
**The Role of Women in Gender Equality: A Critical Examination Of Women in
South-South Nigeria**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of women in gender equality in South-South Nigeria. To achieve this purpose, four research questions were raised and one hypothesis was formulated. The descriptive survey design was used in this study. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select 100 participants across that states in the South-South, Nigeria for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The data were analyzed using mean statistics to answer the research questions, while chi-square statistics was used to test one null hypothesis at .05 alpha levels. The findings revealed that women contribute significantly in gender equality in educational sector, economic sector and social sector. However, the findings also revealed that women did not contribute significant in political sector. This may be as a result of societal variables. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended among others that women should mobilize themselves actively in liberation of women from the shackles of full time house wife, laziness and mediocrity.

KEYWORDS: Women, Gender equality

Introduction

In the 1800s, females in the United States were beginning to demand rights they had not previously realized. For instance, females wanted a voice within the United States political system via the right to vote and by the mid-1800s the Women's Rights Convention was formed to bring large numbers of females together for the right to vote ("Women's Rights Movement," n.d.). By the early 1900s, organizations were formed to focus on the development of females beyond their traditional gender roles ("Women's Rights Movement," n.d.). However, female's entry into the workforce did not guarantee gender equality.

As World War II began, females in the United States entered the workforce. During this time females were approved by society to provide income assistance to their families and fill the vacancies in industries that were left by males who had become soldiers overseas (Turk, 2012; Miller, 2011). As females fulfilled the needs to work to assist in the survival of their families and to support the rise of industrialization, they were not being paid adequate wages.

The female struggle to obtain equality in the workplace continued. Many industrialists believed they could hire females as cheap labour because of their societal insignificance (Pettit & Ewert, 2009). It was not until the 1960s that the core of the women's movement began to make serious changes within the social order in relation to women's rights ("Women's Rights Movement," n.d.). The feminist movement became widespread throughout the United States and some in society were beginning to accept its premise. However, the women's movement alone was not enough to drive significant change.

The development of policies such as Affirmative Action and The Equal Pay Act, along with the spread of global female organizations and the impact of female contributions to society demonstrate changes have occurred. Today, females control corporations, serve in high governmental offices, and even aspire to become president of the United States (Barclay, 2006; Schein, 2001). However, gender inequality remains a factor in the makeup of the social order. Women still face several obstacles to succeeding in male-dominated organizations (Washington, 2011; Catalyst, 2010). As a consequence, it was the researcher's intention to get an understanding of how females respond to gender inequality within the workplace.

Globally, the growing importance of gender equality has been recognized and accepted. The normative framework for human development (UNDP: 2012) is reflected in the broad vision espoused in the Millennium Development Goals which metamorphose to Sustainable Development Goals, the internationally agreed set of time-bound targeted goals for ensuring gender equality and advancing opportunities in diverse sectors of the global economy. The convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and accepted to by 180 states outlines the rights and equality of women, their freedom from discrimination and equality under the law.

Promoting gender equality that is a sine-qua-non to the actualization of the protection of fundamental human rights. This is critical to the whole concern for human development that centre on allowing people to lead a life that they value and enabling them to realize their potentials as human beings. Realizing the growing need for gender equality is also germane to the survival and development of children and the building of healthy communities, societies and nations. The gap between the Sustainable Development Goals of promoting Gender Equality and its actualization in Nigeria, however, is the action dilemma by the Nigerian government that is typified by poor governance, lack of political will, the prevailing patriarchal culture, false public investment and the absence of adequate productive capacity that will create the opportunities for women empowerment and development.

This problematic explains the inevitability and imperative of a pragmatic action-based approach that will translate gender equality programmes into concrete reality. This is especially because the task of achieving the target of gender equality in Nigeria by the year 2023 requires not just passive policies that are separate and distinct from doing, but an active process embodying proper analysis, goal definition, action programs and monitoring results (Ejumudo 2008).

