Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.4 No.2 June, 2021; p.g. 390 – 402; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

GENDER EQUALITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A HISTORICAL VIEWPOINT

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Abstract

Nigeria is a developing nation after almost a century of existence, bedeviled with 'fantastic corruption', terrorism and sliding economy. From the amalgamation of 1914 to this present time, Nigeria has been ruled by the male gender leaving peripheral roles for female gender at the lower level. The male dominance has given room for unchecked flagrant abuse of office, corruption, nepotism, embezzlement which has hindered Nigeria from development. This paper x-rays the performance of women in key positions and on the call by the masses for change during the Jonathan Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) administration to buttress the fact that women can do well in leadership and administrative position if gender equality is made a policy to actualize national development. The allegations of flagrant abuse of office by few of these female appointees contributed to such clarion call for change that ousted the PDP's sixteen years of administration and ushered in All Progressive Congress (APC) is on structured gender-biased and chauvinistic grounds.The aim of this paper therefore, is to show that gender equality is another means by which the Nigerian state can attain sustainable development by accepting, utilizing and maximizing the potentials of the women. Thus, this paper argues the thesis that gender equality must function as a formal notion rather than a substantive one, such that in the eyes of the law, difference must be shown to be "relevant" in order to be admissible. This is achieved using phenomenology, primary and secondary sources as the methodology of this research to capture the lived experiences of women (domination, disadvantage and disempowerment) which creates systematic inequality. Thus, part of the objectives of this paper is to unmask the conceptual paradox that revenges the notion of gender equality in order to bring out the notion that is functional and applicable to law, public and private spheres. This also substantiated the fact that the change of party and leadership in Nigeria was partly due to the involvement of the female gender in the administration that broke the complacency that hitherto has made the male dominance a source of Nigeria's underdevelopment. The paper therefore advocated for legal framework to create room for more female participation on equal pedestal with the male gender in legislation, administration and judiciary to engender equal criticism that

will eventually bring rapid development to Nigeria.This paper ended with discussion on the benefits of gender equality to sustainable national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Corruption, Development, Jurisprudence, Empowerment.

Introduction

*Nigeria is one of the biggest countries in West Africa made of diverse peoples and cultures but a developing nation after almost a century of existence. The country is bedevilled with what a British Prime Minister; David Cameron termed a 'Fantastic corruption',(https//*www.bbc.com.news.,2016) *terrorism and a sliding economy. It is one of the countries struggling to integrate diversity and unity to manage its multicultural compositions, hence, Nigeria recognizes officially three tribes (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and English Language as their official lingua franca. Amidst other issues, Nigeria faces sustainable development as one of its challenges, in spite of human and natural resources which the land is endowed with, yet, majority of Nigerians live below poverty line. Since the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British Colonial Government (*Olugbemi V. K.,2010:152-159) *the male gender has been dominating the governance of the country both at the three tiers of government which are Federal, State and Local Government Levels unchallenged until recently when the global attention focused on gender imbalance. The male domina*nce *had virtually long been unchallenged by the female gender and this has given room for nepotism, embezzlement, abuse of office and corruption which has battered the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. The oil boom era covered the pang of these abuses until the Fourth Republic when the prices of oil fell in the World market. From this, Nigerians realized how deep the treasury had been looted; this necessitates the making of the 'clarion call' for the case of the first Female Honourable Speaker of the House of Representative, Honourable Patricia Olubunmi Ette, (*https://en.m.wikipedia.org.wiki,Patricia Etteh2021-) *(Mrs Allinson-Madueke Diezeani,(*https://en.m.wikipedia.org.wiki, 2021) Diezani Alison-Madueke *the First Female Minister of Petroleum and the First Female Minister of Aviation, Princess Stella Odua(*Thisday Newspaper,2013/08/30) *which were widely condemned byNigerians when compared with the preponderance of the higher level of corruption by the male gender. On the other hand, the feat of Dr. Mrs Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Late Professor Dora Akinyuli and others were also acknowledged worldwide which has earned Dr Okonjo-Iweala an International job as the first Female Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)(***https://en.m.wikipedia.org.wiki**Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala-2021**). The exposure of the deeds of these female genders in governance led to the call for the change mantra that eventually made the administration of Jonathan Ebele Jonathan of People's Democratic Party (PDP) to lose election to Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressive's Party (APC) in 2015. At the same time, the feat of other female gender also led to the lifting of Nigeria globally in the way Dr. Akinwumi Adesina is making Nigeria proud as the two term president of African Development Bank (***https://www.afdb.orgthe**president/biography,202**1).***The little involvement of women in governance from 1999 when Nigeria returned to civilian rule increased the social, economic and political awareness about the running of government thereby giving room for Human and Civil Rights Organisations to start probing into government activities to enhance National development.*

