Promoting Gender Equity, the Way Forward to Sustainable Women Empowerment and Ensuring Rural and National Development in Nigeria.


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Promoting Gender Equity, the Way Forward to Sustainable Women Empowerment and Ensuring Rural and National Development in Nigeria.

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Abstract

This paper aims at pointing out the need to promote gender equity in Nigeria for a sustainable empowerment of women so as to bring about rural and national development in the country. The ultimate goal of women empowerment is for women themselves to be the active agents of change in transforming gender issues and ensuring that men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by gender stereotypes and rigid gender roles. In Nigeria today, a lot of differences and inequalities between men and women abound in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Major constraints such as corruption, illiteracy, poverty, patriarchal culture and low representation of women in politics are among the factors militating against promotion of gender equity and sustainable empowerment of women, and this invariably hinders rural and national development. This paper therefore takes a cursory look at the strategies for promoting gender equity for sustainable women empowerment and ensuring rural and national development. The paper contends among other recommendations that for sustainable women empowerment to be effective as to bring about development, some of the social and cultural factors that militate against the promotion of gender equity and sustainable women empowerment should be addressed and more attention given to women issues in the country.

Keywords: Gender Equity, Women empowerment, Sustainability and Promotion.
Introduction

Women are key to the development challenge. Throughout the developing world, women are at a disadvantage at the house hold, community and societal level. Within the household, women have limited access to, and control over resources and limited influence and house hold decisions. Beyond the house hold, women have limited access to communal resources, are under-represented in public decision-making bodies; have limited bargaining power in markets (such as the labour market), and often lack opportunities to improve their socio-economic positions. Therefore, efforts to reduce gender inequality and promote gender equity are required on multiple fronts, Bryan and Varant, (2008). Gender equality and equity are used interchangeably in this paper because they represent the same phenomenon. But in this paper gender equity is used. Gender equity is a set of actions, attitudes and assumptions that provide opportunities and create expectations about individuals. In this definition of gender equity, gender is not separate from race, ethnicity, language, disability, income, or other diversities that define us as human beings. Gender equity offers a framework for educational reforms in which all females and males are engaged, in reflective learning, regardless of the subject prepared for future education, job, careers and civic participation. Set and meet high expectations for themselves and others, develop as respectful, inclusive and productive individuals, friends, family members, works and citizens, as well as receive equitable treatment and achieve equitable outcomes in schools and beyond, Bryan and Varat, (2008).

Promoting gender equality via a viz equity and women empowerment is the third millennium development goal of the country and its needs and importance has been globally recognized and accepted. Gender equity can only be achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic, social and political participation and decision-making, above all, when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured. Gender equity demands the empowerment of women with a focus on identifying and readdressing power imbalances and given women more autonomy to manage their own lives. When women are empowered, the whole family benefits and these benefits often have a ripple effect on future generations.

The paradigms of gender equity and women Empowerment

Equity is the cornerstone of every democratic society that aspires to have social justice and human rights (UN, 2002). The term gender equity has multiple definitions in the development literature and has been the subject of great debate in the global world today. Gender equity often means encouraging women to have the same opportunities and access in life as men, for instance, equality of access to education and employment. Gender equity can be referred to in terms of access to education, health, political, social and economic opportunities and decision making. World Bank, (2003) defines gender equity in terms of equality under the law, opportunity and voice. The ability to influence and contribute to the development process of their societies. Gender equity means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. This does not mean that men and women have to become the same or equal biologically as against many oppositions to gender equality, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities should not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equity also denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in politics and public spheres Grown et al, (2003). Gender inequality exists because of discrimination in the family, societal institutions and social, cultural and religious norms that perpetrate stereotypes, practices and beliefs that are detrimental to women. Laws and policies equally play significant roles in determining the extent to which gender inequality exists in a society. Poverty and illiteracy are also among the contributing factors of inequality that exit between men and women in a society.