The Concept of Gender Equality

UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework (2003), referred gender equality to mean that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is therefore the equal valuing by society of the similarities and

the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society. The feminist concept of the term is far from sharing the same perspective when it comes to define gender equality. According to Laura Sjoberg and Sandra Via (2010), the feminist concept of gender equality is complex, multi-dimensional, and fluid, and therefore can easily be interpreted in many ways depending on the context, the focus, and the goals of analyses. Different feminisms, for example, liberal, cultural, and socialist feminism, present different theoretical standpoints on gender equality. According to Wodak (2005), most feminists agree on the essential elements of gender equality in that “men and women should have equal rights and equal opportunities in life without being valued differently”. Gender equality implies that all men and women are free to develop their personal abilities and make life choices without the limitations set by stereotypes or prejudices about gender roles or the characteristics of men and women (ABC of Women Worker’s Rights and Gender Equality, 2007).

The Role of Women in Educational Development

The first indices for measuring or assessing the level of attainment of the Millennium Development Declaration in respect of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment are school enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. And knowledge is critical for development because everything we do depends on knowledge (World Bank 2012:17). It therefore implies that equal access to education is the foundation for all the other developmental goals. Meeting the education goal will therefore speed up progress toward every other Millennium Development Goal. Gender parity in school enrolment has a multi-dimensional advantage and a multiplier effect notably because it will help to reduce poverty, lower mortality rates and promote concern for the environment, aside from the opportunity to learn skills and acquire knowledge that will encourage their participation in the development process through social, economic and political decision-making. On the other hand, blocked or limited access to quality education increases their vulnerability to abuse exploitation, disease, poverty and crime. Studies have shown that allowing girls to have full access to education is the single most effective policy of enhancing the overall level of economic productivity.

In Nigeria, the 2005 MDG report shows that there is improvement in respect of attaining universal basic education and that the primary six completion rate increased significantly from 65 percent in 1998 to 83 percent in 2001; it declined in 2002 and increased again to 94 percent in 2003 and 95 percent between 2004 and 2005 (Igbuzor 2006:5). However, enrolment at the primary school level has consistently been higher for boys who have 56 percent compared with the 44 percent for girls. Generally, literacy level in Nigeria has steadily and consistently declined, especially among those between 15 and 24 years. For instance, in 1999, the overall literacy rate declined from 81.35 percent to 69.80 percent, while the rate of literacy for male between 15 and 24 years declined from 81.35 percent in 1991 to 69.80 percent and 62.49 percent to 59.30 percent for female during the same period (Igbuzor 2006).

The Role of Women in Political Development/Good Governance

Political development/good governance is an essential instrument for sustainable development (Morita and Zaelke, n.d.). There is a strong assertion that a balanced achievement of all the pillars of sustainable development depends on the deliberate strategic and operational intervention of the government. Accordingly, good governance undoubtedly corroborates the achievement of economic and social development and environmental

protection. As a result, there is a need for a well-established, quality political or governance system. To this end, active involvement of women in decision-making positions will help foster the overall quality of governance in terms of boosting accountability and transparency, reducing corruption, and protecting the interest of marginalized sections of society (OECD, 2008); without women, achieving sustainable development is impossible (Morito and Zaelke, n.d.). However, women across the world are underrepresented (OECD, 2008). Similarly, despite their significant number, Nigerian women's representation at different political decision-making levels is too sparse to improve governance. They have no equal power in leadership and decision-making across all levels of government (UNDP, 2015). Female legislators, senior officials and managers at the federal level have been fewer by far than their male counterparts (Solomon and Memar, 2014).

Political decision making is another indicator for assessing the accomplishment of gender parity in line with the Millennium Development Declaration is involvement in political decision-making. According to Duverger (cited in Nziome 2012:15), if majority of women are little attracted to political careers, it is because everything tends to turn them away from them, and if they allow politics to remain essentially a man's business, it is because everything is conducive to this belief: tradition, family life, education, religion and literature. The small part played by women in politics, he added, merely reflects and results from the secondary place to which they are assigned by the customs and attitudes of our society and which their education and training tend to make them accept as the natural order of things.

