

GENDER EQUALITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA**Mgbonyebi Voke Charles (PhD)****Department of Public Administration, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.**voke.mgbonyebi@unidel.edu.ng.**ABSTRACT**

Politics of gender equality is a perennial problem dominating economic and political affairs especially in Nigeria. It is an objective achievable with the advent of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). It is also attainable through strategies aimed at bringing about education opportunities, women empowerment and vocational education, Women can at last attain authority, status and financial empowerment for rapid economic and political stability. The paper assesses the politics of issue of gender equality and women empowerment as a development oriented policy and proffers some strategies aimed at ensuring and providing vocational education. The paper gives means of eliminating the problems of politics of inequality and women empowerment in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Administration politics, Gender, Vocational Education, Inequality, Women Empowerment.*

INTRODUCTION

Politics of gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria have been strongly linked with extreme poverty, corruption, nepotism, instability and unemployment (Uchefuna, 2008; World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023). It is widely believed that inequality cannot be separated from the discourse on women empowerment, as both are structurally interconnected within socio-economic systems (Uchefuna, 2008; Aina et al., 2020). Women empowerment has been described as an effort towards nation-building and sustainable development (Uchefuna, 2008; Oxfam, 2021). It has also been argued in contemporary gender discourse that women possess comparable or even superior capacities in certain developmental roles traditionally dominated by men (UN Women, 2023).

The United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) declaration in September 2000 in New York with the aim of promoting global peace, democracy, and environmental sustainability by 2015 (United Nations, 2000; UNDP, 2022). The MDGs included the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment as a central development objective (United Nations, 2000; UN Women, 2023). However, despite numerous national and international interventions, the full realization of gender equality and women empowerment remains largely unattained in many developing countries, including Nigeria (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023). One major limitation is the difficulty in capturing all dimensions of development, particularly those affecting vulnerable populations such as slum dwellers (UN-Habitat, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Another constraint is the overemphasis on formal education, particularly at the secondary school level, without sufficient integration of practical empowerment strategies (UNESCO, 2021). It is therefore argued that a more pragmatic and holistic approach has not been adequately adopted in addressing gender inequality (Igbuzor, 2006; Oxfam, 2021). Against this background, this paper posits that the objectives of gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria can be effectively achieved through vocational education and skill acquisition programmes (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

Objectives of Study

The first objective of this study is to examine the issue of gender inequality and women empowerment in Nigeria within its socio-economic and political context (UN Women, 2023; Aina et al., 2020). The second objective is to identify opportunities that can reduce and eliminate barriers hindering the realization of gender equality and women empowerment in the country (Oxfam, 2021; World Bank, 2023). The third objective is to recommend sustainable strategies that will promote the

rightful inclusion of women in society, enhance empowerment, encourage peaceful coexistence, and support national development in Nigeria (UN Women, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

THE NATURE OF POLITICS OF GENDER INEQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

Gender refers to the state of being male or female, while gender inequality refers to unfair differences in the social, economic, and political treatment of individuals based on sex (Horsby, 2006; UN Women, 2023). Gender inequality exists when there are systemic differences in the roles, relationships, opportunities, and status assigned to males and females within a society (World Bank, 2023). This implies that men and women are often not regarded as having equal social value or access to opportunities, regardless of their shared human capacities (Oxfam, 2021; UN Women, 2023). This condition continues to define the persistent dilemma of women in Nigeria, where structural barriers limit full participation in political, economic, and developmental processes (Igbuzor, 2006; World Bank, 2023).

