



MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN NIGERIA: A DAUNTING YET ATTAINABLE TASK

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ABSTRACT

Gender mainstreaming is a process that ensures that women and men have equal access to opportunities, rewards, and society's valued resources. Nigeria signed and ratified, without reservations, practically all international and regional instruments designed to guarantee the human rights of every citizen. However, certain human-made socio-cultural factors constrain the process, and make it an arduous task in Nigeria. This paper identified and discussed some key gender-related socio-cultural factors that inhibit gender mainstreaming in Nigeria. Namely, patriarchy and androcentrism; the skewed nature of gender socialization; gender inequality in marriage and in the family; religious beliefs and harmful gender practices; Government's poor political will in allocating resources to understanding and addressing the nature of gender inequality; poor representation of women in political offices; gender discrimination in Nigeria's constitution and government policies; and the failure of government to domesticate ratified international instruments on women's human rights. It argued that these factors are open to change and therefore concluded that although daunting, gender mainstreaming is achievable in Nigeria. It also made some critical recommendations to make it happen.

Key Words: Nigeria, Patriarchy, Human Rights, Gender Mainstreaming, and Gender Inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 46% of Nigeria's population was projected to live in urban areas by 2020 (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2004) with over 50% in rural areas where tradition and culture are better preserved. Okafor (2016) identified 371 groups of distinct languages and cultural practices in Nigeria (cited in Ogun 2017). Heterogeneous marriages and patriarchal attitudes and practices characterise the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious Nigerian society. Traditionally, men and boys have pride of place over women and girls. Invariably, gender

differences translate to inequality and discrimination against women and are therefore, more significant for women than for men. Nonetheless, certain traditional societies recognized the activities of a few courageous women who had the audacity to use their God given rights to attempt to transcend the discriminations and socio-cultural barriers that disempowered them and labelled them “the second gender”, “the weaker sex”, or “men’s helpmate”. Moremi, Queen Amina, Madam Tinubu, Gambo Sawaba, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, and many other amazons of Nigeria exemplify this and remain role models for many Nigerian women and men of today.

Times are changing. There is an increased global awareness of men’s indigence and incapacity without their female partners in development. Therefore, men affairs alone can no longer occupy the centre stage. The stage has to deliberately make room to equally accommodate women so as to reflect the needs, concerns, experiences, aspirations, etc. of both genders in all planned actions. This includes legislation, policies, and programmes, as well as their implementation, processes, monitoring and evaluation at all levels. Gender mainstreaming is a deliberate strategy towards ensuring that men and women benefit equally from intentional, premeditated and strategic actions. It ensures the inclusion of women and men in all aspects of development (Neimanis, 2005). Although the idea of gender mainstreaming was first muted at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985, it was adopted as a global strategy advocated by the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995). Almost three decades after, not much success has been recorded in Nigeria especially in the areas of legislation and equal opportunity to decision making positions in the public space, through affirmative action. Gender mainstreaming implies identifying, through existing gender disaggregated data, gaps in gender equality, and developing deliberate strategies through

programmes, policies, legislation, etc. to bridge the gaps; implementing, these strategies, monitoring and evaluating them and holding accountable for results or lack of it, the responsible individuals and institutions.

Nigeria signed and ratified virtually all international and regional human rights instruments without reservations (Joda and Eze-Anaba 2010). Some of these instruments aimed specifically at ensuring gender equality are: the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); The Protocol on CEDAW; the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women; the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality; as well as the gender equality related targets of the Millennium Development Goals of the year 2000, and of the current Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

The Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) unequivocally states that "Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace." Herein lies the idea of gender mainstreaming. The ultimate goal is to empower both women and men and achieve gender equality in our society. It is a process that guarantees equitable access to society's valued resources, opportunities and rewards by both women and men. "Thus, gender mainstreaming is clearly a moral imperative meant to promote prosperity and well-being for all. It is not an option for a few men in power" (Orisaremi 2022). Yet, the men who are almost exclusively in charge of decision making in all the three arms and at all the three tiers of government in Nigeria have consistently

blocked every effort at officially promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming gender is a strategy that should be everybody's business because it is in everyone's interest.

