

GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Gender inequality affects gender relations with untold individual and national consequences and specifically constitutes significant obstacles against women's efforts towards socio-economic opportunities and development in Nigeria. Women have been subjected to domination by men due to persistent cultural stereotype, abusive traditional practices and patriarchal structures culminating in women historically related as the followers of men in the Nigerian society. This pattern of gender relations has for many years undermined women's ability and capacity to pursue their interests, careers and economic development. However, this situation is gradually changing due to the increasing number of women acquiring education and competences with attendant socio-economic benefits. Despite this status quo, gender inequality continues to impede women's pursuit of economic transformation in Nigeria. The paper explicates the practice of gender inequality and its implications on the dynamic roles of women in contemporary Nigeria. It posits that gender inequality undermines the pace of women's economic development, demonstrates gender issues that propel this untoward socio-economic disequilibrium and considers as imperative the dismantling of inequalities for increased women's productivity. The paper recommends that all Nigerians need to uphold all-round equality and eschew discrimination against women in order to enhance women's economic development and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Women, Economic Development.

Introduction

The manifestations of gender inequality against girls and women abound across the globe, and historically in virtually all patriarchal societies. Nigeria is a typical example of a patriarchal society with a

struggling economy and therefore the prevalence of gender issues that marginalize girls and women holds reasonable implications for women's economic development and national growth. Gender inequality is a system that manifest in

gender differences that are created and sustained by society through traditions, customs, conventions and regulations. Gender inequality defines the condition in society where there is imbalance or disequilibrium in rights, opportunities and privileges between people of opposite sex. Gender inequality entails the unequal treatment between males and females and as a system in society it permeates the social structures affecting family, education, healthcare, politics, workplace and the economy (Meagher, 2011; Hook, 2013).

In Nigeria context, which is part of the African continent, where patriarchy seems to dominate, there appears to exist gender inequality that is imbued and entrenched into its patriarchal system. Amadi (2013), states that “wherever there is patriarchy, gender inequality can be argued to be there”. The prevalence of gender inequality in varying degrees at homes, institutions, organizations, government agencies and parastatals makes it a systemic issue that its influence and effects could be far-reaching and instrumental in shaping the social and economic affairs of people and in turn the economic development in the country. This influence extends to both men and women and every member of the population and therefore affects all genders in varying ramifications. In a patriarchy, where gender inequality thrives, the issue of women facing certain challenges emanating from the influence of some social structures that are active factors in the economy emerges. Onyema (2013), posits that “most patriarchy are societies with social structures that critically manipulate girls and women efforts towards economic transformation”. Again, Uchendu (2014), believes that “women are structurally made to be submissive in societies where social and economic inequalities are active”. The economic status of women seems to be subjugated in many dimensions by men, right from the home to the workplace and in the public. Many women seem to be restricted or hindered from freely exploiting

equal opportunities with their opposite counterparts that can significantly improve their conditions of living.

Issues relating to gender inequality and their presumed extensive impacts on businesses, ventures, corporate organizations, firms, industries and government agencies as well as the larger economic sector in relation to women economic development are being investigated on the basis that they could be influencing the output or productivity of women who are perceived by many individuals (women and men alike) as being unequal treated (Okoroafor and Iheriohanma, 2013). The level of women’s economic development in Nigeria has been linked to a number of issues of inequality entrenched by the overwhelming influence of the patriarchal structure of the larger Nigerian society. In agreement, Roberts (2004), stresses that Nigeria has a strong patriarchal structure that is maintained by the sexual division of labour in the household and that the same structure directly restricts women’s availability for wage work and for the service industries.

Moreover, women have over the years and up to this moment worked hard to turn around this long existing socio-economic disequilibrium by gaining education and competences that are increasingly promoting their usefulness in the economic sphere. The changing roles of women and their improved levels of participation in numerous enterprises and businesses have steadily given rise to their relevance and capacity in the Nigerian economy.

Isigwe and Onuoha (2015), observed that women play important roles and have particular skills that they have developed over the years as mothers, wives, and caregivers for the family members and community. Their creativity, patience and capacity to love and build a consensus are qualities that make the female gender a valuable constituency. Also, Ogunde (2013) opines that “the roles of women in small and

medium scale industries and in some high positions of authority have continued to grow over the years and it is contributing noticeably to Nigeria's efforts towards concrete industrialization and industrial development".

