



## GENDER EQUALITY: A VERITABLE TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

*Gender equality has generated a lot of controversies based on the African culture. Human beings are made up of both male and female genders which was confirmed by the Holy Bible. Despite this, men are favoured in all aspects of life bearing in mind the cultural belief of men's superiority over women which still prevails in the Nigerian society. The society believed that the role of a woman is restricted to the kitchen and that was why enlightenment on women equality in the olden days fell on deaf ears of the people in the society. The fourth world conference on women held in Beijing on 4<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> September 1995 enhanced the level of awareness and strengthened action on women development. The affirmative action taken by the countries in attendance gave 30 percent quota to women in all structures of policy and decision making. This gave an encouragement to women to take up challenges in many disciplines and professions. This paper examined the biblical support for women existence to mankind, administrative leadership of a woman, leadership role of a woman in education and politics. Challenges to women in leadership were also considered and the way forward.*

**Key words:** gender equality, veritable tools, leadership, sustainable development.

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### Introduction

Education is known to be the bedrock on which the progress of human being in any society can be built. Education is important in raising national productivity, poverty reduction, enhancing individuals and collective capabilities which prepare man for administrative, educational and political leadership positions. The target from the universal primary education under the Millennium Development Goals was to ensure that by 2015, all children everywhere; boys and girls should be able to complete a full course of primary school. This goal may give room for gender equality to education starting from the foundation.

Gender equality, also known as sex equality, gender equalitarianism or equality of the gender is the view that everybody should receive equal treatment and not be discriminated against based on gender. Gender equality is also a precondition for advancing development and reducing poverty. Empowered women contribute to the wealth and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation.

Gender equality is achieved when woman and man enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society. Until women and men have equal opportunity to participate in public and private lives as community members, citizens, decision makers, and leaders, we would not be living in a sustainable, fair world for all.

Transformation of the education sector including the structure and composition of school management, governance and education ministries needed to create a gender equitable environment. Ensuring representative leadership, decision making and equitable participation in all areas of life is vital for sustainable development. All girls, boys, women and men need to become change agents to ensure a fairer and more sustainable world is achievable for generations to come.

Despite progress made in the last 20 years, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation has declared that more girls than boys are denied the right to education. No fewer than 16



million girls between six and 11, do not have the chance to read and write in primary school as compared to about eight million boys (UNESCO 2016). According to Irina (2016), we will not achieve any of the Sustainable Development Goals without overcoming the discrimination and poverty that stunt the lives of girls and women from one generation to the next. He believed that there is need to work at all levels, from grassroots to global leaders, to put equity and inclusion at the heart of every policy so that all girls, go to school, stay in school and become empowered citizens. Education provides women with literacy and numeracy skills, it helps them acquire critical knowledge for everyday life such as understanding political platforms and voting, which many take for granted.

### **Biblical Support for Existence of Woman to Mankind**

Considering the religious writings, the woman is considered to be an appendage of man's creation-process. After God completed the process of creation, He looked at the works of His hand and they were all good Genesis, chapter 1 v 12(Holy Bible,2001) All religious beliefs attests to the perfection of first creation. Woman came into being because her valuable incomparable presence was needed. It was also believed that only the female species in the entire creation has the ability to gestate, to replicate, to multiply, to nurture, to protect and in the case of the human species, has the additional ability to inspire and influence all those she comes in contact with.

With the advancement in science and technology across the globe, scientists are now fertilizing ova without involving sperm, instead of using nuclei from stem cells but it has not been possible to make an all-male person pregnant and carry a baby to full term. It is only the female that can reproduce offspring of its species. Without the spiritual activity of the female species, creation would not have been possible and there would have been no life on earth, the most important element in the regeneration of the species. Her body, her essence are the first point of contact for the new baby. She shapes and moulds the baby's perception volition, thinking, even the growth of the child's physical body up to the point of maturity when the baby then metamorphoses into an independent adult.