The Role of Women in Economic Growth/Development

One major justification why we should work so hard towards women's empowerment and gender equality is economics. Economic development, as one component of sustainable development, is unthinkable without the involvement of women (Solomon and Memar, 2014, OECD, 2008). Nigeria was once one of the fastest economically growing countries in the Africa (FDRE, 2011). However, like many developing countries, the women's labour force has not been properly utilized. Despite certain improvements following efforts from the government, the economic opportunities for and participation of Nigerian women are still low. This is due to male-oriented development projects and the exclusion of women from the formal employment sector (Solomon and Memar, 2014), confining women to unpaid, tiresome household work. Moreover, women still suffer from lack of adequate access to training, extension and credit services, financial support and modern technology (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2008). Furthermore, inadequate access to education has excluded them from jobs requiring different skills and qualifications. All of this leads women to remain passive observers in the economic sector of the country.

Struggling to bring about economic growth with the recognition of men's efforts only is like clapping with one hand. For the effective and sustainable economic growth of any country, the equal participation of both sexes is crucial. It is a well-established fact that the achievement of economic growth is contingent upon the full use of the skills and qualification of women (OECD, 2008). Most importantly, the participation of women is a matter of necessity. This compelling situation arises because half the entire population of the country is comprised of women. Hence, their empowerment is mandatory, as it enables them to fully use their potential, creativity, and talent, which are instrumental for the economic development of the country. However, if they are not empowered and allowed to use their potential, the country will not go forward at the expected pace.

The Role of Women in Social Development

Social development is a key pillar of sustainable development. And social transformation as a component of sustainable development is unthinkable without the involvement of women (Solomon and Memar, 2014). Even though Africa has witnessed commendable achievements in social development, its progress on gender and women's empowerment indicators is slow; it still has to face considerable challenges within post-2015 development frameworks (ECA, 2015). As part of the continent, the same also holds true for Ethiopia, where the gender-based problem is still very much prevalent and impedes social development. In this respect, the researcher looked into the role of empowering and educating women in reducing population growth, maintaining healthy family/society and avoiding the badly socialized, stereotyped perception of society towards women.

The world population is growing at an alarming rate. In this regard, the fast population growth in Africa, and most importantly in Nigeria, is well-known. Also remarkable is the role of the undermined life of women. As one instrument of women's empowerment (OECD, 2012), educational access should be equally given to women. The education of girls and women plays a tremendous role in social development. However, Nigerian women are not well educated compared with men. Their access to education has been hindered by traditional customary attitudes (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2008). For this reason, the knowledge of women regarding family planning is very poor, especially in rural areas (Korra, 2002). As a result, they produce children in an unplanned way, thereby contributing to the alarming population increase. Currently, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa (FDRE, 2011). Such an increase in population poses a challenge to the sustainable development of the country by constraining the capacity of the government to provide social provisions such as education, health-care, and infrastructure (Environmental Protection Authority, 2012).

Thus, it is clear that educating women is helpful to increasing the well-being of families and children (OECD, 2008). Hence, women should be educated to keep their health and their families' health, so as to improve the overall social development and economic growth of the country by reducing the loss of a productive working force. Furthermore, there are gender-specific diseases as well as diseases related to reproduction, and various socio-economic factors (OECD, 2008). Providing women with due care in these respects as well is imperative to maintaining their health and the labour force of the country.

Statement of the Problem

In this study, the researchers wished to understand how females responded to gender inequality and how females perceived the lack of opportunity to attain leadership roles. Despite advances made during the women's movement, gender inequality is a problem for females seeking leadership opportunities within the political, cultural, civil service and social arena of Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria at large. The gap found within literature was the lack of information supported by women that work within the political, cultural, civil service and social service, with regard to their encountered issues of gender inequality and their perceptions of the barriers that exist to their professional advancement opportunities. With that being said, there is a need to understand the perceptions of women that work within the political, cultural, civil service, social, and industrial sector about encountered issues of gender inequality and the lack of access to professional advancement opportunities.

