

GENDER EQUALITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Onyeka Iwuchukwu

School of Arts and Social Sciences, National Open University of Nigeria, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT:

Gender equality has been the focus of scholarship in contemporary times and the general contention is that women are oppressed and marginalized in many areas of life because of the patriarchal construction of the society which disadvantages them. The proponents of this view argue therefore that there is need for parity which would translate to gender equality. There is no doubt that responsibilities and limitations of being a woman in a male dominated society are glaring realities in Nigerian society because the society "...has preserved attitudes towards women" (James 3). In life gender roles are clearly defined and going against them becomes an aberration. The argument in this paper is that there can never be gender equality in life instead we could talk of gender equity in the treatment of people at home, in workplace and other considerations. Nobody should be marginalized on account of gender as that would counter-productive through an enthrone of mediocrity. The conclusion is that the recognition of each gender first and foremost as human entity is a positive step towards healthy living and development in the nation.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Sustainable Development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The campaign for gender equality is alien as it was non-existent in the traditional Nigerian society. Gender equity is hinged on mutual respect, identification and encouragement of potentials of everyone and equal opportunities given to each person irrespective of gender for the realization of those potentials which should be harnessed for sustainable development in the country. Gender roles were clear though Nigeria, being a patriarchal society, women were rated lower than men so as such should be seen and not heard. The woman was truly marginalized and even till date, in Igboland, a woman cannot talk in the council of elders even in matters that threaten her being. She cannot be a member of the council because she is a woman and can only express a view through her husband, her brother-in-law or a son that has come of age. This marginalization led to the oppression and subjugation of women which they bore because tradition and culture made it so. The movement towards gender equality therefore emanated from the Western world and it started with the suffragette movement of the late-19th century which led to a change in relation to women's property rights in marriage. See for instance, Married Women's Property act of 1882. Gradually the awareness for gender equality increased and escalated in the 60s as agitation for gender equality amplified giving rise to movements like women liberation and feminism. These movements emphasized women's rights and insisted that women should have equal rights with men. Literally, this means that indeed, what a man can do a woman can do also but the originators emphasized the rights of women to work in paid employment and also to vote. This is understandable as women in Western culture before the 19th century manned the home, did domestic works, were lonely and were not economically empowered. The situation in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular was different as women were economically empowered as they engaged in small business ventures, interacted with one another in individually or in groups as sisters, wives, age grades, etc. and contributed to building their families so to some extent, actualized themselves. There was therefore no need an agitation for equality with men.

Women wield economic powers and social influence in their communities yet find it difficult to counter their subordination to and humiliation by men. Some women try to counter this age-long tradition, but unfortunately, by asserting themselves wrongly thereby creating more problems than solving the existing ones. For instance, some women abandon their homes "preferring their profession to marriage, some of them use men to have children without entering into a domestic arrangement (James 3). It is therefore not uncommon to hear the expression "what a man can do a woman can do also or even better" but one hardly hears "what a woman can do, a man can do also". Both expressions are wrong as there are specific roles for specific gender.

The agitation for equality assumed different dimensions with the multiplicity of the movements with each one focusing on a specific issue championing their causes through campaigns, writings, conferences, workshops, seminars and pressure groups. The expectation was that the crusades would culminate in the elimination of the oppression and subjugation of women and entrenchment a platform for self actualization and empowerment. This desire has remained a mirage though some appreciable achievements have been recorded as there is hardly any occupation that is regarded as an exclusive reserve of a particular gender. For instance, now, women serve in the armed forces and other military and Para-military professions, engineering and an increasing number of women are active in politics and occupy high positions in business in many countries of the world. Some countries like India, Britain, Philippines, Liberia and other countries have had women presidents /prime

ministers. In Nigeria, the story is not so different as names like Queen Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin and Moremi of Ife, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Otunba Bola Kuforiji Olubi, Prof. Dora Akunyili, Prof. Grace Alele-Williams, Prof. Akachi Ezeigbo, Buchi Emecheta, Tess Onwueme, Zainab Alkali, Onyeka Onwenu, Hon. Justice Aloma Mariam Mukhtar and many others to numerous to mention have excelled in different spheres of human endeavour. Does this then translate to gender equality in Nigeria?

