REFORMING SOCIALIZATION FOR SUSTAINABLE GENDER EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The process of socialization cannot be dissociated from any practice that is part of the mainstream culture of society, including the practice of gender inequality, which is ubiquitous in all patriarchal societies. The interwoven character and interplay between human socialization and socio-cultural, political and economic inequalities is not in doubt as long as socialization remains a veritable medium for the inculcation of societal norms and values. The paper explores the phenomenal nature of socialization and its interactions with the patriarchal structures that empower gender inequality in Nigerian society. It attempts to demonstrate how the course of socialization, particularly with regards to children, shapes and fuels the continued prevalence of inequalities and discrimination to the disadvantage and relegation of girls and women in Nigeria. The paper affirms that the main factor powering the frequency of gender inequality in Nigeria is the mode of gender socialization, which entrenches the sensibility of negative gender issues in children. It advocates that the process of socialization must be reformed, employing mainly the family unit through parents to effectively nurture and train their off springs without negative emphasis on gender differences, perception and roles. Also, Nigerians should uphold gender balance as human rights issue that is instrumental for the annihilation of gender discrimination and inequalities, towards the promotion of sustainable gender equality and development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Reformation, Socialization, Sustainable, Gender Inequality, Development

Introduction

The crucial and significant place of socialization in the affairs of human beings and societies are so resounding and prominent in the way it influences social relationships, co-existence and social organization. The fundamental task of any society is to reproduce itself – to create members whose behaviour, desires, and goals correspond to those that are deemed appropriate and desirable by that particular society. Through the powerful and ubiquitous process of socialization, the needs of society become the needs of the individual. Socialization is the means by which people acquire important social skills, norms, values and other cultural attributes of society. It is also the way we learn how to perceive our world; how to interact with others; what it means to be male or female; how, when, why and with whom to be sexual; what we should or should not do under certain circumstances; what our society defines as moral or immoral and so on. In fact, it is the process by which we internalize all our society's cultural characteristics (Newman, 2002).

The entire essence of socialization which encompasses how we perceive our environment, our interactions and our identity as male or female underscores the basis for the interface between the process of socialization and the practice of social and gender inequalities in society. It is a fact that through the phenomenon of socialization, people learn and acquire the knowledge of their particular gender, ideas about gender differences, gender roles and from there develop particular gender perception that tend to reinforce the practice of gender inequality in most patriarchal societies, including the Nigerian society (Amadi, 2013). Gender inequality is the systematic state of unequal relationship between the genders in which the female gender is often dominated and exploited by its male counterparts. Okoroafor and Iheriohanma (2013), state emphatically that "gender inequality is 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".

In most societies, particularly the patriarchal ones, they seem to internalize a number of issues of gender, such as gender preferences, gender perceptions, gender roles, gender differentiation and discrimination, etc., into the life of their members through the all-important process of socialization. Such that what is learnt from this process is because it is deemed necessary or essential for social stability and progress. In Nigeria, this is manifest in the prevalent mode of socialization of mainly children and youths to a significant level that apparently helps to continuously shape and promote the sustenance of the system of gender inequality. (Esomonu, 2013). The frequency of socio-economic and other inherent structural inequalities has been strongly attributed to the firm patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society. Considering the fact that socialization ensures the effective inculcation of the social norms, values, roles and that gender inequality is, basically, part of the social structure built on norms, values and roles of the different genders (as defined by society), there is clear-cut interactions between the two phenomena that can be exploited in any given direction. It is on this basis that the paper explores the interplay between socialization and the practice of

gender inequality in Nigeria. It seeks to examine how the process of socialization as it currently exists in Nigeria tends to enforce the continuous prevalence of gender inequality in the country. It further highlights that based on the significant role of socialization in the internalization of norms and values it could serve as a fundamental and potential medium for reforming the way and manner children and youths are brought up, particularly with regards to the issues of gender in such a way that can reinforce the positive change of perception and behaviour towards the promotion of gender equality and sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper attempts to explicate a number of concepts and issues that interface socialization, gender inequality, gender equality and sustainable development. It attempts to proffer answers to the following questions;

(i)   how effective is socialization as a medium for inculcation of norms and values in society?