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment: This refers to the need to ascribe power or authority to women as their counterparts (Uchefuna, 2008; UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). The need for politics of gender equality and women empowerment arises because women are relegated to the background by their male counterparts, culturally, socially, politically, and economically in Nigeria (Aina et al., 2020; UN Women, 2023; Oxfam, 2021). The situation the man above the woman in almost every aspect of human existence (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Politics of gender inequality manifests in various forms (Aina et al., 2020; UN Women, 2023). It could be inequality in culture as commonly practiced in Nigeria (Oxfam, 2021; World Bank, 2023). The cultural phenomenon sees women of the same age and status vacate seat for their male counterparts during occasions in the same way, women do serve their younger male counterparts during ceremonies (UN Women, 2023; Aina et al., 2020). Socially, marriages are mainly blessed only when the husbands approve (Oxfam, 2021; UN Women, 2023). The head of communities are usually men no matter what a woman is (World Bank, 2023). Inheritances are controlled by the oldest son in the family no matter the number of senior women of the same parents (Aina et al., 2020; UN Women, 2023). Politically, no woman has been president of the country (UN Women, 2023). There are few instances of women being elected as chairperson in local government or members of various governments or members of houses of assemblies, deputy governors, speaker house of representatives, speaker of state house assembly etc. (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2022). The women economic aspect portrays women as people who spend their earnings to feed the family, while the men save for development purposes (Oxfam, 2021; World Bank, 2023). But at the end of the day, the men develop properties leaving women with nothing of theirs (UN Women, 2023). This condition keeps most women under perpetual poverty, and they become dependent on the men always (World Bank, 2023; Oxfam, 2021). The point here is why the case is not in the reverse (Aina et al., 2020). In these cases, the women are in the background (UN Women, 2023). Consequently, the men claim superiority while the women undoubtedly go home with feelings of inferiority and may resort to fate in all that had happened (Oxfam, 2021; UN Women, 2023).

Educational inequality among women has been a persistent phenomenon until the nineteenth century (UNESCO, 2021; UN Women, 2023). Female children were relegated to the background educationally (Aina et al., 2020). They were mainly nurtured for marriages (Abu, 2008; UNESCO, 2021). The reasons were obvious: Many Nigerians regard women as best for domestic chores; they were regarded as feeble minded people that could not function well in arduous industrial activities (Oxfam, 2021; World Bank, 2023). They were seen as not capable of attaining the level of education that can promote productivity (UNESCO, 2021). They could be manipulated easily to the disadvantages of any business (UN Women, 2023). Some culture forbid women from taking part in family or community decision processes because of the observed weaknesses in the event of any opposing threats (Aina et al., 2020; World Bank, 2023). Men are assumed to be stronger (UN

Women, 2023). In another vein, some religious sects do not expose their girls or wives to strangers (Oxfam, 2021). Therefore allowing them to attend schools would mean exposing them to dangers of fornication or adultery (UNESCO, 2021). Poverty has led some families to subject their young girls to child labour or are serving as house-helpers to earn income for survival (World Bank, 2023; UNICEF, 2023). The situation has deprived girls of school age from beginning or continuing their education (UNESCO, 2021). This situation reduces the number of girls enrolled in primary and post primary schools annually (UNICEF, 2023). These among other factors are responsible for the large gap between the boys and girls enrolment in schools and therein reduced the number of women holding political and government office positions (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023).

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NEEDS)

This programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria noted that access to education is inhibited by gender issues (NPC, 2004; World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023). It further stated that as a national target, at least 50 per cent of secondary school students should have access to good quality vocational education (NPC, 2004; UNESCO, 2021). It was for this purpose that the Universal Basic Education (UBE) of the Federal Government of Nigeria was being focused (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). Yet no meaningful achievement has been realized (World Bank, 2023). The schools and other infrastructures are not quantitatively and qualitatively expanded for the effective take off of the programme (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Neither are the manpower needed to man the schools sufficiently and qualitatively available to achieve goals (UNESCO, 2021). Stressing the purpose of education, Igwebuike (1993) quoted Fafunwa (1989) who sees education as an aggregate of all the processes by means of which an individual develops abilities, skills and other forms of positive behavior in the society in which he lives (Fafunwa, 1989; Igwebuike, 1993; UNESCO, 2021). Resting on this definition, it suffices to state that women should be empowered first of all by education (UN Women, 2023; UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND EDUCATION

