

## **PATRIARCHY AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD**

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### **Abstract**

In Nigeria, it is observed that the womanhood is reduced to a mere infidel and a second-class citizen, hence, there is the commonality of general belief system that the best place for women is in the 'Kitchen'. This trend has brought about tremendous misrepresentation of women right at the level of the family down to the circular society. The Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women. Women are therefore discriminated upon from, in most cases, acquiring formal education, mistreated and perpetually kept as house-help; the average Nigerian woman is seen as an available object for prostitution, forced marriage, street hawking, instrument of wide-range trafficking and a misfit in the society. Thus, the purported irrelevance associated with the status of women in society has merely reduced an average woman to an inferior commodity. This paper attempts to examine the conceptual and material bases of patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria, identifies dimensions of gender inequality and discrimination, and discuss socio-cultural and political factors leading to discrimination. For a better understanding of this work, a historical approach will be employed. This paper therefore argues that if the concept of democracy allows for diversity of opinion and participation of different groups, then, the same cannot subsist by excluding women, which effectively constitutes half of the world's population. The paper submits that all forms of inhuman discrimination and gender inequality must be challenged and opines for a deliberate, sensitive, consistent and systematic approach of gender relations this should include gender mainstreaming in all aspects of life.

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**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Gender, Gender Relations, Inequality

## **Introduction**

Women constitute about half of the population of the Nigerian State and are known to play vital roles as mothers, producers, managers, community developers/organizers etc. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal and informal structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant. The Nigerian society has been patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. (Aina, 1998). It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women (Stacey 1993; Kramarae 1992; Lerner 1986). It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females.

The patriarchal society sets the parameters for women's structurally unequal position in families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, by tacitly condoning domestic and sexual violence and sanctioning differential wages for equal or comparable work. Tradition or culture and religion have dictated men and women relationship for centuries and entrenched male domination into the structure of social organization and institution at all levels of leadership. Patriarchy justifies the marginalization of women in education, economy, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance(Salaam,2003).

Also this culture of patriarchy is a very strong determinant of male dominance over female and as a result men will sit back in the family to keep the family name and lineage growing while women will be married out. Thus men are being trained for leadership activities while women are confined to domestic activities; roles ascribed to them by culture which affect them later in life, thereby making them to lose self confident/worth and have low self-esteem in their career in adult life, politics inclusive. Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to the bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, women are highly marginalized and are poorly represented in political activities. (UNDP Report, 2005).

This position of women in society in relation to men and the subordination, oppression and marginalization of women has attracted the attention of scholars, activists, feminists and development workers for a very

long time. The issues relating to what is also known as gender inequality has become very prominent in the last few decades. The paper examines patriarchy and gender inequality; dimensions of gender inequality and discrimination that excludes women from governance and politics which is detrimental to national cohesion, progress and development and attempts to address these issues and the rights of women in Nigerian society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Patriarchy**

The word “patriarchy” has been recreated in the past two decades to analyze the origins and conditions of men’s oppression of women (Kamarae, 1992). Originally used to describe the power of the father as head of household, the term ‘patriarchy’ has been used within post 1960s feminism to refer to the systematic organization of male supremacy and female subordination (Kamarae, 1992; Stacey, 1993; Aina, 1998; etc.).

The term has been defined as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. Feminists theorists have argued that in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes, whether it is feudal, capitalist or socialist, a sex gender system and a system of economic discrimination operate simultaneously. They characterize patriarchy as an unjust social system that is oppressive to women. As feminist and political theorist Carole Pateman writes, "The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection." (Carole 1988). In feminist theory the concept of patriarchy often includes all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance over women. Feminist theory typically characterizes patriarchy as a social construction, which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations (Ann, 2001).

Okpe, (2005) submits that patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religion, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men. Thus, any system that operationalizes an order that accords men undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal.

It is observed in the literature that the establishment and practice of male dominance over women and children, is a historic process formed by men and women, with the patriarchal family serving as a basic unit of organization. A patriarchy is considered the head of the household and within the family he controls productive resources, labour force, and reproductive capacities based on the notions of superiority and inferiority and legitimized by differences in gender and generation.

Patriarchy is a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate women. The material base of patriarchy is men's control over women labour power. That control is maintained by excluding women from access to necessary economically productive resources and by restricting women's sexuality. Men exercise their control in receiving personal service work from women, in not having to do housework or rear children, in having access to women's bodies for sex, and in feeling powerful and being powerful. The crucial elements of patriarchy as we currently experience them are heterosexual marriage, female child rearing and house work, women's economic dependence on men reinforced by arrangements in the labour market), the state, the numerous institutions based on social relations among men-clubs, sports, unions, professions, universities, churches, corporations and armies(Hartman, 1997).

### **Gender**

Gender is the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women. For instance, gender roles of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household are socially, historically and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences. It is important to note the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female. For instance, the adult female has breast that can secrete milk to feed a baby but the adult male does not have. Gender roles differ from place to place and change with time. But sex roles are naturally fixed(Alamveabee,2005).

### **Gender Relations**

Gender relations are part of social relations, referring to the ways in which the social categories of men and women, male and female, relate over the whole range of social organization, not just to interactions between individual men and women in the sphere of personal relationships, or in terms of biological reproduction. In all aspects of social activity, including access to resources for production, rewards or remuneration for work, distribution of consumption, income or goods, exercise of authority and power, and participation in cultural, political and religious activity, gender is important in establishing people's behaviour and the outcome of any social interaction. As well as institutions between individual men and women, gender relations describe the social meaning of being male and female, and thus what is considered appropriate behaviour or activity for men and women (Pearson,2000).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Three views have emerged in recent times as serious explanations of women exploitation and oppression which we have categorized as the

materialist perspective, the radical feminist position and postmodernist approach. The materialist see oppression of women as systematic and built into the structure of society. They see women's subordination as having a material base and a consequence of capitalism especially in a class society that is structured in hierarchical patriarchal relations. The argument of this group is grounded on two premises. The first is that women are socialized into low paying jobs. Secondly, women in addition to any paid labour that they may be engaged in do unpaid domestic labour outside capitalist relations of production. Domestic labour is not only unpaid but is also not computed by economist in calculating the GDP of countries. Meanwhile, domestic labour is necessary to oil the wheel of capitalism. The materialists argue that domestic work or housework is productive labour and a hidden source of profit for capitalism(Dalla and James,1972). The criticism against the materialist conception which has its root in Marxism especially the orthodox ones is that there is too much emphasis on material factors and class analysis. In fact, some scholars argue that for most Marxists, it was unthinkable that working class men might be oppressors in their own homes or that 'bourgeois' women might also be oppressed(Delphy and Leonard, 1992).