(ii)   how does the process of socialization of children and youths enforce the practice of gender inequality in Nigerian society?

(iii)   what role can the family (parents) play in reforming the process of socialization towards gender equality in Nigeria?

(iv)   how can the reformation of childhood / youth socialization help to eliminate negative gender issues for the promotion of gender equality and sustainable development in Nigeria?

Socialization: Meaning and Essence to Society

The meanings of socialization help to directly depict its essence as a practical human experience and process. Socialization has been defined variously in very related and utilitarian dimensions by different scholars. It remains up to date, a formidable human and societal phenomenon with long-lasting and effective potentials. Socialization is the lifelong process of social interactions through which individuals acquire a self-identity and the physical, mental, and social skills needed for survival in society. It is the essential link between the individual and society. Socialization enables human beings to develop their potentials and learn the ways of thinking, talking, and acting that are necessary for social living.

The essence of socialization mainly lies in its almost inevitable place in the life of human beings and societies. It completely stands out among the many life experiences and processes people undergo in the course of life. Garcia (1990), captures the real essence of socialization and states that:

> *"Socialization is essential for the individual's survival and for human development. The many people who met the early material and social needs of each of us were central to our establishing our own identity. During the first three years of our life, we begin to develop both a unique identity and the ability to manipulate things and to walk. We acquire sophisticated cognitive tools for thinking and for analyzing a wide variety of structure, and we learn effective communication skills. In the process, we begin a relatively long socialization process that culminates in our integration into a complex social and cultural system."*

Socialization is also imperative for the survival, stability and progress of society. In every human society, people socialize in order to support and maintain the existing social structure. Socialization ensures the sustenance of the prevailing social structure by enabling society to "reproduce" itself through passing on its cultural characteristics from one generation to the other. Although the techniques employed to teach newcomers (particularly children) the beliefs, values, and rules of behavhiour are somewhat similar in many societies, the content of socialization tends to differ greatly from one society to another. How people talk, eat, walk, play and do so many other things are all functions of the culture in which they are bred (socialized). At the same time, individuals are also influenced by their exposure to subcultures of class, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. In addition, each of us has unique experiences in our families and friendship groupings. The kind of human being we become depends greatly on the particular society and social groups that surround us at birth and during early childhood. What we believe and uphold about ourselves, our society, and the world does not spring full-blown from inside ourselves; rather, we learn these things from our interactions with others (Kendall, Adler and Adler, 2007). The meaning and essence of the process of socialization to people and society is therefore unequivocally of high premium for human and societal stability and progress.

Socialization: Medium for Norms/Values Internalization

The elemental function of any human society is to procreate itself – to create members whose behaviours, desires and aspirations are in conformity with those that are considered appropriate and covetable by that particular society. Through the puissant and common process of socialization, the needs of society become the same with that of individual. According to Kendal, et al (2007), "socialization is the lifelong process of oral interaction through which individuals acquire self-identity and the physical, mental and social skills needed for survival in the society". It is the essential link between the individual and society. It is the means by which individuals acquire the important social skills, norms and values, ethics and other cultural characteristics of society. More precisely, it is the way people learn how to perceive their environment; how to interact with others; what it means to be female or male; how, when, why and with whom to be sexual; how to handle different circumstances' what is moral or immoral in the eye of society, etc. It is basically the process by which we internalize all the cultural content of our community.

Sociologists use the term socialization to refer to the lifelong social experience by which individuals develop their human potentials and learn culture. The process of learning the beliefs, norms and values that are socially expected of individuals as members of a particular society or a particular social group is known as socialization (Calhoun, Light and Keller, 1997). There is emphasis on the learning of norms and values because it is socially expected of members to do so. Through socialization, people come to learn the elements of their culture which includes cultural norms and values. To learn a culture is to learn people's norms and values, their ideas of what is expected in terms of behaviour and actions of people, their ideas of what is desirable or not in life. When we

uncover people's norms and values, we learn a great deal about them; for norms and values are the expectations and standards by which people define right and wrong, good and bad, fair and unfair, acceptable and unacceptable, etc. Values underlie people's preferences, guide their choices and decisions and indicate what they hold worthwhile in life. Values may be specific, such as honouring one's parents, owning a house and car, marrying with children, or may be general, such as health, love, democracy, gender inequality or even gender equality.

