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Gender Equity as a Quest for Social Peace in Nigeria

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Abstract

Women today appear to be more hopeful, energetic and optimistic than ever before in our time. Though, this is not to say that women are totally exempted from experiencing stressful or traumatic events based on gender-related issues, which persist for women as threats to their health, economic and social equities. This paper is thus designed to look at the concept of gender equity as a quest for national peace. Gender equity could be seen as providing equal opportunities for all, regardless of their sex, in accessing and understanding cultural and social events in the pursuance of peaceful co-existence in their respective environments in Nigeria, as a nation. In place of discrimination, gender equity makes it possible for the two sexes to find strength in their diversity, sharing between them those things that make them unique entities. The benefits of gender equity in attending to corroborative role performance of every individual in the maintenance of peace across the social diversity in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. Based on the discussion, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made.

Keywords: Gender equity; Quest; Social peace.

1. Introduction

Gender equity is used in addressing the imbalance in the benefits available to females and males. According to [3], gender equity is to ensure that men and women operate on a level playing ground.

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There is need to acknowledge the fact that gender equity and gender equality are closely related. However, there exists between the two concepts a slight difference. Gender equality though, does not mean that men, and women become the same, it is to emphasize that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are males or females. According to [12], equity leads to equality. Based on the premise that gender equity emphasizes fairness, a recourse to principles of justice to correct and supplement law, to take specific measures for the purpose of eliminating inequalities between men and women, justifies equity as the starting point to gender equality. Considering the wave of violence or criminal activities in recent times in Nigeria, as being witnessed in many other countries of the world, it is important that men and women come together to address the issue through dialogue. This is because if a nation must have peace, there ought to be strategies to be employed to do away with aggression in her environment. The role of women in achieving a culture of peace in a nation cannot therefore be overemphasized. Though it is observed that women in Nigeria are gradually getting out of the home as mere home makers, to work and earn salaries outside the home in order to support their husbands, there are even instances of women who had served as ministers, senators, amongst others, and competed favourably with their male counterparts to give meritorious services to their nation Nigeria. This is not to say however that such “lucky women” who are given the opportunity to serve, do not have challenges to grapple with, and adjust to. It is indeed, the ability of women, mostly those in authority, to face and manage many of the glass ceiling barriers in their way of performance, that shows them as being highly capable and worthy of corroboration with their men counterparts, for a positive change. However, there are still observed stereotypical factors which remain as threats to women’s contribution to the sustainable peace of Nigeria. Unless these factors, which bother on discrimination against women’s empowerment and equity are appropriately dealt with, it might be very difficult for them to perform their mediating roles for the needed peace in Nigeria. To support this assertion, [5], who while showing interest in the bill that was passed by a female member of the Senate, seeking for gender equality in marriage, quoted George Bush, saying that, countries that are doing well are those that give women opportunities. One of the factors adduced for gender inequality is the lower status in social value of women in the household and the larger society. According to [7], women’s efforts are hardly recognized or valued for the unpaid care and domestic work they provide in the home. Nigerian men, often find it very difficult in promoting shared responsibility within the household and the family. To further establish the fact that women’s and girls’ priorities seem to be meaningless in Nigerian Society, reference is made to the abduction of the Chibok girls by the insurgent group. Critically, one can imagine the type of emotional stress such girls would be exposed to. An individual whose life is in perpetual danger can hardly have the time to think of any positive contribution to her nation. Access to education is another major issue of inequality. It is where women and girls are systematically more disadvantaged than men and boys. As presented by [2], African education systems, Nigeria inclusive, have been characterized by high structural inequality with regard to religion, rural, urban residence, and gender, amongst others. It is stated here categorically that out of all the factors identified, gender forms the most widespread and persistent basis for inequality in opportunity for access to schooling, and educational output and outcome. This could explain why majority of the African countries such as Nigeria, suffer under-representation in their respective education systems. Also, the observed gender imbalance in the access to education by women and girls, could have been responsible for why overwhelming majority of the female population is under-represented too, in their respective political system and decision-making positions either in the private or public arena. To buttress this argument, The Premium

Times of Thursday 2nd February, 2017 reported that, in Nigeria, there are only seven female senators in the 8th National Assembly out of one hundred and nine (109) members. This implies that the ratio of women to men is 9:109! Gender imbalance is observed to abound too in the distribution of leadership positions either in the public, workplace, and even in the University System. The survey carried out by the researcher on the State and Federal Universities, in Ondo State, Nigeria on the pattern of appointment of the principal officers in these universities, confirmed this observation. Critically, one could state that the lopsidedness observed in the distribution of positions of the Principal officers in the sampled universities only confirmed the reflection of the broader societal structural gender inequalities. The tables of analyses in the sampled Universities, were as displayed as follow:

Table 1: Appointment of Principal officers by gender, in Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko (AAUA) Ondo State, Nigeria.

Title of Position Held	Male	Female	Total
V.C	1	-	1
DVCs	1	1	2
Librarian	1	-	1
Registrar	1	-	1
Bursar	-	1	1
Total	04	02	06

Source: Researcher’s Field survey (2017).

❖ **AAUA is a state University in Ondo State, Nigeria.**

Table 2: Appointment of principal officers by gender, in Ekiti State University, (EKSTU), Nigeria.

Title of Position Held	Male	Female	Total
VC	1	-	1
DVCs	1	1	2
Librarian	1	-	1
Registrar	1	-	1
Bursar	1	-	1
Total	05	01	06

Source: Researcher’s Field survey (2017).

