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Diversity and Inclusion in the Nigerian Work Environment: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract: The Nigerian work environment reflects the nation's kaleidoscope of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions. However, the importance of leveraging this robust diversity and achieving an inclusive workplace is rarely researched. Using the thematic literature review method, this paper explores the complex diversity and inclusion landscape in the Nigerian work environment, focusing on the opportunities it offers for growth, the challenges to overcome to harness these opportunities and the policies for addressing the issues of diversity and inclusion. Findings revealed that diversity and inclusion attract top talent, enhance innovation, corporate performance, and decision-making, and reduce biases, stereotypes, and employee attrition. It also revealed complex challenges, including change resistance, hidden biases, and communication barriers. Organisations can navigate these challenges by employing diversity training, inclusive leadership, equal opportunity, and general language policies. A contradiction was also revealed between the country's ability to utilise its diverse potential and what is being achieved resulting from a low level of equity and inclusion in the Nigerian workplace and inadequate institutional and governmental structure to address the issues of inequality and discrimination. It is, therefore, imperative to formulate policies with broader coverage, expand existing ones and strengthen enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance from both organisations and individuals.
Keywords: Diversity, inclusive workplace, inequality, discrimination, Nigerian Work environment

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected and diverse world, fostering an inclusive work environment is imperative for organisations to thrive (Miller & Katz, 2022; Daniel, 2021). Nigeria, known for its ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity, presents a unique setting where diversity and inclusion must be addressed effectively to harness the potential for maximising the benefits therefrom (Ugwuzor, 2023; Ngalo et al., 2023). With a population of over 200 million, Nigeria is home to more than 250 ethnolinguistic groups (Ugwuzor, 2023), diverse cultures, religions, ages, and even different nationalities (Adeleye et al., 2014). Therefore, it is not uncommon that the Nigerian work environment, which reflects the nation's kaleidoscope of cultures, ethnicities, languages, and religions, is a vibrant tapestry of diversity (George et al., 2017). At the same time, within this intricate mosaic lies a wealth of opportunities and challenges concerning diversity and inclusion (Cletus et al., 2018). In recent years, there has been a growing concern about diversity challenges in Nigerian organisations and institutions. These challenges derive from unconscious biases, cultural clashes, language barriers, lack of representation, etc., which result in unintentional discrimination against certain groups, misunderstanding and conflicts among employees and ineffective communication in the organisations (Olele and Achugo, 2023). However, there has also been a recognition of the pivotal role diversity and inclusion play in shaping the success and sustainability of organisations operating in Nigeria. The opportunities may be in achieving competitive advantage through adaptability, reduced employee turnover and enhanced creativity and innovation (Hofstede Insights, 2022; Olele and Achugo, 2023).

Although diversity extends far beyond the visible differences that meet the eye, encompassing an array of unique backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences (Gross-Gołacka et al., 2022; Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2009), it does not include colour in the Nigerian context since the Nigerian society consists of black individuals, unlike the instances in other nations such as South Africa, United States, or other nations with disparate racial populations. Inclusion, on the other hand, is the commitment to fostering an environment where every individual, regardless of their background, feels valued, respected, and has equal access to opportunities (ILO, 2022). The dynamic interplay between diversity and inclusion forms the bedrock of Nigeria's thriving, innovative, and equitable workforce (Oderinde and Olanipekun, 2023).

Research on diversity and inclusion in Nigeria has, in recent times, focused on managing the challenges of diversity through inclusion (Ikeije & Lekan-Akomolafe, 2015; Inegbedion et al., 2020; Ekejiuba et al, 2023; Ngalo et al., 2023)); underemphasising the importance of leveraging on diversity and achieving an inclusive workplace through the formulation and implementation of policies bordering around diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian workplace. This paper, therefore, navigates this intricate terrain to provide an in-depth examination of diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment, highlighting the opportunities it offers for growth and the challenges that must be overcome to harness these opportunities. Particular attention is paid to the current state of diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment and the existing legislation and policies that indirectly address the issues of diversity and inclusion in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Diversity: This refers to a wide range of individuals who exhibit differences in characteristics, attributes, backgrounds, and perspectives. These differences can encompass various dimensions such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, educational background, and more (Inegbedion, 2020; Moore et al., 2020). Diversity recognises and values the uniqueness of each individual and

acknowledges the variety of experiences and perspectives they bring to the organisation (Gross-Gołacka et al., 2022).

