WHO:2015).

### **Barriers Against Gender Equality**

According to Smith (2019) some barriers for gender equality are:

(a). Biases (pro-male bias): Males performance is often over estimated compared to female performance. There is preference for men work in work places do to bias.

(b). Motherhood penalty: Many studies show that women experience when they have kids is the strongest gender bias. Motherhood triggers assumption that a woman is less competent, less committed and less available to her career.

(c). Lack of female leaders: Men and women tend to associate leadership with more masculine traits such as strength, assertiveness and confidence. According to Bachman (2021), men and women do not judge the same traits in women as positively.

(d). Benevolence bias: benevolence bias consists in associating women with vulnerability and the need for protection. Thus, women tend to be given fewer stretch assignments and positions in work places.

(e). Lack of confidence: Several studies show that women tend to be less confident in themselves than men even if they have similar ambitions to progress in their careers. Women under evaluate themselves whereas the men over evaluate themselves. The confidence gap affects women negatively.

### **Ways to Promote Gender Equality in Daily Life**

According to Lombardo (2020), the ways to promote gender equality in daily life include:

(1). Share household works and child care equally: Household work and children's care should be every adult's responsibility. Ask yourself if there is an equal division of labour in your home. The work of caring for children is still done mainly by women in much of the world.

(2). Watch for signs of domestic violence: Get some help and support if you know a friend or acquaintance suffering from domestic violence or other abuse. This type of violence is not restricted to physical aggression. Verbal attacks (curses and threats) and psychological abuse (controlling, manipulative and intimidating behaviours) also affect women. Seek out family members, friends and even formal institutions such as police when suffering violence.

(3). Support mothers and parents: Those responsible for children and teens need support in every society. Institutions and companies should guarantee maternity leave. They are necessary actions.

(4). Help women gain power: According to Barsh (2019), 2017 data from UN on Women, only 17 countries have female heads of states and | or government. Women should be help to gain power.

(5). Listen and Reflect: One of the main obstacles to eliminating prejudice is that people have difficulty recognizing that it really exists. Try to pay attention to your assumptions and avoid holding biased attitudes.

(6). Pay the same salary for equal work: The same salary should be paid for the same work to both men and women. Every company and institution should implement this idea of equal salary to men and women for equal work.

(7). Sexual Harassment zero tolerance: Employees must have a safe channel to report bullying and sexual harassment without being exposed or dismissed in work organizations. Proven cases should be punished.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, gender equality is not only a goal in its own but an important thing for achieving all the sustainable development goals. Any attempt to meet other goals without promoting gender equality will not work since women are the back bone of any meaningful development and progress in the society. Gender equality should be supported by all for achieving meaningful sustainable development and progress in Nigeria.

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