The radical feminists argue that women's subordination is not rooted in relations of production but in specific relations of reproduction and sexuality. They contend that housework can be looked at as reproducing and not producing labour power. Firestone, a radical feminist argued that 'unlike economic class, sex-class sprang directly from biological reality: men and women were created different, not equal'( Firestone,1972), The position of the radical feminists have been criticized for putting too much emphasis on reproduction and sexuality. It gives the impression that women are subordinated mainly because of their role of giving birth to children. But we do know that the subordination of women goes beyond reproduction. Some scholars have pointed out that it is curious that feminists should 'succumb to such blatant biological determinism' (Jackson,1999),

The postmodernists contend that women subordination results from the cultural construction of who a man or woman is. They argue that the use of word and language affect our psyche on the definition of men and women. They point to the effectiveness of the capacity of language to shape our thoughts and desires. Postmodernist conceptions of why women are oppressed has been criticized for neglecting the social context of power relations and failing to recognize the systematic oppressions of gender, class and race(Walby,1992).

## **Dimensions Of Gender Inequality And Discrimination In Nigeria Women and Education**

Education is said to be a vehicle that break the shackles of poverty thereby leading to transformation, development and progress(Ikoni,2009). With the 2005 MDGs' first deadline for attainment of gender parity in primary and secondary schools' enrolment already missed, the ability of women and girls to empower themselves economically and socially by going to school, or by engaging in productive and civic activities is still being constrained by their responsibility for everyday tasks in the household division of labour (CEC Report 2007).

In Nigeria, educational facilities are generally believed to be inadequate, and access, limited for many, especially girls and women (Uku 1992). According to the *United Nations Human Development Report* (2005), Nigeria was classified as a *low development country* in respect of equality in educational accessibility. *Female Adult Literacy Rate* (ages 15 and above) for the country was 59.4% as against male, 74.4%; the *Combined Gross Enrolment* for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools for female was 57% and male, 71%. Consequently, Ojo (2002) affirms that women are fewer than men in certain socio-economic activities. According to him, the percentages of female workers in some selected professions were as follow: architects, 2.4%, quantity surveyors, 3.5%, lawyers/jurists, 25.4%, lecturers, 11.8%, obstetricians and gynecologists, 8.4%, pediatricians, 33.3%, media practitioners, 18.3%.

However, Omolewa (2002) shows that this inequality has its root in the colonial system of education which was primarily geared toward meeting the manpower need of the colonial government that obviously alienated women from educational and economic opportunities. Women in Nigeria are harder-hit than men by poverty due to the non-challant emphasis placed on female education, and the prevalence of early marriage which tend to further impoverish the womenfolk, and subject them to statutory discrimination (Ojo 2002).

To Mamdani (1996), incidence of poverty is more rampant among the female-gender in Africa because of discrimination in educational opportunities. On the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), Nigeria ranks a disparaging 123<sup>rd</sup> position with the Estimated Earned Income for female as low as US \$614 and the male, US \$1,495 (UNDP 2005).

Lack of education has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the formal sector. The social pressures on females such as early marriages, and other extraneous factors as well as consideration of female education as secondary to that of boys and certain inhibitive religious practices in some parts of Nigeria are the major causes of the high illiteracy rate amongst women. As the impact of teenage pregnancy and early marriage

makes abundantly clear, girls are at a double disadvantage in educational access, especially in the north, where these practices are most widespread (NDHS, 2003).

Education gives women the opportunity to be less dependent on men and to have more control over their sexual and reproductive health, often resulting in fewer births and a greater spacing between births, which is both healthier for mother and child. Where women lack education and information about family planning and have a low social status, there is a much higher prevalence of unintended pregnancies; the biggest risk factor associated with this being unsafe abortions.

Generally, the girl child educational opportunities tend to be circumscribed by patriarchal attitudes about gender roles, which result in some parents attaching greater importance to the education of boys than girls. This is always the likelihood when the parents lack resources to enroll all children in school. In some families, investing in girls' education is regarded as investing for the benefit of the family she will eventually marry into, unlike in the case of boys. This argument holds in particular for higher education, which involves greater expenditure and is seen to be less necessary for females whose main role will be in home keeping and child bearing.

There also exist gender stereotyping in the school curriculum and the academic streaming process, where certain subjects and courses such as the sciences, mathematics and other technical disciplines are tagged masculine, while secretarial studies and home economics are tagged feminine, thereby denying both sexes the opportunities to benefit from exposure to all subject areas or a wider choice of subjects. The female inferiority complex established from childhood through social interactions in the home, including the differential levels of support and motivation, influence the aspirations and eventual learning achievement of boys and girls.

### **Women and the Economy**

By the virtue of the population of Nigeria the potential female labour force is 50% but the actual value is 31%. The proportion of women in the formal sector is very minimal. This is noticeable in the industries and the civil services; statistics indicate that in the Federal Civil Service, which is the highest employer in the country, women are mostly found in the junior categories (Ajir, 2002).

Women are mainly involved in petty trading, selling wares in the market and street hawking in urban areas. According to statistics 78 % of women are mostly engaged in the informal sector, which are farming and petty trading. Despite this, their contribution is not commensurate monetarily. The women's unpaid labour is twice that of men, and its economic value is estimated to be up to 30% of the nation's Gross National

Product. Women self-advancement has been curtailed by the burden of reproduction, particularly in Nigeria with a very high birth rate as well as the cultural roles associated to women - role of child bearing, child rising and homemaking.

Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices. In some establishments women are not allowed to get married or pregnant because it is thought that it will reduce their productivity and of course profit. Some women particularly the young ones are only employed as long as they are ready to use their bodies to woo customers for their business organizations. This is what is called "corporate prostitution"(Salaam,2003).

