

GENDER DISCRIMINATION AND FEMINISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Gender discrimination continues to be highly pervasive, manifesting in different dimensions and in different cultures in Nigeria. Women are under-represented in almost every sphere of social life including politics, commerce, agriculture, industry, military and educational institutions. Gender issues in development received little attention from the researchers. This paper discusses gender discrimination and feminism in Nigeria. After discussing the sectorial challenges or factors militating against women's participation in the different spheres of social life, this paper seeks to determine whether feminism is really needed in Nigeria. This study rejects the psychological and the anthropological explanations of the functionalist perspective on gender discrimination. The functionalists were not able to explain the changes in the status of women in the society. This study therefore adopts the feminist framework as the anchor theory because of its relative proficiency in gender analysis and the status of women as well as its potentials for the promotion and protection of women's rights and indeed gender equality and the empowerment of women which are the necessary pre requisite for national development.

Keywords: Women improvement, gender analysis, feminist framework, Economic development

INTRODUCTION

Historically, inequality exists between men and women. Women have been either historically denied access to or granted unequal access to economic opportunities, power, status and privileges in society. Women experience unequal access to resources and decision making processes, with limited mobility in most countries. Women are under-represented in almost every sphere of social life such as politics, commerce, agriculture, industry, the military, religious and educational institutions. They were not granted equal voting rights, until recently when there

is global recognition, and concern about gender discrimination (Amadi, 1982:71, Alemika & Agugua; 2001).

In Nigeria, in spite of the several women's rights outlined in the 1999 constitution, many women do not enjoy the same freedom as men, particularly in the fields of education, economic empowerment and political participation. There exist a wide range of inequality between men and women in attaining certain positions in Nigeria. The discrimination against women has permeated through the Civil Service and Military ranks where critical appointments are being reserved for only men with women neglected to the background (Alemika & Agugua, 2001).

On a global level, Britain perhaps because of its institution of Monarchy produced Margret Thatcher as her Prime Minister in the 1980s. Otherwise with the exception of Germany no large democracy in Europe has given women the opportunity to lead their country. Ironically, it is the so-called developing countries of Asia, Latin America and Middle East (India, Philippines and Israel etc) that have produced women Heads of State, through election.

The recognition of historical and global discrimination against women prompted the United Nations Organization (UNO) to declare 1975-1985 as "Decade for Women". This declaration was to raise global awareness on status of women and to mobilize the world community to eliminate discrimination against women so that women may attain equal economic, social, political and legal status with their male counterparts. In 1992, the United Nations Organization produced the convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which adopted General Recommendation 19, which includes violence in the prohibition of gender based discrimination: violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately (is discrimination). "It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty". Violence against women is an internationally recognized human rights violation when either a public official or private person commits the violence.

Countries participating in the CEDAW must take all the necessary measures to eliminate gender discrimination including legal sanctions, civil remedies, and preventive measures (such as public information and education campaigns and protective measures such as support services for victims). Further, the fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing, China in September 1995 adopted a platform for Action (PPA) for implementation by member countries. The platform document addressed several issues including discriminatory practices that marginalize women from vital opportunities in society (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001:2).

Also the European Union adopted a political will to protect and promote women's rights as evident in the guidelines agreed in 2008, addressing discrimination as well as violence against women. The guidelines on violence against women and girls, and combating all forms of

discrimination against them, promote gender equality put in place effective, coordinated strategies and address the impunity of those who have perpetrated gender discrimination. The document also prioritizes women's rights within the EU Human rights policy towards Third World countries, and sets out a strategy for dealing with individual cases of human rights violations (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001:2).