This paper therefore, shows how gender equality can be used to sustain development in Nigeria, since the involvement of women in governance placed the government in strict scrutiny and limelight more than when the male gender committed the exact deed or feat. It does behove that gender equality is the key for public scrutiny of government activities thereby serves as watchdog to put the people in government and public service on toes for rapid and sustainable development. Globally, the history of women development in the millennium had been predicated on struggles. Women are traditionally perceived and treated as subordinates, inferior and weaker sex, yet they are regarded as integral part of

men that would build the world (Olugbemi, 2005:72). *Hence, gender equality is another means by which the Nigerian state can attain sustainable development by accepting, utilizing and maximizing the potentials of women. Therefore, the following objectives will be attained in this research: (i) attempt a conceptual clarification of gender equality (ii) appropriate gender equality into mainstreaming the different levels in which women are dominated, disadvantaged and disempowered (iii) to show that integrating gender equality into our everyday life (social, cultural political and so on) can bring about sustainable development in Nigeria.* The paper argues the thesis that equality must function as a formal notion rather than a substantive one, such that in the eyes of the law, difference must be shown to be "relevant" in order to be admissible and visible. *The justification of this study is that every nation is adopting the finest values in order to attain sustainable development, gender equality model is one which accepts and maximizes the potential of 51% (fifty-one per cent) of Nigerian citizens (women) to increase productivity, and maintain sustainable development. It is also a model that brings out the humanness from people, shuns discrimination, and makes the public and private spaces safe for women, girls and all others.*

Conceptual Clarifications of Terms

Gender: Gender differs from sex in that it is social and cultural in nature rather than biological. The term gender in the context of this paper refers to the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. In most societies, being a man or a woman is not simply a matter of different biological and physical characteristics. Men and women face different expectations about how they should dress, behave or work. Relations between men and women, whether in the family, the workplace or the public sphere, also reflect understandings of the talents, characteristics and behaviour appropriate to women and men.

Gender attributes and characterizes, encompassing, *interalia*, the roles that men and women play and the expectations placed upon them, vary widely among societies and change over time. But the fact that gender attributes are socially constructed means that they are also amenable to change in ways that can make a society more just and equitable (Beauvoir, 2011). *The woman is the gender that stands in ontological opposite to the masculine gender. Nigeria's citizens are made of men, women, boys and girls.*

Gender Equality *means the fact of giving equal in rights, status, and advantage to men and women without discrimination (*https://en.m.wikipedia.org.wiki,Patricia Etteh,2021). *The question of equality has raised number of arguments among feminist philosophers, scholars and theorists such questions as do women want to be treated as men?*(Beauvoir, 2011: 10). *Does equality require different treatment? Are there more important values than equality? At the core of all these questions is the root of how to define and respond to sexual difference. And should difference be emphasized, what if any, is the place of affirmative action*(Calcagno, 2007:) *to assist the 'different' to achieve functional equality proper? The argument of this paper is that g*ender equality and women's empowerment do not mean that men and women become the same; only that access to opportunities and life change should neither be dependent on, nor constrained by their sex. *Thus, part of our task is to unravel the concept of gender equality that could be appropriated to attain sustainable development in Nigeria.*