Inclusion: This is creating an environment or culture in which all individuals, regardless of their diverse characteristics, backgrounds, or identities, feel valued, respected, and fully included in the workplace (Nguyen et al., 2023). Inclusion goes beyond mere tolerance of differences; it actively seeks to ensure that all individuals have equitable access to opportunities, resources, and experiences, and it promotes a sense of belonging, participation, and engagement among everyone, regardless of their diversity (Chaudhry et al., 2021). Inclusion strives to break down barriers, eliminate discrimination, and foster a sense of unity and cooperation among individuals from all backgrounds.

Although diversity and inclusion are two separate phenomena, they are interrelated. Diversity alone in a workplace is insufficient and does not translate to a thriving organisation. However, the presence of the two concepts forms a beneficial connection that nurtures a vibrant, effective, and innovative organisation (Oderinde & Olanipekun, (2023). In other words, organisations not only need to have a range of people with different backgrounds, knowledge and perceptions among organisational teams, but they also need to create an environment in which the ideas, skills and contributions of these team members are appreciated, valued and respected to harness the benefits

Theoretical Framework
A relevant theory that can help explain diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment is the Social Identity Theory, proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s. This theory provides insights into how individuals categorise themselves and others into social groups and how these group memberships influence their attitudes and behaviours (Tajfel, 1978; Bergami and Bagozzi, 2020; Ugwuzor, 2023). Applying the Social Identity Theory to diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment highlights the importance of recognising and addressing social categorisations, fostering a positive social identity that includes all groups, mitigating in-group favouritism and discrimination, creating common goals, and promoting inclusive leadership and communication. For instance, in Nigeria, with its diverse population comprising numerous ethnic groups, religions, and cultures, individuals naturally categorise themselves and others into various social groups. These social categorisations can be based on ethnicity, religion, language, and region (Inyokwe, 2021). The opportunities and challenges of diversity and inclusion often stem from these initial categorisations. According to the Social Identity Theory, people derive a sense of self-esteem and identity from their group memberships (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2020; Alabi et al., 2023). In the Nigerian context, individuals take pride in their ethnic or religious backgrounds. This can be an opportunity as it allows for the celebration of diverse cultures and perspectives in the workplace (Trepte & Loy, 2017). However, it can also pose challenges if employees strongly identify with their group to the detriment of intergroup cooperation (Biwang, 2023; John, 2023).

Social Identity Theory suggests that people tend to favour their in-group members over out-group members (Trepte & Loy, 2017; Biwang, 2023). In the Nigerian work environment, this could manifest as in-group employees collaborating more effectively and feeling a stronger sense of belonging. At the same time, out-group members may face exclusion or discrimination (Appiah, 2013). The challenge here is to mitigate such biases and foster a sense of inclusivity for all groups. Aligning with the Social Identity Theory, one way to address intergroup tensions and promote inclusion is by creating superordinate goals—objectives that transcend individual group interests (Biwang, 2023; John, 2023; Wu et al., 2022). In the Nigerian workplace, organisations can establish common goals that require

collaboration from employees of various backgrounds. This can help break down intergroup barriers and encourage cooperation (John, 2023). According to the theory, leaders play a crucial role in shaping group dynamics (Zhao et al., 2019). In Nigerian organisations, leaders who exemplify inclusive behaviour and emphasise the value of diversity can have a positive impact. Thus, inclusive leadership can serve as an opportunity to promote diversity and inclusion, but lacking such leadership can be a challenge to achieving an inclusive work environment.

Consistent with the Social Identity Theory, effective communication reduces intergroup tensions and fosters inclusion (Cletus et al., 2018). Open and honest dialogues about diversity, biases, and the value of different perspectives can help employees understand each other better and work more harmoniously. By leveraging these insights, organisations in Nigeria can better navigate the opportunities and challenges associated with diversity and inclusion, ultimately creating more inclusive and equitable workplaces.

