

**TRANSFORMING THE TRADITION OF GENDER INEQUALITY  
TOWARDS ACTUALISING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The festering gender inequality and exclusion of women from decision making at different levels of government occasioned by the feminization of their contributions is the bane of Nigeria's sustainable development quest. For many decades, gender inequality has scarred the country at the detriment of women while their male counterparts are not limited by their gender. Transforming the tradition of gender inequality has the impetus to accelerate Nigeria's development. With primary and secondary data, this paper examines efforts that should be made by stakeholders to bring the needed change and promote gender mainstreaming which makes the issues of men and women equal concern, and should start from the family level and traditional institutions considering the fact that transformation demands effective change. As agents of change and equal partners with their male counterparts, women are inextricably linked with actualization of sustainable development. Proper enforcement of equal status act at all levels is highly encouraged.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Equality, Nigerian Women, Sustainable Development, Tradition

## BACKGROUND

It is on record that since the year 2000 Nigerian women have served in different capacities in both regional and international organisations. Most decision making endeavours have always been dominated by men especially politically and economically. As agents of change and development, women are part of every society. For many decades, gender inequality has scarred the country at the detriment of women while their male counterparts are not limited by their gender. Globally, gender inequality limits women's potentials. The festering gender inequality and exclusion of women from decision making at different levels of government occasioned by the feminization of their contributions is the bane of actualisation of sustainable development in Nigeria. Gender equality does not mean women are to take the position of their male counterparts because everyone has his or her role to play. The discourse on the inclusion of women in the politics of sustainable development is apt and could not have come at a better time than now when there are issues on how to transform Nigeria and facilitate the nation's sustainable development quest. The issue of gender inequality predates Nigeria's independence. The tradition of gender inequality has gained prominence over the years in many communities and has continued to pose a huge threat to Nigeria's sustainable development quest.

This study sets out to critically examine the ways of bringing the needed change to end gender inequality in Nigeria. Policymakers should ponder on this important question: what does the future hold for a country where women's roles and efforts in initiating development are disregarded?

It is no doubt that women in Africa are yet to gain ground in the mainstream of political, economic, and social issues (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2006), at least when compared with their male counterparts. Kombo and Minungu (2012) enthused that gender relations show that culture had traditionally been used to oppress women, and that cultural practices were used by men to subject women to the traditional cultural framework. Cultural stereotyping in patriarchal ideology is believed to victimize women in Africa and assumptions made upon women include: A man is the head of the household; women are less intelligent than men; women are emotionally unstable; and women are the weaker sex.

As efforts to achieve gender equality attract discourses on sustainable development globally, Nigeria cannot be left behind on this timely and crucial issue considering her significance in Africa's way of emerging. Some factors that militate against gender equality in Nigeria are religion (to an extent), culture, public perception on gender disparity among others. Religion has the potential of serving as a vehicle of the much needed transformation in the country. It should be emphasized that not all cultural practices are oppressive to women but some traditions that subject some women to various preventable challenges after the demise of their husbands especially when they are left with little or nothing to survive with.

Slipman (1986, p. 5) states thus: "Women's domestic responsibilities mean there is little time to become involved in organisations around work such as trade unions and professional organizations where men have traditionally learnt their (political) skills" (cited in Nwankwo, 1996). Seclusion of women is inherent in Christianity and Islam as women are given secondary roles. Nwankwo also notes the politically hindering aspect of culture (known as purdah) as practiced by some Muslims in some parts of Northern and Western Nigeria. But we believe that our religious values are highly significant in

nation building for a new Nigeria to emerge.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of gender inequality has scarred for decades in most parts of Nigeria both in public sector and at grassroots. In spite of the important positions that political parties occupy in the country's polity, a negligible number of women are members of political parties in Nigeria. Very few occupy executive positions in the parties and there are no obvious measures by the parties to increase women's participation in the political arena (FMWA, 2006, p. 40).

Women in Nigeria still form an underclass and lack equality of opportunity, both in the contributions they make to development and the benefits they receive from it (British Council Nigeria, 2012, p. 6). There is no gainsaying that gender inequality which often than not, is at the disadvantage of women, and is part of the problems facing the country especially in terms of actualising sustainable development and peace. The extent of gender inequality in public life in the country is that women are severely debilitated in terms of actualising their full potentials in most sectors of the economy due to limitations associated with such acts.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the nexus between gender equality and sustainable development.
2. To explore the historical account of gender inequality; and
3. To identify and suggest strategies for the actualisation of sustainable development through transformation of the tradition.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS AND THE NEXUS BETWEEN GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

It is pertinent to conceptualize gender and sustainable development to establish a link between them. The issue of gender equality in Nigeria has dominated discourses on gender studies in recent times. The equality spans almost all sectors of the nation's economy to the extent that it has intensified agitations over implementation of various policies that protect the rights of women to facilitate the elimination of all forms of discrimination against them.

