GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND NIGERIA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT
Gender inequity has become an issue for global concern especially in the developing countries of which Nigeria is one. Thus questions have been asked as to the role of women in economic development. Worried by the prevailing scenario of gender inequality in our clime, this paper examines gender mainstreaming and Nigeria’s economic development. Evidently, women had played second fiddle to men and they have been relegated to the background in various fields of human endeavour. The important roles women play in nation building and economic development are currently receiving deserved scholarly attention. Many women do not participate fully in political activities either because the society frowns at it or they are not educationally sound. Although there have been some improvements over the years, majority of women still lag behind men in power, wealth and opportunity. Many factors such as traditional, socio-cultural, socioeconomic and religious constraints inhibit women’s participation in and contributions to economic development. Though history has recorded some notable Nigerian women’s contribution
to national development, much is still left undone. The paper, therefore, recommends the use of public enlightenment to facilitate women empowerment, dismantling of traditional and religious inhibitions on women’s goal of self-actualization and that the government should intensify programmes for women education and ensure that there is an equitable representation of both sexes in political appointments.

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Women Education, Participatory Democracy, Development, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realising gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination. Gender mainstreaming requires both integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different policies, and addressing the issue of representation of women and men in the given policy area (Acholonu, 2001). Both dimensions – gender representation and gender responsive content - need to be taken into consideration in all phases of the policy-making process. To address the issue of representation means looking at the representation of women and men as policy beneficiaries, as well as their representation in the labour force and in the decision making processes. Abdulkadir (2003) opines that gender mainstreaming is as much about addressing gender inequalities in society through policies, as it is about the organisations’ own ways of working. Addressing the issue of representation within institutions also involves addressing the gender dimension of the organisational structures and the working procedures.

Bearing the above in mind it is needful to assert that women in Nigeria have always played second fiddle hence they have been excluded from numerous socio-political activities, including decision-making in the family and society. Moreover, they have been relegated to the background in almost all ramifications of human endeavour. They are regarded as less intelligent than men and as weaker sex. As Chafetz (2009) observed:

The words used to describe the masculine role are quite positive: practical ‘logical ‘experimental brave ‘trustworthy’. The words used to describe femininity are considerably different. Such terms as petty, fickle, frivolous, shallow’ and vain are negatively charged in the society.

The above citation clearly captures the scenario in the case of Nigeria of gender inequity. More so, Nigerian political setting right from its inception has exhibited positive support for male dominance over female because the men believe that women are not expected to carry out any outstanding role except those roles affiliated with domestic matters alone. This traditional belief that woman’s place is in the kitchen has, over the years, pushed the woman to the degrading, derogatory position in national affairs and had, in many ways , affected her ambitions and so her
participation in political activities. Women have seriously remained in the passive state with its degradation consequences to such an extent that they are not having much freedom that would have allowed them to favourably compete with men. In Nigeria, female participation in education and politics had been neglected. Seminars and workshops organized on women often focus on lack of education as a constraint to women contribution to national development. 

Wikipedia (2018) sees gender mainstreaming as the public policy concept of assessing the different implications for people of different genders of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes, in all areas and levels. Mainstreaming essentially offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among people of different genders. The concept of gender mainstreaming was first proposed at the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya. The idea has been pushed in the United Nations development community. The idea was formally featured in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, and was cited in the document that resulted from the conference, the Beijing Platform for Action (Wikipedia, 2018).

In the light of the above, the important roles that men and women play in economic development and nation building are currently receiving what could be described as “deserved attention”. This paper therefore adds to the existing body of knowledge on the subject matter. The intention is to examine gender mainstreaming and Nigeria economic development from the perspectives of challenges and prospects.

Statement of Problem

At all levels, there is a growing academic interest in gender issues, especially with recourse to the level of participation of women in economic, social and political spheres. The “third wave” of globalization emphasizes the issue of democratization, women and human rights which dominate world interests in Africa. African women, especially in Nigeria are exploited and marginalized. Despite, the fact that women constitute about 56% of the total population (NPC, 2011) they are discriminated against in the economic cum political process. It would appear that the marginalization of Nigerian women is more pronounced in the democratization processes. Women in Nigeria constitute more than two-thirds of the country’s 70% adult non literate population while they hold less than 5 percent of the important decision making positions (UNDP HDI, 2009). The present national assembly in Nigeria has an appallingly low average of 0.05 percent of women in both Senate and House of Representatives. This limited conception of the economic and political relevance of women is responsible for their gross marginalization.