The campaign for women emancipation and gender equality in Nigeria took a different perspective as scholars disagree on the issue of women oppression. Some of them agree that Nigerian women have been living in bondage others oppose that view and cite some notable women in history to support their view. This argument does not suffice because Nigerian society is basically a patriarchal one which subordinates women. A woman is seen as an object for the man's delights from his belly to his groin consequently this assertion: is it possible "... that a woman that I paid to get with my hard earned money should challenge me in my house? Does she think that I carry these balls between my thighs for nothing...the gods of the land ordained that a man must own a wife to bear him children ... I don't want to come home and not find my food and woman waiting for me" (Onwueme 146). Another man asks his wife: "Did I not pay your bride price, Am I not your owner?" (Emecheta 48). A woman is therefore trained from childhood to internalize an inferiority complex as she is prepared for the role of a wife and mother, her ultimate ambition being how to satisfy her husband. In the traditional society and even in some cultures now, her consent is not usually needed in the transaction of selling or buying her. Luckily, the trend is changing but has not obliterated women oppression and marginalization in families, communities, work places, politics and other spheres of life and this is inimical to the sustainable development of our nation.

This notwithstanding, the idea of gender equality in the society is utopian because no two individuals can be equal. The adherents of gender equality should focus on equal opportunities for empowerment and self actualization for every individual irrespective of gender. Few women who were given opportunities have proved their mettle and marched with thundering steps on grounds men feared to tread. Dora Akunyili's achievements in NAFDAC are still fresh in our mind.

Shades of Feminism

It is difficult to discuss gender equality without mentioning Feminism, a movement that initiated the struggle for women's rights and gender equality. It originated from the Western World and with liberal and radical feminism as its major offshoots. The liberal feminists stress gender equality through political and legal reforms with a focus on the ability of women to reflect **"...their equality through their actions and choices"** (Ettinger 65). **They see women are rational and normal human beings who should be treated as such . they therefore preach against a system that devalues women and the work they do** (Griselda 54). They emphasize harmonious co-existence of men and women through the reversal of male-oriented structures in the society and building **"a home where women and men can live freely together"** (Longwe13). Radical feminists on the other hand are concerned **with only women's experiences, perceptions, do not see anything good in man** and are interested in a "a revolution that must affect everyone from homes to public life because male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination" (Morgan 598). This view is rejected by some Nigerian scholars who view feminists as rebellious sect "dancing furious steps [to] the feminist drums [that have] gone mad"(Nnolim 46). Chimalum Nwankwo, equates feminism with dissidence (198) while Femi Ojo Ade sees it as an "aberration" and "occidental phenomenon"(75).

It is difficult to discuss gender equality without a space for Feminism which is the popular term for the agitation of gender equality and women's rights. As the popularity of the feminist movement grew, the women of colour felt that its tenets did not reflect the aspirations of the black woman and they came up with their own coinages among which is womanism.

Nigerian women scholars have not been left out as they have been vibrant in their postulations of concepts which each believe best expresses her ideals of the gender equality. One thing that is worthy of note in the Nigerian women perspectives of feminism is that they obtrusively or inadvertently preach complementary relationship of the genders. These women understand that there are gender roles based on cultural background but, advocate the emancipation and empowerment of women at variant degrees.