Some females are denied equal opportunity in fulfilling leadership roles. The ratio of males to females in executive roles is nearly 10:2. When considering the number of Local Government

Chairmen, members of the State House of Assembly, Federal House of Representatives and other areas. In civil service females make up more than half of the workforce. Yet, females only make up less than 50 percent of Directors, Permanent Secretaries or Commissioners. Consequently, there is a need to yield insight on the subject of females who experienced issues of gender inequality regarding career opportunities to determine barriers that prevent females from professional advancement opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated “The Role of Women in Gender Equality: A Critical Examination of Women in South-South Nigeria”. Specifically, the study is designed to:

1. Determine the role of women in gender equality in educational sector.
2. Determine the role of women in gender equality in political sector.
3. Determine the role of women in gender equality in economic sector.
4. Determine the role of women in gender equality in social sector.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What are the roles of women in gender equality in educational sector?
2. What are the roles of women in gender equality in political sector?
3. What are the roles of women in gender equality in economic sector?
4. What are the roles of women in gender equality in social sector?

Research Hypothesis

H0₁: There is no significant role of women in gender equality in educational sector.

Methodology

The researcher used descriptive survey design for the study in which data was collected from a representative sample at one point to make inference about the target population. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select 100 participants for the study. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The data were analyzed using pie chart statistical tool.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the roles of women in gender equality in educational sector?

Table 1: Mean Statistics of the roles of women in gender equality in educational sector

Educational Sector	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Score	Mean
Demand for female education	50	20	20	10	100	310	3.10
Sponsor female education	20	30	30	20	100	250	2.50
Sponsor self	45	25	20	10	100	305	3.05
Advocate for female education	55	25	15	5	100	330	3.30
Make legislation for female education	10	15	45	30	100	205	2.05

Table 1: Education Sector Data

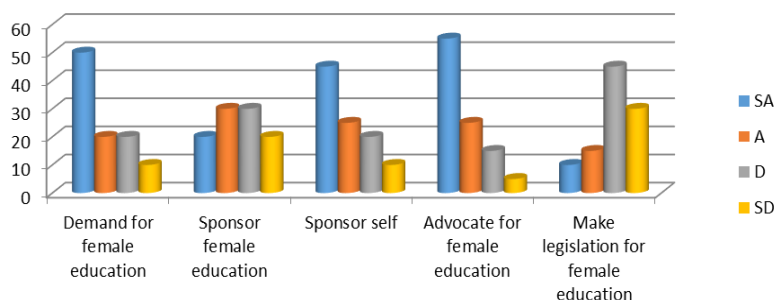


Fig 1: Educational Sector

The results in Table 1 reveal that most of the mean scores were higher than the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that women play significant role in gender equality in educational sector. The level of responses is also presented in Fig 1.

Research Question 2: What are the roles of women in gender equality in political sector?

Table 2: Mean Statistics of the roles of women in gender equality in political sector

Political Sector	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Score	Mean
Participate actively in politics	20	10	45	25	100	225	2.25
Sponsor female in politics	15	10	60	15	100	225	2.25
Aspire for political office	10	5	50	35	100	190	1.90
Belong to a political party	20	25	30	25	100	240	2.40

Table 2: Political Sector

The results in Table 2 reveal that all the mean scores were lower than the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that women do not play significant role in gender equality political sector.

Research Question 3: What are the roles of women in gender equality in economic sector?

Table 3: Mean Statistics of the roles of women in gender equality in economic sector

Economic Sector	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Score	Mean
Work and pay tax	40	30	20	10	100	300	3.00
Contribute to the family welfare	70	20	5	5	100	355	3.55
Engage in businesses	60	25	10	5	100	340	3.40
Encourage young women to work	30	40	15	15	100	285	2.85

Table 3: Economic Sector

The results in Table 3 reveal that all of the mean scores were higher than the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that women play significant role in gender equality in economic sector.

Research Question 4: What are the roles of women in gender equality in social sector?