Table 3: Appointment of Principal officers by gender, in Federal University of Technology Akure (FUTA), Nigeria.

Title of Position Held	Male	Female	Total
VC	1	-	1
DVCs	1	-	1
Librarian	1	-	1
Registrar	-	1	1
Bursar	1	-	1
Total	04	01	5

Source: Researcher’s Field survey (2017).

Table 4: Appointment of Principal officers by gender, in Federal University of Technology Oye Ekiti (FOYE), Nigeria

Title of position held	Male	Female	Total
VC	01	-	01
DVC	01	-	01
Registrar	01	-	01
Librarian	01	-	01
Bursar	01	-	01
Total	05	-	05

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey (2017).

Tables 1-4, showed the stereotypical patterns of appointment in all the sampled universities: AAUA, had 2 females and 4 males; EKSTU had 1 female against 5 males, FUTA had 1 female, 4 males, while all the appointments in FOYE were completely taken over by males. As previously pointed out in the study, the data in the Tables, were the typical reflection of what operates in the larger Nigerian Society.

Caretaking is a common role which is often linked with women in the family. According to [4], many women who are faced with care-giving burden of significant others in the family, even at the risks of their own untreated depression, are often abandoned when they need care-taking, due to their physical illness. In other words, [6] stated that women, unlike men at such critical period, hardly receive family care, but must have to

rely on paid assistance. Still on this same issue, the Medical Women's International Association (WMIA) in the "Gender Equity Update [8]" stated the need to control the historical imbalance which showed that men, unlike women have often been considered the only norm in health services.

1.2 The need for Women's Involvement in Quest for Social Peace in Nigeria

The need for women's involvement in the maintenance of peace in Nigeria is of great importance. In the first place and logically, considering the fact that women constitute about half the population of Nigeria, qualifies them as having equal right to contribute their own quota to the development of the nation too. In the view of [3], the process of sustainability of any nation involves the participation of all segments of the population. It requires the development of skills, capacity, and effective use of resources that could enhance productivity.

In the home front, the contribution of women are immensely felt. Women, not only as home makers, but also as good models, are often sensitive to the needs of their homes. They usually take the lead in the nurturing and training of the child to meet the expectations of the society. In the contributions of [10], while discussing cultural diversity, observed that joint participation of parents in their children's learning is vital. This he observed could strengthen the family ties, enhancing parents and children's mutual respect and obligation. In other words, family members strive to maintain cooperation and harmony thereby helping members of the family to make changes of the existing culture, through the borrowing from the strength of one another. This confirms the fact that the much needed peace and harmony which are essential in the larger society, actually starts from the home, which is the basic unit of the society itself.

There are proofs to show that women are capable of making positive contributions to the maintenance of peace, if given a free hand. For example, the investigation of [1] on conflict resolution strategy and managerial effectiveness, showed that the interpersonal and persuasive approaches adopted by female managers, had more positive results, compared with the coercive and competitive approaches adopted by male managers.

In a nutshell, [11], the UN women Deputy Executive Director, in her paper delivered on "A Culture of Peace Requires the Participation of Women", expressed the feeling that to achieve a sustainable peace in a nation, it is important for everyone to work together to suppress all forms of violence. Women empowerment is stressed by her, as being of crucial importance to maintaining the culture of peace. Reference [11] also emphasized further that peace is not just the absence of war, but the nurture of human life, which in due cause, could only be achieved successfully through women, who are seen as natural nurturers. Hence, women are not only found to be good at dialoguing, but also sensitive to human needs and rights.

1.3 Conclusion

In spite of societal gender-based factors and values, which often serve as hindrance to women advancement, there are still proofs beyond reasonable doubt, and based on the preceding evidences, that Nigerian women are of great value, possessing special qualities, that could influence decisions at various levels, starting from the home, to the communities and the country as a whole. As wives and mothers, they are often the most affected by violence or lack of peace and security. By giving them the opportunities to raise their voices for peace, they can

make a lot of difference in their environments. By integration of women into politics, and decision-making positions too, it would opportune them to continue the pursuit of peace. This is because based on women's sensitive and persuasive nature, it would be easier for them to recognize sources of conflict, and what could be done to quench violence before it degenerates to full-blown war.

1.4 Recommendations

1. Reference [9] observed that women are known for their important qualities which make them suitable for leadership positions. Such qualities include hard work, dedication, endurance, tolerance, honesty amongst others. These features were described by [13] too as great assets for their public acceptance. Women should endeavour to always demonstrate these virtues in their respective homes for the benefit of their children. They, as nurturers of children should educate them to imbibe the spirit of love, and do away with those of vengeance, aggression, and violence.
2. The general public, civil servants, university workers and others, should also uphold the spirit of tolerance, and love; giving gender equity a chance, whoever becomes the head, regardless of the gender, should be supported so as to give peace a chance in our domain.
3. The government at all levels should give priority to the provision of health care facilities and make them available in all nook and cranny, to allow both men and women to have easy access.
4. The government should not only update their policies as required, but should always see that they are well-implemented to meet the yearnings of those they are to serve. All dangerous or harmful stereotypical practices should be done away with, and replaced with more acceptable ones.

It is hoped that if all the recommendations, are studied and put into use, it would go a long way to eradicating or reducing drastically, gender-based prejudices, and promote peaceful co-existence in Nigeria.

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