Women are mostly involved in farming and food processing. They do not have access to land but can only use the land at the benevolence of their husbands and brothers. Women also have limited access to agricultural inputs. Women tend to be disadvantaged, because when compared with men, they do not have access to obtaining credit facilities and so are rarely engaged in the production and marketing of lucrative cash crops, such as cocoa, which tends to be a male preserve. The legal protection granted by the constitution and the Labour Act has little or no effect in the informal sector – agriculture and domestic services where the vast majority of women are employed.

### **Women and Politics**

The various Nigerian constitutions guaranteed the rights of women to participate in active politics; however, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in women's participation. This is only when we measure increase in participation with certain standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of public offices held by women; number of women related policies implemented by government etc. Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Nigeria considering these standards, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts( Nkechi, 1996 ).

Women's aspiration to participate in governance is premised on the following ground; that women in Nigeria represent half of the population and hence should be allowed a fair share in decision-making and the governance of the country. Secondly that all human beings are equal and women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life. The right



to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law.

The 1999 Nigerian constitution by virtue of Section 40 states the following:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests: Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition.

Section 42(1) of the same constitution states further that: A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to any form of discrimination.

This further confirms that you can go to court to seek redress if as a woman your franchise is violated and that the constitution as a whole prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Section 77 of the Constitution also states:

(1) Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, every Senatorial district or Federal constituency established in accordance with the provisions of this Part of this Chapter shall return a member who shall be directly elected to the Senate or the House of Representatives in such manner as may be prescribed by an act of the National Assembly.

(2) Every citizen of Nigeria, who has attained the age of eighteen years residing in Nigeria at the time of the registration of voters for purposes of election to a legislative house, shall be entitled to be registered as a voter for that election.

From the foregoing, it appears that there is nothing in the constitution, which excludes the participation of women in politics in Nigeria. Yet when it comes to actual practice, there is extensive discrimination. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in the 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections held in the country. Men dominate most public offices till date. Female gubernatorial candidates have emerged but none has ever won and same goes for the Presidency. Legislative representation has witnessed the presence of women yet they remain under-represented when compared to their male counterparts. Following two decades of military rule statistics reveal that women only secured 3% representation in contested positions in 1999, 4% in 2003, while in 2007 they made with only 6%. Few and almost insignificant number of women were elected into various posts in past four general elections held in the country between 1999 and 2011. The result of the

survey shows that no woman was elected as governor of any state in the federation. We only had few women as members of Houses of Assembly across the country and as members of the upper house (Senate) and lower house (House of Representative) of the National Assembly.

According to the figures collated from the database of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), records shows that a total 7160 candidates (men and women) contested in the April elections. Of this number, only 628 women participated. Out of the 25 candidates that participated for the office of the President, only 1 is a woman while 5 women contested for the office of the Vice President.

**Table 1.** Comparism of women representation in 2003, 2007 and 2011 general elections.

| Position       | No. of available seats | No. of women elected in 2003 | No. of women elected in 2007 | No. of women elected in 2011 |
|----------------|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Presidency     | 1                      | 0                            | 0                            | 0                            |
| Senate         | 109                    | 3(2.27%)                     | 9(8.26%)                     | 8(7.34%)                     |
| House of Reps. | 360                    | 21(5.83%)                    | 25(6.94%)                    | 12(3.33%)                    |
| Governorship   | 36                     | 0                            | 0                            | 0                            |

**Source:** Gender Audit and IPU PARLINE database (2012).

From the table we see that 8(7.34%) out of the 109 senator's elected in 2011 were women compared to 9(8.26%) in 2007, while only 12(3.33) out of 360 members of House of Representatives are women, down from 25(6.94) in 2007. Out of Nigeria's 36 states only one-Lagos state voted in a woman deputy governor, and no woman was elected governor.

In a related development the first and only female Speaker of any House of Assembly in Nigeria, Mrs. Margaret Ichen was frustrated out of office in Benue State. Women have not received much support from the men because those who have found themselves at one position of authority or the other are frustrated out of office or forced to step down. Different reasons are adduced for the low level of the involvement of women in politics. This includes; Gender roles – Patriarchy; Virility deficiency – women's conception of politics ;Lack of economic incentives (Financial backing); Discriminatory customs and laws etc. (Nkoyo, 2002 and UNESCO, 1999).

There is a National Gender Policy that commits to ensuring Affirmative Action for women, however, women's representation remains below the 35% target. Suffice to mention that, the manifestos and constitutions of political parties in Nigeria rarely mention Affirmative Action for women, and when they do, their commitments are lower than the bench mark set by regional and International conventions.

Women Participation in Nigerian politics is an issue of great importance. Women have been put at the background politically for years; this has engendered a consciousness of women under-representation in public life. In order to improve the socio-political status of women in

Nigeria, numerous women Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's), have sprung up. They have embarked on campaigns to encourage women's participation in politics, although in reality, this campaign has not gone beyond the conference halls of hotels and pages of newspapers, that is it has not actually reached the grassroots. One of the strategies is to soften the ground for the female contestants by agitating for some concession. This is called affirmative action. It is aimed at increasing women representation in political offices. The recent election of Park as South Korean president is worthy of mention(CCTV News, 2013) The women advocates agree upon thirty percent affirmative action as the demand. This is to ensure that women constitute a critical minority of thirty 30 percent in all political posts.

### **Women and Human Rights Violation**

Over a decade now, numerous cases of women's rights violation such as acid baths, murder of women, rape, widow abuse, and physical assaults, have occurred in Nigeria. Unfortunately it is only extreme cases of women's rights violation which results in death or permanent disability that earns the media attention and the police interests. Critical cases like female circumcision or genital mutilation, wife battery, marital rape, sexual harassment, verbal and emotional abuse, incest, termination of employment as a result of pregnancy, etc. are not considered problematic enough to be highlighted in the media as well to be taken seriously by the police(Salaam,2003).

More so the victims of violence, especially domestic violence and rape, hardly report to the appropriate authorities. For instance wife battery is considered a private affair between the husband and wife. Moreover, the tradition or culture and religious beliefs in Nigeria as a typical patriarchal society see the wife as a property of her husband, who has moral right to beat her as penalty for insubordination and or perceived wrong doing. In the case of rape, women consider it a social stigma if their ordeal becomes a public knowledge.

