

Socio-Cultural Milieus And Gender Inequality In Nigeria: Appraising Options For Promoting Gender Mainstreaming

Egobueze Anthony^{1*}, Onyekwere Lauretta.², Ogele Ezio Promise³

¹Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. anthony.egobueze@ust.edu.ng

²Department of Sociology, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. lauretta.onyekwere1@ust.edu.ng

³Department of Political Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. ezio.oge1@ust.edu.ng

*Corresponding Author: - Egobueze Anthony

Abstract:

This study examined socio - cultural milieus and gender inequality in Nigeria with an appraisal of options for promoting gender mainstreaming in perspectives. The journey of guaranteeing gender equality began some decades back with the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. This was followed with the Fourth Conference on Women which was held in Beijing, China in 1995. The document that arose out of the conference became known as the 'Beijing Platform for Action' (BPFA). Despite these efforts, inequality associated to gender have continued in Nigeria. The study observed that socio -cultural milieus are impediments to gender equity and recommends legislative options that would guarantee equity in representation by both the female and male genders in public and private services in the Country as panacea to resolving this imbroglio.

Keywords: Female, gender, gender mainstreaming, inequality, mainstreaming, male, options.

I. INTRODUCTION:

In every human society, there is always conflicting interest which defines how the people exist. These are factors that shape competition and rivalries in the society.

Schwab (2017) states:

Talent is one of the most essential factors for growth and competitiveness. To build future economies that are both dynamic and inclusive, we must ensure that everyone has equal opportunity. When women and girls are not integrated—as both beneficiary and shaper—the global community loses out on skills, ideas and perspectives that are critical for addressing global challenges and harnessing new opportunities (v).

The statement above underscores the relevance of gender equity in all aspects of development. Progressive steps to achieving parity for women and men in development have been a topical issue globally. The process started in the 1970s, with 'Women in Development' (WID), with its main focus on the assimilation of women into existing development initiatives. This approach had currency in the propagation of women, especially in decision making. However, the next decade – the 1980s featured "Specific Action" (SA), and it was characterized by a new paradigm known as 'Gender and Development (GAD). GAD explains

the relationship between women and men, and it emphasizes, *inter alia*, that:

- Gender is not a women's issue, but both men and women
- Both men and women have different and special needs
- Women cannot be treated as a homogenous group
- Women are disadvantaged compared to men
- Inequality between men and women is systemic and structural.

The concept of gender mainstreaming was first proposed at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 (UN, 1985). The idea gained prominence in the United Nations Development Community and formally featured at the Fourth Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in 1995 (UNWomen, 1995). The document that arose out of the conference became known as the 'Beijing Platform For Action' (BPFA) (UNWomen, 1995). The BPFA state that governments and other actors should advance active policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all political programmes, in order to ensure that before decisions are made, an evaluation of the impact of such decision on women and men respectively is interrogated (UNwomen, n.a). To achieve the above, "BPFA adopted the 35% Affirmative Action (Amadi, 2017, p. 153)."

Affirmative action means special consideration for disadvantaged groups in publicly funded opportunities. The aim is to level the playing field, as the groups preferred are often those that have been discriminated against in the past. Some national governments have policies in public service composition, publicly provided health and education services as well as government contracting decisions. Observing the effects of affirmative action can provide useful guidance on what contributes to public organizations' performance (World Bank Group, n.a). Towards achieving this, the State and non state actors are urged to take strategic action in the following critical areas:

- Persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women
- Disparities in, and unequal access to, education and training
- Inequalities and inadequacies in, and unequal access to, health care and related services
- Violence against women and children
- Effects of armed or similar conflict on women and children
- Disproportion in economic structures and policies in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels
- Poor mechanisms and attachments at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- Prospect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of women
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to, and participation in all, communication systems, especially in the media
- Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment
- Persistent discrimination against violation of the rights of the girl child

Gender mainstreaming is a procedure rather than a goal, where efforts to integrate gender into existing institutions of the mainstream have little value for their own sake. Therefore, being part of the mainstream means that women and men have even-handed access to resources, including opportunities and rewards. It implies equal participation in influencing what is treasured in shaping options within society. Becoming part of the mainstream offers the prospect to influence who does what in a society, who wins what, who has access to jobs and income, who controls the society's resources and institutions, who makes

decisions and who sets priorities. These and many others are critical in a political system.

As noted earlier, this research interrogates socio-cultural milieus and gender inequality in Nigeria, with focus on activating Legislative options as panacea for achieving gender balance. In order to situate our study within the above context, we pose the following questions?