Sustainable Women Empowerment

The term sustainability refers to the management and conservation of natural, social and economic resources to the best advantage so as to meet the present and future needs of the people. Sustainable women empowerment means conserving then positive changes inculcated in gender needs and aspirations of women so as to meet the present and future trends of women folk. The concept of empowerment is related to gender equity but distinct from it. According to UNPF, (2009) empowerment is a process that marks changes over a period of time and requires that the individual being empowered is involved as a significant agent in that change process. The united Nations Population Fund, (2009) report on gender equality, records that despite many international agreements affirming their human rights, especially women are still much more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. Women are also less politically active than men and are usually victims of domestic violence. Empowering women therefore gives them equal right and opportunities with men in all spheres of life. It means given them equal education and opportunity to develop their personal ambition. Empowering women gives them the right to speak out in terms of decision and policy making. It is an agreed fact that “a woman empowered is nation built”. Empowerment is relevant and useful only when the empowered realizes what to do with it, but is rather unfortunate that many rural women are still not literate enough to know their right from their left. The core of the concept of empowerment lie in the ability of the women to control their own destiny Godson-Ibeji, (2015).
Strategies for promoting Gender Equity in Nigeria for Women Empowerment

Provision of Access to Education

Basic education is the foundation for developing flexible skills needed to participate in the knowledge intensive economic activity (Plate 1). Increasing women access to formal or information education will help to empower them. The data in the table above reveals the enrolment of women into primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The results show an upward increase over the years from 1999 to 2012 in all levels of education. It is a welcome idea, although the year 2015 is the target of millennium development goal of eliminating all forms of gender in equality and gender disparity in all levels educations. These targets are yet to be met. Fortunate enough, Nigeria is generally approaching gender parity in educational enrolment as the proportion of women has improved. This implies that the level of development being witnessed in the country now is as a result of women empowerment in the field of education. For there is an adage that says, “Train a women and you have trained a nation”.

Provision of Agricultural training and farm inputs

Providing women with modern and efficient farm inputs like improved seed, animal breeds, information on market prices, extension and advisory services will go a long way to improve their economic productivity (Plate 2). Adequate access to agricultural inputs and services can improve the women’s contribution to food production which will benefit the entire family’s nutritional and food security. If women’s access to productive resources were the same as men’s, women’s contribution to food production could reduce the number of hungry people in our country.

Exposing Women to Entrepreneurial skills

Rural women can be empowered through the provision of entrepreneurial skills (Plate 4). According to united Nations Development programmes (UNDD), (2005) report, women have been producing cottage industry products of marketable quality in Malaysia but lack of design, branding and packaging has left the products very much a localized merchandise. It is therefore pertinent to train the women in production of products that carry barub and packaging which could go beyond the border of their country. This kind of idea could be introduced in Nigeria when a vast majority of the rural women engage in one productive activity or of the other.

Provision of Financial Resources and Credit for Women

Without access to financial and credit resources, rural women will not have the capacity to deal with cost associated with innovation such as establishing a rural enterprise and improving their productivity, FAO, (2011). Through financial service access, women can become economically empowered by using credits, savings and insurance to promote their own economic activities, protect their assets, strength their links to markets and diversity their economic activities (Plate 5). This could also allow them to be more self-reliant, create employment opportunities and also create wealth for them and their families. This will need to both rural and national development.

Access to Health

The health of the household members is strongly related to the economic performance of the women (Plate 6). Based on this, creating favourable environment that would boost the health conditions of the women will contribute greatly to rural national development. The provision of health facilities such as ultra-modern hospitals women and childcare centres will help to improve the women access to health services in rural areas.

Political Empowerment

Women political empowerment refers to equitable representation of women in decision making structures both formal and informal and their voices in the formulation of policies affecting their homes, communities and societies at large (Plate 7). The data from the table above reveals the ratio of women to men in the parliament. From 1999, 1.0% to 2012, 7.70%. This is a low representation of women in the decision making of the society in which they belong. It was only the past immediate president who brought up the figure up to 30% in the last few years. The low representation of women in the structure of governance in invariably means that national and local priorities are typically defined without meaningful contributions from the women whose life experiences give them different awareness of the community needs and interest from that of men.

Constraints to Gender Equity and Women Empowerment in Nigeria

The major constraint to promoting gender equity and women empowerment in Nigeria is lack of clear link to policies and commitment by the government, civil society groups, private sectors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). To buttress this point, Lawal, Obasaju and Rotimi, (2012) noted that for gender equity and women empowerment to be addressed in Nigeria, an appropriate political and institutional frame work should be established. Though Nigeria seems to have adopted policies to promote gender equity, but there is lack of practical approach to it.
Patriarchal Culture

In Nigeria, the patriarchal culture of male supremacy over women still remains embedded, obscured and protected within traditional institutions and structures held in abeyance and relative utmost sacredness. The patriarchal cultural norms, attitudes and practices, which have been accepted as natural order of things is a major constraint to the task of promoting gender equity. This culture is in-grained in men and it is demonstrated both consciously and unconsciously, despite the gender 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. MDGs Report (2013).

