

## THE IMPACT OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper argues that gender discrimination is as old as creation. Over the years women were made to believe that their rightful place was in the home front as housewives producers and minders of children. The paper focuses on cultural, societal and religious practices, in our traditional society that prevent women from contributing their quota to both the community and the nation at large. In this modern world where women have assumed prominent roles in the economic, political, and social developments in different societies, there is a clarion call for both the government and other men of the country to be supportive of their female counterparts as this will enable them to exhibit their potentials for the benefit of the development of our nation. The paper concludes that there should be mass literacy campaign towards women education. Education shapes the life of women by equipping them with knowledge, skills, right attitudes and values to participate effectively and also contribute meaningfully to national development.*

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Development, Education, Women, Yoruba.

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### Introduction

Gender is a broad analytic concept that highlights the roles and responsibility of women in relation to those of men. Obasi sees gender as a culturally constructed characteristics, qualities, behaviours, and roles which different societies ascribe to females and male (2004:65). There is a great need to involve women in national development; there has been an age long discrimination against women. Though, women are responsible for looking after the home and inculcate in their children the virtues of life, their contributions have not been adequately acknowledged by society.

As a matter of fact, women were never fully recognized as partners in the development process in their various countries for many years. Government usually male dominated have consistently tried in some cases even succeeded in marginalizing women who constitute about half or even more of the total population. Gender here connotes masculinity and femininity, it is the socially constructed and culturally determined characteristics associated with the women and men, and the assumptions made by these characteristics including the condition in which men and women lived and work. Just like culture gender is also dynamic it varies from culture to culture. Over the years women were made to believe that their rightful place was in the home front as housewives, producers and minders of children.

Indeed what is required in this respect is a reappraisals of this culture with a view to identifying its strengths and weaknesses, such a reappraisals have the potential of promoting the kind of self understanding that would provide some basis for determining

the kind of socio-cultural reconstructions that would enable Africans to come to terms with the challenges of contemporary life. The paper maintains that education enables women to achieve greater self –fulfillment and to contribute to social and economic development of their societies.

### **Women and Development**

Despite the high profile presently enjoyed by professional women and highly politicized women’s organizations, Nigerian women have not been effectively served by the development process; hence their status remains effectively undermined. The wide range of issues that still affect women’s development in Nigeria indicate clearly the need to combine local voluntary and governmental efforts with the role of foreign donor agencies.

When we talk about development its dimensions and implications requires the involvement of international development organizations in the struggle to reverse the socio – cultural, economic and political subordination and debasement womenfolk, and to acknowledge and enhance their immense contribution to the development process in the world.

As a matter of fact women have received various supports from individual researchers and academic institutions, by reviewing their rights, roles, and status e.g the United Nations Organization has been a verbal and practical lead in underwriting the need for women to achieve full equality and participation in the challenges and benefits of social development. Since independent in Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> 1960, successive Nigerian government has sought to encourage industrialization, so as to bring about economic development and to serve as a source of revenue to the government. More states were created with the development of the oil industry; wage employment was equally created for women. But the truth of the matter is that the provision of wage employment is not in itself a way of liberating women, because such jobs often breed gender subordination.

Gender bias has become a common a common occurrence, everywhere. Victims of gender discrimination lose motivation and morale needed to perform their jobs effectively. (Graham, 2017:200). The status and rights of women have encountered major limitations even in developed nations such as the United Kingdom. But the impacts of foreign assistant together with the European courts have in no small measure strengthened the national interpretation of laws against sexual discrimination. This is to say that where national laws exist, foreign assistance can be profitably channeled towards strengthening them.

The gradual globalization of the public and private struggle for gender equality shows that foreign assistant and external finance have assumed an important role. For example in September 1995, people the world over gathered in Beijing China for the fourth world conference on women to discuss the theme of “Action for Peace, Equality and Development”. The development agencies and international aid organizations have played prominent role in the global and national political process in achieving laws to improve the position of women.

### **Challenges Faced by Women in National Development**

We cannot deny the role of Nigerian women in post independent, though the number of women in various post may appear to be few, in the area of African culture women remain pawn both in the hands of nature and the authority of their husband. The word “culture” has been given various definitions by different scholars from different disciplines. When we talk

of the culture of a people our reference point is the totality of their way of life. It consists of all the ideas and principles guiding the individuals' life, individually and collectively which include arts, beliefs, customs, inventions, language, technology and traditions (Bohanah,1981:942). To the philosopher, culture means the growth of the mind or intellect to accommodate a broad range of ideas, values, beliefs and so on. While some scholars see culture as an assemblage of artifacts, traditions, and belief system. The philosopher knows that longevity and happiness in the world of men depend less on their material than on their inner attributes or endowments. Culture to the anthropologists consists of all the ideas and objectives of a given set of people. It is a complex and total configuration of a people's institutions, mode of life and expectations commonly prevalent in their community and shared by the people. We can also classify culture into three broad categories namely; the cognitive aspect of culture (knowledge and belief) the technological aspect (art) and the ethical aspect (morals, law and custom).(Metuh and Ojoade,1999:16).