These are testimonies to the increasing capacity and roles of women in the economic circles that make them more relevant in a struggling economy like Nigeria. However, it seems that despite this increase in women's participation and contributions to Nigeria's economic development, a lot of women remain under the negative influence of the shackles of gender inequality. Many girls and women are still marginalized, discriminated, subjugated and exploited because of the prevalence of the structures of social and economic inequalities in the Nigeria society. Even some women who have attained esteemed levels of educational excellence and occupy high positions of authority seem not to be left out in suffering some disadvantages and having lesser opportunities and privileges than their male counterparts in the Nigeria corporate realm. This is not understandable if it is happening in a 21st century developing economy, when most economies of the world are encouraging inclusive, diversified and competitive economic enterprise. This is the thrust of this paper: the implications of the system of gender inequality on the growing women economic development in Nigeria. The paper agrees that women are increasingly achieving developmental strides in the national economic sphere but seems to be confronting major constraints from the prevalence of socio-cultural, political and particularly economic inequalities that are subsumed under the phenomenon of gender inequality. These inequalities appear to be critical obstacles on the way of women's essential and full participation and contributions to their own economic independence, transformation and

progress as well as that of national development.

The paper, therefore, sets out to focus on the expositions of some critical concepts such as gender, gender inequality and economic growth/development. It proceeds with discussions on the manifestations of gender differentiation/discrimination, gender issues/implications of changing roles of Nigerian women, gender inequality/patriarchy and women economic dispositions in Nigeria, and the effective promotion of equality/ women economic development in Nigeria. It also seeks to answer the following pertinent questions:

1. how significant is the practice of gender inequality in present day Nigerian society?
2. are Nigerian women getting enough opportunities to participate and contribute like their male counterparts towards national growth and development in Nigeria?
3. what can be done in order to encourage increased women economic growth/development for the promotion of gender equality and sustainable development in Nigeria?

Brief Expositions on Critical Concepts

Gender The concept of gender became popular in focus and controversy from 1970's after the International Conference on Women. The underlying drive was to use the idea of gender to establish the growing notion that women were disadvantaged and devalued in most societies of the world. One of the simple but classical definitions of gender came from Hannan (2001), which states that "gender is the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female and the relationship between women and men; girls and boys as well as the relations between women and those between men and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization process.

Gender as a word is often used interchangeable with the word sex but they are not exactly sharing the same meaning. While sex implies the natural biological/physiological differences between male and female, gender refers specifically to the socially constructed and institutionalized differences that is used and relied upon to identify and distinguish males from females. Alaga (2011), see gender as the social construction of female and male identity. It refers to the socially constructed roles of and relationship between men and women and differs from “sex” which refers to the biological characteristics that define human as female or male. The existence of genders (male and female) is somewhat the grounds upon which the practice of gender inequality is predicated in most human society.

Gender Inequality This can be perceived as one of the most contentions and controversial issue that is often generating discordant opinions and ideas. Gender inequality is used to refer to the opposite of gender equality which implies the imbalance or disequilibrium of rights, privileges and opportunities, etc., between the genders. This is the practical nature of gender inequality in most human societies, including the Nigerian society (Okoroafor and Iheriohanma, 2013). Gender inequality in essence, implies the unequal perception and treatment of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles. Gender inequality involves the socio-cultural, political and economic manifestations, in which women and men do not enjoy equal rights, privileges and opportunities across all sectors of the society, including economic participation and decision-making. It also constitutes distinctions of behavior, aspirations and needs of women and men (Akinola, 2009).

Gender inequality through one of its predominant dimensions which is gender discrimination and differentiation seems to

manifest itself in different ramifications in the Nigerian society, particularly in the socio-economic sphere. Okoroafor (2018), defines gender discrimination as “the practice of treating and relating with one particular gender in the society in a way and manner that undermines the gender’s freedom and progress”. In agreement Nakpodia and Urien (2012), links gender discrimination to gender inequality and to women’s economic opportunities and development with the statement that, “gender discrimination is a problem that has eaten deep into the society. Women are seldom allowed to do their work; training opportunities are less for women than men. There is no contesting the fact that there is gender inequality and stereotyping that is skewed to the disadvantage of the girl-child and women in our society.