Many writers on feminism use it both as a concept and as a theory. As a concept feminism is a process of reducing gender discrimination, ensuring that women have rights and lifting them out of poverty by getting out of the cycle of early marriage and childbirth and empowering them to be full members of society. It is a process of socio-economic change which include: the changing roles of men and women in the society, change in various components of women's life including reproduction; allowing women control over pregnancy, reducing motherhood and infant mortality, keeping girls in school for longer period and to make sure that well-paid jobs are available for them when they finish education. The feminist is a group of progressives that provide leadership for the struggle for the attainment of gender equality, economic security, religious tolerance and political freedom, (Banks, 1986). As an approach feminism was developed in 19th and 20th centuries in the years 1960 – 1980 with the aim of overturning gender discrimination and violence against women. It first appeared in France in 1864,, Netherlands in 1872, Great Britain in 1890s and United States in 1904 (Evans, 1981). The Feminist theory is one of the major contemporary sociological theories which analyses the status of women and men in the society with the purpose of using that knowledge to better women's lives (Mason, 1968). It is an approach to gender equality like education, economic opportunity along with women's rights and equal access to resources and decision making processes. The feminist framework is mostly concerned with giving a voice to women and highlighting the various ways women have contributed to the general development of the society. The argument of feminist theory is that gender discrimination makes woman disillusioned and unable to develop their potentials (Eisenstein, 1991).

Conceptual Clarification

Many writers on gender discrimination use the distinction between sex and gender as the starting point for their analysis. Sex refers to the most basic biological differences between men and women – differences in genitals and reproductive capacities while gender refers to the culturally or socially constructed patterns of behaviour which may be attached to the sexes. Discrimination on the other hand refers to action against people on the grounds of their group membership – particularly the refusal to grant members of another group the opportunities that would be granted to similarly qualified members of one's own group. Discrimination may also be

seen as a characteristic of a social relationship in which individuals and groups are denied access to the goods, services and resources which are generally accorded to other citizens. Gender discrimination therefore implies several states and processes in which women are either denied access to or experience unequal access to critical goods, services, activities and resources accorded to their male counterparts (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001:8). Gender discrimination could also be a product of cultures that devalue women and girls and discriminate against them. The discrimination manifest itself in the form of domestic violence, marital rape, deprivation of food, lack of access to information, education, health care and general impediments to mobility (UNICEF cited in Igbozor, 2009).

LITERATURE REVIEW

With more than 160 million people and almost half of this population are women, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the world's eight (8th) most populous nation. The nation with nearly four hundred (400) ethnic nationalities has a landmass of 923,768 square kilometers (Otite, 1990). Politically, the country operates a federal system of government. The country is therefore structured administratively into 36 states and FCT and 774 Local Government Areas (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001).

The review of literature on the status of women shows that, Nigerian women are among the hardest working population, but have remained economically and politically marginalized. Women suffers gender discrimination in all aspects of social life such as politics, commerce, agriculture, industry, the military, religious and educational institutions and find it extremely difficult to advance in social status except through the status they gain from either their husbands or fathers (Amadi, 1982; Alemika & Ogugua, 2001). Women have been stereotyped, marginalized and trivialized in such a way that whatever men know and do in the society is considered superior to that which women do and know (Amadi, 1982). Gender discrimination has been encouraged, fuelled and reinforced by the traditional/cultural and religious factors militating against women's status and their participation in various sectors of the society. In several traditional Nigerian societies, the status of a woman has been considered as that of a wife, mother and housekeeper. A wife was regarded as the husband's property. The man paid a certain amount as bride price and the woman become his (Amadi, 1982) found that in the South Eastern Nigeria, a widow suffered much during the mourning period which usually lasted for about a year. She was not allowed to do her hair, wash her clothes or even bathe regularly. She is denied every right of inheritance in her father's house as tradition holds that the share of the woman is in her husband's house. In extreme cases she was buried with her husband. For men who lost their wives on the other hand, there was hardly any recognized traditional period of

mourning. A widower could in fact, marry another wife within a matter of weeks after wife's death (Amadi, 1982:75). In some cases if a mother dies after childbirth, the babies are not spared as well. If a woman delivers twins, triplets or quadruplets, they will be thrown into the river or strangled and later buried in the bush. Though the practice of killing twins or malformed babies has been in existence for centuries, it has stopped but other practices such as patronizing traditional birth attendants, early marriage still persist in some of the modern day communities.