Gender refers to the identification of the sexes usually influenced by cultural factors like religion, politics social factors and education (Agu, 2007). Humm (1990) posits that gender is the stated roles that are ascribed to men and women based on what is perceived to be their sex in society; it is a culturally shaped group of attributes and behaviors given to the female or to the male (cited in Ogunipe, 2007, p. 12). Mutunga (2006, p. 365) opines that gender refers to socially constructed identity through which roles are assigned at different levels and which can differ according to culture and can be changed by circumstances that include conflict situation, decision, making etc. In other words, it involves social attributes that are required or learned during socialization and define activities, responsibilities, and needs connected to being male or female and not to biological identity associated with masculinity or femininity.

Canning (2012, p. 4) maintains that the embrace of the concept of gender as a culturally formed set of social relations, distinct from sex, signalled the departure of feminist social scientists from the unchanging and universal notions of biological differences. Mutunga (2006) further elucidates the acquired attributes which are often expressed as power, roles, resources and privileges of men and women. The essence of equality in any human endeavor is to ensure or strike a reasonable balance. It also creates room for fair judgment. Gender equality according to the Canada – Ukraine Gender Fund (2004) means that women and men enjoy the same status and have equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social, and cultural development, and to benefit from the results. The concept of gender equality acknowledges that different treatment of women and men sometimes required to achieve sameness of results, because of different life conditions or to compensate for past discrimination (cited in Lawanson, 2007).

Sustainable human development addresses both equity within and among generations – enabling all generations, present and future, to make the best of their capabilities. It brings the development process within the carrying capacity of nature, giving the highest priority to environmental regeneration – to protect the opportunities of future generations (Ajakaiye and Akinbinu, 2000, p. 211). According Brundtland (1987) sustainable development emerged in 1987 through the World Commission on Environment and Development and has been conceptualized as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs. Lele (1991, p. 607) describes sustainable development as a new way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor which is compatible with the preservation of the environment; while Pearce and Watford (1993, p. 8) see sustainable development as a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate. It emphasizes the hitherto unappreciated role of the environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income quality of life. The issue of sustainable development, according to Oyeshola (2008, p. 160) is now seen as the problem that is confronting humanity. Here in Nigeria for instance, activities of man threaten actualisation of much desired human potentials.

Women are inextricably linked with actualisation of sustainable development because they are agents of change and are believed to represent more than half of world's population. According to Agu (2007) the traditional definition of women in relation to men has led to the gross underdevelopment of women. They bore the burden of food production for the entire population. They are also least benefited from the resources in their environment due to the limited or even no exposure, awareness and knowledge. Gender inequality limits society's chances of developing especially when people are prejudiced. In education for instance, gender equality continues to evolve around changing academic orientation at all levels of learning because girl education improves economic growth and benefit society (Hadden and London, 1996 cited in Johnson *et al* 2005). To achieve gender equality, sustainable change in the education of girls is crucial to promote harmony. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) stresses the non-discriminatory character of human rights, including the equal rights of women and men, but with much emphasis on the right to life, liberty and dignity for all.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theory of people centered and participatory development is premised on the truism that it is only when people are actively engaged in both development process and discourse that they would have the opportunity to contribute their quota to

the societal transformation and advancement. But it becomes the detriment of society when they are neglected. Iruonagbe (2008, p. 640) argues that once people are able to participate in decision making over issues that concern their livelihood, they are able to realize their human potential, build self – confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment. This process has the impetus to empower the people (both men and women) rather than to marginalize them, thereby guaranteeing economic growth and equitable distribution of its benefits. Chinsman (1995) avers that people centred development will:

1. Enable people to realize their potential, build self – confidence, and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment;
2. Free people from poverty, ignorance, filth, squalor, deprivation and exploitation; and
3. Correct existing economic, social, political injustices and oppression (cited in Iruonagbe, 2008, p. 640).

