

Gender Equality as a Sociological Strategy for Effective National Development in Nigeria: An Evaluation of a Christian Sociologist

ODUDELE ROTIMI

College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Abstract. In any male dominated society, women face the challenge of relevance among many others. In spite of the fact that women constitute more than half of the world's population and contribute to two thirds of the world's food production, there is an unimaginable discrimination against women not only in Nigeria, but all over the world. The development of any nation requires the contributions of its members irrespective of gender status. Thus, the paper examines the role of male and female gender in the national development. It also specifies constraints which hinders female contributions to national development. In order to fast track national development and to make Nigeria's transformation programme a reality and a huge success, there is the need to integrate gender without discrimination in all aspects of the governance. This is the order to exploit the hiding potentials especially in the women folk in contributions to the development of their society in particular and that of the nation in general. Pragmatic and phenomenological methodology guided the examination of concepts and closely related research works. It is recommended that policies and programmes such as women for change and development initiative, women in development, women agricultural credit facilities and affirmative action; these policies should be fully implemented right from the national to local level. There should be an intensive awareness of all citizens to the fact that equal education opportunity is the right of all citizens, irrespective of gender, age, locality, creed or social status and should therefore be made available to all. The study concludes by

proffering some suggestions to be implemented for effective national development.

Keywords: Gender equality, Sociological strategy, Effective, National development, Religious evaluation.

1. Introduction

The status of women in the society is very diverse worldwide. It is obvious that little recognition has been accorded women in spite of their majority in Nigeria. Among many important traits associated with the differentiation of gender inequality is religion, which itself must be regarded as a fluid concept with interpretations and practices embedded and thus varying with respect to cultural and historical relations. Admitting the complexity of the issues, some religious norms and traditions can contribute to the formation of gender inequalities and to subordinates the role of women in society. Using an exploratory quantitative analysis, the influence of religiosity on gender inequality in social, economic and political spheres is examined. Globally, there is no place where men and women are treated equal (Stump, 2008). Women are often oppressed and marginalized in almost all aspect of human endeavours. They are regarded as subordinates to men in all spheres of live.

According to Egwemi (2009), female constitute over 50 percent of the world population, in spite of this advantage in terms of population, women are disadvantaged and enjoy very few privilege and rights relative to their male counterparts.

These poor global records of women's status are worst in the Africa continent. In Nigeria the situation is not different as a highly patriarchal society where men dominate all spheres of women's lives (Olurode, 1990). Women are in a subordinate position particularly at the community and household levels, and male children are preferred over the female (Yusuf, 2010). Consequently, a high percentage of women employment are restricted to low income generating activities, concentrated within the lower levels of the unregulated, formal sector, which are not adequately represented in the National Accounting System (King, 1995). By comparison, men employed within the informal sector are located in the upper levels and are predominantly engaged in higher income-generally with respect to politics and public life in order to liberate Nigeria's human capital resource for active participation in the vision for free market economy. Whereas, women are economically backward, politically sidelined and disfranchised (Adeyanju, 2012).

It is against this back drop that promoting gender equality is now globally advocated as a development strategy for reducing poverty levels, improving health and living standards, as well as enhancing efficiency of public investments among men and women. The attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end in itself and human rights issue but as a pre-requisite for the achievement of sustainable development in contemporary Nigeria.

2. Clarification of Concepts

For a better appreciation of the objectives of this paper, it is perhaps good for us to attempt clarification of some key concepts or terms. These terms includes gender, equality, gender equality, strategy, development, national development and evaluation.

Gender: Gender is social differentiation based on sex. It is defined as a personal conception of oneself as male or female. Iwuoha and Anusiem (2013) also affirmed that the term gender further refers to a social and cultural understanding of masculinity and femininity. The term gender has been defined by various authors. It can also be

described as the symbolic construction of being male or female. The term gender in the study refers to culturally based expectations of the roles and behaviour of men and women. The term distinguishes the socially constructed from the biologically determined aspect of being male and female. Thus, it refers not to men and women but the relationship between them and the way this is socially constructed (Moser, 1993). Gender should be seen therefore as being synonymous with participation of men and women in the activities of the community and the empowerment of women and men, thus enabling both to accept responsibility and equally share in the benefits.

Equality: The fact of being equal, or having the same value or equal treatment of people irrespective of social or cultural differences. Equality here means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is not different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunity.

Gender Equality: Refers to equal enjoyment by women and men of socially valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards. Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same, but that their opportunities and life chances are equal.

Strategy: Here, it refers to action that becomes necessary for the direct achievement for the main goal with available limited resources. The task of strategy is an efficient use of the available human and capital resources for the achievement of the main goal. According to Max (2011), strategy is about shaping the future and is the human attempt to get to desirable ends with available means.

