

Gender Equality, Governance and Women Empowerment Agenda in a Democratizing Society: Issues, Prospects, and Challenges

Olabisi I. Aina & Kehinde Olayode

Department of Sociology/Anthropology &

Department of International Relations

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

DOI: 10.36108/NJSA/1102/90(0150)

Vol. 9 Issue 1, 2011

Abstract

With the current global urge and mandates for gender equality, the African continent is re-awakening interest on gender issues and gender mainstreaming in public policy and planning. This paper addresses issues and prospects in embracing Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) principles in a democratizing state such as Nigeria. Basic questions raised include – what are the ideals of GEWE? What relevance does the GEWE Agenda have for a democratising state? What different legislations, policies, and programmes are strategic to this process? What roles have been played by Civil Society Organizations in instituting a GEWE agenda in a nation state such as Nigeria? What are the gains of the gender equality agenda for the country's overall development? What problems still face the process of achieving gender equality and gender justice in Nigeria? These discussions espouse the importance of the GEWE Agenda and the need to engender social development and political transformations in the emerging democratic Nigeria.

Keywords: gender equality, women empowerment, poverty, governance

Overview of the Concept of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

Gender inequality as a concept has engaged the attention of scholars, development practitioners, policy makers, and civil society organisations for over three decades now. This is because the continued existence of disparities between women and men in access and control over resources, and the overt discrimination against women throughout history, are now seen as a clog in the wheel of national and international development agenda. Importantly, the achievement of gender equality is bound up with all other goals of sustainable development, such as good governance, human rights, environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, and inclusiveness in development planning and practice.

The roles of men and women in societies are not only treated differently, but are often given unequal weight and value. The age long restrictions placed on women's life choices and opportunities hinder not only their growth, but the development of nations. No wonder, countries with wide gender gaps are found to exhibit poor indicators of growth and wellbeing – poor nutrition, high maternal mortality rate; high infant mortality rate; high poverty rate; low life

expectancy; low level of education; high HIV/AIDS sero-prevalence rate; and are mostly agrarian society (low industrial growth) among others.

As the 'gender variable' enters the development equation, attention is now drawn on a better understanding of gender relations, particularly the unequal power distribution between women and men across societies. Gender equality does not ignore the biological differences between men and women (especially in reproductive roles, rather it helps to appreciate the uniqueness of each gender group and the importance of bringing the different needs and priorities of both women and men into development agenda, thereby helping to focus on gender differences in social arrangements, gender equity, and social justice – which are at the heart of sustainable development. According to a UNPD Report (2004), '*development that is not engendered is endangered*'. Therefore engendering national development is to ensure that both men and women are free to develop their full potentials, and are able to make choices without restrictive gender roles. It thus follows that women's and men's needs and interests are to be equally valued and protected if any nation is to achieve sustainable development.

The initial efforts made at integrating the woman's question into the development process tend to focus exclusively on women. This attempt gave rise to the evolution of the Women in Development (WID) approach of the 1970s (i.e. the women empowerment paradigm). Aside from the feminist movement of the 1960s in Europe and America, the first international policy push for women in development agenda came from the United Nations, by its International Year of Women (1975) and the International Women's Decade (1976–85), which led to the establishment of Women's Ministries in many of its member countries, and the adoption of WID policies by donor agencies, governments, and NGOs.

Though WID opened up some spaces for the women's agenda, it failed to bring women's issues into the centre-page of the development discourse. As it becomes obvious that women and men have to be involved in setting development goals and agenda, the inadequacy of the WID/WAD approach led to a paradigm shift (i.e. the evolution of the Gender and Development approach - GAD). GAD addresses both the needs and priorities of women and men, while analyzing the outcomes of development based on such factors as gender, age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, and class. No longer are women (or men) treated as homogenous group, while the underlying structural inequalities in societies are treated as important variables shaping and reshaping women and men experiences in societies.

It follows therefore that "gender issues" are not the same as "women's issues". Rather, understanding 'gender' means understanding opportunities, constraints and the impact of change as they affect both women and men. Put simply, traditional gender stereotypes (often detrimental to women) could only be amenable to positive change by creating a partnership between women and men, and building mutual trust across gender groups.

A key strategy in promoting gender equality has been the adoption of 'gender mainstreaming' tools which ensure that women's and men's concerns and priorities are incorporated into development policies, strategies, and interventions at all levels, and at all stages – policy formulation and programme/project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, etc.

Despite the paradigm shift (i.e. between WID/WAD and GAD approaches), Gender Equity and Women Empowerment (GEWE) principles continue to guide national development agenda. While 'gender equality' is an end in itself, 'women empowerment' agenda remains an entry point in this process. Within the development praxis, gender equality remains a means to an end, that is, sustainable human development. With the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals a more vigorous global and national attentions are now drawn on gender sensitive policies. The Goal 3 of the MDGs, which aimed at achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, is not only of intrinsic value in itself, but also central to the attainment of all the other MDGs.

