

The Challenges and Prospects of Achieving Gender Equality in Nigeria by Year 2030

Horsfall, Abiye Doris

Department of Industrial Relations and Diplomacy, College of Social and Management Sciences, Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti, Nigeria

Dorishorsefall58@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study examined the challenges and prospects to achieving gender equality in Nigeria by 2030. The objectives of the study are to examine Nigeria's progress to gender equality in the areas of politics and education, evaluate the challenges hindering Nigeria from achieving gender equality and identify measures the government should take in order to make sure that gender equality is achieved in Nigeria by 2030. The study adopts a quantitative research methodology by making use of secondary data sources. These include the in-depth analysis of textbooks, journals, newspapers and internet sources. The findings of this study reveal that the challenges hindering Nigeria from achieving gender equality are the existence of cultural norms, lack of political will and religion. It has also revealed the possibilities of Nigeria to achieve gender equality in the areas of education and politics by 2030. The possibility of achieving gender equality in the area of education is high, due to the gender friendly policies in the educational sectors, but in the area of politics the possibility of achieving gender equality by 2030 is very slim because women in Nigeria are not highly represented in politics. It was recommended that the Nigerian government should ensure that gender friendly policies in every sector are made and implemented this would help foster national stability in the country.*

Keywords: gender; gender equality; Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a major societal issue that has dire consequences especially in Nigeria where patriarchy is prevalent due to strict traditional norms. Women have been consistently excluded from decision-making in the society. In governance and all social groups, women are being discriminated allowing for male dominance [1]. This system of governance caused further imbalance, marginalization, suffering and conflict [2]. Gender equality is necessary in achieving the sustainable development goal (SDG) by 2030 because none of the three components of Sustainable Development Goal can be achieved without achieving gender equality [3].

Achieving gender equality has been a longstanding movement which has gained significant global attention, especially from the second half of the twentieth century. Gender equality is a concept that deals with the equal access to available resources and opportunity for all humans (men and woman). In other words, it is a state where women and men are free to develop their personal capabilities and make choices without any form of discrimination [4]. This may include equal treatment that is considered comparable in terms of rights, benefits, responsibilities, and opportunities. Promoting this kind of equality is an important aspect of human development and humanity in general. However, the heavily patriarchal and dominant male-centric nature of the African continent has huge implications for gender equality.

Nigeria is a traditional society with stringent gender norms which makes achieving gender equality very challenging. Consequently, this has made the call for gender equity and equality an issue in society [5]. Gender bias in the country is negatively impacting the country and preventing it from attaining its economic potential. Several researchers and even policymakers have argued that for Nigeria to make progress in this area, men must learn to value women and understand that women are not only mere partners but equal partners that have the ability to shape the entire socio-economic and political structure of the immediate and larger society [3,6]. Hence, women from every sector must of necessity be empowered.

Therefore, understanding gender equality and women empowerment serve as an important component of the socio-economic development strategy of any nation as gender equality is an important indicator and accelerates sustainable development [7]. According to [7], one percent decrease in gender inequality increases a country's development index. The inclusion of gender equality in the Sustainable Development Goals indicates that there is a call for all nations of the world to embrace gender-friendly policies that will change the status of women globally. Despite the charge for nations to achieve gender equality by 2030, the extent to which Nigeria has worked to attain this goal in the area of politics and education remains unclear. Thus, this study sought to examine the possibility of Nigeria attaining this goal in education and politics by 2030.

1.2. Objective of the Study

- i. To examine Nigeria's progress in gender equality in the areas of politics and education.
- ii. To discuss the challenges hindering Nigeria from achieving gender equality
- iii. To identify strategies that the nation needs to adopt in order to the achieve gender equality by 2030.