Religious discrimination against women is minimal; there are many priestesses in traditional Nigerian religion, although some of the famous gods such as Amadioha, Chukwu and Igwekala are always served by men priests. Admittedly, not much can be done in this area for the gods themselves are supposed to elect their priests. The imported religions are much more discriminating than the native ones; the advent of Islam, Christianity and Colonialism did not advance the interests of women (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001:10). In general women's traditional/cultural and religious challenges, include practices such as widowhood practices, wife inheritance, female genital mutilation, male child preferences, malnutrition and lack of access to food and other stereotype beliefs in male and female child upbringing and education (Igbuzor, 2009:236).

Educationally, Nigerian women recorded significantly lower levels in the country's tertiary institutions, teaching and medical profession (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001). Furthermore, women suffer discriminatory practices more than the men; educating girls is widely perceived as being of less value than educating boys; girls are forced to terminate their education if they became pregnant; they are not given the chance to continue with their education after babies are delivered. As a result, there are proportionately more dropouts among girls than among boys. The hope that this injustice to girls will discourage immorality is in vain because boys who are usually the main culprits are not punished in the same way and so will continue to seduce girls (Amadi, 1982:77). In the occupational structure women have faced severe gender discrimination that hinders their social mobility. They are socialized into lower statuses and more restricted self-images. In terms of rewards women's occupation usually have lower rewards than men's occupation. Women in the workforce are systematically discriminated against, kept in lower paying jobs, denied equal opportunities for advancement and laid off quicker than the men (Bullough, 1974; Parkin, 1974; Golthorpe, 1983; Crompton, 1987). A part from the negative impact of this on national prosperity, it has become obvious that the marginalization of women in employment has reduced their access to substantial regular income and social status in the society.

Economically, it is well documented that gender discrimination is a constraint to economic growth and poverty reduction while a more equitable gender relation is an accelerator of poverty reduction. Women provide an estimated 60-80% of labour input in agriculture, especially in food production processing and marketing. Many women are farmers in their own right, apart from working on family farms. Although various efforts have been made by several agencies, unfortunately women's contribution in this regard is not adequately acknowledged in the development of agricultural sector. Despite the fact that women are predominantly the food producers of the nation, the majority of them are still food insecure, being small holders whose farm sizes or that of their husbands fall below the threshold level for adequate food production. Most affected are usually lactating and pregnant women whose protein and energy falls below the required daily intake. This contributes to the high incidence of differential feeding practices which result in low protein and energy intake in early life (Igbuzor, 2009).

Surprisingly, anti-discriminatory laws and legislations exist in Nigeria but they have not been enforced. The Nigerian legal system is made up of a tripartite system of laws (Statutory, Customary and Sharia) which made it difficult to fulfill one of the basic stipulations of the Nigerian Constitution (Chapter II Section 17 Subsection 2) which requires that all citizens regardless of gender, circumstances of birth etc shall have equal rights, obligations and opportunities before the law and which states that "All citizens without discrimination on any group whatsoever, shall have the opportunity for securing adequate opportunity to secure stable employment. In a pamphlet entitled laws and customs affecting women's status in Nigeria, Dr. J. O Akande lists the following disadvantages among many others suffered by women under civil law: A married woman cannot control her own property especially if the property is acquired after marriage. She cannot enter into loan or hire purchase agreement without the husbands consent. She cannot obtain a passport without the husbands consent. Her domicile follows that of her husband; therefore during the subsistence of marriage, she is merely an appendage of the husband and not an individual. For instance a woman living in Nigeria cannot start divorce proceedings against her husband if he is living outside Nigeria (Akande, 1979 cited in Amadi, 1982:78).