GEWE and the African Policy Environment

African governments have responded unequivocally to the burden of underdevelopment as they institute continent-specific development goals and strategies, and with firm commitment to gender equality being recognised as bait to development. As expressed in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), adopted in 1981 and which became operational on October 21, 1986, member states established bodies to protect and promote human and people's rights. The most important obligation for each country is to adopt legislative or other measures to protect the dignity of Africa and its peoples. Although ACHPR document did not specifically cater for gender equality in member states, the Charter nonetheless, provided the basis for other bodies to consider the issue of women's rights and gender mainstreaming. A good example of this is the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance which has a section on the rights of women and children in member states. Also, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) adopted in July, 2001 was designed to address the current challenges facing the African continent, particularly issues such as escalating poverty levels, underdevelopment and the continued marginalisation of Africa in the globalization processes, which were of serious concern to African leaders. Importantly, NEPAD has as one of its strategic objectives, acceleration of women empowerment as it anchors the development of African on its resources and resourcefulness of its people, and ensuring that all partnerships with NEPAD are linked to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development targets.

The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa is a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights (ACHPR). The Protocol was adopted on

July, 2003 in Maputo and reaffirmed African's commitment to the protection of women's rights as enshrined in major international instruments of human rights. The protocol endorses affirmative action to promote the equal participation of women, including equal representation of women in elected office, and calls for the equal representation of women in the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. As of 1st July, 2004, thirty countries, including Nigeria have signed the Protocol.

Being signatory to almost all the international treaties, covenants, and conventions on gender equality and women empowerment, countries in the African region are also bound by these agreements. Like countries elsewhere, they have responded with specific policies, and strategies including affirmative actions and quota systems. A few African countries are now emerging with some level of best practices.

GEWE Policies and Strategies

Women empowerment approach gained momentum after the Beijing Conference (1995). The Beijing Declaration (Section 13) presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for development. The Declaration holds that 'women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. Under the WID approach, women empowerment was strictly based on economic model and principles, which present women as 'the problem' thereby necessitating only 'women-focused' plans and projects, a GAD approach uses a multi-dimensional approach to 'women empowerment', whereby women's empowerment goes beyond changing women's socio-economic conditions, to changing the system which continues to reproduce gender inequality in societies. Thus, according to Hannan (2003), empowerment should lead to concrete action that would bring about changes in laws, in access to resources and in public and private institutions that reinforce women's subordination. Proponents of the agency approach to empowerment (e.g. Larrea, 2005) argued that focusing only on transforming underlying power structures, such as the promotion of democracy or equity in political participation is meaningless, unless people are in the condition of health and well being to take advantage of such opportunities. Hence, Luttrell *et al.* (2007) critically assessed debates on empowerment process, and warned that care should be taken not to overemphasize the separation between 'structure' and 'agency', rather that attention be paid to a combination and a sequencing of both forms of approach in the empowerment process.

In most African countries, women empowerment strategies have mainly been in the area of welfare programs e.g. micro-credits (under the poverty alleviation programs), skill acquisition centers for women, and more attention on maternal health amongst others. Very little has been done in the area of sharing the public space with women as regards participation in decision

making and women occupying leadership positions both in government and in the corporate world.

Although current figures present reduction in gender gaps between men and women in such areas as economic participation and empowerment, health and survival, and educational attainment, the gaps remained obviously large in the area of political empowerment. It is not surprising that the little progress made in other spheres has not translated to obvious gender equality and women empowerment in reality, as men continue to hold the reins of power, and thereby control the continent’s economic resources.

The Beijing Platform for Action set the goal of 30% as a “critical minimum” for women in national decision-making positions (ultimate objective being 50%). Table 1 presents data on women’s participation in national Parliaments across regions. The African Region continues to rank below other regions (except the Pacific and Arab States), while the Nordic countries recorded highest women participation.

Table 1: Participation in national parliaments across regions (as at 31st May, 2009)

Region	Single House	Upper House	Both houses
World Average	18.6	17.5	18.4
Nordic Countries	41.4	-	-
Americas	21.5	20.4	21.3
Europe – OSCE (including Nordic Countries)	21.2	19.4	20.9
Europe – OSCE (minus Nordic)	19.3	19.4	19.3
Asia	18.4	16.5	18.2
SS Africa	18.2	21.0	18.5
Pacific	13.0	32.6	15.2
Arab States	9.7	7.0	9.1

Source: International Parliamentary Union, 2009

African country-level data (Table 2) shows that Rwanda and South Africa present remarkable progress, with over half of Rwanda Parliament being women. According to Odeke (2009), women in Rwanda, after the genocide, played an active role in reconstruction of Rwanda, and have taken up many jobs that were formerly the preserve of men, such as in the construction sector and motor mechanics. Increased participation of women in politics in most of these African countries is being achieved through constitution reviews, national gender policies, and such strategies as affirmative actions and quota systems. Although some of these strategies (especially affirmative action) have been criticized as ‘ghettoizing’ women’s political participation, it remained a very viable option in countries where politics bears a masculine face. Table 3 show information on African countries with quotas mandates by constitution or legislation. According to Okojie (2009), as at 2006, six African

countries had constitutional quotas, 19 countries had voluntary quotas, while three had reserved seats system.