CEDAW is recognized as the "international bill of rights for women" because it is the most comprehensive and specific international declaration on gender equality and women advancement so far, that clearly examines the effects of culture on gender relations and defines what constitutes discrimination against women in society. It is therefore not surprising that many men in authority seemingly loathe CEDAW despite their much needed support for its domestication. Women and some of their male sympathizers in positions of influence seem to have got around the problem by preparing and proposing piecemeal, gender related bills and other legal provisions rooted in the general principles of CEDAW without an explicit mention of the Convention. Some of such bills, acts, and policies in Nigeria are: the National Reproductive Health Policy and Strategy to Achieve Reproductive and Sexual Health for All Nigerians (2001), the National Policy and Plan of Action on Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation in Nigeria (2002), the National Reproductive Health Policy (2002), the Child Rights Act (2003), the Reproductive Rights Act (2005), the National Gender Policy (2007a), the National Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria (2007b). Affirmative Action Bill, the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (2015a), the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (2015b). While the Bill for the Establishment of a National Institute for Reproductive Health (the RH Bill) (2005), and the CEDAW Bill (2007) never saw the light of day mainly because they were perceived as products of radical feminism of the West.

Mainstreaming gender in Nigeria has multidimensional constraints traceable to the process of socialization; personal or selfish interests of some men; cultural beliefs and values; and social

practices, among other factors. Yet, these constraints are surmountable because they are socially created. Some of these alterable socio-cultural elements that inhibit gender mainstreaming in Nigeria are discussed below.

THE CHALLENGES TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN NIGERIA

I. Prevalence of Patriarchy and Androcentrism

Patriarchy has long been established among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria, and indeed in Africa. It is obvious in the various aspects of gender relations. From the history of women's struggle in Nigeria, it is evident that their apparent docility can be largely accounted for by patriarchy, a social hierarchy that does not only make men more powerful (Falola 2013), but places them over and above women. Traditionally, in most Nigerian societies, men were the recognized decision makers at home and in the public sphere; men owned and controlled scarce and essential resources; men married women and paid the much valued bride wealth; men owned the offspring of marriages even in most matrilineal societies in Nigeria; men largely led religious groups and worship; men for the most part, fought wars and had the power to use women or girls to broker peace between warring communities or to avert war; men's interests generally subsumed those of women as a second gender or an appendage. Traditions die hard. Despite some recognisable changes, a clear break with the past has not been established in modern times and matrilineal societies are not exempted (see for instance, Orisaremi 2021). Even in urban communities where men and some women engage in white and blue collar jobs, women's inevitable domestic or productive work is not as valued as work in the public sphere, simply because the latter is dominated by the men folk. These practices that impede women empowerment and reinforce gender inequality, can be altered through gender mainstreaming.

II. The Skewed Nature of Gender Socialization

Most societies globally, socialize their males and females from infancy to act and play roles that are socially assigned to their distinct gender as boys or girls. Yet, the process is discriminatory to the disadvantage of the girls. Gender socialization is influenced by biology, the family, education, and religion among others. It is very handy in transmitting cultural rules, norms, values, and expectations through generations. It ensures that gender roles and gender role stereotypes are preserved and sustained. For instance, home management, nursing and children's education are perceived as women's roles while higher education, politicking, politics and decision-making are the preserve of the men. Nigerian women are often frustrated out of politics because of the numerous challenges they have to contend with, like exposure to violence and harassment, poor accountability, high cost, sexism, misogyny and so on.

Invariably, the prevailing patriarchal attitudes, the nature of gender socialization, and division of labour are skewed in favour of dominant men and their interests. Yet, both genders are socialized in the same system and so are obliged to safeguard their unique culture including its inherent undesirable elements. It is therefore not surprising that the same male and female members of the society who can be agents of positive change, act as gate keepers by preserving and protecting their culture regardless of certain discriminatory practices considered obnoxious, harmful or unfair.

III. Gender Inequality in Marriage and in the Family

The dual institutions of marriage and the family are essential elements in the perpetration of gender inequality in a highly religious country as Nigeria where marriages are mainly heterosexual and religiously sanctioned. Traditionally, gender inequality characterized age differentials in marital unions; in choice of spouse; in the ability to grant free and full consent to marry; in exercising the right to vital choices within marriage; in parenting; in personal rights

and control over family property; etc. This implies that: (1) men were generally mature and more experienced than their very young and largely innocent or naive wives; (2) men's choice of whom to marry generally superseded girls' preferences; (3) young girls were sometimes coerced into marriage; (4) parental consent was regarded as more important than the girls' especially under customary and religious laws that allow for child betrothal; (5) procreation was regarded as a wife's primary function; (6) and men had the exclusive right and control over their wives, children and family property. (Atsenuwa 2010; Orisaremi and Alubo 2012). Men clearly dominated marriages and the nature of marriage relations and family contexts tended to facilitate gender-based domestic violence.

