

Gender Mainstreaming: A Tool for National Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined gender mainstreaming as a tool for national sustainable development in Nigeria. Gender mainstreaming begins with the fact that gender equality is a primary development goal and key in any nation's development. In Nigeria, there seems to be substantial patriarchal or male dominance in the significant aspects of its society. Women seem to be discriminated against and relegated to the background. They are often seen as second-class citizens who belong to the kitchen and bedroom. This has made a significant fraction of women in the nation unable to participate equally in the country's political, economic, technological, educational and social spheres. When this is allowed to continue, women who are naturally intuitive, creative and innovative are therefore unable to contribute positively to the attainment of sustainable development goals in the nation, such as reduction in poverty, good health and well-being, decent workplace, sustainable communities and economic growth. This paper, therefore, addresses the need and impact of gender mainstreaming on sustainable development in Nigeria. Conclusion and recommendations are also given.

Keywords: Gender mainstream, Sustainable development, Economic growth

The term 'sustainable development' is intended to embrace the idea of making sure that generation in the future inherits the earth, which supports their livelihood in such a manner that they are not worse off than those of today (Ossai & Nwalado, 2012). To bring about sustainable development, there is the need for gender mainstreaming which allows both males and females to participate and contribute to the economy, policy, and social development of the society (Igbuzorin Ossai & Nwalado, 2012). Gender mainstreaming is viewed as the process of assessing the implications for females and males of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making females' as well as males' concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all the political, economic and societal spheres so that both gender benefit equally, and inequality is not allowed. The main goal is to achieve gender equality (Hosein, Basdeo-Gobin&Gény, 2020).

Gender equality is often seen as a significant issue in the economic development of upcoming economies. The world's worst countries for gender equality are observed to have continuously failed to give the same opportunities for females that are available for males. Nigeria has been listed as ninth among the bottom 10 countries measured for equality by The

World Economic Forum (WEF) (Sauter, Hess & Frohlich, 2013). In Nigeria, although the 2006 national population census showed that females make up 48.78% (about half) of the total population, only a few exceptional females have achieved prominence in modern political and government spheres. Millions of females around the world, especially in Nigeria continue to experience discrimination, gender-based violence, denial of their sexual and reproductive health rights, their role in peace and security and active participation in sustainable development (Archibong, Bassey & Nwagbara, 2018).

Several reasons have been proffered for the present imbalanced position of females in Nigeria today. The reasons include but are not limited to colonization, history patrilineal system through males, dominated by military rule, literacy on the part of females which neglects them to the background (Oganwun Ossai & Nwalado, 2012). However, global awareness of the role of females in sustainable development has made nations, groups of people and researchers think of ways to enhancing females' role in sustainable development (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). To attain this, there is need for gender mainstreaming to be strictly considered in Nigeria since the overall goal is to incorporate a gender perspective in all planning and decision-making processes. The main aim of this paper therefore is to emphasize the need for gender mainstreaming in encouraging better participation of females in the achievement of the goals of sustainable development which includes lasting improvement on the quality of life in the present and future of Nigeria.

Concept of Sustainable Development

Brundtland Commission Report in Malessah (2019) defines sustainable development as that which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the abilities and capabilities of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is commonly seen to require a balanced pursuit of three goods such as - ecological health, social equity, and economic welfare. It is grounded on the ethical commitment to enhance opportunities and well-being of not only the present generation but that of future generations (Emina, 2021). It also refers to the continued and sustained qualitative improvement in the general standard of living of a people in a nation and the structural transformation or changes in the productive and distributive input and output systems of the nation's economy (Ojobo in Gbadebo, Keshiro, Sule, Adeyemi & Yemi, 2018). The principle of sustainable development is that the pursuit of quality of life must be compatible with similar equality of life for all including future generations (Boonchai & Beeton, 20

Concept of Gender

Gender refers to the maleness and femaleness of the human capital of a nation such as Nigeria (Abolade, 2021). Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a society such as Nigeria at a given time considers appropriate for males and females. The beliefs and social constructs about womanhood and manhood create gender systems which determine females' and males' roles, responsibilities, activities, access to and control over resources, and decision-making opportunities (Hosein et al., 2020). These systems are socially created and can change over time. Yet, they establish resilient norms regarding what is expected, allowed and valued in females and males, shaping their socialization, institutions such as the family, media, law and education system, how race, class, age, religion, disability, and sexuality are lived, and how inequality is experienced. Gender does not refer to females, but to relations between and among females and males (Barriteau in Hosein et al., 2020).

