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An Assessment of Women Empowerment in the Sustainable Development of Nigeria

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess women empowerment in the sustainable development of Nigeria. To achieve this, the researcher employed qualitative methodology, with secondary sources as instruments of data collection. Based on the data analyzed, findings of the study showed that the role of women across different dimensions of sustainable development is less reflected in the country. The use of women's labour force in the economic development of the country is minimal. The place of women in society is also relegated to contributing minimally to the social development of the country. In addition, women's rights are not properly being protected in order for women to participate in various areas of the country particularly the rural areas but are subjected to abysmal violations. The country will not achieve sustainable development with the recognition of the dominance of men's participation in all these areas. The fact that women constitute more than half the entire population in Nigeria makes empowering them to be an active part of all development initiatives a compelling circumstance. The study concludes that unless women are empowered can they play their role in economic, social, and political, areas. Hence, this paper calls for the strong commitment of the government to empower women and utilize all the potentials of the country to bring about sustainable development.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Sustainable development, Women's empowerment

Introduction

The issue of women's empowerment is at the top of agendas across Africa, as this is widespread in all cultures. In developing countries, gender disparity is highly rampant compared to the developed countries (Ahmed et al., 2001). As a result, low empowerment of women and high gender gap still impede the development process of Nigeria. Even though the country is on the path of development in various respects, the likelihood of its sustainability is in question.

Since 2000, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) together with other UN partners and the rest of the global community has made gender equality central to their work. Gender equality is a right as fundamental as any other in the national and international bills of rights. It is a necessary piece in the foundation for a peaceful and prosperous world, and its observation can help fuel economic growth and benefit societies and the human race at large.

Promoting women empowerment and gender equality has become a globally recognized and an acceptable reality. Gender issues have also been identified as

critical to the achievement of national development goals. In fact, the attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end in itself it is equally a catalyst to, and a sine-qua-non for the achievement of sustainable development.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to make an assessment of women empowerment in enhancing equality to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria. To achieve the objective of this, the paper is divided into five (5) sections including the introduction, conceptual clarifications of women empowerment, gender equality, and sustainable development based on the literature. This will be followed by theoretical analysis of the issue raised. Section 3 will examine the responses to gender equality and women empowerment in Africa, and gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria. The need to empower women and achieve gender equality and an analysis of the three pillars of development towards achieving women empowerment will make up section 4 and the last section will be the conclusion and recommendation.

The term gender equality will take a central stage in the work, as there cannot be any meaningful discussion on women empowerment without addressing the issue of gender equality which is why the study employed both terms throughout the work.

Conceptual Clarification
Gender equality: This is understood to mean that the "rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female" (Warth and Koparanova, 2012). It is also defined as a situation where "all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally" (Holzner et al., 2010). The ultimate goal of gender equality is the non-existence of discrimination on the basis of one's gender (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013).

Sustainable Development
The concept of sustainable development arises due to the change of human perception as to what development is. Development perspectives shifted gradually, leading to what we perceive today as sustainable development. In the 1950s and 1960s, the focus was on the economic growth and productive capacity of a country. However, in the 1970s, the focus shifted to equity matters, i.e., social development and income distribution, as awareness grew of the prevailing gap between rich and poor (ECA, 2015; Gunduz, 2004; Drexhage and Murphy, 2010).

Historically, the concept first appeared in a document entitled ''Our Common Future'', also known as the Brundtland Report, provided by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987 (Lele, 1991). It defines sustainable development as a development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (WCED, 1987). It calls for attention to be paid to the interest of future generations while attempting to satisfy our present needs.

Indeed, sustainable development is recognized as a potential pathway to reorient development towards a more inclusive model, which aims to achieve a symbolic relationship among desirable economic, social, and environmental systems for both present and future generations (Cobbinah, Black, & Thwaites, 2011; Folke et al., 2002).

Women Empowerment

Empowerment can be defined as a "multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important" (Page and Czuba, 1999).