Economic Development The concept of economic development has intrinsic bearing with the concept of economic growth. This is primarily because economic growth is the basic element that precedes economic development, that is, there has to be growth or expansion of an economy before that economy can proceed to attain development. Sen (1983), states that, “one cannot conceptualize economic development without first invoking economic growth. This is because economic growth is one aspect of the process of economic development”. In real terms, economic growth reflects the increasing expansion of the economic structures and sphere, leading to the increased capacity to satisfy the requirements and needs of an economy overtime. It is measured as the percentage rate of increase in real gross domestic product, or real GDP.

In relation, economic development is a broader concept that has an all-encompassing effect in application and context. Economic development generally refers to the sustained, concerted actions of policy makers and communities that promote the standard of living and

economic health of a specific area. It can also be referred to as a combination of the quantitative and qualitative changes in the economy. Such actions can involve multiple areas including, development of human capital, critical infrastructures, regional competitiveness, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, health, safety, literacy and other positive initiatives (Udeh, Okoroafor and Ihezue, 2013). Again, economic development can be defined as the process of improving the quality of human life through increasing per capita income, reducing poverty, and enhancing individual economic opportunities. It is also sometimes defined to include better education, improved health and nutrition, conservation of natural resources, a clear environment and a richer cultural life (Matsuyama, 1997).

Manifestations of Gender Differentiation/ Discrimination against Women

Gender inequality often manifests in the forms and magnitude of the practice and effects of role differentiation and discrimination. Gender issues such as discrimination and differentiation are elements through which the system of gender inequality perpetuates itself in patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. Nakpodia and Urien (2012), state that gender discrimination exists in most parts of the world today. It is a universally acknowledged truth that societies had always been inclined to discriminate against the female half of the human race. It begins as soon as a child is born. There is much happiness and celebration when a male child is born because of the importance attached to sex. This is due to cultural beliefs in the society. According to Nwosu (2012), in his thesis on gender role perceptions and the changing roles of women in Nigeria, states that gender discrimination against women often find expressions not only in the attitude but also in the practices of most of the African societies. These practices include stereotypes and restrictions that are

made against girls and women such as the following:

1. The common practices of patriarchy, by which the man is traditionally regarded to be the head of the family;
2. Ascription of social status to the physiological and physical differences between men and women with the former of course considered to be “superior” to the later.

The thesis further highlights different perspectives explaining gender role differentiation and discrimination and its salient effects on women economic development. They are in the forms of religion, tradition, culture, law and public opinion.

1. **Religion:** The Bible and Quran seem to give subtle recognition to the superiority of men over women in society. The two religions demand unquestionable obedience and subordination of women to the authority of men. The Quran clearly directs that men are appointed guardians over women while the Holy Bible emphasizes men’s headship over women in Genesis, Chapter 3, verse 16 which reads: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over there.
2. Culture and Traditions of society especially in developing countries such as Nigeria are known to have dominant influence on gender role discrimination and differentiations. Up to 1990’s, in Igboland, female children in the family were not given the privilege of education because they were regarded as “birds of passage” (Onosedo, 2013). Similarly, there are variations in the economic duties of men and women such as trading, farming or cultivation of certain types of crops and in religion and ritual positions in relation to the sexes (Oтите and Ogionwo, 2006).

3. **The Legal Perspective:** The law and customs of most parts of Nigeria, have tended to perpetuate gender discrimination in society by denying girls and women such fundamental human rights as inheritance of property, equal employment opportunities, equal access to credit facilities, rights to procure bail and even decent treatment as widows, etc. All these discriminations are veritable means of economic subjugation and exploitation of women in the Nigerian society.
4. **Public Opinion:** This is another significant factor that has not only deepened role differentiation and discrimination between men and women in society but has militated against the active advancement of women in Africa. In the opinion of Emihe (1996), the notion of where the woman should go to, how she should dress, how she should behave, and what type of work she should do, have immensely affected and hampered the adventure instinct in most African women.