1. Why do socio – cultural milieus hinder gender parity in Nigeria?
2. To what extent do existing policies in Nigeria favour gender equality and engender mainstreaming?
3. Why has gender mainstreaming failed thus far in Nigeria?
4. What options would ameliorate inequality and engender gender parity in Nigeria?

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TERMS:

Concept clarification is imperative in content development; it not only reduces ambiguity and haziness, but provides an opportunity for the researcher to provide readers with formula-driven task that engages critical thinking. To this end, the following concepts as they relate to our study would be defined: Gender, Mainstreaming and Gender Mainstreaming.

Gender: refers to the social conception rather than biologically ascertained roles of men and women as well as the relationships between them in a given society. These roles and relationships are not fixed, but could and do change. That is, it is "the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationship between women and men and girls and boys (Okojie and Amadi, 2008, p. 25)."

Inequality: is a state of unevenness, disparity, injustice, dissimilitude that exists in social relations. It is an unfair situation in a society where some people have more access and opportunities than others. It is indeed anisometric treatment of individuals wholly or partly and it arises as a result of differences in sex, economic and social opportunities, amongst others.

Mainstreaming: is an interrelated set of ideas, values, practices, institutions and organizations that determine "who gets what" within a society. It is the act of including a social group, sect, body, into the mainstream. Mainstreaming are concerns directed towards achieving equality and improving the relevance of development agendas. It targets at closing the gap of inequality and social, political, economic and cultural imbalance in the society. It interrogates basically gender disarticulation and injustice.

Gender Mainstreaming: the United Nations Economic and Social Council defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as a gender position, the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels (UN, 2000). That is, it is the process of assessing the implications for women and men or boys and girls in any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes, in any area and at all levels. In development terms, it is described as the process of reducing the gaps in the development prospects between women and men and working towards equality between them. This involves the identification of gaps in gender equality through the use of sex-disaggregated data, developing scheme to close those gaps, putting resources and skills into instrumentality for gender equality, monitoring implementation, and holding individuals and institutions accountable for results. It is not an end in itself; but, a process whose ultimate goal is to achieve gender balance.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research adopted the liberal feminism as its theoretical framework. Generally, feminist theory has been misconstrued by many people, because they think it focuses exclusively on the female gender and that it has an intrinsic aim of propagating the superiority of women over men. In reality, feminist theory essentially views the social world in a way that brightens the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, thus, supports the pursuit of equality and justice. The goal of liberal feminism is for individuals to use their own aptitudes and the democratic process to assist each of the genders become more equal in the eyes of the law, in the workplace in particular and the society at large. The theorist believes, this would be achieved by galvanizing women into vocal groups that could speak authoritatively at advanced level, through lobbying policy makers and legislators and raising consciousness on issues of inequality which hitherto hindered the access of women to equal opportunity with men. Liberal feminists use available resources and tools to campaign for change; hence, they stand in contrast to Marxist feminists who believe in revolutionizing even the democratic process.

To liberal scholars, the critical issue is making the legal and political rights of women equal to men. In their arguments, they disabuse the belief that women are, weaker than men in intellectual and physical capacities, hence their discrimination in social and political environments. Female subservience to men, according to them is rooted in

a set of customary and legal limitations that hinder women's entrance to and success in the socio-political environment. Thus, they attempt to sure the playing ground for both sexes via political and legal reform.

The drum for liberal feminism was high in the late 1800s and early 1900s in America; the aim was to gain women's suffrage and individual liberty. The theorists were concerned with liberation through equality, and ending men's nastiness to women. Early liberal feminists had to counter the assumption that only white men deserved to be full citizens. Feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Sargent Murray, and Frances Wright advocated for women's full political inclusion (Marilley, 1996). Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (November 12, 1815 – October 26, 1902), John Stuart Mill (May 20, 1806 – May 8, 1873) popularised liberal feminism through their various writings. Betty Frieden and others are modern scholars that also contributed to this idea.

The model emphasizes the curious issues of liberty and reforms, which are underpinned in change, liberation, and democratization. These are defining indices that stimulate gender balance in Nigeria. The Liberal feminist theory, therefore, provides a good philosophical direction for the analysis of socio – cultural milieus and gender inequality in Nigeria because it critiques inequality and the oppression and social exclusion of the female gender in social, political and economic affairs of the society. It emphasizes equality of access to political and social activities in the society. It equally propagates lobbying of policy makers and legislators to enact enforceable policies and laws that each of the genders would leverage on to be effective in the society. Furthermore, it reviews questions such as governance, inequality, democratization, economic and social relations, cultural stereotypes, customs and tradition which are currently discriminatory to the female gender in Nigeria. This phenomena shape the internal and external behaviours of individuals and groups in the society.