Feminism involves much more than the agitation by a group of women for equal rights and privileges with men in all fields of human endeavour. According to Kate Soper, it is the search for the "registration and realization...of feminine 'difference', of that ineffable 'otherness' or negation of human culture and its symbolic order (and gender system) which is not human" (11). It is a protest by women against all perceived oppressive structures that inhibit them in the society. It is therefore geared towards dismantling the status quo and ushering in a more viable alternative of a society where human beings would be given equal opportunities to actualize themselves irrespective of their gender. Unfortunately, women could not agree on the nature, structure, and the modalities for the actualization of their desires hence, the emergence of different versions of feminism. Originally, the liberal and radical feminists dominated the discourse.

The liberal or mainstream feminists stress gender equality through political and legal reforms with a focus on the "ability of the women to show and maintain their equality through their actions and choices" (Ettinger 65). They believe that women are rational and normal human beings who should be allowed to exist and express themselves as such. They contend that the woman is inhibited in the workplace and at home because of her unequal standing with men. Women, according to them, are exploited by the patriarchal system through "prostitution, domestic work, child care and marriage" and that "...this system devalues the work they do" (Griselda 54). They believe that a healthier relationship between men and women could be achieved if the image of the woman as sex object and home keeper alone is changed. The success of this depends on the reversal of rules invented by men to confine women. They emphasize harmonious co-existence of men and women through the reversal of male-oriented structures in the society and building "a home where women and men can live freely together" (Longwe13).

Radical feminists are concerned with only women's experiences and perceptions and do not see anything good in man. They advocate the need for women to unite in a common sisterhood that transcends class or race for a successful revolt against male dominance. They feel that the control of women by men extends from public world to private life in homes, so, man becomes the target. They therefore propose "a revolution that must affect everyone from homes to public life because male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination" (Morgan 598). Perhaps, this extreme stance explains why many scholars often misunderstand feminism and regard feminists as irresponsible and aggressive men-haters. This also explains

why some African women dissociate themselves from feminism. Accordingly, in rejection of Western brands of feminism, they come up with.....and many other concepts to champion the emancipation of women from African perspective.

Feminism therefore means different things to different people. The meaning ascribed to it at any given time depends on the context, socio-political backgrounds of the people and other historical and cultural determinants. In spite of the multifarious nature of feminism, the melting point is that it connotes the identification of oppression of women, the need for its eradication and empowerment of women. All versions of feminism insist that women have in the past been suppressed and oppressed by men through patriarchal norms that have been accepted and rationalized as natural. These are mainly various forms of prejudices which are peculiar to women alone. Feminist scholars therefore support the rejection of all forms of oppressive structures against women, male domination and the need to change the prejudices. However, African women in the Diaspora, insist that the capitalist structures in the world do not create a favourable forum for universal sisterhood in the feminist movement. The scholars contend that the white woman's mainstream perspectives do not represent the experiences of Black woman and that whenever they include the Black woman's concerns, it is done from a racist perspective. Consequently, the black women invented their own brand of feminism which they term Women of colour feminism to fully represent the yearnings of African women in the Diaspora. Alice Walker invents "womanism".

Walker and other Africans in the Diaspora like Toni Morrison, revolt against feminism because they see it as a product of colonialism, neo-colonialism and subjugation as the white women joined their male counterparts to colonize, oppress and subdue the black race irrespective of gender. They therefore call for a movement that encourages solidarity among them which could create a forum where "...black women and men can dialogue about everything, spaces where we can engage in critical dissent without violating one another. We are concerned with black culture and black identity". (Walker 32)

This explanation becomes necessary not just because of colonialism and oppression of blacks by whites but more importantly, the assumption by the whites that feminist issues from their perspectives are universally acceptable. They also argue that the middle-class white feminists tend to impose the dichotomous or adversarial male to female relations of the west on the rest of the world. The Womanists favour logical gender relations based on cultural imperatives and seems to be the acceptable nomenclature for many African scholars since it reconciles the euro-centric feminist ideals that are relevant to the black woman's experience with issues that are peculiar to African women and in the Diaspora. Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi for instance, welcomes the tenets of womanism because it is communal in its orientation, and the ideology is centred on collaboration and complementarity. (119).

