

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper assessed the relevance of gender equity in Nigeria tertiary education. Gender equity is a sine qua non to sustained national development at all times. The paper maintained that gender equity should be enthroned by all especially at the basic social unit in society – the family from where it will translate to society. The paper further examined gender equity from the perspective of philosophy; it further examined challenges to gender equity and sustainable development. Gender is “the sex-role identity used by humans to emphasize the distinctions between males and females”. It refers to the roles which are assigned to male and female on the basis of their anatomical differences; the system of roles and relationships between men and women that are determined not by biology but by the socio-political and economic paraphernalia of life. Gender embodies the relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, political structures, as well as in the household, and reinforced by custom, law and specific development policy, it is something that is constructed and acquired by people. Gender is not the same thing as sex. While sex is biological, and is determined from the moment a child is conceived, gender is socio-cultural and fluid.

Keywords: Gender, Equity, sustainable development

Introduction

In Nigeria, the current debates on gender equity in both aspects of human activities is a continuous process. There are several arguments as for example the role of men and women in decision making on matters involving education should enhance greater participation. The demand for participation in Nigeria educational system as stated in the policy on education emphasizes greater participation of both men and women. The national policy on education provides an equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education for skill acquisition, job creation and poverty reduction. With this provision, implies that:

1. the decision making in schools and school governance structures should include all role-players (male and female)
2. there should be greater representation to ensure equal opportunities at all levels to promote functional education at the upper level of education

This paper critically assessed gender equality in Nigeria tertiary education in respect of the moves towards greater representation at all levels of education.

The Concept of Gender Equity

Gender is “the sex-role identity used by humans to emphasize the distinctions between males and females”. It refers to the roles which are assigned to male and female on the basis of their anatomical differences; the system of roles and relationships between men and women that are determined not by biology but by the socio-political and economic paraphernalia of life. Gender embodies the relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, political structures, as well as in the household, and reinforced by custom, law and specific development policies.

Therefore, it is something that is constructed and acquired by people. Gender is not the same thing as sex. While sex is biological, and is determined from the moment a child is conceived, gender is socio-cultural and fluid. From the above, we can differentiate between the two sex is a biological factor similar in all societies and cultures, while gender is a socio-cultural and historical construct which varies from culture to culture, and over time within a culture. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. It is meting out fair and equal treatment to men and women everywhere in the family, in the workspace, in resource allocation and in political and social issues. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to ensure that women and men operate on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality. As Reeves and Baden point out, gender equity recognizes that women and men have different needs, preferences and interests and that equality of outcomes may necessitate different treatment of men and women which are assigned to male and female on the basis of their anatomical differences; the system of roles and relationships between men and women that are determined not by biology but by the socio-political and economic paraphernalia of life. Gender embodies the relationship of inequality between men and women as manifested in labour markets, political structures, as well as in the household, and reinforced by custom, law and specific development policies. Therefore, it is something that is constructed and acquired by people. Gender is not the same thing as sex. While sex is biological, and is determined from the moment a child is conceived, gender is socio-cultural and fluid. In other words, sex is a biological factor similar in all societies and cultures, while gender is a socio cultural and historical construct which varies from culture to culture, and over time within a culture. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. It is meting out fair and equal treatment to men and women everywhere in the family, in the workspace in resource allocation and in political and social issues. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to ensure that women and men operate on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development, according to the Brundtland Report is “balancing the fulfillment of human needs with the protection of natural environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present but in the indefinite future”. The International Institute for Sustainable Development also defines sustainable development as that: “development which meets the

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This simply infers that the concept of sustainable development operates on the principle of need fulfillment both for the present generation and the generations unborn. The International Institute for Sustainable Development categorizes the concept of sustainable development into two main principles namely:

- a. The concept of need (in particular the essential needs of the world's poor)
- b. The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet the present and future needs.

Sustainable development can simply be referred to as a situation where an individual finds expression in him/her supported by a strong social economic stability to engage his/her resources in a productive venture which will invariably uplift his/her wellbeing. The effectiveness of any sustainable development programme could be measured by the human development index obtained in such a society. This includes the comparative average of life expectancy, literacy level, and quality of education as well as standard of living of the people. Where there is a remarkable improvement in the people's areas of need, it could be adjudged that there is an effective sustainable development programme.

