

Gender Studies and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Doi:10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n10p31

Abstract

This paper looks at Gender Studies and Sustainable Development in Nigeria. The paper conceptualizes three key issues and they are gender, gender inequality/stratification and sustainable development. The relationship between gender equality and sustainable development is part of the discussion in the paper. However, the paper also discusses about different forms of gender inequality that are challenges to achieving sustainable development in Nigeria and other parts of the world. These are educational, professional, household, ownership and natality inequalities etc. The paper also has conclusion and recommendations. Some of the recommendations include the provision of equal educational opportunities for men and women by the government, mobilization programmes on the importance of gender balances, women empowerment, campaign against child labour and the roles of traditional and religious leaders in promoting gender equality in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Gender, gender inequality, stratification, sustainable development, change.*

1. Introduction

Gender studies is one of the interesting areas of research in many parts of the world including Nigeria. It is a multi-disciplinary field that is concerned with the socio-cultural construction of roles of male and female in the society and how such construction brings about changes in the socio-economic and political conditions of each sex. Gender studies attempts to explain the differences between men and women and implications of such differences in the societies. However, there is one critical point we shall understand about gender studies. It explains how inequality is produced and reproduced in human societies and also how gender becomes a discriminating tool in the distribution of labour, care, property, income, education and political process in general.

Nigeria is one of the developing countries of the world and the country is vast. It is blessed with abundant human, agricultural, solid mineral, atmospheric and water resources. But the country is facing many social, political, economic and religious challenges that are threats to achieving sustainable development. One of the challenges confronting the country is 'gender disparity' or 'gender inequality'. Although the Federal Government is trying in taking some measures to correct gender balances in Nigeria through the efforts of UNESCO, UNICEF and some other national programmes such as Woman Development Initiative but gender inequality is a well known feature of Nigerian socio-economic and political landscape.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

2.1 Gender

The term gender has to do with socially constructed aspects of differences between men and women (John and Gordon, 2005:240). Gender can also be defined as the distinction created by societies between human beings on the basis of masculinity and femininity in relation to their

expected roles in the society (Akinmade, 2000:148).

Gender also refers to the arrays of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values and relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis (USAID, 2007). Bem (2010), talked about gender and for him, gender is how a person's biology is culturally valued and interpreted into locally accepted ideas of what is to be a man or woman.

From the foregoing, it can be understood that gender is all about the disparities or differences between men and women in the society. However, the socio-cultural factors of the society also play important roles in showing the differences.

2.2 Gender Inequality/Stratification

This is one of the key concepts associated with gender studies. Gender inequality is a situation where there is structural discrimination, differential or unequal treatment on the basis of sex which is often rationalized by culture, institutional and administrative rules. When such kind of situation happens, access to resources, incomes and opportunities of particular sex may not be possible. On the other hand, stratification is the ranking of male and female, in terms of power, prestige, status or roles in the society. For example, in a typical African society and Nigeria in particular, men are entitled to make household decisions and the women have to conform to what they do.

2.3 Sustainable Development

The Bruntland Commission (1987), defined sustainable development as "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.

In another definition by Munasinghe, (2004), sustainable development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental system.

Age (2005:85); defined some objectives which sustainable development is expected to realize: increased capital incomes, employment, promoting human welfare, satisfying basic needs and protecting the environment.

For the concept of sustainable development, we shall consider that the path of future generation, achieving equity between the rich and poor and participation on a broad basis in development and decision making is very important in any society or nation.

3. Gender Equality and Sustainable Development: The Relationship

It can be said that there is a relationship between gender equality and sustainable development. The two concepts are interwoven, intertwined and interconnected. They are also important.

While on the other hand, development is geared towards producing or creating something new or more advanced for the society and its members. On the other hand, gender equality allows healthy rivalry and competition between men and women and also by so doing, it gives them the opportunities for achieving a sustainable development. According to Umoh (2005), gender equality and sustainable development are two sides of the same coin.

Gender equality helps in reducing marginalization and encourages the empowerment of women (Momadu and Bello 2001: 204). It is also through that sustainable development can be achieved in our societies.

Therefore, the sustainable development can be seen as the target goal since it is meant for the society and its members; gender equality remains the instrument for achieving and attaining the goal.

From the foregoing, it can be said that gender equality and sustainable development have a very strong relationship. Gender equality seems to directly determine whether the sustainable development can be achieved or not and therefore, there is the need for a good leadership in our societies that can enhance and promote gender balances for a sustainable national development.

4. Forms of Gender Inequality

There are many different forms of gender inequality in Nigeria and other parts of the world and they are also challenges to achieving a sustainable development.