Many black scholars view the term feminism with scepticism, and many men see it as being synonymous with rebellion. For instance, Charles Nnolim condemns the attitude of some African feminists who he insists "...are dancing furious steps, and that the feminist drums have gone mad"(Nnolim 46). In his own view, Chimalum Nwankwo, equates feminism with dissidence (198) and Femi Ojo Ade sees it as an "aberration" and "occidental phenomenon"(75).

In his own reaction, Chinweizu sees it as a senseless exercise because he claims that actually women are in control in the society which is replete with features of female hegemony over men as dictated by matriarchy.

Perhaps, in response to the criticism against Feminism that Nigerian Women are postulate forms of feminism that suit the Nigerian cultural background. Ogundipe-Leslie for instance created “STIWANISM” coined from STIWA an abbreviated form of Social Transformation Including Women in Africa. She argues that her own ideology in “frees African gender discourses from the critique of and in comparison to feminism” (cited in Kumah, 6). Clenora Hudson-Weem’s invented “Africana Womanism” which she claims addresses “the need to avoid tagging African women agenda onto white feminist values...[and] involved with the peculiarities of African women’s needs, not one that serves as an “addendum to feminism” (cited in Kolawole, 25) Nego Feminism is Obioma Nnaemeka’s brainchild which she claims encourages negotiation which is in the foundation in many African cultures “...give and take, compromise, balance...” (377-378). Femalism is initiated by Chioma Opara which is focused on the African female writer, who she contends, is a females and not a feminist in the Western sense. She tries to distinguish it from the Western concept of feminism and claims that as a hue of African feminisms, “psychoanalytical criticism in its negation of the gendered subjectivity deemed as culturally and socially constructed” (17-18). Catherine Acholonu insists that men and women co-exist in African culture and that each role complements the other. She contends that the terms patriarchy and matriarchy are colonial coinages imposed on Africa because “...several African societies reflect systems with ranging degrees of dual-sex hierarchies in which men and women exist in parallel and complementary positions and roles within the society”(6). She cautions against pushing “... the tenets of feminism to scandalous, even criminal and murderous levels” (46). The latest is Akachi Ezeigbo’s Snail sense Feminism which is also based on negotiation. She is optimistic that the desired change is imminent but that women should avoid confrontation with men. Feminism therefore means different things to different people depending on the context and cultural backgrounds of the people. Nigerian Women have not been left out as they coin different terms or propose ideologies to draw attention to the marginalisation of women and the need for its elimination. Ogundipe-Leslie created “STIWANISM” coined from STIWA an abbreviated form of Social Transformation Including Women in Africa which she insists “frees African gender discourses from the critique of and in comparison to feminism” (cited in Kumah, 6); Nego Feminism is Obioma Nnaemeka’s brainchild which encourages negotiation, “...give and take, compromise, balance...” (377-378); Chioma Opara’ Femalism focuses on the African female writer, Catherine Acholonu in Motherism advocates the co-existence of men and women and that each role complements the other and Akachi Ezeigbo’s Snail sense Feminism is also based on negotiation. My own coinage and contribution to the debate is **Focus Feminism** which is directed to the women urging them to focus on themselves, eliminate intra-gender conflicts and oppression so as to have the moral justification for confronting an external oppressor-man. A close study of these Nigerian postulations reveal that none of them advocate gender equality but a complementarity that would ensure that each individual is given an opportunity and freedom for self actualisation. They understand that in our culture, like Ezigbo said, any woman who decides to confront men will fail (). The implication therefore is that from the family to the public sphere, gender equality is an unattainable goal.