Martinussen (1997, p. 38) reveals that participatory development embodies a process of enlarging peoples' choices (cited in Dipholo, 2002). The involvement of the people entails allowing them to discover the possibilities of exercising choice and thereby becoming capable of managing their own development (Dipholo, 2002). The fact that human development indicators measure the efforts contributed by the individual, family, community and society as a whole, as noted by Mamphela Ramphele (Mo Ibrahim, 2010, p. 32) is an indication that actualising sustainable development depends on the provision of equal access to training and resources for men and women. According to Iruonagbe (2008) this theory also focuses on the situation of the rural poor and the need for equity and equality in the distribution of resources, considering the fact that participatory development implies that development must be people – based or human centred because development entails the full utilization of a nation's human and material resources for the satisfaction of various needs. In other words, this theory is premised on the fact that without effectively engaging both men and women in the development process, it would be difficult for a nation to successfully nip her socio-economic and political challenges to the bud.

## **GENDER INEQUALITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Gender inequality predates independence of Nigeria. Agu (2007) notes that before the colonial administration in Nigeria, women were generally accorded inferior status in the scheme of things. Chauraya (2012) argues that gender inequality in an African set up is common, normal and tolerated, but such tolerance is at the detriment of women themselves. Acholonu, (1995, p. 75) traced the problem of gender inequality to the colonial era and missionary activities in Africa when for the first time, African women saw themselves being forced into a position of sexual inequality, as the Europeans introduced their philosophy of the voiceless woman, which is a gender stratification that eventually placed women behind or below the men, and equated womanhood with instability and weakness through the popular maxims: “a woman is not to be seen, not to be heard”, “behind every successful man, there is a woman, there is a woman”, “frailty, thy name is a woman”. Such ideas were strange to average African woman. The colonial masters were also accused of excluding women from higher education and from studying science and managerial disciplines, but were rather reserved for the men. The system of education reflected the policies of separation of the sexes from start to finish as they built special schools for the women such as secretarial studies centers and midwifery schools but denied of admission to the colonially controlled universities (Acholonu, 1995).

Between 1970s and 1980s feminism and its opponents emerged with the dominant discourse on women's studies in Nigeria and other parts of Africa mainly due to the fact that African women were eager to express their own realities as they

established their differences from foreign feminisms (Ogundipe, 2007, p. 7). It should be pointed out that gender inequality was not peculiar to Africa alone. For instance, Brown (1995, p. 59) also gives insight into the issue of gender disparity in Nanaimo, British Columbia between 1891 and 1914 where trustees feminized some positions and masculinized others thereby engaging in gender formation, with the assertion that: “Gender had a Janus face: where there were possibilities for women, men were constrained; where there were possibilities for men, women were constrained.” However, it is also argued that some women’s ideas have been coloured by the belief in male superiority which is un-African (Acholonu, 1995). This problematic issue does not go down well with any aspiring nation as long as sustainable development is concerned.

On the other hand, Brautigam (2002) opines that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) recognised from its first session in 1946 that issues related to the status of women would require specific attention. The CSW takes a lead role among intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations in elaborating policies and strategies aimed at achieving gender equality in all parts of the world. It develops recommendations and suggests courses of action for eliminating discrimination against women and achieving equality. While the equal treatment of women and men in the law is an essential basis, the achievement of women’s de facto equality depends greatly on women’s role in society, and on attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes concerning that role. Such attitudes cannot be changed with the stroke of pen alone. Thus work on the legal framework was soon complemented by a strategy that shifted from the drafting of legal rights to the actual enjoyment of these rights through policy formulation and institutional development. In essence, this strategy puts particular emphasis on addressing the causes of women’s inequality rather than dealing with the symptoms. Oguonu (2009) observed that changing gender norms could be difficult. This change according to Baker and Ricardo (2005) could be made slower by the fact that “those who make programme and policy decisions often have their own deep-seated biases about gender and are frequently resistant to those efforts to question the sexual behaviour of boys and men in the African context, for instance, have sometimes run into resistance by national level leaders who perceive that African men themselves are being bashed and maligned (cited in Oguonu, 2009, p. 342). Some of the problems associated with gender inequality are structural and cultural violence on the lives of people involved.