According to Kabeer (2001) "Empowerment refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. Similarly, Janet G. Townsend *et al.* (1999) base their definition of empowerment on the notion of being 'powerless', and define empowerment as "the gaining of power by the vulnerable."

Women's empowerment on the other hand refers to "women's ability to make strategic life choices where that ability had been previously denied them" (Malhotra et al., 2009). Accordingly, empowerment is central to the processes of maintaining the benefits of women at individual, household, community and broader levels (Malhotra et al.2009). It involves the action of boosting the status of women through literacy, education, training, entrepreneurship, and rising awareness (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). Hence, women's empowerment is all about allowing and equipping women to make life-determining choices across different issues in the country.

Methodology

The study employed qualitative methodology, with secondary sources as instruments of data collection comprising documented materials.

Theoretical Analysis

There are several frameworks on gender roles and women empowerment, due to the diversity of the concept. Many amongst others are; the welfare approach, the equity approach, the anti-poverty approach, the efficiency approach, the empowerment approach, the feminist approach, the liberal feminist approach, etc. The empowerment approach will be adopted in the analysis of the study.

The Empowerment Approach

The empowerment approach, developed in the mid-1980s is a relatively new approach in women and development discourse. A distinctive quality of the empowerment is that it approaches the matter from the standpoint of the Third World women. "The origins of the empowerment approach are derived less from the research of the First World women, and more from the emergent feminist writings and grassroots organizational experience of Third World women" (Moser, 1993). In

particular, the Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), a network of activists, researchers, and policymakers from the Third World, had an important contribution to the emergence and development of this approach.

The empowerment approach points to the existing structures in our societies as sources of women's subordination, and puts a strong emphasis on the necessity of challenging them in all areas and at all levels. Throughout its long history, women's gender subordination has become deeply and firmly embedded within the existing structures. The structures of inequity start within the family, and reach all levels of socio-economic, political, and cultural structures of our societies. The empowerment approach views the issue of women's gender subordination within this complex socio-political, economic, and cultural context. It therefore understands that the solutions proposed need to be accordingly sophisticated:

> Since the causes of women's inferior status and unequal gender relations are deeply rooted in history, religion, culture, in the psychology of the self, in laws and legal systems, and in political institutions and social attitudes, if the status and material conditions of women's lives are to change at all, the solutions must penetrate just as deeply (Batliwala, 1994).

Women's gender subordination is deeply rooted not only in the existing structures, but also in the minds of both women and men. The structures of inequity function in a spiral way in that they feedback themselves. They not only produce women's gender subordination, but also strengthen and protect it through socio-cultural norms. The result is the so-called 'false consciousness' which makes both women and men believe that women's inferior position is normal and natural:

> Gender-based subordination is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of both men and women and is usually viewed as a natural corollary of the biological differences between them. It is reinforced through religious beliefs, cultural practices, and educational systems (both traditional and modern) that assign women lesser status and power (DAWN, 1988).

The empowerment approach views the issue of gender subordination not only from the gender perspective. According to the approach, women's experiences in socio-economic, political, and cultural structures are determined also by other factors such as class, nation, ethnicity, and race:

> Over the past twenty years women's movement has debated the links between the eradication of gender subordination and of other forms of social and economic oppression based on nation, class, or ethnicity. We strongly support the position in this debate that feminism cannot be monolithic in its issues, goals, and strategies, since it constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds (DAWN, 1988).

In this respect, the empowerment approach combines the feminist struggle with the struggle against other forms of oppression. In other words, the struggle

against gender subordination must go hand in hand with those against national, racial, and class oppression.

DAWN (1988) refers to this as "Third World perspective" of feminism which strives for the "deepest and broadest development of society and human beings free of all systems of domination." As Bhasin (1995) writes, "the goal of women's empowerment is not just to change hierarchical gender relations but to change all hierarchical relations in society, class, caste, race, ethnic, North-South relations."

