

#### 4. Effective Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: A Gender Inclusion Perspective

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##### Abstract

*Throughout the history of human civilization, women have faced discrimination, which has reduced them to occupying lesser positions and participating in limited roles, as compared to men. Thus, women have played nonexistent or at best minimal roles in developmental efforts in a largely patriarchal world. Over the years, proponents and advocates in development have proposed the inclusion of gender relations as it concerns the experiences and contributions of men and women. This is based on the resolve that gender inclusion was necessary for the attainment of sustainable development. The objective of the study is to examine Nigeria's chances of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), within the purview of gender inclusiveness. It explores the level of inclusion of women concerning Nigeria's journey towards the attainment of sustainable development. The study is expository in nature as it analyzes the secondary data obtained from the SDG5 – Gender Equality Performance Indicator from 2018 to 2022, for Nigeria. The results showed a steady decline in gender parameters such as women's participation in parliament, employment and education. Therefore, the study suggested ways of improving gender inclusion practices through mental restructuring, gender policy articulation and execution, recognition of women's productivity, enforcing women's rights of enjoyment and so on.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Gender inclusion, Gender equality, Development, Sustainable Development.

##### Introduction

The year 1911 marshalled an epoch-making event for gender inclusion with the establishment of International Women's Day (Blessing and Fred, 2022). This ushered in the consciousness of the nations in recognizing the role of gender in development. The global movement in ensuring and enacting country-by-country gender policies that promote equality, and equity was mainstreamed as an important aspect in the advancement of civilization (Archibong, Bassey and Nwagbara, 2018).

111 years later giant strides and advances have been made in the global promotion of gender equality. These advances are reflected in greater access to education for the girl child, a higher percentage of women in senior leadership positions, and more equality in civil and political rights for the female gender (Ejumudo, 2013). While the gains of gender equality are high for most developed countries (MDCs), they are low in less developed countries (LDCs).

Nigeria, being, a strongly patriarchal society, has seen the gender gap continually widen. Discrimination, exclusion and inequality are continually meted out to the female gender in education, employment, corporate and political positions. Nigerian women occupy a paltry 6.7 per cent of political positions as against the global

average of 22.5 per cent (Ugwuanyi and Formella, 2022). This is despite the global drive towards promoting gender equality and inclusiveness. This creates a situation whereby the less patriarchal societies are synonymous with development while the highly patriarchal ones are synonymous with underdevelopment (Fallon, and Viterna. 2015, Mikkola and Miles, 2007).

Eight years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria has continued to score below average on SDGs ranking generally and SDG 5 particularly, which is Gender Equality. With seven years to go before the deadline for the attainment of the SDGs, Nigeria faces the unfortunate eventuality of failing to meet the global goals of sustainable development, especially as the tasks remain enormous and insurmountable. This portends an unfavourable forecast of Nigeria's likelihood of ever attaining sustainable development. In this regard, the objective of the study is to examine Nigeria's chances of attaining the target for Agenda 2030, within the prism and purview of gender inclusiveness.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Gender

Gender refers to the “roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for different groups of people (men and women)” (ILO, 2019). In this study, gender refers to the behaviour, roles and actions expected of a person by society because of being male or female. Thus, gender is a sociocultural construct which is determined by society based on the sex or biological makeup of an individual.

Traditional gender roles are often ascribed to men and women in specific spheres, with men expected to be providers and women expected to be homemakers. However, these roles are changing, and many individuals are challenging and redefining traditional gender norms. Understanding gender as a social construct is crucial for promoting equality and addressing gender-based discrimination.

### Gender equality

This refers to “Equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys in realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development” (UNICEF, 2017). Gender equality involves equal access to opportunities, resources, and services for all individuals, regardless of their gender. It is considered a fundamental human right and is deemed necessary for the creation of a fair and egalitarian society.

The clamour for gender equality arose from the fact that women and girls have continued to face discrimination, violence, and marginalization in many areas of life. This creates a situation of gender inequality whereby an individual is unfairly discriminated against and met with unfair practices due to their gender. Eradicating gender inequality requires actively challenging and changing harmful gender yardsticks, promoting inclusiveness, and supporting policies and practices that empower women and girls.

### Gender inclusion

This refers to the “initiatives, activities or programmes that are open to both men and women but are designed to overcome any barriers to the full participation that one of the two sexes may experience” (International Finance Corporation, 2020). This study recognizes gender inclusion as involving the creation of spaces where individuals

of all genders feel valued, respected, and supported. Gender-inclusive spaces sue for tolerance, empathy and a sense of belonging, and address the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals who fall into various gender types.

