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Gender Disparity in Nigeria: A Discourse on Its Origin, Nature and Inevitability

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Abstract:

The perceived subordination of women is observed to be a universal phenomenon even though the extent varies among countries. The Nigerian society is characterized both by diversities and disparities. The male gender is generally more valued than the female gender whether intentionally or otherwise. This is reflected in the social indicators which show varying degrees of gender disparities in terms of educational attainment, political participation and economic empowerment.

This paper discusses the extent to which disparity is entrenched in the Nigerian system, the socio- economic and political factors responsible for the inequality as well as the extent to which efforts are being made to reduce the gender gap. It proceeds to give logical analysis on reasons for the persistent disparity despite the various interventions aimed at reducing or possibly eradicating it. Useful recommendations on how the gap can be made less obvious in order to allow greater leveraging of the female strength for sustainable development in the country were suggested.

Keywords: Gender, Gender role socialization, Disparity

1. Introduction

Government in Nigeria over the years have tried to ensure that its female population have the same opportunities as the male population have through various policies such as the National Economic

Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Universal Basic Education Act, Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria and so on. Nigeria also has a National Gender Policy which focuses on women empowerment while also making a commitment to eliminate discriminatory practices which are harmful to women. But significant gender gaps in education, economic empowerment and political participation still remain in Nigeria. JICA (2011).

Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to the bridging the gender gap, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, women are highly marginalized and are still poorly represented (UNDP Report, 2005).

This position of women in society in relation to men and the subordination, oppression and marginalization of women has attracted the attention of scholars, activists, feminists and development workers for a very long time. The issues relating to what is also known as gender inequality has become very prominent in the last few decades.

The major hindrance to achieving this equity and breaking the glass ceiling for women both in organizations and in the political arena has been attributed to the socio-cultural values entrenched in the Nigerian society. Many of these values have placed women in a somewhat disadvantaged position such that competing favourably with the male counterpart becomes a harlequin task.

Another fundamental factor responsible for the almost inconsequential role of women in our society and politics in particular is the patriarchal nature of our society. The male gender is believed to have superior rights and the woman is seen as a property of the man. Patriarchy has given ascendancy to men in politics, authority and decision making in and outside the home. Though in recent years, it appears that women are almost beating the glass ceilings. Women have held such positions as head of the World Bank, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) as well as the Stock Exchange. Women have risen to the position of Chief Executive Officers in Banks and several other companies. Several female ministers have been appointed and there have been a number of female deputy governors elected into office. The country has also once had a woman Speaker of House. However, breaking the glass ceiling to the highest echelons of power still proves difficult as the country as never produced a female state governor or female president. Though, it is hopeful that with the unrelenting campaigns on discrimination against women it will be achieved soon. But what still bothers the mind is the question as to whether the inclusion and participation of these eminent women noted above really indicate that gender parity has been achieved in Nigeria? Can it be said that there is equality in terms of pay, representation, recognition and rights?

This paper shall therefore seek to determine the extent of gender disparity in Nigerian organizations and Nigeria generally as well as determine whether both men and women have equal opportunities in organizations. The percentage of females in key positions as compared to males will also be determined and explanatory analysis and recommendations shall be given.

Before this however, it is expedient to have an understanding of the gender construct and how it shapes individual behaviours and societal expectations through the process of socialization.

1.1. The Gender Construct

Gender has to do with the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Making a clear distinction between the terms 'Gender' and 'Sex' is important in the sense that sex only connotes the anatomical description of the male and female while gender is the socially constructed notion of masculinity and femininity which is not necessarily a product of an individual biological sex. Gender roles differ geographically and may change with time but sex roles are naturally fixed and universal (Alamveabee, 2005). The two terms however are interwoven in the sense that though we were born male and female, we grow up as boys and girls, being taught the attitudinal and behavioural expectations of each gender.

Contrasting approaches have been taken to explain the formation of gender identities and the social roles based on these identities. The debate is really one about how much learning there is. Some scholars allow more prominence than others to social influences in analyzing gender differences (Giddens 2009). Gender differences are not biologically determined but culturally produced. Inequalities thus results because men and women are socialized into these roles.

1.2. Gender Roles

Gender roles are expectations regarding the proper behaviours, attitudes and activities of a male or female. They are learnt through the family, school, media and religious institutions. Acceptable and appropriate roles for men and women differs from one cultural setting to another. Despite the changing conceptions on gender roles, men's staying at home to care for the children is still seen as an unusual phenomenon. Studies have shown that for every stay-at-home father, there were about thirty-eight (38) married stay-at-home mothers (Fields, 2002; Robinson, 2002).

While attitudes towards parenting may be changing, studies show little change in the traditional male gender role. Men's roles are as much socially constructed as that of the women. In any society, gender stratification requires not only individual socialization into traditional gender roles within the family but the promotion and support of those traditional roles by other social institutions such as religion and education. However, with all major institutions socializing the young into conventional gender roles, every society has men and women who resist and successfully oppose the stereotypes. There have been cases where women become leaders and professionals and more feminine men who care for children and so forth.