Interestingly, the mass media is also culpable in the discrimination and subjugation of women in Nigeria. Both in the professional and representation in the society, the mass media paint the women as an entity perpetually subordinate to the man. Nigerian films are ideological apparatuses or devices that perpetuate the images, myths, ideas, concepts or discourses that aim at fixing women in a negative lower positions in their relationship with men and their actual life conditions. Most editorial decisions are made by men in the media. The man is glorified as the hero while the woman is seen as the subordinate. Most cover stories are originated by the

men, leaving the fashion and kitchen pages for the women. In broadcast shows the woman appears on air as an object of attraction while the man makes real money through editorial decisions behind the camera (Bilton, 1987).

Politically, the woman is marginalized, she hardly get the permission to venture into politics as men believe that home keeping should be their priority and not how the society is governed. The mode of operation of political parties in Nigeria is one of the factors inhibiting women's participation in politics. Most political parties hold their meeting at night, which discourages many women especially married ones, to play active role in politics. It takes a very understanding husband to allow his wife attend nocturnal political meetings in which important decisions are taken. To crown it all, the men and the women themselves sometimes believe that the women does not have the requisite economic power to indulge in dirty political ideals characterized by money shows, violence, assassinations and other vices (Branka, 1971; Mason, 1986).

Women's numerical strength in the population is not reflected in the political life and decision making processes and structures of the nation. They are not adequately represented at the Senate, national and state legislatures and the House of Representatives. At the state House of Assembly and at the Local Government Area Councils, women are either completely absent or grossly underrepresented as well as at the highest decision-making levels (Executive, Legislature, Judiciary in the country (Alemika & Ogugua, 2001).

The review of literature on gender discrimination also shows that, the traditional image of a woman is changing fast. There are changes also in the family institution and in the whole social structure of the society. These changes are mainly due to various effects of modernization through western cultures, education, internet/computer facilities, pop cultures, movies, cable news, and growth of cities, migration and accelerated change of the economy from subsistence to industrial (Susan, 1989; Hartmann, 1982).

Globalization, trade liberalization and increasing competition have transformed the social, economic and political landscape of the African and the Nigerian woman. These trends have been closely associated with a rapid increase in urbanization and women's entry into the paid labor force and the growing visibility of women's contribution to the economy. A woman's domestic tasks have changed along with the change in the occupational structure of the society. Women are rapidly moving into fields once considered exclusive male specializations. They are found in such fields as politics, commerce, agriculture, industry and military, religious and educational institutions (Susan, 1989).

All over the world successive governments interventions through legislations and programmes have considerably improved the status of women. In Nigeria, the development of

the national policy on women in the 1980's was to facilitate the full integration of women into the development process. Women's representation in social, political and economic life has improved and many laws against gender discrimination have been institutionalized.

Nigerian governments continue to introduce measures to advance the status of women such as the establishment of the National Women Development Centre, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (Alamika & Ogugua, 2001).

Other measures include the introduction of the Better Life Programme, Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme. The impact of these programmes is however, yet to be objectively and rigorously evaluated. Nigerian women have made significant progress and development in their struggle for empowerment, equality and liberation since the end of formal colonial rule in 1960. Indeed, the struggle for the advancement of women's rights started during colonial rule particularly in the 1920's when women organized protests against colonial policies. Nevertheless, women in Nigeria still experience social, economic and political exclusion and deprivations (Amadi, 1982, Alamika & Ogugua, 2001)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many of the earliest theories about gender were anchored on Psychological and Anthropological explanations or the functionalist perspective. These explanations emphasize that gender is the major criterion for social division of labour; some tasks are socially defined as men's work while others are considered to be women's work. Thus, some psychologists and Anthropologists have made the following generalizations which applied to all known human societies; women produce children; they are mothers and wives; women do the cooking, clearing, sewing and washing; they take care of men and are subordinate to male authority; they are largely excluded from high status occupation and from positions of power (Haralambos & Holborn, 2009:92). The Functionalist view emphasizes that gender is biologically determined (the differences between men and women are natural). The biological differences according to this perspective are responsible for the differences in both the behaviour of men and women and the roles that they play in the society (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004).