Despite the gradual changes brought about by Western education, modernity, exposure to global realities, and the languid adoption of some key women's human rights legislation in Nigeria, men's interests in marriage and in the family drive both institutions till date. Many Nigerian men still assert much authority and control over their female spouse. It is still very much acceptable in many rural farming communities to marry as many wives as possible for their labour service and that of their children. Polyandry is an abomination in most if not all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, where polygyny flourishes. The practice of polygyny in many traditional and even in modern settings disempowers women and places them in a precarious state while engendering competition and rivalry. It indirectly affirms men's relatively high value and prime place in the family and society.

Other unfair traditional practices that reinforce women's low status and undermine their dignity as human beings include: female genital cutting (FGC); forced early marriage; marriage by abduction; forced celibacy; traumatic puberty initiation rites; certain harmful labour and delivery practices; wife inheritance; sexual hospitality practices involving women; women's

inability to inherit property or to own land; and the various dehumanizing ordeals widows are meant to go through at the demise of their male spouse; etc. None of these is applicable to a widower.

Furthermore, childbirth, especially the birth of a son, completes most marriages in Nigeria. It does not only put a seal on the marriage but guarantees a woman's place in her marital home. In spite of scientific knowledge, men generally take responsibility for fertility and women take the blame and the shame for childlessness in any marriage. All of these practices increase men's leverage over women. Little wonder many men who ordinarily should lead the process of positive change, feel threatened and unwilling to actively work for women empowerment and gender mainstreaming.

IV. Religious Beliefs and Harmful Gender Practices

Nigeria is arguably, a pretty conservative society with relatively inflexible cultural and religious values and practices. Religion is often used to justify gender-based violence and other forms of gender inequality against women especially in the family setting. Christians for instance, would urge women to "submit" to their husbands whom God has anointed as "head" over the family. By implication, men are empowered to treat and discipline their wives, as they would minors, and even to demand sex at will from their female spouse. Marital rape is hardly recognized by any religious faith in Nigeria. Traditional Christians totally forbid divorce on any grounds while Muslims give room for unfair divorce regulations rooted in their belief in the right of the man to unilaterally renounce his wife (the *talaq*) (Imam 2010). Both religions give rise to practices that are detrimental to married women and to their children and natal families. The recent viral story of the late gospel singer, Osinachi Nwachukwu who silently suffered untold violence from her husband until her death, is a sad example of how religion can be used to foster gender-based

violence and reinforce gender inequality in society. Also, the pervasive religious beliefs greatly influence gender relations in the polity and economy, particularly among Muslims in the north who place much emphasis on gender segregation or purdah that restricts women to the private sphere leaving the public arena exclusively to men. Thereby denying women and men the ability to live out their full potentials.

V. Government's Poor Political Will in Allocating Resources to Understanding and Addressing the Nature of Gender Inequality.

A prerequisite for gender mainstreaming is a reliable system of generating and analysing gender disaggregated data on a regular basis. This helps to give some sense of direction to stakeholders responsible for addressing the problems of gender discrimination in the society. Gender discrimination is widespread in practically all areas of development including formal education, health, legislation, security, etc. More governmental and even non-governmental commitment is needed towards the provision of safe formal education for girls (particularly in the face of incessant terrorist attacks on schools); gender sensitive health-care delivery system; gender sensitive budgeting; gender sensitive economic, political, social (including recreational) policies; gender sensitive legislation; etc. However, this is hardly possible with government's poor planning and apparent poor commitment to conducting a regular census and other regular forms of data generating activities needed to guide development.

VI. Poor Representation of Women in Political Offices

Despite the vulnerability of girls in a male dominated society as Nigeria, the head of the Kano office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Rahama Farah, recently reported that 60% of the estimated 18.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria are girls (VOA 2022). Majority of these children are in the terrorist ravaged north of Nigeria. The latest available

report of the National Bureau of Statistics (2016) indicated that only 38.4% of women have tertiary education; the formal sector employment rate for women is 65.1% compared to 71.5% for men; men at the national parliament constitute 92.5% and women, a token 7.5%; and representation at the local government is 94.4% men and a trifle 5.6% women; of the total number of judges, female judges constitute only 26.2%; men dominate the high-ranking government administrators with decision making powers as no single state of the federation has ever produced a female governor and only about four states have ever produced female deputy governors. In fact, the lot of women dipped under the current political dispensation as only Kaduna state currently has a female deputy governor, Hajiya Hadiza Balarabe, who was elected in 2019. Only seven of the 44 ministers appointed in 2019 were women. Of the 109 Senators and 360 House of Representatives, only 8 and 13 respectively, are women. The narrative is more worrisome in most state and local government administration.