Corruption, Illiteracy, Poverty and Mis-governance

Policy makers often perceive the importance of education as a major source of improving family health and welfare. It then means that lack of it reduces the equal right of women to wage employment and this can lead to poverty which the women experience in the rural areas: According to Kabeer, (2005) the design of educational curricula has not yet taken note of the fact that more woman are entering into the labour market. Another bottle neck to promoting gender equity is corruption and insecurity. Corruption is the foundation of and gateway to mis-governance. Although, corruption is not the only dimension of mis-governance but it is central to bribery, extortion, fraud, manipulations and different shades of malpractices. This brings about false public investment and a wide pragmatic approach to gender mainstreaming by government.

Political Will and Genuine Commitment

Creating gender friendly, responsive, equitable and egalitarian society demands the full support from all levels or tiers of government particularly the federal government which formulates general policies that are expected to provide the direction. If the micro policies and activities at the lower levels of governance. If these supports are put in place, commitment will not only be discerned by other stake holders, but will engender support and co-operation that are germane for the realization of the goal of gender equity and women empowerment in Nigeria.

Limited Access to Resources in a technologically defined world

Gender equity requires equal access to services and infrastructure such as roads electricity, water and communication tools. Without access to such resources, women with tremendous knowledge, expertise and passion are not given an outlet to use their knowledge and skills, keeping them at a disadvantage. Technology tools are particularly important as they enable women to use their time, energy and expertise more efficiently. Bryan and Varat, (2008).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper took a look at how to promote gender equity and achieve sustainable women empowerment that will ensure rural and national development in Nigeria. Empowering Women in Nigeria should be a top priority which demands genuine attention and commitment of all Nigerians. The higher the empowerment of women in the society, the higher the development of the rural and the nation at large. Therefore, all levels of government, development planners, civil society, non-governmental and private organizations, should ensure that women are sustainably empowered in diverse ways so as to bring about development. Based on the findings of this paper, it is recommended of this paper that development planners should shift their focus from poverty reduction to wealth creation. By focusing on poverty reduction, women are viewed as subjects of poverty rather than as producers and generators of wealth. Government should establish a gender friendly, gender sensitive and gender equitable society that is free of discriminations and inequalities so as to harness the full potentials of all individuals and promote the principles of fundamental human rights which is necessary for sustainable empowerment of women in Nigeria. Promoting gender equity demands a pragmatic approach to appropriate policy formation, programme design, focused implementation, effective monitoring and evaluation in a genuine climate of political will, genuine commitment and national re-orientation. Finally, for sustainable empowerment of women to be achieved, some of the social and cultural bottlenecks that hinder women empowerment such as patriarchal culture, insecurity and poverty should be properly addressed by different stakeholders and more attention be given to women issue for a more sustainable rural and national development.
References

Table

| Table 1: Trends in and status of gender equity and Women Empowerment (female per 100 male) in 2012. |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Ratio of girls to boys in primary educated (girls per 100 boys) | 76 | 78 | 78 | 79 | 81 | 81 | 83 | 83 | 85.1 | 85.41 | - | 90.0 | 100 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education (girls per 100 boys) | 75 | 81 | 81 | 80 | 78 | 77.4 | 80.6 | 79.4 | 75.4 | 79.91 | - | 90.0 | 100 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education (girls per 100 boys) | 46 | 66 | 66 | 87 | 72 | 75.5 | 70.1 | 69.0 | 66.4 | 66.82 | - | - | 100 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector (100%) | 6.60 | - | - | - | - | 7.90 | 7.90 | - | - | - | 7.70 | 14.0 | 100 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (100%) | 1.0 | 3.90 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 3.10 | 2.10 | 7.50 | 7.50 | 7.0 | 7.70 | 35.0 | 100 |

Plates

Plate 1: Access to Education

Plate 3: Improving Women Access to Land and Other Natural Resources

Plate 5: Financial Resources and Credit for Women

Plate 7: Political Empowerment

Plate 2: Agricultural Trainings and Provision of Farm Inputs

Plate 4: Exposing Women to Entrepreneurial Skills

Plate 6: Access to Health Care