Social researches on gender roles reveal some persistent differences between men and women. Traditional gender roles have restricted females more severely than male. For instance, women often feel pressured both to marry and become mothers. Marriage is most times viewed as their true identity into adulthood. Even though men also play a role in marriage and parenting, these do not appear to be as critical in the life course of a man. Society defines men's identity more often than not on their economic success and even though many women today fully expect to have careers as well as achievement recognition in the labour force, success at work is not seen as paramount to their identity as it is for men (Doyle and Paludi, 1998). Furthermore, confidence and assertiveness reflects positive traits for both men and leaders while women are associated to of passive femininity which indicates that even if they are assertive, they are viewed as acting in conflict with their stereotyped nature and are thus criticized (Roth, 2005). This is to say that when women act in ways that are consistent with their gender stereotype, they are viewed as less competent leaders but when they act in ways inconsistent with their stereotype, they are labeled unfeminine (Catalyst, 2007). This illustrates the consequences of gender role socialization which has contributed to the issue of disparity worldwide.

1.3. Gender and Organizational Disparity

In the last decade or so, women have made significant progress in obtaining responsible positions in organizations. Among the reasons for this development are laws governing fair employment practices, changing societal attitudes towards women in the workplace and the desire for companies to project a favourable image by placing qualified women in managerial positions (Wehrich et al, 2008).

The adult woman is no longer solely associated with the role of homemaking because many of them both married and single are more engaged in the paid labour force. For instance, in 2001, 60% of adult women in the United States held jobs outside the home compared to 38% in 1960 (Schaefer, 2005). However, many women entering the job market find their job options restricted in many ways especially in terms of occupational segregation or confinement to sex-typed 'women's jobs' such as secretaries, office assistants and so on. The National Bureau of Statistics revealed that more females (27,483,577) were working as proprietor/active partners, unpaid workers, clerical and related office workers, as well as hired labourers, casual workers/operatives in the informal sectors than their 27,160,099 male counterparts (NBS, 2010). Furthermore, the statistics showed 240,714 females compared to 214,568 male workers engaged in clerical and other related office work in Nigeria. Women are underrepresented in occupations historically defined as men's jobs which often times attract much greater financial rewards and prestige than women's jobs.

From the workplace pattern described above, it is evidently clear that women earn less than men in the paid labour force. Also worthy of note is that while women may well be at a disadvantage in male dominated occupations, the same is not true of men in female dominated occupations. Budig (2002) in his examination of national database containing career information on more than 12,000 men, collected over the course of 15 years discovered that men were uniformly advantaged in female occupations. This is a situation which observers of the labour force have termed 'Glass Escalator' which is quite in contrast with the 'Glass Ceiling' experienced by women in men dominated occupations. He proposed that men ride a glass escalator by virtue of their gender status and not by standing out in women's jobs.

A major cause of gender disparity in organizations today is gender discrimination. There is strong evidence that gender discrimination is still occurring in the workplace. In one study, researchers sent identical curricula vitae to a psychology department for Assistant Professor openings but manipulated the applicants' sex to be male or female. The male candidates were judged worthy of being hired 73% of the time, while the female applicants were deemed worthy of the job only 45% of the time (Steinpreis et al, 1999). The prevalence of sex discrimination was also exemplified when symphony orchestras began hiring musicians without knowledge of the applicants' gender and this increased the amount of females hired by about 25% (Goldin & Rouse, 2000). According to 2011 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, women are currently most underrepresented in the following occupations - management, technology, mathematics, architecture, engineering, science, production and transportation.

The following table on academic staff distribution in all Nigerian Universities between 2001 -2005 further reinforces this fact.

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE
2000/2001	15,289	3,578
2001/2002	15,067	3,359
2002/2003	17,936	4,110
2003/2004	19,739	4,132
2004/2005	21,795	1,740

Table 1: Distribution of Academic Staff in All Universities

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, Abuja.

Regardless the anti-discrimination legislative measures taken, discrimination in the workplace is still a prevalent issue.

Sociological research has found that organizations are gendered in several ways. Organizations are gendered to the extent that such things as competence and incompetence, authority and subordination, advantage and disadvantage, logic and emotion, exploitation and control are all patterned in terms of a distinction between the male and the female. Roth (2005) posited that men would find it quite easier to reconcile their gender with the expectation of an employer who has a predetermined expectation of ideal employees who are completely dedicated to their work without career interruptions or other domestic responsibilities distracting them from their official duties.

Women face a lot of challenges trying to juggle work and family. I wish to use the phrase 'second shift' to describe the double burden that many women face and few men share equally. This is in terms of work outside the home, followed by child care and house work. By this, many women struggle to cope with two jobs, one in the workplace and one at home. In her study of 52 couples over an eight-year period, Sociologist Arlie Hochschild reported that wives and not their husbands drive home from the office while planning domestic schedules and play dates for children before getting home to begin the 'second shift'. Drawing on national studies, she concluded that women spend 15 fewer hours each week in leisure activities than their husbands. (Schaefer, 2005). This shows a dimension of disparity which may seem difficult to eliminate as regards expenditure of physical and emotional energies.

