

GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP IN NIGERIA

OVENAONE JENNIFER UNIGA

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution

Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

Email: unigajenni@gmail.com

TAKUBU DANLADI FWA

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution

Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

Email: yakubudanladifwa@gmail.com

TABKI, IRISIM EMMANUEL

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution

Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

Email: nobleirisim@gmail.com

&

ALIYU SAIDU GARBA

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution

Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

Email: aliyugarbakwaja@gmail.com

Abstract

The world over, gender issues get skewed to the advantage of some groups of persons, while others suffer disadvantages. In certain societies, there are existing male privileges, especially, in so called patriarchal societies, while women do not have such privileges. That citizenship does not mainstream gender in society, puts human rights in jeopardy leading to derogation of those rights. Where human rights of a group lack promotion, protection and preservation, peace and progress is derailed. It is in a bid for peace building, that the United Nations, African Union, ECOWAS and other world bodies have come up with Resolutions, Protocols, Conventions and other human rights and peace instruments for the well-being of disadvantaged and underprivileged groups in the world. It is at this instance that this paper attempts to focus on world situation generally, and Nigeria in particular. The paper relies on secondary documents and other official records, Axel Honneth theory of recognition and the functionalist approach to give credence to the work.

Keywords: Gender, Gender roles, Gender inequality, Citizenship, Development, Sustainable development, Peace building.

INTRODUCTION

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) provides that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity”, The Nigerian Constitution (1999) affirms to this. Gender perception poses a major challenge for women all over the world. While the forgoing cannot be debated, there exist differences in the level of discrimination faced by women as these vary from one country to another. In Nigeria, women have suffered immense discrimination, rejection as

well as deprivation due to gender bias. This discrimination, over many years, has been a setback to women and affected their peace and dignity as well as their rights as human beings (Olanrewaju, 2018). Gender issue has gained much significance in recent years because of the realization that, when and if almost half of the nation's population 49.47% (Trading Economics, 2021) made of women is not factored into policies in a social democratic citizenship, then, underdevelopment will be entrenched in the body polity of that society. This is the picture of Nigeria.

In discussing gender issues and development within the African context, cultural differences in gender roles will emphasize how gender norms are socially constructed (Ojalammi, 2011 cited in Olonade, Busari, Idowu, Imhonopi, George and Adetunde 2021). Gender norms as opined by (Akanle, 2011), assign specific roles, responsibilities, tasks, and privileges to both the female and male. He further stated that this turns out to be a problem if such primitive allocations of role and dichotomized distribution favors the individual(s) involved. The dominant trend has over the years assumed male superiority while women are seen as weak, subordinate and inferior, and this has led to the emergence of specific initiatives such as the creation of the Family Support program, the Family Economic Advancement Program, the Better Life for Rural Women Program and the formation of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in 1995. All these initiatives were targeted at intensifying the role of women in fostering societal developmental aims. Regrettably, this form of women's developmental program has been criticized for its failure to address and realize the real needs of women and their wellbeing. Rather than attaining gender balance, using this approach has added to the problems and even increased women's marginalization (Abdullahi, Adekeye, and Shehu, 2011).

According to (Nwajiuba, 2011), gender role differences worldwide seem to be a natural phenomenon which has brought about gaps in enjoying specific opportunities by men and women. Pointing out that this development has recently become worrisome leading to some clamouring that the female folk be given unhindered access to contribute to the development and be involved in policy – making. As a result, international programs and conferences now focus on women with the intention to incorporate women into the development agenda based on equality with their male counterparts (Aina, 2012). The Report by Mckinsey suggest a growth by 23% or \$220 billion by 2025 if women participated in the economy to the same extent as men. Nigeria will need to address these numbers to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality for all by 2030.

Women make up 35 percent of the unemployed population of Nigeria, (National Bureau of Statistics), and account for more than 70% of Nigeria's poor population even though they make up less than 50% of the population according to the (World Poverty check). In the last four decades, International Conferences on Women were organized by the United Nations: Mexico in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, and China, Beijing in 1991. In Nigeria, these forums' agendas comprise achieving gender equity in national development, among several issues. Several facts reveal that hostile gender relations such as unequal access to power and resources, gender-based division of labour, gender biases in rights and privileges, remain on the increase (National Gender Policy, 2007). Policies on gender like the 'affirmative action' in Nigeria structured in most cases with the idea of 'gender equity' and 'women empowerment,' and to also lend voices to women's support and increased opportunities have remained ideas

on paper. So too the issues of women's health, education, employment, and to improved access to socio-economic activities and conditions (Azu, 2014). As was earlier noted, many of such programs have failed to be implemented and have deepened the crises at other times.