METHODOLOGY
The design of this study is a thematic literature review which involves sourcing secondary data by systematically identifying and retrieving relevant existing data and information from various published sources. Academic databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and others provide access to a wide range of peer-reviewed journal articles. University and research libraries provide extensive collections of books, journals, and other publications. Government websites, agencies, and local, regional, or national departments provide published reports, statistics, and policy documents for valuable secondary data sources. Non-Governmental Organizations and international organisations' published reports, surveys, and research findings were also accessed. Industry- and trade-specific magazines, journals, and trade associations

published articles, reports, and data related to the study, provided data on valuable industry insights. Both online and offline news archives were sources of historical data, public opinion, and events related to the research topic. Online platforms and research networks like ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and others provided access to research articles relevant to the research topic. All data were evaluated for credibility, reliability, and relevance of the sources, and sources were adequately cited and referenced for transparency. This method yielded positive results as it helped to identify links among existing studies on the issues under study and provided a broader synopsis for the creation of new scientific knowledge.

Opportunities in Dimensions of Diversity in Nigeria

Nigeria's diversity is multi-dimensional, encompassing ethnicity, religion, gender, age, and disability. Understanding and appreciating these various dimensions is crucial for organisations seeking to create an inclusive workplace. It is essential to recognise that diversity goes beyond surface-level differences and encompasses a rich tapestry of perspectives and experiences which benefit both employees and the organisation. Below are the opportunities in dimensions of diversity in Nigeria:

Innovation and creativity
Several studies have shown that diverse teams are more innovative and creative (Hofstede Insights, 2022; Deloitte, 2018) while homogeneity in work teams stiffens innovation (Smedley, 2014). On the one hand, variety unites people with a range of backgrounds, viewpoints, and life experiences. This diversity in thinking nurtures creativity and innovation, as distinct perspectives can spark original problem-solving approaches and fresh concepts (Amaliyah, 2015); Olele and Achugo, 2023). For instance, research on Nigerian corporate organisations by Hofstede Insights (2022) revealed a correlation between diversity, organisational culture, and a more creative and innovative workforce. Another report from a study of private

institutions in Lagos by Oderinde and Olanipekun (2023) stated that when an organisation boasts a workforce encompassing diverse cultural backgrounds, it creates an environment conducive to exchanging creative and innovative ideas. On the other hand, it has been reported that the absence of diversity in leadership may impede an organisation's capacity to effectively address novel situations demanding innovative thinking (Hewlett et al., 2018). In the Nigerian work environment, harnessing the diverse talents and perspectives of employees from diverse backgrounds can lead to enhanced problem-solving and product development.

Enhanced corporate performance

Diversity and inclusion play a crucial role in enhancing corporate performance. Research has indicated that organisations that possess diverse and inclusive workforces tend to perform better than their rivals in profitability and financial performance (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Hunt et al., 2018). An organisation that fosters an environment where employees of all backgrounds are respected, valued and empowered can tap into a broader spectrum of skills, experiences, and perspectives. These diverse thoughts and approaches can lead to great solutions, increased productivity, and improved business outcomes (Hunt et al., 2018). In their research, Dixon-Fyle et al., (2020) found that an organisation's diversity and inclusion promote corporate performance. According to their research findings, companies that invest in diversity equity and inclusion outperformed their industry peers by 35% in 2019, 33 per cent in 2017 and 34 per cent in 2014. Deloitte (2012) also found that when the diversity and inclusion levels of their study organisations were high, they recorded an 80 per cent improvement in business performance (Dixon-Fyle et al., (2020). A recent study by Hofstede Insights (2022) on Nigerian corporate organisations showed a correlation between diversity and Return on Assets (RoA). According to the study report, organisations with ethnic diversity had higher RoA than others. This advantage arises from the synergy created by a diverse team working together to find creative solutions to complex challenges, ultimately setting these organisations apart from their competitors.

Market understanding

A diverse work group offers a unique opportunity for organisations to better understand and cater to the needs of various customer segments (Smedley, 2014). Customer needs and wants are fulfilled by a diverse group of people, which helps in understanding the diverse customer needs. Moreover, diverse work organisation not only lead to improved market insights but also leads to product/service customisation and improved market share. In their study, Hewlett et al., 2018) revealed that companies embracing two-dimensional diversity were 45% more inclined to have increased their market share in the past year than those lacking such diversity and were 70% more likely to have successfully entered new markets. Additionally, teams that included one or more members representing a target end-user were found to be up to 158% more likely to comprehend the needs of that specific target audience and innovate accordingly. These, in turn, lead to enhanced customer satisfaction and create better business opportunities (Hunt et al., 2018; Olele and Achugo, 2023).