Methods: Grey literature such as reports and research briefs from the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Nigeria Population Commission, National Demographic Health Survey Nigeria was used for this review. In addition, literature searches from peer-reviewed articles published in databases such as Google Scholar were used for this review.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender refers to women's and men's roles that are defined by society. It describes the social differences between men and women that are learned and vary widely among societies and cultures [8]. According to [6], gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes and variables such as race and class, deployed in the distribution of privileges, prestige, power, and a range of social and economic resources. Interestingly factors that influence or change society's outlook on the gender concept in course of time include historical, ideological, cultural, religious, ethnic, and economic factors [2,6]. While gender can be generally referred to as the classification of humans into male and female. However, gender is far beyond the binary identification of humans into these categories. According to [9], it is a social construct that creates a relationship between males and females in terms of roles in power sharing, decision-making, division of labor, and remuneration. This construct is also assigned based on constructed roles, relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, influence, and relative power which the society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.

It is the view that both men and women should receive equal treatment and not be discriminated against based on their gender. Furthermore, gender equity is the process of allocating resources, programs, and decision-making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex. Gender equity makes it possible for both men and women to be seen as the same and treated fairly when opportunities arise [10]. Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men according to their respective needs. This may be equal treatment or treatment that is different but is equivalent in terms of rights and benefits.

2.1 Nigeria's Progress to Gender Equality in the Areas of Politics and Education

While advancements have been made to reduce women marginalization, achieving gender equality in this area by 2030 remains a serious challenge as this progress is impaired by a lack of political will, the persistent patriarchal culture, and the absence of adequate productive capacity that will create the opportunities for women empowerment and development [11]. This is especially because the task of achieving the target of gender equality in Nigeria by the year 2030 does not require mere passive policies that are separate and distinct but an active process requiring proper analysis, well-defined goals, and action programs that are properly monitored from top to bottom [12].

Women's involvement in politics varies throughout the world and their participation in politics. Several arguments have cropped up about the .

Education: Education is the bedrock of human development and social progress of a nation. The importance of education for the advancement of women was highlighted in the Beijing Platform for Action, in which it was identified as one of the 12 critical areas of concern and affirmed as critical for gender equality and women empowerment [13]. The Nigerian government has gone through these stages and adopted several policies and frameworks to serve as guiding principles to the progress and development of education in the country.

According to [14], female education has an important impact on the development of a stable, prosperous and healthy nation resulting in active, productive, and empowered citizens. There are a lot of challenges facing Nigeria and making it difficult to achieve quality education and attain gender equality in this sector by 2030. In 2009, reports from the Nigerian Population Council (NPC) showed that women with higher educational qualifications are more likely to be in formal employment and earn higher wages than those at the level of primary education [8]. Thus, achieving gender equality in the area of education is central to meeting Sustainable Development Goal-5. Educating girls benefit the girls, their families, and their communities as it helps to create healthier, safer and more prosperous society. According to the Global Partnership for Education's Gender Equality Policy and Strategy 2016-2020 (GEPS), achieving gender equality in education refers to equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys, and equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to society. [11].

The Nigerian government is presenting taking proactive steps toward improving women's education by formulating policies and laws that can help improve access to education and training opportunities. These policies include the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in 2000. This UBE program provides free and education at both primary and secondary (primary and high school) levels. The government has also introduced adult literacy centers solely for adult literacy and skills acquisition for women. In order to reduce the gender gap in education, the ministry of education has set up model secondary schools focused on women's education. In these schools' larger admission quotas are allocated to girls as compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, the federal government instituted a legal framework that addresses the problem of women's education through Laws that prohibits the withdrawal of females from school for the purpose of marriage [6].

Politics: Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigerian women have tried to gain access to the political decision-making position by contesting for elective positions at various levels. Their efforts have not translated to appreciative gains in subsequent elections since 1999. Women participation in politics is key to for any form of meaningful development to occur as it would help to promote gender equality. Although presently in Nigeria women are allowed to vote and exercise their right as compared to the 1970s, when women particularly in the northern region were not allowed to vote or be voted for, however, women are still being marginalized as they do not enjoy their full right to act while in office [11]. Women are still grossly prevented from holding political offices even when they are elected into offices, these women are used as assistant or deputies while the men are placed in charge of the sensitive matters. For instance, in 2019 general elections a total of 73 candidates contested for the presidential seat among these 73 only 7 were females, for senatorial elections between 2007 and 2015 only 8 women occupied seats in hallowed chamber while in 2019 from 360 seats available just about 11 seats were occupied by women. The country has not elected any female state governor since 1960 till date [8,13]. Sadly, women have still not attained the 30 percent seat in government as recommended in the Beijing platform of action.