The process of socialization is the process of cultural transmission. Norms and values are fundamental and integral components of all cultures. They are expectations and statements, from the standpoint of culture, of what ought to be. Because socialization ensures the learning of culture from one generation to the next, it is the vehicle that "transports" norms and values and other cultural components across generations. It is the medium through which the value system of society or social organization is sustained between generations. Therefore, it is an essential phenomenon in the life of individuals and societies. Suffice it to say, that given the role of socialization in engendering the norms and value system of any society, it is right to state that poor or ineffective socialization of individuals (particularly children and youths) can adversely affect the internalization of the right norms and values of society. The inculcation of the right social norms and values in Nigeria remains majorly the responsibility of parents at the micro stratum of the Nigerian society, which is the family. At the macro level of the Nigerian society, the responsibility to imbibe the norms and

values falls within the domain of the school system through teachers, and other agents of socialization such as religion, mass media, workplace, associations, etc.

Systemic Gender Inequality in Nigeria Context

The practice of gender inequality is a well-known phenomenon and socio-cultural, political and economic issues that also has its psychological dimensions. Its scope of influence on individuals and societies may not be easily and fully determined as it varies in degree across different societies. Gender inequality is said to exist anywhere in the world where human beings inhabit. The female gender, the world over, are excluded from certain types of jobs and tasks, but some had asserted their authorities and influence, like the women of Dahomey who took active part in the political affairs of their nations, even fighting side by side with their male counterparts. (Onyenechere, 2008). By definition, gender inequality can be defined as the unequal treatment and 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 African countries, that womanhood have been reduced to a mere "infidel" and a second-class citizen; this has inspired the general belief that the woman's best place is the "kitchen". All these assertions and treatment towards the females have been attributed to the system/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 of this, women are discriminated from acquiring education, widely mistreated and perpetually kept as house-helps (Uchendu, 2011). In a more specific explanation, Udegbe (1998), opines that "male and female go along with a number of stereotype that virtually imposes both role performances and possibilities of different kinds. That is why Harrris (1991), confirms that women have been traditionally designated to occupations, which require such skills with cultural values.

In Nigeria, women constitute about half of the total population and are known to play active part in production, management, community development, etc., apart from the traditional roles as mothers, child-bearers, child-rearers and caregivers. Women's contribution to the socio-economic development of the nation is phenomenal compared to that of men owing to their dual roles in the reproduction and productive spheres. However, their active participation in formal and informal structures and processes, where decisions generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (Esomonu, 2013). In the civil service, Roberts (2004), observed that women experience 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%. This amounts to huge economic waste. The proportion of women in the formal sector is very minimal. This is noticeable in the industries and the civil services; 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 (2012), declares that, "the public sector in Nigeria is mainly only dominated by women but controlled by men even when the Head of the civil service have been women consecutively for some years". From the family level to the group and community strata up to the larger public sphere, women have often been excluded from positions of power (Nnamdi, 2014). All these male domination and control go a long way to fuel the system of gender inequality in many societies, particularly those that seem to have poor education status and democratic norms as can be observed in many developing nations of the world, including Nigeria (Jike, 2003). This status quo, raises questions as to the degree of prevalence of the system of gender inequality in Nigeria. The position of women to men in Nigeria, like in most African countries, is perceived to be that of domination, subordination, oppression, marginalization and exploitation. Efforts to bring an end to it are gaining a lot of attention (Offodile, 2011). Gender equality issues have become a global core commitment because equality between men and women is not only fair but also morally good. Gender equality is not mere charade of women activists; rather, it is a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development (Nwokocha, 2014).