Fantastic Corruption *was a an 'undiplomatic' statement made by the British Prime Minister to describe Nigeria and Afghanistan countries level of corruption in a conversation at the Buckingham Palace with the Queen Elizabeth II at an event to mark the Queen's 90th birthday when Nigerian*

President Mohammadu Buhari attended anti-corruption summit in London on 10th May, 2016 (https//www.bbc.com.news.,2016). The statement, fantastic corruption, was prompted because the Transparency International's 2015 corruption perception index which ranked Nigeria at 136 while Afghanistan ranked 167 ahead of only Somalia and North Korea(Ibid.).According to Bola Akinterinwa, the words 'Fantastic Corruption' as used by Cameron to describe Nigeria's corruption status could be attributed to 'remoteness from reality or imaginative dimension to the issue of corruption in Nigeria being of monumental corruption.... due to high level public institutional corruption (Ibid.). In Nigeria today from experience, many public institutions such as banks, Point of Sale (POS) Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), etc. are scientifically stealing from their clients without any rebuke from the government. Both the government and the populace see the corruption as a normal daily occurrence and have been adapted to it without any checks by the institutions or government. The anti-corruption agencies are bulldogs that cannot bite, the way Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) handles corruption cases are mere charade.

***Development** is defined as the process of developing, growth, directed change (*UNESCO, 2017). *In this paper, development is used in terms of using gender equality as a process in directing change economically, socially and politically in Nigeria.*

Jurisprudence concerns the status of women before the law. We question in what ways National laws have alleviated the historical subjective conditioning of the female status, in this instance, gender equality. Women's disadvantage position is triggered by irrationality and reaches the worse injustice. Disadvantage positions create inequality that sustains violence, sexual exploitation, and discrimination. For instance, Women have been believed to be mentally unstable or at least weak-minded, to be scheming and deceptive, and to have an improper motivation for making claims of harm against men. For these reasons, they tend to be seen as untrustworthy witnesses. Since they have been characterized as sexually insatiable and indiscriminate, they tend to be seen as deserving whatever harm they "provoke" from men. Corresponding assumptions about men's rational superiority encourage their being seen as believable witnesses. At the same time, assumptions about men's natural sexual needs are taken as justification for their violations of women. Feminist jurisprudence attempts to respond to these problems as double standards and matters of equality and rights(Smith, Patricia,1993).There are clear patterns of women's inferior access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, women are systematically under-represented in decision-making processes that shape their societies and their own lives in Nigeria. While it seems more women have entered political positions in recent years, including through the use of special quotas, they still hold a less than 23.7 per cent of parliamentary seats, far short of parity (UNESCO,2017). The situation is not much better in the private sector, where women globally occupy less than a third of senior and middle managerial positions.

Empowerment: Women do 2.6 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. While families, societies and economies depend on this work, for women, it leads to lower earnings and less time to engage in non-work activities(Beauvoir,1989).In addition to equal distribution of economic resources, which is not only a right, but accelerates development in multiple areas, there needs to be a fair balance of responsibility for unpaid care work between men and women. However, it is important to acknowledge that where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore, a critical aspect of promoting gender

equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. This would enable them to make decisions and take actions to achieve and maintain their own reproductive and sexual health.