Concept of Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming starts with the recognition that gender equality is a primary development goal and a crucial objective of development planning. It is therefore a strategy that ensures that both females and males have access to, and control over resources, decision-making, and benefits at all stages of the development process in ways that promote human rights, gender equality and social justice. Its goal is to complement and facilitate female's empowerment and autonomy. Strategically, it ensures that goals, such as poverty elimination or economic development, also advance gender equality (Hosein et al., 2020).

Gender mainstreaming is viewed as "taking account of gender concerns in all policy, programme, administrative and financial activities, and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation (United Nations Development Programme, 2015). Similarly, according to the Caribbean Community Secretariat, gender mainstreaming is a good governance issue which makes government more efficient and effective at producing policies and services that can strengthen the social and economic wealth of a nation. It is about females' and males' rights to equal opportunities, equal recognition and equal rewards within Nigeria (Hosein et al., 2020).

Gender mainstreaming is also referred to as bringing a feminist lens to policies and policymaking. This requires awareness that policies can reproduce asymmetrical gender power relations that mostly benefit males and disadvantage females (Hay, 2012). It also requires recognizing that some voices have been systematically silenced and that those with less power have been excluded from political decision-making (Schneider in Hosein et al.,

2020). It is concerned with who has been silenced, how and why this silence is maintained, and how it can be challenged (Hosein et al., 2020).

Barriteau in Hosein et al.(2020) described gender mainstreaming as a process that attempts to harness political will to remove, or at the least close the political gaps between females' de jure right to participate in the governing of their communities and their de facto experience of continuing albeit varying, levels of exclusion. Mukhopadhyay (2007) divides gender mainstreaming into two dimensions. The first is 'integrationist mainstreaming', which integrates gender equality into the analyses of issues across all sectors. Integration promotes the incorporation of gender concerns and issues and analysis into the existing development priorities of the government and its development partners, without changing the overall agenda. The second dimension is 'transformative' or 'agenda-setting mainstreaming', which seeks to understand why females are asymmetrically positioned in the first place and address the causes of those inequalities (Mukhopadhyay, 2016).

The aim of agenda-setting is to transform the existing development agenda and enable females and males to be active participants in decision-making processes that affect their daily lives and livelihoods, through the systematic application of a gender perspective. To illustrate, quotas can be considered an integrationist approach since they advance females' equality without necessarily altering existing patriarchal ideologies or structural reasons for exclusion (Bari in Hosein et al., 2020). For example, making sure agricultural extension services address both females and males and integrates gender into agriculture is an example of integrationist mainstreaming while advocating for females' land rights so that females gain economic autonomy and do not just participate as wives or dependents is agenda-setting mainstreaming (Hosein et al., 2020).

Gender Mainstreaming on Sustainable Development

Gender mainstreaming analytically connotes the use of two hands by persons when washing or clapping. Notably, a person cannot clap with one hand; neither can he or she effectively wash without rubbing both hands together. This simple analogy of the functionality of both hands found in the human body essentially illustrates the importance of gender mainstreaming in human society. In other words, making both males and females equally relevant in the scheme of affairs in every society is the right step in the right direction to sustainable development. Gender mainstreaming has to do with including females in all spheres of decision making and development programmes as a policy issue. In short, it is a strategy for bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society to ensure gender equality (Kanjere&Rachid, 2014).

The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is not achieving females' equality with males (which sets males as a standard), but transforming unjust structures of power in all its forms to promote females empowerment in relation to opportunities, rights, freedom, decision-making and social justice (Podems, 2010). Through gender mainstreaming, all plans, programmes and projects (even those that are not mainly concerned with gender equality) promote gender equality in addition to sector-specific development objectives (Hosein et al., 2020). Gender equality is human right and it is essential for the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals (Abolade, 2021). To have sustainable development, there must be equitable distribution of resources based on gender equity (Pathania, 2017).