Despite the efforts made by the Nigerian government and other non-governmental organizations to close the gender gap in the area of politics and education with a view to attaining SDG Goal- 5, there are still some challenges.

2.2 Challenges Hindering Nigeria from Achieving Gender Equality

Religion: Religion is one of the major challenges hindering Nigeria from achieving gender equality. Nigeria has two dominant religions which are Islam and Christianity. The Northern part of Nigeria is where Islam is most dominant as compared to other regions and most of the Islamic laws are restricted as it pertains to women involvement in politics and education [13]. However, Southern part, Christianity is the religion that is widely practiced and part of its teaching also requires that women be subject to men. This creates a pathway for men to dominate women. Religion further helps to widen the gender equality gap as it is seen to promote patriarchy.

Entrenched Cultural and Traditional Beliefs: Culture being the way of life of a people is usually difficult to change. Cultural barriers can work against women's involvement in the public sphere. Nigeria is a country with diverse cultures, and each of these cultures has their rules and regulations. In Nigeria, it has been observed that most of the laws are not in favor of women doing some certain things. Culture is a strong factor that hinders women's involvement in politics. The patriarchal structure of the traditional society enables men to dominate women. Through the patriarchal system, Nigerian women are socialized into a culture of female subordination. In the North, the women are not allowed to talk with men except their husbands, women are required to cover their whole bodies before they could appear in public; while in the Southern part of Nigeria women are made to obey their husbands too [14]. These embedded cultural beliefs hinder women from participating in politics and even education. Because of cultural beliefs, men have so much control over women.

Perspective: The mentality or perspective of Nigerians is a challenge for attaining gender equality. In Nigeria, women are perceived to be inferior in societal ranking while men are perceived to be superior [10]. This unacceptable practice/perception needs to be stopped as it has dire consequences including impacting negatively on women's mental health [15]. To further buttress the societal perception of women and their socially constructed role in Nigerian society. The current President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, said in a press conference that took place in Germany that a woman's role is in the "other room" referring to his wife, this implies that to achieve gender equality then there need to take a holistic approach or system wide to change the current narrative so as to help promote women involvement in key aspects including politics and education.

Lack of Political will: The lack political will on the part of the Nigerian government is one of the hindrances to effective gender equity in Nigeria. Although efforts have been made in this regard, however, the results achieved have been poor due to non-implementation of already existing policies [15]. This seeming gap has continued to spark discussions and frustrations in equal measures especially when a country such as Rwanda in Africa has taken the lead in gender equality while Nigeria seem to lack the political will to enforce the desired changes [15].

2.3 Way forward to Achieving Gender Equality in Nigeria By 2030

1. The Nigerian government should raise funds and these funds should be given to each community to support women empowerment.
 2. The Nigerian government should ensure that the National gender policy is enacted into laws and acted upon to provide legal framework for gender equality in the national development plans and strategies.
 3. Nigerian women should be given unlimited access to education by their families, society, and media. With this, women will come to the realization of the opportunities through which they can improve their status in society.
 4. Non-governmental organizations should advocate for socialization and awareness programmes as a means to encourage national priority.
 5. The Nigerian government should ensure that the National political parties allow women access to political offices as a means of encouraging female participation.
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6. The government should ensure that females are protected and given all necessary access to reach their goal for the advancement of self and community.
7. The Nigerian government should formulate and implement policies for example a policy that will enable women and men have equal positions in the elections for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

3. CONCLUSION

Gender equality is a global agenda and around the world countries are already taking steps towards achieving the set target of gender equality by 2030. The Nigerian government should increase their effort towards ensuring gender equality between men and women in the political and economic sector, because achieving gender equality in these areas by the set time will boost the nation Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Gender issues should be given more attention and handled properly in order to reduce gender inequality in Nigeria.

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