## **STRATEGIES FOR THE ACTUALIZATION OF GENDER EQUALITY**

The need to include women as partners in development has necessitated the introduction of terms such as ‘gender sensitivity’ in which some public offices and assignments are allocated to women and the greater the number of women in such positions the greater the gender sensitivity the leadership is deemed to express (Agu, 2007). The fulcrum of gender equality is that it would pave way for the actualisation of sustainable development. The first step towards transforming the tradition of gender inequality in Nigeria is the successful and uncompromised implementation of National Gender Policy as developed by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, and Gender and Development Action, which is aimed at building a society where no person is discriminated against, and all the abilities of social groups are mobilized and utilized to achieve enjoyment of basic human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well being of citizens for fair and rapid economic growth. It is agreed that the policy will bring about development planning that is based on data and a

system of governance where human, social and technological resources are used well for development without waste of time and money that generation after generation shall benefit from.

Some of the policy objectives of the National Gender Policy also include: to establish a culture of gender sensitivity and equality principles in all institutions and structures of government, private sector, and communities, by putting relevant administrative policies in place; and to eliminate all harmful cultural, religious and social gender-biased practices which produce gender inequalities. It is truism that every society is composed of women and men and that everyone has specific role to play but it becomes problematic when there is imbalance in issues concerning gender. Another significant area of focus should be human rights of both sexes. Gierycz (2002) posits that both men and women are human beings and need to properly interpret human rights of women. It would be said that the essence of it in this context is sustainability. Furthermore, the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna explicitly placed the issue of the human rights of women on the international governmental agenda and incorporated that terminology in the Declaration and Programme of Action, stating that ‘the human rights of women and of girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights’ (paragraph 18, cited in Gierycz, 2002, p. 30).

It is quite difficult to discuss the transformation of the tradition of gender inequality in society for sustainable development without emphasis on the protection of human rights of women that according to Gierycz (2002, p. 31) is rooted in the international standards of human rights, which are encompassed in both general international and regional instruments and the instruments that specifically address all or selected human rights in relation to women. There is need for increased participation of women in the labour market, industrialization and mechanized agriculture which could tackle rural poverty. The strategy would also enhance the establishment of the culture of respect for fundamental human rights of women and men, as well as freedom of expression; and eliminate all negative stereotypical representation of women and girls.

In terms of equal education, Tembon and Fort (2008) examined the importance of girl education for economic growth (cited in Verwimp and Bavel, 2011). It is timely to fill the gaps that already exist in the area of women’s and men’s educational achievements in most parts of the country especially Northeast, North-West and South-South geopolitical zones.

In politics, the role of perception in perpetuating the dominance of men cannot be underplayed. For instance, Nwankwo (1996) notes that any women who believe that females can never make good leaders, will naturally never vote for women in elections. They will also raise their daughters as inferior to their sons. The implication according to her is that their children are likely to grow up with the idea that the natural order of life is that of male superiority. It is believed that women’s dependency and poverty are socially constructed. Women are trapped in dependency and culture of deprivation right from childhood where they are socialized into culture of inferiority (Winniefridah, 2012). The society is therefore responsible for such enduring dependency and tradition of unequal access to both power and resources leading to gender imbalance as seen in the public sector.

Such imbalance cannot be recorded in a country where gender mainstreaming is taken as a core national goal. It has grave implications for income distribution in the country. According to British Council Nigeria (2012) Nigeria is among the thirty

most unequal countries in the world with respect to income distribution. The poorest half of the population holds only 10% of national income. Significant rural-urban differences in income distribution impact particularly on women, because 54 million of Nigeria's 80.2 million women live and work in rural areas, where they provide 60-79% of the rural labour force. Inequality harms social cohesion and may exacerbate conflict, especially when some social groups are perceived to be excluded from opportunities. Conflict is known to adversely impact on women and girls, thereby reducing their mobility and inhibiting participation in social, economic and political life.

Nwankwo (1996, pp. 64-65) further reveals that religious attitudes and cultural affirmation of women's supposed inferiority and incapability to lead, has sunk so deeply into the psyche of many women that they not only believe it but may fight any attempt to change the status quo. Some sincerely believe that if women were allowed to take positions of authority, the fabric of society would be destroyed. So, a male leader is preferable to a female even if he is incompetent. One of the notable factors that perpetuate gender inequality is that women are conditioned to be dependent on men for their happiness and fulfillment in life.