For (Afinsi, 2010), even though the patriarchy system in many African societies is highly pronounced, African women display enormous power that binds the community. However, in the opinion of (Oyekanmi, 2005), inequality exist in one form or the other. In almost all human society, men and women do not have the same status, including the United States of America that is more favourable to women's rights. This is as a result of the fact that although there are specific roles that can be performed by every gender, there are differences in the ways by which these roles are rewarded. Therefore due to this in equality human society is incomplete minus the female gender (Akanle, 2011; Adebisi, Oyafunke and Adewusi, 2017).

Failure to acknowledge women's roles will make human society's developmental efforts practically impossible due to the unique functions embedded in each gender. Therefore, an essential tool for society's development lies in understanding gender roles from the traditional perspective. This is imperative for Africa's sustainable development. Some scholars like (Olufemi, 1993), have noted that according equal worth and significance to gender roles as performed by men and women, will restore the stability and unity that were in existence in the African traditional societies.

Conceptual Clarification

Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. (Gender – WHO).

The definition by Jhpiego () holds; gender refers to the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being women and men (Jhpiego.org).

Citizenship

A citizen is a participatory member of a political community. Citizenship is gained by meeting the legal requirements of a national, state, or local government. A nation grants certain rights and privileges to its citizens. In return, citizens are expected to obey their country's laws and defend it against its enemies (csc.wayne.edu).

The Centre for the study of Citizenship uses the Merriam- Webster dictionary definition of citizenship as: "membership in a community." This definition allows us to define our reach broadly, focus upon social inclusion as well as exclusion, yet, still fit the realm of citizenship. A legal status and relationship between an individual and a state that entails specific legal rights and duties.

Citizenship is generally used as a synonym for nationality. Where citizenship is used in a meaning that is different from nationality it refers to the legal rights and duties of individuals attached to nationality under domestic law.

Development

Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. The purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. Development is visible and useful, not necessarily immediately, and includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.

The international agenda began to focus on development beginning in the second half of the twentieth century. An understanding developed that economic growth did not necessarily lead to a rise in the level and quality of life for populations all over the world; there was a need to place emphasis on specific policies that would channel resources and enable social and economic mobility for various layers of the population.

Among the definitions and emphasis for the term “development” is that of Amartya Sen’s “capability approach,” which defined development as a tool enabling people to reach the highest level of their ability, through granting freedom of action, i.e., freedom of economic, social and family actions, etc. Here lies the HDI (Human Development Index on which development is measured). The UN Development Program (UNDP) initiated the development of the HDI. Martha Nussbaum developed the capabilities approach in the field of gender and emphasized the empowerment of women as a development tool.

Peace building

Peace building is the development of constructive personal, group, and political relationships across ethnic, religious, class, national, and racial boundaries. It aims to resolve injustice in nonviolent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict.

Peace building becomes strategic when it works over the long run and at all levels of society to establish and sustain relationships among people locally and globally. Strategic peace building connects people and groups “on the ground” (community and religious groups, grassroots organizations, etc.) with policymakers and powerbrokers (governments, the United Nations, corporations, banks, etc.) It aims not only to resolve, but to build societies, institutions, policies, and relations that are better able to sustain peace and justice.

Strategic peace builders address issues of human rights, economic prosperity, and environmental sustainability as well as violence. (University of Notre Dame).

Theoretical framework

The rise of feminism is an expression of the female folk’s hidden desire to be honoured and “accepted” for what and who they are. On this Axel Honneth a German philosopher and sociologist born in 1949, articulated a theory of recognition in 1996 which states that social justice can be achieved through the relationships we have with each other, subject to subject. He argues that our unique human interdependence as inter-subjective recognition, has been institutionalized in society, in the sphere of family, civil society and our ability to function freely (Taylor, 1994 cited in O’Brien, 2011). Recognition theorists argue that empowerment and social change is best achieved inter-subjectively, by being recognized by others (Murphy and Brown, 2012 cited in O’Brien, 2011).