Despite the set-backs orchestrated by these elements of gender inequality (differentiation and discrimination) against women's opportunities and economic development, the changing roles of women in recent times has been quite noticeable and important with a lot of implications on both global and national levels. There have been some significant changes in the traditional roles of women across the globe and in particular, Nigeria. The social impediments of tradition and culture are gradually giving way to new ideas, new values and practices. In these contemporary times, women are increasingly making giant strides and breaking new grounds in almost every field of human endeavor, including those occupations and professions that were once considered the exclusive preserve of men. Consequent upon this, some countries of the world including Nigeria can today,

boast of women doctors, pharmacists, engineers, politicians, lawyers, bankers, vice-chancellors, military officers, pilots, wrestlers and footballers, and even commercial car drivers (uber drivers), among others. Examples include: Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala-listed for five years consecutively as one of the most powerful women in the world by Forbes Magazine; Ibukun Awosika chairman, First Bank of Nigeria Plc; Arunma Oteh- current Vice President of the World Bank; Sarah Alade-former Acting Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria; Chinelo Anohu- Amazu- Director General of National Pension Commission, etc. Ekong (2010), expresses that women are said to contribute a substantial part of the armed forces in China, Cuba, Israel and Russia, while 12% of labourers at building sites and 25% of Asian and Latin American miners are women.

Gender Issues and Implications of Changing Roles of Nigerian Women

Gender issues tend to inject some dynamism in the roles women play in many societies, including the Nigerian Society. Gender issues emanate mainly from gender perception and relationships. Gender issues have been linked to women's economic activities and development (Onosedo,2013). The issue of gender role perception is one that tends to influence gender relationships in the workplace and by so doing impact on industrial development processes. Gender roles are those roles that are culturally determined by the society according to the biological categories of male and female and according to the functional needs of the society as well. Gender role perception refers to those assumed patterns of behavior that are culturally determined and which society expects from a person or category of persons. For women in particular, gender role perception will refer to those culturally determined patterns of behavior which the society expects of them as women (Nwose, 2012).

Women in traditional African society have remained victims of gender discrimination and other forms of inequalities. This is because they are marginalized, undervalued and largely unrecognized. They are often subordinated and considered inferior in relation to their male counterparts. This explains the reason African societies are sometimes referred to as the men's world. In Nigeria, as in most parts of Africa, we live in a male dominated society where the male folks continuously and persistently relegate the female to the background because society has made it so (Emihe, 2006). The inferior and subordinate position which society assigned to women in developing countries and Africa in particular can be explained from the often observed situation in which men in farming communities are recognized as "farmers", while the women are referred to as "farmers' wives". In this regard, the woman's role is not only underrated but perceived as merely supportive to the man's role (Egwuonu, 2015).

The above description portrays the traditional roles of women as dictated mainly by the social structures in most African societies but this has over the years changed drastically in many different ramifications. There has been a significant change in the traditional social structures and this has consequently affected to a reduced extent the level of women's discrimination and dominance by men, thereby giving way for the fast emerging changing roles of women in the Nigerian society and in other African societies. This dynamism in the roles women play in Nigeria adds to their increasing economic development. These are manifest in the implications of the changing roles of women in contemporary Nigeria as outlined below:

1. **Democratization of Gender Roles:** The changing roles of women have led to an appreciable level of democratization of gender roles in the Nigerian society by enabling women to explore and exploit their

potentials and interests and also to contribute to national development. This trend is different from the situation in some societies in the past, in which women were not allowed to perform certain roles because of their sex and not as a result of their inability or lack of skills.

2. **Dynamism in Traditional Roles:** Western civilization with its powerful tools of education, urbanization and industrialization is perceived to have seriously influenced the traditional family institution. Some of the women's' roles and values that are traditionally situated within the family seem to have undergone some drastic changes. Since African societies came into contact with western civilization about a century ago, some of their cultural values and roles have undergone drastic restructuring and new roles have also emerged, at the same time (Ogunlade, 1990).

3. **Increasing Women Migration:** As a result of the rising tempo of urbanization and industrialization across the globe and even in developing nations and Nigeria in particular, women, like the male counterparts, are increasingly migrating from the rural to urban centers in search of greener pastures by taking advantage of economic opportunities in the government establishments, commercial outfits and in the private/industrial sectors.