Methodology

The methodology of this research is critical phenomenology: which includes primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are eye-witness account, oral interviews, diaries and archival materials while the secondary sources are written documentaries, books, internet, newspapers, magazines, journals etc. It is a useful and fertile style of thinking and the strength of phenomenology lies in its interdisciplinary appeal. It is on the one hand a conceptual system within the history of philosophy, and since Husserl, its intention has been to create new concepts in order to think the dimension of human experience and meaning (Sinn) more clearly and fully. But Husserl also conceived phenomenology as a method which would provide a deeper access to the fullness of phenomena as they present themselves to human consciousness. Phenomenology, as Merleau-Ponty said, "can be practiced and identified as a manner or style of thinking. (…) It has been long on the way, and its adherents have discovered it in every quarter"(Unah,2002).A straightforward appeal to one's own experience may not be sufficiently mindful of its own background assumptions and its location on the social map; as such it can be corrected, without simply being overthrown, by a broader, structural analysis of the total situation in which this experience unfolds, in Unah's(Ibid.) words; 'it is a reconstruction after an initial demolition exercise.' Similarly, a scholar can all the better accommodate the richness and complexity of lived human experience when she enriches phenomenological reflection with a case study or other data gathered by researchers through primary and secondary sources or even with the insights expressed by artists and writers; a phenomenological sensibility, in this case, gender equality.

*As a method, critical phenomenology slows down the stream of consciousness in order to create a descriptive attitude which focuses attention on the fullness (Fülle) of things and events. This process reveals the depth and complexity of phenomena (in this instance gender inequality) which are usually covered over in our habitual, unrelated attitude of perceiving and judging what we experience. Phenomenology follows our naïve relationship to the world and lifts it up into philosophical thinking. Qualitative phenomenological research like the primary source in the human sciences works closely with first person descriptions about specific human experiences and attempts to illuminate the complexity of the research participants' worlds. It aims for depth and understanding of the human condition, rather than statistical validity. In relation to qualitative research, a phenomenological inquiry practice pushes researchers to question the fundamental conceptual assumptions that undergird their research theories and practices and opens the field to new ways of understanding what is being researched. Here are two examples: Merleau-Ponty's (*Merleau-Ponty1962: viii) *introduction of the concept of the lived body was a very fertile challenge to the scientific theories of the body as a machine-like, anatomical entity. It has revolutionized the thinking in contemporary cognitive neuroscience (Gallagher& Zahavi,* Gallagher, S., & Zahavi, D. 2008: *Varela, Thompson, & Rosch,* Varela, F. J., et al, 1992,). *His phenomenological critique of the Kantian notion of "internal representations", which is a fundamental and unquestioned concept in most psychological theories, has the potential to open up research in cognition and intelligence in new and exciting ways (*Dreyfus, H. L. 2002:367-383). *It teaches us to pay close attention, to describe well, to understand phenomena within their larger context, and to reflect on our own limitations as researchers, thinkers, and fellow human beings.* For the rest of the work, the paradox of gender equality will be done to unmask the conceptual ambiguity

associated with gender equality. The importance of gender equality and its relation sustainable development in Nigeria will be discussed. This will open up to the understanding of the need and benefits of gender equality. This research will recommend the way of sustain gender equality that will lead to development, then conclusion follows. The role gender equality plays in sustainable development cannot be overemphasis. Thus for any nation to experience stable and sustainable development, there is need for consciousness rising on the notion of gender equity, equality and empowerment.