### **Development**

This is a “multi-dimensional investment in human capital, physical infrastructure, institutions, and environment” (Eneji *et al.*, 2016). This study conceives of development as the process of growth, progress, and advancement in various aspects of life, including economic, sociopolitical, cultural, technological and environmental areas. Development is a multifaceted and dynamic process that enables a person, community, and society to improve their current state. This usually comes through the acquisition of new skills, knowledge, and technologies that result in increased productivity, innovation, and competitiveness.

### **Sustainable Development**

Brundtland in 1987 defined sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Bellu, 2011). Sustainable development is a holistic approach that balances economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection to ensure a thriving planet for future generations. It recognizes the interconnectedness of human well-being, economic prosperity, and environmental health, and seeks to reconcile the needs of the present with the needs of the future. Sustainable development requires a fundamental shift in how we think and act. It demands that we move beyond short-term thinking and prioritize long-term benefits, adopt circular economic practices, and embrace renewable energy sources. It also requires that we recognize the intrinsic value of nature and the rights of future generations to inherit a healthy planet.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

This was a global call to action for people, planet and prosperity, aiming to enhance economic, social and environmental dimensions of social development through the implementation of 17 sustainable goals (Ogisi and Begho, 2021). SDGs will be explained further in subsequent subheadings.

## **GENDER ISSUES IN DEVELOPMENT**

Throughout history and human civilization, women have faced discrimination, which has reduced them to occupying lesser positions and participating in limited roles, as compared to men. This is because the primordial societies were male-dominant, which prohibited or limited women from being involved in activities that were exclusive to men. As a result, men were involved in outer social and economic activities while women were confined to domestic and household affairs, (Perigo and Mangila, 2020).

Thus, the observable gender biases which existed on the global front saw the lives of women and girls fixated at the family level (Mikkola and Miles, 2007). The norms and rules which were established and dictated by society at large stereotyped women as incapable of women of holding certain jobs or leadership roles as those demanded traits which were assertive and tough. Rather, women were deemed as possessing those nurturing and homemaking characteristics that confined them within the customary territory of childcare and home

management. Essentially, women were confined within the household space, while men were handed eminent roles and participation fields that saw them making impacts in governance, politics, public affairs, the economy and the overall development of society (Perigo and Mangila, 2020).

Women have played non-existent or at best minimal roles in developmental efforts in patriarchal settings. Flood, (2004) noted that women's development sectors are often weak, marginalized, underfunded, and have little impact on mainstream developmental policies, programs and processes. It was not until years after the Second World War that the relevance of gender in development was not recognized. More specifically, the period of 1975 to 1995 saw radical changes in development as an exercise that involved equity in gender involvement (Pati, 2022).

Perigo and Mangila, (2020) observed that an American sociologist named Lester Ward was instrumental in challenging the way knowledge, customs, practices and perceptions that people had about gender. Aside from establishing a new model for assessing gender relations, he partook in women's liberating activities that enhanced the political and social standing of women in the United States. Thus, organizations, both local and international, were urged and demanded to work in communities and address development and empowerment without taking into cognizance the issue of gender. Over the years, proponents and advocates in development have proposed the inclusion of gender relations as it concerns the experiences of men and women. The importance of gender relations in development, as espoused by Abebe (2015), was necessary for the following reasons.

1. It recognizes, diagnoses, and remedies gender-based discrimination which leads to development programs that are inclusive.
2. It facilitates development that has positive, far-reaching socio-economic and cultural impact through active participation of women and men in information aggregation and analysis based on gender.
3. It enhances the opportunities for successful implementation of development planning and interventions by considering division of labour and access to, control of resources on a gender viewpoint as it involves and affects men and women.
4. It allows for a more efficient use of resources in development by considering social, technical and economic considerations that involve gender groups and individuals.
5. It pushes the drive for global gender parity to become a central feature in the development process which could result in alleviating world poverty, removing particularly gender inequalities will give the world a better opportunity to attain sustainable development.
6. It enables activists, practitioners and policymakers in development to understand gender relations and how they are shaped by power dynamics to determine the behavior and actions of men and women in development interventions.
7. It proffers understanding to the social construct of gender which defines the interactions that occur between men and women in development in terms of power relations, decision-making, control of resources and income in households.
8. It allows for the ranking of development initiatives based on the considered needs of men and women, as well as other socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups so that they could be targeted for development opportunities.