There may be no basis for workplace disparities in view of the established facts that women have caught up with men in terms of education. In fact, in the United States and a number of other countries, women now surpass men in educational achievement. The woman's dilemma evidently is not that of achievement or not having what it takes to successfully compete with her male counterpart in organizations but rather that of balancing work life and family which is a crucial aspect of a married woman's life.

Correll (2001) in her study on Motherhood Penalty argues that motherhood operates as a status characteristic in the workplace because it elicits negative cultural assumptions and schemas about a mother's ability in the workplace. The motherhood penalty describes how mothers suffer severe wage and hiring disadvantages in the workplace. Correll's study tests the status discrimination theory's hypothesis that women, specifically mothers, are systematically disadvantaged in the workplace by biased performance expectations. Strong evidence was found that employers discriminate against motherhood as a devalued status characteristic and thus had lower performance expectations of mothers.

Until recently, the assumption that males were better leaders than females were rarely questioned. However, since the early 70s, the foundation of that assumption has been shaken by the large number of women who have been elected Prime Ministers in countries such as Britain, Canada, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Norway, Sri Lanka and to other high government offices as well as several women in Nigeria who have proven their worth in their various professions and offices such as the former director of NAFDAC, late Prof (Mrs.) Dora Akunyilli, the present Minister of Finance, Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who before her appointment was Managing Director of the World Bank, and several others who have been elevated to managerial positions in business organizations.

Therefore, if the nation is to make any appreciable progress, it needs to go beyond stereotyping and leverage individual contributions without any gender prejudice or bias.

1.4. Gender, Workplace Segregation and Wage Disparity

Despite the high level of unemployment, wage employment still remains a significant source of income and a privilege in Nigeria. Wage disparity in the workplace had initially been attributed to differences in human capital as well as labour market skills. But while some of the gender gap is indeed due to differences in human capital, research has shown that it does not account for all the incidences of gender gap.

According to Sociologists Margaret Mooney Marini and Li-Ping Fan, a large portion of the gender wage gap is due to job segregation. While differences in human capital do end up creating a gender gap in wages, they found that explanatory mechanisms focusing on the characteristics of workers account for only 30% of the gender wage gap at career entry (Marini and Fan, 1997).

Marini and Fan are able to conclude this by studying workers at career entry, where gender differences in human capital are lowest. By equalizing human capital as much as possible, they are able to better understand the true causes of the gender wage gap. Their first finding was that women and men are assigned to different entry-level jobs, setting them on different wage rates. What this basically means is that when entering the workforce, women are pushed into “female-type jobs,” whereas men are assigned to “male-type jobs.” The reason why a wage gap exists is because “female-type jobs” generally have lower wage rates than “male-type jobs”. This is known as allocative discrimination, where the higher-paying jobs are allocated to the males, while the lower-paying jobs are allocated to the females. This can have a large impact on future earnings for women because being placed in “female type jobs” is often a barrier as women move forward in their careers (Marini and Fan, 1997). Therefore, allocative discrimination does not merely create a wage gap in the present, it also sets the stage for the wage gap to get wider and wider as men and women progress throughout their careers.

Discrepancies in aspiration between men and women have however been discovered to account for the largest percentage of wage disparity. According to Marini and Fan, the aspiration for different jobs and education by both genders can be attributed to gender-role socialization as well as gender discrimination.

The National Bureau of Statistics (2010) records a distribution of employed persons by economic activities in Nigeria as follows:

S/No	Economic Activity	Male	Female
1.	Mining and Quarrying	116,458	30,030
2.	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	10,261,705	4,575,988
3.	Manufacturing	2,099,411	3,237,589
4.	Transport and Storage	1,877,193	131,989
5.	Construction	1,041,811	100,758
6.	Wholesale and Retail Trade	3, 645,017	8, 452, 172
7.	Accommodation and Food Service Activities	464,215	2,266,093
8.	Professional Scientific and Technical Activities	463, 818	246,693
9.	Real Estate Activities	65, 423	3,274
10.	Electricity, Gas Steam and A/C Supply	142,720	9889

Table 2: Distribution of Employed Persons by Economic Activities

Source: NBS (2010)

Table 2 gives an evidence that job segregation exists in Nigeria. It shows a very low percentage of women representation in male tagged jobs and vice-versa. The implication of this is that females confined to the female tagged jobs would consistently earn less especially where the male tagged jobs attract higher pay, thereby causing disparity in wages.

Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women’s employment in certain sectors of the economy and discriminatory remuneration practices. According to the Gender in Nigeria Report 2012, women in formal employment are paid less than men and this has grown since 1999. According to the report, women consistently earn less than their male counterparts regardless their educational qualifications and even in some cases, earn less than men with lower qualifications. It was found that only one in every three employees in the non-agricultural formal sector is a woman and that women occupy fewer than 30% of all posts in the public sector and just 17% of senior positions. Also, Nigeria has nearly five times more male judges and permanent secretaries than females.