Therefore, from a feminist perspective, the empowerment approach "involves the radical alternation of the processes and structures which reproduce women's subordinate position as a gender" (Young, 1993).

The paper, in agreement with the empowerment approach sees it as a strategy which aims at helping women to gain the power they need for breaking the relations of dependency. That equality for women is impossible within the existing economic, political and cultural processes that reserve resources, power and control for small groups of people. Increasing women's socio-economic and political will is a necessary condition for challenging the structures of oppression. There is greater disparity in African men and women status and potential for development. For example, most women still lack access to education, employment and income-generating opportunities, information, and parliamentary representations. Women's low political power is a reflection of their poor participation and representation in politics. Gender disparities vary across all the regions of the world, most prominently in third world countries. The share of seats in parliament varies across the regions of the world. For population with at least secondary school education and labor force participation rate, females have lower rates compared to men among all the regions of the world. The Nigerian scenario is not different. In spite of the fact that Nigeria has embraced gender mainstreaming, it is evident that gender inequalities are still persistent. This is evidenced in existing gaps between male and female counterpart in all facet of the society. In relation to Touwen (1997) who writes that "the lack of power causes dependency, marginalization, and poverty.

Responses to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Africa

Gender equality and women empowerment has become one of the central themes in global treaties, covenants and declarations principally due to the understanding that it is a catalyst to clear-cut development strategies which is targeted at poverty reduction, improved living standards, good governance and profitably productive investments that are critical to the creation of an enlarged capacity that provide men and women equal opportunity and unrestrained access to decision-making and policy implementation institutions and processes.

Historically, women have comparatively been subjected to marginalization, oppression and injustice both in public and private life. While the pursuit of gender equity remains strongly embedded within the framework of fundamental human rights and gender justice, investments in women are now recognized as crucial to achieving sustainable development for transiting economies of Africa. In most traditional African settings, women are adversely affected in several ways.

These include deprivation of the women of quality education and decent training, poor healthcare, female circumcision, underage marriage, and limited access to productive resources and political power. While Marx noted that the inferiority nature of women was a function of men's chauvinistic nature to perpetuate their domination over women, Agbalajobi (2010) points out that the increasing domination of women by men has been the cause of women not succeeding in gaining power. All these could engender lower quality of life and culminate in limited productivity and hinder economic efficiency and developmental growth.

Essentially, African countries have demonstrated some measure of concern about human development problems by initiating specific developmental goals and strategies and accepting the critical role of gender equality or parity in the developmental process. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) adopted in 1981; the Women Right Protocol of 2003; the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) adopted in 2001. 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 which outlines the rights and equality of women, their freedom from discrimination and equality under the law, are some of the initiatives that are linked with the Millennium Development Goals and at the same time, a testimony to commendable response in the African continent.

Today, it is instructive to note that due to the realization of the gap created by the marginalization and social injustice against women and the missing link in the developmental agenda by the limited access to existing opportunities in virtually all sectors of the socio-political and economic setting, women are gradually coming into public fore. A plausible explanation for this trend and development is the thinking that one of the indicators of the progress and development of any nation is the position of women in that society (Akpoveta, 2008: Thompson and Hickey 2012).

Therefore, all efforts to continuously promote and improve African women's status deserve utmost attention and support. Although the Millennium Declaration underscored the importance of eliminating all forms and shades of discrimination, exploitation, social harassment and gender bias as well as all situations that encourage the infringement of the rights of women through government policies and decisions, traditional and customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism, a lot more commitment and a pragmatic approach that will translate into concrete actions are desirable around the globe, particularly in Africa. Parity between boys and girls in school enrolment has, for instance, been achieved in most regions of the world. Gender disparity in tertiary education is also still tilted in favour of men in Africa and women access to paid employment that is secured in the light of income and social importance is still very low when juxtaposed with that of men in all sectors.