4. **Increasing Numbers of Educated Women:** Education is a powerful tool for human emancipation and development. Education has facilitated and enhanced women's self-confidence, character and capacity. These changes in women's social status help to equip them with new skills, knowledge and competences to compete more favourably with the men in different professions and to assume roles outside their traditional household duties.

5. **Impact of Legislation/Legal Reforms:** The impact of gender-friendly legislations and legal reforms on the traditional roles of women in Nigeria has been quite noticeable and significant to an extent. Through the

instrument of legislation and legal reforms, some of the obnoxious patriarchal practices against women such as female circumcision, domestic violence, non-inheritance issues, and widowhood practices have been exposed more than ever before and even challenged in the law courts. Women's rights are increasingly being accorded recognition and considered as necessary for human and sustainable development. From this backdrop, it is somewhat clear that gender issues tend to inject some dynamism in the roles women play in many societies, including the Nigerian society.

Gender Inequality/Patriarchy and Women Economic Dispositions in Nigeria

The concepts of gender inequality and patriarchy are often related to one another because of their homogenous characteristics, influence on each other and relatively common context and applications. They both define societal phenomena that share common and related antecedents in most societies where they prevail (Udoma, 2009). They constitute social systems, practices and values that, even though they vary in degree from society to society, remain phenomenal and very instrumental in human history and development. All facets of human development have been found to be influenced in one form or the other by the system of gender inequality imbued into the patriarchal structure of most societies. The tentacles of gender inequality and patriarchy have been found to be active in putting into disadvantaged position the concerns and interests of girls and women in many societies, including women's economic enterprise and development in the Nigeria society.

It has been argued, investigated, studied and recorded in many articles and empirical reports that there is gender inequality in every patriarchal society in the world. The only difference is that the degree of gender inequality differs from one patriarchy to the other (Onyema, 2012). The concept of

patriarchy must remain central to a feminist understanding of society and patriarchy is indispensable for any analysis of gender inequality (Walby, 1990). This statement gives credence to the fact that gender inequality, as a system, can hardly be disassociated from patriarchy in society. From the definitions of the contexts of gender inequality and patriarchy, there appears to be a striking connection between the two phenomena. It can easily be argued that patriarchy harbours gender inequality in the sense that in a patriarchy, men dominate women among other things and gender inequality simply defines the unequal relationship between the genders. It is this "unequal context" that provides a dominating dichotomy between the genders. Newman (2002), defines patriarchy explicitly as, "male dominated society, in which cultural beliefs and values give higher prestige and value to men than women". This definition points out that in any patriarchy, all persons (whether male or female) are not equal. This is not only between the genders (males and females) but also among men and women because all men are not equal and all women are not also equal in society. Again, within the family, workplace and social settings, everybody is not equal. This is where there might be a slight difference between gender inequality and patriarchy. While patriarchy emphasizes domination of males over females, gender inequality tends to specifically emphasizes inequalities between the two genders (male and female).

By definition, gender inequality can be regarded as the unequal treatment or perception of individuals on the basis of gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences. It has been observed across the different communities in Nigeria, as in most other African countries, that womanhood is now reduced to a mere "infidel" and a second-

class citizen; this has inspired the general belief that the woman's best place is "kitchen". All these assertions and treatment towards the females have been attributed to the systems/structures of gender inequality and patriarchy (Amadi, 2013). A majority of African countries, including Nigeria, are patriarchal in nature, which is a major feature of a traditional society. Patriarchy is a structure of a set of social relations with material base, which enables men to dominate women and feel more entitled to material privileges than women. As a result, women are discriminated from acquiring education, widely mistreated and perpetually kept as house helps (Uchendu, 2014).