Socialization: As Inculcator of Gender Inequality in Society

Literarily, to inculcate means to cause (as a person) to become filled or saturated with certain qualities or principles; to teach and impress by frequent repetitions or admonitions (Webster New Ideal Dictionary, 2009). What the process of socialization, basically, does in human society is to imbue into the consciousness and behaviour of people the cultural attributes of their group, community or society. Hogan (2006) states

that "Sociologists use the term (socialization) to describe the process whereby people learn to conform to social norms, a process that makes possible an enduring society and the transmission of its culture between generations". The entire process of learning to conform is a process of inculcation. Therefore, socialization as a process typically involves the act of inculcation of ideas, skills, norms and values together with all the cultural features of a society. It is not a mere and simple process but a complex process that involves human and learning interactions. Mberu (1999) in his work, "Infrastructural Sociology", sees socialization as, "a complex phenomenon that includes the process of acquiring our entire cultural heritage, the process of becoming a successful member of society and the process of acquiring awareness of oneself and a sense of identity". In his view, a socialized person is one who has internalized (inculcated) social norms and values, who has self-control and has learnt right or wrong. It becomes one through socialization – being taught all the things he or she needs to know to function as a normal member of specific society.

Socialization integrates a child into a community by inculcating into him discipline, aspirations, social roles and skills necessary for group membership. The young child is taught that respect and obedience for older people are crucial. The child learns to control his temper and wait for things he wants. Over time, these disciplines are inculcated (internalized) so that such behaviour is taken for granted. Ezewu (1983), points out that, "a child is socialized as it learns the ways of life of the society into which it is born and in which it will function as an adult member; socialization, therefore, is the process by which people are developed into social system members, interacting with one another in a social environment". This implies that childhood socialization is quite

instrumental for the proper functioning as an adult member of society. Macionis (2005) posits that, "sociologists use the term "socialization" to refer to the lifelong social experiences by which individuals develop their human potential and learns culture".

The above definition though simple is broad in context because of its emphasis on "human potential" and "learn culture". To learn culture is essentially to inculcate a society's total ways of life which includes that society's norms and values, do's and don'ts, laws and morals, likes and dislikes, behavioural tendencies and dispositions. Socialization as a process makes it possible for a society's cultural contents to be inculcated into the members across generations. In inculcating norms, values and the general dispositions of a society, socialization provides the vehicle for effective transmission of culture. Part of the cultural content of a patriarchal society is its system of male domination, male centeredness, male identification, male control and women oppression. These universal features of a patriarchal society propagate the practice of gender inequality in society. Since socialization, ideally, inculcates the entire content of any given culture and the patriarchal structure of society is imbued into its culture, it therefore explicitly implies that socialization as a process in society inculcates patriarchal structures which encompasses the social structure of gender inequality. In addition, gender socialization is core social learning. We learn gender-appropriate behaviour (as defined by our society) through the socialization process. Our parents, teachers, friends, and the media all serve as gendered institutions that communicate (inculcate) to us our earliest, and often most lasting beliefs

about the social meaning of being male or female and about thinking and behaving in masculine or feminine ways (Kendal et al, 2007). In simple terms, the all-important process of socialization is instrumental in inculcating the norms, values, dispositions, etc., that nurture and propagate the patriarchal structure which shapes and fuels the continuous prevalence of the practice of gender inequality in many societies, including the Nigeria society.

Gender Equality and Women Economic Productivity in Nigeria

The concept of gender equality implies that women, men, girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections. This does not mean that women and men or girls and boys are the same. By virtue of their sex, they are not and will never be. But as human beings, they are supposed to be treated exactly the same way without any form of discrimination. Hence, the United Nation's sustainable development goal which is: to promote gender equality and empower women, is a human right as well as a people-centered development issue. It is worthy of note that two of the indicators set to monitor this goal are ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions as well as share of women in wage employment in the non-governmental and non-agricultural sectors. Thus, gender equality is measurable and achievable (Akedi, 2013).