Akande in her address delivered at Women in Technical Education and Employment (WITED) week, Federal Polytechnic Ado chapter held on 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2015 said that "the child of a good mother and a bad father has a greater chance to turn out well than the child of a bad mother and a good

father". When a family unit is coming into being, the pivotal stabilizing factor there is the woman. 'He who finds a wife (woman) finds a good thing' - Proverb, chapter 18 v22 (Holy Bible,2001). The woman through her activity turns her house into a "home"; she bears the children, nurtures them, inculcates values and ethics into them (because they spend more time in her company) as a result of which stable and well-mannered individuals arise from the family unit.

### **Administrative Leadership of a Woman**

A Leader can be referred to as a person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country. It could also be a person who influences a group of people towards achieving a common goal. Leadership is that process in which one person sets the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment. According to Aykut, Apinya, Billy, Crystal, Libert and Ritina (2008) leadership is a communication process of influencing and directing people to commit and achieve a shared goal voluntarily in a given situation.

### **Leadership Role of Women in Education**

Research on school administration carried out by Growe and Montgomery (2000), found that schools with female administrators were better managed (the quality of pupil learning and professional performance of teachers were higher), and on the average, performed better than those managed by male administrators. Furthermore, De la Ray (2005) noted that characteristics such as building coalitions and advancing individual and community development are construct that women display in their relational styles. Women are also better at conflict management, having better listening skills and showing more tolerance and empathy.

Women constitute the key resource in development and their potentialities have to be harnessed if the goals of sustainable development are to be achieved. The restricted educational opportunities available to girls and women in the olden days have hindered the active participation in the affairs of the nation. It is important to note that education is one of the most important avenues for opportunities in any nation whereas illiteracy exposes them to ignorance, disease and poverty which together have constrained their development and eventually limited the possibility of sustainable development.



It is necessary that efforts should be geared towards the enhancement of the status of women and their role in development should begin with encouragement to the girl-child to participate in science and technology at the early childhood education. Sachaefer (2008) declared that a detailed overview of the status of the world's women issued by the United Nations in 2000, noted that women and men live in different worlds – worlds that differ in access to education and world opportunities, and in health, personal security and human rights.

Again, Okebukola (2008) stressed that in the developing African countries where the unsettled patriarchal system persists, the girl-child and indeed the women are subjugated to play subordinate role that often impede their access to equal opportunities for development.

Nakpodia and Urien (2012), held that gender discrimination exists in most parts of the world. It is a universally acknowledged truth that societies had always been inclined to discriminate against female half of the human race, it begins as soon as a child is born. There is much happiness and celebration when a male child is born because of the importance attached to sex.

Gender has impact on science education. Yoloye (2004) and Ezirim (2006) noted that male supremacy and gender stereotyping are factors among others that were identified to influence occupation choice. Longe and Adedeji (2003) are of the opinion that science and technology is a male dominated subject and that females tend to shy away from scientific and technological field.

Ogunneye and Lasisi (2008) reported that more ladies were found in Biology than any other science subject department in higher learning institution. With all these aforementioned, Babajide (2010) found that gender had no significant influence on achievement in science. Supporting the findings of Babajide (2010), it was recorded in the year (2010-2014, 2014-2016 and 2016-2018) academic sessions in Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti that the Deputy Vice Chancellors (Academics) were erudite female professors from Faculty of Science. Professor Grace Alele Williams is an educator who made history as the first Nigerian woman to become the head (Vice Chancellor) of the University of Benin, Benin City Nigeria.

### **Political Role of Women in Sustainable development**

Nigeria has witnessed the involvement of women in politics in the Fourth Republic at different levels. Women aspire to be involved in politics but are scared by the way political and electoral issues are

handled. It was observed that Societal attitudes towards female politicians which are borne out of ingrained perceptions of gender roles and women's position in the society have been working against women in their pursuit of political power. Women's political participation is the actual involvement of women in the governance of the communities they belong to through elective, appointive and merited position (New Tactic, 2015). The right of women to political position is a fundamental issue to ensure reduced poverty and promote healthy socio-cultural development.