A former Minister for Women and Social Developments, Mrs. Hajo Sani at the 19th United Nations Session, in New York in 1998, captured the state of women who are victims of violence in Nigeria. She said,

"There is no record of the prevalence of violence against women especially within the home. This is because women hardly report violence to the police for fear of reprisal from both the husband and wider family. In addition, the law enforcement agents do not readily entertain complaints of domestic violence. They treat such complaint as a minor offence of 'two people fighting' or laugh it off as 'husband and wife problem'..."

In the same vein, in Nigeria, laws to protect women from violence are inadequate. For example, marital rape is generally not recognized as an offence in any system of law in Nigeria, even when the wife is wounded in

the course of forced sexual intercourse. Formal mechanisms to seek redress in cases of domestic violence or rape, through police investigation followed by a court proceeding, are often ineffective. This is particularly the case in rape cases, where police are not adequately trained to handle such cases and the burden of proof remains with the prosecution, requiring a woman to prove that she did not consent, or where a woman's testimony, under Muslim law, is not as valid as that of a man. As a result of the foregoing, women's rights issues and situation in Nigeria is not given the seriousness it deserves by both government and individuals.

### **Women and the Law**

Nigeria criminal law has a number of provisions relating to sexual and domestic offences that are especially relevant to women's rights. However different laws, for instance on rape, apply to different parts of the country.

Rape is defined in a gender-specific manner, as "carnal knowledge" or sexual intercourse with a woman or girl without her consent or under duress. Besides the restrictive nature of the definition, which does not extend to the rape of males, it must be pointed out that in practice most rape victims are unable to benefit from these provisions. The way in which a rape trial is conducted and the nature of the evidence required exposes women to indignity, making it a man's trial but a woman's tribulation. The law needs to be extended to cover marital rape. Currently the Penal Code specifically excludes "sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife" from the definition of rape, so long as she has attained puberty.

With respect to the criminal law, it is also necessary to remove the gender disparity in punishments applicable for indecent assault. Presently, there is a dichotomy, which creates the impression that one gender is superior to the other. Sections 350 and 363 of the Criminal Code cover the same offence (unlawful and indecent assault) but provide for a lesser punishment when the victim is female (two years imprisonment) than when the victim is male (three years imprisonment).

In northern Nigeria the Penal Code specifically precludes as an offence any act which does not amount to the infliction of grievous injury and which is done by "a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife, such husband and wife being subject to any natural law or custom in which such correction is recognized as lawful". The law through the Penal Code condones the widespread problem of domestic violence, by encouraging beating of wives in as much as it does not amount to grievous harm.

In case of traditional laws the wife herself is often regarded as property and she is generally not expected to entertain any expectation. In fact, under some traditional customary law systems, especially in south east

Nigeria, she is one of the chattels to be "inherited" after the death of her husband.

### **Women and Religion/Culture**

Generally religion is used as an instrument in defense of a class society and patriarchy. It discriminates against women. As a result of the theocratic character of the governance of the northern part of Nigeria before the advent of the British colonialists Islam has been institutionalized as a culture - the way of life - of the majority of the people of the region. Islam like most religious beliefs gives hope of fantastic heaven – the paradise - to the adherents.

Knowing well the emotional attachment of the northern Nigerian Muslims to religion and the psychological equanimity they derive from it, politicians ruling the northern Nigerian states introduced Sharia law in order to enhance their political prospects and divert attention away from their own looting and failure to improve living standards. Of course, Sharia as religious law gives central place to paternalistic interpretation to women's appropriate roles and socio-political arrangement of the society.

Sharia law conflicts with national secular principles, especially in relation to women's rights, on which Nigeria is formally based. It places a lot of restrictions on the rights of women. The major victims of this political Sharia are women.

We fight against discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, ethnic origin or race. In this sense, the right of Muslims to practice those aspects of Sharia, which pertains to worship, mode of dressing, naming of children and other personal or family matters must be respected.

However, religion should be a personal affair and should be separated from the state. This is even more imperative in a multi-religious society like Nigeria. The failure to adhere to this principle by successive capitalist governments in Nigeria, is one of the main reasons for the rising wave of ethnic and religious conflicts in the country, particularly since the beginning of the introduction of Sharia law by some states in year 2000. The bourgeois politicians who introduced the Sharia penal code with severe punishments such as stoning and amputation for crimes like stealing, prostitution or so-called adultery, argue that these type of law and punishments are necessary to curb the increasing wave of crime in the society. Even some sections of the working masses both within and outside the Sharia states, perturbed by the violent crimes and social decadence which pervade society, genuinely support the penal code in the belief that it is the solution to these problems.

The penal code is also informed by the belief that the harsher the punishment the lesser the crime rate. But these are erroneous views. Crimes, violence and other social vices are products of worsening mass poverty and unemployment, which are engendered by the Nigeria's crisis-ridden neo-

colonial capitalist economy. Only the abolition of the causes of endemic poverty, the provision of decent living, full employment with a living wage, free and qualitative education and medical care, plus adequate housing for all can lead to the reduction, if not eradication, of crime.

### **Women and Trafficking**

Over time, hundreds of thousands of women have been sold into slavery, as wives or prostitutes, after being kidnapped or tricked into going with traffickers. Although in International law, trafficking, has long been recognized as a form of human rights abuse, only recently has it been recognized by the international community as a violation of women's right.

The Nigeria government has repeatedly committed itself to eliminating the trafficking of women, yet it continues to restrict information about this crime, thus failing to mobilize society to combat it. The persistence of trafficking is officially attributed to feudal thinking and thus contemporary factors; legal, political, social and economic, which have contributed to the resurgence of this practice are overlooked.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), backing the statistics of the International Labor Organization (ILO), around 200,000 to 300,000 children are trafficked each year for forced labor and sexual exploitation in West and Central Africa.<sup>7</sup> In addition, according to a 2001 survey on child labor in West and Central Africa, about 330,000 children were employed in the cocoa agricultural industry in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Nigeria. Out of the 230,000 children working in Côte d'Ivoire, around 12,000 had no family connection to the cocoa farmer or any local farm in the country, and 2,500 were recruited by intermediaries in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. (IITA, 2002) An alarming reality is that girls are more frequently the victims of child trafficking than boys. Table 1 shows the empirical evidence from a 2003 study for Benin, Nigeria, and Togo.