Gender equality refers to an equal sharing of power between women and men in their access to education, health, administration and managerial positions, equal seats in Parliament, among others (GNAT, 2014). It implies the same status, rights and responsibilities for women and men. Alaga (2011), remarks that gender equality does not actually imply that women needs and priorities should be valued in order to overcome the barriers of stereotypes and prejudices so that both sexes are able to equally contribute to and benefit from economic, social and political development (Isigwe and Onuoha, 2014). The involvement of women in leadership positions has been limited. Recently at international level, women have occupied only a small share of senior leadership positions in the United Nations system and in government hierarchies, including the diplomatic services. In fact, since 2007, the number of women holding positions at the top managerial cadre in the United Nations has increased by 40%. With regards to women ambassadors to the United Nations, the share has increased from 5.7%, in 2000 to slightly over 12%, in 2014. Even at this, the participation rate of women is still low (Obiako, 2018).

The first woman to become a national political leader was the Prime Minister of Sri-Lanka, Sirimavo Bandaranaika in 1960. A total of three women were national leaders in 1960s (Clark, 2012). The total number of women who have reached these leadership positions has increased slowly with Africa producing two heads of state namely, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia and Malawian President, Joyce Banda. According to Clark (2012), the global average of women holding parliamentary seats remains under 20%, which is well below 30% target set in the 1995 being platform for Action in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). With the current rate of progress, that target may not be achieved globally before 2025 and beyond that in many countries, the proportion of women in national legislation in the world regions range from roughly 22%

in America and Europe with the 42% in Nordic countries pushing the average to 20.2% in Sub Sahara Africa, 17.9% in Asia, 14.9% in Pacific and 10.7% in the Arab States. Five countries all in Gulf and Pacific have no woman parliamentarian at all (Clark, 2012).

It is relevant to note that globally, no country has fully attained gender equality. The Scandinavian countries like Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland are leading other countries in the world in trying to bridge the gender gap. These countries have managed to maintain relatively equitable distribution of available income, resources and opportunities for men and women. The Middle East, Africa and South Asia are having the greatest gender gap even though some countries in these regions, including South Africa, Lesotho and Sri-Lanka appear to be ahead of USA in the pursuit of gender equality (Nkoyo, 2015). In Nigeria, despite recent progress made in narrowing gender gap in leadership, women's positions remain unequal to that of men. Women in Nigeria are still considered as minor players and secondary participants in decision-making and key leadership positions.

In fact, since after independence in 1960, the military occupied the leadership of the country for 29 years and this gave a limited space for women participation in politics. The first Republic (1960-1966) was dominated by men. It was the same in the second Republics (1979-1983) and even during the third Republic (1992-1993). In 2007, the National Gender Policy was signed to support gender mainstreaming in politics and governance. About 35% of cabinet members are women and for the first time in the year 2012 a female, Hon. Justice

Mukhatar Aloma was Chief Justice of Nigeria. More women are appointed into ministerial positions especially, in the finance and petroleum key sectors of the economy. These women have exhibited a number of qualities, which distinguished them from their male counterparts. Even at this, Nigeria women are still largely underrepresented in elective and core leadership, positions (Isigwe and Onuoha, 2014). The above scenario in Nigeria portrays a clear picture of low participation of women in decision-making and political leadership positions in the country. This linked to among other factors to cultural barrier and gender stereotyping which encourages male dominance and seeing the female gender as inferior. This culture has over time been embedded in the leadership structure of Nigeria where the most important positions are taken by men while the women take the back seats and play the traditional supportive role. Women's improved productivity and empowerment in Nigeria entails tackling and eliminating gender stereotyping that often underpin the culture of inequality and discrimination. For Nigeria to fasten its quest for greater development in all ramifications, women should be core participants and contributors to Nigeria's political and economic progress.