The philosophy of recognition is resonating with a wider audience interested in social change. This shift is taking place in the context whereby more people are becoming dissatisfied with theories of redistribution that have shifted the scales of justice or brought about a more equitable society as speculated. For example, 'from the rich to the poor, and from owners to the workers, women's programmes – better life for rural women in Nigeria' (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Recognition enable us examine justice claims for struggles over religion, nationality and gender.

Honneth (1996) describes struggles for recognition as social processes in which certain groups resist forms of unequal treatment, and demeaning labels ascribed to them by dominant and powerful elite groups. Disrespect can occur when recognition is denied at either stage of personal or social development within family/friends, civil society or by the state.

Functionalist Theory

Some of the theorists include Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim, and Talcott Parsons (Haralambos and Holborn, 2014). The functionalist perspective typifies human society as a biological organism with various parts that harmoniously work for its smooth functioning. Likewise, society is multifaceted structure with different elements that must work in harmony to ensure the entire system's stability and survival. This means that asides from the fact that gender roles need to be recognized, society's division of roles is intended to function for the complex whole.

Gender and Citizenship Rights in Nigeria

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as amended is the basic law of the land, and it incorporates every aspect of the body polity of the society. In its third chapter, the Constitution provides for Citizenship expressing the rights and privileges assigned to citizens of the State. However, a critical assessment of the Constitution reveal a lopsided and skewed document relished with advantages in rights and privileges for men; whilst, women face a whole lot of disadvantages and discriminations with less rights and privileges.

As every other law emanates from the framework of the Constitution, issues of citizenship, politics, culture, health, economy, education, land ownership, legal decisions, gender etc. also provide little or no privileges for women; hence, the struggle for women always to achieve recognition and relevance.

Language of the Constitution – The language of the constitution is not gender neutral. Perhaps this is so since it was written by men. For example, the pronoun "He" appears in the 1999 Constitution about 235 times according to (Gamawa, 2013). Some advocates have recommended for replacing "he" with "a person" or "He and she."

Rights and Privileges of Citizenship – Section 26(2) (a) of the 1999 Constitution confers the right of citizenship to any woman who is married to a Nigerian citizen but denies such right to a foreign man married to a Nigerian woman. Nwaogu (2022) noted that Rauf Aregbesola Minister of Interior conceded so much in his speech at the launch of the committee on National Action Plan to eradicate statelessness in Nigeria. Though he alluded to our patricidal custom, but he concluded that it is just an oversight.

Religious rights – Section 38(1) of the 1999 constitution provides for freedom of thought, conscience and religion... either alone or in community with others... However, there have been incidences of discriminations against female citizens on the basis of their faith, a case in point is that of Abdulsalam Firdaos Amosa who was denied Call to Bar in 2017 because she wore her hijab under her wig (Oladeinde, 2017). The same fate go for Christian faithful, especially of the Deeper Life Bible Church who will not wear the mandatory trousers at National Youth Service year but will rather wish to convert them to skirts against the rules of the organization.

Law and Legal Rights – Legal rights in Nigeria's criminal law have a number of provisions relating to sexual and domestic offences that are especially relevant to women's rights. However different laws, for instance on rape, apply to different parts of the country.

Rape is defined in a gender specific manner, as "carnal knowledge "or sexual intercourse with a woman or girl without her consent or understanding. Besides the restrictive nature of the definition, which does not extend to the rape of males, it must be pointed out that in practice most rape victims are unable to benefit these provisions. The way in which a rape trial is conducted and the nature of the evidence required expose women to indignity, making it a man's trial but a woman's tribulation. In case of traditional laws the wife herself is often regarded as property and she is generally not expected to entertain any expectation.

In fact, under some traditional customary law systems, especially in the South east Nigeria, she is one of the chattels to be "inherited" after the death of her husband

Criminal and Penal Code Law - The criminal code discriminates against women on the issue of punishment against personal assaults. Assault on a man is a felony (serious offence) as provided for in section 353 criminal code with 3 years imprisonment. Assault to a woman or girl is a misdemeanor (less serious offence) section 360 and attract imprisonment of 2 years.