In summary, as noted earlier, liberal feminist theory provides direction for this analysis. Suffice it to say that in Nigeria and many other developing societies, women and girls are at the centre - stage of oppression in domination. Political, cultural, social, and economic stereotypes define the bases for this obnoxious oppression, thus making them depressed, disoriented and bemoaned. This has remained a dominant cultural milieu which needs review. Legislative rather than cultural and religious re-orientation option bridges this gap.

4. A SYNOPSIS OF GENDER BASED INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Gender-based violence occurs in all societies, but commonly found in developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The violence happens everywhere, including the home setting or the wider environment like schools, offices, religious organizations, homes, political parties, social events places amongst others. In Nigeria, it lives with us and is exemplified in sociocultural, ethno-religious and political-economic contexts. It is majorly predicated against the female gender and reflects the extent to which women are debased and their rights trampled upon. It also reflects the cause of their voicelessness in matters affecting them.

"Cultural norms also continue to serve as the bedrock for gender differences which now exist in right under the law (World Bank, 2001, p. 51)." In Ogba Clan of Rivers State for example, there is cultural domination. A woman no matter her aged cannot receive kola –nut before the least male, even her one year old male child would receive such kola before her. This is applicable to many other parts of Nigeria, especially Igbo land. There is male chauvinism and total domination against the female folk in cultural affairs. In the southern parts of Nigeria, many women are prone to violence, such as forceful ejection from marital homes owing to the death of a husband.

There is also social violence associated to economic conditions of families. Most families force their under aged children in hash labour on farms. Others are engaged in commerce and industry activities. This situation is common in Anambra State and many parts of Igbo land. Children under the age of 12 have to work on the farms in excruciating conditions, defiling the weather conditions against their will. This practice is common in the forest and farm regions of Nigeria. Most children are deprived of education just to work and earn monies for their parents. These are grave issues of child labour, which is repugnant to natural justice.

Forceful early marriage is a very common phenomenon in some communities in Northern part of the Country because of their religious belief. The main victims of early marriage are young girls from twelve years old. Importantly, some girls enter the puberty period in the house of the husband who is far older than them, some of whom could be old enough to be their grandfathers. Violence occurs when the girl refuses to marry such men or have sex with a husband. Worst still, at pregnancy, the young aged girls most often suffer from obstructive labour or from vascular vigna fiscolate (VVF).

Ironically, young girls can be bought directly from their parents for future economic or political benefits.

Domestic violence is widespread in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. It occurs in different and diverse forms like rape caused by armed robbery, child assault, especially by fathers and domestic service persons. The effect of this on the society is the geometric increase in the spread of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria.

Widowhood is a misfortune that occurs when a married person loses his or her spouse as a result timely or untimely death, thus, making the survival a widow or a widower. Widowhood practices are experienced in almost all the ethnic groups in Nigeria and it appears to have gender implication as there are certain cultural imbalances in the practices, more against the female gender. Such practices encompass physical hardship, deprivation, ritual inflictions, emotional volatility, socio-economic and psychological ordeals. The travail of a widow arises as soon as the demise of her husband is made public; the in-laws most often accuse her as a suspect for the death and demands for the list of the man's properties including bank accounts and cheques as well as landed properties. This is followed by a series of ritual rites and practices like crying several times daily, wearing of sac clothes, eating with obsolete and broken plates, isolation from people outside in dangerous atmosphere and drinking the water used in bathing the remains of the deceased. Contributing on this subject, Oloko (2001) avers that in different parts of the country, widowhood is associated with rituals and taboos, which are degrading and inhuman. Nigerian women also suffer from malevolent beating and battering from their husbands. Some husbands are lazy and cannot maintain the basic needs of their home like food, shelter and clothing, when confronted by their wives who is the homemaker, alerting them of lack of some basic food items, instead of providing, they end up battering her even to the point of stupor or death. Besides husbands and wives, some boyfriends mercilessly beat their girlfriends, for flimsy reasons of having an affair with another guy. Some of these cases end – up in police stations, while most are swept under the carpets. Beside the male gender battering the female gender, the reverse is noticeable in any home, where the female beats their spouses. In some Igbo communities, if a wife is caught beating her husband, she is fined by '*Umu Ada*' (daughters of the family), but when a husband does the same, he goes without any form of punishment; this is discriminatory to the female gender.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a cultural practice that is very common in Nigeria is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as ‘all procedures which involve partial or total removal of the external female genital and/or injury to the female genital organs, whether for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reasons’. It is a practice in which the female sexual organ is mutilated to reduce her sense of libido and deactivate her interest in sex. FGM is widely acknowledged as an abuse of human rights, which is deep-rooted in cultural beliefs and perceptions within many societies in Nigeria and the world at large. UNISELF Nigeria (2008) opines the practice of female circumcision is widely known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Nigeria in the past had the highest absolute number of cases of FGM in the world amounting for about one quarter of the estimated 115-130 million circumcised women in the world.