Table 2: Representation in Parliament and ministerial positions (2009)

Country	Single House %	Upper House %	Year of Election	Ministerial Positions	No of Ministers
Rwanda	56.3	34.6	2008	16.7	18
South Africa	43.5	29.6	2009	44.8	29
Angola	37.3	-	2008	6.3	32
Senegal	22.0	40.0	2007	17.9	28
Cape Verde	18.1	-	2006	35.7	14
Burkina Faso	15.3	-	2007	14.3	35
Cameroon	13.9	-	2007	11.6	43
Sierra Leone	13.2	-	2007	14.3	21
Liberia	12.5	16.7	2005	20.0	20
Niger	12.4	-	2004	25.8	31
Togo	11.1	-	2007	9.5	21
Benin	10.8	-	2003	22.2	27
Mali	10.2	-	2007	23.1	26
Equatorial Guinea	10.0	-	2008	14.0	50
Guinea Bisau	10.0	-	2008	25.0	20
Gambia	9.4	-	2002	27.8	18
Cote D'Ivoire	8.9	-	2000	9.5	16
Ghana	7.9	-	2004	15.9	44
Nigeria	7.0	8.3	2007	22.7	22
Chad	5.2	-	2002	17.2	29

Source: International Parliamentary Union, 2009

Quotas, according to Okojie (2009), have proved to be an effective instrument for promoting gender equality in political representation when implemented with care. With quota provisions, Rwanda has become the country with the highest female representation in parliament in the world. Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005) and Grown (2006) argued that the extent to which the quota system translates to actual decision-making power for women is questionable, hence, in most cases quota provisions may be merely symbolic.

Table 3: Countries with quotas mandated by constitution or legislation

Country	Type of Quota	% of Women Mandated by Quota	Year Introduced
Djibouti	Reserved Seats	10.0	2002
Eritrea	Reserved Seats	30.0	1995
Kenya	Executive Nomination	3.0	1997
Morocco	Women only+	10.0	2002
Niger+	10% Elective 25% Nominated	35.0	2000
Rwanda	Reserved Seats	30.0	2003
Somalia	Women's List+	10.0	2000
Sudan	Reserved Seats	9.7	2000
Tanzania	Special Seats++	20.0	2000
Uganda	Reserved Seats	17.0	1989

Source: IDEA, 2004. Key: + Only women can vie for these seats; ++ Special seats for women allocated to political parties

Gender at the Intersection of Nigerian Development Agenda

With only seven years to the end of the Millennium Development Goals target date of 2015, Nigeria, like many other African States, continues to face development crises including high level of poverty, corruption, bad governance, poor health indicators, environmental degradations, eroding educational systems, economic crises and worst still, violent conflicts. Central to the African development debate is the gender conditions in the continent, and in particular the status of the African women. It is now popularly agreed that the achievement of all the other MDG Goals is hinged on the achievement of MDG Goal 3 – “to promote gender equality and empower women” have signed the Protocol.

Using a gender perspective, this section looks at the various development challenges in Nigeria, including poverty, corruption, bad governance, globalization, and impacts of social reforms on the social sectors amongst others.

Poverty

Poverty is not only described as having a woman’s face (see UNIFEM, 2000; World Bank, 2001; UN-DAW, 1993), the underlying determinants of poverty are traced to the subtle but enduring nature of gender inequalities both at the level of policy and practice. Feminization of poverty is heightened in both public and private engagements in Africa, through non-gender responsive methods of resource allocations, inequity in human resource development, low participation of women in decision making, and more importantly, in politics and governance; environmental insecurity; and non-gender responsive policy environment.

The feminization of poverty and the specific impact of poverty on women is the result of inequalities embedded in norms, traditions and practices that hinder women’s access to critical resources such as land and credit. These curtail their inheritance rights and constrain their political participation. The causes and outcomes of poverty are highly differentiated between women and men, particularly because of persistent unequal access to, and control over, productive resources and decision-making processes. Yet, traditional conceptualizations of poverty consistently neglect to take this into account, resulting in policies and programmes, which fail to improve the lives of poor women and men and their families. A focus on gender equality is essential for adequate analysis of the causes and impacts of poverty and the identification of effective strategies to eradicate poverty. Central to such a focus is attention to gender perspectives, including the equitable participation of women (Aina, 2008).

Widespread poverty remains a major challenge to development efforts in Nigeria. Some of the challenges of poverty are – unemployment, malnutrition, illiteracy, low status of women, environmental degradation, and limited access to social and health services, including reproductive health services. The outcome of these poverty generated conditions includes high levels of fertility, morbidity and mortality, and low economic productivity. Sustained economic growth and development are essential to poverty eradication, and more importantly, women empowerment is now seen as an entry point to gender equality in society.

Gender inequality generally plays a significant role in accounting for Africa's poor growth and poverty reduction performance. Majority of the poor are women who live in rural areas and are active in trade and the informal economy, but continue to be hampered by lack of rights, resources and economic opportunities. The gender gap in Nigeria, like many other African countries, is more complex due to the cultural and traditional context which is anchored in beliefs, norms and practices which breed discrimination and feminized poverty. Although women's participation in the market economy has increased, especially in the informal sector, however at the same time, women's domestic workloads have not declined. Women continue to be primarily responsible for such activities as the care of children and the elderly members of the household, cooking and cleaning, fetching water and firewood and managing the household in general. Thus, the existence of gender related barriers can thwart the economic potential of women and such barriers have an adverse impact on enterprise development, productivity, and competitiveness within the Nigerian state.

Nigeria, which has the largest economy in the African region, despite its rich endowment with natural and human resources, is ranked among the poorest countries in the world. Empirical data show that 70% of Nigerians live below the poverty level, many of who live on less than 1 US dollar per day. Also, over 47% of the labour force is unemployed (Aina, 2008). Women are worse hit as the nation faces deepening economic crisis, mainly because they lack access to critical resources – education, capital, labour, entrepreneurial skills and more importantly, lack of control over the use of their valuable time. Hence, the percentage of women remains predominantly high among the core poor, while poverty seems to wear a woman's face.