Women and the Equality Challenge in Nigeria

The challenge of gender equality in Nigeria can be understood when we study the lived experiences of women. The lived experiences of women include their statutes (social, cultural), political participation, (power relations), political power, job, works. It is evident in Nigeria (Oyediran and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2015:35-53: Haga, Aja&Okoye,2015:27-40) that 'the lived experiences of women' are still subordinate to men making our society is chauvinistic and patriarchal. Women have been excluded in all forms of economic (including Agriculture(Nwakwasi, P.C. Umunakwe &E.N. Ejiogu-Okereke,2016:10-18)) and political (Chuka-Okonkwo, & G.C. Ihemebirim, 2016:105-110, Ohazuruike &G.I. Okoroafor, 2016:122-129)life in Nigeria. Women make up 51% of the population, there are and have been very few women elected in high political positions. From the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 to independence to military and civilian era, no woman has been elected or appointed to the position of president, vice-president, governor, senate president and only very few were elected as senators, legislators at the houses of representatives and state assemblies. From the statistical record, the experiences of women in Nigeria show that there is gender inequality (Olugbemi., 2017:683). The usefulness of communal analyses on the place and status of women among the tribes such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and others on gender inequality in Nigeria explains vividly how androcentric and sexism has become a normal human experience for the women. This is because the standards of evidence are communal and dynamic, and are influenced by our understanding of social relations. If that understanding of social relations are not discarded and changed, gender equality becomes an impossible stage to attain in Nigeria and sustainable develop becomes a theory and not praxis. The real issues on women's experiences in the Nigerian society characterized her as Dominated, Disadvantaged and Disempowered (3D). This raises fundamental challenge in bringing the very best of our humanness to bear. Domination includes laws that treat women and girls as second-class citizens, harmful cultural practices and systemic inequalities violate their human rights and prevent them from reaching their potentials. Sexual and reproductive rights are critical in their own right. Shortfalls in these multiply other forms of discrimination, depriving women of education and decent work. For example, only 52 per cent of women married or in a union freely make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care. Around the world, there are many basic causes of discrimination that still curtail women's rights in private and public spheres. For example, discriminatory laws need to change and legislation adopted to proactively advance equality. Yet 49 countries still lack laws protecting women from domestic violence, while 39 bars equal inheritance rights for daughters and sons. Furthermore, gender-based violence is a rampant,(Awoniyi,2019:61-79 "given that this is one of the most pervasive human rights violations in the world today (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/ , 2021).

Based on data from 87 countries, 1 in 5 women and girls under the age of 50 will have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the last 12 months (Ibid.). Harmful practices, such as child marriage steal the childhood of 15 million girls under age 18 every year. Women in Northern Africa hold less than one in five paid jobs in the non-agricultural sector. The proportion of women in paid employment outside the agriculture sector has increased from 35 per cent in 1990 to 41 per cent in 2015. More than 100 countries have taken action to track budget allocations for gender equality (Osuji, 2004). According to National Judicial Council in Nigeria, at the Federal level, 29.38 percent were females while 70.62 percentages were males. In 2020, it was 102.72 males per 100 females to male to female ratio which increased from 99.54 per 100 females in 1950 giving an average annual rate of 0.23 percentage. At the legislative arm of government, out of the women population of 49.33 percentage and male population of 50.67 percentage, however, only 7 women were elected into the Senate out of 109 members while only 11 out of 360 were also elected into the House of Representatives in 2019 (an unequal representation). At the executive arm of government, only7 out of 44 Ministers were women that are 16 percentages as against the 35 percentage Affirmative Action a Convention to which Nigeria is a signatory. According to Nwamaka Ogbonna, Nigeria have the lowest female parliamentarian members in sub-Saharan Africa and ranks 133rd in the world for female political representation ... gender equality still remains in a deplorable state (https://blogs.Ise.ac.uk/Africa, 2021).

Even in the private sector, women in Nigeria own only 20 percentages of enterprises in the formal sector and only 11.7 percentages of Board Directors are women (Ibid.). This disparity in participation between the males and the female especially in politics is with the wide margin, the road to sustainable development will be tortuous. Olugbemi (2011:281) argued that women are not yet bold enough to challenge the electoral practices in this country. Daylight manipulations of electoral results in favour of highest bidder are one of the factors militating against women's full integration into politics. There is need to close the gap between the male and female gender.

Gender equality does not mean that men and women become the same but that access to opportunities and life changes is neither dependent on, nor constrained by their sex. In the past, biological differences have been used to show that classifications are not sex based (Osuji,2004:10). Thereby the reasons for having anti-discrimination laws have been seen as the reason to allow discrimination (https://blogs.Ise.ac.uk/Africa,2021).