9. It facilitates social and institutional change which could result in sustainable development with justice and progress.
10. It leads to policy linkages which address, integrate and prioritize balanced gender inclusion into policy formulation of development initiatives and interventions.

With the recognition of the imperatives of gender consideration in development, global gender movements were initiated to improve gender relations on a global scale. By the 1970s, some key concepts emerged in pursuing the issue of gender inclusion in development namely: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Gender in Development (GID) and more recently, Gender and Development (GAD) (Pati, 2022). The movements of WID and WAD gained global acceptance as a means of enhancing gender involvement in development. These concepts in gender development focused on women as the missing link in the quagmire that human development had found itself in recent centuries (Aguinaga, Lang, Mokrani, and Santillana, 2013).

Consequently, the main strategy in addressing the exclusion of women from the development process was to focus on women empowerment programmes and projects. The GID and GAD frameworks focus on the relations between women and men and present the unequal relations of power that prevent equitable development, and women's full participation as the problem (Aguinaga, Lang, Mokrani, and Santillana, 2013). The goal of the GID/GAD framework is equitable and sustainable development, with women and men playing active roles as decision-makers (Pati, 2022).

There were initiatives which were proposed and adopted as global policies for addressing gender issues in development. One of which was quotas and proportional representation. These are generally seen as laws that allocate quotas to women in a view to ensuring the promotion of gender balance in society. Quotas are considered as a legitimate means of securing this end (Leach, Mehta and Prabhakaran, 2016).

In many countries, the societal exclusion of women in various strategic strata of life has alluded to a myriad of reasons ranging from financial, cultural, and traditional to political (Pati, 2022). Owing to this fact and the reasons that have made it so implies that quotas should not be seen as discrimination towards men. Instead, it is perceived as a positive form of discrimination which has become adopted into the laws and constitution of the land for most countries of the world.

## **GENDER ISSUES AND PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA**

In patriarchal societies like Nigeria, it is a known fact that the female gender has always been exposed to variable forms of discrimination that they are females. This is because, aside from not having in place specific laws or policies to promote gender inclusion, the Nigerian climate is not gender friendly. This is due to a myriad of determinants which as explained below (Makama, 2013).

1. **Ideological Factor:** Ideologically, the Nigerian society is patriarchal. As a patriarchal system of male domination, Nigeria shapes women's relationships in all spheres. It transforms males and females into men and women and constructs the hierarchy of gender relations, giving rise to male privileges, where men have more access to societal resources and positions than women (Makama (2013). The gender role ideology is used as an ideological tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of the home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere.
2. **Political Factors:** The nature of politics is an important factor in the inclusion or exclusion of women in

politics (Ugwuanyi and Formella, 2022). Male domination of politics, political parties and the culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Often male-dominated political parties have a male perspective on issues of national importance that disillusions women as their perspective is often ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties (Ugwuanyi and Formella, 2022). Also, women are usually not elected to the position of power within party structures because of gender biases of male leadership.

3. **Socio-Cultural Factors:** The Nigerian traditional social structures have been significantly characterized by peculiar cultural practices that are potently disadvantageous to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices (Akanle, 2011). The gender status quo is maintained through low resource allocation to women's human development by the state, society and the family (Ejumudo, 2013). This is reflected in the social indicators which reflect varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in all countries (Ejumudo, 2013).
4. **Economic Factors:** The economic sector of Nigerian society is one area where discrimination against women has been richly pronounced (Ejumudo, 2013). The role of women in employment and economic activities is often underestimated because most women work in the informal sectors, usually with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection (Kemi and Jenyo, 2016). The denial of women's inheritance and land rights has made their economic participation considerably constrained and by implication, their educational aspirations (Makam, 2013).
5. **Bio-socio Factors:** The socialization process of the girl child in Nigeria, as observed by (Kangiwa, 2015), places much emphasis on the biological makeup of the female gender. And this has been evoked as a factor hindering women's empowerment and political participation. Their roles as mothers and wives have also been culturally influenced and predetermined just because they are females. The expectation thus is for them to be gentle, provide care for their husbands and children (Kangiwa, 2015).

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN NIGERIA: THE NATIONAL GENDER POLICY

The Gender-Responsive Policymaking Handbook (2020) defines gender policy or gender-responsive policy as an inclusive policy that considers the needs and interests of both women and men as well as the specific needs of subcategories within the main framework of gender.

Kura and Yero, (2013) argued that the existence of a National Gender Policy was a necessity “due to the permissive nature of gender discrimination worldwide”. Thus, a policy of such nature was crucial to promote gender equality, especially as closing the gender gap was a causative factor to ensuring development.