The Human Development Index (2006) puts Nigeria among the twenty countries with the lowest human development index, being ranked 154 in a table of 179 countries (UNDP, 2006). The Human Poverty Index (HPI-I) value of 37% for Nigeria, ranks the country as the 111th among 135 developing countries for which the index has been calculated. In the economic sector (both the formal and informal sectors), women fare worse than men. More so, as a result of their exclusion from access to education and wealth-creating assets, women lack capital to engage in large-scale economic ventures. Limited skills and information prevent their full integration into the labour market, and a

vicious cycle of female poverty is thus prevalent in practically all sectors of the Nigeria economy.

As from the mid-1980s, Nigeria adopted and implemented neo-liberal policies that are supply-driven, technologically efficient and profit-oriented, seeking to achieve the full use of the country's resources for social and economic progress through existing institutions and systems. This was based on the assumption that comprehensive planning systems of the previous decades is falling out of use because it is assumed that market forces increasingly dictate the pace of growth and development in the private sector. This has resulted in minimally regulated economic and social institutions and marginal state intervention in the market, with little benefit for those (usually women) who operate outside of the formal markets. On the whole, the neo-liberal policy framework tends to have a negative impact on social development and gender relations, with increasing gender inequalities, joblessness for women and the 'feminisation of poverty' (UNIFEM, 2005).

Incorporating gender perspectives into discussion of poverty reduction not only facilitates an improvement of women's situation and increased gender equality, but contributes to positive outcomes in achieving the goal of good governance. Gender responsive governance is crucial for achieving the goals of poverty reduction programmes and policies. There is evidence that countries with weak or undemocratic governance structures and processes are more likely to do poorly on both poverty reduction and gender. Empowerment, equality and equity are principal concepts in poverty reduction. The significant differences in voice, opportunity and outcome between different groups in society, including between women and men, is a critical factor to address in poverty-reduction strategies. It is a matter of concern that much of the focus on governance continues to be solely in terms of political aspects, overlooking the importance of social and economic empowerment and equality between women and men for sustainable development (Ashworth, 1994a).

Human rights, entitlements, networking, voice, social capital, as well as economic participation and resources, are essential for liberating poor women and men to be able to both meet basic needs and develop the capabilities and opportunities for more active political participation and influence at all levels. A gender-sensitive political economy should be a development goal geared at improving the socio-economic living conditions of both women and men. Transformation of economic gender relations is necessary to facilitate women's attainment of the right to own and manage financial resources, which in turn will allow them to expand their participation in other areas.

Good Governance

Good governance has been defined as the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs, and the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens'

groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Accountability, transparency, participation and legitimacy are the core elements of good governance. Gender responsiveness is essential to all of these, and is a measure of good governance. Analysis and action on gender issues, the participation of women as well as men in governance processes at all levels, and the recognition by institutions of women's rights and needs, are central to good governance as to poverty reduction.

The relationship between good governance, poverty reduction and gender equality at the grassroots level is the key to sustainable development, based on equality and equity and the effective participation of all stakeholders at all levels of society. A major concern in many African countries is the continued exclusion of women at all levels, including grassroots levels, from important political and economic negotiations, and/or women's purely token representation without possibility for meaningful contribution in governance both at the grassroots and at national level. Women's as well as men's voices must be heard in all areas of development, including in analyses of poverty and development of strategies and programmes for sustainable development. What has emerged very clearly from research in Africa is that women at the grassroots level have an important contribution to make to the development of participatory forms of democracy. There is potential for greater attention to gender perspectives in the move towards democracy at the local level. Facilitating women's participation can move institutions towards more inclusive forms of democracy (Ashworth, 1994b).

Women's limited access to resources, public debate and political decision-making is still insufficiently considered in mainstream governance literature. Only ten to twelve per cent of parliamentarians world-wide are women. A major area of concern regarding gender equality and governance is thus the issue of participation of women. However the issue of gender equality in relation to governance goes far beyond women's representation. Equally important is the lack of attention to relevant gender perspectives in both process and substance. Governance policies are developed by institutions whose rules, norms and practices often effectively restrict women's right to meaningful participation and potential to make real choices. Gender perspectives are important in governance in particular because the discourse, procedures, structures and functions of governance remain heavily skewed. This raises important questions about transparency, inclusion, legitimacy and accountability – all of which lie at the heart of the governance debate.

Bad governance can only be addressed if gender biases are addressed and eliminated. Gender-responsive governance presents equality among women and men (access to resources, participation in decision making, sharing of benefits); respect for human rights; empowerment of women; and a transformative agenda. Its attainment through the preparation of a Gender and Development (GAD) plan and budget can be a potent advocacy tool and has its

implications for social equity. The GAD Plan and Budget, translate political commitments and goals into reality, and reflect the government's social and economic priorities at various levels.

Governance must be gender-sensitive if it is to be equitable, sustainable and effective. Participation and civic engagement are critical determinants of good governance, a concept which addresses issues of social equity and political legitimacy and not merely the efficient management of infrastructure and services. The different ways in which women and men participate in and benefit from governance are significantly shaped by prevailing constructions of gender, whose norms, expectations and institutional expressions may constrain women's access to the social and economic, and thus political resources. Most societies ascribe roles and responsibilities to women and men differentially but fail to value, or even account for, the crucial contributions women's labor makes to household and community maintenance. Ironically, such social reproduction allows little time (or, in some cases, permission) for women to participate in civic life in ways which help them to determine their own lives (Boserup, 1977).