George Peter Murdock is an Anthropologist who argues that the biological differences between men and women are the basis of the sexual division of labour in society. He argues further that biological differences such as the greater physical strength of men and the fact that women bear children leads to greater roles out of sheer practicality. In a cross cultural survey of 224 societies ranging from hunting and gathering bands to modern nation states, Murdock found that: Men with the superior physical strength can better undertake the more strenuous tasks such as lumbering, mining, quarrying land clearance and house building. Not handicapped

as a woman by physiological burdens of pregnancy and nursing, he range further afield to hunt, to fish, to herd and to trade. Woman is at no disadvantage however in higher tasks which can be performed in or near the home e.g. gathering of vegetable products, the fetching of water, the preparation of food and the manufacture, clothing and utensils (Murdock, 1949 et al in Haralambos & Holborn, 2004:98).

Thus because of her biological function of child rearing and nursing; woman is tied to the home; because of her body physique she is limited to less strenuous tasks. Another famous functionalist, Talcott Parsons (1955) advanced similar arguments to account for the role of women in industrial society. He argues that in a relatively isolated nuclear family in modern industrial society, a woman performs two basic functions; the socialization of the young and the stabilization of adult personalities. He stated that: In our opinion, the fundamental explanation of the allocation of roles between the biological sexes lies in the fact that the bearing and early nursing of children establish a strong presumptive primacy of the relation of mother to the small child (Parsons cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2004:98)".

This was particularly so in modern industrial society, where the isolation of the nuclear family led to a strong relationship between mothers and their children. Parsons characterized the woman's role in the family as expressive, which meant she provided warmth, security and emotional support. This was essential for effective socialization of the young. The second function of women in the family according to Parsons is stabilization of adult personalities. The male breadwinner spent his working day competing in an achievement oriented society. The expressive female relieved this tension by providing the weary breadwinner with love, consideration and understanding. Parsons argue that there had to be a clear cut sexual division of labour for the family to operate efficiently as a social system, and the instrumental and expressive roles complemented each other and promoted family solidarity. The functionalists have failed to explain the social structures which constrain women in the society. In order to properly understand the issue of gender discrimination, however, the discourse must be situated within the context of the feminist framework.

The feminist explanation of gender discrimination lays emphasis on the social structure of society. Gender according the feminist perspective should not be viewed as biological or instinctual but as socially constructed (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004) Ann Oakley (1974) a pioneer feminist, rejects the views of Murdock and Parsons. She argues that there is no natural or inevitable division of labour or allocation of social roles on the basis of sex. She stated that: Not only is the division of labour by sex not universal, but there is no reason why it should be. Human cultures are diverse and endlessly variable. They owe their creation to human

inventiveness rather than invincible biological forces (Oakley, 1974 cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 2004:98)".