The reproductive roles that women play often lead them involuntarily to prefer low quality, poorly paid, part-time and relatively flexible employment. This mean that women may often forgo promotion to highly paid jobs if these involve anti-social hours or frequent travel away from their families. It is worthy of note that women are often also excluded from the informal networks that men partake in outside of the office, activities which bonds the men and helps create connections that are important when promotions become available. This has short changed several women and perpetuated wage disparity between men and women. Although many firms employ diversity programs aimed at reaching greater number of women in the field, women are still not reaching the top levels within their companies at the same rates as men. Mohapatra, Aditi, et al. 2010

2. Dimensions of Disparity

Disparities have appeared in different forms in the country but the three major areas in which it is most prominent shall be discussed.

2.1. Economic Disparity

Nigeria, since its return to democracy Nigeria has experienced some impressive economic growth. This is reflected in its growth from US\$36 billion to nearly US\$555 billion between 1999 and 2010. This has moved Nigeria into the class of emerging middle income economies (World Bank, 2011). The figures may even be higher considering the non-inclusion of the informal sector dominated by women and which make a substantial contribution to national wealth creation (GNR, 2012). Despite the impressive growth, official unemployment has risen, that is those who are out of employment and are actively looking for work (NBS, 2010). According to NBS 2010, majority of the unemployed both in the rural and urban areas of the country are females. In actual figures, the country has 24.9% of its female population unemployed compared to the 17.7% unemployed men.

Available data show it is currently stands at about 12%, up from 6.2% in 1987 (Aigbokhan, 2008:11). In fact, only one in 10 of the six million Nigerians who enter the job market every year find employment (Kwakwa *et al.*, 2008). Empirical data also shows that 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty level with many living on less than 1 US dollar per day. The result is that half of young Nigerians are officially classified as economically inactive, though in reality they are part of the large majority who make their living in the informal sector.

Some have described Nigeria as a case of jobless growth (Olesin, 2011). In part, this can be explained by an over reliance on oil exports that generate most of the country's revenue. This has been accompanied by relatively little investment in productive infrastructure, a factor that has crippled industrial growth and further employment creation.

As the nation faces deepening economic crisis, women are worst hit. Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices. (Makama, 2013).

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.

It is a fact that education prepares many Nigerians for employment in the formal sector. A recent survey shows that some 10.7 million adults in Nigeria have access to a wage income linked to a regular formal sector job in the public and private sector (EFInA, 2010). The question one may then ask is whether there is a balanced spread between the male and female population. Regardless their educational qualifications, Nigerian women have been found to occupy very few positions in the public sector and earn consistently less than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the proportion of professional and technical workers in Nigeria according to the Human Development Report (2008-2009) is 2219 females to 7781 males.

Existing data show that there is a persisting wide gap between the income generating and employment opportunities of women and men in virtually all sectors of the Nigerian society (FG 2012:12). Women involvement in the industrial sector was estimated at 11% compared with the 30% for men, while women's participation in income generating activities that are predominantly characterized by intense manual labour like mining and quarrying is virtually non-existent mainly as a result of the gender-related perception concerning the social construction of labour and production-related activities (National Bureau of Statistics 2004:39-41). Though, this has improved by 2010 with a very low percentage of women engaged in this type of work (NBS 2010). Furthermore, empirical data indicates a significant gender gap in land ownership. Nigerian women have very limited ownership rights. Though civil law entitles women to have access to land, and a few states have even enshrined equal inheritance rights into law, but certain customary laws stipulate that only men have the right to own land. (CEDAW, 2003). Also, in the Federal Civil Service, which is the largest single-entity employer in Nigeria, 76% of civil servants are men and 24% are women. Meanwhile, women constitute less than 14% of the total management level positions, while 17.5% of those engaged in the medical field are women compared with the 82.5% men (CIDA2012: 17). Besides, other indications of gender disparity suggest that men involved in the formal sector is approximately 87% against the 11% of women, while the extractive industry with an annual business volume of over US \$ 42m has virtually zero level involvement by women (CIDA, 2012:27). Gender-induced norms and values equally assign to women the task of home or household management and it has the potency of precluding women from pursuing their careers to top management positions and decision-making cadres at the same rate, frequency and fashion as their male counterparts in essentially all sectors of the Nigerian society (National Gender Policy 2006:4). No wonder, among the 70% of the population estimated to be living below poverty line in Nigeria, over 65% are estimated to be women. The situation is further worsened by the fact that women's access to bank loans is restricted by their limited financial resources. Statistics show that less than one-third of loans in Nigeria are awarded to women. (CEDAW 2003).

It is in the light of this that the importance of gender equality for poverty reduction is been advocated by the World Bank.

2.2. Educational Disparity

United Nations Human Development Report (2005) records that Nigeria was classified as a low development country in respect of equality in educational accessibility. Female Adult Literacy Rate (ages 15 and above) for the country was 59.4% as against male, 74.4%; the Combined Gross Enrolment for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools for female was 57% and male, 71% (Makama, 2013)

The UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report for 2008 produced evidences of disparity in the net enrolment ratio between boys and girls in primary schools (68% and 59% respectively) (UNESCO, 2008). Similarly, girls' completion rates were found generally lower than that of boys especially in some states in the North (UNESCO, 2008).