Like many other African nations, the history of women's struggles in Nigeria is replete with deceit and political insincerity of the ruling elites. The extreme marginalization of women by the Nigerian state in national politics was a common event under successive military and the civilian regimes. The various military regimes did not produce any woman in the Armed Forces Ruling Council, or at ministerial level, although some handpicked women were appointed as commissioners. According to Pereira (2000), the proliferation of state structures for women, especially during the Babangida regime, and the women-focused programmes such as the Better Life for Rural Women Programme was rooted partly, "*in an attempt to increase the legitimacy of the regime, both internationally and with regard to the populist agenda at home*", rather than an explicit commitment to improving women's status (WRAPA, 2008: 45).

With the collapse of the Second Republic and eventual return of the military to national politics, the rights of women increasingly became trampled upon. This was largely due to military draconian rule and Nigeria's economic crisis, orchestrated by the agents of the Structural Adjustments Programme (Pereira, 2000: 121). In the process of putting in place structures for a "Third Republic", the Banbangida administration inaugurated a Political Bureau of which two women were included, one of whom was Mrs. Hilda Adefarasin, the President of National Council of Women's Societies. The inclusion of Mrs Adefarasin in the Political Bureau did not change the status quo for women in Nigerian politics. The Babangida's administration wanted to use women to attract grassroots support and not necessarily to emancipate women from inequities and social injustice (WRAPA, 2008: 40).

The attainment of democratic rule on May 29th 1999, after twenty-nine years of military rule was a reassurance that the Nigerian state might still overcome its impeding crises of underdevelopment reminiscent in politics, economy, international relations, religion, law, family system and intergenerational culture. But a few years later, it became clear that many politicians in Nigeria were yet to learn their lessons from the atrocities committed during the First and Second Republics, and their attendant impacts on the slow pace of development in the Nigerian political sphere.

The opening up of democratic governance in Nigeria created platforms for agitations for political freedom, increasing representation, and eradication of all forms of gender discrimination in our body polity. President Olusegun Obasanjo on assumption of office expressed his commitments to women, children and youths; hence his overt commitment to the Beijing Declaration which proposed 30% government seats at all levels for women. His proclamation was followed by the National Policy on Women Affirmative Action in 2000 which stipulates that women should be given 30% positions in Executive and Legislative arms of government. It is unfortunate that this proclamation was never fulfilled both by government, and political parties in Nigeria. The Obasanjo regime, however, witnessed a number of women handpicked for government senior jobs, most of whom history has recorded brilliant performance (WRAPA, 2008: 45-47).

However, the Nigerian political terrain has become almost an impossible area for women to trend, exemplified in highly corrupt and monetized electoral process right through party formation, membership, participation, party primaries, campaigns, and election results. Electioneering has been exemplified with thuggery, and violence, while election victory is synonymous with 'cash and carry'. Thus, election process and procedures are shrouded in secrecy. Women who are in minority are usually disadvantaged not just because of number, but much more because of lack of funds, and inability to meet up with the level of thuggery and violence employed by men.

While women's membership in parties has greatly improved from the First Republic (1960-65), their positioning within the party hierarchy and influence over party decisions are minimal. This became very evident during the 2003 general elections, when in spite of the unprecedented number of female aspirants and the heightened local mobilization amongst the generality of women, only a handful of women were nominated. The reason for this is not farfetched. Nigerian political parties are traditionally and intrinsically male-dominated. Most parties paid lip service to gender issues.

Corruption

In recent years, there have been attempts to establish a relationship between high levels of women in politics and less corruption resulting from their presence and influence. The argument is that women may be more relationship-oriented, may have higher standard of ethical behaviour and may

be more concerned with the common good than men are. It is also believed gender differences might be attributed to socialization, or to differences in access to networks of corruption, or in knowledge of how to engage in corrupt practices, or to other factors. In summary, analysis of country-level data indicated that higher levels of women's participation in public life are associated with lower levels of corruption (Agbalajobi, 2008).

However, other authors have criticized the gender-responsive arguments as antidote against corruption. One of such is Goetz (2003) who questioned the notion that women in governance will result in lower levels of corruption. According to Goetz, these studies failed to acknowledge the extent to which gender relationship may limit the opportunities for corruption, particularly when corruption functions through all-male networks and in fora from which women are socially excluded. Goetz believes that as workplace becomes more feminized and women take the top leadership jobs, it cannot be assumed that women will choose less corrupt behaviour. The two arguments shall be explored using the Nigerian experience of women participation in politics and corruption as case study.

Corruption which drains public resources and takes much needed funds away from national economic development or social services, disproportionately affects women and the poor who are most dependent on them. Women may also be in less powerful positions to challenge corruption when it occurs. Alternatively they may face gendered forms of corruption such as the demand for sex in return for particular services or resources.

Campaigns by women's movements on the right to information have provided valuable mechanisms for the collective empowerment of poor women in claiming accountability from institutions. There are significant ways in which the effects of corruption are particularly harsh on women. Considering the position of women in society, whereby women often face social, cultural, political and institutional discrimination, they are more likely to face even more repression in a corruption-ridden society. In other words if access to such institutions is restricted by gender considerations, corruption compounds this by making it even more difficult for women to access public goods, including services. Corrupt government is usually unable to give attention to the development of the social sectors – education, health, and infrastructures, with women bear the burden of such social dislocations and policy impropriety.