The trafficking of women is not a purely local phenomenon, within Nigeria's borders. It has a significant regional and international dimension too. Criminal rings are involved in the smuggling of women across international frontiers, mainly for menial work in the heavily immigration, dependent economy of Gabon, plantation work in Cameroon and commercial sex in Europe (GAATW, 2007).

Record has shown that, children between the ages of seven and sixteen are frequently transported to Gabon and Cameroon, from various points in the east of Nigeria, in the states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers and Imo. The period between March 1994 and January 1997 at least 400 children were rescued in Akwa Ibom State, which is one of the main departure points to Gabon.

In the last 10 years, there has been large scale trafficking of adolescent girls and young women, to Europe, particularly Italy, for work in

the sex industry. These women are lured abroad by traffickers promising them legitimate and lucrative work, but on arrival they are handed over to prostitution racketeers(Salaam,2003).

They are forced to engage in sex work to pay off large debts supposedly accumulated to pay for their travel documents, tickets and accommodation. And to avoid non-compliance, they are threatened with physical abuse or death or exposure to the authorities and possible imprisonment or deportation. In effect, these women are held under duress in a form of debt bondage.

Some young women who have succeeded in escaping or who have been deported by the Italian authorities have described how the system works. At the going rate, in the city of Rome in which one of them worked, she would have had to have sex with 3,000 partners to achieve the targeted sum. After 25 days and scores of partners, she managed to escape and found her way to Nigeria (Minaj broadcast international television report and Yahoo news, 6th June, 2001). These portrays a society where everything is commodity and this includes women's bodies.

### **Women and Reproductive Health**

Reproductive health implies that people should have the ability to reproduce, that women can go through pregnancy and child birth safely and that reproduction is carried to a successful outcome. It further implies that people should be able to regulate their fertility without risk to their health and that they are safe in having sex. In essence it includes fertility regulation and STD prevention as well as child survival and safe motherhood. But these rights are mere dream in Nigeria due to abandoning by the government, in line with the dictate of IMF/World Bank, the essential responsibility of providing free and functional health care to the people as a social service among other factors(WHO,2002).

Maternal mortality ratio in Nigeria is estimated at 800 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, with a wide geographical disparity ranging from 166 per 100,000 live births in the south to 1,549 per 100,000 live births in the north, of the estimated 536,000 maternal deaths that occur globally, Nigeria contributes approximately 10%, although its population size is only about 2% Of the global population figure. Nigeria has the second highest maternal mortality burden in the world with estimated 37,000 mothers dying annually from pregnancy-related causes. Thus, most maternal deaths result not from 'disease' per se, but from pregnancy-related complications, which are now widely recognized as a leading cause of death and disability among women of reproductive age in developing countries. An estimated 40% of pregnant women experience pregnancy -related health problems during or after pregnancy and child birth (Nigerian Demographic and Health survey,2003).

The five direct obstetric complications that cause the majority of maternal deaths throughout the developing world are hemorrhage, sepsis, unsafe induced abortion, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, and obstructed labor (WHO, 1996). Interestingly, most of these maternal deaths and complications can be prevented and averted with very cost-effective interventions, even where resources are limited.

Studies have also shown that the sexual practices of male partners are likely to be the primary source of risk to women of infection with HIV or other STDs. Women (including wives) are often not in the position to negotiate safe sex and many have not yet imbibed the condom culture, as a means of protection against AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Reproductive health counseling for women and adolescent girls is crucial to overcome this problem. In recent years, illegal abortion has been recognized as a major cause of mortality rate in young women. These deaths could be avoided if women had easy access to family planning services and people have a right to make a choice as regards pregnancy.

There is the demand that husbands should accompany their wives on their first visit to government funded family planning clinics means that women are denied their rights to control of their fertilities. Also by this demand, the sexuality of single, divorced and widowed women are restricted. It means that women can only express their sexuality in marriage.

The provision in the National Population Policy that allows a woman to have a maximum of four children while men invariably can have as many as possible infringes on women's reproductive and sexual rights.

### **Socio-Cultural And Political Factors Of Gender Discrimination**

Since the advent of colonialism in Africa, women have always been exposed to varying forms of discrimination due to the simple fact of their 'femaleness', which ought to have been understood on the basis of its mutual usefulness (Obbo 2005). It is observed that most African countries have not had specific laws or policies to stem the tide of gender disparity. However, the colonial hegemonic philosophy, dependent political ideology and identifiable socio-economic exigencies are seen as factors aiding the prevailing distinctions between men and women in our society (Adeniran 2006).

### **Ideological Factor**

Patriarchy as a system of male domination shapes women's relationship in all spheres including politics. It transforms male and females into men and women and construct the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged (Eisenstein 1984). Andrienne Rich defines patriarchy as:

*“A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law, and language,*



*customs etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.” (Roc,1977)*

The society is so patriarchal to the extent that if a man dies in politics or electioneering process, he is better honoured than a female in a similar situation. The society will praise him and not her. This to a large extent has discouraged a lot of us from participating in electioneering, in such a case children are left motherless, who will then cater for them? It is easier for a man to remarry, than for the woman. When it comes to the decision, of participating in politics, all odds must be weighed because the woman has a lot to lose than the man in politics.

The gender role ideology is used as an ideological tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This is one of the vital factors that shape the level of women’s political participation globally. However, this ideological divide is not reflective of the reality. The boundaries between public and private are often blurred in the daily lives of women. Nonetheless, domestic domain continues to be perceived in the North as well as in the South as the legitimate space for women while public space is associated with men. Women have to negotiate their entry into and claim on public space according to the discursive and material opportunities available in a given culture and society. Although the gender role ideology is not static rather remained in a flux while intersecting with economic, social and political systems of a particular society, women continue to be defined as private across countries which resulted in their exclusion and disempowerment.