World Bank (2019) reported that Nigeria's population is 200,962,417; out of which 50.69% are males and 49.31% are females. When a group (females) that makes up about half of a population is seen as not being equal with the other group (males) based on sex which the group did not determine, and which does not imply that the female group is not as intelligent as the male group, but that the female group is rather subjugated by social norms and values, then the development of the society is likely to be slow and stunted.

According to a report, Nigerian females have significantly worse life chances than males compared to other societies of the world. Regardless of their educational qualification, they still occupy fewer than 30 per cent of all positions in the public sector, only 15 per cent of Nigeria's 80.2 million females operate bank accounts and is 3 times less likely than a man to receive bank loan, 5 times less likely to own land than a man. This reveals the neglect of the Nigerian government in tackling the issues of gender inequality despite all attempts from various quarters to reduce its tenacity. The report also emphasized that females are Nigeria's hidden resource. Yet over 80 per cent of them are unable to read compared to 54 per cent of their male counterpart. In some Nigerian states especially in Northern Nigeria, majority of females are illiterate, and more than two-third of young girls are unable to read and write (Gender in Nigeria Report, 2012). Gender mainstreaming resulting in gender equality in every sphere of human endeavour may eventually put Nigeria on the map of developed nations of the world and enhance the development of the individuals and the nation economically and socially which would invariably lead to a quantum improvement on health as a healthy nation is a developed nation (Abolade, 2021).

There is growing evidence of the synergies between gender equality and economic sustainability. For instance, when females participate in public administration, public resources, are likely to be allocated more towards investment in human development such as child, and females' health, nutrition, employment (Buckingham-Hartsfield, 2013). It was

reported that females' access and control over agricultural assets and productive resources is important for achieving food security and sustainable livelihood. This means that females' knowledge and collective action are central to building more economically, socially and environmentally sustainable strategies to manage local landscape produce food and secure water (Food and Agriculture Organization 2017). Certain aspects of gender equality such as females' education, full participation in decision making and employment have positive impact on the economic growth of Nigeria considering females' roles in the family, community and the environment where they live (Archibong, 2018; Agarwal, 2010).

It is believed that for communities to be more peaceful which is sustainable development goal 16 (peace and justice), females should be given equal opportunity with males in the decision-making process (Kabeer & Natali, 2013). Accordingly, it was stated that females are intelligent, creative and innovative but they are sandwiched and buffeted between the patriarchal controls of the males in the community and some cultural demands that restricts them to the kitchen and bedroom. When these values and practices inherent in Nigerian society are allowed to continue, the females in the society would be unable to contribute meaningfully to development in all areas of human development endeavours. This could eventually hinder the achievement of sustainable development goals 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and 11 (sustainable cities and communities) (Abolade, 2014). Furthermore, females who engage in Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SME) and have the needed support from the society and family will contribute to the development of the community (Maziku, Majenga & Mashenene, 2014).

In Nigeria, females' participation in literacy programmes is poor because of cultural demands, poor socio-economic status of females and husband refusal to allow them to participate. Literacy, which is the foundation of education, is essential for development and females denied education might not be able to contribute to their quota as human resources to the sustainable development of the society. It was further stated that females are the building blocks of the nation which means that for any nation such as Nigeria to be strong, the building blocks must also be strong. Unfortunately, a major portion of females in a Nation such as Nigeria are poor, illiterate, ignorant, under-developed and unskilled which means that the nation will just be like its building blocks. No nation can rise above the collective ignorance and poverty of its mothers. The reason for this is that females in their national roles as mothers and on account of the very strong influence they have on the formative years of children are the first teachers of societal ethics. A society is as ethical or unethical as its motherhood (Abolade, 2013). Therefore, to attain sustainable development, the hitherto

feminization of poverty must be addressed by making sure that females are seen and treated as equal to males in society and allowed without prejudice to compete favourably with their male counterparts through effective gender mainstreaming (Abolade, 2021).