In another vein, the percentages of female workers in some selected professions, according to Ojo (2002) are as follow: architects, 2.4%, quantity surveyors, 3.5%, lawyers/jurists, 25.4%, lecturers, 11.8%, obstetricians and gynecologists, 8.4%, pediatricians, 33.3%, media practitioners, 18.3%.

Furthermore, on the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), Nigeria ranks the 123rd position with the Estimated Earned Income for female as low as US \$715 and the male, US \$1,596 (UN-HDR 2008-2009).

All these are pointers to the fact that unequal educational opportunities exist in Nigeria. The root of this inequality has been traced to the colonial system of education which was primarily geared toward meeting the manpower need of the colonial government that obviously alienated women from educational and economic opportunities (Omolewa,2002). Various social factors influence the value that parents in different communities attach to the education of their daughters. Mahdi, (2011) found from his study that some parents

prefer to send their boys to school because only sons inherit and carry on the family name and investing on a girl child was considered a waste because she would eventually end up under a man. So rather than sending them to school, they are kept at home with the aim of preparing them for their conjugal homes.

Lack of adequate education has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the formal sector. The social pressures on females such as early marriages as well as seeing female education as secondary to that of boys and some other inhibitive religious and cultural practices in some parts of Nigeria could be seen as responsible for the low level of education among women.

Apart from the moral question of equality of opportunity, a growing body of evidence suggests that providing equal access to education, and specifically providing education to girls, is good economics, because it makes labour markets more efficient, enhances growth rates and helps reduce social disparities (Morrison *et al.*, 2007).

2.3. Political Disparity

Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Nigeria. However, there is yet a significant level of under representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts.

Although the National Gender Policy set a target of 35% as a benchmark towards gender parity in Nigeria, Nigeria is yet to achieve gender parity in political representation at all levels. Female presidential and gubernatorial candidates have emerged but none has ever won and only an insignificant 16.7% have managed to become deputy governors. Following two decades of military rule, statistics reveal that women only secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made with only 6% (Makama, 2013). Internal party selection processes and outcomes during the 2011 elections suggest that in all political parties few women were elected to contest seats (Irabor, 2011); and that those that were selected were given seats that were hard to win.

The 2011 election results suggest regression from the apparent progress that followed the return to democracy in 1999. Out of the 3306 candidates who contested elections into the National Assembly during the April 2011 elections, only 302 (9%) were women. Only 13 (3.7%) of the 348 candidates who contested the gubernatorial seats were women. In all, only 909 (9.06%) of the total 10,037 candidates for available seats were women (INEC, Gender Statistics Newsletter 2011). Breaking this down a bit, 2011 elections had in the House of Representative, 25 women out of its 360 members, constituting just (6.9%) and there were just 7 (6.4 %) women out of the 109 members of Senate. The story is also same in the civil service where women have only 3.5% representation and 9.2% in the directorates.

As at April, 2013, women in Nigeria's Federal Cabinet represented a total of 31%. The local government also recorded a low representation of just 4% Nigerian Councillors as women. This explained why Nigeria ranks 106th position out of 136 countries under the World Gender Gap Index ratings (Global Gender Gap Report, 2012). The low 9% representation of women in the National Legislature is significantly below the global average (15%), and far behind that of other countries such as Rwanda with 56%, South Africa with 43.2%, Ethiopia with 27.7%, Cameroon with 20% and Niger with 12.3% (Olurode, 2011). Presently, the 2015 general elections produced only 5 (17%) women Ministers out of the 36 available portfolios and also only 8 (7.3%) women Senators out of 109 members while the House of representative women membership dropped to 19 (5.2%). Summary of which is shown in the table below:

Year	Senator	House of Representative
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	8 (7.3%)	19 (5.2%)

Table 3

Source: www.inecnigeria.org

All the registered political parties in Nigeria have not been able to achieve gender parity in terms of political representation at national level in line with the National Gender Policy (NGP) and the dictates of the Affirmative Action. Nonetheless, there is an indication that the traditional home- centered perception about women is undergoing a positive shift.

3. Factors Responsible for Disparity

3.1. Socio-cultural

- The issue of son preference where importance is attached to male education, especially in some parts of the country. Expenditure on the female gender is seen to be less necessary as their main role was seen as ending up in child bearing and home keeping. The domestic domain continues to be generally perceived as the legitimate space for women while public space is associated with men.

- Patrilineal principles of inheritance and descent where family line and property is transmitted through men, patriarchal structures of authority, where families are tightly knit and resources controlled by the senior male, as well as patria-local marriage systems requiring women to be absorbed into their husband's families after marriage all add up to foster inequality.

- The female subjective position established from childhood through gender- role socialization coupled by the differential levels of support and motivation experienced, all influence the aspirations and future achievement of boys and girls.

- The decision making power is also often believed to reside in the man. According to the 2008 DHS, nearly 62 % of women reported that men make most or all of the decisions about major household purchases; 83.5 % of men reported control over these decisions (NPC and ICF Macro, 2009). It is no wonder therefore why women's opinion is seen as subjective to that of the man and most often not respected.