Attracting top talent

Organisations that prioritise diversity and inclusion are often more attractive to a wide range of talent (Hunt et al., 2018). Glassdoor (2022) reported that 75 per cent of job seekers are interested in employment with organisations that have diverse work teams. Nigeria's competitive job market benefits organisations that create inclusive cultures, thereby attracting and retaining top professionals from diverse backgrounds (Ikeije and Lekan-Akinmolafe, 2015).

Reduces biases and stereotypes

An inclusive work environment not only encourages employees to challenge and overcome their biases and stereotypes (Cletus

et al., 2018; Hewlett et al., 2018) but also promotes equity and fairness in the employment processes. This discourages preference or rejection for a particular group of individuals. It also encourages having opposite and different groups to bring in their uniqueness to the work environment. For instance, having both young and old employees (Felman and Ng, 2016; Darwin, 2019; Oderinde and Olanipekun, 2023), men and women (Woolley & Malone, 2011), etc. While the young folks are energetic, exuberant, coachable, and open to learning, the old people bring experience, wisdom, perception, keen attitude, etc., So having youth and age together brings something more significant than if they were there individually; the same thing goes with males and females. While men are good at compartmentalising, they can analyse the situation, make quick, clear decisions, and rationalise things uncommonly well; having females on board brings in effective communication. They serve as the communicators, the connectors who connect all the dots and synthesise new understanding and new perspectives the men do not see, building networks and passion around the cause. A McKinsey (2007) study reports that organisations with a varied mix of workers are at their best performance while those without miss out on the economic potential of minority markets. Their report revealed that in Europe, women played a pivotal role in 70% of household purchases and had a 60% influence on car-buying decisions in Japan. Consequently, an organisation comprised entirely of men and involved in selling consumer goods for households may be at a disadvantage in understanding its market compared to one that maintains diversity. Woolley and Malone (2011) also found minimal connection between the collective intelligence of a group and the individual IQs of its members; however, when a group includes a higher proportion of women, its overall collective intelligence increases. The same goes with religion, Muslim-Christian (Cannon, 2023), ethnic/cultural mix (Hunt et al., 2018), and the list goes on. Therefore, Nigerian organisations need to build a workforce that is rich in talent, skills and perspectives from different backgrounds that can solve complex, multifaceted problems.

Enhanced decision-making
Research findings from academia, business corporations, and various institutions substantiate that diverse and inclusive teams tend to arrive at higher-quality decisions, frequently with greater efficiency, grounded in factual analysis, and exhibiting reduced cognitive biases or susceptible groupthink (Hunt et al., 2018). Researchers have looked deeper at individuals involved in organisational decisions and have identified that diverse teams significantly have better opportunities for uncovering better alternatives. According to Cloverpop's (2017) findings, diverse teams made better decisions 87 per cent of the time and two times faster. The report also provided evidence suggesting that diverse teams also make superior decisions compared to solitary decision-makers nearly 95 per cent of the time, which was nearly 4 times more effective than conventional practices. People of varied ages, genders, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, etc, show substantial mental differences and see things differently. So, the greater the distance among individuals in terms of geographical, generational, biological and cultural differences, the more diverse their viewpoints become, and the more inclined they are to bring forth fresh insights, information and improved decisions. Logically, there is nothing magical about age, ethnicity, gender, culture, etc, but it is the collective power of inherent cognitive differences that drives the force behind enhanced decision efficacy (Larson, 2018). Considering this perspective on decision-making, Nigerian organisations can leverage building diverse teams to ensure higher-quality decisions for better organisational performance and growth.