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE FAMILY

This discussion on gender equality is hinged on Grotius’ postulations of Natural Rights in the early 17th century. Grotius who lived between 1583 and 1645 introduced the idea of *natural rights* of individuals whereby he insisted that each individual has natural rights that enable self-preservation. His opinion is that the people are *sui juris* (under their own jurisdiction). This means that each person has a right as a human being but that there is a delineation of those rights because of what is possible

for everyone to accept as morally right. He contends: “We should, therefore, avoid doing harm to or to interfere with one another” (Wikipedia online). If we avoid doing harm to one another, it means that no gender should marginalize, oppress or subjugate the other. There would therefore be mutual respect and appreciation of one another but that does not translate to gender equality. In the family for instance, the man is the head of the family but that does not make him a slave driver and his wife at his service like the Achebean women, seen but not heard and who are equated to children. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman and even in polygamy, the union and relationship is between a man and a woman at any given time. **Gender equality in the family is therefore an illusion because the husband cannot bear children and the woman cannot impregnate her husband but if each spouse sees the other as a human being who is capable of feeling joys and pains, each will always be eager and willing to lend a helping hand in the steering of the family ship. They complement each other for the sustainable development of the family.** In that case there will be no question of what to tolerate in or who should be allowed to enter or stay in “my house” as the house belongs to both of them. There is always a leader in every group to coordinate issues but cannot operate effectively in isolation. A good leader considers the opinion of other members of the group and records unimaginable success. Likewise in the family, the husband is the leader but should consider his wife as a human being with potentials to be harnessed for the progress of the family. The wife is expected to compliment her husband and the wife who claims equality with her husband sows seeds of discord a battalion has only one commander and a ship one captain. That wife is asserting herself wrongly and a woman who decides to drink, gamble, and sleep around with men (in this case since men womanize, the woman is manizing) and aborting babies at will to show equality with men is also asserting herself wrongly; a woman who decides that she cannot ‘submit’ to any man but uses men to bear children, would realize that they children need both parents. In the craze for emancipation and equality, it is important to realize forgetting that even an unborn child has its own rights and if every member of the family engages in the battle for rights and equality, the family crumbles. A woman who engages her husband in the battle for equality does not realize the power of womanhood. What power is greater than the power of child bearing?

The natural gender roles are irreversible. God re-creates the world through women so pregnancy, child bearing and nurturance are innate parts of a woman so no gender equality in words or action can force the woman produce the sperm and the man, the ovaries. Also, a man is endowed with more physical strength than a woman so he undertakes certain tasks at home and elsewhere naturally and a woman cannot do that with dexterity even if she attempts to do so. Couples therefore need to complement each other by availing themselves of the necessary opportunities for self-discovery and actualization. The children are given equal treatment in terms of running errands and in educational opportunities. A family where there is mutual appreciation and respect, both genders contribute to the building of a peaceful and harmonious home for a more sustainable development of their family and the nation.

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY

Identification of gender is natural because from birth the baby is either a male or a female and from then on the gendered self is developed and gender role, depending on cultural background, is internalized as parents interact differently with children depending on their sexes. Through such interactions parents instill different values or traits in their children on the basis of what is expected of them according to the sex of the child. Traditionally a girl is made to believe that her ultimate ambition

is marriage and child bearing hence she is confined to household chores while her male counterpart is encouraged to aspire to greater heights through education. Luckily, the trend is being reversed as more girls are in school now and its impact in the development of various communities is glaring as more women excel in various professions, business and politics and are contributing greatly to national development.