The tripartite issues of education, employment and political power (relationship) are analyzed by Jean O'Barr thus: "access to education and to employment are the key ingredients for individuals in a modern society to obtain if they want to exercise political power... the education of an individual, both formal and non-formal, enables her or him to have access to a job or profession which guarantees economic control of some resources. These resources, coupled with an organisational base which teaches leadership skills, give a person self-esteem. From a psychological point of view, it is this self-esteem which enables a person to gain political power and to exercise it effectively when the occasion arises. Thus, without education and without employment that prepares them for public life,...women will not become competitive in the contemporary political world" (O'Barr, 1984, p. 153, cited in Nwankwo, 1996). The paucity of women in political scene therefore finds some of its explanation in the discrimination they have faced in the area of education.

The underlying nature of the ever-changing nature of political system in Nigeria has undoubtedly severely hindered women's participation (Nwankwo, 1996). Gender education will boost the potential of women in participating and contributing to national development. The gap that already exists in Nigerian political parties is obvious and needs to be addressed. Women should no longer isolate themselves from electoral process for them get into leadership positions to enable them actively participate in decision making.

Increased political participation of women in Nigeria would accelerate gender equity and effective implementation of National Gender Policy in all parts of the country. According to Johnson *et al* (2005) and there is a correlation between political participation and education. That is why the education of women should never be taken for granted. According to Winniefridah (2011) education and empowerment that recognizes differences between men and women, and between women themselves, is crucial for capacity building to achieve sustainable development. Development is sustainable when projects or programmes do not end with a particular generation. In essence, gender equality has the potential of making programmes have far reaching effects as they go beyond a generation. Accelerating educational opportunities for women at all levels



would also guarantee sustainable human development in Nigeria. This can be done by giving women the opportunity to plan and work with their male counterparts.

Another area is raising revenue which is critically important for gender equality because it enables governments to spend more on social programmes that increase women's economic opportunities and help reduce their burden of unpaid care work. For instance, these could include, school feeding programmes, health and child care services, improved public transportation or water and energy access programmes. New media is highly significant in curtailing gender inequality and harnessing the opportunities inherent in gender equity in society. It would go along way to shape perceptions towards gender equality on social networks.

### **Gender Mainstreaming**

Gender equity in Nigeria is an issue that needs to be taken seriously. It is in the interest of entire Nigerian society that gender mainstreaming is effective without compromise and further delay. Gender mainstreaming would further make the issues of both men and women critical to policymakers and society at large. Integrating gender equality into key national policy and planning frameworks would promote women's economic empowerment, including women's economic opportunities, legal status, rights, voice, and their participation in the economy; enhance national capacities to reduce gender-based violence through multi-dimensional and multi-partnership approaches; promote women's active participation in peace-building, reduce violence because most conflicts are linked with resource scarcity; rebuild social structures and processes reflecting the needs, interests, and insights of women and men; promote gender equality and women's empowerment in disaster-risk reduction plans and programmes; enhance capacities for gender mainstreaming through trainings, monitoring and evaluation frameworks; enhancing accountability mechanisms for achievement of gender equality in programming and gender parity.

Shaping of the perception of male superiority is also critical to the transformation of the tradition of gender inequality in Nigeria. The moment stakeholders begin to advocate for a change of perception on superiority of males over females, then gender inequality would become history as this would give women the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to development of society. That is when national development will be participatory and people-centred. Daughters sometimes lose out from situations where fathers have to choose from their children who they would send to school due to economic factors as noted by Nwankwo (2006). Gender equity would give women equal participation, psychological inspiration and full involvement in efforts aimed at peacebuilding and security. Politics should no longer be synonymous with men, which has been the case since the country's independence. The Federal Government of Nigeria, political parties, Civil Society, public and organized private sectors should learn from countries that have tackled the issue of gender inequality in the public sphere having overcome by filling the gap. Countries like Rwanda and Sweden to name but a few have been able to tackle gender inequality in governance.

### **Enlightenment of more women on affirmative action**

How many women are aware of women's rights? As in other democracies of the world, successive governments in Nigeria have been engaged in the sustained campaign for greater effective women participation in politics in line with the Beijing

declaration which advocates for 35 per cent affirmative action (Salaudeen, 2011). One of the factors inhibiting women's participation in the public sphere has been attributed to the *purdah system* (i.e. house seclusion of women) thereby giving men the opportunity to constitute a larger percentage of the party membership to the extent that this tends to affect women when it comes to selecting or electing candidates for elections. This ugly trend is not to the advantage of women in Nigeria. Many people still argue that Nigerian women still have a long way to go. The Women Initiative for Change campaign has done a lot, but the progress seems to be slow. The optimism that change will come some day should not be ruled out. Women's groups need to take it as responsibility to embark on advocacy programmes in the areas of equal educational opportunities, Millennium Development Goals on women and children; poverty reduction and maternal healthcare. It is interesting that Section 17 (3) © of the 1999 Constitution has made provisions for ensuring adequate health, safety and welfare services for all persons.