Reduced employee attrition
Diverse and inclusive work settings tend to have lower rates of employee turnover, as employees are more inclined to feel a sense of

connection to the organisation and its goals. Avery et al. (2008)'s research revealed a positive correlation between perceived inclusivity and the intention to stay. They, therefore proposed that individuals feeling more socially connected tend to display increased organisational identification and attachment, reducing the likelihood of their departure. However, the reverse is the case for organisations that do not make efforts to maintain a diverse and inclusive workforce. For instance, a Deloitte survey focusing on the preferences of Gen Z and millennials unveiled that 52 per cent of employees from these generational cohorts will contemplate leaving their current organisations within a two-year period if they find the efforts to cultivate inclusive and diverse work environments unsatisfactory Deloitte, (2022). Therefore, the implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in the Nigerian work environment will stand as significant symbols for numerous organisations, acting as powerful measures to alleviate employee turnover intentions and reduce feelings of work alienation ((Oderinde & Olanipekun, 2023; Olele and Achugo, 2023).

Challenges in promoting diversity and inclusion in Nigeria

While the benefits of diversity and inclusion are evident, there are substantial challenges associated with its implementation. This is because it is a growing concept in organisations, and it is complex in nature (Cletus et al., 2018). Some of these challenges include:

Unwillingness to accept change

 Diversity and inclusion initiatives often face change resistance challenges. Those who fear reverse discrimination or disruption of existing power dynamics may resist diversity efforts (Powell, 2020). In Nigeria, some of the resistance to change can be attributed to deeply ingrained practices and beliefs (Olele and Achugo, 2023). Many employees tend to rely on muscle memory and will never accept change. As a result, questions such as 'this is the way we have done things, this the way it has been working, why change it?' will come up when management brings changes in work systems, policies, processes and procedures in their organisations. This is because they are so comfortable with the old way of working and doing things in the organisation. Employee training, education, engagement and clear communication are required to navigate this resistance in Nigerian organisations.

Hidden bias

The presence of diverse people in the workplace has the potential to trigger stereotypes, misunderstandings and biases concerning individuals from different groups, which can affect decision-making as well as cause problems of inefficiency and counterproductivity in organisations (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Ndukwe et al., 2020). People have different biases ranging from gender, ethnicity, age, educational background, etc. An instance is the outdated Nigerian beliefs that portray women as being suitable for temporary or low-responsibility roles because they are seen as weaker gender, less capable than men and are inclined toward marriage and childbearing, leading them to abandon their careers even at the height of their professional success in favour of family priorities (Cletus et al., 2018). Such gender bias strikes a chord and occasionally elicits adverse reactions from individuals (Larson, 2018). Some researchers have conducted a study on employees' views of their workplace in terms of their sentiments on the level of inclusiveness in their organisations, and findings show that employees discern negative bias in terms of evaluations of their potential (Hewlett et al., 2018). On a related note, Dixon-Fyle et al. (2020) reported from their research findings that openness of the work environment, which includes bias and discrimination, was also one of the most significant concerns, with negative sentiment ranging from 38 to 56 per cent across industries within which the study was conducted. According to Cletus (2018), ethnic and religious biases, which manifest in the Nigerian workplace, can hinder cooperation and create divisions among employees.

Ensuring an atmosphere free from bias and discrimination requires inclusive leadership and managers holding themselves accountable for openness, fairness, and equal opportunities (Dixon-Fyle et al., (2020).

Communication barriers due to language differences

Effective communication is not only essential to creating and maintaining workplace cohesion but also crucial for the achievement of both the tasks and goals of the organisation (Cletus et al., 2018). However, in multicultural workplaces like Nigeria, communication and collaboration can be hampered by language differences (Ikeije & Lekan-Akomolafe, (2015); Ngalo et al., 2023). For instance, there can be confusion, conflict, lack of teamwork, and low morale in the workplace when there is linguistic diversity (Dale-Olsen and Finseraas, 2020). Communication between coworkers is slower if they do not understand one another, which can lead to conflicts and production problems. Dale-Olsen and Finseraas (2020) discovered that linguistic diversity also negatively affects productivity. He added that Increasing distances between languages increases potential costs. In the absence of complementary skills, language differences can lead to task differentiation, which can negatively impact productivity. Organisations' understanding of the language peculiarities of members is vital to attending to their language needs. There is also a need for organisations to aim to foster a general language as it will build trust among organisation members.