Development: Todaro (1981) sees development as many sided process involving changes in structures, institution and attitudes, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty in a given society. Pearson (1970) uses the concept of development to mean the participation of people in the determination of their

development. For this study, development may be defined as mass participation of both female and male gender in transformation of society in every ramification from lower productive capacity to a higher one.

National Development: Here refers to the collective efforts of the people irrespective of their gender based within a defined geo-political entity in the application of their skills and knowledge to the exploitation and harassment and human of the nation's natural potentials, for improving their social, moral, economic, cultural, political and spiritual well-being within the context of the national interests.

Evaluation: An assessment used as the basis to judge or determine the value of a variable or expression. It means to form an opinion of the value or quality of something after thinking about it carefully. It is also a systematic determination of a subject's merit, worth and significance, using criteria governed by a set of standards.

3. Christian Observation of Gender Equality in Contemporary Nigeria

The argument has been for ages about the unique roles of women and how much they can contribute to the overall benefit of the society. In most societies, women are considered weak and fragile, while the men are strong and energetic. That is to say, we find out that as regards to status of gender, men benefit more than the female counterpart. This also applies to security issues, where men are considered to be stronger than women and as such are not so much involved in wars (Attah, 2003). The significance of gender equality and women's empowerment for Security Sector Reform (SSR) should be considered. It is noted that there is need to establish strategic targets and specific initiatives to increase the recruitment, retention and advancement of women and other underrepresented groups in security system institutions and oversight bodies. Worldwide, women, men, girls and boys have different experiences in areas such as trafficking in human beings, robbery, sexual violence, abduction etc. Women are more fearful and feel

more insecure with regard to kidnapping, robbery, etc. than men (Ojo, 2007).

It is observed that women are more religious than men. They see religion as more important in their lives and go to church more often. Probably because religious rituals are a form of precaution analogous to wearing a seat belt, therefore religion functions to reduce anxiety for women and helps them feel protected against threatening events (Jaja, 2007). Furthermore, in matters of insecurities like kidnapping, armed robbery, rape, and wars, women are more hit than men, because physically they are handicapped and defenseless. Men are not as insecure as women and children and even though they face the same issue of insecurity, they are not easily gullible and they are more critical in nature than women. Hence, Bada (2012) continued and said that women see religion as a source of emotional security like a child's security blanket. Being generally more anxious than men, women have more need for religion to allay their fears. When all hope is lost for a woman she has no other solace than to turn to God in prayer. Women have no option in times of helplessness than to fall back to their Maker, humbling themselves and praying to God to assist them in their state of insecurity. In difficult moments, prayer becomes for women the only way forward. This is because, prayer is the master key to unlock every stronghold and transform the lives of evil men and women who are blood thirsty (Ebeze, 2003).

Besides, Religious studies tends to be a rather androcentric discipline and in both geography and the sociology of religion, women as researchers and subjects of research had long been in the minority until the last couple of decades. No wonder, Hopkins (2009) tries to open up the discussion about feminist geographies of religion. Yet, it represents a creative and stimulating research approach in the social sciences, and its neglect is tied with the status of women in religious norms and traditions as much as in society in general. The relation between religion and gender equality can be explained by the assertion that societies with higher religiosity accept the authority of religious teachers, who advocate patriarchal

organization of society (Bukoye, 2007). We assume that those women who adhere to the dominant religions, might also not be inclined to take part in their society's public life, due to their upbringing and the social traditions surrounding them. Nevertheless, many religious institutions are always helpful to women in economic and social distress (Nnoruga, 2009).

Biblically, there are two creation stories in the Bible. The first is regarded as the priestly account (Gen.1 – 2:4a) where there was orderly presentation in which the creative acts were performed in six days. The second account unlike the first was a technical process in which God entered practically into the act of making man. God was seen as a man creating out of pre-existing materials. Unlike the priestly account where man was created last, J account presents man the first to be created (i.e. Apex of creation). The woman was created out of ribs of man and this shows the inferiority complex of a woman to man. Man was given authority to give names to all living creatures. Man was not here co-exist. This may account for the Old Testament basis for insignificant emphasis placed on women. However, critical examination of the first creation stories clearly shows that man and woman were created co-equal, co-important and co-exist. No wonder, why the New Testament put more relevance and importance on women than before. In other words, from this context, gender inequality seems to be a social construct. That is to say, it is neither a biological construct nor religious instruction, but creation or invention of the society. Since we now live in a more competitive world, what men can do, women can do same, or even better. Women should be given equal chances, considerations and recognitions in education, politics, religion, culture, economy, family and so forth. The only exception is when there is clash of opinion or class and class struggles, then consideration may be given first to male if their performances are evidently equal (Odudele, 2006). Thus, gender equality is of paramount importance towards having an effective nation development in contemporary Nigeria.