Gender Mainstreaming History in Brief

The European Union (EU) stepped up the efforts to achieve equality between women and men in the 1970s, although provision for equal pay was already made in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. The demand for equal treatment dominated this era during which the individual’s right to equality was addressed. In 1975, the first European equality directive was passed covering equal pay. This was soon followed by a 1976 directive on equal access to employment, training, promotion and
working conditions. In 2002, this 1976 law was strengthened and extended to include a formal ban against sexual harassment (Ezeigbo, 2016). Other directives followed: equal treatment in statutory social security schemes; in occupational social security schemes; for the self-employed and their assisting spouses; on maternity leave and health and safety conditions for pregnant women and nursing mothers; on the organization of working time; on parental leave and leave for family reasons; on the burden of proof, making it easier to prove discrimination in the courts; and on part-time work.

Equal treatment laws are effective in combating overt discrimination but are not enough to ensure equality. Their starting point is that women and men should be treated the same way. But as women and men do not start from the same position, equal treatment does not always lead to equal outcomes. Seemingly neutral policies can have biased results (Igube, 2004). The 1980s saw the introduction of specific or positive actions addressing the disadvantages experienced by women. Recognizing the shortcomings of equal treatment legislation when it comes to tackling inequalities between women and men, the EU co-financed specific actions for women especially in training and labour market activities through the ESF. The EU also adopted a series of recommendations and codes of good practice in areas such as education and training; childcare; combating sexual harassment; positive action; discrimination in the media; and improving women’s access to decision-making positions by “Action Programmes on equal opportunities” (Iwuchukwu, 2006). But specific actions in favour of women also proved only to be a partial solution. They prepared women for operating in a male-dominated culture but did not challenge the structures and the culture of organizations, institutions or companies or seek underlying causes and solutions. This led to a new strategy – gender mainstreaming – which shifted the focus to systems and structures themselves, to the relationship between women and men, and to their individual needs. This approach gained worldwide acceptance at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995 (Iwerieber, 2006).

Gender mainstreaming recognizes that existing structures are not gender-neutral. The result of this is that apparently gender-neutral policies can in fact reinforce gendered divisions and inequality between women and men. With gender mainstreaming a call for policies that accommodate a diversity of circumstances, accepting that – age, ethnic origin, disability and sexual orientation, for example, also have implications for gender equality. The EU adopted its gender mainstreaming approach in 1996.

In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam confirmed the importance of promoting gender equality and formalized the commitment to gender mainstreaming.

According to Article 2 of the Treaty, gender mainstreaming is one of the fundamental tasks to be actively promoted by the Community; Article 3 lays down the principle of gender mainstreaming by stating that in all its activities the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities and to promote the equality of women and men; Article 13 provides for pro-active measures to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation;
Articles 137 and 141 refer to gender equality in relation to the labour market. They stipulate equal opportunities and equal treatment at work and that each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied.

Obstacles to Gender Mainstreaming in Nigeria

Gender inequality is skewed against women. In times past, women were given inferior education to men. This, according to Kisekka (2011), was because “women education curricular emphasized Home Economics” which was tagged Domestic Science with sub-areas as laundry, needle work, embroidery, cookery and child care. In fact, the colonial education system was discriminatory against women. Many women do not participate in economic and political activities to the fullest either because the society frowns at it or because they are not educationally sound. According to the United Nations (1993), “women constitute a majority of the world’s population but they receive a small proportion of its opportunities and benefits”. The United Nations Report (2009) stated that “one out of three households in the world has a woman as its breadwinner”. This means that many households depend solely on women with regards to their duties or tasks for the household — men, children and the elderly.

With sound education which is the greatest weapon of development, women can go places. They will gain knowledge that will allow them to look at the world more critically. Through education, some women have secured ministerial appointments at federal level. Education, indeed, makes a man hence; women should seize that opportunity to excel in various areas of the educational sector. However, as Ohachenu (2017) put it, “although there have been some improvements for women over the past twenty years, the majority still lag behind men in power, wealth and opportunity”.

Marginalization of the (Nigerian) women arising from traditional, socio-cultural, socio-economic, religious, etc. constraints deny them full access to political participation. In spite of the overwhelming contributions that women have made, are making and are expected to make to the socioeconomic development of the nation, they are still frustrated with many obstacles that tend to limit their activities, which cannot usher in national development.