Culture has material and non- material components. Then non-material component of culture consist of the inner behaviour, attributes, ideas, desires, values and norms of a group of people expressed in the form of customs, folkways, mores language and other external symbols. The material culture on the other hand comprise of the physico – social environment objectively expressed in things made from inorganic elements such as tools, weapons and machines.

The non material components of culture tend to dictate many of the societal arrangements including gender role, ideologies etc. These social arrangements in terms of status and roles are not static, rather they have been undergoing changes in the face of colonization, industrialization and urbanization. There is an intrinsic link between culture and society, when we look at the society, we can see that it is not all aspect of the society that can be control through state intervention, hence Abraham in his book, *the mind of Africa* explains different ways by which culture can be used to achieved the required moderation and regulation in the society. He maintains that by uniting people in common beliefs and attitudes or at least in tolerance for certain beliefs, actions and values, culture fills with order that portion of life beyond the pale of state intervention (1962:27). This common beliefs as a result of which culture creates order in the society provide the basis for the development of common reactions, common interest and common attitudes.

Culture is very important in human development. Human culture as Pettman puts represent among other things, the historical accumulation of human values (1979:18). The concept of culture as a dynamic phenomenon gives impetus to the search for progress in all social sectors and branches of learning, and even to the belief and constant refinement of cultural experience, this will further enhance the beauty of human nature together with its immediate environment.

In traditional Nigerian societies a woman is subordinate to her husband. This culture of male subordination is not only limited to her husband but also to all the members of her husband family. A woman derived her status from being a wife and a mother. She performs these two major roles by having as many children as possible, hence she enjoys a sense of fulfillment by giving birth to a male child. Among the Yoruba south-western Nigeria marriage was considered as a symbolic union of two families. The success of a man depend on the number of wives and children he possesses. Ransome-kuti says

men show off their wealth by number of children and wives they have (1961:67). A man with many wives has the opportunity of getting enough assistant in the field, hence a man sees his wives as life long slaves.

Another challenge faced by the Nigerian women in the traditional societies is the patriarchal structure. According to the oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary patriarchal structure is a structure of a set of social relations which enables men to dominate women or giving power and importance only to men (2005:885). This system provides material advantages to males while at the same time placing constraints to the females role.

However, the ethnic group of south – east Nigeria also allows women to go through what they call “fattening ceremony” in this type of situation, a young girl is kept in seclusion as a result, she is refrain from outside and domestic training to enable her to fully prepare for the role of a wife, during this period of seclusion the wife to be is properly fed. The Benue people of Nigeria also believed that a woman does not lead a battle, thus leadership is mainly the responsibility of Tiv men that is “Kwase Hemen Tyay ga” (Ityayvar,1992:35). They see their girls as parcels to be exchange in marriage meaning “Kwase Yamen Sha Ishe”. This type of marriage allows a male family member to exchange his sister for another girl who would become a wife. A girl has no choice in this type of marriage, hence, she could be exchange to a man who is elderly, ugly, diseased or disabled.

While men remain in the compound of their birth for the duration of their lives, reverse is the case in women, upon marriage she enters the compound of her husbands, the residence patterns, marital practices and attitudes across the different ethnic groups put men in an advantage position from historical past to the present. In Nigeria traditional societies, if a woman failed in her procreative role, she will not only lose the prestige accorded her by her marital status but another woman would be brought in to carry on from where she had failed. In *Tanzania*, despite the fact that Luguru women of Tanzania were politically outspoken and had economic autonomy, there exist cultural factors, e.g long puberty rite that kept women in seclusion from the time of their marriage which reinforced male supremacy. Even though women’s role vary from culture to culture Boulding argued that in all societies from the past to the present, the breeding of babies and the feeding of humans is exclusively the role of women this he calls the triple- role concept of “breeder- feeder –producer”(1977:89). “Kunya” in Hausa language means modesty or shyness, hence the Hausa culture supports that girls remain shy and obedient, these young girls can be married to older men without question, these young girls are sometimes assaulted and rape by would be husband (Usman,1997:80). For example cutting their young wives with sharp object to allow penetration, Usman describes this as marital rape under the Nigerian constitution. The institution of female seclusion called “Kunle” in Hausa language supported by Islamic injunctions has further increase the subordinate position of the Hausa muslim women. As a result these women cannot mix with strange men, they cannot pursue careers outside their homes.