### **Political Factors**

The nature of politics is an important factor for the inclusion or exclusion of women in politics. Vicky Randall defines politics as an “articulation, or working out of relationships within an already given power structure”, which is in contrast with the traditional view of politics that defines it as an activity, a conscious, deliberate participation in the process by which resources are allocated among citizens. This conception of politics restricts political activity only in public arena and the private sphere of family life is rendered as apolitical. This public-private dichotomy in traditional definition of politics is used to exclude women from public political sphere and even when women are brought into politics they are entered as mothers and wives.

Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women’s political participation. Often male dominated political parties have a male perspective on issues of national importance that disillusions women as their perspective is often ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties. Also women

are usually not elected at the position of power within party structures because of gender biases of male leadership. The society frowns at women keeping late at night, most political meetings and gathering usually run into the mid-nights, especially when one is actively involved and wants to vie for a political post. As a mother, with children and husband at home, it is usually not easy.

It important to also mention that most successful women in politics are those with supportive husbands, those who have become husbands, those without husbands, and those who are through with childbearing, those who have mingled with the military, daughters of past politicians/leaders. Specific names were mentioned, including: Dora Akunyili (supportive husband) Iyabo Obasanjo (divorcee and daughter of the past president), Condoleezza Rice, (single lady), Sara Jubril (widowed), Hillary Clinton (wife of former president). These names were mentioned by the majority of the respondents sampled. It goes a long a way in showing that women are actually in the known about the trend of women participation in politics irrespective of the odds against them.

Politics in Nigeria has been described as a terrain meant for the hardened (Akinola, 2009), and where candidates cannot fund elections themselves without recourse to godfatherism (Soyinka, 2004). Godfatherism involves a patron-client or servant-master relationship which cannot be free of violence, especially in the area of controversies where a candidate fails to comply with earlier agreed negotiations and contracts. Politics of godfatherism hardly favours women. No women can stand the resultant consequence of not yielding to the godfathers' demands, as we have seen in Oyo and Anambra states .

Electioneering in Nigeria has been characterized by violence, electoral irregularities and various criminal activities. However the continuous campaign for women to be actively involved in the democratic process has yielded little compare to the increasing number of women heading key positions in other domain.

The larger democratic framework and level of democratization also impact women's political participation. Secular democracies in Europe and also in some of the developing countries have created relatively more space for women's participation in politics as compared to countries where religious orthodoxy has been shaping politics and democracy.

Adherence to discriminatory gender ascriptions persisted after the end of colonial rule in Nigeria. Ake (1996) claims that the surrogate post-independence political elite deliberately weakened women organizations hitherto involved in active agitation for liberation by enhancing the militarization of the polity, and increasing the statist of the economy. As observed by Mama (1997), gender blindness has meant that until recently the

differential impact of colonialism on African men and women has not been taken into consideration.

Opaluwah (2007) however, opines that the coordination of gender advocacy based on indigenous patriarchal anxieties about meaningful gender equity, external pressure and western prescriptions has had far reaching consequences for the womenfolk. Our unbridled openness to western influence by the political leadership has equally worsened the dependency dilemma; with the west providing us with anything, but participative emancipation (Ake 1996) e.g. the sapping effects of the SAP policy of 1986 on Nigerian women. Unlike the largely successful equity-driven NEP Development Plan (1971-1990) in Malaysia which ensured gender parity in schools' enrolment, rhetoric has often been the bane of such programme here e.g. the *New Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy* (NEEDS), projected to draw inspiration from the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)'s gender parity principle-*Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa* (2004). According to Oyekanmi (2005), in respect of Nigeria, the enabling laws and programmes to achieve the objectives of NEPAD are not yet in operation.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors**

Indeed, to a considerable extent, gender has been a subsidiary issue in Nigerian society. The traditional social structures have been offering limited incentives for amending the existing distribution of power between men and women. As observed by Nmadu (2000), the Nigerian society (pre-modern and contemporary) has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potently inimical to women's emancipation, such as early/forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices. Moreover, to Bhavani *et al* (2003) such unequal social and gender relations needs to be transformed in order to take women out of want and poverty.

As daughters self-identify as females with their mother and sisters, and sons as males with their father and brothers, gender stereotyping becomes institutionalized within the family unit (Haraway 1991). Also, the dominant narratives of religion in both colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society indeed privileges men at the detriment of women, even in educational accessibility. As such, our society remains entrapped in 'history of analogy' whereby it is either exoticised, or simply represented as part of European history (Mamdani 1996).

CEDAW articles (1979), therefore, acknowledge that whatever socio-cultural norms that deny women equal rights with men will also render women more vulnerable to physical, sexual and mental abuse.

The subordinate status of women vis-à-vis men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across countries. Gender role ideology does not only create

duality of femininity and masculinity, it also places them in hierarchal fashion in which female sex is generally valued less than male sex because of their socially ascribed roles in reproductive sphere. The gender status quo is maintained through low resource allocation to women's human development by the state, society and the family. This is reflected in the social indicators which reflect varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in all countries.

Additionally gender is mediated through class, caste and ethnicity that structure access to resources and opportunities. The socio-cultural dependence of women is one of the key detrimental factors to their political participation in public political domain. Women also find it hard to participate in politics due to limited time available to them because of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. With their primary roles as mothers and wives and competing domestic responsibilities and care work, they are left with little time to participate in politics.

In some of the countries, particularly in Nigeria, women also face cultural constraints on their mobility. The mechanisms of sex segregation and *purdah* are used to restrict their mobility. Politics requires women's exposure to interact with male and female constituents and address public meeting.

### **Economic Factors**

The economic sector of our society is one area where discrimination against women has been richly pronounced. According to the CEC Report (2007), the role of women in employment and economic activities is often underestimated because most of women work in the informal sectors, usually with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection. It observes that the female labour force in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 was about 73 million, representing 34% of those employed in the formal sector, earning only 10% of the income, while owning 1% of the assets.

However, the denial of women's inheritance and land rights has made their economic participation considerably constrained and by implication, their educational aspiration (Nmadu 2000). Politics is increasingly becoming commercialized. More and more money is needed to participate in politics. Women lack access to and ownership of productive resource, limiting the scope of their political work.