Empowerment involves conferring power to or ascribing authority to someone (Njoku Aruleba, Victor, 2008; UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). It also means to give somebody more control (Hornby 2006; Oxfam, 2021). Therefore, women empowerment connotes investment or conferring authority and creation of enabling environment for women in order to contribute their own quota to the social, political, economic and cultural development of society (Uchefuna, 2008; UN Women, 2023; Aina et al., 2020). In Nigeria, all the values are placed on men (World Bank, 2023; Oxfam, 2021). Perhaps, this is why women serve men on most social occasions (UN Women, 2023). Men bless marriages except in few cases where women hold sway (Aina et al., 2020). The best part of the pudding is reserved for men (Oxfam, 2021). Most organizations in Nigeria are headed and controlled by men (World Bank, 2023). The same is true of political office holders (UNDP, 2022). The men own much of the wealth as well as properties in various places including women themselves (UN Women, 2023; Oxfam, 2021). Since women are owned by men, their properties and all they own reverts to the men (Aina et al., 2020). Wealth and properties are visual sources of power and authority (World Bank, 2023). It is obvious therefore, that women hold less power and authority compared to men (UN Women, 2023). Hence they are at the background to be trampled upon by men (Oxfam, 2021). Viewed from these perspectives, we can conclude that women have never been fully empowered in Nigeria before now (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023). These evidences show that women are not yet freed from the shackles of cultural bias, political marginalization, social discrimination and poverty (Aina et al., 2020; Oxfam, 2021). Many women are beaten up by men because they are suspected to be evil minded or witches (UN Women, 2023). It has been suggested that the noble course of women is good education (UNESCO, 2021). It is a major tool for empowering women (World Bank, 2023). It imposes the skills, knowledge and positive behavior to deal profitably and change environment for development and good of mankind

(UNESCO, 2021). It has been said that when a woman is educated, a whole nation is educated to take on the challenges of nation-building (UN Women, 2023). Men alone cannot take charge since the female folks constitute 50% of the population of Nigeria (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2023). The NEEDS of the Federal Government of Nigeria recognized the desirability to integrate women by enhancing their capacity to participate in economic, social, political and cultural life of the country (NPC, 2004; World Bank, 2023). The government intends to ensure equitable representation of women in all aspects of national life, and thus implement the provision of the UN convention on elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, to ensure good legislation, establish scholarship (NPC, 2004; UN Women, 2023). The need to integrate women into the scheme of things is further enhanced by the eligible performance of the women in Nigeria like Mrs. Margaret Ekpo, Queen Amino, of Zaria, Prof. Mrs. Dora Akunyili, Dr. Obi Ezekwezili, Prof. Grace Alele Williams speaker Hon. Eleh of House of Representative, Lagos state Deputy Governor under Governor Ambode and others (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). All these women were able to break out of the shackles of gender discrimination and disempowerment through quality education (UNESCO, 2021; UN Women, 2023). There is a prediction that if social is not gender-balanced and women are not empowered, a chaotic society becomes unavoidable (Oparah, 2000; UNDP, 2022). This perhaps calls for the promotion of gender equity (UN Women, 2023). NISER report of 2005 and amplified by Igbuzor (2006) attests to this (Igbuzor, 2006; NISER, 2005). This can better be appreciated through the study of the challenges posed by gender discrimination and women disempowerment in Nigeria (World Bank, 2023).

THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIA

Among the terrible issues facing women in Nigeria are: 1. How to close the disparity between males and females in the trado-cultural milieu 2. The political/economic marginalization of women in society 3. Social and religious differences between men and women in society 4. Health relations among others (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023; Oxfam, 2021). There have been lots of political relevance and the women are asking for the reduction of the number of male folk or equating with the number of men for reasons of democracy (UNDP, 2022). Different efforts by governments, private individuals, and non-government organizations directed at achieving gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria, have not attained the noble objectives constrained by traditional and socio-cultural institutions (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023).

TRADITIONAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Many Nigerian traditions do not give women opportunities to contribute to some decisions affecting the family or the community (Oxfam, 2021; Aina et al., 2020). For example, the final decisions on the man to marry a daughter are the husband' prerogative (UN Women, 2023). Neither are the women allowed to attend and contribute in community meetings except on special invitation to give evidence (World Bank, 2023). In some communities, the income of the women is expended on feeding while that of the husband is kept (Oxfam, 2021). Any future financial needs of the women are predicated on the husband' discretion (UN Women, 2023). This has broken many homes and discouraged hard work among women (World Bank, 2023). Thus making life difficult for such families (Aina et al., 2020). Some cultures exclude widows from public view (UN Women, 2023). All these tend to limit the progress of women in society (Oxfam, 2021). Nowadays, some families do not believe in the education of women (UNESCO, 2021). They believe that expenditure on women education is a waste because the woman's life ends in the kitchen (World Bank, 2023). The benefit accrues to a different family as soon as the woman is married (UN Women, 2023). This perhaps explains why there are more males than female enrolment in schools (UNDP, 2007; UNESCO, 2021).

POLITICAL SUBJUGATION

Women are naturally physically weaker, the men seize the opportunity to relegate them to the background in holding political position and authority (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). In doing so, men control the vast resources having gained power by political manipulations and thus leaving the women without roles in leadership and ownership of the resources of their own country (Oxfam, 2021). Therefore, the participation of women in government has been significantly low (Ogbeia & Okoro. 2007; UNDP, 2022). The situation has made women poorer and unable to boldly challenge the men in keen political contests to positions of authority in government (World Bank, 2023). This is succinctly presented in the Table 1 below.

Table 1

Period in years	Institutions/Contexts	No. of Men	No. of Women	Total
1979-1983	House of Senate	56	1	57
1979-1983	House of Representatives	442	3	445
1979-1983	House of Assembly	145	27	172
1992-1993	Governorship elections	300	–	300
1992-1993	Local government chairmanship Elections	765	9	774
1993-1993	House of Assembly elections	971	12	983

Source: Ogbeta & Okoro: Women in National Parliament However gradual improvement ha recently been noticed during the Olusegun Obasanjo administration 1999-2007.

Table 2: Percentage Gender Enrolment in Vocational Education Programme in Nigerian Schools

YEAR	PRIMARY SCHOOLS		REMARK
	BOYS	GIRLS	
1,990	100	82	Fewer girls enroll in primary school than boys
2001	100	79	primary school than boys
SECONDARY SCHOOLS			
1991	100	105.5	There is a drastic downturn of the percentage of girls enrolled in secondary schools
2004	100	79	Fewer women therefore applied for entry into tertiary institutions because there are fewer girls completing senior secondary schools

Source: UNDP report on gender equality and women empowerment.

SOCIAL SECLUSION

One most embarrassing effect of the men holding political power is the suppression of women in most activities of national life (NPC, 2004; UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). The work force in

Nigeria political system is predominantly 90 percent men (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2022). There is an unprecedented discrimination against women in many areas of appointment or employment (Oxfam, 2021; UN Women, 2023). Very few women have risen to management positions (World Bank, 2023). There are few women in the armed forces, the engineering as well as other disciplines and they are hardly made heads of bigger organizations and government institutions until recently (UNDP, 2022; UN Women, 2023). In the reports "the social charter, investing in the Nigeria people" NEEDS emphasized the griming apprehension about the social and income Inequality, particularly gender discrimination as the bane and causes of poverty in Nigeria (NPC,2004; World Bank, 2023; Oxfam, 2021).

THE COST AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND FAILURE TO COMPLETE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Another major challenge to women freedom from gender inequality and lack of empowerment is the high cost of quality education in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2021; World Bank, 2023). Many young girls because of high cost of tuition, PTA fees, teacher's fees, school construction etc. abandon school for marriages because the parents are unable to bear the cost and burden of education (UNICEF, 2023; UNESCO, 2021). This is obvious from the low per capita income of majority Nigerians (World Bank, 2023). Above all, the education received is often of poor quality and fails to equip people with the skills and knowledge they need to lift themselves and their society out of poverty (DFID, 2007; UNESCO, 2021). The state of affairs is worsened by lack of strong political will by governments to provide enough finance and other resources of equipment, educational infrastructures, transportations, parent-teacher association (PTA) fees for effective training of enough high level empowerment for women education (UNICEF, 2023; World Bank, 2023). Added to these are unstable government policies, though these challenges have been frustrating (UNESCO, 2021). DFID 2007 has worked in collaboration with UNICEF as a part of girl education Initiative to ensure stronger collaboration to help government to get more girls into schools (DFID, 2007; UNICEF, 2023). A sum of E26m has been released for the UBE programme and another E12m to ensure getting equal number of girls and boys into schools in Nigeria (NPC, 2004; UNESCO, 2021).