When we turn to the Yoruba culture we discover that the birth of a male child usually strengthens the position of a wife in the family, it is equally possible for a marriage to breakdown on account of the lack of a male child. Achebe buttress this point by saying that among the Igbo Eastern Nigeria a woman who has three boys

in quick succession is honored by her husband by killing a goat to celebrate. While the birth of female children lead to anxiety and shame for the mother.

None of the three major religions in Nigerian namely: Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions endorse equality between men and women. In most denominations women are exempted from priesthood this further confirms our submission. The creation account of Genesis 1 : 26 -29; Gen 2 : 15 -20 in the Bible also shows that Adam is more fundamental than Eve because it is man that is created in the image of God. Even before the advent of Islam and Christianity the status of women was nothing to write home about. In ancient Greek for instance women was primarily regarded as one of the greatest destruction on earth. They never attached any progressive importance to her. To them women have no any productive contribution to make in society? (Baumgardner and Richard 2000:12). Aristotle sees women as subordinate to men in all respect; in his biological analysis Aristotle maintains that: Women are the result of a physiological failure at the moment of conception. When the male semen imposes its form on the female matter at the point of procreation, the result is a male child. But when the semen fails to gain itself, then the result is female child or deficient offspring (Fortenbaugh, 1975: 57). Here we can see that Aristotle equated the female child with deficient offspring. To him the role of women within the household is however not the bodily character of a slave but the preservation of goods procured by men, hence the virtue demanded of a woman is expected to reflect her role within the household.

However, women's reason does not prevail where men are present The position of women could be likened to that of a slaves But not the menial role of a slaves but rather they lack the capability to deliberate, that is the ability to act with foresight. Thus when this deficiency of slaves is combined with the bodily strength suitable for necessary tasks then the role assigned to slaves by the society seems to be a natural one.

While comparing male and female, women are seen as weak, as a result does not fit to be in a position of authority. In traditional religion women are always kept out of the cults of most traditional religion, they always stay in the background. Even though all the religion in the country preach that women take a back seat with respect to men. We discover that there is a particular ethnic group in Nigeria precisely the Ijo and Edoid in Delta region of the Country where traditional religion is practiced, it is believed that God is *Woyin* (Our mother), *Ayibarau* (She who begets and kills); *Oginaranu* and *Tamarau* (Creator). God for these ethnic groups is a female, with this fact one might expect that women would be accorded a similar status and role in society, but reverse is the case. While there are female gods in these societies, the female beings are totally invisible in the physical lives of these societies, no female high priestesses, and no woman is a founder of any of the communities (Adeoye,2005 : 467).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Efforts should be made to organize Women for mass literacy, adult education inclusive. Public enlightened programmes should be designed to stimulate educational awareness among African women. The curriculum should be designed to make it more gender sensitive by ensuring that female students have qualitative education in all fields of human endeavour. Efforts should be made to mobilize and encourage more women to attend formal and non – formal education. Women should be ready to cope with the numerous challenges of contemporary world. Our government on their part should remove all gender based discrimination in education, employment and conditions of employment and services, women

should be given equal opportunity to participate in decision making. Women should be empowered to participate in community development programmes as well as educational and political activities should be enhanced. Our women should be able to acquire the power to control their own lives in the homes and work places.

All religious beliefs should be reviewed, male and female students should be given equal opportunities to participate in priesthood, there is need for pragmatic programmes geared towards all forms of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, and behaviours that affect women this should be between men and women in the family, community, and institutions.

Because of gender inequality against the female gender it is important that there should be an establishment of gender sensitive data banks and data base studies, this will enable us to be aware of the equality of men, and see all forms of discrimination based on gender as undesirable and unjust.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed that women were powers to be reckoned with. Women matters have made a remarkable advance from the margin of global attention to the centre of national and global politics. At regional and sub – regional levels, Nigeria is a signatory to the African Charter on People’s Rights(1981), the protocol on the Rights of women in Africa, The African Charter on the Rights and welfare of the Child (1990); The Ecowas Declaration and a plan of Action Against Trafficking in Person (2001); (Olaniyi,2004:65). Apart from declaring 1976 -1985 as the United Nations Decade for women, four world conferences on women have also been held: 1979 Mexico City, 1980 Copenhagen, 1985 Nairobi and 1995 Beijing. These conferences have directed the searchlight on a variety of issues affecting women.

The development of a nation lies in the development of the totality of the individual. As a matter of fact, the Nigerian government is doing a lot to improve the lot of women. Government has established a separate ministry for women both at the federal and state level. The federal government had convened various workshops specifically to prepare a blue print on women in education in Nigeria. But it is important to say that government should go beyond paperwork and appropriate legislations should be enhanced to implement these provisions.

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