International trade has been broadened to include trafficking in persons. It involves the dual - sexual exploitation and labour exploitation of victims and it is transgender in nature, but with the female gender as the primary victims. Traffickers target the female gender because they are inexplicably affected by poverty and very vulnerable to exploitation because of existing cultural stereotypes that limit their access to employment, educational opportunities and other resources. This is identified as inimical to gender equality and very common in Edo State, Nigeria.

Gender inequalities significantly limit women’s opportunities to control over, and use of services and productive resources. The World Bank (2001) states: ‘promoting gender equality should therefore be an important part of a developing strategy design to lift all people out of poverty’. However, women face numerous challenges within the agricultural sector; some of these are lack of control over land, capital and even their own labour. Also, there are challenges like lack of access to appropriate technologies, exploitation by marketers or service providers as well as lack of access to productive opportunities. Furthermore, women’s access to agricultural facilities like improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and extension services are limited. Additionally, women lack the capital required to purchase inputs, even when they are offered at subsidized rates.

5. GLOBAL CHALLENGES TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The global attention to gender issues gained critical attention with the introduction of the Millennium

Development Goals. “Goal 3 of the MDGs, aimed at achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment (Egobueze and Nweke, 2014, p. 4).” To achieve MDG 3 and all the other goals, many States increased their capacity of development planning and other policy advocates to understand how gender relations work in their interface and at all levels.

Gender mainstreaming so far has not been successful because it essentially has been propagated from the feminist politics and policy, existing in the strain between the mainstream and interventions to secure gender equality. It arose as a plan in a period global leaders of both public and private entities are anxious to reduce the burdens imposed on market actors. However, present macroeconomics methodology has tended to underpin a simplistic anti-poverty agenda that is antagonistic with process of gender mainstreaming. Mainstreaming gender lies essentially not in the short term conception of legally enforceable rights, but in the long term activation of the legislative and policy process to serve the goal of equality the both sexes. Beside the above, the following are likely the relevant factors that suffocate gender mainstreaming:

- Political will and leadership
- Policy framework
- Insufficient Resources
- Sex-disaggregated
- Poor data information system
- Inadequate expert knowledge and tools
- Discriminatory Socio-cultural and Religious Practices
- Discriminations by political parties
- Wrong Perception of Women in Politics
- Poor Family background
- Fellow Women
- Poor media Supports

6. NIGERIANS STATE AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Nigeria is a heterogeneous society with over 250 recognized ethnic nationalities with rich, but diverse cultural and traditional institutions (FGN, n.a). Decision-making in almost all the communities is vested in the male folk (Men and boys). Religious and cultural beliefs as well as poor access to funds subjugate the female gender to submit to the male gender not minding their age. The males are exemplified as their fathers, husbands and to a large extent their male children. The female gender is repressed and dominated to the firm control of the male. It is important to note that not less than 70% of women in Nigeria

currently live below the poverty line. This thought synchronizes with the statement of the Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development Hajiya Zainab Maina as opined by Pwanagba (2013) that several interrelated socioeconomic factors have led to the poor economic status of a large segment of Nigerian women, such that 70% of people living below the poverty line are women.

The female poverty has led to the pauperization of the gender and the effect is their exploitation and obnoxious oppression by the male gender. Okoronkwo – Chukwu (2013) holds the view that ‘traditionally, men are born leaders and have affected the notion of who should be the effective and right candidates in various political posts. The stakes against women are legion because, apart from the issue of men being heads of families, so many other taboos are invoked by them to scare women away from contesting political positions. As a result all these hydra-headed challenges, they shy away from politics.

