

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more experienced than their very young and largely innocent or naive wives; (2) men's choice of whom to marry generally superseded girls' preferences; (3) young girls were sometimes coerced into marriage; (4) parental consent was regarded as more important than the girls' especially under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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