To road to the establishment of a national gender policy in Nigeria dates to the pre-independence era of the country's history. Shortly after the Second World War, the UN, in 1948, drafted a declaration of a charter on human rights which contained the phrase, “All human beings are equal” as it pledged equal opportunity for men and women (Leach, Mehta and Prabhakaran, 2016). Decades after, the 1995 Beijing declaration demanded 30 per cent of women's representation in government (Abolade, 2021). Prompted by these epoch-making events, the Federal Republic of Nigeria ensured that the constitution enshrines the concept of equality of rights of citizens of

the country. Hence, it was enshrined in the law of the land that women were required to possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life (Raheem and Garba, 2017).

However, in practice, this is not the case, as Nigeria, being a male-dominated society tends to relegate the female gender to the background. Statutory laws in Nigeria do not give recognition to women as equal to men. Be that as it may, there have been policies put forward by successive governments to enhance gender inclusiveness in Nigeria such as:

- Better life for rural women (1987)
- Family Support Programme (1994)
- Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (1996) (Ejumudo, 2013)

At the return to democracy, Nigeria established the Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation in 1999 followed by the passage of the law on National Policy on Women in the following year of 2000 (Akanle, 2011). The need for the policy was “to fulfil the yearnings as well as (promote) the efforts of federal, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations, international development partners, the private sector, concerned corporate bodies and individuals to integrate women fully into national development, to remove those gender inequalities that have evolved through structures and processes created by patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism” (Akanle, 2011).

Moreover, (Akanle, 2011) noted that the inadequacy of the National Policy on Women to address the gender gap issue in Nigeria led to the proposition and adoption of a national gender policy in 2006. The National Gender Policy principally focuses on the following basic principles which aim at promoting gender equity in Nigeria. It includes:

- Identification of gender mainstreaming as a development approach and tool for achieving social transformation, agenda for economic reform, value reorientation and evidence-based planning,
- A realization that results and efficient focused policy implementation required from all stakeholders, a cooperative and comprehensive interaction,
- Recognition of gender issues is central to and critical to the achievement of National Development Goals and objectives and a requirement for all policies to be reviewed to reflect gender implications and strategies as contained in the gender policy and implementation modalities specified in the National Gender Strategic Framework and,
- Promotion and protection of human rights, social justice and equity (National Gender Policy, 2006).

To achieve the objectives of the National Gender Policy, the following strategies were employed by the government:

- Partnership, policy and programme reforms through mainstreaming of gender concerns at all levels.
- Agenda of economic restructuring reforms for enhanced productivity and sustainable development, which addresses the needs of women children, and other vulnerable groups.
- To enhance required technical expertise and positive gender culture, the policy advocated for the provision of capacity building and gender education and,
- Legislative reform to guarantee gender justice and respect for human rights (National Gender Policy, 2006)

The main goal of this National Gender Policy was therefore to establish a clear vision and framework to guide the

process of developing laws, policies, procedures and practices that will ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres and structures of government as well as in the workplace, the community and family. Given the mandate given, the specific objectives of the National Gender Policy are to:

- Create an enabling policy environment for translating government commitment to gender equality into reality.
- Establish policies, programmes structures and mechanisms to empower women and to transform gender relations in all aspects of work at all levels of government as well as within the broader society.
- Ensure that gender considerations are effectively integrated into all aspects of government policies, activities and programmes
- Establish an institutional framework for the advancement of the status of women as well as the achievement of gender equality.
- Advocate for the promotion of new attitudes, values and behaviour, and a culture of respect for all human beings in line with the new policy.
- Strengthening the voice of women in civil society, in parliament and in other legislatures who have already made a visible impact by challenging gender-blind laws and policies.
- Enhancing the work that is already being undertaken by the Ministries of Women Affairs and the National Centre for Women Development at the national, state and local government levels and those of other development agencies committed to issues of women empowerment, gender equality and equity for all.
- Guide the development of the National Gender Action Plan (NGAP) (National Gender Policy, 2006).

Notwithstanding the existence of the 2006 National Gender Policy and its elaborateness in identifying and suggesting ways of addressing gender parity in Nigeria, discrimination against women and girls both in the public and private spheres continues unabated. The female gender continues to be underrepresented despite the stipulations of the law which provides for a maximum of 60% and a minimum of 30% representation for either sex (Kemi and Jenyo, 2016). This provision became imperative because of the Beijing Conference which stipulated that 30% of public seats and positions should be reserved for women (Leach, Mehta and Prabhakaran, 2016). Nigeria records an increase of 78% progress in women's election into public offices spanning from 1999 - 2007 (Iwuchukwu, 2013).