The current state of diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment

The work environment in Nigeria has unusually high levels of diversity across ethnic/cultural, racial, religious, linguistic, age and socio-economic dimensions but falls short of international equity and inclusion standards (Adeleye et al., 2014; Hofstede Insights, 2022; Onwuamaeze 2023). The deficiency arises from the weak institutional frameworks in place to effectively address workplace diversity issues. Despite the integration of principles against discrimination in employment and occupation by the United Nations Global Compact initiative in 2012 and the inclusion of anti-discrimination provisions in the 1999 Nigerian constitution, which prohibit biases based on factors such as race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national origin, social background, age, disability, HIV/AIDS status, trade union affiliation, and sexual orientation (Osiki, 2022; UN et al., 2012; Adeleye et al., 2019), there is still substantial evidence indicating that workers continue to encounter discriminations and exclusions within their organisations (Ekejiuba et al., 2023). These issues persist from the initial stages of recruitment and extend through placement and compensation processes.

The problem of employment discrimination and inequality in Nigeria, as pointed out by Fajana et al. (2011), remains largely unaddressed. Instead, these issues have worsened due to the absence of strong and adequate frameworks in the country that would hold organisations accountable for matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Adeleye et al., 2014). In the Nigerian public sector, employees' recruitment, selection and placement are heavily influenced by ethnicity and gender, which restricts the advantages of promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace (Ekejiuba et al., 2023). Some individuals are denied employment opportunities solely because they are not indigenous to the environment, while others are incorrectly placed based on their gender.

Private sector organisations also grapple with issues of discrimination. While the public sector faces challenges related to an ageing workforce and requiring individuals to attain a specific age to be eligible for senior positions or certain public offices (Adeleye et al., 2014), private organisations have practices that prevent the hiring and retaining of older employees. They often set the age for entry-level recruitment at 25 years, aiming to bring in young, dynamic, and trainable individuals who can better adapt to the demands of competitive business operations and modern

technology (Nwakanma and Onyeonoru, 2021) and prefer young and dynamic individuals for executive positions below a certain age (Adeleye et al., 2019). Likewise, women encounter discrimination practices in private organisations, where they are seldom found in leadership roles (Onwuamaeze, 2023; Hofstede Insights, 2022; Adesua & Adedoyin, 2012; Okongwu, 2021)). Moreover, women face barriers to employment in certain job positions due to concerns about their potential family responsibilities and maternity leaves (Abara, 2012). They are also often relegated to non-standard forms of employment, which places them at a significant disadvantage in terms of well-being, job responsibilities, wages, and working conditions (Osiki, 2022).

Relatedly, People experience exclusions and discrimination based on HIV/AIDS. HIV status has become an obstacle to finding employment and maintaining the same. Individuals living with HIV/AIDS experience constant stigmatisation and discrimination during employment processes as they face employment denial as well as employment insecurity. Numerous organisations include mandatory HIV/AIDS testing in their pre-employment screening processes (FMLP, 2013). In a study conducted in 2012 by the Global Network of people living with HIV, it was revealed that more than a quarter of respondents in Nigeria faced difficulties in securing employment once their HIV status became known, marking the highest percentage among the surveyed countries (GNP+, 2012). The same study showed that up to 45 per cent indicated that in the past year, they had lost a job or a source of income as a result of stigma related to HIV/AIDS, while 42 per cent were denied promotion.

Another form of workplace exclusion in Nigeria is discrimination based on nationality. The world has gotten more and more globalised in recent times, resulting in increased labour migration across countries. This has also been exacerbated by the lifting of national borders to allow the free movement of human resources among African states resulting from the African Continental Free

Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). However, migrant workers face hindrances such as victimisation and unfair recruitment procedures, which discourage their engagement in the formal job sector. Due to their primary focus on income generation, these workers are primarily relegated to unsecured employment, often taking on transitory and temporary positions. Unfortunately, this exposes them to poor working conditions and substantial risks of job insecurity and layoffs due to the precarious nature of these roles (Olayinka and Nwafor, 2021). Migrant workers not only experience exclusions during the hiring process but are also denied access to trade union activities and protection.

Additionally, employers avoid employing workers with disabilities who are mentally or physically disabled because they are viewed as "slow" or incapable of understanding or completing workplace goals, tasks or demands. Even when they find themselves in the workplace, they are harassed, discriminated against, or ridiculed by impervious colleagues who are completely indifferent to their needs (Cletus, 2018). In addition, their rights and needs in terms of ramps or special needs equipment are disregarded most often (Green et al., 2002).