Globalization

Nigeria, like many other African countries, continues to play the role of an unequal partner in the areas of trades, industrialization, technology development, learning and applications. Globalization reinforced the north-south divide with attendant implications for socio-economic development on the developing economies including Nigeria. Generally, the developing nations

are not only disadvantaged against the developed nations, the individuals and groups within them are further disadvantaged.

Women, who traditionally face socio-cultural discriminations within traditional modes of production in Africa, tend to face the double burden of the emerging capitalist production systems which present men with more opportunities (since men traditionally control critical resources - land, labour, capital, and entrepreneurial skills). Thus, women bear the brunt of the new production systems. Huge gender disparities are therefore found in the labor market processes (both commercial agriculture and non-agricultural employment); new technologies including ICT; and the global markets. This has undermined the total potential of African nations to be competitive in global markets, especially given the critical roles of women in both reproductive and productive roles.

Because women lack requisite educational qualifications, they tend to be found in low skilled works, while men are generally found in high paying jobs, in the banks, industries, and the corporate world. Tzannatos (2008) found that job segregation in the labor market (irrespective of country income level) appears rather resilient, with very little changes witnessed since the 1980s. As the world, including Africa, faces economic down-turns, industries are forced into restructuring and downsizing, which meant the appropriation of the principle of 'last hired, first fired', meaning that women, who are late comers into the corporate world, are likely to lose their jobs before their male counterparts. The informal sector, with its attendant poor working conditions and low remuneration tend to have a feminine profile. Both within global and internal market systems, African women continue to face brick walls.

Depletion of Natural Environment

Women in Nigeria, like their counterparts in other African states, generally have very poor access to natural resources, including land, water bodies, forestry resources, and are virtually ignored in the prospects for extractive industries (oil, gas and solid minerals). Women therefore often encroach into what they see as 'free' spaces (forest lands) for subsistence farming, gathering of fuel-wood, herding, and gathering of wild resources amongst others. To survive poverty, women exploit the natural environment thereby becoming major actors in the process of climate change.

Industrialization

Currently, Nigeria faces low level of industrialization, principally, because of poor raw material base for industrial development and very low input of requisite technology. Agriculture which is supposed to be a veritable source of raw materials for industrial production is virtually neglected, impacting negatively on over 70% of rural women in this sector. Although, Nigeria has witnessed some level of development in post harvest technologies, such technologies are often inappropriate for women's use. Even where such technologies are appropriate, they are generally inaccessible and unaffordable

to rural women. The deep gender divide between men and women has also been attributed to gender gaps in educational attainments, especially technical education.

Negative Effects of Reforms in the Social Sector

The impact of liberalization policies (reforms) meant a decline in state support to the social sector, limiting access of household members, especially women and their children (usually the girl child), to education and health services. Thus, the negative effects of reforms are more obvious in the social sector – in particular, education, and health sectors. A common pattern across most African States is the drastic reduction in the financing of the social sector at the face of threatening economic crises. This is obvious in the present state of educational and health institutions in the continent. A common pattern is that women tend to bear the brunt of government low finances of the social sector, i.e. as child rearers, and carers of infants and the elderly. This is particularly obvious in the case of HIV/AIDS in the continent. It is therefore argued that HIV/AIDS tends to wear a gendered face in Africa. Unlike in the West (where HIV/AIDS is linked to homosexual behaviors), heterosexual behavior tends to be at the core of HIV/AIDS spread in Africa, especially with the culture of polygyny and its attendant complexities.

Not only is a woman unable to assure the fidelity of her husband, in a heterosexual relationship, also, she has no right to query the fidelity of her co-wives either (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2003; 2005). The majority of African women could not assert their reproductive rights (rights to determine when to have sex, how to have it, and rights to contraceptives among others). Thus, basic health indicators continue to show very gruesome pictures of high maternal and infant mortality rates, while the continent presents very high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. With increased poverty, compounded by high unemployment rates, young girls are easily trafficked for sex work within and outside the continent, thus further exposing them to the killer disease – HIV/AIDS. In all, the increased burden of HIV/AIDS further increased the work burden of women who become carers of the infected and/or the affected - husbands, children (including grand children), parents, and relations.

In Nigeria, the attainment of the universal education goal is constrained by the high rate of attrition in primary schools which is due to many factors including: (i) engagement in income-generating activities by some children during school hours; (ii) inability of parents to meet expenses for schooling such as school uniforms, textbooks, furniture, etc; (iii) distant or inaccessible location of schools from pupils' homes; (iv) ill-health arising from poor environmental sanitation, lack of portable water, lack of toilet facilities; (v) religious and cultural factors which cause some parents' preference for religious schools, such as Quranic schools, instead of western-type primary education; and (vi) early marriage of girls and teenage pregnancy.

A major challenge in Nigeria is how to integrate the principles of gender awareness, sensitivity and responsiveness within the MDGs and other regional and global instruments into the extant national macro-policies such that gender equality becomes more than just the concerns of women and the few gender-sensitive institutions and people but becomes part of the goals of governance at all levels and within the populace. This led the country to develop a National Gender Policy which was approved by the Federal Executive Council in the year 2006.