HIV/AIDS SCOURGE

The UNDP report (2007) showed that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among Nigerian young women of 15 to 24 years old declined from 5.9 percent in 2001 to 5.2 percent in 2003 (UNDP, 2007; UNAIDS, 2022). That is about 59.6 percent of females have no adequate knowledge of prevention in 2003 (UNAIDS, 2022; WHO, 2021). Consequently HIV/AIDS orphans are estimated at 1.8 million in 2004 (UNICEF, 2023; UNAIDS, 2022). The implications are that deaths and inconveniences which result from the diseases are enormous in addition to the fact that girls dropped out of school to look after the affected parents who were groaning in pains (UNICEF, 2023). It has further reduced the chances of women completing schooling and thus checking the chances of girls to achieving gender equality and empowerment with their male counterparts (UN Women, 2023; UNESCO, 2021).

FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIRLS THAN BOYS

The political and cultural influences have created a boom of opportunities for men than women in most areas of human endeavor (UN Women, 2023; World Bank, 2023). This is because men are naturally stronger physically and are preferred in some occupations and employments (Oxfam, 2021). Certain cultures also forbid women from appearing in public places to avoid seduction (Aina et al., 2020; UN Women, 2023). Parents believed that educated girls benefit their husbands to the detriment of their parents or family (UNESCO, 2021). Thus many girls are abandoned and drop from school and go for early marriage (UNICEF, 2023). These cultural stratifications have aggravated gender inequality and women empowerment with the male counterparts (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023).

REGIONAL AFFILIATION / BIGOTRY

The multiplicity of religious sects has aggravated the scenario in favor of men (UN Women, 2023; Oxfam, 2021). Many orthodox churches forbid women from holding religious positions (World Bank, 2023). For example, women do not hold the position of priest or pope in the Anglican and Catholic denominations (Aina et al., 2020). In like manner, Muslims hardly permit their wives to interact with strangers or visitors in their homes (UN Women, 2023). The African traditional religions (in early days) forbid a woman under menstruation from sleeping in the house (Oxfam, 2021). Such women can only sleep outside and may not participate in the eating of the fowl cooked as sacrifice to the gods (World Bank, 2023). However, the Pentecostal organizations have broken the rules and released women from this bondage and women are actively involved in all forms of services in their churches (UN Women, 2023). They want relief from traditional institutions that have secluded and ostracized them from being relevant in the scheme of things (Aina et al., 2020). They want to gain control over their destiny and that of their children (UN Women, 2023). They want freedom from marginalization, domination poor education, infestation by HIV/AIDS and other diseases (UNAIDS, 2022; WHO, 2021). They demand equal opportunities for the girl-child in employment and other public engagements; neither are they happy with religious bigotry, impoverishment by attitude of men (DFID, 2007; Oxfam, 2021). Other issues linked to instability in Nigeria include false accusations against widows at the death of their husbands (Etsenamhe, 2008; UN Women, 2023). The women are now saying that their maltreatment is enough (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2023).