Thus, the Nigerian government in 2021 resolved to revisit and review the 2006 National Gender Policy with the aim of redressing the nation's challenges as it concerns addressing gender imbalances in public and private life. This was coming twenty-six years after the resolutions of the Beijing Plan of Action where the Nigeria government had pledged along with other member-nations of the UN to stand up for women. As a result, the government adopted the revised National Gender Policy (2021 - 2026) as a framework for improving gender relations so as to achieve national growth and socio-economic development in both private and public sectors (National Gender Policy, 2021).

Consequently, the revised policy is founded on the following prominent tenets:

1. That the promotion and protection of women's rights as human rights, provision of social buffers and safety nets, social justice, and equity are critical to national cohesion, growth, and stability.
2. That the peculiarity of the needs of women and girls, as distinct from men and boys, are demonstrably not homogeneous, originate from varying circumstances and therefore demand distinct policy responses at

sector and sub-sector levels.

3. Gender policy is central to the achievement of overall national development goals, objectives, and targets on many fronts and from both the macro to the microeconomic levels as gender equality is a driver of growth and good governance.
4. The cooperative interaction of all stakeholders including government, private sector, civil society organizations, traditional and religious leaders, community-based organizations and development partners at all levels is required to drive effective implementation of the policy.
5. That implementation shall build existing structures and draw on international policy frameworks, protocols, experiences and practices including affirmative action (National Gender Policy, 2021).

The Gender Policy upholds the importance of gender equality and inclusion, not only as a basic human right but also as a strategic approach to alleviate poverty and improve the standard of living, implement sustainable development, and promote good governance and public accountability. As stated in the National Gender Policy, (2021), “gender equality is crucial for socio-economic development as well as the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, including the principle of 'leave no one behind', and the African Agenda 2030, 'the Africa we want', with a central point of view on gender equality, and empowerment of the African woman in the new economic age”. Thus, having a National Gender Policy reviewed periodically to address the growing demands of gender relations and inclusions in the necessity of successful implementation of sustainable development (Kura and Yero, 2013).

### **Sustainable Development Goals Implementation In Nigeria From A Gender Perspective**

The concept of sustainable development has been an issue of scholarly discourse for decades and did not become a global initiative until the Brundtland conference in the 1980s (Loewe and Rippin, 2015). The ensuing four decades saw the concept of sustainable development progress into an urgent and obligatory measure that needed a global action plan and policy direction for its implementation. The sustainable development movement recognized the importance of gender in actualizing its agenda for a safe and secured world for the present and future generations. Thus, in 2012, gender equality was adopted in the document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development titled: “The Future We Want”. Abolade (2021) observed that, amongst other things, the document recognized the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment across the pillars of sustainable development namely, social, economic and environmental.

In September 2015, the nations of the world met under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN) in New York and adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which became the successor framework to the defunct Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Ighobor, 2015).

Unlike the MDGs, which concentrated largely on social outcomes while key development priorities were absent, the SDGs adopted an all-inclusive approach. It focused on the challenges faced by all nations and promoted cooperation between the private and public sectors in the execution of the goals. The SDGs were made up of 17 goals and 169 targets. However, gender was given its pride of place in the SDGs as a key goal in the actualization of sustainable development. It represented SDG 5 which was stated as to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Loewe and Rippin, 2015).

Nigeria joined the rest of the world in implementing the SDGs on the kickoff date of January 1st, 2016. Below is a

table showing the performance indicators as it relates to SDG 5:

**Table 1: SDG5 – Gender Equality Performance Indicator from 2018 to 2022**

SDG5 – Gender Equality Performance Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Proportion of women in national parliaments	5.6	5.6	3.6	3.6	7.2
Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods (% of females aged 15 to 49)	52.3	26.3	42.8	35.6	35.6
The ratio of female -to-male mean years of education received (%)	69.0	68.5	69.7	74.0	74.0
The ratio of female -to-male labour force participation rate (%)	84.3	84.7	84.8	76.9	80.4

**(Sources: Sachs et al., 2018; Sachs et al., 2019; Sachs et al., 2020; Sachs et al., 2021; and Sachs et al., 2022)**

In Table 1, it was shown that there was a decline in the proportion of women in Nigeria who were elected to the legislative arm of government between 2020 and 2021. However, women's representation rose in 2022, signifying an increase in women's involvement as legislators in the country. This can be alluded to the point raised by Uwa, Anegbode and Daudu, (2018) that following the wake of the millennium and the 2015 general elections that many women have risen to the challenges of the time by vying for and assuming leadership positions in both politics and religion.