Women in Nigeria are clearly disadvantaged largely as a result of men's relentless effort at "malestreaming" gender with its resultant negative effect including women's generally poor access to resource allocation and substantial credit facility; non-criminalization of gender-based violence against women at home, in the workplace, and elsewhere; poor valuation of women's contribution to the macro-economy; and lack of remuneration for productive work predominantly done by women. Although there is some progress in bridging the gender gap in these areas, there is much to be done particularly in the rural communities.

VII. Gender Discrimination in Nigeria's Constitution and Government Policies

A Nigerian social activist, Igbuzor (2003) documented the unsuccessful attempts over the years to make the 1999 constitution all-inclusive of the various minority and special interest groups including women. The Citizen's Forum for Constitutional Reform (CFCR) made some extensive

gender related recommendations in 2001 in addition to those in the 2001 report of the 1999 Presidential Committee on the Review of the 1999 Constitution. and Pereira and Akiyode-Afolabi (2005:15) also documented the CFR submission to the National Political Conference of 2005. In summary, both recommendations had to do with: (1) changing the Federal Character Commission to Equal Opportunity Commission to accommodate all shades of minorities including women; (2) granting indigeneship to married women in their Nigerian male spouses' state of origin; (3) guaranteeing eligibility to citizenship by registration, to a foreign spouse of a Nigerian woman as provided for the men in the constitution; (4) inclusion of affirmative clauses that clearly reserve at least 30% of elective and appointive positions to women; (5) ensuring that political parties adopt quotas for women in their nomination processes; (6) the establishment of a Gender and Social Justice Commission; (7) the provision of special measures to enhance gender equality in access to education, politics and governance in the constitution; (8) making some additions to chapter IV of the constitution to make it justiceable; (9) an unambiguous provision affirming gender equality in the constitution; and (10) making available, the funds needed to implement the National Policy on Women.

Agitations for the realization of these recommendations have been on for decades and experts and civil society organizations have put in a lot towards realizing them at the 2022 Constitution review process. Interestingly, despite the lip service paid by male politicians to the importance of women in the Nigerian society, the male dominated current 9th National Assembly, in March 2022, shamelessly, threw caution to the wind and rejected all the five gender-related proposed constitutional amendments. Namely, (1) indigeneship right in the state of a woman's male spouse after five years of marriage. (2) citizenship for women's foreign spouse; (3) affirmative action for political offices; (4) the provision of a minimum of 20 percent of ministerial or

commissioner nominees for women; and (5) reserved seats for women. Thereby affirming the high level of hypocrisy among the Nigerian male politicians.

Nigerian men claim to identify with the global democratic principles which they have reduced to merely “winning” elections at all costs. Yet, they fail to recognize, let alone put into practice, the genuine democratic principles that uphold the fundamental human rights of every citizen. Why for instance, would the male members of our National Assembly deny women their non-Nigerian male spouse (and even their innocent children), their fundamental rights in a supposedly democratic country. Whereas, a non-Nigerian female spouse of a Nigerian man can freely choose to take on the citizenship of her husband.

The answer to this question is not far-fetched. It is deeply rooted in androcentrism and patriarchy that make it convenient for men in authority, even under so-called democratic governance, to reduce the basic democratic principles of gender mainstreaming to gender “malestreaming” (Orisaremi 2022). The entire male dominated government has been lukewarm in matters of gender mainstreaming especially as it relates to the constitution which is the highest law of the land. The CFR highlighted some double standards in the constitution and argued for instance, that section 42.1(b) of the constitution has always been used to resist women related affirmative action in Nigeria. Whereas, other previous forms of affirmative action have been successfully implemented in this same country. Examples are: The Africanisation Policy of the 1930s, the Nigerianisation Policy of the 1960s, the Nigerian Enterprise Promotion Decree of 1970s, among others.

We have one common humanity. Gender sensitive law and policy makers in the United States defied the odds and took practical steps towards reducing gender inequality in their patriarchal setting by courageously passing such laws as: Equal Pay Act of 1963; Civil Rights Act of 1964 and

1972; Equal Credit Opportunity Act; Pregnancy Discrimination Act; Fair Housing Act; Family and Medical Leave Act among others (Prabhakar 2018).