Table 2: Mean Statistics of the roles of women in gender equality in social sector

Social Sector	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Score	Mean
Providing services in health sector	40	40	10	10	100	310	3.10
Providing help to the needy	60	20	15	5	100	335	3.35
Providing water supply	20	25	50	5	100	260	2.60
Help to care for the homeless	40	30	20	10	100	300	3.00

Table 4: Social Sector

The results in Table 4 reveal that all of the mean scores were higher than the criterion mean of 2.5. This implies that women play significant role in gender equality in educational sector.

H0₁: There is no significant role of women in gender equality in educational sector.

Table 5: Chi-square analysis of the roles of women in gender equality in educational sector

Row			SA	A	D	SD	Total	χ
Demand for female education	Observed		50	20	20	10	100	
	Expected Count		36.7	23.5	26.5	13.3	100.0	
Sponsor female education	Observed		20	30	30	10	90	
	Expected Count		33.1	21.1	23.9	11.9	90.0	
Sponsor self	Observed		45	25	20	10	100	
	Expected Count		36.7	23.5	26.5	13.3	100.0	98.686
Advocate for female education	Observed		55	25	15	5	100	
	Expected Count		36.7	23.5	26.5	13.3	100.0	
Make legislation for female education	Observed		10	15	45	30	100	
	Expected Count		36.7	23.5	26.5	13.3	100.0	
Total	Count		180	115	130	65	490	
	Expected Count		180.0	115.0	130.0	65.0	490.0	

Chi-square χ -cal = 98.686, P-value = 0.00

The analysis in Table 5 revealed the calculated chi-square value of 98.686 and the P-value of 0.00 less than 0.05 ($P < .05$). Since the p-value is less than .05 ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant role of women in gender equality in educational sector was rejected while the alternative is retained. It can therefore be concluded that there is a significant role of women in gender equality in educational sector.

Discussion

The analysis in Table 1 revealed that women contribute significantly in gender equality in educational sector. This is through sponsoring others, self-sponsored, advocate for female education and make legislation concerning female education. This is to bridge the disparity existed before between male and female gender with respect to education. This agrees with the assertion of World Bank (2012) that knowledge is critical for development because

everything we do depends on knowledge. It therefore implies that equal access to education is the foundation for all the other developmental goals.

The analysis in Table 2 revealed that women contributed less in gender equality in political sector. This is because of less participation in politics, less sponsoring of female candidates, lack of interest to aspire for political position. This agrees with the report from (OECD, 2008) that women across the world are underrepresented. In addition, (UNDP, 2015) reported that women in Nigeria have no equal power in leadership and decision-making across all levels of government. Female legislators, senior officials and managers at the federal level have been fewer by far than their male counterparts (Solomon and Memar, 2014).

The analysis in Table 3 revealed that women contribute significantly in gender equality in economic sector. This is through work and payment of tax, doing businesses. However, women with mega wealth are fewer than men. This aligned with the assertion Solomon and Memar (2014) who posited that it is due to male-oriented development projects and the exclusion of women from the formal employment sector, confining women to unpaid, tiresome household work (Solomon and Memar, 2014). This assertion applies even more forcibly to Nigeria, where women are engaged in unpaid, tiresome household work, leading them to be the most impoverished section of society (Tigist, 2011).

The analysis in Table 4 revealed that women contribute significantly in gender equality in social sector. This is through sponsoring providing of health care, water supply and other social services. This agrees with the assertion of Solomon and Memar (2014) who opined that social transformation as a component of sustainable development is unthinkable without the involvement of women.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that women contribute significantly in gender equality in educational sector, economic sector and social sector. The contribution of women in political sector to break gender disparity between male and female was not significant.

Recommendations

Based on the outcome of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be a political will to encourage women to be viable in all sectors of life.
2. Government at all levels should equality of male and female in all sector of the economy.
3. Women forum should organize themselves to sponsor candidates to represent them in political sector.
4. Women should be given access to money to invest in the economy.
5. Women should mobilize themselves actively in liberation of women from the shackles of full time house wife, laziness and mediocrity.

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