Spousal abuse/wife beating is accepted for the purpose of a husband correcting his wife- section 55(1) penal code law.

Onerous burden of proof in sexual offences – section 221 criminal code deals with defilement of girls less than 16 years, and states that a girl of or above 13 years but under 16 years of age; or a woman who is an idiot or imbecile will require her testimony to be corroborated for a conviction to be held.

Right to privacy and domestic violence – Section 37 of the 1999 constitution provides for "the privacy of citizens, their homes ..." Some activists have expressed fear that that this section is too broad and can serve as a cover for those who engage in Child marriage and domestic violence. It means you are not allowed to intrude into a person's private matters, without exception.

Women prohibited from night work – Section 55 of the Labour Act prohibits women from working in the night. The section provides that "no woman shall be employed on night work in a public or private industrial undertaking or in any branch thereof, or any agricultural undertaking or any branch thereof." The only exception is for nurses.

Discrimination against female police officers – The Nigeria Police Force is the worst culprit as an agency in the discrimination against women.

- Police women on duty are prohibited from putting on jewelry except wedding or engagement rings and /or wristwatches; applying face powder, lipstick or coloured nail varnish
- Police Women are required to place the alphabet “W” before their rank.
- Compensation, Gratuity and disability Pensions: provision was made for payment only to “wife” or “widow”, No reference to spouses (husbands).
- Police women married to civilian husbands are disallowed from living in police barracks.
- Travel allowance made only for accompanying ‘wife and children, No husbands.
- According to section 121 of the Police Regulations, women police officers shall as a general rule be employed on duties which are concerned with women and children.
- According to rule 122, married women are disqualified from enlisting in the Police: a Police Woman who is single at the time of her enlistment must spend two (2) years in service before applying for permission to marry giving particulars of fiancé who must be investigated and cleared before permission for marriage is granted.
- Section 125 of the police regulations states that “A married woman police officer shall not be granted any special privileges by reason of the fact that she is married and shall be subjected to posting and transfer as if she were unmarried.”
- Section 126 of the police regulations provides that “A married woman police officer who is pregnant may be granted maternity leave in accordance with the provisions of general order (a federal government instruction that regulated the condition of public officials). However, an unmarried woman police who is pregnant shall be discharged from the force.

Legal Decisions - Both at the superior and inferior courts, legal decisions are discriminatory to women and girls. The High Courts in a case of dissolution of marriage, will normally rule on title to property and not on matrimonial property, meaning that, the man who has the (document) in his name, gets every property acquired during the pendency of the marriage leaving the woman with nothing, except where she was judicious enough to get properties in her name. The customary courts at the grass roots, also make very unfavourable decisions to women and girls, being that in most cases, men are the ones presiding and will show solidarity with their fellow men. In a research conducted by Legal Consultants Uniga and Ibora (2008) for Concern Universal, now United Purpose, an International Organization, in six local government areas of Cross River State, it was found that Customary Courts decisions on rights of women and girls to access to farm lands were not favourable.

Government appointments and composition of agencies – Section 14(3) of the 1999 constitution did not include gender consideration in the composition of the government and of its agencies. Many have argued that this provision may hinder affirmative action in favour of women by not giving it constitutional recognition. It may also give room for marginalization of women in government appointment. The section provides that “The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria..., thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States..., or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.”

Human Rights – Cases of human rights violations of women abound in Nigeria as acid baths, murder of women, rapes, widow abuses, and physical assaults. Unfortunately it is only extreme cases of women's rights violation which results in death or permanent disability that earn the media attention and the Police interests. Critical cases like female circumcision or genital mutilation, wife battery, marital rape, sexual harassment, verbal and emotional abuse, incest, termination of employment as a result pregnancy, etc. are not considered problematic enough to be highlighted in the media as well to be taken seriously by the Police (Salaam, 2003). More so the victims of violence especially domestic violence and rape, hardly report to the appropriate authorities. Such instance is considered a private affair of the husband and wife. Moreover, the tradition or culture and religious beliefs in Nigeria as a typical patriarchal society see the wife as a property of her husband, who has moral right to beat her as a penalty for insubordination and or perceived wrong doing. In the case of rape, women consider it a social stigma if their ordeal becomes a public knowledge.