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Nigeria
The first two decades of development planning in Nigeria from 1963 when it became a Republic, was largely characterized by gender- blind and gender-insensitive development policies. In the same vein, the country, particularly since the wake of the

1980s, embraced gender-biased economic policies where women's interests were subsumed within the national interest and gender sensitivity was almost inconsequential, infinitesimal and a non-issue.

Awareness about the role of women in development gained momentum in the latter half of the "1980s (Omu & Makinwa, 1987). Awareness was further enhanced in 1995 as a result of the effective participation of Nigerian women in the International Conference on Women in Beijing, China. Some laudable efforts have been made to put in place the necessary mechanisms required for the elimination of gender discrimination so as to ensure gender parity and human dignity. The National Gender Policy, which replaced and reinforced the previous National Policy on Women, is particularly targeted at the gender inequality problematic in Nigeria. In spite of these efforts, it is appropriate to state that the role of Nigerian women in development has not been sufficiently emphasized.

In highlighting the Nigerian experience, the study considers it imperative to briefly examine three periods namely, the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial period. During the pre-colonial era, Nigerian women contributed to the sustenance of the kin groups. Pre-colonial Nigerian economy was basically at a subsistence level, and Nigerian women participated effectively in this economy. Apart from being mothers and wives and taking charge of the domestic sector, women contributed substantially to the production and distribution of goods and services. Women in pre-colonial Nigeria were fully involved in food processing, for example, fish drying (especially in the coastal areas of Calabar, Oron and the Niger Delta area), garri processing et cetera. In eastern Nigeria, the women of Okposi, Uburu and Yala were very active in salt production. In northern Nigeria, even the women in purdah were involved in food processing and also traded with the aid of their children. (Curtin 1964)

The colonial economy was an export oriented one and it seriously undermined the prestige of the traditional occupations of Nigerian women. It dealt heavily on the economic life of women. While it placed women at a great disadvantage, it enhanced the economic status of the British, Lebanese, and a few male Nigerian merchants. Many of the smaller markets hitherto dominated by women gradually disintegrated as a result of the emergence of expatriate firms such as John Holt, United African Company (U AC.), Lever Brothers et cetera (Curtin, 1964). Colonial policies and statutes were clearly sexist and biased against women.

Though, it should be noted that women took active role in political struggles against the hegemony of the colonialists. For instance, in Aba, women staged an uprising popularly called the Aba Women's Riot in 1929, with one of the leaders being Margaret Ekpo. It was a fierce demonstration of the strength of women's group in response to bad colonial governance. In fact, the women's protest was both a political and economic agitation against the colonial authorities. Similarly, in Western Nigeria in 1946, the Abeokuta Women's Union, led by Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti also protested against discriminatory taxation and British high-handedness in taking away the powers women had over the markets. Yoruba women's political efforts equally led to the dethroning and banishing of the King, Ademola 11 from Egbaland.

Other legendary women were Queen Amina of Zazau (Zaria), Princess Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin, Henrietta Lawson, Hajia Gambo Sawaba, Keziah Fashina, Oyikan Morenika, Kofoworolu Pratt, Flora Nwakauche and Janet Mokelu. (Mazrui 1991)

The post-colonial period saw an emergence of Nigerian women playing very active roles in various aspects of the nation's development, and assumed a more critical role in traditional agriculture. Particularly as a result of the large scale exodus of able bodied men to wage labour; Nigerian women took over an increasing portion of the burden of food production, contributing between 50 per cent and 70 per cent of Nigeria's food requirements. While the situation in the public sector remained unsatisfactory, it was markedly different from what had obtained during the pre-colonial and colonial times. Five years after independence, only 6.9 per cent of the salaried workforce was women; by 1970, 8.7 per cent of the total numbers of established staff in the Federal Civil Service were women. In 1980, the percentage of women had risen to 12.6 per cent. Similar patterns were maintained in State Civil Services but the situation has been getting better with time as we now have more women in public sectors, though not enough. (Mazrui 1991)

Therefore, it can be deduced from the above that colonialism also played an active role in relegating women to the background and denying them their manpower in contributing to the economic development of the society. Unfortunately, most researchers hardly look at colonialism as one of the factors responsible for the economic downfall of women because if women had continued their economic activities as in the pre-colonial era, they would have been able to contribute substantially to the development of the country.