In some communities, a woman is not expected to contribute to any discussion except in a meeting of only women despite the fact that she may have a solution to a particular problem. She should contribute through her husband and if she is a widow, through her son who has come of age and if she has no such son, she is voiceless. The focus of this paper is not widowhood rites or rights of inheritance but is illustrative of the need for equity, of equal opportunities and treatment of all irrespective of gender. In Yoruba land, women have the same inheritance rights as their male counterparts but the case is different in Igboland where women cannot inherit property. A woman in Igboland “ceases” to be a member of her father’s family but a visitor and is treated as such. This can never apply to men so where then lies the equality. If she is not married, she would just pray that she would not get a sister-in-law that would kick her out. This explains the Igbo proverb which says that “a home stead that is destined for extinction breeds only girls.” A woman, who loses her husband, goes through harrowing experiences and is confined for a stipulated period so wastes the time she would used judiciously to fend for her family. On the other hand, as the corpse of a man’s wife is being taken to the mortuary, relations and friends are already looking for a lady who would be “consoling him” during the mourning period. I am not saying that this is right but these are realities institutionalized in the society and no gender equality can send a man away from his home and is treated like a visitor whenever he goes home or be forced into seclusion on the loss of his wife, at least in the Igbo society. Luckily, some of these structures that hinder progress are gradually being demolished. The focus should therefore be on the destruction of the social structures that inhibit or devalue women but as Ezeigbo advises, it has to be gradual for sustainable development in community.

GENDER EQUALITY AT THE WORK PLACE

The conception of women as care givers may have contributed to the designation of certain occupations like teaching and nursing to women. Though these professions are vital to sustainable development, they are not economically valued. Teaching is the most devalued profession in Nigeria. It is seen as women’s job so they are poorly paid, dishonored and downgraded. Nurses now fare better. Traditionally the man as the breadwinner is expected to be in a plump job that would enable him cater adequately for his family so jobs held by men have been also economically valued. Sometimes, men prefer to hire or promote men instead of women. In some establishments, a married is not employed and an employed spinster should not get married until after a certain number of years yet no such rule applies to men. Such women are denied the opportunity to contribute to national development because the woman that is schemed out on account of gender may be the best suited for the job. Sustainable development for the nation thereby suffers a setback.

GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICS

Nigerian women have from the traditional society, participated in politics but the percentage is negligible. Out of millions of Nigeria women in history only few like Queen Amina of Zaria, Emotan of Benin, Moremi of Ife, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margret Ekpo and few others. The reason for this maybe because of the contention that traditionally, men contend that “...serious matters of state concerns are too heavy for the brittle heads of women and children...” (Onwueme 148). This belief appears to be true as Nigeria is yet to produce a female governor or president though they have been contesting and the percentage of women in other elective positions is still very low as shown in the table below.

NUMBER OF SEATS HELD IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY STATE AND GENDER (1999 – 2007)

SENATE			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1999	106	3	109
2003	105	4	109
2007	101	8	109
HOUSE OF REPS			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1999	349	12	361
2003	338	22	360
2007	334	26	360
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1999	895	21	916
2003	877	39	916
2007	853	56	909

LG CHAIRPERSONS			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1999	587	7	594
2003	693	12	705
2007	226	11	237
COUNCILORS			
	MALE	FEMALE	
1999	6532	80	6612
2003	8454	270	8724
2007	1576	164	1740

Source: Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Abuja

The reason for this shortfall is that according to Femi Falana¹, the Nigerian political terrain is not favourable to women as it is too violent and most political meetings are held at night. The structure of modern society restricts women's participation in politics as they have more responsibilities and have lost some of their traditional privileges. Moreover, the political parties do not look favorably upon female candidates but there is hope that with the concept of Sail-sense Feminism, the percentage of

¹ Femi Falana in a Paper presented at the

women in politics will rise considerably. This notwithstanding, women with leadership qualities should be encouraged to participate actively in politics because they have the desire and ability to do so not because they want equality with men.

Gender Roles in Nigerian Society

Nigeria is a multifarious society with thousand uncountable cultural groups so gender roles differ from one cultural background to the other. However there are some defined gender roles that are natural and others that are somehow universal in the traditional. Generally, the bearing and nurturance of a child is ascribed to the female gender while the male gender is seen as the provider. The male gender is seen as being stronger in terms of physical strength so is expected to carry out tedious tasks like hewing trees/ firewood, clearing the bush, tilling, hunting, fighting wars, getting involved in masquerade cults and so on. The female gender on the other hand carries out other tasks that do not involve much physical exertion like home keeping, weeding the farm, petty trading, cooking for the family and taking care of the family. He man provides the wealth and the woman manages the resources to ensure that no aspect of the family suffers. In Igboland, a man marries a wife to take care of her needs and that of the children, the wife is known as Oliaku (one who enjoys wealth).