THE ROLE OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN

In the earlier discourse, the role of education as a vehicle for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and creativity was emphasized. The obvious question is "What type of education to move nations out of the quagmire of underdevelopment to greatness? Since the solution to this problem remains, a new dimension is on the offering. Vocational education has been tipped as the most viable option to drastically reducing gender discrimination and empowers women. (NFC, 2001). Education has been aptly defined by Finale (2006) to consist of the total activity that is planned, organized and developed in favor of the preparation of the youths for responsible economic participation in the community. Adagha (2005) Mebaane and Duru (2006) together showcase the nature and roles of vocational education as education that has broken away from the traditional method of training and apprenticeship to a modern one. It involves teaching by instructions, working of problems, analysis of cases, playing of business games, sitting for qualifying examinations before going to practice skills learnt. The advocated vocational business education curriculum have provided opportunities for employment in the public and private organizations and so encouraged the establishment of individually- owned businesses. The vocational courses are in agriculture home economics, line arts and culture and business and technical education. Common subjects are computer appreciation, information technology, economics, clothing, nutrition, electronics, accounting mathematics, entrepreneurship, auditing, shorthand/book-keeping, office practice etc. Ndinechi (2000) referred to the competences of vocational business education mathematical chart and categorized them as professional education, teaching, business core graduates in and general education thus:

15% - Professional Education

15% - Teaching area

20% - Business Core Area

50% - General Education

He concluded that the function of business education includes developing occupational skills recording, coordinating merchandising and managing the flows of goods and services. Vocational business education also produces professional, higher level manpower and tertiary consumers including teachers, researchers and adult groups who appraise and update business knowledge. Igwebuike (2007) further classified some vocational fields and their occupational clusters as in Table III below:

1. Creation of entrepreneurial class

FIELD	OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES
Distributive education	Distribution and marketing (textile, general merchandise foods)
Health economics education	Practical nursing, nursing aids, medical office assistance, dental assistant, medical record technicians
Home economics education	Child care, institutional services, clothing services, nutrition, home management
Office occupations education	Business data processing, office machines, stenography, secretarial services book keeping
Trade and Industrial education,	Construction, manufacturing, machine trades (maintenance and repairs)
Agricultural Education	Production on agriculture, agro-business, agricultural mechanizations, food processing, ornamental horticulture
Pre-technical and technical education	Electronic, computer programming, machine tool design

He charged that vocational technical education can create wealth and help to alleviate poverty by engaging in the various activities and believing that it has what it takes to achieve many of the MDG's. It is the same areas of human endeavor identified such as agriculture, commerce, health, home economics office management, industrial and technical education that have galvanized the developed countries to achieve their social and economic potentials. Ikehukwu (2001). Abdullahi (2002), Adeyemi (2003), Folahan and Omoniyi, Mebanne, Abdul Rachael (2006) was confident to group and summarize the roles of business education in national development as follows:

1. Creation of entrepreneurial class
2. Exploration of new business opportunities
3. Proper coordination and communication of various factors of production
4. Sourcing of business funds.
5. Risk bearing
6. Innovation
7. Transformation of traditional industry through modernization
8. Making people to be self-reliant
9. Stimulation of indigenous technology and
10. Wealth re-distribution for the low income groups in rural areas

Oborah, Folahan and Omoniyi (2006) noted the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities generated by the study of business education to include:

- (1) Recruitment/placement services
 - (2) office location/layout
 - (3) Desktop publishing/book binding
 - (4) Business centers/photocopying services
 - (5) employment agency/training and consultancy services
 - (6) Business development/ contracting/rental and leasing services.
- According to the World Bank report (2001), attacking poverty by physical capital was not enough but also b) addressing assets in inequalities across gender, ethnic. Rural and social sciences divide which are as important as health and education (Igbuzor, 2006).

The analysis above therefore suggests that hardly can any nation survive without developing her citizens within the relevant educational programmes. Perhaps this is why business education has been established in Nigeria by the government. It is therefore the kingpin towards which every nation must gravitate in order to achieve human capital development. It is the way to the source of attaining sound knowledge, intellectual and professional competences. In the same vein every nation must turn to vocational business education to effectively play entrepreneurial role, create employment and explore new business opportunities, ensure effective fund sourcing, innovativeness, ensure proper wealth distribution and make people to be self-reliant.

BENEFITS OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Integration of women can be made possible if occupations in vocational education can easily be combined with domestic works as mothers and housewives. In this way, women can be fully integrated and empowered. They will be equitably represented to eliminate all forms of discrimination, promote access to micro-finance, save for the family needs and other poverty alleviation strategies. It can reduce women vulnerability and provide social security (NPC 2004). It will enable women to actively participate in the world of work and play various roles in nation-building.