- In some part of the country, women also face cultural constraints in terms of mobility. The mechanisms of sex segregation and *purdah* are used to restrict their movement. Whereas, for them to be actively involved in socio-political and economic activities that will empower women, they need to have adequate exposure and opportunity to interact with male and female constituents, express their view and pursue their aspirations.

- Gender stereotyping in the school curriculum and the academic streaming process, where certain subjects and courses such as the sciences, mathematics, engineering and other technical disciplines are tagged masculine, while secretarial/clerical duties and home management are viewed feminine, thereby denying both sexes the opportunities to benefit from exposure to all subject areas or a wider choice of subjects.

3.2. Economic

- The denial of women's inheritance and land rights has made their economic participation considerably constrained and by implication, their educational aspiration (Nmadu 2000).

- Politics is increasingly becoming commercialized. More and more money is needed to participate in politics. Women lack access to and ownership of productive resource, limiting the scope of their political work.

- According to the CEC Report (2007), the role of women in employment and economic activities is often underestimated because most of women work in the informal sectors, usually with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection. It observes that the female labour force in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 was about 73 million, representing 34% of those employed in the formal sector, earning only 10% of the income, while owning 1% of the assets.

- Denied access of women to resources of their own, thereby limiting their abilities to provide for themselves and being reduced to economic dependents in some parts of the country.

3.3. Political

- Women find it hard to participate in politics due to the limited time available to them because of their dual role in the productive and reproductive spheres of their lives. Women self-advancement has been curtailed by the burden of reproduction, particularly in Nigeria with very high birth rate as well as the cultural roles associated to women.

- The high level of insecurity in the country as well as the fear of intimidation, physical assault and innuendos about moral standing also may discourage many women from political participation.

- Many women even though are interested in politics may sacrifice their political ambition to avoid domestic problems.

- Male domination in politics, political parties and the culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Usually, these male dominated political parties maintain a masculine perspective on issues of national importance that disillusions women as their perspective is often ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties. Furthermore, women are usually not elected into prominent positions within party structures because of gender biases of male leadership.

- While the society disapproves keeping late nights for women, most political meetings usually run into late in the night. As a mother with children and husband at home, this may not be quite easy.

- Many women aspirants may be financially constrained in terms of lack of resources to cover the registration fees and to establish campaign structures. Many women may find it difficult raising several millions of naira to run for a gubernatorial election. (Ekpe, et al, 2014). The party may also not consider it cost effective nominating a woman for such position considering her meager contribution to party finance and formation (Nda, 2003).

- Traditional and cultural values require that women need their husbands' permission to attend meetings or be involved in any activity outside the home. Hence, most successful women in politics are those with supportive husbands, the unmarried, divorced, widowed and those through with the nurturing stage of child raising

- Politics of godfatherism may be difficult for women to play because it has to do with a servant-master relationship which may not be devoid of violence, especially in the area of controversies where a candidate fails to comply with earlier agreed negotiations and contracts. No women can stand the resultant consequence of not yielding to the godfathers' demands.

4. Efforts at Reducing Disparity

There has been several government and non-governmental initiatives aimed at reducing disparity in the country. For instance, Nigeria ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on 13 June 1985, although efforts to operationalize its thirty articles locally have waned. The country also adopted the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action and signed up to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and, crucially, the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol). However, local implementation of these has remained weak, although the essence of these important global and regional declarations was captured in the NGP, launched in 2007. The latter document is unequivocal in its assertion that "Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate all spheres of women's lives" (Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, 2006: 6).

Others include the Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education in Nigeria 2003 which led to the launch of the Girls' Education Project in 2004, National Commission for Mass Literacy and Non-formal Education 1991 which reduced illiteracy by encouraging children to attend school as well as established functional literacy centres for women; Family Support Basic Education Programme 1994 which encouraged families in rural areas to accept education for girl children as a way to enhance child health and youth development; National Policy on Women 2001 which enhanced access by locating facilities close to communities and also enhanced teacher recruitment; provided incentives for girls to study mathematics and science; National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004 – a poverty reduction strategy that enhanced the integration of women in national development by increasing their capacity to participate in the economy and in employment; Universal Basic Education Act 2004 which provided pre-primary education and also confirmed universal right to primary and early secondary education. By making education free (at least in intent) government showed a policy commitment to equality of opportunity and promoting better education on the girl child.

International initiatives have also moved the gender parity debate to the center of policy attention. For example, local policy papers mention Paragraph 4.2 of the Programme of Action that followed the watershed International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. This justified investment in education of women and girls in terms of their empowerment and full participation in the development process. Similarly, the third goal among the Millennium Development Goals focus on gender parity in school enrolment, with the hope of achieving this by 2015. After returning to democracy in 1999, Nigeria also signed up to the Dakar Framework of Action that seeks to realize six goals among which is to achieve education for all and also to achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015.

There is also the advocacy by the UN Gender Theme Group, Nigeria, for gender mainstreaming. A major aspect of the gender mainstreaming process according to this UN group is the increased involvement of women in decision-making processes (formal and informal) about social values, development directions and resource allocations. This goes beyond the participation of women in equal numbers as beneficiaries of initiatives to a form of participation that enable women, as well as men, to influence the entire agenda and basic priorities. (Schalkwyk et. al, 1996).