In the same vein, the human right to dignity of human person is crucial to women and young girls. Women ought not to be treated by being identified as a group, but identified based on specific needs. Where the female gender cannot provide all their basic need of sanitary towels, hygienic toilets, water and toiletries as programmed by their physiological make up, but resort to using rags, this is the height of indignity. In Nigeria, the least Government can do is remove taxes on sanitary materials or (rebate), because this biological function occur 5-7 days a month, for 12 months until menopause. Without over burdening the issue, some of these women and young girls contract infections from the unhygienic materials they use, and this in some cases leads to infertility and barrenness for life. This is aside the monthly menstrual pains (dysmenorrhea) some of these women and young girls experience. The question begging for answers are: why not menstrual clinics, why not free sanitary towels like there are free condom, why not open discourses on menstrual hygiene as family planning, why is it treated as a taboo?

Education Rights – Education is said to be the vehicle that break the shackles of poverty thereby leading to transformation, development and progress (Ikoni, 2009 cited in Makama 2013). With the 2005 MDGs' first deadline for attaining gender parity in primary and secondary schools enrolment already missed, the ability for women and girls to empower themselves economically and socially by going to school, or by engaging in productive and civic activities is still being constrained by their responsibility for everyday tasks in the household division of labour.

Lack of education has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the formal sector. The social pressures on females such as early marriage, and other extraneous factors as well as considerations of female education as secondary to that of boys and certain inhibitive religious practices in some parts of Nigeria are the major causes of the high illiteracy rate amongst women. Generally, the girl child educational opportunities tend to be circumscribed to patriarchal attitudes about gender roles, which result in some parents attaching greater importance to the education of boys than girls.

Political Rights and Power – The various Nigerian constitutions guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active politics. Women's aspiration to participate in governance is premised on the following ground: women in Nigeria represent half of the population and

hence should be allowed a fair share in decision making and the governance of the country. The right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law – 1999 constitution sections 40 provides for right of assembly and to belong to any political party; section 42(1) provides against discrimination on any basis, and section 77 (1) (2) make provision for women to vie for seats in the National Assembly. The National Gender Policy commits to ensuring Affirmative Action for women, however, women's representation remains below the 35% target. Women participation in Nigerian politics is an issue of great importance, because women have been put at the background politically for years due to a not- too-friendly political terrain for women which is structured both culturally and secularly. Thus women find it difficult to ascend to positions of leadership and power.

The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria has remained 6.7% in elective and appointive offices. This obviously is below the global average of 22.5%, the African regional figure of 23.4%, and the West African sub regional figure of 15% (Idike, Okeke, Okorie, Ogba, &Ugodulunwa (2020) in Oloyede, 2016). The more women demand political inclusion in the Nigerian nation, the less democratic the spaces for inclusion open to women seem to become (Quadri, 2015). Nigeria as a nation is therefore still performing below generic expectation concerning gender equality; but this may be because the women have not recognized that embedded in the gender issues are large degrees of power equations. This necessary power positioning necessitates mainstream policies of self-extension on the part of the women. Political representation portrays political power (Ferrant, 2011). Gender activists in the Nigerian state and elsewhere are essentially engaged in contestations for power; yet, the voice of women has not been heard in resounding trajectories on very many issues which have arisen since the restoration of democracy in Nigeria. The data presented in the table below tells the whole story.

Table 1. Female Members of Nigeria's National Assembly (1999–2015).

Year	Senate	House of Representatives
1999	3 (2.8%)	12 (3.3%)
2003	4 (3.7%)	21 (5.8%)
2007	9 (8.3%)	26 (7.2%)
2011	7(6.4%)	25 (6.9%)
2015	7 (6.4%)	19 (5.2%)

Source. Adapted from Idike, et al (2020) in Quadri (2015)

Economic Rights – By virtue of the population of Nigeria, the potential female labour force is 50% but the actual value is 31%. The proportion of women in the formal sector is very minimal. This is noticeable in the industries and the civil services. Statistics indicate that in the Federal Civil Service, which is the highest employer in the country is, women are mostly found in the junior categories (Ajir, 2002 cited in Makama, 2013).