The Role of Women in Nation-Building

Oparah (2008) identified several roles of women, particularly those who acquired vocational education will effectively play the following roles in any nation namely:

Custodian of socio-cultural and national values, procreation, first teacher to a child, home makers and trainers. These are natural gifts of women.

Agents of conflict resolution, peace and symbol of justice. Since there are more men who appear to be corrupt than women, these role Could be effectively played by women.

Agent of economic development: Women work as farmers, traders, producers of food and other economic goods. They facilitate wealth creation and poverty reduction, generate income for the family as an employee of an organization or when self-employed in any of the vocational occupation in textile, distribution, business centre management as mentioned earlier in this research.

Commercial leaders

Women have stronger bargaining power and are able to sustain commerce.

Political managers: Some Nigerian women exercise a lot of positive influences on society as leaders e.g. Prof. Dora Akunyili. Their ability to weep sentiments can win socio-political relevance. They can manage a nation if given the opportunity to do so. Educated women are known to have very strong positive influences on their spouses holding political and executive offices. Rumor had it General Abdulsalami Abubakar who was the Military Head of State 1998 to 1999 handed over power within one year due to the pressure from the wife. The wife being a Judge of the Federal High Court, a lawyer by profession and being aware of the consequences of remaining in power too long, chose the right path for the husband, Such women of substance are agents of peace and political stability.

Child Development/Trainers

An educated woman can become an asset to a child through proper guidance and training at home. The uneducated woman easily spoils a child. A bad mother harbours and encourages the son who is a truant despite the father's efforts to resist the bad behavior. The Illiterate mother protects the son from the father's query. The child could not complete secondary school education and remained a destitute in the society Educated women can easily organize home lessons to coach their children and save family resources 1 other purposes unlike the uneducated person.

Moral developers Women of intellect have the capacity to inculcate the right attitude and values in their children thereby reducing chances of vagabonds, prostitutes and fraudulent gangsters with evil consequences. Thus educated women to serve as agents of morality.

Providers of economic goods and services

Educated women particularly those with biases in vocational education often easily find employment in many of the occupations as teachers, hotel managers, traders, desktop publishers, agriculture making, catering services, business centers, secretaries etc. Apart from adding to the family in help to reduce the burden of unemployment and render vital services to their country.

Freedom Fighters

Educated women can always defend themselves against state and private oppressive laws by the desire gain cheap political popularity and religious fallacy. Some women stood their ground against the obnoxious laws of sharia that were introduced in Northern part of Nigeria at the early stage of Olusegun Obasanjo Administration in 1999. The women who knew their rights and rose against the laws would not accept to be coaxed by their male counterparts in government; and religious oppressors were opposed as well or else female adulterer would have been stoned to death leaving the male counterpart free from the same offence. Currently there is serious movement by educated women against those religions forbidding housewives from appearing in public.

Panacea for Women Liberation in Nigeria

The quantum of challenges facing women in Nigeria is great and may threaten the developmental strides to a standstill unless some drastic measures are adopted and implemented as follows:

PROMOTION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICIES FOR WOMEN

A fundamental strategy for women liberation requires direct and unequivocal policies by government in the regions proclaiming women equality to men and granting them entitlement to all forms of education across the vocational disciplines shall help to douse the existing tension. The policies should emphasize special and qualitative vocational education for girls at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The ratio of girls enrolment to boys should be doubled for now. Post graduate studies opportunities for vocational educational teachers should be expanded to accommodate more candidates. Government should adequately fund and extend free training programmes for all serving teachers and improve their conditions of service to motivate them. The minimum age for marriageable girls should be prescribed. Special advertorial campaign on the need to educate women should be mounted to explain the benefit to all nooks and crannies of the country. The envisaged policies should provide sanctions against spouses, parents, religious bodies, traditional institutions, or organizations that may attempt to restrain opportunities for women education. Laws should also be enacted to protect the policies. Parents who are unable to send their children should be assisted by government through financial aids such as loans or scholarships. This will lessen the burden of paying school fees and other demands associated with women education. In this regard, most girls can afford the cost of education and complete their studies to help salvage the riations. Since education creates awareness and improve human intellect, women who are exposed to it will the challenges posed by their male counterparts with equal vigour and success. The success will metamorphose to gaining more employment and thus remove the political and other forms of socio-cultural seclusion being experienced by women over the years. This time around, women shall be able to acquire greater financial capacity and authority to counter and compete favourably against their male counterparts. Education will enable women to know their rights and hence they cannot be easily cheated socially, culturally, or politically.