Our cultural beliefs and practices have made it difficult for some women to stick out their necks in the midst of men. In Nigeria, the man is the head of the family and hence his decisions are always right, final and binding on the woman. He is the known leader in all occasions and situations and the woman, a mere follower. Knowing fully well the role of education in human building, the man feels that the educated woman will threaten his supremacy in the home. He does his best, therefore, to ensure that the woman under him is kept in ignorance. In some cultures, it is a taboo or a waste of time and family financial resources to educate female children because they later discard the family name for their husbands’. Others believe that the education of the girl-children will delay their marriage (Narayan, 2007).

Moreover, to the traditionalists, it is believed that in the formal school system, the girls become exposed to or are trained in sex and sexuality matters. They feel that such exposure or training will
lead the girls to promiscuity which will rob them of their chastity, that being a highly valued moral quality of the girl-child and her parents’ moral training disposition towards her to be rated at marriage.

Traditional prejudice against women is an inhibiting factor to women education and participation in politics. Traditionally, women are to be seen but not heard. Consequently, a woman who makes her seen and heard at the same time is considered to be living the life of a man. The society would even ask whether such a woman is married. Disapprovingly, some women regard such a woman as being too daring because to them, it is against the societal norm and culture for a woman to be in the forefront or to be involved in any form of politics (Nwagwu, and Ifeanacho, 2009).

Women bear the brunt of educational discrimination in the face of parental poverty. The present-day harsh economic situation experienced by many Nigerian families has immersed many parents into untold financial hardship. The negative implication of such financial stress and strain is that the education of their children, especially the female ones, is neglected. The negative effect on the education of their daughters is manifest in the assumption that they can be sent to marriage (to raise the parents’ financial status) or be engaged in different jobs, no matter how menial. In order to supplement the poor socio-economic status of parents, the female children are more accessible to approach to engage in street hawking, farming, house-help commercial activities (and in extreme situations, prostitution). Under such poverty-stricken circumstances, if such girl-children are sent to school at all, they do not go beyond the primary education level.

According to Mohammed (1985) Religious practices also pose as stumbling block to gender mainstreaming and women education and participation in politics; some religious beliefs equate politics to sin and an entrance ticket into hell and, therefore, forbid women from participating (actively) in it. In the Muslim religion, women are confined to Purdah. There is no gainsaying that such women will not be exposed to formal education and participation in national politics. There are some extreme cases in which some parents who regard themselves as very holy Christians feel that if their female children are enrolled in school, they will be too exposed to knowledge that will make them disregard the doctrines and dressing patterns of the religion. Early marriage is also a constraint because once some girls are married, further education becomes a difficult or an impossible task; the husbands may not agree to allow them to continue. The women on their part may also be struggling to have children, care for their children’s and husband’s needs. Such divided attention would bar them from coping with the desire or aspiration to further their education. A related barrier is untimely or unwanted pregnancy which causes many girls to drop out of school, prematurely.

**Imperative of Gender Mainstreaming and Women Involvement in Socio-Economic and Political Development**

Women have always been held to be less intelligent, less productive, less creative, less useful and by implication, less human than men. For these reasons, women have had fewer rights and a lower social status than men. Since Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, not a single one of the presidential leaders so far had been a woman. Nigeria has not recorded any woman
governor. A woman has never headed the Nigerian Army, Navy, Air Force or Police Force. Such discrimination may serve as adequate reason why many parents prefer to focus attention on the education of their male children instead of the female ones, since the male children will be in better/favourable positions or conditions to compete in the economic and political struggle in the society.

The nature of Nigeria politics is characterised by violence, bitterness, manipulation and falsification of figures, high class rigging, etc. This has made most women hate or shun participation in politics. However, with recent development, hope is rising in the conduct of elections. In spite of all these, it should be put in mind that man is a political animal, whose knowledge of human rights derives from his sense of rationality. In general, education endows man with this knowledge. Politics cannot be severed from education or education from politics.

Though men have dominated the political scene in Nigeria at the expense of the women folk, women with exceptional qualities refuse to adhere to the dictates of the established tradition. Today, there are historical evidences to prove the contributions of women to national development in the political scene. One of such women is Late Mrs. Olufumilayo Ransome-Kuti, an activist who championed the course of women’s liberation. (*The Aba Women’s Riot of 1929 is another example of involvement in political struggle. The women, for political and cultural reasons, demonstrated against the plans to make them pay taxes and their reactions yielded positive result. Other examples of notable Nigerian women in politics include Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Emotan of Benin, Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Senator Franca Afegbua to mention but few (Mohammed, 1985).