This inequality unravels the tautology. It makes no sense to say that equality will be granted only when the sexes are equal. This raises the issue of freedom from systematic subordination because of sex and /or gender. Achieving gender equality requires women's empowerment to ensure that decision-making at private and public levels and access to resources are no longer weighted in men's favour, so that both women and men can fully participate as equal partners in productive and reproductive life. First, there are differences between the roles of men and women, differences that demand different approaches. Second, there is systemic inequality between men and women.

Our concern as citizens is to figure out a practical way for all to understand the meaning and application of gender equality at home, market, workforce, law, economic drives, and participation in national, state and local levels. This understanding will enable us overcome

traditional ideology of gender differences between men and women; essentially by not weakening and devaluing women's abilities to gain access to the rights and protections that men have enjoyed. Our concern is that women's difference must not be used to keep women from enjoying a legal status equal to men's. what the so called women's weakness understood as biological should be socially reconstructed to the benefit of the society especially pregnancy which we believe benefits the nations rather than the women. Thus, pregnancy is not a disability but rather a social benefit of increasing national strength and good citizenship. It is therefore essential that she must be entitled to the same rights, protections, and privileges. There is need for national re-orientation on a positive social meaning of other types of difference such as race, age, and sexual orientation, to enhance development. These significant differences must be taken into account by the law in order for justice and equity to be achieved. What has been good law for men cannot simply be adopted by women, because women are not in fact the same as men. Women have different needs which require different legal remedies. The law must be made to recognize differences that are relevant to women's lives, status and possibilities, thus ensuring equality for all.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. Gender equality requires equal enjoyment by women and men of socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and rewards(https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/2021). Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives(https://www.unfpa.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-gender-equality,2021).

Consequently, the gender equality law in Nigeria is ineffective at getting women what they need and are socially prevented from having a chance at productive lives of reasonable physical security, self-expression, individuation and minimum respects and dignity.

The Importance of Gender Equality and Its Relation Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Gender inequality is a constraint to the progress of any society because it limits the opportunities of one-half of its population. When women are constrained from reaching their full potential, that potential is lost to society as a whole. Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and is vital to the realization of human rights for all. The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life (Ibid.).Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence. The male and female gender must have equal opportunities for financial independence through work or through setting up businesses and enjoy equal access to education. Both sexes should have the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests and talents; share responsibility for the home and children and are completely free from coercion, intimidation and gender-based violence both at work and at home.

Gender equality is critical because it will enable women and men to make decisions that impact more positively on their own sexual and reproductive health as well as that of their spouses and families. Decision-making with regard to such issues as age at marriage, timing of births, use of contraception and recourse to harmful practices (such as female genital cutting) stands to be improved with the achievement of gender equality. Gender equality matters as women and girls represent half of the world population and therefore half of its potentials. If we allow gender inequality to persist, it will continue to slow social progress. Gender equality is a human right hence; women are entitled to live with dignity and with freedom from want and from fear. Gender equality is also a precondition for advancing development and reducing poverty (https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equalit,/,2021).Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation. Still, despite solid evidence demonstrating the centrality of women's empowerment to realizing human rights, reducing poverty, promoting development and addressing the world's most urgent challenges, gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise (Ibid.).Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Gender equality should be a concern for men because the achievement of gender equality implies changes for both men and women. More equitable relationships will need to be based on a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of women and men in all spheres of life, including the family, the workplace and the society at large. It is therefore crucial not to overlook gender as an aspect of men's social identity. This fact is, indeed, often overlooked, because the tendency is to consider male characteristics and attributes as the norm and those of women as a variation of the norm. Even though, the lives of men are just as strongly influenced by gender as those of women such as societal norms and conceptions of masculinity and expectations of men as leaders, husbands or sons create demands on men and shape their behaviour. Men are too often expected to concentrate on the material needs of their families, rather than on the nurturing and caring roles assigned to women. Socialization in the family and later in schools promotes risk-taking behaviour among young men, and this is often reinforced through peer pressure and media stereotypes. The adoption of a gender perspective is an important first step as it reveals that there are disadvantages and costs to men accruing from patterns of gender difference. It also underscores that gender equality is concerned not only with the roles, responsibilities and needs of women and men, but also with the interrelationships between them and to the greater extent development of the nation.