To make the process sustainable involves the participation of all segments of the population and requires the development of skills, capacity and institutions to ensure effective use of resources and enhanced productivity. In this regard the involvement of women is crucial to the achievement of sustainable development in the country. Gender equality will therefore lead to the sustainable development. It is change designed to be both horizontal to meet the present day needs and also vertical to make allowance for the needs of future generations to be met too.

Philosophy and Sustainable Development Philosophical aspects of gender equity refer to interpersonal responses which we acquire in the course of male-female, human relationships in diverse social contexts. The social contexts could be in the workplace, in schools, in the family or home. The interpersonal reactions are usually feelings, thought patterns attitudes, perceptions, to mention a few. They help to determine what people do and how they think and behave. Critical thinking in philosophy can be seen in education, political, economic, culture and so on. However, in this paper, the focus is on the social contexts from where the critical examination of life flows. In this paper especially as it related to sustainable development, Philosophy has a distinctively important role to play in the imperative exercise of re-defining and re-directing the content of the technological worldview. As Sodipo notes:

Philosophy is reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles we use to organize our experience in morals, in religion, in social and political life in law, in psychology, in history and in the natural sciences.

The history of philosophy is in fact a history of man's critical attitude to life. Two important admonitions of Socrates remain perennially relevant: "Man know thyself" and the other "the unexamined life is not worth living". Therefore the technological advancements though

positive is a challenge to philosophy. It is for philosophy to critically assess the content of technological development vis-à-vis implications for social existence. It is for philosophy to bring to the awareness of the practitioners of technology the underlying assumptions involved in the language and model they use. Philosophy's concern with knowledge and wisdom has been man's greatest catalyst for change and progress. As the history of science shows, many of the spectacular discoveries of science originated from human centred studies. Sodipo notes that:

Philosophic and scientific thinking were born together in ancient Greece. And through many centuries, especially from the 17th century in Europe philosophic rejections have been revitalized by fresh contact with concepts, methods and standards of scientific inquiry. On the other hand, the history and development of science has shown that the greatest contribution for science has been made by those who possessed what is rightly called philosophic insight.

Philosophy then will be doing a great service to humanity and technology by helping create, nurture and sustain a sound and human scientific and technological culture. And as Schumacher opined, philosophy shall have to teach that: Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organization and discipline. Without these three all resources remain latent, untapped.

It is important to point out that sometimes, gender equity actually works against males. But, in the main, much injustice has been meted out to women in many areas of life. Indeed, because the injustice has gone on for so long, it is often difficult for some women to acknowledge that they have been wronged. The wrong thing appears normal to them no matter how much they hurt. Scholars have linked gender equity and sustainable development. On March 8, 2008, the UN Secretary General said "As we know from long and indisputable experience, investing in women and girls has a multiplier effect on productivity and sustained economic growth"¹⁴. In 2007 a very intricately detailed study of the relationship of gender equality with sustainable development was presented by a group of Swedish researchers. It covered gender differences in lifestyle, mobility, use of time and environment. It was found that, indeed, there was a close relationship between gender equity and sustainable development in the area of education of girls and women empowerment and the relationship with development. The results were found to be very positive and significant. Kofi Annan said, "Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress toward equality, development and peace". Thus, sustainable development is tied to gender equity

Assessment of Gender Equity in Tertiary Education in Nigeria

Gender equity in Nigerian tertiary institutions is a topic of great importance. It is recognized that women have been historically marginalized in various aspects of life including social, economic and political spheres. The Nigerian government has been actively engaged in gender-responsive policies and programs to address this issue. The National Gender Policy, developed in 2006, emphasizes the strengthening of institutions and systems for gender mainstreaming and building partnerships with male-led institutions to deliver results for girls

and women. Although progress has been somewhat slow, Nigerian tertiary institutions are becoming more responsive to the engendering process by ensuring that academic programs and the learning environment are gender-responsive

However, it is important to note that gender equity gaps still exist in the Nigerian tertiary education system. Gender inequality can be observed in areas such as student enrollment, staff employment, and administrative policies and programs. Efforts are being made to bridge these gaps and institutionalize gender mainstreaming strategies. For instance, Ekiti State University has adopted gender mainstreaming strategies and mechanisms to bridge gender gaps and institutionalize gender equality

Some Issues Affecting Equality in Nigeria

1. Discriminatory laws, religious and cultural norms, gender stereotype, and low levels of education that undermine women's right and opportunities.
2. The disproportionate effect of poverty on women, which limits their access to recourses, services and political participation.
3. The prevalence of violence against women, which is driven by social norms, economic stress, family relations, patriarchal belief, and targeted assertion against female autonomy.