These unjust practices within human resource management demonstrate that diversity issues in the Nigerian workplace are still a big challenge. This situation is reflected in Nigeria's ranking as 45th out of 47 countries in the global diversity readiness index, as reported by the Society for Human Resources Management survey in 2009. Nigeria stands out for its exceptionally high level of diversity, encompassing factors such as ethnicity, culture, race, religion, language, age, and socioeconomic background, which positions it as one of the top five most diverse nations. However, the concurrently high levels of exclusion have a negative impact on its diversity readiness (SHRM, 2009). Another study by Hofstede Insights conducted in 2022 showed that the level of diversity, equity and inclusion within the boards and management teams of corporate organisations in Nigeria

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remains low and falls below global benchmarks. The study, which assessed the state of diversity, equity and inclusion in 154 leading companies in Nigeria in four key parameters, including gender, age, ethnic diversities and educational background, reported that only 48 companies representing 31 per cent of the companies assessed passed (Hofstede Insights, 2022). This situation has caused Nigeria to miss out on growth and development opportunities both at the organisational and national levels (Ugwuzor, 2023).

Legislations, Policies and initiatives related to diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment

As of the time of producing this paper, Nigeria has no specific nationwide policies focused exclusively on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. However, the Nigerian government has implemented various labour laws and policies that indirectly support diversity and inclusion. Here are some of the key legislations, policies and actions related to diversity and inclusion in the Nigerian work environment:

The Nigerian Constitution
After initially enacting the Nigerian Constitution in 1999 and subsequently amending it in 2011, the constitution was subjected to additional amendments in May 2023, mainly in relation to governance, the restructuring of legislation, and the judicial process. It is the fundamental legal framework that forms the basis for all other laws enacted by the Nigerian government. Section 1 of the Constitution establishes its supreme authority throughout Nigeria, binding all Nigerians. There are several fundamental human rights outlined within the Constitution's Chapter 4, section 42, including the right to be free from discrimination regardless of the reason for the discrimination. Even though this chapter discusses discrimination in a broader context, it does not explicitly address workplace discrimination in any way and does not cover the issue of age. Therefore, it is not sufficient

to address the issue of workplace discrimination (Osiki, 2014).

The Federal Character Principle
Among the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution is the Federal Character Principle (FCP). It has been in place since 1979 to make sure appointments to public institutions reflect the country's rich ethnic and geographical diversity (George et al., 2017). A major benefit of the FCP, according to the Nigerian government, will be national integration (ODI, 2006). It is intended that the principle of federal character will be universally applied to all sectors of the Nigerian economy in order to achieve equity. However, in practice, it appears that the federal character principle is mainly observed at the federal level, even though Section 14(4) requires that state and local governments also adhere to it in their operations. However, there are no specific mechanisms for states and local governments to actively promote the essence of the federal character despite the fact that this requirement exists, making this subsection largely ineffective.

Furthermore, the federal character principle does not establish mechanisms to ensure fairness between states and their local governments or between local governments and their wards (Osiki, 2014). Therefore, employment opportunities at the state and local government levels do not adequately reflect the diversity of the nation's ethnic composition. The Federal Character Commission (Establishment) Act, on the other hand, addresses primarily issues of ethnicity in recruitment processes and mainly within the public sector (Adeleye et al., 2019), without considering the private sector and other potential causes of marginalisation, such as age, religion, sex, and disability, and the private sector. The limited focus excludes factors like sex, religion, age, and disability that might contribute to marginalisation in the workplace.

Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill
The Gender and Equality Bill was proposed in a bid to guarantee the rights of women to inheritance, employment opportunities, education, marriage and divorce, as well as check violence against women. It was introduced for the first time in March 2016 at the Eighth Senate but was opposed by some members who felt it was against their religious practice, arguing that the rights of citizens as well as women, were clearly captured in the Nigerian Constitution. It was reworked and represented in 2019 but met the same fate as it was stepped down because of a lack of support from senate members, who stated that it infringed on Islamic religious practice (Iroanusi, 2019). In May 2023, the was presented, but this time, it passed the reading but with the condition that the sponsor should address the issues of concerns raised in the previous reading and identify the areas where changes were made before the Senate will consider its passage Ogundapo (2023).