Also, the figure above showed about 50 per cent decline from the application of satisfactory modern methods in family planning between 2018 and 2019. By 2020, the practice of using satisfactory modern approaches to family planning significantly increased but fell by 2021 and remained constant going into 2022.

In terms of the data on the ratio of female-to-male mean years of education, there was a decline between 2018 and 2019. But in 2020, there was an increase in the ration of female to male mean years of education, which continued to rise in 2021 and stabilized in 2022.

For the data on the ratio of female-to-male labour force participation rate, the years through 2018 to 2020 experienced increase in terms of women's involvement in employment. However, in 2021, there was a decline in women's participation in the workforce and employment. But in 2022, women's involvement in labour increased significantly.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that Nigeria's poor implementation of the SDGs is reflected on the poor performance indicators of SDG 5. Though the United Nations and affiliate agencies adopted several conventions and declarations for the global promotion and advancement of gender equality, it remained elusive for millions of women around the world, especially in less developed countries. In Nigeria, for instance, the female gender has continued to experience discrimination, gender-based violence, denial of their sexual and reproductive health rights, and so on (Archibong, Bassey and Nwagbara, 2018).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Numerous feminist theories and perspectives have emerged over the decades to explain the issue of gender inequality in the contemporary world. These theories include Liberal Feminism, Classical Marxism, Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism, Eco-Feminist Perspective, Feminist Environmentalism and so on. However, this work adopted the eco-feminist theory in analysing this problem of gender inclusion in pursuance of sustainable development in Nigeria.

### Ecofeminist Theory

The ecofeminist theory arose as a counterculture in the 1970s, with proponents such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Ynestra King, Bina Agarwal and so on (Aguinaga, Lang, Mokrani and Santillana, 2013). It condemned the degrading association that the patriarchy attached between women and nature. It also criticized the left-wing movements for not taking this into account and questioned the paradigm of progress of “real socialism” and movements within the communist parties.

The Ecofeminist theory which is also referred to as the Women, Environment and Development perspective posits that there is a natural link between women and the environment as both are involved in the creation of life (Pati, 2006). The post-colonial development of less developed countries like Nigeria was characterized by capitalism and patriarchy which exploited both nature and women's labour. Because of this linkage between women and nature as well as their dual exploitation, proponents of this theory of feminism argued that women have a greater interest in ending domination over nature and their own lives (Leach et al., 2016).

Ecofeminists see the patriarchal dominance of women by men as the prototype of all domination and exploitation in various hierarchical, militaristic, capitalist, and industrialist forms (Pati, 2006). They point out that the exploitation of nature has gone hand in hand with that of women, and the ancient association of women with and nature links women's history and the history of the environment and is the source of natural kinship between feminism and ecology (Leach, Mehta and Prabhakaran, 2016). Therefore, ecofeminists see female experiential knowledge as a major source for an ecological vision of reality.

Gaard and Gruen (in Zein and Setiawan, 2017) argued that the ecofeminism framework is based on four conventions:

1. The mechanistic materialist model of the universe that resulted from the scientific revolution and the subsequent reduction of all things into mere resources to be optimized, dead inert matter to be used.
2. The rise of patriarchal religions and their establishment of gender hierarchies along with their denial of immanent divinity.
3. Self and other dualisms and the inherent power and domination ethic it entails.
4. Capitalism and its claimed intrinsic need for the exploitation, destruction and instrumentalization of animals, the earth and people for the sole purpose of creating wealth.

Ecofeminists propose that these four issues have created a divorce between nature and culture which has caused some of the ills that have befallen the earth and its sustainability of life. Arguments tracing a universally caring attitude of women toward nature fail to convince in the face of varying behaviour across classes, regions and contexts. Urban women who use little firewood or fodder, and women from rich peasant households who can obtain much of what they need from family land, have a very different dependence on and hence relationship with communal forests than do poor rural women (Pati, 2006)

Following the ecofeminist paradigm, this study addresses the content of the female gender's input towards sustainable development. Ecofeminists are chosen as the theoretical basis for this study because they link femininity with nature, which sustainable development seeks to preserve. Sustainable development is basically aimed at ensuring that nature's resources are not eroded in the quest for man's advancement. As a social movement, Kronlid, (2003) defined ecofeminism as “the community of women that are engaged in restorative and preservative work”. Thus, ecofeminism proposes that there is a link between gender inclusion and sustainable development.