Oakley first takes Murdock to task arguing that the sexual division of labour is not universal, nor are certain tasks always performed by men, others by women. She maintains that Murdock interpretation of his data is biased because he looks at other cultures through both western and male eyes. In particular, she claims that he prejudges the role of women in terms of the western housewife-mother role. She argues further that the expressive housewife-mother role is not necessarily for the functioning of the family unit. It merely exists for the convenience of men. She claims that Parson's explanation of gender roles is simply validating myths for the domestic oppression of women. She points to research evidence that working mothers are not detrimental to the wellbeing of their children. Since comparisons between different cultures show that the behaviour and roles of women and men are highly variable. She believes that the gender roles are culturally rather than biologically determined. Whatever, the biological differences between males and females it is the culture of the society that exerts most influence in the creation of masculine and feminine behaviour. If there are biological tendencies for men and women to behave in different ways these can be overridden by cultural factors. She argues that individuals are socialized in the different sex roles and outlines four (4) main ways in which socialization into gender roles takes place; First, the child's self-concept is affected by manipulation. For example, mothers tend to pay more attention to girls' hair and dress them in feminine clothes. Second, the differences are achieved through canalization involving the direction of boys and girls towards different objects. Girls are given dolls, soft toys and miniature domestic objects and appliances to play with. Boys on the other hand are given toys which encourage more practical logical and aggressive behaviours for example bricks and guns. The third aspect of socialization or the use of verbal appellations such as 'you are a naughty boy 'or' that is a good girl'. This leads to young children to identify with their gender. The fourth aspect of socialization is that male and female children are exposed to difficult activities. For example girls are particularly encouraged to become involved with domestic tasks (Oakley, 1974 cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 20004: 100).

The feminist focus more on the gender inequalities than the differences between men and women. They are mainly concerned with the exploitation of women by men. To them it is primarily men who have benefited from the subordination of women. The feminists see gender as a structural feature of society. In the same way as social class and other power relationships gender is socially constructed. The family is seen by the feminist as the key institution oppressing women in modern societies. Mason (1986) argues that women are doubly oppressed on the basis of gender and as social class. Even though all women may be

subordinate to men in society, women of higher class enjoy advantage denied to other women of lower classes. Several Marxist feminists see women as an oppressed group who had to struggle for their own liberation against their oppressors – that is against men. In line with these views, Bryson (1999) argues that women have always been exploited by men and that only revolutionary change can offer the possibility of their liberation.

Marxist feminists view gender inequalities as resulting from the unequal power of men and women in society. They traced the origin of gender inequalities to the development of capitalism, patriarchy and male domination over the laws of inheritance (Siegel, 1995 cited in Ozo-Eson, 2004:5). They argued that societies have largely been characterized by the institution and practice of patriarchy which provides analytical framework that enables us to investigate several concerns and experience of women in society including gender discrimination. According to Busfield. (1996) Patriarchy denotes: The role of the father or more generally the rule of men. Whereas the concept of gender suggest not only differences but also asymmetries and inequalities in the relation between men and women, the concept of patriarchy is used to characterize the wider social structure in which men and women are located within it be the family with the focus on the power of the father or the wider society where it is the fire power of men that is more generally emphasized (Busfield, 1996 cited in Alemika & Ogugua, 2001:7).

Agreeing with the views quoted above, Rhonda Capelon (1994) argues that gender discrimination is a systematic and structural, a mechanism of patriarchic control of women that is built on male superiority and female inferiority, sex stereotype roles and political dominance of men and dependency of women while the legal and cultural embodiments of patriarchic thinking vary among different cultures: there is an outstanding convergence in regard to the basic tenets of patriarchy (Capelon, 1994 cited in Alemika & Ogugua, 2001:9). To reduce gender discrimination, Marxist feminist advocate the empowerment of women both physically, socially, economically, politically, educationally and otherwise. This also entails women having full control over their own lives, access to means of livelihood, taking decision on issues that affect them and total elimination of all discriminatory tendencies towards women (Ozo-Eson; 2004:6). According to Batliwali (1994), the concept of women empowerment is all encompassing. It refers to: A range of activities from individual self-assertion to collective resistance, protest and mobilization that challenge basic power relations. For individuals and groups where class, caste ethnicity and gender determine their access to resources and power, their empowerment begins when they not only recognize the systematic forces that oppress them, but act to challenge existing power relationships. Empowerment therefore is a process aimed at changing the nature

and direction of systemic forces which marginalize women and other disadvantaged section in a given context (Batliwali 1994 cited in Ozo-Eson, 2004:6).