Reforming Childhood Socialization for Gender Equality/Sustainable Development in Nigeria

One of the cardinal goals of the United Nation's sustainable development programme is to achieve gender equality across the globe and Nigeria as a member state is very much part of this agenda. It is realistic to think that part of the challenge of the pursuit to end socio-economic and other forms of inequalities (particularly, gender

inequality) in Nigeria is the issue of how Nigerians socialize their young ones (children/youths) from birth up to adulthood. This is with regards to the primary socialization. There is every reason to trace the continuous prevalence and resistance of the practice of gender inequality in the Nigerian society to the pattern of childhood socialization, that is, mainly primary socialization. This type of socialization refers basically to the earliest type of socialization human beings encounter in life, usually during childhood. It is socialization that inculcates into children the basic ideas, knowledge, skills of life and awareness of the things of life in their immediate environment. It concerns mainly the socialization of children and young people. Kendall et al (2007), believe that this type of socialization connects to issues of appropriate behaviour through the process of socialization. Our parents, teachers, friends and the media all serve as gendered institutions that communicate to us our earliest, often most lasting beliefs about the social meanings of being male or female and about thinking and behaving in masculine or feminine ways".

Every human society has its own peculiar pattern or mode of socializing its members but the form of socialization in most traditional African societies, including the Nigerian society that is characteristically patriarchal has been similar and authoritative in nature. Patriarchal societies are known to socialize their members in line with the tenets of male superiority and dominance over the female (Essien, 2005). This has been the unequal state of affairs between the males and females in most traditional African societies and it has not significantly changed over the years judging from the issues of socio-cultural, political and economic disequilibrium that are still in existence against the females and evidently witnessed in many African countries. Nigeria is an example of a typical patriarchy and is believed to have social structures that propagate the practice of gender discrimination and inequalities. Gender inequality is seen to be part of the social structure, which forms part of the components of our culture and therefore an integral part of our social learning and orientation (socialization). The primary purpose of socialization is to enable a society "reproduce" itself by passing on its culture from one generation to the next. This makes the process of socialization central for individual survival and human development (Macionis, 2005).

Moreover, socialization in the Nigeria context cannot be dissociated from the patriarchal structure of the society. It is only rational that the basic features and antecedents of patriarchy will be constituents of the norms, values and dispositions that are inculcated in the course of socialization among Nigerians. Through socialization the knowledge, ideas, perceptions and dispositions about gender are learnt and they become people's ways of life. Ezewu (1985), stresses that, "socialization is the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make them more or less integrated members of their society". Gender socialization which predominantly occurs during childhood/youth period provides the opportunity for children and adolescents to acquire fundamental societal/traditional lessons, ideas, knowledge and characteristics about gender (about being female or male). This form of socialization helps children develop mindsets and certain behaviours about gender. They also develop a sense of

gender perception, gender roles and some other gender-related attitudes and tendencies which they often adopt and grow up with. It is at this stage that the basic ideas and general notion about gender inequality are inculcated into children and youths and as men and women of tomorrow, they will live and act as integrated members of the society based on the way they were socialized or raised. It is therefore clear that socialization inculcates the norms, values and dispositions that encourage and support negative issues of gender, which in turn tend to promote and propagate the continued prevalence of gender inequality in patriarchal societies, Nigeria inclusive.

If gender socialization, which mainly takes place during childhood, is reformed in Nigeria, it has the potentials to influence the sort of ideas, knowledge and dispositions about gender that will be inculcated into children and young ones, thereby altering the way they will perceive and uphold the concept of gender. If Nigerian children are given a more balanced and gender friendly upbringing and training, it will encourage the development of a true sense of equality, fairness and respect no matter their genders. It will positively influence the way they perceive their own gender and the opposite gender and also reflect in the way they will treat and relate among themselves and with the members of the other gender. The present form or mode of socializing the young ones, particularly children, has been reinforcing the practice of gender inequality because, male superiority and dominance over the female forms the centerpiece of the entire process. Obiako (2018), argues that, "in Nigeria, most children, particularly the ones raised in the rural settings and even in the some cities learn gender-appropriate

behaviour, tendencies and practices that the patriarchal structure provides, and as it is right now, places more emphasis on male authority and higher value over the female".