Women are mainly involved in petty trading, selling wares in the market and street hawking in urban areas. According to statistics 78% of women are mostly engaged in the informal sector, which are farming and petty trading. Despite this, their contribution is not commensurate monetarily. The women's unpaid labour is twice that of men, and its economic value is estimated to be up to 30% of the nation's Gross National Product.

Women are mostly involved in farming and food processing. They do not have access to land but can only use the land at the benevolence of their husbands and brothers. Women also have limited access to agricultural inputs, and when compared with men, they do not have access to obtaining credit facilities, and so they are not engaged in large scale agriculture. The legal protection granted by the constitution and the Labour Act has little or no effect in the informal sector where the vast majority of women are employed.

Reproductive Health Rights – Reproductive health implies that people should have the ability to reproduce, that women can go through pregnancy and child birth safely and that reproduction is carried to a successful outcome. It further implies that people should be able to regulate their fertility without risk to their health and that they are safe in having sex. In essence it includes fertility regulation and STD prevention as well as child survival and safe motherhood. But these rights are mere dream in Nigeria due to abandonment by the Government in line with the dictate of International Monetary Fund/world Bank. The essential and basic responsibility of providing free and functional healthcare to the people as a social service among other factors (WHO, 2002) has been jettisoned.

Studies have also shown that the sexual practices of male partners are likely to be the primary source of risk to women of infection with HIV or other STDs. Women (including wives) are not often in the position to negotiate sex and many have not yet imbibed the condom culture, as a means of protection against AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Reproductive health counselling for women and adolescent girls is crucial to overcome this problem. In recent years, illegal abortion has been recognized as a major cause of high mortality rate in young women. These deaths could be avoided if women had easy access to family planning services and people have to make a choice as regards pregnancy.

Religious and Cultural Rights – Generally religion is used as an instrument in the defense of a class society and paternity. It discriminates against women. As a result of the theocratic character of the government of the northern part of Nigeria before the advent of the British colonialism, Islam has been instituted as a culture – the way of life of the majority of the people of the region.

Knowing well the emotional attachment of the northern Nigeria Muslims, to religion and the psychological equanimity they derive from it, politicians ruling the northern Nigeria States introduced Sharia in order to enhance their political prospects and divert attention away from their own looting and failure to improve living standards. Sharia law conflicts with national secular principles, especially in relation to women's rights, on which Nigeria is formally based. It places a lot of restrictions on the rights of women. The major victims of this political sharia are women.

Women and Liberty Rights (Trafficking) – Over time, hundreds of thousands of women have been sold into slavery, as wives or prostitutes, after being kidnapped or tricked into going with traffickers. Although in international law, trafficking has long been recognized as a form of human rights abuse, only recently has it been recognized by the International community as a violation of women's rights.

The Nigerian government has repeatedly committed itself to eliminating the trafficking of women, yet it continues to restrict information about this crime, thus failing to mobilize society to combat it. The persistence of trafficking is officially attributed to feudal thinking and thus contemporary factors; legal, political, social and economic, which have contributed to the resurgence of this practice are overlooked.

The trafficking of women is not a purely local phenomenon within Nigeria's borders. It has a significant regional and international dimension too. Criminal rings are involved in the smuggling of women across international frontiers, mainly for menial work in the heavily immigration dependent economy of Gabon, plantation work in Cameroon and commercial sex in Europe (GAATW, 2007).

Socio-cultural Rights – Gender has been considered a subsidiary issue in Nigerian society. The traditional social structures have been offering limited incentives for amending the existing distribution of power between men and women. As observed by Nmadu (2000), the Nigerian society (pre-modern and contemporary) has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potentially inimical to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife inheritance and widow practices. Moreover, to (Bhavani et al cited in Maka (2003), such unequal social and gender relations need to be transformed in order to take women out of want and poverty.

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women ((CEDAW),1979) acknowledged that whatever socio-cultural norms that deny women equal rights with men will also render women more vulnerable to physical, sexual, and mental abuse. The subordinate status of women vis- a-vis men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across countries. Gender role ideology does not only create duality of femininity and masculinity, it also places them in hierarchal fashion in which female sex is generally valued less than male sex because of their roles in reproductive sphere. The gender status quo is maintained through low resource allocation to women's human development by the state, society and the family. This is reflected in the social indicators which show varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in all countries.