Moreover, on the opposite side of the spectrum, women outnumber men in secular and Western Christian states, because no gender is preferred by social norms or state policy. For this reason, we consider a higher share of women in society to be a sign of greater gender equality (Adeyanju, 2012). Difference in male and female literacy is of paramount importance at this point in time. The ability to read and write improves women's lives and allows them to more actively participate in the economic sphere. Better-educated women are also more likely to take part in public life and the economic development of their state. Women has a better status in societies which grant them equal access to education with men. Literacy make women overall less dependent on men and gives them enhanced freedom (Agara, 2011). Thus, the issue of gender is a critical phenomenon that has gone beyond social and religious construct only, but has spread to cultural terrain among living and non-living things. For instance, among the Yoruba, we now have "Ako Okuta" (Male Stone), "Ako Aja" (Male Dog), "Ako Ibepe" (Male Pawpaw), etc. This signifies that the issue of gender is versatile that has permeated every aspects of human endeavours. In contemporary Nigeria, gender problem is better solved by avoidance and silence about it without much emphasis. In other words, emphasis on gender is also gender consciousness which later creates gender inequality and problem. This in a long run, results to class and class struggle, competition and unhealthy rivalry. It has given birth to feminist school of thought which is an advanced stage of gender consciousness that a times may be against family and religious teachings. Obviously speaking, before we can have effective national development in contemporary Nigeria, gender equality as a sociological impetus have to be emphasized.

4. Gender Equality as a Sociological Strategy for National Development

In Africa generally and in Nigeria Gender equality is a critical issue in the process of development of any nation since the role of women and men are required irrespective of their gender based. For instance,

Socialist/Marxist argued that mass participation of women in production work was responsible for the huge success in Russia, Sweden, Holland, Germany and China, to the extent that it was recorded that ninety (90) percent of Chinese women worked outside their homes had shoot them from 3rd world economy to the position of 1st world international economy. This contributed immensely to the national development of China (Deckard, 1975). He further stated that it was evident that women's efforts were needed to facilitate industrialization in the Chinese economy for rapid expansion of the economy. According to state of the world's reports (1995), women all over the world are making vast and unacknowledged contributions to the wealth and welfare of their communities in unpaid domestic work and in small scale businesses and trading activities. Some of these women are household heads with sole responsibility for their families.

In Africa, it had been on record that women are responsible for three quarter of all subsistence agriculture in addition to their domestics' responsibilities. Most women in Africa are engaged in the informal sector and in Nigeria, for instance the informal sector employs about 46 percent of the female labour force (World Bank, 1990). Despite women's contributions in our nation, there are discriminations against them. For instance, Obasanjo (1991) observed that women are subjected to one form of discrimination or the other, especially as they are not employed evenly throughout the occupational structure. Even when employed, they are concentrated in low paid, low status jobs and sometimes may have to work twice as hard as their male counterparts before get promoted (Olajubu, 2007). Akinwumi (2012) also concurred with women discrimination and observed that in Nigeria women are marginalized while men are given greater opportunities to advance.

Historically, women marginalization traced back to colonial period in Nigeria where it was reported that women were deliberately excluded by the colonial state in activities such as road constructions, mines and processing industries which led to their gradual displacement from engaging in productive activity. With these

women's creative potentialities in area of education, employment and political participations were somehow blocked; rather, they were forced to go into professions that would remind them of their subservient role in society (Umar and Abukakar, 1997). This women discrimination was also observed in membership of parliament, as it was captured in the World Economic Forums (2011). In Global Gender Gap report as cited in Ada (2015), out of 129 countries in the world, Nigeria was ranked 121st position for women in parliament. This assertion was clearly displaced during 2011 General Election, despite all the work put in by women advocates and multilateral agencies before and during the election, Nigeria did not come any closer to meeting the minimum 35% representation set as a benchmark by national gender policy in 2006. The report further stated that instead, we regressed-dropping from 9% representation in federal legislature to 7% away below average rate of 20% female parliaments in sub-Saharan Africa and 19% globally (Ada, 2015).

Similarly, Nnoruga (2009) observed that in Africa society in general and Nigerian society in particular had placed most of the leadership roles on the men folk, thereby championing the course of gender inequality. He further stated that the traditional society did not recognize the contributions of women in any decision making process. Women are fragrantly ignored in any important meetings of the family, community and even in most government establishments. In the formal sector, according to Katepa (1996) as cited in Agara (2011) outside the Agricultural sector, women tend to concentrate on occupations which are not too technical in nature.