Perhaps, if gender inequality is to be dismantled in the Nigerian society in the near future, it has to first take off from the point of childhood socialization. Nigeria has to focus extensively on reforming the way and manner children and youths are socialized. Gender socialization of Nigerian children should be reformed to reflect a new direction aimed at inculcating and sustaining a sense of mutual respect, equality and understanding as well as tolerance between females and males. From childhood, Nigerian children should learn to tolerate, respect and deal with one another in more positive and balanced ways, in all dimensions of their interactions and experiences (Okoroafor and Iheriohanma, 2013). This will go a long way to begin to actively refocus our children and young ones to see themselves as equals and as individuals with an egalitarian sense of living that will pursue development in a more gender-balanced and friendly environment.

This is not as simple as it is stated here but obviously an onerous and painstaking exercise and process that entails change of approach or change of methodology previously used in childhood socialization in Nigeria. It will entail taking more proactive steps to address specific untoward issues that are imbued in the present gender socialization that children acquire in the country. Since childhood socialization is mainly acquired and experienced at home through parents, relatives and neighbours, the family has an enormous and essential responsibility in this agenda. The family institution being the primary agent of

socialization can start from the moments after birth to nurture and train their off springs consciously with less emphasis but balanced instructions and guidelines on gender differences, gender/social roles, gender perception and other related ethos of human relationships. Ezewu (1985), comprehensively portrays the role of the family in socialization as it pertains to children as follows:

> *"Despite the changes in the family functions in society, the family has not lost its importance as the primary socialization agency in the life of an individual, since it is the family that is the only known social institution for child bearing and an essential agency for child rearing, socialization and the introduction of the child to the culture of society. Family functions, therefore, could be seen, among other things, to comprise: (a) child bearing, and (b) child rearing and socialization".*

Being the established smallest unit of society or social organization, the family can be extremely instrumental in the reformation of the pattern of socializing children on issues of gender. The question: what can Nigerian families do to positively reform childhood socialization and transform Nigerian children to be equality conscious and driven while building a more egalitarian society arises at this juncture. Certain things about the contemporary pattern of childhood socialization have to change to allow for the growth of a sense of equality among the genders. From a more practical perspective, this reformation of childhood socialization through parents at the family stratum can easily take off with more concentration on the male gender. From the moment, the boys

are conscious enough to learn, parents must commence teaching them morals and how to be self-disciplined, never to fail to accord respect to everybody no matter the gender. This sort of training of the mind of children should be for both girls and boys but more attention should be given to the boys in order to begin to put aright the prevailing level of inequalities against girls and women, which is fallout of boys and men domination and discrimination against girls and women. Children should be trained to know how to reciprocate respect and be humble while interacting and doing things with other people, especially with the opposite sex. Even the negative contemporary gender related issues such as rape, child abuse, domestic violence and human trafficking are all predominantly against girls and women, and are largely believed by many sociologists and psychologists as partly the outcome of poor, abusive and ineffective upbringing of their perpetrators. What parents do in front of their children have lasting impression on the minds of children, and are easily emulated by the children who naturally look up to their significant others, particularly, parents as models.

Again, children tend to follow the examples of their parents and so Nigerian parents must start the reform of gender socialization of their children by showing examples of positive "inter-gender" relationships in which fathers and mothers respect, tolerate and treat one another equally. Children learn a lot from what they see and when parents begin to exemplify a life of equality before the children, the seed of the sensibility of equality is planted in the minds of children.

It is interesting to note that in present-day Nigeria, many parents still prefer having male children to females. This is common in

the rural and more traditional settings within the country. Even among some elites, this trend is not far-fetched as it is also witnessed in some developed climes. In fact, there is a notion that some eligible bachelors prefer to have their supposed spouse to be pregnant preferably with a male child before marriage can be formalized (Onyema, 2012). The preference for male child more than the female is part of the sensitivity surrounding the issues of gender perception, gender bias, gender discrimination, etc., which directly help to propel the practice of gender inequality in Nigeria. Kendall et al (2007), observe that:

> "Many parents prefer boys to girls because of stereotypical ideas about the relative importance of males to the future of the family and society. Although some parents prefer boys to girls because these parents believe old myths about the biological inferiority of females, research suggested that social expectations also play a major role in this preference. We are socialized to believe that it is important to have a son, especially for a first or only child. For many years, it was assumed that a male child could support his parents in their late years and carry on the family name".