The ecofeminist theory is concerned with equality, freedom, and equal opportunities between men and women in all facets of life in Nigeria. By estimates, the Nigerian female population is almost equal to that of the male population (49.46 % in 2022) (Ugwuanyi and Formella, 2022). As a result, relegating the female population to the background is detrimental to the attainment of the SDGs. The experience in the Nigerian democratic system reflects the female gender position in society. Despite having a population size almost the same as men, women in politics account for less than 7 per cent (6.7 per cent) of national lawmakers (Ajemba, 2023). Feminist theory therefore points out that the diversity of beliefs and practices of the patriarchal society that Nigeria inhibits it from attaining its full potential. This poses a threat to the successful implementation of SDGs.

From the standpoint that environmental problems such as climate change and degradation threaten man's survival and sustainability, it is therefore proposed in this study that ecofeminist theory is ideal for analyzing the issue. Öztürk, (2020) inserted that ecofeminism holds the view that “environmental problems and women's issues are interrelated”. This perspective is explained by the fact that ecofeminism holds a variety of views of nature, kinds of social constructivism and contextualism, and conceptions of values and of the self, and from the presumption that this variety reflects the reality of environmental problems (Kronlid, 2003).

The biggest criticism of ecofeminism comes back to the idea of essentialism or a belief that things have set characteristics. Some people believe equating women with nature reinforces the dichotomy of gender norms that feminism sought to avoid (Regan, 2020).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research tool was utilized in this study to examine the implementation and challenges of the SDGs to about gender inclusion in Nigeria. Therefore, the data adopted in the study were obtained from secondary sources such as books, journals, magazines, conferences seminar papers and newspapers.

## **GENDER ISSUE CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

Asides the National Gender Policy, the Nigerian governments have embarked on other initiatives which were proposed to tackle gender issues in development such as affirmative action. The principle and practice of affirmative action have become a universally adopted phenomenon in the pursuance of development. The principle of affirmative action impinges on several countries of the world to respect and sustain the rights of vulnerable groups based on their orientation, religion, race, creed and most especially gender (Pati, 2022). Make sure you discuss the gender issues and problem in Nigeria before discussing the provisions of the law.

Nigeria, recognizing the paramount importance of affirmative action has taken a cue from best international practices to promote the involvement of women in their pride of place in ensuring development in society. The

role of gender inclusion is recognized as necessary in enhancing democracy and democratic survival in Nigeria in the current dispensation and beyond (Ugwuanyi and Formella, 2022).

Nigeria, by its very nature as a less developed country, has the challenges and limitations that are peculiar to countries of its kind. These challenges are by no means exhaustive. However, they are categorized under the sub-headings below:

### **Male-dominant culture**

The central culture that permeates the Nigerian society is male-dominated male dominated. This male-dominated culture accords women an inferior position in society. The patriarchal nature of male hegemony is embedded, obscured and protected within traditional institutions and structures held in abeyance and relative utmost sacredness (Makama, 2013).

A major challenge to the task of executing gender-sensitive and gender-equality policies in Nigeria, therefore, is the patriarchal cultural norms, attitudes and practices, which have been accepted as the natural order of things (Makama, 2013). This culture is still deep-seated in society, and it is demonstrated both consciously and unconsciously, irrespective of the general drive for a meaningful change in gender relations through policy initiatives and actions as well as sundry international conventions and accords to which Nigeria is a signatory (Ugwuanyi and Formella, 2022).

### **Corruption and Bad Governance**

Corruption is the foundation of and the gateway to bad governance. Corruption which is the misuse of entrusted power for private benefits, has become the order of the day in Nigeria to the extent that it has become the culture (Anyalebechi, 2016). Corruption has become so endemic, institutionalized and structural that it has a holistic effect on governance. It pollutes and undermines the government's intentions towards the economy, education, employment, and other areas of society that are critical to the actualization of an egalitarian society that ensures gender equality (Anyalebechi, 2016).

### **Inadequate human capacity**

Human capacity building and utilization have been proposed as the missing link in Nigeria's developmental strides. Despite the huge human resources available to Nigeria, the quality of human capacity has been grossly inadequate. The inadequateness of human capacity has severely affected the way public resources, programmes, and projects are formulated, analysed and implemented for the accomplishment of national development goals (Iwuchukwu, 2013).