Gender equality entails a lot of benefits which ranges from the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation to the stoppage of harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. It also recognizes and values unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. Gender equality ensures women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. It ensures universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as world best practices accordance

with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences. Understanding gender equality makes it possible for government to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. Apart from the above, it enhances the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women and allows the government to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

It is therefore crucial not to overlook gender as an aspect of men's social identity. This fact is, indeed, often overlooked, because the tendency is to consider male characteristics and attributes as the norm and those of women as a variation of the norm. Therefore, there is need for social equality; social equality refers to equal participation and equality of the rights of individual members of the society (Olugbemi,2011:273).While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. For more than 30 years, UNFPA(https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/, 2021).

[1] has advocated for women and girls, promoting legal and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection, and supporting initiatives that improve women's and girls' health and expand their choices in life. Implementing new legal frameworks regarding female equality in the workplace and the eradication of harmful practices targeted at women is crucial to ending the gender-based discrimination prevalent in many countries around the world.

Conclusion

Consciousness rising is the corner stone of creating awareness on women's life and the need for gender equality. Consciousness rising brings about new understanding by making known the unknown. In the scenario the need to raise consciousness on the contribution of gender equality to sustainable national development is timely. The value of pluralism in the construction of policies, laws, constitution and reforms should not be undermined as it should be a way of making the values and assumptions of Nigerian communities accessible for critical evaluation

The need for value-neutrality: Neutrality in law is supposed to protect against ideological bias as well. It does this by taking a supposedly universal perspective on a case, rather than a particular perspective. Neutrality is also assumed to be built into certain processes of the law, and in particular the processes of human reasoning. Neutrality is believed to function in the law in at least two ways. It is assumed to be built into the processes of the law, and it is assumed to be produced by those processes. Feminist jurisprudence challenges the first set of assumptions by raising questions about legal reasoning. It challenges the second by raising questions about how a law created and applied by partial and biased persons can itself be neutral. Thus, feminist jurisprudence also raises the question of whether neutrality is a

possible, or an appropriate, goal of the law. There is need to challenge minds and attitudes of women and towards all

Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. Implementing new legal frameworks regarding female equality in the workplace and the eradication of harmful practices targeted at women is crucial to ending the gender-based discrimination prevalent in many countries around the world.

There is need to provide high-quality trainings, courses, programmes and resources on gender equality as well as emerging topics. We foster and employ innovative, participatory learning approaches and methodologies. The UN work with diverse partners around the world to ensure the quality and effectiveness of their training services and products, therefore, Nigeria should participate actively on the UN 75- global initiatives on gender discourse; essentially to anchor gender relations in Nigeria.

Gender mainstreaming should be used as a strategy for integrating gender concerns in the analysis, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects. It is therefore a means to an end, not an end in itself; a process, not a goal. That notwithstanding, the purpose of gender mainstreaming is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women in population and development activities. This will help women to overcome regular encounters of intimidation, deprivation and obstruction for them to harness **development (**Olugbemi, 2005:73). This requires addressing both the condition, as well as the position, of women and men in society. Gender mainstreaming therefore aims to strengthen the legitimacy of gender equality values by addressing known gender disparities and gaps in such areas as the division of labour between men and women; access to and control over resources; access to services, information and opportunities; and distribution of power and decision-making. They should consolidate such gains that are central building blocks towards gender equality.

Implication

This research has shown that gender equality is necessary for development. It enables the country to maximize the potentials of women whose contributions to economy and all spheres of life will speed up national development and as well hold the pillars of its economy. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies, development and benefit societies and humanity at large.

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