However, this perception and preference is gradually changing, particularly among the exposed and educated families, the female children are increasingly growing up to become successful and devoted women who can offer their extended family as much care as the males and in some cases more than the males. It is believed that with education and the passage of time, the long-surviving preference for male children would gradually phase out. This will in part encourage positive gender perception and understanding towards the actualization of gender equality, which is considered pivotal for the pursuit/attainment of sustainable development.

The way many Nigerian parents socialize their children significantly differ across the genders. Many parents, both those in the rural or urban areas not minding the level of education or even how uncouth or urbane, tend to, from birth act towards their children on the basis of their gender. They train the boys in a more energetic manner than the girls while encouraging the girls to be soft and devoted. This is not only peculiar to Nigeria because it is also akin to way the girl-child is socialized in most Western climes. Macdonald and Parke (1986) aver that, "from birth, parents act towards children on the basis of the child's sex. Baby boys are perceived to be less fragile than girls and tend to be treated more roughly by their parents. Girls are thought to be cute, sweet and cuddly and receive more gentle treatment". Also, Nkemika (2015), states that "parents influence the gender roles children play by passing their own beliefs and understanding about gender, which include the genders different perception of things, mannerisms, preferences and attitudes, to them. Parents play an influential role in the socialization of gender perception and gender role development of their children in many different overt and covert ways. Therefore, in the quest for gender equality and sustainable development, the family, through particularly parents has extremely important role to play in the effective and proper gender socialization of children who will be the men and women of tomorrow that

will foster and sustain the pursuit and practice of gender equality which is critical for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria and across the globe according to United Nations Conviction.

Conclusion

Reforming the process of childhood socialization in Nigeria through mainly the conscious efforts of parents at the family level can help towards the dismantling of gender inequality in the country. This can be achievable by parents avoiding negative emphasis on gender (sex) differences, preferences and roles in such a way that the male child is trained to perceive the female child as equal human being – who is created to be free, respected and treated with a sense of equality all the time. This can positively influence girls/boys and women/men relationships and co-existence to the extent that can facilitate the quest for gender equality which has been advocated as part of the global strategy to pursue and attain sustainable development. Even some of the approaches used in socializing the girl child that makes her to be somewhat timid, naive, dependent and less assertive can be mellowed to allow them have full exercise of their mental, social and physical potentials and capacities. This act can empower their sense of ingenuity and determination to work as hard as men or even more than men in a more equality-oriented atmosphere for their greater productivity and for national growth/sustainable development.

Recommendations

In view of the issues, analysis and discussions of this paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. On a more general note, Nigerians should consciously examine the mode of childhood socialization with a view to ameliorate some of the acts that overtly or covertly reinforces the issues of gender, such as gender differentiation, gender perception, gender/social roles, gender bias, etc., that are propagating the continued prevalence of the practice of gender inequality in the country.

2. Nigerian parents should make sentient efforts to reform (change) the way children are socialized and prepared for the future. While giving the right socialization to both male and female children, more attention should be accorded to male children to encourage them to imbibe a sense of tolerance, fairness, respect and equality between and among the genders. Male children should be taught to respect the females, perceive and treat them equally without any form of discrimination or stereotyping. This agenda will help eliminate gender and social inequalities and violence against girls and women in the Nigerian society.

3. Nigerians (as individuals) should see gender equality as an extension of upholding the principles of fundamental human rights in society. Reciprocal respect, mutual equality and general tolerance and peaceful co-existence between the genders (males and females) are ethos that are synonymous with the concept of gender equality and therefore should be sought after, valued and sustained for human and sustainable national development in Nigeria.

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