It also seeks to ensure that women benefit equitably with men from access to society's resources in terms of such things as recognition and respect, secure and rewarding employment, education, health, leisure and personal security.

Apart from these initiatives, government has also initiated allocation of quotas in order to promote gender balance. The Law (Nigerian) provides for a maximum of 60% and a minimum of 30% representation for either sex, which was implemented as a result of the Beijing Conference. The Conference agreed that 30% of public seat and positions should be reserved for women. Nigeria records an increase of 78% progress in women's election into public offices spanning from 1999 – 2007. According to Kira (2003), quotas do not discriminate but compensate women for actual barriers that prevent women from pursuing a political carrier. This technique has contributed in no small measure to improving female willingness to participate in Nigerian politics despite the prevailing political structure and societal norms, as a woman's experience is needed and necessary in political life and policy making in order to enhance human development.

5. Discussion

The plight of Nigerian women, like their counterparts in other parts of the world have been characterized by inadequate access to education, lack of adequate representation in all decision making spheres, inadequate access to financial and material resources, undue dominance by men, lopsided political appointments and general imbalances.

In Nigeria, governments over the years have made it a point to ensure that its female population have similar opportunities as the male population and to implement the NGP as well as other policies aimed at ensuring parity and gender balance in the country. To this end, appreciable efforts have been made to increase female representation in the socio-political and economic spheres of the country.

Development and figures in recent years have also shown positive progress towards achieving gender parity in Nigeria. According to Nigeria Human Development Report of 2008, the ratio of girls to every 100 boys in primary education moved from 76 in 1990 to 93.6 in 2007 and the ratio of girls to every 100 boys in secondary education was 75 in 1990 and moved to 97.6 in 2007.

Furthermore, the percentage share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector rose from 66.3 in 1990 to 79 in 2005 and the proportion of seats held by women in the National Assembly moved from 1% in 1990 to 9% in 2011. These progress can be credited to the various policies and initiatives aimed at achieving parity at all levels. But despite these efforts, inequality still exists.

The various initiatives have not been able to eradicate disparity in the country. Nigeria ranks among the countries with the highest rates of inequality in the world, despite a 6% average growth rate of the economy. This is largely owing to the unequal income distribution and differential access to basic infrastructure, education and job opportunities. Nigeria's position on the Gender Equality Index (GEI) is consequent on the fact that the women folks are most times sidelined and this is having an effect on the country's development. One may then be forced to look into other factors that may likely be responsible for the persistent imbalance.

The most prominent factor that may be difficult to ignore is the socio-cultural as well as religious values entrenched in most societies in Nigeria which limit girls and women's capabilities, and undermine concerted efforts aimed at helping women and girls realize their full potentials. The institutions of culture and religion which are also the custodians of deeply entrenched religious and traditional practices that reinforce gender biases and discrimination, constitutes major barriers to female empowerment in Nigeria.

Women's subordination has been seen as an undeniable norm and this majorly has been responsible for their subjective status in the society.

Nevertheless, without prejudice, gender disparity may not be a conscious or intentional act but that which is brought about by the basic responsibilities, obligations and expectations of womanhood. It is important to examine how women and men are positioned

differently in the society. These differences most times result in significant forms of discrimination and wide gaps in terms of political, economic and social participation, resulting in persistent gender inequality. It is always being said that 'what a man can do, a woman can do better', but the reverse of the saying that 'what a woman can do, a man can do better is almost unheard of. This is not because it may not be true but a man is seen as a superior figure to be followed by the woman. Furthermore, there are some roles naturally designated to the woman which may be difficult to change given the biological make up as well as the socio-cultural expectations from the womenfolk. For instance, the woman was created to bear children and perform other maternal roles which flow naturally from a mother because of their makeup. The woman's make up is such as to provide care and affection. In other words, an affective and relational disposition which in most cases is at variance with the makeup of the achievement focused and logical man. This explains why the woman's mind will always be on the welfare of her home even while at work. It is easy for a man to forget his obligation to pick the kids from school. But a woman would hardly forget this, maybe basically due to the maternal bond which has been established right from conception. This further buttresses the fact that there are differences in the amount of time parents spend thinking about the care of their children. Most fathers seem less involved in the invisible mental labour associated with care of the children. The makeup of a man is most times that of dominance, authority and logic while the woman is emotionally inclined, coupled with her duties as a wife as learnt through the process of socialization. It is in realization of these motherly roles and societal expectations in this regard that explains why a woman may not be deemed suited for a 12-hour leadership job involving various business meetings as well as official weekend engagements, leaving little or no room for other unofficial responsibilities. Hence, it may be difficult for a woman to fully assume the same role as the man would and stand the same promotional opportunities considering these obligations.

Because women differ from men both in terms of their biological capacities and socially constructed role, total equality would only be achieved with the alteration or erasure of these God given as well as imposed roles. Achieving this is a question that requires serious reasoning. Thus, the experience of equal treatment by both women and men will to a large extent depend on whether the choices as well as the fundamental freedom experienced by both are same.