Osuizigbo (2016) opined that women are relegated in the area of political appointments due to cultural stereotypes, patriarchal structure of the society. Since the re-birth of democracy in 1999, women in Nigeria have tried to gain access to decision making positions by contesting at various levels. In 1999 only 2.8% of female were members of Senate and 3.3% in the House of Representatives. In 2003, only 3.7% were in Senate and 5.8% in the House of Representatives, in year 2007, 8.3% were in Senate and 7.2% in the House of Representatives; in 2011, 6.4% were in Senate and 6.9% in the House of Representatives; in 2015, 6.4% were in Senate and 5.2% in the House of Representatives.

The above is evidence that women have been marginalized because men monopolized the decision making structure and were in the majority. Women themselves are often reluctant to run for public position and this is partly attributed to cultural prohibitions on women speaking in public or going to public places. African societies according to (Tripp, 2008) have the feelings that women who vie for public / political office have to consider the risk of being labeled 'loose' or 'unfit' as mothers and wives and being socially stigmatized. Such consideration makes many women to shy away from politics.

The Federal and State governments are now aware of the political capability of women ranging from sincerity, objectivity, accountability and participatory approach in handling democratic issues. They are more democratic, allow for power and information sharing, are more sensitive, more nurturing than men, focus on relationship and enable others to make contributions through delegation. Women are coming up in politics and there are a lot of women given ministerial appointments by the Federal Government such as late Dora Akinuyi, Chairman National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC). Dr. (Mrs) Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was appointed as the Minister for Finance in Nigeria. Dr. Mrs. Obi Ezekwesili was appointed as the Minister for Education. The state governments also followed suit by appointing women into reputable political positions, in year 2010-2014 in Ekiti State, Nigeria, the deputy governor was an erudite female professor (Professor Modupe



Adelabu), presently the Deputy Governor in Lagos State is a woman of honour (Mrs Adebule Oluranti). The Commissioner for Works in year 2014-2018 in Ekiti State, Nigeria, was a female civil engineer (Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ogun). All these could be attributed to the involvement of women into politics at the Federal and State government levels.

### Challenges Women are Facing in Leadership

In Africa society, the issue of children, or family for that matter, is one that disturbs many women as they make decision to take up a leadership position. That is lack of time due to women's reproductive roles, believing that women's role is typically one of a homemaker. The mentality of the society that the education of a woman would end in the kitchen deprived them of having education. Women also fear to raise voices and speak out for fear of victimization, given the cultural expectations of what a woman should or should not do.

In addition, there are few women in positions of power due to lack of unity among women themselves. They may tend to see other women as a threat and are jealous of one another. People still believe that women lack political experience, confidence, education and connection to run for office which make some women to have erroneous beliefs that the position of leadership are meant for men.

### Conclusion

Gender has impact on education, technological advancement and national development. Women should not see themselves as 'second citizen' but as role models and mentors that can have a critical effect on the career paths of women who aspire to advance in higher education administration, leadership position, political and public offices. Women should see themselves as a super beings with sixteen hands working at the same time without certificate that is, as a mother, wife, mentor, teacher, mentee, cook, laundryman, counselor, in-law, friend, sister, confidant, planner, manager, home keeper, administrator and politician. Women should believe in themselves and follow the idea of what a man can do, a woman can do if not better.

### The way forward

The Federal and State governments should come out with policy to ensure female representation at all levels of governance which should be on appointment and not election through voting. Women of good attribute should be celebrated during mother's day. There is need for support from other women to develop the confidence to take up leadership position other than making unnecessary jealousy. Women should be given social, economic, educational and political will to enable them

contribute their positive quota to the development of the country.

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