According to Batliwali the concept of empowerment was developed by the Third World feminists to challenge patriarchic ideology to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality (the family, caste, class, religion, educational and political process etc) and to enable poor women to gain access to and control of both material and informational resources (Batliwali, 1994 cited in Ozo-Eson, 2004:7)”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of women cannot occur within the context of gender discrimination, injustice and socio-economic under-development. No society can progress when half of its population suffers systemic discrimination. The removal of sectorial challenges will enhance the capacities of women by improving their social, economic and political status and ensure the full integration of women into the development process. Government should put to end all forms of gender discrimination in both public and private sectors in education, employment and housing, and also protect equal property and inheritance rights. Government should improve anti-discriminatory legislation and instituting merit-based affirmative action in employment, injecting gender as component of Federal Character and enforcing legal protection for the fundamental human rights of the girl child in all areas of religious, social and economic life.

Government should adopt gender mainstreaming as a strategy for women development. Gender mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that gender is taken into account in all government policies, programmes and interventions. It involves bringing into account the experiences, concerns, knowledge and interests of women and men to bear on programming in all areas and at all levels. It addresses the underlying root causes such as gender stereotypes and social norms that perpetuate and compound inequality and discrimination. Gender mainstreaming include removing restrictions to women’s mobility, providing full access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, ensuring access to education and employment opportunities as well as access to economic resources such as land and financial services.

Since patriarchy and its related practices constitute major impediments to the full participation of women in the development process, the structures that prop up patriarchy which gives men ascendancy in inheritance, authority and decision making in and outside the home, should be discouraged through education, enlightenment and national awareness. Government should show more commitment to the empowerment of women beginning with ensuring the rights of women as guaranteed by the Nigerian constitution are protected. Governments should recognize and protect women empowerment and gender equality in education, job creation and

economic empowerment. In order to ensure the emancipation of women in the legal framework, government should abolish all those existing laws which discriminate against women through a carefully worked out programme of social mobilization and awareness generation.

Education is one of the critical issues for developing the society. Education gives women opportunity to escape from poverty, live healthier and productive lives, and raise the standard of living of their families and communities among others. Unless education gives women the confidence and skills to participate in the entire development process, the chance for profound long term change in the power relationship between men and women will be very low. In order to emancipate women in education, government should provide education and relevant training for girls and women with special needs, the gifted, handicapped, nomad, women in purdah, riverine and rural areas dropouts, widows, single parents, market women and career women. Government should discourage or forbid withdrawal of girls under 18 from schools for marriage through legal sanctions. They should be empowered through appropriate legal sanctions. Women should be empowered through appropriate educational and skill development programmes to utilize their great potentials for the economic progress of the country.

In order to improve the status of women in agriculture, government should remove the obstacles to women's access to land, water, necessary credit facilities and other productive inputs, extension services, training in agriculture, appropriate technologies and tools. Governments should ensure the removal of all constraints posed by customary laws and practices to women's rights to land, either by acquisition and or by inheritance. They should enhance the visibility and productivity of women in the privatization of public enterprises in agricultural production for export and home consumption.

In order to ensure the full participation of women in politics, government should provide equal opportunity, same level playing ground and political freedom for women to contest for elective post and be entitled to appointive posts anywhere irrespective of their place of origin. Government should use the party structures to promote the concept of reserving a minimum number of seats in the states and National Assembly for women. Women should be adequately represented in government appointments. However, women have been advised not to see political appointments as a way of engendering gender parity. Men only use and dump women through such political appointments and perpetually marginalize them in politics. Women have also been advised not to see their gender as a disadvantage but as an asset to aid them get to the apex of their business or careers. Women should start believing that they can be given leadership positions by virtue of their capabilities and by virtue of their gender. Above all, women are enjoined to explore their potentials in order to achieve their goals.

CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination exists in all countries of the world and it is almost always decried. Even in the western societies such as America and UK where it is almost abolished there are feminists who are still fighting gender inequalities. Gender discrimination is now universally recognized as unethical, every country strives towards gender equality by ensuring that both men and women enjoy equal opportunities in such important fields as education, politics, economy and commerce. In Nigeria, deliberate efforts are made towards improving the status of women through policies and programmes based on gender considerations. The feminists and women liberation movements emphasized the need for education enlightenment and national awareness on the citizens' constitutional and fundamental human rights in order to remove legal, cultural religious and other constraints against the full integration of women into the development process.

Although one must appreciate the efforts of the feminists for their militancy, which resulted in global recognition and concern about gender discrimination and empowerment in general, it must be stated that things are not easy because there are women anti-feminists who believe that it is not in their own interests to press for gender equality with men. Thus while feminism has been commended for re-orientating the society to accept gender equality, complimentary roles and respect for family values, it has been accused of making outrageous demands which are against the customs and norms of marriage in Nigeria. Among the freedoms the feminists are demanding include the right to own and control their salary, the right to go to party and even have men friends and visit them when they please. As a result of feminism and women liberation movement, many Nigerian marriages have shattered abroad. In Europe, the laws against gender discrimination are enforced, women are given special preferences, they cannot be harassed, beaten or trampled upon as it is common in Nigeria. Women liberation especially women sexual liberation also leads to a potential role reversal whereby many women (and perhaps men too) are viewed as sex objects in a manner similar to the ongoing (and much longer prevalent) portrayal of women.

While feminism and gender discrimination may be seen as grave threat to the social, economic and political status of women, the significant question is: is feminism really needed in Nigeria? The common answer is that societies have largely been characterized by the re-occurring patterns of gender discrimination in which women are either denied access to or experience unequal access to critical goods and services. Feminism is indeed needed in Nigeria because young girls and women cannot walk on the streets anytime without the fear of being victims of sexual abuse by men. It is traumatizing that even old women are not safe to go to farms including in the daylight without fear of being raped and assaulted. Feminism is needed

because some men just blatantly refuse their wives to work without any concrete reason and against their choice. Feminism is needed when a terrorist group can abduct over 200 school girls and appear to be getting away with it. Feminism is needed when a man commits rape and the court discharges and acquits the rapist and convicts the victim for indecent dressing and yet there were other resolved and unreported cases of gender discrimination and violence against women in several communities in Nigeria.

However, the feminism needed in Nigeria is that which allows every person irrespective of gender to reach their potential. The one in which women are not looked upon or made to feel lesser because of their status as women in the workplace, at home or generally in the society. This is therefore why everyone should be a feminist; women and men inclusive, if not for the love of themselves but for that of their daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. It is apparent that men and women need each other emotionally and of course for survival. It is strange therefore, that in spite of this unavoidable interdependence, discrimination exists between them.

THE WAY FORWARD

Though most sociological studies have concentrated on women, not much has been done on gender issues and development. However most writers have focused on gender in isolation from other institutional contexts; economics, family, law, religion, politics and so on. Previous writers have studied gender as a distinct sphere of existence apart from the social structure of the society. Variables such as class, status, gender roles, change and power relationships were not considered important in gender analysis. It is obvious that gender discrimination is real. Therefore sociologists and other writers should direct more attention in future in writing books and researching on gender issues in development.

It is equally significant for society to address the problem of gender discrimination. The society need to redefine its priority and address the socio-economic and political factors associated with gender issues in development. The implication here is that the problem of oppression, subordination, marginalization and other deprivations suffered by women should be address. The society and the feminists in particular must put more pressure on the government and the ruling class to address gender issues instead of viewing women as a subordinate sex.

It is also significant that government and policy makers in particular utilize the data presented and their analysis for the formulation of policies and programmes to support the empowerment of women and gender equality. The implication is that when our analyses are adopted in the formulation of policies, we shall be working towards the promotion and protection of women's rights and indeed gender equality. Furthermore, the society will place more emphasis on a strategic and sustainable approach to economic growth and development.

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