To Eade (1996), such government's macro-economic policies like liberalization of petroleum sector and removal of subsidies e.g. on fertilizer, have always created distortions, in spite of strides women (rural dwellers) make in self reliance. To this end, Ake (1996) believes that the

contradictions between the latent and manifest functions of public policy have often been the bane of all emancipatory agenda in Nigeria.

### **Bio-socio Factors**

The biological makeup of the female gender has been evoked as a factor hindering women empowerment and political participation. Their roles as mothers and wives have also been culturally influenced and predetermined. Expectation thus is for them to be gentle, providing care for their husbands and children. On the other hand a lot of women have come to see themselves as subjects, which must be provided for, or an object of beauty which must be maintained, which must look good all the time. This situation is deeply embedded in the socialisation process of the girl child in Africa where socio-cultural values and traditions are widely held.

### **Addressing Gender Inequality And Oppression**

#### **Women Empowerment Programms**

Sand Brook and Halfari defined women empowerment as a multi-dimensional process involving the transformation of the economical, political, social, psychological and legal circumstances of the powerless with its aim of dismantling the cultural, traditional and social norms, which disvalue, disempower and dispossess women with its central objectives tied to the needs of women to opportunities, facilities, skill acquisition and position of authority, especially within the political sphere. This recent development accords women the opportunity to develop their individual talent and contribute more meaningfully to societal development, helping subvert cultural as well as the societal norms which have been of disadvantage to the women folk.

Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics (FONWIP) is an example, whose central objective is to promote women empowerment and eradication of all forms of violence and discrimination against women. It supports women in decision making in both public and private sector. The group organizes seminars on empowerment and inequality among other things. It is influential in its agenda; it requested that government should yield to 30% female representation in government appointments; made several attempts to increase official awareness on gender issues in public policies and conduct of workshops for women who aspire to run for public offices.

#### **Activities of UN and other International Organizations**

The principles, policies and actions towards ending gender inequality in Nigerian politics have been advanced and undertaken with the influence of international organizations by both government and non-governmental organizations. On its part, the United Nations (UN) has fostered several Declarations and Conventions aimed at ending all forms of political discrimination among women.

Among such documents that prohibit women discrimination are:

- i. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- ii. The International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- iii. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Following conferences in Copenhagen, Nairobi, Vienna, Cairo and Beijing, women participation on development has become a recurrent issue as women access to decision making and full participation in public affairs is now recognized as a fundamental condition for democracy and for attaining sustainable development, as true democracy is characterized by full and equitable participation of women in both formulation and implementation of decisions in all spheres of public life. And no state can claim democracy if half of its population are excluded from decision making processes.

The UN also has programs and agencies dedicated in uplifting the status of women in political affairs, e.g. the 4th Conference of Women held in Beijing, China in 1995, with the theme “Equality Development and Peace Contriving Strategies” towards active liberation and empowerment of women with its overall aim at annulling those practices and values that discriminate against women; taking steps to increase the number of women representation in legislative bodies around the world; the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status, which is essential for the achievement of both a transparent and accountable government; ensuring and encouraging the women towards realizing their abilities and utmost importance in the political and social development such that they will be significantly represented in the decision making bodies in every organization; politically educating and empowering women to take active part in the political process as party members, leaders, voter and candidates.

#### **Quotas and proportional representation**

These are generally seen as a positive action of laws allocating quotas for women to assist in the promotion for gender balance in public life. Quotas are considered as a legitimate means of securing this end. In many countries the exclusion of women in politics is as a result of many reasons – financial, cultural, traditional and political. Asserting this fact and the reasons that have made it so implies that quotas should not be seen as discrimination towards men and cannot be branded unconstitutional as most quotas are formulated under neutral basis. The Law (Nigerian) provides for a maximum of 60% and a minimum of 30% representation for either sex, which was implemented as a result of the Beijing Conference. The Conference agreed that 30% of public seat and positions should be reserved for women. Nigeria records an increase of 78% progress in women’s election into public offices spanning from 1999 - 2007. This technique contributes to no small measure in improving female intention to participate in Nigerian politics despite the prevailing political structure and societal norms, as “a

woman's experience is needed and necessary in political life and policy making in order to represent the entire society" (Phillips, 1995). "Quotas do not discriminate but compensate women for actual barriers that prevent women from pursuing a political carrier" (Kira, 2003).

### **The Affirmative Action**

It is interesting to note that the principle and practice of the Affirmative Action is a universal phenomena. Several countries of the world have history, one way or the other, showing that the rights of women and the vulnerable are to be respected and sustained. It is therefore of crucial importance for Nigeria to take a queue from best international practices in order to allow a pride of place for women. This will enhance democracy and democratic survival in Nigeria in the current dispensation and beyond.

Conversely, literature is however replete with numerous practice of the tenet of Affirmative Action. For example, in the United States of America, obvious references are made in respect to government policies on preferential admissions of women into higher institutions of learning. This is to foster the spirit of self determination and class consciousness (Ihonvbere, 2000; Orji, 2003). The tendency also is to more or less incorporate women into mainstream corporate governance and sense of worth, liberty and freedom (Nkoyo, 2002).

Similarly, the scope is less pervasive in Germany. However, what exists can be said to be related to the use of legal measures to ensure factually equal positions for women and men in professional life. Again, in Uganda, certain parliamentary seats are reserved for women in the 39 districts, and in Argentina the electoral laws establishes as a point of responsibility the rights of women as specific quotas are allocated and considered and exclusive pressures of the women class. The same case holds true of countries like India, Eritrea, Bangladesh and Iran of recent. Obi (1998) and O'Bar (1984) noted that apart from the obvious quota system, other variables of the Affirmative Action includes setting aside specific goals that weights gender as a plus factor or some kind of priority rule and setting time frame for enhanced equal participation of women in politics. Nevertheless, for very obvious reasons, Nigerian political parties could apply any of these noble objectives to enhance women participation in Nigerian politics. This also means that the on-going review of the relevant sections of the constitution must as a matter of necessity, include the plight of women in the scheme of things to forestall future discrimination of Nigerian women in politics and other spheres as well.