Gender roles in the society were clearly streamlined and each gender's position in the society was recognized and respected. Women in the traditional African society never complained of marginalization by men since some structures and institutions were exclusively for women. However the weight of oppression was heavy on them but was accepted as norm. In spite of that, in some cultural backgrounds women wielded some measures of power and authority in certain spheres of the society like the Omu in Delta Igbo, the Iyaloja in Yorubaland and women- husbands exist in some cultures too.. Also Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile Ife, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margret Ekpo have imprinted Nigerian women in the sands of history.

The traditional Nigerian society sees "...the primary and the most important role of a woman as that of being a wife and a mother...she is expected to be loyal, obedient and submissive to her husband"(Iwuchukwu 1998). Hence in Igboland a prospect bride is admonished to stand under the sun or use her head as firewood if her husband asks her to do so. Consequently, from childhood she is made to see herself as an inferior and a subordinate being who consequently loses confidence in herself while her male counterpart is encouraged to perceive himself as being superior, so is trained to be strong and assertive. However a school of thought believes that since women have specific roles in the society the 'claim' of women oppression and subordination is a colonial phenomenon. They support this view with the fact that many African women in history have excelled, even in areas considered to be exclusive reserves of men. The contention of this paper is that the fact that women did not cry out does not obliterate the fact that there was oppression.

CONCLUSION

Nigerian women have achieved a lot in all spheres of life and today there is hardly any occupation or profession that is regarded as exclusive reserve of a particular gender. For instance, women now serve in the military and para-military forces which were hitherto seen as men's job while male nurses and teachers abound. Armed robbery gangs, kidnappers, agberos, drivers have women among them. Should this be termed gender equality? No. A man and a woman can never be equal but can work together in mutual respect for sustainable development. The girl-child should be allowed and encouraged to

actualize herself and aspire to greater heights just as the young boy. However a boy remains a boy and a girl is a girl. There are certain things a woman **can do** which a man **cannot do** and vice versa so both can never be equal. The advocates of gender equality should therefore tread with caution for sustainable development of the country.

REFERENCES

- Emecheta, Buchi (1994) *Joys of Motherhood*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- Ettinger, Bracha L., (2006) *The Marxical Boarder Space*. Minnesota; University of Minnesota Press.
- Griselda, Pallock. (2001) *Looking Back to the Future*. New York: G&B New Arts Press.
- James, Adeola.(1990) *In Their Own Voices African Women Writers Talk*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Kumah, Carolyn.(1002) "African Women and Literature". in *West African Review*, Vol. 2, No.1.
- Longwe, Sarah.(2000) "Towards African Woman Leadership: From Dream to Reality" in *African Forum: The Status of Women* Vol. 4 April 2000.
- Moss, Pamela.(2007) *Feminisms in Geography: Rethinking Space, Place, and Knowledges*: New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. (2004) "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's Way". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Vol. 29, No.2, Winter, 2004.
- Nnolim, Charles.(2000) "Trends in the Criticism of African Literature" in Emenyonu(ed) *Goatskin Bags and Wisdom: New Critical Perspectives on African Literature*. Trenton: African World Press.
- Nawnkwo, Chimalum.(2006) "African Literature and the Woman: The imagined Reality as a Strategy of Dissidence". *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism*. Vol. 6,No 2.
- Ojo-Ade, Femi (1998). "Female Writers, Male Critics". In *African Literature Today*. No. 13.
- Onwueme, Tess (1993) *Three Plays*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press with Heinemann Books Nigeria.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Onyeka Iwuchukwu is a Professor in the School of Arts and Social Sciences at National Open University of Nigeria in Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.