More recently, women that have made impact and those that are still in governance are Kofo Bucknor Akerele, Kema Chikwe, late Dora Akunyili, Mobolaji Osomo, Oby Ezekwesili, Ngozi Okonji-Iweala, Ndidi Okereke, Patricia Etteh, Deziani Allison-Madueke, Kemi Adeosun, Amina j. Mohammed, among few others. However, in spite of these seemingly considerable gains in public life, discrimination in political and economic affairs has not ebbed in the Nigerian public domain.

The Need to Empower Women and Achieve Gender Equality

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. But, today gender inequality persists everywhere and stagnate social progress.

Marrying young also affects girls' education. About one third of developing countries have not achieved gender parity in primary education. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school. Disadvantages in education translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labour market. Women's and girls' empowerment is essential to expand economic growth and promote social development. The full participation of women in labor forces would add percentage points to most national growth rates double digits in many cases.

Gender equality and women empowerment is a fundamental human right. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing

poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys. Investing in education programmes for girls and increasing the age at which they marry can return $5 for every dollar spent. Investing in programs improving income-generating activities for women can return $7 dollars for every dollar spent (http://www.un.org/ sustainable development)

A number of studies have shown that sustainable development is impossible without women's empowerment and gender equality. Consequently, it is asserted that gender equality is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable development (Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). It is also affirmed that gender disparity is prevalent across the cultures of the world and that without serious steps to tackle it, sustainable development cannot be achieved (Stevens, 2010). Furthermore, UN Women (2014) rightly outlined that to create a just and sustainable world and to enhance women's roles in sustaining their families and communities, achieving gender equality is paramount. On the other hand, if gender equality is not maintained, it will retard the country's development. In line with this idea, Stevens (2010) interestingly underlines that "an increasing number of studies indicate that gender inequalities are extracting high economic costs and leading to social inequities and environmental degradation around the world." Therefore, one can understand from such explanations that without the equal inclusion of women in all areas of development initiatives, all the above-mentioned components of sustainable development cannot be achieved. However, gender inequalities across economic, social and environmental dimensions remain widespread and persistent (UN Women, 2014)

For greater emphasis and detail, the paper will also discuss the three pillars/components of sustainable development mandatory for the justification of women empowerment.

a. **Economic growth**

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). Like many developing countries, the women's labour force in Nigeria has not been properly utilized. Despite certain improvements following efforts from the government, the economic opportunities for and participation of the women are still low. Inadequate access to education has excluded them from jobs requiring different skills and qualifications. All of these lead 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. Most importantly, in Nigeria, 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.

Moreover, women account for 70% of the world's poor because of unequal economic opportunities (OECD, 2008). It is worth noting that the economic strength of women is instrumental in achieving other pillars of sustainable development. Most importantly, the economic empowerment of women is crucial for them to become active participants in the politics of the country. Those who are economically poor will not have time and attention to devote to politics (Solomon and Memar, 2014). It is when women are economically powerful that they can better influence politics. Hence, the economic empowerment of women has several non-economic advantages as well.

b.   Political development/good governance

This 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) even though, in Nigeria, we have reportedly seen cases of women abusing public offices, but this cannot be generalized. Without women in the public domain, achieving sustainable development is impossible (Morito and Zaelke, n.d.). Similarly, despite their significant number, 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). Likewise, evidence across all territories in the country shows that the participation of women in local political, administrative and development leadership and decision-making is negligible (UNDP, 2015). This proves that women are unequally represented at various levels of government. This has led women to perceive politics as an area exclusively reserved for men (Solomon and Memar, 2014). Generally, even though the government is striving to empower women and attain gender equality across all areas through various legal frameworks, the political decision-making role of women has not been properly attained on the ground. If one seeks sustainable people-centered development within a country, there is a need to have fair representation of women across different levels of decision-making. Their equal representation is indispensable to obtaining all-inclusive decisions. By all-inclusive decision, the researcher means one that reflects the idea and protects the interest of all stakeholders, most importantly of both genders. It is apparent that to reach a fair decision that equally protects the interests of women, the mostly male dominated political system should be changed to allow women to have a say about their lives as well as the political system of their