In Like manner, the incidence of infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS can be brought to the lowest ebb or completely eradicated because educated women have been tutored on how best to protect themselves against deadly diseases. Moreover, women educated in the vocations have many opportunities to excel because they have acquired skills and experiences in various disciplines in engineering, economics, business development among others. Such women can be self-employed to earn reasonable income which has been the main drive to prostitution and other crimes in societies. A woman who is financially comfortable can take many challenges in the family.

PROVISION OF ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

One major constraint to development in the country is the dearth of economic infrastructure. The educational institutions and economic sectors are notorious for the delayed state of the infrastructure. The classrooms, the equipments (furniture, school desks) machines, audio-visual

aids, computers, telecommunication' curriculum materials and gadgets, including education media resources are either rotten, inadequate or archaic. These items are needed for effective and efficient teaching and learning. Almost all educational institutions particularly those operated by governments can hardly cope with the pressure of demand for classrooms, teaching equipments and others. The facilities available are over stressed, hence they cannot accommodate the learning population of students in the institutions. To worsen matters, qualified teachers are rare commodity; a situation where the minimum ratio of teachers to a student is 1:00. The situation has been compounded by the lack of economic infrastructure of regular electricity, purified water, good motorable roads, limited lines of railways and waterways pirated by sea lords and armed robbers. These infrastructures, apart from helping to develop other sectors are inadequate and sometimes are completely lacking to serve the education and economic sectors. The commonest victims are the women who hardly can undertake self-employment in their vocations for lack of these basic necessities. The expansion of classrooms, supply of more equipment, teachers and other resources will make for more enrolment of more women in schools. This will also facilitate teaching and learning and reduce the gap in opportunities for boys and girls. Teachers should be highly motivated by improving their conditions of service to enable them oiler their best in their profession. Armed with rich knowledge and qualification, women can become heads of government, political and private sector organizations. They can reasonably engage in entrepreneurial business such establishing industries and providing essential services. They can now manage different organizations without difficulties like their male partners in trades or commerce.

FUNDING WOMEN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The government in Nigeria should as a matter of urgency establish financial houses, such as banks, that will provide the funds needed for the take off of the businesses undertaken by the Nigerian women. The funds should offer revolving loan on very low interest. In this way, Nigerian women entrepreneurs can face the challenges posed by men over the years.

MOBILIZATION AGAINST POLICIES OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND WOMEN DISEMPOWERMENT

The pursuit of government policies and implementation of the laws, if well handled, usually have tremendous influence on people's behavior. It also brings international support by other nations on topical issues are highly respected by the comity of nations. The combine efforts of the government, international agencies and the stakeholders are hereby recommended to the policies that can liberate women from gender discrimination and disempowerment. The United Nations and her organs such as UNESCO, ILO, DFID, UNDP, among others should be united to put the good fight that will liberate the female folk from the iron fist of greedy men.

CONCLUSION

The issues of gender inequality and women empowerment have taken tortuous course in Nigeria despite machinery set up to redeem the situation by stakeholders. National governments, non-governmental organization (NGO) and the international community's need to redress the issues of traditional and socio-economic institutions, the high cost and low equality of education, political and religious marginalization as well as other factors militating against strategies put in place to achieve positive objectives. Stakeholders are to encourage the promotion of pragmatic policies and resource commitment needed to drastically reduce gender discrimination and empower women for rapid national development in Nigeria.

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