Though there were no manifest discriminatory laws against women in recruitment and unemployment, the ratio of men to women employed in the formal sector is still very much in favour of men. (FMWA, p. 50). There are presently existing programmes by various stakeholders to create change. The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (SEEDS) and many others are sustainable development strategies aimed at reducing poverty through job creation to both sexes, ensuring food security and remedying inequalities. The Nigerian Labour Congress is engaged in rising awareness through advocacy and lobbying to ensure that non-discriminatory employment practices are encouraged.

Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity has intensified its efforts at ensuring that gender sensitive international standards on employment, working conditions, operational safety and health are adhered to. There is need to strengthen the Gender Management System which was set up to provide an enabling environment for the intended restructuring of gender relations in the country. When the issue of inequality is transformed, women would have more significant roles to play in developmental projects. It has become rather obvious that gender mainstreaming is a factor of sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Institutional responsibility for promotion of Gender mainstreaming**

Lawmakers need to advocate increased social inclusion for women in all sector of the economy, enlighten the people on the benefits of United Nations Security Council's Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security, as well as active involvement of traditional rulers, chiefs and elders. Some of the issues relating to gender inequality happen to be rooted in cultural practices especially at the grassroots. Traditional institutions are critical to the transformation of festering gender inequality and actualisation of unshakable gender mainstreaming which would guarantee sustainable development. Traditional institutions should therefore, stop paying lip service to issues of gender equality and encourage rural dwellers to end practices that rather enhance disparity. Any attempt or efforts to transform the current degree of gender inequality must put into consideration the place of traditional institutions which are significant in creating positive change. Leaving the issue of gender inequality in the hands of government alone may not yield the expected result at the right time. Therefore, there is need for concerned groups to put both human and material resources together through collaborative efforts.

One of the notable things observed during the interviews conducted while carrying out this study was the level of optimism among women on actualising sustainable development through gender equality and over government's efforts on the issue. Collaborative role of men and women cannot be underplayed from the actualisation of sustainable development. Much desired change largely depends on the capability of stakeholders to enhance education of women to correspond with that of men in all sectors of the economy. At the family level, parents should endeavour to empower their female children along with the males either in form of skills acquisition or tertiary education without any discrimination.

## **CONCLUSION**

The collaboration of women's groups in actualising the needed percentage of their involvement in development discourse should begin with proper organisation of women of substance who have the zeal to change the status quo and achieve the needed result. This could be done at all levels in society including the micro, meso, macro and individual levels. Government should endeavour to go beyond establishment of agencies or departments, and target groups of specific interest because developing policies aimed at gender equality in the country is not enough. There is need to go beyond that and initiate strategies.

Active involvement of women in decision making in different sectors of the economy would go a long way to making society overcome challenges of gender bias/inequality. It is pertinent to establish programmes that would make far – reaching impact in the lives of women in the country which would also benefit their male counterparts to avert future consequences of dependence and low achievement in life. Those women who still shy away from conflict resolution thereby leaving it for men to handle should realize that men alone cannot successfully address issues of conflict without the involvement of women. Even UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security mandates women to be actively involved in peace and conflict issues. The National Assembly after consulting various stakeholders must ensure adoption of bills on gender equality to be passed into law, and proper enforcement of equal status act at all levels. It should be noted that early marriage limits opportunities girls may have in having good education; apart from inadequate empowerment, the girl would lack the capability to carry out basic functions as a woman to the extent that the obvious lack of education may spill over to future generations. Unfortunately, her value would be commensurate with her level of education as socio economic status would be affected due to inadequate training. Conclusively, the government should partner more with Civil Society Organizations in areas of gender mainstreaming, trainings and workshops, and advocacy through new digital media technologies due to the advantage of wider audience to accelerate urban and grassroots sensitization on the need to mainstream gender in all programmes. Nigerian women are, therefore, encouraged to have confidence in themselves as equal partners with their male counterparts. Gender equality when actualized would guarantee Nigeria's sustainable development quest.

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