country (OECD, 2008; Alvarez and Lopez, 2013). To complicate matters, even the above-mentioned economic development will not be achieved unless women are placed in key political positions. This is due to the interplay between economy and politics: one influences the other.

c.   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 Nigeria, where the gender-based problem is still very much prevalent and impedes social development. In this respect, the paper 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. 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 particularly in the rural areas are not well educated compared with men and based on cultural dispositions. Their access to education has been hindered by traditional customary attitudes). 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. 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). Health is also one aspect of social development, which is strongly related to other sustainable development outcomes such as, inter alia, better education and higher productivity (ECA, 2015). Health related problems will increase human costs from different directions, including health-care costs, and ultimately end up plunging people into poverty (ECA, 2015). Africa still faces the world's most dramatic public health crisis (ECA, 2015). Although there have been improvements, from the perspective of gender a great deal is required to be done in Nigeria to improve the health status of women, which constitute a significant portion of the population. For instance, the majority of HIV/AIDS victims in the country are women of reproductive age. These are all partly attributed to the illiteracy of women. Moreover, women's illiteracy will adversely affect the health of the family as a whole. Thus, it is clear that educating women is helpful to increasing the well-being of families and children (OECD, 2008).

Moreover, to bring about social development, removing the badly socialized stereotyped perception of society towards women is also equally important. Gender is

a socially and culturally constructed identity (King and Mason, 2001). The stereotyped perception of society particularly in the rural areas towards women is detrimental to the well-being of women as well as to the development of the entire country. There is a need to remove such culturally and socially deep-rooted attitudes so that women will enjoy their rights, determine their lives, and fully contribute towards the development of their country. Unless such detrimental perceptions are addressed at the grass roots level, all other efforts will not address gender inequality effectively. Even if the government is working aggressively on the protection and promotion of women's rights and gender equality, deeply rooted cultural attitudes still impedes any practical effects.

As UN Women (2014) noted, "achieving gender equality and realizing the human rights, dignity and capabilities of diverse groups of women is a central requirement of a just and sustainable world." In short, scholars have affirmed that the realization of human rights is vital in the development of a country. Most importantly, implementing the rights of the significant number of marginalized Nigerian women for full participation in all levels of human activity will play a paramount role in hastening and sustaining the development the country is pursuing and subsequently leads to the achievement of SDG 5 by the year 2030.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The concept of sustainable development is a multidimensional concept. It embraces economic, political as well as social development. In this study, the components of sustainable development are discussed with an equal degree of emphasis, as we believe that they have equal and direct relevance to the enhancement of women empowerment and gender equality. The study revealed that even though Nigerian women account for half the country's total population, the full use of their potential for economic, social, political development is not being carried out due to the widespread gender gap. This paper concludes that attaining development among all the pillars of sustainable development is unthinkable without empowering women and obtaining gender equality, thereby using the entire potential of the country.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to build on these achievements to ensure that there is an end to discrimination against women and girls everywhere.

Thus, this paper calls upon the government and various stakeholders to take the following measures to bring about sustainable development in empowering women and making full use of their labour force for economic growth.

- Educating and maintaining the health of women to enhance productivity and social development.
- Empowering women and providing them with fair representation across different decision-making levels of the government structure to better protect women's interests and to achieve quality governance.
- Protecting the rights of women to make them active participants in the economic, social, political, cultural, and other arenas of the country, thereby bringing about development.

- If gender gaps can be closed in labour markets, education, health, and other areas, then poverty and hunger eradication can be accelerated." "Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is the right thing to do, and is a development imperative.

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