VIII. Failure of the Nigerian Government to Domesticate Ratified International Instruments on Women's Human Rights.

Nigeria signed and ratified all international instruments relating to women and children's rights (see Joda and Eze-Anaba 2010 for details), yet failed to show any reasonable commitment to domesticate and make them justice able in Nigeria. The recently enacted Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015 if properly enforced, can be said to be a step in the right direction. Interestingly, Nigeria like other state parties, has an obligation to report to the relevant international monitoring committees on the various international human rights instruments signed and ratified. Non-domestication is as good as non-ratification because it denies women and other affected citizens the right to approach the national courts to enforce their rights (Imam 2010). Hence, the 6th April 2022 court order of 35% affirmation of women's participation in government was regarded a huge victory for women. Nonetheless, court judgements cannot replace the much desired legislation that will fully domesticate women's human rights in Nigeria and provide a conducive atmosphere for women to thrive and contribute freely, their quota to development.

These challenges are not cast in iron. They are clearly human-made and therefore amenable to social change. Addressing them will certainly transform the current unequal gender relations while guaranteeing the fundamental human rights and the dignity of each and all the citizens of Nigeria irrespective of their sex and gender.

CONCLUSION

Mainstreaming gender guarantees the full participation of women and men in the development of any society. As desirable as the process is, several socio-cultural factors pose challenges to its realization in Nigeria. Understanding these challenges is essential to finding a lasting solution to the problem. Culture is human made and therefore open to change. Women need the support of their male counterparts who dominate all aspects of governance in Nigeria to effect the much needed change. It is imperative for government to create and guarantee an atmosphere of gender equality by ensuring a gender sensitive constitution and domesticating all the relevant international legislation needed for women and men to flourish in the country. The future of Nigeria depends a great deal on the principles of equity, justice and human rights for all in every facet of our social life. Although a daunting task, gender mainstreaming is attainable in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

- Civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders should sensitize and raise the awareness that gender mainstreaming is everybody's business so as to ensure the active contribution of all at interpersonal and group levels.
- Government and the relevant development agencies need to increase efforts at generating the much needed gender disaggregated data to enable a more realistic gender analysis of the Nigerian population.
- Parents should be made to appreciate the need to create equal opportunities for boys and girls in the course of socialization and ensure equal access to available opportunities.
- The custodians of religion and culture should be honest enough to teach the truth about gender equality to their adherents.
- There is a need for CSOs and law makers to revisit all gender related bills that will genuinely address the challenges women face as a disadvantaged group, with a view to enacting them as laws. This will guarantee the needed conditions for their enforcement and making them justiceable in Nigeria.
- It is important for government at all levels (especially at the national level) to live up to its responsibility to protect and promote the rights of all its citizens particularly of its

indispensable 49.5% female population who work hard and selflessly for the development of the country.

- Relevant CSOs should train citizens on how to organize themselves in the various communities and how to monitor and evaluate the activities of political office holders in the area of gender mainstreaming among others.
- The network of CSOs and all the stakeholders advocating for engendering the Nigerian constitution and adopting women's human rights legislation should use the avenue to encourage one another and be determined never to give up the fight despite the lethargic attitude of our elected male politicians.
- Women should do more to work with politically influential men as partners by using their influence to address the discriminatory laws and practices that unjustly place them over and above their female counterparts.
- Women should organize better and engage in collective bargaining with male and female politicians in the various political parties to ensure the commitment of every political office seeker to gender equality in practical and unambiguous terms and with specific targets and time lines for addressing the prevailing gender issues in their constituencies. They should however beware of political propagandists who simply tokenize gender issues.
- Governmental and non-governmental organizations should do more to sensitize the public and civil servants as well as the law enforcement agencies on the existing gender related policies so as to minimize their abuses.
- The public sector at Federal and State levels should consider formulating policies and incentives to ensure that qualified women fill 50 percent of public sector posts.
- The public sector should identify measures to ensure that women fill at least 35 percent of posts for judges and permanent secretaries.
- The President should be bold enough to show leadership in appointing women to at least a third of Ministerial positions. Governors and Local Government Executives should follow suit when making appointments at sub-national levels.
- Governmental and non-governmental organizations should actively create awareness and mobilize every sector of the society to ensure that gender justice prevails in Nigeria.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I certify that I have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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