Klasenin Abolade (2021) posited that the absence of gender mainstreaming results to gender inequality in education and employment which negatively affects the economic growth of the country as the amount of human capital in that society will be reduced, which thus hampers the economic performance of the Nation. Education plays a major role in improving the life of the woman, her household and the community. The educated woman is an asset as her children are likely to be educated as well, which invariably sets the society on the path of continuous improvement and progress and also sets the tone for developing the nation. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the percentage of literate females as at 2016/2017 was 59.3% as against that of males, which was 70.9%. The illiteracy rate among females in Nigeria is rather high at 61.4% in 2015 and it moved to 62.02% in 2018 (World Bank, 2020). If this inequality continues without proper gender mainstreaming, sustainable development especially in the areas of literacy, well-being and economic growth may not be achieved.

Females perform most of the economic activities in Nigeria and other local African settings for the upkeep of the family; many are involved in petty trading and farming though not recognised or paid for. Though they work hard on the farms and in other economic activities, a large fraction of them are still poor economically because they have little to work with and the money is usually spent on family upkeep. Therefore, gender mainstreaming ensures better societal and family support and recognition of the females and their contributions which would invariably accentuate their economic challenges so that they can compete with their male counterparts on capital and property procession for their better economic performance and national development (Abolade, 2019).

In the political sector of Nigeria, females' representation in the House of Representatives is 5.5% and in the Senate, it is 5.8%. The differences in the number of females and males in the race point to the fact that females do not have the wherewithal in the political landscape of the country. Females make up only 23.7% of national parliaments globally (United Nations Women, 2020). Political scene in Nigeria is characterized by violence and ethical practices that seem alien to that world hence the inability of females to play on the same level with their male counterparts; they cringe away from vying for political posts though they have much to give to the society based on their feminine instincts and abilities (Abolade, 2021). However, gender mainstreaming ensures that females have equal opportunities to fully participate in economic, social, political activities in the nation and have equal access to

employment compared to their male counterparts. It is established that when females participate in politics and are involved in leadership, it is highly beneficial to society as the society becomes more egalitarian, democratic, inclusive and responsive which invariably results in the achievement of sustainable development goals such as reduced inequalities and better communities (Markham, 2013).

There are few females in paid employment in both public and private sector organisations in Nigeria (World Bank, 2019). According to United Nations Women (2019), the global employability rate of males is 94%, while that of females is 63%. These females have so much to contend with in the male-dominated world of work. Some workplaces are gendered where males are the ones in higher positions (Abolade, 2021). In Nigeria, 65.3% of senior positions are occupied by males, while only 34.7% are occupied by females (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2019), 26.6% of females within the labour force aged 16–64 years were unemployed. There is therefore a gap of 6.3% between the rate of unemployment between females and males. About 50.43% of Nigerian females were in paid employment as at 2017 as against 86.04% in Rwanda (World Bank, 2019). This gap in the labour force undoubtedly hinders the development of the nation and hinders the achievement of sustainable development goals such as decent workplaces and economic growth (Abolade, 2021).

Conclusion

Females have important roles just as their male counterparts play in the sustainable development of the nation. However, it seems that gender inequality seems to be a clog in the wheel of sustainable development. It can therefore be concluded that gender mainstreaming which ensures that both males and females have equal rights, opportunities, equal recognition and equal rewards within society's political, educational, economic and social aspects of the nation enables all to be positive contributors to the development of a better and sustainable society.

Suggestions

The following suggestions are made:

1. Proper orientations should be done across various communities in the country to address cultural norms that make females to be seen as unimportant and second class citizens;
2. Employers of labour which include the government should ensure that both males and females have equal opportunities for employment, promotion and recognition regardless of their gender differences;

3. The government should also ensure that proper training and orientations are conducted throughout the nation to train citizens on the need to support both gender equally in the enhancement of sustainable cities and communities; and
4. The nation as a whole should encourage females' participation in the political sphere of the nation and not see them as citizens who should be relegated to the background and not given equal chances in politics.

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