The Role of the Civil Society in GEWE

The new democratic dispensation in Africa, with emphasis on greater transparency, accountability and good governance, has opened new vistas for the engagement of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) in various facets of development. Most development works at the grassroots are carried out by NGOs, CSOs, and their respective coalition groups, especially in such sectors as - health, education, environment, and agriculture and rural development. More NGOs and CSOs are now getting involved in policy issues, especially monitoring of international and national policy documents on women, e.g. CEDAW, National Gender Policy, and the newly instituted global interest in engendering of national budgets.

The CSOs have recorded significant achievements in the areas of:

- Pushing for legislative reforms (thereby helping to lobby for bills which address women issues and gender discrimination). In Nigeria for example, CSOs recorded much progress in this area, while some of the bills lobbied for, and passed by Federal/State Houses of Assemblies. Others countries, especially Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda amongst others are noted for the gender-based activism amongst the CSOs/NGOs. Tanzania is usually singled out as a country where NGOs initiated and sponsored the 'Gender Responsive Budgeting' in government.
- CSOs in Africa have worked hard to produce sex disaggregated data and gender statistics which are often used to confront policy makers during advocacies and lobbying. Currently some of these organisations work with government to build capacity of policy makers in their ability to produce gender statistics and sex disaggregated data. In Nigeria, WARDC (Women Advocates, Research and Development Centre) Lagos, have recorded collaborative works with Federal and State Governments in this area.
- Although CSOs tend to work in all sectors, with a vision to empower women, and to make them more competitive, significant success have

been recorded in their ability to work with female politicians to galvanise money for elections and to win elections (see Ibrahim, 2004).

- Importantly, CSOs/NGOs continue to provide voice for local communities, while also making governments more accountable to the electorates. These are obvious in public dialogues, the print media, and television programmes.
- In a place like Nigeria, it is a truism to say that CSOs provide Orphans and Vulnerable children with care and support, much more than the government.

However, the activities of women/gender focused NGOs and CSOs have been thwarted by:

- Small scope, e.g. lack of national presence, which is essential to any meaningful engagement in policy process.
- Although the government may sometimes involved CSOs when drawing up gender related policies and/or programmes, the selection process may be skewed against CSOs that may be seen as too vocal, thereby not using the best elements in policy dialogues and programmatic actions.
- Lack of experience by many CSOs in policy analysis and processes.
- Absence of a continuous, sustainable information flow between the government institutional structures and CSOs. For example, a country like Nigeria is yet to promulgate a Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, meaning that information is still hoarded.
- Narrow specialisation by CSOs.
- An unenlightened and largely indifferent public who are hardly gingered to provide any feedback on policies and program implementations.

Conclusion: Forward-looking Strategies in Achieving GEWE Objectives

This paper reinvigorates the centrality of the ‘gender’ variable in development policy and planning in the quest for national growth and overall sustainable development, and the institutionalisation of fundamental human rights and principles and social justice in nation building. The key players in this process (bringing GEWE into regional and national development agenda) have largely been through the efforts of the International Development Partners, Local NGOs and Civil Society organisations.

To correct the structure of gender inequality within the Nigerian state, and its attendant negative impacts on sustainable human development, a multi-dimensional approach is required, while variety of social and political actors must play important roles in resolving gender imbalance in socio-cultural,

economic, and political arrangements in the continent. For example, individuals at the household level must become targets of popular actions and programmes, while local communities must play important roles as drivers of change. CSOs/NGOs are best at mobilising for change at the grassroots level, and may need to put more priorities on:

- Mobilising community support for a gender culture within the respective nation state;
- Through coalition efforts, present a common front to government and other interest groups on GEWE;
- Capacity building in gender mainstreaming into policies, laws, and legislative processes for GEWE agenda to be functional;
- Provision of supports for grassroots mobilisation to enhance women participation in politics;
- Targeting female politicians to transform into an agency role in confronting male oligarchy in party politics;
- Building the capacity of female politicians in a number of grounds e.g. fund raising, making public speeches; a better understanding of legislative procedures and practices; lobbying skills; understanding political terrains and making appropriate choices; coping with stress in public office; balancing of women's multiple roles;
- Mobilize media supports for GEWE.

The government must take responsibility for the following actions:

- Framework(s) for implementing National Gender Policy (NGP), and a number of affirmative actions prescribed within international agreements and treaties on GEWE, e.g. a 30% representation of women in political positions and senior public offices by year 2010.
- Mobilization and sensitization of women for national politics at all spheres of government.
- Borrow from 'best practices' across the world, including:
 - o Engendering national budgets;
 - o Entrenching GEWE principles in the country's Constitution and other legal frameworks;
 - o Domesticating CEDAW and other treaties on GEWE;
 - o Imbibe a gender culture, including a gendered language in all official documents.
 - o Enforce all political parties to comply with GEWE principles both in theory and practice and ensure that leadership and constitutions of political parties reflect this, etc.
 - o Promote gender education at all levels – primary; secondary; tertiary. This simply means that textbooks and pedagogy are engendered across disciplines while in particular the respective governments to invest in Gender Studies as a discipline.

- Support research and media programmes that propagate gender equality values.

International community and development partners have the following important roles to play:

- Provision of financial support for women political participation/individual female aspirants;
- Building the skill of female politicians in fund raising, and possibly advocating that where needed, specific African Government creates a special government account to support female politicians for comparative financial advantage with men, at least in the short run;
- Regular dialogues with government re - their commitment to international treaties on GEWE, and National Gender Policies (where they currently exist);
- Regular dialogues with government re- the implementation of NGP.