Thirty-five per cent of women in Nigeria have experienced gender- based violence. This implies that one in every three Nigerian women has suffered physical and/or sexual violence. According to the 2018 Nigeria demographic and health survey, 31% of women between ages 15 and 49 have experienced physical violence. Further 36% of once married Nigerian women have suffered from spousal violence. Nigeria also has a prevalence of female genital mutilation as at least 20% of Nigerian women between ages 15 and 49 were circumcised as of 2018. Forced early marriage is also prevalent in the country.

The Strategic Development Results Framework (SDRF) for implementing the Nigeria National Gender Policy is a comprehensive tool created through an intensive consultative process involving several stakeholders and institutions. Following the Federal Executive Council's approval of the National Gender Policy in 2006, the SDRF's development spanned 8 months, beginning in January 2008.

The process included a series of consultations and a survey aimed at evaluating the preparedness of government institutions to implement the Gender Policy. This survey also identified gaps in current gender-related programming, ensuring that the framework would effectively address those deficiencies. The SDRF serves as a strategic guide for driving the implementation of the National Gender Policy, aligning efforts across various sectors to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Nigeria. This framework highlights the dedication to advancing gender policy in Nigeria and creates an organized structure for achieving key gender-related outcomes.

Philosophical Aspects of Gender Equity

Here it is germane to share information and thoughts on cultural, social and philosophical complexities of gender equity. Unlike the other areas, the issues here are less tangible and quantifiable as they are not issues in the home. The home or the family unit is the smallest and most powerful social unit of a society or a nation. Who we are and what we do is determined basically by what we have continuously been exposed to from childhood in the home. The different gender roles which were decided by custom and tradition in the society are interpreted and played out in the home. The husband and wife relationship is learnt by the children. The children's perceptions of how their parents interact and relate is usually carried into their own future homes, thus laying the foundations for sustainable future healthy boys and girls. The issue of wrong values is replicated from the homes whether wealthy or poor, all homes produce children. When these children are exposed to aggressive, violent environments, they learn to be violent. Aggressiveness is actually coded into their nervous system. This is why violence in the home is absolutely undesirable. In monogamous as well as polygamous family arrangements, care must be taken to produce secure atmosphere for intellectual wisdom to thrive. Therefore, it is important that the thinking, knowledge, wisdom and values passed on to the children and wives and children as future husbands and wives, mothers and fathers are such that would mold them positively in future. The risks are greater in homes with polygamous arrangement than in monogamous ones. In polygamous homes, children are conditioned to beware of those other children and their mothers and the wives who may appear to accept sharing of their husband and their mothers are actually in emotional turmoil. Mariama Ba has captured this so well in her book *So Long a Letter*. The point being made here is that the philosophy of life being consciously and unconsciously passed on is carried into future generations, and this form the bases of wisdom and intelligence in the subconscious of the child.

The Way Forward

Several studies have shown that gender inequalities as such have direct costs. In many cases, public policies have been based on the needs of the dominant group in society or on the needs of those who have traditionally been the decision-makers, mostly men. The women's rights movement, an increased presence of women in decision-making, strong commitments to women's human rights at all levels, and the development of gender studies and sex-disaggregated data, have all helped unveiling the fact that public policies often did not take into account women's differing needs and situations.

Evidently, decisions regarding public policies and services, which do not fully take into account the needs and situations of all final users may lead to inappropriate solutions and an inadequate allocation of public funds. Gender mainstreaming is an inclusive strategy, aimed at integrating the need of all people. It is also based on the fact that women are not a "vulnerable group", as they represent more than half of the population in most societies. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy to improve the quality of public policies, programmer and projects, ensuring a more efficient allocation of resources. Better results mean increased well-being for both women and men, and the creation of a more socially just and sustainable society

Conclusion

This paper has treated some philosophical issues of gender equity and sustainable development. Since gender equity is inextricably linked with sustainable development, it is time to start doing something no matter how little in whatever position we find ourselves. This is not championing the cause of women; it is a matter of being concerned about the future generations as well and the future of our nation. It is about ensuring that both sexes contribute equally to the development and sustenance of the future generations. Only then can our society be truly developed. Indeed our approach should be holistic if our present situation would be better, and the future much better than the present.

End Notes

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