He further stated that woman employment in formal sector is limited, being less than 5% for the majority of countries in Africa or in the world. Although in Nigeria today, women are virtually integrated in every profession as workers, entrepreneurs as well as professionals and no more just home keepers. They are now in every profession. We have women Judges, Lawyers, Engineers, Accountants, Bankers, Doctors, and Pharmacists, just to mention a few

of them. Politically, we have slight improvement in women's participation as we have few numbers of them in National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly. Even in area of appointment, we have few of them appointed as ministers or commissioners. However, the level of women participation in all spheres of lives is still not encouraging and this calls for more involvement towards effective national development in Nigeria.

5. Evaluation and Recommendations

The clarion call here is for a return to the positive aspects of African culture to enhance the dignity and self-worth of women instead of using negative aspects of this culture to enslave and dehumanize them. In physical strength and agility, women are not the same as men, but in spiritual strength and uprightness, it may not be out of place to say that men are no match to women (Akintunde, 2006). The different roles played by women from the Old Testament times to the time of Jesus Christ and the early church, portray women as great leaders and examples of faith (Abogunrin, 2003). We must realize that the world is dynamic and the rate of change is rapid. There is an urgent need to re-assess the roles and position of women in religion and politics if we are sincere with effective national development in contemporary Nigeria.

In order to fast track national development and make Nigeria's transformation programme a reality, there is an urgent need to foster various sociological strategies of gender equality in governance for sustainable development of our country. It further considered that policies and programmes such as Women for Change and Development Initiative, Women in Development, Women Agricultural Credit Facilities and Affirmative Action etc. These policies should be implemented right from the national to local level. There should be intensive awareness of all citizens to the fact that educational opportunity is the right of all citizens, irrespective of gender, age, locality, creed or social status and should therefore be available to all (Oyewole, 2012). The study concludes by proffering suggestions to be

implemented for effective national development. The following are therefore recommended:

There should be more gender participation in decision-making in contemporary society. In spite of the fact that conflict has a high level of impact on the lives of women, it is disheartening to note that they are not fully involved in the peace building processes. The United Nations Security Council recognized women's exclusion from decision-making processes, which contravenes their rights and so advocates for the inclusion of women and gender in decision-making, as that would strengthen prospect for sustainable peace and national development.

It should be upheld that without the participation of women, there can be no sustainable peace, and without peace, there can be no reasonable national development. The contribution of women in peace building and reconciliation efforts can become most effective by increasing their participation in decision-making organs and in the implementation of policies at the institutional and community levels.

Moreover, women should be given crucial roles to perform in the Church. Jesus had many women disciples like Mary and Martha (John 11:1-4) and many women followers. They were active in ministry and occupied leadership position in building the foundation of God's redemptive plan for mankind as seen in the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus Christ. Nantondo (2009) was of the opinion that in heaven, there will be no sex. Thus, if we are walking in the spirit now, we will not be conscious of sex, but only of the spirit of God. This is supported by Matthew 22:30 which says: For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. He further gave an account of women who led the first century church. According to him, women filled positions of leadership in the first century church.

Thus, platforms should be provided that would enable Nigerian women to gain visibility to contribute to national debate and influence policy development and democratic processes. Women should be mobilized to exchange ideas

and opinions on national issues and overall development of their country. As a result, empowerment through education is also crucial so as to enable women to acquire pertinent skills that would facilitate their competition for decision making posts. It must be noted that, for men to be elevated over women does not indicate that they are more perfect than women, because women can also perform better in several other capacities towards effective national development in contemporary Nigeria.

6. Conclusion

The paper is of the view that women should wake up from their slumber and seek to occupy leadership positions both in the churches and political arena. For as Namani (2005) has rightly observed, in the beginning there was gender equality but inequality was introduced along the line due to the patriarchal quest for power and privileges which was sustained by serious interpretation and ideologies. The study concludes that the contribution of both male and female gender to the national development is strategic in any development process. Gender discrimination against women in the public sector or service is obvious and has negative impact on national development. This discrimination should be discouraged and abolished in order to give different opportunity to all categories of gender to contribute their own quota to the national development. This research work confirmed the relationship between religiosity and gender inequality factors, while the strong influence of economic development on gender inequality was controlled sociologically. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to allow more women participation in politics, religion, economic activities, decision making, marriage and public lives while this gender consciousness do not have negative influence on religious and family settings in a long run. The relevance of this paper is to change the historical trend of gender inequalities towards effective national development since the only thing that is permanent in nature is change.

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