Notwithstanding, the above narrative of the influence of gender inequality and patriarchy on women in Nigeria, many Nigerian women have continued to be strong in trying their best to pursue their dreams, interests, aspirations and other endeavours to the extent that has been widely recognized. Their increasing efforts and productive capacity has continued to rewrite the past somewhat bleak narrative. Amadi (2013), states unequivocally that, "women in Nigeria are steadily gaining education, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills that is giving a number of them opportunity to compete more favourably with their male dominating counterparts". Udoh (2018), stresses that, the rate at which women are acquiring formal and informal education and requisite skills is on the increase and it is empowering more women in Nigeria. He went further to state that women are doing great in many areas of human endeavour and exploits even in the face of unequal treatments and various dimensions of socio-economic inequalities and that, women in Nigeria begin early to suffer this condition as girls and have endured many patriarchal hitches to keep up with their dreams, hopes and aspirations. Despite the challenges facing the women in Nigeria as a result of the impact of the

system of gender inequality, they still strive to do well and contribute their own quota towards national economic growth and development. One wonders what women's efforts could amount to if there are no socio-economic inequalities (gender inequality) at the pace they are going. It is obvious that the absence or minimization of the influence and impact of gender inequality and its attendant negative elements can significantly upgrade women's collective determination, participation and efforts to contribute immensely to their own improved collective economic enterprise and productivity that will reflect positively on national productivity. Obi (2017), observes that "never in history has Nigerian women been as active and productive as they have become in recent times, making them a force to reckon with in Nigeria's drive for a diversified and competitive economy".

Promoting Gender Equality and Women Economic Development in Nigeria

Women in Nigeria constitute about half of the nation's population and are known to play active part in production, management, community development, etc., apart from the traditional roles as mother, child bearers, child rearers and caregivers. Their contribution to the socio-economic development of the nation is phenomenal compared to that of men, owing to their dual roles in the reproductive and productive spheres. However, their active participation in formal and informal structures and processes, where decision generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (Esomonu, 2013). Besides, Roberts (2004), observes that women in the civil service are characterized by limited and insecure employment opportunities and marked substandard wages, poor work conditions, unstable hours and disadvantageous employment contracts. By virtue of the population of Nigeria, the potential female labour force is 50% but the actual value is 31%. The proportion of women in the formal sector is very minimal.

This is noticeable in the industries and the public service, statistics indicate that in the federal civil service, which is the highest employer in the country, women are mostly found in the junior categories (Ajir, 2002). Furthermore, Onyema (2016), observes that, “the public sector in Nigeria is mainly only dominated by women but controlled by men even when some women have occupied the position of Head of the civil service consecutively for more than eight years”.

It is a truism that the other half of the human population other than men, are women. In every economy, there are both men and women and they both participate and contribute to the economy though in varying degrees and sometimes in different conditions. Women constitutes “the adult female human beings”, who over the years have remained the silent workers, bearing and rearing children, keeping the home and helping their husbands in the farms. They received various forms of training, which aimed at making them masters in the art of home keeping, attending to the domestic needs of the family and other vocational skill works such as weaving, pottery, and petty trading. Women were largely denied free expression and development of their interest areas. They were not allowed to engage in any other roles outside the family system and were dominated in the public circles by men. (Udoh, 2018).

This was the picture of women’s participation in the economy in the past. Recent statistics and data clearly depict steady increase in number of women participating and contributing not only to their personal economic success but also more profoundly to that of the nation. With presumably slightly higher population or about the same population with the men in Nigeria, women constitute in number, a population, that can make tremendous impact on Nigeria’s economic growth and development. Nigerian women are undoubtedly improving their abilities,

potentials, talents as well as acquiring good education and skills that arms them with the necessities for viable participation and contribution to national economic agenda. Onyema (2012), states that, “in Nigeria, women have come up to a height in the center stage of the nation’s economy. From records, women head the boards of many banks and companies. They are not left out in the administration of the Ivory towers. A Woman once headed the post of Pro Chancellor of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Grace Alele Williams, a professor of mathematics was the vice-chancellor of University of Benin. There are women who have proved their mettle in law, engineering, medicine and in sport. Over the past two decades, women have not in any way relented in their upward economic mobility in Nigeria. Today, many corporate organizations are headed by women and some heads of higher institutions of learning are also women. The first bank of Nigeria plc. is headed by Mrs. Ibukun Awosika - a woman with the caliber of men. These are evidences to women’s continuous engagement and contribution to the national economic growth in different capacities. However, it is noteworthy to state that as a patriarchy, Nigeria has some structures of social and economic inequality that are undermining the improved participation and contribution of women to their own economic empowerment and that of the nation.