On the whole, various attempts have been utilized in different cultures and societies to address women oppression. At a point in time, it was thought that inclusion of women in development would address the women question. This led to what became popularly known as Women in

Development (WID) in the 1970s. Meanwhile, patriarchal structures and systems were left intact. It did not take long before it became known that mere inclusion of women would not change the position of women in society. It then became necessary to interrogate the process of development and how that process excludes and marginalizes women. This led to the response that became known as Women and Development (WAD) in the 1980s. Similarly, this approach ignored patriarchy and it did not take long for people to realize the place of patriarchy and construction of gender relations, which led to the approach of Gender and Development (GAD) in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the GAD approach was meant to interrogate gender relations, the main strategy for its implementation has remained gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is the systematic process of integrating women and men's needs, concerns and experiences into the formulation, implementation and evaluation of projects in a way that would address gender inequity. Unfortunately, as gender was being mainstreamed, patriarchy was not touched. After about two decades of trying to implement GAD, the position of women all over the world remains precarious.

There is no doubt that the main beneficiaries of gender mainstreaming are petty bourgeois, middle class, elitist women who when they ascend to position as a result of long years of struggle for the participation of women insist that they made it on merit. Many of these women do little or nothing to address the women question. They not only maintain the status quo but also reinforce patriarchy in collaboration with men.

Other amiable factors which increase women's empowerment include:

i. Support network and prospective role models: Through the identification of aspirants and pairing them with established women politicians, playing mentoring a role and providing capacity building training to young or aspiring female politicians.

ii. Building a Coalition of NGOs and Grassroots women associations that coordinates the support and advocacy for women aspirants.

iii. Awareness of their political and legal rights and to claim them.

iv. An enabling environment that allows for women to engage in decision making process in a sustainable and effective way free from political harassments and violence.

v. Establishment of legal funds to enable women politicians challenge electoral malpractices.

vi. Identifying and engaging relevant stake holders such as Independent National Electoral Commission and political parties in introducing quota.



## **Conclusion**

The rights of women and female folks in the socio-political space of Nigeria on her democratic agenda has been a matter of public debate and, hence attracts serious concerns by individuals, academic, public analysts and the wider international community as a whole. The plight of Nigerian women, like their counterparts in other parts of developed countries, have been characterized by lack of adequate representation, Lack of access to well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general; undue dominance of men in the socio-political scheme of things; Poverty or lack of money or resources; lopsided political appointments and the general imbalances associated with very unjust treatment of the female citizens in its entirety. There is no doubt that this trend negates the collective interests of human fundamental rights and the rights of equality, freedom and personal dignity of women in society. This attitude also falls short of all necessary dictates of the principles of the much cherished Affirmative Action and the Beijing Conventions on the inalienable rights of women. This tradition also poses very serious threats on Nigeria's path to democratic consolidation and sustainable development in this country. Therefore, in order to address the women question and transform gender relations, there is the need to challenge patriarchy in all its manifestations in domestic production, paid employment, culture and religion, sexuality, male violence and the State; and specifically promote women's rights. On a final note, this paper suggests that any programme(s) introduced should be carefully conceptualized in an innovative, creative and radical manner aimed at eliminating all forms of patriarchy, then we will be on the right path to overcoming the subordination and oppression of women and bringing about human centred development.

## **The Way Forward**

Democracy anywhere in the world is the prerogative of the people. This is because sovereignty they say, belongs to the people (women inclusive). It is therefore important that the act of governance should be diversified to capture the interest of women through adequate representation. First of all, the United Nations General Assembly should reaffirm its convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) thereby making it compulsory for all nations of the world to adopt as cardinal objectives of its constitutions. Violation of this convention in any form should be meted with strider sanctions. Again, relevant clauses of the Beijing Conference should be reactivated giving specific rights to women. This way, the personality and character of women will be respected. Second, Societal obstacles of religion, tradition and other obnoxious beliefs must be broken, women should not be domesticated, they have to enjoy right to work and associated benefits as men. They along with

men have to have access to free and functional education and health care, electoral process and contest must not be a preserve of the rich. All these are parts of what can create level playing ground for both men and women. However, the reality is that those stated preconditions could only ultimately be secured when patriarchy is challenged. Some scholars have suggested that patriarchy is located in six relatively autonomous structures, which we have adopted in this paper as programmatic sites that patriarchy can be attacked (Walby, 1990, Igbuzor, 2012). These sites include domestic production, paid employment, culture, sexuality, male violence and state. It is important to point out that the level of work at the six sites below has to be at the local, national and international levels:

- a. **Domestic production**
  - Challenging patriarchal division of labour in the home
  - Advocating for equitable distribution of housework
  - Promoting male responsibility for fatherhood and
  - Inclusion of domestic work in the computation of GDP.
- b. **Paid employment**
  - a. Challenging stereotypes in paid employment
  - b. Fighting discrimination against women in paid employment
  - c. Promoting the entry of women into male “dominated or reserved” professions
- c. **Culture and Religion**
  - a. Combating cultural practices that oppress women e.g. widowhood practices, wife inheritance, female genital mutilation etc
  - b. Challenging cultural taboos that subordinate women
  - c. Challenging practices that promote son preference
  - d. Challenging cultural practices that predispose women to malnutrition and restrict access to food.
  - e. Challenging stereotypes in upbringing of the boy and girl child
  - f. Promoting education of the girl child
  - g. Challenging gender stereotypes in the media
  - h. Promoting radical and women sensitive interpretation of religion
- d. **Sexuality**
  - a. Empowering girls and women to have control over their sexuality
  - b. Challenging practices that predispose women to infections such as STIs and HIV/AIDS
  - c. Promoting women sexual and reproductive rights
- e. **Male violence**

- a. Combating violence against women
  - b. Interrogating masculinity and feminity and promoting new conceptualizations of a transformed man and woman.
- f. **State**
- a. Challenging the patriarchal arrangement of the State and the violence in the State.
  - b. Challenging neo-liberalism and fundamentalism
  - c. Challenging State practices that fuel violent conflicts
  - d. Promoting women participation in governance
  - e. Promoting women friendly constitutions and legal frameworks
  - f. Promoting redistribution of national budgets in favour of women
  - g. Supporting affirmative action for women and other marginalized groups

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