Humbe in The Guardian (2015) posits that ‘violence against persons, particularly the vulnerable groups which includes women and girls, is rooted in obnoxious cultures and traditions commonly practiced in Nigeria.’ Such violence is in the form of physical, sexual and emotional abuses. Suffice it to say that some States have laws against gender based violence (GBV), harmful widowhood practices (HWP) but, the implementation of these laws remains in deficit. Most Northern States have legal instruments that legalize violence against women and children. One of such instruments is the Penal Code as applicable in Northern Nigeria. Section 55 of the Penal Code (applicable in Northern Nigeria) authorizes corrective beating of a child, pupil, servant or wife as long as this does not cause grievous bodily harm. Goal 3 of the MDGs targeted at the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women in order to bridge the gap of inequality created by long-term discriminations against women. This goal is aimed at making women, visible in socio – political and economic lives of their States. Sadly, the proposition of the UN on this goal was truncated by primordial cultural and religious encumbrances; women still remain highly marginalized, discriminated against; and are under-represented in political offices and in every facet of the life of the nation. ‘This is more obvious when the proportion of men to women in politics and decision making positions is compared despite the fact that women represent 50% of the nation’s population (Ugwuegede, 2014).’

In the midst of the trajectory of gender inequality, especially oppression of the female gender by the male dominated Nigerian communities, it is

imperative to promote gender equality and parity. Promoting gender equality, therefore, is globally accepted as a development strategy for achieving gender balance in every facet of our development and it is predicated on reducing poverty levels among women and men, improving health and living standards and deepening efficiency of public institutions. To achieve gender parity, The National Gender Policy was approved by the Federal Executive Council of Nigeria in 2006. The concerns of the National Gender Policy are articulated in the radial below:

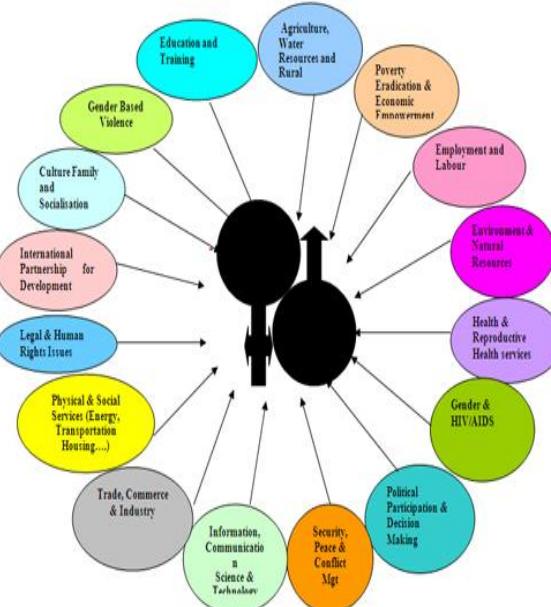


Fig 1: A radial showing gender issues

Source: *Federal Ministry of Women and Social Development, Nigeria.*

Discouraging gender imbalance, Section 42 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states “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 (FGN,1999).”

Despite this constitutional provision, Nigerian State still fails to give males and females equal opportunities to advance socially, physically, educationally, politically and economically. Evidences abound of the existence of several negative aspects of gender relations, such as gender-based violence, division of labour, disparities between males and females access to power and resources, and gender biases in rights and entitlements, remain pervasive in Nigeria.

The National Gender Policy is premised on building a just society devoid of secession, exploit the full potentials of all social groups, thoughtless of sex or circumstance, promote the

delegation of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well being of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth (Ciroma, 2006). Just like other Member States of the United Nations Organization, Nigeria signed and ratified the various relevant international instruments, treaties and conventions on equal access and non-discrimination to all persons irrespective of sex without reservation. Signing of this document is a commitment to eradicate inequality associated to sexes in Nigeria.

The National Gender Policy was designed to fill this gap, and replace the erstwhile National Policy on Women (FMWASD, 2006). In a forward to the Policy, the then Hon. Minister for Women Affairs and Social Development, Ciroma states, *inter alia* the policy is aligned with relevant regional and international protocols and instruments such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) AU Solemn Declaration for Gender Equality, African Protocol on People's Rights and the Rights of Women (APPRW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Conference on Population Development Plan of Action (ICPDPoA), NEEDS/SEEDS, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and a wide range of sectors.

She further states that the Policy seeks to equip stakeholder with strategic skills for engineering the levels of social change required for achieving the desired empowerment of all citizens. (Ciroma, 2006). The framers of the Policy identified the following strategies as crucial for achieving the objectives of the National Gender Policy, these include:

- Policy, partnership and programme reforms through mainstreaming of gender concerns at all levels;
- Gender education and capacity building to enhance necessary technical expertise and positive gender culture;
- Legislative reforms to guarantee gender justice and respect for human rights and
- Economic reforms for enhanced productivity and sustainable development, especially that which addresses the needs of women and children, and other vulnerable groups.