National Workplace Policy on HIV And AIDS 2013
This policy was formulated by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity based on the principles of social justice, human rights and equity in the year 2005. The policy was reviewed in 2013 as the need to make changes to include updated epidemiological insights on HIV/AIDS and new international labour guidelines such as the 2010 ILO Recommendation 200 (No.200) on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work. The major objective of the policy is to protect the rights of individuals living with HIV/AIDS through the removal of discrimination and stigmatisation they go through in their workplaces (FMLP, 2013). Additional progress has also been made on this with the enactment of the HIV/AIDS Act 2014, which renders discrimination on the basis of HIV status illegal and the mandating of people for HIV testing as a requirement for access to services and employment (Adeleye et al., 2019). However, despite the policies and laws, unequal treatment of individuals and stigmatisation based on HIV status is still rife in the Nigerian workplace. This is probably

due to weak institutional and legal frameworks to hold organisations responsible for such practices (Adeleye, 2014).

Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018
This was promulgated in 2018 and signed into law in 2019 (Anietie Ewang, 2019). It was formulated to protect the rights of as well as outlaw the discrimination of such individuals (Ajayi, 2019). It assures that people with disabilities have the right to work and earn a living in a job market without barriers (Factsheet, 2020). Violators of this rule could face legal consequences, including having to pay damages to the affected individuals. Public institutions employing workers are required to ensure that at least 5% of their workforce consists of people with disabilities under Section 28(2) and (3) of the law. Despite these provisions in the Nigerian legislation on people with disabilities, they still experience a lack of access to employment opportunities as well as job insecurity in the Nigerian workplace.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION
From the findings, it is clear that diversity and inclusion are critical elements for the success and sustainability of organisations in Nigeria. However, there is a contradiction between the country's ability to utilise its diverse potential compared to what is actually being achieved (Adeleye et al., 2019; Ugwuzor, 2023). Many factors, including the low level of equity and inclusion in the Nigerian workplace and inadequate institutional and governmental structure, influence this paradox. It is not enough to enact laws and formulate policies, but the coverage of those policies, the implementation, and the monitoring of the implementation processes are very crucial. Most of the laws and policies discussed above are limited in scope. For instance, the constitution, which serves as the citizens' charter, does not address the issues of gender and age discrimination in the workplace. Even the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill, which appears as the hope of women and girls in Nigeria, faces opposition challenges and

unnecessary delays in the Senate. Similarly, the Federal Character Principle covers only the ethnic and religious differences, which are significantly the features on which the Nigerian society is divided, leaving out the states, the local governments and the private sector (Osiki, 2014; George et al., 2017). This has given private organisations the autonomy to manage the workforce issues in their organisations. Although the National Workplace Policy on HIV and AIDS 2023 and the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2023 are specific in addressing the issues of discrimination and stigmatisation of individuals based on HIV status and discrimination based on disability, there are gross implementation challenges due to weak legal and institutional mechanisms to hold organisations and individuals responsible for violations.

Consequent to the weak legal and institutional frameworks in Nigeria, private organisations view issues of diversity and inclusion as voluntary initiatives (Adeleye et al., 2012). When they take the initiative, they do the same in a way that only benefits their organisational goals. On a different but related note, private organisations have diversity and inclusion as part of their values without an appropriate understanding of their intersectionality and adequate processes and procedures to ensure they are properly managed. They now create a Noah's Ark of two of every species in their teams and believe that the benefits will come naturally (Deloitte, 2021).

It is, therefore, imperative for the Nigerian government to have policies with broader coverage to handle issues of discrimination and exclusions in the workplace and to also create and strengthen enforcement mechanisms to ensure complete compliance from both organisations and individuals. There is also a need to ensure that the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill hanging in the Senate is passed into law without further delay.

On the part of the organisations, it is not enough to have diversity and inclusion terms on their value statements or have every gender, age, ethnic group, etc, represented in work groups, but there is a need for them to recognise the multifaceted dimensions of diversity, understand the business case for inclusion, and put policies, processes and procedures in place to properly integrate the diverse individuals in their work teams and benefit from their differences.

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