Sani, H (2001) submits that women are becoming increasingly aware of their role in the political structure of the nation. Cases like that of Professor Dora Akunyili (former Director General of NAFDAC), Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (the former Minister of Finance) and other women politicians in the House of Representatives, Houses of Assembly and the Senate are clear indications that women are now becoming more prominent in Nigeria politics. Professor Grace Alele Williams who was a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin is the first female to hold such a post in Nigeria. Many other women have excelled in various sectors of the economy. The Nigerian woman is gradually seeking, struggling and obtaining for her country a better and more promising future.

Today, many Nigerian women have risen above the prejudices of men and the society. They compete with men in all spheres of life. Women are now found in posts which were previously exclusively reserved for men. In fact, proper and adequate education, enlightenment and dynamism have blended to fortify them for the struggle for recognition. Presently, the women folk are recognized as an indispensable part of the agents that are working for the good of Nigeria. From the viewpoints of women education and political involvement as great assets to the nation, it should be remarked that women who are given posts of responsibility have been performing very well. The women’s excellent performances have attracted changes in attitude toward them. In fact, the more effective, patient and transparent progress and success trends of women in politics lie on the policy that they do not have time and space for partial consideration or undue compromise which
often buy men’s conscience over or distract their male counterparts. Women are very principled as they solve issues in very subtle ways. Uhuo (2011) puts it, “the tide of women agitation for significant representation in politics is gradually simmering down as most of them are beginning to pick up plum jobs both on the national and international scenes”. Women are now aware that the quest for political independence in the country should not only aim at the liberation of the country from foreign dominance but also cut across all areas in which undue oppression and discrimination are rampant and dominant. Consequently, they are making conscious efforts to uproot all the thriving tap roots of oppression and its attendant evil from the society.

**Trends and Perspectives in Gender Mainstreaming and Economic Development**

According to Lucy Osuizigbo successive governments have formulated and implemented policies to develop the economy. However, closing the gap in men and women contributions to economic growth has yet to be adequately exploited as a strategy to develop the economy and alleviate poverty. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, 2017, released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Nigeria is the 122 out of 144 countries in closing gender gap. The report ranked gender-based disparities in different countries particularly in the areas of economic participation, education, health and survival, and political empowerment. The rankings are designed to create global awareness to challenges posed by gender gap and to highlight opportunities in reducing the gap,” according to WEF (2017). A former Minister of Education, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, comments on Nigeria’s position. ” Nigeria is 122 out of 144 on Global Gender Gap Report, 2017. This is poor. We must do better from now. “Part of Rwanda’s sustained strong economic performance over the last 15 years is traceable to the inspiring way it has bridged gender gap.” We have to prepare ourselves rapidly for post-oil Nigeria, and the best way is to empower all our girls and women and unleash their talents,” she adds. Ezekwesili explains that gender parity is about making the woman the best she can be.

Dr Adesina Fagbenro, a former Regional Coordinator of Department for International Development, South-West, was cited as cautioning that no country can prosper economically if half of its citizens are left behind. According to him, women participation is fundamental to inclusive governance without which good governance and economic development are not possible. “If government is to meet the needs of both men and women, it must build on the experiences of both genders. Such equality can grow our economy and reduce poverty,” he says (Amor, 2017).

More so, Dr Omobola Johnson, a former Minister of Communications Technology and Chairperson, Alliance for Affordable Internet, calls for equal opportunities within the workforce to help women to reach the peak of their careers and contribute much to national development. She wants corporate organisations and civil societies to support and empower women for nation-building. “Providing equal opportunities within the workforce will accelerate a woman’s career. Organisations should create a flexible environment for women to contribute effectively at work while having time for the family. “We need to ensure more female representation at the top in the private and public sectors by eliminating barriers against women working in certain sectors or occupations to increase output” (Daily Times, 2018).
A real estate investor, Mrs Udo Okonjo, regrets that Nigeria loses much in gross domestic product due to lack of gender inclusiveness. Okonjo is convinced that women are naturally endowed with strength for multi-tasks and entrepreneurship to bring about employment creation, economic development, domestic savings and social and political stability. “Greater management of household resources by women, either through their own earnings or cash transfers, shows that if given opportunities to occupy top positions, they can enhance growth by spending in ways that benefit the society’” (Okonjo, 2015).