### **Economic Discrimination**

The major factor that contributes to uneven development and feminization of poverty is gender inequalities within the overall society, including all sectors, and this is reflected in the wide disparities between women and men (Ejumudo, 2013). Over 65% of women are projected to be among the 70% of the population estimated to be living below the poverty line (Adeyanju, Bamigbade and Ajayi, 2020). Men have greater access to secured and high-paying employment. The capacity of women and men to contribute to the economic growth of the country is

affected by the disparities in economic privileges (Ejumudo, 2013).

### **Legal and Human Rights Inconsistencies**

As in most countries, Nigeria is legally regulated by a body of laws that govern major public and private relationships. For example, the issue of marriage is regulated by either Sharia law, statutory law, common law or customary law system (Adeosun and Owolabi, 2021). The manner through which such laws are interpreted and applied frequently varies and are highly inconsistent and in most cases is subjective to personal considerations, mostly when it has to do with the female gender. Kangiwa (2015) noted that in most cases, these laws and acts are interpreted not to favour the protection of the rights and interests of women in society.

### **Gender-Based Violence**

In recent times, gender-based violence has become a major issue not only in Nigeria but in the whole African continent. This reflects the extent to which women's rights are threatened. It also resulted in a situation where women were not able to make a case on many issues concerning and affecting their lives. Violence, particularly domestic violence and rape against women has become a common occurrence in contemporary society (Raheem and Garba, 2017). The cultural practice of female genital mutilation is a violation of basic rights and constitutes a major lifelong risk to women's health. This harmful traditional practice is meant to control women's sexuality, but it has led to great suffering among women in Nigeria (Raheem and Garba, 2017).

### **Absence of Political Will**

Oloyede (2016) pointed out that the fact that the higher levels of government have women grossly misrepresented shows that the drive towards creating a gender-friendly, responsive, equitable and egalitarian society is mere lip service. As a result, all efforts to ensure that the gender gap is reduced would be an exercise in futility except there is top-down holistic support from all levels or tiers of governance, particularly the Federal government (Oloyede, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

Given Nigeria's position on gender equality and the implementation of the SDGs, the study concludes that Nigeria is lagging far behind. Where it matters most in scoring high on gender equality indicators, especially women's representation in politics and government, Nigeria has scored low. Therefore, there is a consistency between poor gender inclusion practices and low SDG ranking in Nigeria.

As the clock ticks towards the deadline for the implementation of the SDGs, Nigeria is faced with the reality of failing to attain the global goals of sustainable development. Therefore, there is a need for urgent steps to be taken to put Nigeria back on track. The study suggests the following steps to be taken to overcome the challenges of gender inclusion and SDGs implementation in Nigeria:

### **Mental Restructuring**

Gender education has not permeated at all levels of the populace, even among the policymakers. Gender issues are mostly viewed as exclusively about women trying to upstage accepted norms and values of marriage, family and religion. The attainment of gender equality is therefore in a negative light and overtly or covertly resisted by

the majority, including policy makers. Therefore, there is a need for mental restructuring.

### **Policy Articulation and Execution**

The leaders who are charged with the responsibility for policy articulation and execution need to demonstrate the political will towards enforcing gender equality. They need to develop positive attitudes to gender issues and equally promote effective policy frameworks that will actively bring about prompt implementation of gender equality programmes across all levels of government and in the private establishment in the country. There should be a top-bottom approach in gender inclusiveness which would provide the exemplary leadership necessary for Nigeria to meet the target for Agenda 2030.

### **Recognition of Women's Productivity**

The government should endeavour to accord the necessary recognition to women's productivity capacity in all sectors of humanity to encourage them to see themselves as a major stakeholder towards the nation's building in Nigeria. There should be nationwide legislation that stipulates private and public organizations to have the approved quota for women's participation in leadership and management positions.

### **Eradication of Cultural Discrimination Against Women**

Another dimension of gender-based marginalization can be perceived in the unwritten norms and traditions which shape and influence organizational culture and practices. Nigerian government must put appropriate legislation in place to address all the aspects of discriminatory cultural policies by all the ethnic groups in Nigeria so that the SDGs aimed at encouraging women empowerment would not be impeded.

### **Rights of Enjoyment**

Women's rights have been systematically undermined by the Nigerian legal systems which made many legal instruments to be discriminatory and gender blind.

Consequently, the existence of gender-sensitive provision in the Nigeria constitution may not enhance any progress at the level of state governance, suggesting that interventions focused on the state level may be more effective. This reality needs to be better acknowledged by programme planners and implementers.

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