Addressing Gender Inequality

Women Empowerment Programmes – Sand Brook and Halfari defined women empowerment as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economic, political, social, psychological and legal circumstances of the powerless with its aim of dismantling the cultural, traditional and social norms, which devalue, disempower and disposes women of its central objectives tied to the needs of women to opportunities, facilities, skills acquisitions and position of authority, especially within the political sphere. This recent development accords women the opportunity to develop their individual talent and contribute more meaningfully to societal development, helping subvert cultural as well as the societal norms which have been of disadvantage to them.

Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics (FONWIP) is an example, whose central objective is to promote women empowerment and eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination

against women. It supports women in decision making in both public and private sector. The group organizes seminars on empowerment and inequality among other things.

Activities of United Nations and other International Organizations

The principles, policies and actions towards ending gender inequality in Nigerian politics have been advanced and undertaken with the influence of international organizations by both government and NGOs. On its part, the United Nations (UN) has fostered several declarations and conventions aimed at ending all forms of political discrimination among women. Among such documents that prohibit women discrimination local and international are:

- * The Universal Declaration of Human Rightsⁱ
- * The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- * The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- * Nigeria's Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act

Quotas and proportional representation

These are generally seen as a positive action of laws allocating quotas for women to assist in the promotion for gender balance in public life. Quotas are considered as a legitimate means of securing this end. In many countries the exclusion of women in politics is as a result of many reasons- financial, cultural, traditional and political. Asserting this fact and the reasons that have made it so implies that quotas should not be seen as discrimination towards men and cannot be branded as unconstitutional as most quotas are formulated under neutral basis.

The Affirmative Action

It is interesting to note that the principle and practice of the Affirmative Action is a universal phenomenon. Several countries of the world have history, one way or the other, showing that the rights of women and vulnerable are to be respected and sustained. It is therefore of crucial importance for Nigeria to take a cue from best international practices in order to allow a pride of place for women. This will enhance democracy and democratic survival in Nigeria in the current dispensation and beyond.

These other factors are noteworthy to increase women's empowerment:

1. Support network and prospective role models can (groom aspiring female politicians).
2. Building a Coalition of NGOs and Grassroots women associations
3. Creating awareness of women's political and legal rights

Conclusion

In pre-colonial African societies, gender relationships were cordial with very particular, specific assigned roles that were recognized and respected. Colonization in Africa however, disrupted this balance, introducing inequalities in all strata of the society. Thus, the struggle of women for recognition and respect in society, and participation in leadership the world over, with resultant UN Resolutions on Conventions, Protocols and other legal instruments to address concerns and needs of women. At the national level, the international instruments are domesticated and adopted to function at states and grass roots levels through programmes and policies bringing about rise in women political organizations, women groups at the grass root levels to champion the cause of women.

Thus, a gendered citizenship requires the recognition and respect for the concerns and needs of groups in society. For example, Nigerian men now enjoy paternity leave as approved by circular (HCSF/SPSO/ODD/NCE/RR/650309/3) of 25 November, 2022, Sahara Reporters). Also, the rights of widows, people with disabilities, minority groups are continually being promoted to make rights more gender specific. Good examples in the world space are Spain's menstrual leave Law (ri.fr/en/international news), and Scotland's free period products policy (nytimes.com/2022/08/15/world/euro). It is only a gendered citizenship that can bring about human centered development.

Recommendations

In the pursuance of nation building and development, women should be accorded a much better role than they are allowed to play at the moment. More women should be engaged into the politics and public offices. In order to realize this, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Policies that will ensure equal gender representation should be formulated, adopted and enforced by government.
- Parents should de-emphasize gender socialization that prevents female from acquiring scientific and technological skills.
- Gender discriminations based on employers' perception of appropriate work roles for the sexes should be addressed by government.
- The pressure of marriage that prevents females from going for further studies to qualify for academics should be addressed and discouraged by parents.
- Parents should be encouraged to give equal opportunities to their children in educational pursuit irrespective of gender, because education serves as the bedrock for attainment of purpose.
- Socio-cultural stereotype that views women as 'properties' of the men should be jettisoned and a level playing field should be allowed for all irrespective of the gender.

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