Information and Communication, Research and data as well as Monitoring and Evaluation are supportive strategies for achieving the policy goal (Ciroma, 2006).

It is important to note that despite several policy directions from the Executive, gender imbalances in Nigeria has been a recurring decimal. Very

critical is that experienced in the political environment. Democracy rather than promoting equality in practice, has divided Nigerians more. Ajakaiye and Roberts (2002, p. 4) opine that: 'we take 'democracy' to mean the process or governmental form that affirms the superiority of the people, meaning, the repository of political power is vested in them (the people), to be exercised directly or through their elected representatives under a free electoral process. If the people are without biases to any sex, (male or female), then how has there been the dominance of one sex, in the political process in Nigeria in particular and the world at large? The UNDP report concludes that women's participation in politics and decision making is still inadequate (Asaju and Adagba, 2013). Hamalai (2012) posits that "statistics on women's participation in governance and decision making is still worrying, especially for countries such as Nigeria that are lagging far behind in the number of women involved in decision making (p.72)." Women representation in politics has been abysmally low. The tables and graphs below explain our findings

TABLE 1: Women representation in elective positions in nigeria (1999 – 2015)

OFFICE	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	SEAT AVAILA BLE	WOM AN	SEAT AVAILA BLE	WOM EN	SEAT AVAILA BLE	WOM EN	SEAT AVAILA BLE	WOM EN	SEAT AVAILA BLE	WOM EN
PRESIDE NT	P	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
SENATE	109	3 (2.8)	109 (3.4)	4 (3.4)	109 (8.3)	9 (8.3)	109 (6.8)	8 (6.8)	109 (6.8)	8 (6.8)
HOUSE OF REPS	360	12 (3.3)	360 (5.8)	22 (5.8)	360 (6.9)	27 (6.9)	360 (6.9)	27 (6.9)	360 (6.66)	24 (6.66)
GOVERN OR	36	-	36	-	36	-	36	-	36	-
STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBL Y	990	24 (2.4)	990 (3.9)	40 (3.9)	990 (5.8)	57 (5.8)	990 (6.9)	68 (6.9)	990	-
GA CHAIRPE RSO	774	13 (1.67)	774 (19)	15 (19)	774 (3.6)	27 (3.6)	774	-	774	-
COUNCIL LORS	6368	69 (1.1)	6368 (4.2)	267 (4.2)	6368 (3.7)	235 (3.7)	6368	-	6368	-

Source: Source: Eyeh (2010); Irabor (2011) and Okoronkwo-Chukwu (2013), Ugwegbede (2014), Hamalai (2012) and Internet and constructed by the Author

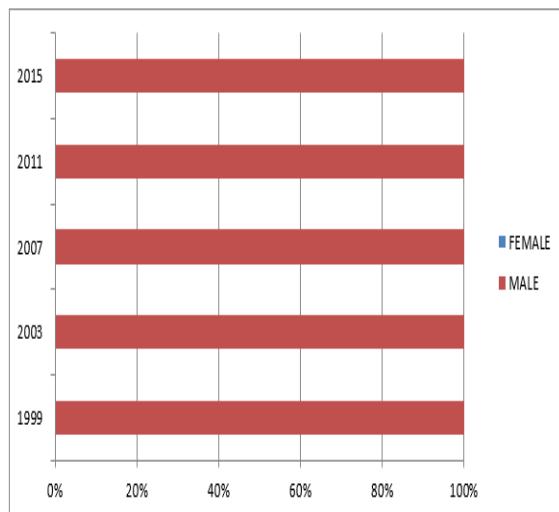


FIG.2: A bar chart showing the percentage of female representation in the presidency of Nigeria (1999 – 2015)