Overall, National Gender Policies provide both the legislative framework and clearly defined roles of national machineries for a sustainable gender equality and women empowerment agenda for the region. Few countries (Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, and Ghana) now give credence to gender responsive budgeting in order to achieve gender equality and women empowerment agenda targets. Nigeria should endeavour to be included in the list.

References

- Agbalajobi, D.T. (2008) *Gender and Corruption: Insights from Nigeria Democracy (1999-2008)*, Paper Presented at the GTZ/EADI Workshop on *Gender and Corruption in Development Cooperation*, Eschbon, Germany, 11-12th November, 2008.
- Aina, O.I. (2008) *The Gender Equality/Women Empowerment (GEWE) Agenda and the Nigerian Development*, Paper Presented at the International Laboratory for PhD Students on *Globalisation, Social Problems and Social Policy*, 18th-23rd November, 2008, Maiduguri, Nigeria.
- Anne, Marie Goetz (2003) *No shortcuts to power: African Women in Politics and Policy making*. (London: Zed Books).
- Ashworth, Georgina (1994a) *Women, Public Life and Governance*. UN Economic Commission for Europe.
- Ashworth, Georgina (1994b) *Women, Good and Bad Government*, in *Good Government*. One World Action. London.

- African Union (2003) *Protocol to the African Charter: Human and People's Rights in the Right of Women in Africa*.
- Boserup, E. (1977) *Women's Role in Economic Development* (London, George Allen and Unwin).
- Candida, M.; Ines, S.; Maitrayee, M. (1999) *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks* (England: An Oxfam Publication).
- Dahlerup, D. & Freidenvall, L. (2005) Quotas as a 'Fast Track' to Equal Representation for Women. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 7 (1): 26–46.
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (2006) *National Gender Policy – Situation Analysis and Framework* (Abuja, Nigeria).
- Global Incorporation (2009) *The World Bank and United Nations* (New York: Global Inc).
- Grown, C. (2006) Indicators and Indices of Gender Equality: What Do They Measure and What Do They Miss? Background Paper for *Global Monitoring Report 2007*, World Bank, Washington, DC.
- Ibrahim, Jubrin & Salihu, Amina (eds.) (2004) *Women Marginalisation and Politics in Nigeria*. Abuja: Open Society Initiative for West Africa and Centre for Democracy and Development. *Approach for Women Emancipation in Politics*.
- IDEA (2004) *The Implementation of Quotas – African Experiences*. IDEA. Stockholm, Sweden.
- International Monetary Fund (2002) *The IMF and Good Governance: A Factsheet*. IMF, Washington D.C., August 31, 2002.
- Isiugo-Abanihe U.C. (2003) *Male Role and Responsibility in Fertility and Reproductive Health*. Ibadan: Ababa Press.
- Isiugo-Abanihe, U C. (2005) Socio-cultural aspects of HIV/AIDS infection in Nigeria. *African Journal of Medicine and Medical Sciences*, 34:12-22, *Suppl*.
- Luttrell, C.; S. Scrutton, C. & K. Bird (eds.) (2007) *Understanding and Operationalizing Empowerment*. Switzerland, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).
- Odeke, Grace (2009) *Gender and Governance in West Africa: Designing an Institutional Change Management Approach for Women Emancipation in Politics*. A paper presented at the Regional Training Series on *Women Development and Gender Management – Placing Gender on the Agenda of West Africa's Development: Examining the MDGs, Global Recession and Development in Africa*, African Regent Hotel, Accra, Ghana, 24–26 June, 2009.
- Okojie, Christy (2009) *Gender and Governance in West Africa: Concepts, Biases and Way Forward*. A paper presented at the Regional Training Series on *Women Development and Gender Management – Placing Gender on the Agenda of West Africa's Development: Examining the MDGs*,

- Global Recession and Development in Africa, African Regent Hotel, Accra, Ghana, 24–26 June, 2009.
- Pereira, Charmaine (2000) National Council of Women's Societies and the State 1985-1993: The Use of Discourses of Womanhood by the NCWS, in Jega, Attahiru *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics Under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*. Kano: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet and Centre for Research and Documentation.
- Tzannatos, Zafiris (2008) Monitoring Progress in Gender Equality in the Labor Market. In Mayra Buvinic *et al* (eds.), *Equality for Women: Where Do We Stand on Millennium Development Goal 3? The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*. The World Bank, Washington DC.
- UNDP (2006) *Human Development Reports* (New York, UNDP).
- UNDP (2008) *Human Development Reports* (New York, UNDP).
- UNIFEM (2005) *Progress of World Women Reports* (New York, UNIFEM).
- USAID/GHANA (2002) *Briefing Paper*.
- World Bank (1997) *Helping Developing Countries Combat Corruption*, Washington D.C., The World Bank.
- World Bank (1999) *Gender and Transport: A Rationale for Action*, PREM Notes, No. 14, January.
- World Bank (2000) *Evaluating the Gender Impact of Bank Assistance* (Washington, the World Bank).
- World Bank (2001) *Engendering Development: Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- World Bank (2002) *Ghana Strategic Country Gender Assessment* (New York: World Bank).
- WRAPA (2003) *Nigeria 2003 Elections: The Experiences of Women Aspirants in Political Party Primaries*, (Abuja, WRAPA).
- WRAPA (2008) *Gender and Affirmative Action Issue Based Project* (Abuja, Nigeria).