Sen (2003), observes that there are over 100 million missing women in the world. They are missing because of bias in relative care. Besides, there are other studies conducted by (Coale 1984 and Das Gupta 1987) and the studies discussed about the prevalence of missing women. This has to do with embryos and foetuses that are aborted, femicide victims and those who lost their lives due to gender based violence. Sen (2001a, 2001b), identifies different forms of gender inequality. These forms of inequality are to be discussed in relation to contemporary situations in Nigeria and other parts of the world.

- i. **Educational inequality:** Education has to do with a process of teaching, training and learning especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and skills. Education is also a tool for any meaningful development in societies. Inequality is common in the education sector. This is a wide disparity in school enrolment for boys and girls especially in Africa and Asia. Women that are denied education are usually married out at tender age as low as 10 years old. They are often denied vocational skills and hence they are not productive. Due to over dependence on male partners, women are vulnerable to all forms of abuse. There is growing interest in female education in Nigeria but the gap in school enrolment is still wide. The United Nations (2007), observes that girls and children from poorer or rural families are least likely to attend school.
- ii. **Professional Inequality:** This is an inequality between men and women in terms of employment and promotion in work and occupation. It is very common in Nigeria and other parts of the world. According to United Nations (2007), over 60 percent of unpaid family workers are women worldwide. This simply means that women will continue to lack access to job security and protection. In northern Africa, for example, women's participation in paid employment is very low and there has not been significant progress. Even in Nigeria, the women are most of the times denied leadership roles and this is because of some socio-cultural beliefs.
- iii. **Household Inequality:** This is another form of inequality that is a challenge to achieving a sustainable development. Household has to do with all the people living together in a house. In Nigeria and other part of the world, there is a household inequality. This is because the women are usually made to be in the subordinate position in terms of decision making and allocation of household resources.
- iv. **Ownership Inequality:** Ownership has to do with the fact of owning something like a property such as a land etc. In Nigeria and other part of the world, the ownership of land is often unequal. This is because in extreme cases, women are not allowed to own or sell a property.
- v. **Natality Inequality:** Natalty simply means birth and natalty inequality refers to inequality at birth that happens when the preference to make children is given to female ones.

Sen mentions that there are over 100 million missing women in the world. Most of those women lost their lives as a result of gender inequality. Two other different computations suggest that missing girls at birth and excess female mortality after birth add up to more than 6 million women a year. Of these 23 percent in the reproductive years (15-49 years) and 38 percent in the age 60 and older group...while excess male mortality accounts for 1 million a year (World Bank 2011-120). There are some countries of the world such as China, India and Sub-Saharan Africa

that account for 87% percent of the world's missing girls and excess female mortality among women of reproductive age in sub-saharan Africa especially due to high prevalence of HIV among them. Due to gender inequality, women are 3 times likely to be infected with HIV than men (Amzat 2010) and for that reason, more women die from HIV than men.

Going by the analysis above, it can be said that there is high value on male births than the females in our societies.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to discuss about Gender Studies and Sustainable Development in Nigeria. It discussed about important issues on gender studies in Nigeria and other parts of the world. Some of the issues are the conceptualization of gender, gender inequality, stratification, sustainable as well as the relationship between gender equality and sustainable development. Different forms of gender inequalities that are challenges to achieving a sustainable development in Nigeria and other parts of the world have also been discussed in the paper.

Based on that, it can be noted that gender studies and sustainable development are important. As such, there is the need for the promotion of gender balances by the government and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria so that a good sustainable development can be achieved.

6. Recommendations

The paper has some recommendations that can also be considered important and they are as follows:

- There is the need for the governments in Nigeria at the Federal, State and Local Government level to give equal educational opportunities for men and women. This is because education is a tool that can bring about positive changes and with that, a sustainable development can be achieved.
- A mobilization programme on the importance of gender education is needed in our societies and the programme can also be organized through the mass media. With that, majority of the people that live particularly in the rural areas of Nigeria can be enlightened on the value of men and women and how they can contribute to national development.
- The empowerment of women is very important in Nigeria. They should be adequately equipped with vocational skills that can help them to be productive and also contribute to national development. The women development initiative is a programme that is introduced by the government of Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the President of Nigeria and it can be a good example.
- The fight against child labour and other related issues can bring about developmental changes in Nigeria. As such, there is the need for the government to give all the necessary support to organizations such as National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and other Related Matters (NAPTIP). This is because it is an agency that fights against child labour and all other forms of men and women trafficking.
- However, there is also the need for the support of traditional and religious leaders in Nigeria. They should all give their co-operation in making gender equality a priority so that a sustainable development can be achieved in the country.

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