Source: constructed by the author

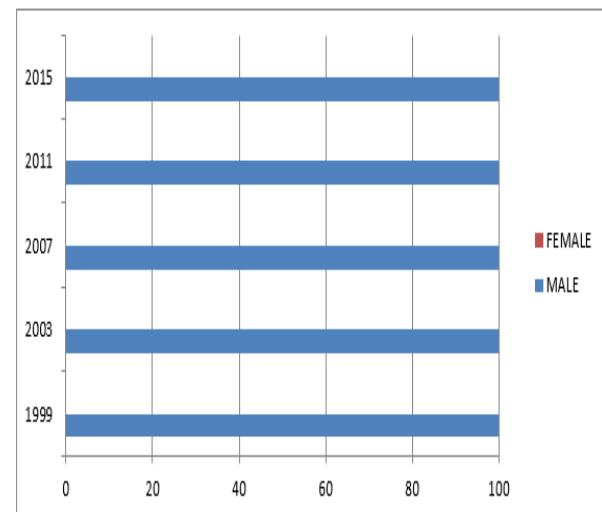


Fig. 5: A bar chart showing female representation in the Governorship of the 36 states of Nigeria , 1999 - 2015

Source: constructed by the author

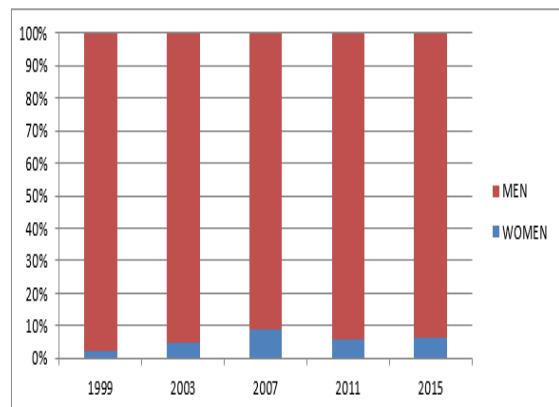


FIG.3: A bar chart showing female representation in the Senate of from, 1999 – 2015

Source: constructed by the author

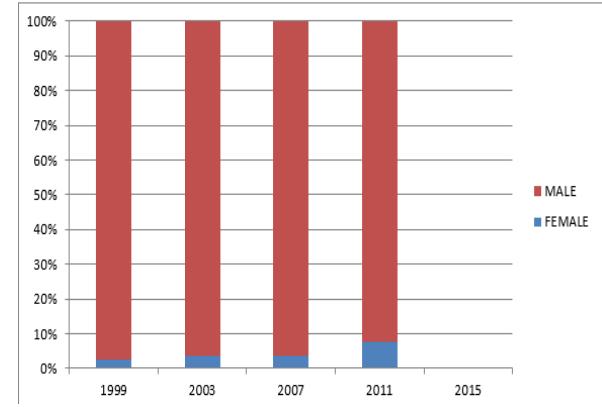
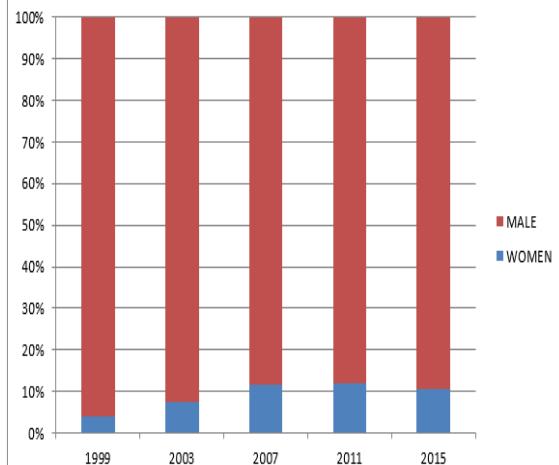


Fig.6: A bar chart showing female representation in the 36 State Houses of Assembly in Nigeria, 1999 - 2015

Source: constructed by the author



Source: constructed by the author

FIG.4: A bar chart showing female representation in the house of representatives of the from, 1999 – 2015

Table 3: Representation of women as Ministers and Permanent Secretaries from 1999 – 2017 in Nigeria

REGIME	OBASANJO		YAR'ADUA		JONATHAN		BUHARI	
	NO OF WOMEN	%	NO OF WOMEN	%	NO OF WOMEN	%	NO OF WOMEN	%
OFFICES								
MINISTERS	7	(16.6)	7	(16.6)	13	(31.0)	7	19.4
PERMANENT SECRETARIES	8	(9.0)	9	(20.9)	11	(25.5)		

Source: constructed by the author

From the above tables and figures, it is evident that the female gender is not only pauperized, but marginalized and unfairly treated in the democratic process in Nigeria. They are not only marginalized, but also alienated from holding key positions in government. The 35 % affirmative action is hardly realized in Nigeria.