Where the woman is unmarried or has grown up kids, the belief is that women are weaker vessels, having less physical and emotional strength and resilience compared to the men. Findings also has it that women tend to be less logical and more emotional than men which explains why many organizations may be very hesitant in hiring women for demanding jobs most especially in the face of the ever increasing and growing competition in today's world.

This explains why the disparity observed appears to be difficult to eradicate totally even though it has significantly reduced.

It is important to note that many women, no doubt have beat some male records in the global world, but the fact still remains that the position and role men have been created to assume cannot be replaced by the female gender. Even though women have the technical abilities and qualifications to compete favourably in masculine tagged jobs, of doubt will be the matching physical and emotional strength and stamina that goes with these types of jobs which has been differently and discretely assigned by divine creation. From the religious angle, using a man's rib to create the woman is an expression of a woman's power status subordination to the man.

Asides women's predetermined roles, scriptural injunctions further suggest that the woman was created to assist and compliment the man and as such pronouncing the man the head with the woman expected to be in submission to his authority. No wonder most societies especially in Africa project male dominance over women.

The 2002 national study of the changing workforce reported that employees especially women want jobs that give them flexibility in their work schedules so that they can better manage work-life conflicts. In fact, evidence indicates that balancing work and life demands now surpasses job security as an employee priority (Robbins et al 2009). In addition, Shellenbarger (1999, 2000) predicts that the next generation of employees is likely to show similar concerns. This may especially be true in a traditional society like Nigeria. This further buttresses the fact that disparity may persist given the biological role of women which is not likely to change.

The only way to cushion the effect is to advocate for greater female recognition and participation in all sectors of the country and also ensure that women are given an enabling atmosphere so that they can maximize their potentials with focus on fair play and equity.

More value should also be placed on the female gender. Their potential and achievements should not be downplayed but rather appreciated especially in view of the dual position they occupy as contributors to the economy and as mothers. The world as produced several successful female CEOs, engineers, doctors and so on. Also, evidence suggests that allocation is more effective and efficient, and ultimately produces superior human development outcomes, in countries where women are more broadly represented. It is argued that men and women allocate resources differently, and that women tend to favour a redistributive agenda, and to spend more on children's education, social services and health (Clots-Figueras (2011); Miller (2008); Bolzendahl and Brooks (2007); Alesina and La Ferrara (2005). Much of this work shows that an increase in the number of women elected into office at different levels changes the way resources are allocated in favour of areas that enhance human development. So the female potentials should not be undermined.

6. Recommendations

It is obvious that a combination of personal and shared issue combines to undermine the broader representation of women and most of these can be dealt with in order to increase women's willingness for public participation. For instance, instituting various legislations in favour of women such as banning night meetings, legislation against political violence, provision of adequate security for political aspirants and enforcing division of family roles will give women greater opportunity to prove their worth in the socio-economic and political affairs of the country. Greater support and encouragement from the men both in the home front and in other areas will also go a long way in fostering female participation. To this end, the initiative of the Lagos State Government in Nigeria should be commended for granting paternity leave to enable men complement the efforts of their wives, promoting the male fatherhood responsibilities and also helping to build the relational side of the men, a stride, which if sustained, will help reduce the persisting

gender gap in no small measure. Societal limitation of tradition should be minimized to allow for women to more projected. Job stereotyping should be discouraged as much as possible and female competence should be recognized, appreciated, properly utilized and rewarded rather than being downplayed. Wage parity should be ensured where women engage in male dominated professions and should in fact be better paid in recognition of their courage to take up male tagged jobs. Female employees should be offered their promotions while working part-time or on maternity leave and evaluating them based on talents rather than on their schedules. This would foster retaining experienced and loyal workforce. There should be no discrimination as to men been paid or promoted more because they do not observe flexible scheduling such as maternity leaves or antenatal visits. Public policies can also be used to further support women on issues relating to health, education and economic capacity. Equal educational opportunities for both genders should be promoted and enforced while decrying preference for male child education. National budgets should be redistributed in favour of women and political parties should encourage better participation of women in decision making at all levels.

Women should benefit equitably with men from access to society's resources in terms of such things as recognition and respect, secure and rewarding employment, education, health, leisure and personal security. Positive projection of women, their value in and to the society as well as their moral and intellectual strength will help correct the generally weak perception about women and make the obvious disparity less visible. They must be valued because they constitute a significant proportion of the country's productive force.

Setting inter and intra party quota systems as well as nominating female candidates to contest winnable seats at party levels will also help improve parity levels.

The Affirmative Action of 35% representation of women should be implemented fully even though its implementation cannot still achieve equality in a total sense.

Government should put in measures to address the factors identified as being responsible for disparity in the country.

7. Conclusion

From the preceding discussion and analysis, achieving total gender parity in Nigeria may be difficult. However, the country must make concerted efforts at establishing a gender-sensitive and gender-neutral society that is devoid of all vestiges of discrimination and inequity.

Achieving equality is not just a question of numbers but that of benefiting from equitable treatment and having same opportunities in terms of education, employment, wages and civic participation. This way the full potentials of all social groups shall be maximally harnessed. Hence, national strategies should aim at prioritizing efforts towards achieving this in order to experience sustainable development.

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