Basically, economic development of Nigerian women entails the quantitative and qualitative transformation of women in Nigeria in terms of women’s number in participation and their capacity to engage alongside their male counterparts in the economic sphere. It definitely implies the improvement of the quality of women's life through increased per capita income, reduction of poverty among women and more fundamentally enhancing their individual and collective economic opportunities. It further includes gaining

better education, improved health and nutrition (particularly the reduction of maternal mortality) and the general freedom from all sorts of gender discrimination, bias and violence, etc. Economic development for women in a patriarchal nation like Nigeria involves a long list of issues that require to be resolved and transformed in positive light.

All these indicators of women economic development are issues that social and gender inequality negates and undermines in practical terms. The system of gender inequality hinders most of these features of women economic transformation and impedes their growth in the Nigerian society. How can women be able to gain equal access to opportunities that promote their standard of living and economic health if they are structurally dominated and subjugated by their male counterparts in virtually all facets of the economic sector? How is the development of human capital as it pertains to women achievable if many Nigerian women remain marginalized and relegated from socio-political and cultural positions of authority and influence? How can women's economic success be attained in Nigeria when there is abject poverty among many rural and urban women? Reducing poverty among women requires increase in their per capita income and availability of opportunities of economic engagements and endeavours for women. From all indications, gender issues ranging from the inequalities in rights, opportunities, working conditions to discrimination and exploitation of women are generally antithetical to women's ability and capacity to develop economically. They constitute major obstacles to women's individual and collective drive and potentials towards concrete and realizable economic progress. In a nutshell, women economic development in Nigeria encompasses attaining gender equality because as long as gender disequilibrium (inequality) continues to rear its ugly head forward systematically

in Nigeria context, women's impact both in terms of their number in participation and also capacity to function in Nigeria's economy will be considerably limited. Therefore, for improved meaningful and constructive strides of women in the corridors of Nigeria's economic sphere to be attained and sustained, all ramifications of negative gender manifestations against women have to be dismantled in all their prevailing forms and magnitude. This is a daunting challenge but a right step in the right track and direction for a nation like Nigeria in the quest for sustainable development in today's globalized competitive economy.

It is therefore, not only necessary and timely but also imperative that the shackles of gender inequality, which is deeply entrenched in the patriarchal social structure of the Nigerian society, should give way for an egalitarian and non-gender imbalanced society in order to eliminate women's discrimination, subjugation, domination, marginalization and economic exploitation. The mere fact that gender inequality exists in Nigeria and yet Nigerian women continue to increase their participation and contributions in Nigeria's economic exploits and enterprise brings up the need to encourage and support them to do more for a struggling and developing economy like Nigeria. The time has come for the structural dismantling of the system/practice of gender inequality in all its forms and magnitude in order to provide a level playing ground for both men and women, in fact, girls and boys to start with. This position of thought and expression offers a healthy approach to a better and more formidable relationship between Nigerian women and men that will help build stronger ties, teamwork, cooperation and solidarity that can equally contribute to the increase in women economic productivity/development for the greater economic growth and development of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Gender inequality in all its ramifications including inequalities in rights, opportunities, working conditions and discrimination/bias against girls and women has continued to constitute concrete obstacles to women's efforts towards significant economic development. Despite the increasing number of women acquiring good education and competences, the issue of gender and social inequalities remains a considerable clog in the wheel of progress of women's economic development in Nigeria. Gender issues in different ways act to undermine women's individual and collective productivity in a nation that is striving to improve its productivity towards sustainable development. Again, the changing roles of women in contemporary Nigeria is indicative of the fact that the dismantling of gender inequality in all its forms and magnitude has the potentials to create a more enabling and conducive environment for increased women's participation and contributions for their own economic transformation and also by extension foster inclusive and sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions, analysis and positions of this paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. The governments (national and sub-national) should prioritize their goals to put more focus on ensuring that there are equal rights, equal opportunities, equal working conditions and the stoppage of all forms of gender discrimination and bias in order to increase women's capacity and efforts towards economic growth and development.
2. Nigerians at all levels, from the family unit up to the institutions and work organizations, particularly those at the management positions, should realize the need for a gender balanced society and

encourage women's increased and effective participation and contribution to their own individual and collective economic development and national productivity. With women constituting about half of the population in Nigeria, their increased economic development is of utmost social and economic value to the nation.

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