7. POSSIBLE OPTIONS TO GENDER MAIN-STREAMING IN NIGERIA

Gender mainstreaming has a trajectory of about two decade's experience with stories of woe in achieving affirmative action in most nations of the world including Nigeria. To achieve equity in mainstreaming, the panacea is legislative options. In order to drive this therefore, the following critical questions are germane:

1. How has the Nigerian woman fared in achieving parity with their men counterparts?
2. Is any of the gender's rights been violated and infringed upon?
3. How have the constitutional provisions, treaties and Nigeria's signatory to many international human rights instruments including CEDAW enhanced gender parity in the Country?
4. What options are pathfinders to engender gender equality?

To address these hydrophobic questions which are targeted at reducing inequality and advancing gender parity, the study proposed a legislative option as a strategy for mainstreaming and sustaining gender equity in Nigeria in particular and the world at large.

Egobueze (2020, p. 53) notes that "the Legislature is the law-making body of a political unit, usually a national or sub-national government that has the power to make, amend and repeal the public policy." Given the above power, the Legislature arguably has the power reshape and set the pace for the development of every State. This is important in giving direction to gender main-streaming. To achieve gender equality in Nigeria, there should be established in each Legislative Chambers in Nigeria, namely the bicameral National Assembly (the Senate and House of Representatives), and the Unicameral thirty Six State Houses of Assembly as well as the Seven Hundred and Seventy Four Legislative Councils of the all Local Government Councils in Nigeria and the Area Councils of Federal Capital Territory, Abuja a Special Committee, to be known as "*Committee on Gender Matters*"(CGM). The functions of the Committee are to ensure that all legislative enactments would be gender sensitive to entrench equity between men and women, boys and girls. Similar Committee of this nature "*the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women*" (IPU, 2006) was established in 2006 by the Cyprus Parliament. To achieve this, it is advocated that the National Institute for Legislative Studies do organize a one day National Legislative Sensitization Summit on CGM. This Summit should have as participants all the Senate/House Officers of the National Assembly,

the 36 State Houses of Assembly House Officers and their Clerks as well as the Leaders and Clerks of all the Local Government Councils in Nigeria and the Area Councils of Abuja. At the end of the Summit, delegates are enjoined to organize. Train – the – trainer workshop for all the other officers of the House that did not attend the workshop. Similarly, in the next alteration of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended), Committee on Gender Matters proposed in the above paragraph should be included. This should be in line with the prominence given to the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Like the PSC, the Committee would be charged with statutory functions that promotes gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, we propose the establishment of the National Gender Commission at the Federal and State levels. This is akin to what was done for the Federal Character Commission (FCC). This however should be fore-run by an Act of the National Assembly legalizing the Body Corporate, and with functions assigned thereto. To this end, therefore, the National Gender Policy (NGP) should serve as the fulcrum for the enactment of the Act.

The current law on domestic violence in the country is clearly inadequate, particularly, regarding the battery. Domestic violence is currently classified under common assault, which downplays the seriousness of this crime. According to section 55 of the penal code as applicable in Northern Nigeria, wife, child and domestic servant's beating are allowed as long as it does not amount to grievous hurt. This implies that a man who beats his wife short of inflicting injuries on her is acting within the ambit of the law. This negates the spirit of natural justice as the female gender is greatly oppressed. However, Section 353 of the criminal code makes an indecent assault on males punishable by 3 years imprisonment. A similar offense of indecent assault on females is treated as misdemeanour punishable by a maximum of 2 years imprisonment (Section360), these are discriminatory provisions and anti the female gender and be amended by the National Assembly. The Legislature should propagate gender mainstreaming by integrating it into all its internal programmers including training. It should provide gender training for all its members and staff, including those at the highest levels, In such training, gender aggregated statistics and indicators should be collected and analyzed by the expert in order to evaluate where we are and suggest where we need to be as a State.

Peer review is imperative in gender mainstreaming, information exchange on gender mainstreaming

within legislative houses and organizations are germane to attaining gender parity. The National Assembly, Federal Ministries of Women Affairs, Youth Development, NGOs should champion advocacy on the domestication of the Child Right Act by all State Houses of Assembly. Though some States have domesticated the Act, other States that have not done the same are enjoined to without further delay.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper examined socio – cultural milieus and inequality in Nigeria and appraised options for promoting gender mainstreaming. Gender inequality exists globally, but Nigeria's situation is worrisome. Mainstreaming gender is a complex process that emphasizes the needs for gender equality in achieving meaningful development. This is an attempt to establish a gender-equality perspective across all policy areas. It is a strategy that requires the equality of men and women in policy design, implementation and evaluation. The solution to eliminating this inequality is a legislative option which shapes and directs States' policies.

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