In her views, Mrs Amina Oyagbola, Founder, Women in Successful Careers (WISCAR), says educating, mentoring and empowering women have proven to be a catalyst for rapid socio-economic growth across the world. According to Oyagbola, societies where women are repressed are among the most backward. “Nigeria seems to be somewhere in-between.” She claims that women in Nigeria make up 49 per cent of the total population but lacked opportunities to realise their potential and contribute to economic growth. According to her, this is a waste of human capital and a barrier to economic progress. “This is a dangerous state of affairs for any society. “Women are valuable role models, agents of positive cultural and policy changes. If we can harness these attributes effectively, Nigeria’s growth can be more inclusive and equitable. Education of women is therefore key. “This is why WISCAR, via its mentoring programme, is helping to equip several professional women with relevant skills and competencies to effectively manage their careers, assume leadership positions and contribute to nation-building” (WISCAR, 2016)

Mrs Bisi Adeleye-Fayemi, Wife of Gov. Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti, says that promotion of women’s economic rights is critical to economic growth. According to her, these rights entail sexual and reproductive rights and rights to education, mobility and ownership, as well as right to live free from violence. She identifies early and forced marriage as factors limiting young women’s engagement in educational and economic activities.” Threats to women’s rights include those posed by culture, religion and tradition, as well as processes of globalisation and economic change. “Right gained is not right maintained, unless there is constant monitoring of rights,” she argues. Adeleye-Fayemi suggests strengthening of women’s access to both formal and informal justice systems, adding that the systems should advance equal rights, opportunities and participation. “There is a need to create full and decent productive employment opportunities for women and access to finance, as well as provision of social protection.”

The Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group, Mr Jaiyeola Olaoye, also emphasizes that women’s contribution is important for the growth of any economy. “Investment in the health and education of women and girls are the way forward.” “The logic is that educated, healthy women are more able to engage in productive activities, find formal sector employment and earn higher incomes than uneducated women. “Educated women are more likely to invest in the education of their own children and are likely to have fewer children.” “Thus, investment in human capital has positive short and long term outcomes; it is good for productivity gains.” “Attention should be focused on equal access to education,” he advises (The Tribune, 2017).

Mrs Clare Omatseye, the Director of Society for Corporate Governance, suggests that gender equality and inclusiveness should be given a priority attention in the public and private sectors.
“As Nigeria pursues various economic development plans including the Millennium Development Strategy Vision 2020, a core part of the national strategy must be to invest more in women empowerment. “Nigeria and Africa as a whole must invest in women. The economic future depends on it. “Give women the opportunity to grow. Don’t view them as threats but as partners in progress, she urges (Omatseye, 2016).

Analysts call on the three tiers of the Nigerian Government to adequately empower women and girls so they can be partners in the efforts for the country’s economic success. Analysts also urge women to make conscious efforts to get into leadership positions and make positive impacts that will inspire others.

**Recommendations**

In the light of the issues raised in the paper, the following recommendations are apt for policy:

1. Women should be given high priority for a balanced development in the country. For women to participate actively in economic development, they should not be neutral or sit on the fence. Rather, they should work hard to embrace functional education which will make them models in their various fields.

2. There is need for public enlightenment to awaken the awareness of all citizens for equal educational opportunity as this will help to bridge the gap between men and women in economic development.

3. Government should ensure that all traditional and religious constraints are eliminated employing relevant legislations to bring a change of attitude toward women education progress and to embrace all professionals.

**Conclusion**

Gender mainstreaming and Nigeria economic development have been espoused with an attempt at clarifying the intellectual “cobweb” surrounding the roles women play in socio-economic development. Recourse was also taken to theoretically review tangential issues of concern for a better understanding of the concepts under interrogation. An attempt has also been made to establish the nexus between feminism and gender inequality in Nigerian political space.

It is the position of these writers, that despite inhibitions evinced in this paper that constrain gender mainstreaming; the prospects of Nigerian women in political and socio-economic development are bright. Moreover, some of the obstacles highlighted in the paper are already being remedied even though the outcome will be gradual. The number of girls admitted into schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities has increased phenomenally and steadily outnumbering those of males. In the northern part of Nigeria, a quiet but significant social revolution is now taking place among women. It may not be very long before education reaches the corridors of the purdahs. Even nomadic men, women and their children including females are now receiving education which is invariably a source of political, economic and social empowerment.
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