Achieving Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Reinvigorating The Centrality of Gender Mainstreaming and Women Empowerment

By

Isaac Onwudiwe Omeje
Peace and Conflict Studies Unit
School of General Studies
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Abia State
08069349831,
omeje.isaac@mouau.edu.ng / zikmano@yahoo.com

&

Nnamdi Green Nwaoha
Peace and Conflict Studies Unit
School of General Studies
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture,
Umudike, Abia State
08037913479,
favour4green@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper takes as its point of departure that sustainable development is possible in Nigeria if gender mainstreaming and women empowerment are properly addressed and implemented. They are transformative approaches with great potential for gender equality, sustainability, and positive changes in any society. Women constitute a significant proportion of the country's population and contribute hugely to national progress. However, the inability to integrate their concerns and priorities in the formulation and implementation of policies in every strata of society, including development processes, has led to agitations for desperate pursuit of women's interests and rights. This tends to impact negatively on sustainable development in Nigeria; hence the position of this paper that mainstreaming gender and empowering women should be given paramount attention for effective sustainable development. Reinforcing this position, the paper acknowledged that mainstreaming gender and empowering women are central to sustainable development in Nigeria. The general systems theory was the theoretical framework adopted to further justify this acknowledgement. Among other things, the paper found that addressing these gender-related issues will, undoubtedly, bridge the gap for gender inequality, power imbalance, discrimination, stereotyping, and marginalization thereby stimulating sustainable

development in the areas of politics, economy, education, agriculture, and social cum cultural milieu. It concluded by recommending, among others, that government at all levels should, as a matter of fact, integrate and domesticate gender mainstreaming and women empowerment framework into their policies and enforce them since policies without political will to implement them amount to efforts in futility.

Keywords: Gender equality, Gender mainstreaming, Centrality, Women empowerment, Sustainable development.

Introduction

In the field of development, gender mainstreaming and women empowerment have been acknowledged to be central to sustainable development. Development scholars, feminists, and international development agencies have affirmed this centrality at various conventions, resolutions, and declarations on gender and development issues. For instance, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] (1979), dwelled on full development of women and advancement of their rights; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), set a global land-mark on women's rights, gender equality and empowerment as a condition for social justice and sustainable development; ECOSOC Agreed Conclusion (1997), called to address gender concerns in all planning activities including setting priorities, allocating resources and identifying actions and development activities; and, the World Summit Outcome of the United Nations Assembly (2005), emphasized gender mainstreaming as a tool for achieving gender equality and sustainable development. These conventions, among others, were committed to end discrimination against women in all forms and provide the basis for realizing gender equality through ensuring women's equal access to political, social, educational, health, economic, and other public life, etc. (Archibong, Bassey, & Nwagbara, 2018). The above confirmation has re-awakened scholarly thinking that sustainability of development efforts could be achieved if gender mainstreaming and women empowerment are holistically addressed.

What then are gender mainstreaming and women empowerment? The United Nations Economic and Social Council [ECOSO] (1997), defined gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. Women empowerment,

on the other hand, is the relative ease with which women have access to decision making roles and can mobilize available legal, economic, social and political capital to make and take decisions that affect their lives and those of others around them (Egwurube, 2016).

These gender issues emerged following dissatisfaction with the widening gender gaps which perpetuate inequalities, pushed the women to insignificant positions, and impacted negatively on development efforts. Earlier efforts to address the disparity seemed parochial because of its attention on specific issues of women hence, a paradigm shift to broad processes of change, targeting policies, structures, and institutions. UN (2002) argued that neither 'bringing women in' nor ensuring their greater participation in an unjust, unsustainable development process would suffice but to rethink gender relations, structures, and practices that perpetuate inequalities, particularly in the division of labour, access to and control over resources, and potential for decision-making. This prompted the need to seek out male allies to jointly redefine gender roles and relations and move away from 'women' as a target group, to gender equality as a development goal (UN, 2002).

As Sandole-Staroste (2009) has further observed, the field of development does not ignore gender relations and most scholars do not dispute that gender relations must be addressed; they agree that women and men should participate equally in development processes. The paper however, intends to add voice to the agitation to mainstream gender and empower women in order to achieve gender equality and enthrone development that is truly sustainable. Women are dehumanized, abused, and discriminated against in all strata of life. Addressing these subtle forms of disadvantage is a right step in gender mainstreaming and women empowerment which have been adjudged to be central to sustainable development.

To achieve the above aim, efforts are directed to economic, socio-cultural, political, educational and legal structures where inequalities are perpetuated. The presence of equality, equity, parity, empowerment, and transformation in those facets therefore is an indication that gender mainstreaming and women empowerment are achieved.

Conceptual clarifications

Gender mainstreaming

Gender itself refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. As beliefs and social constructs about womanhood and manhood, it can change over time yet; it determines women and men's roles, responsibilities, activities, access to and control over resources, and decision-making opportunities (Hosein, Basdeo-Gobin, & Rose-Geny, 2020). They further argued

that gender establishes resilient norms regarding what is expected, allowed and valued in women, men, girls and boys (femininity and masculinity, according to [UNICE, 2017]), shaping their socialisation, and institutions such as the family, media, law and education system. How race, class, age, religion, disability, sexuality, and the ways in which inequality is experienced, are also a function of gender. Gender, therefore, does not refer to women or men but to the relations between them. Thus, both sexes experience relations of gender from radically different positions of personal, social, economic, and political power (Hosein, Basdeo-Gobin, & Rose-Geny, 2020).

Gender mainstreaming, therefore is a strategy that was adopted to include a gender perspective in legislation, policies, programmes and projects. It emerged as a result of worldwide women's movement at the UN's conferences in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and more importantly, Beijing (1995) at the fourth World Conference on Women, named Platform for Action (Sandole-Staroste, 2009).

ECOSOC (1997), defined gender mainstreaming as: "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality". In the same vein, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) defined it as "taking account of gender concerns in all policy, programme, administrative and financial activities, and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation (Hosein, Basdeo-Gobin, & Rose-Geny, 2020). It is also a strategy towards realizing gender equality by integrating a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes with a view to promoting gender equality between women and men and combating discrimination (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2016). In all these, gender mainstreaming points to efforts to streamline gender roles and expectations such that both men and women will feel at home with each other. It is thus the bringing on board men's and women's concerns and priorities to the justification table with both giving equal treatment and consideration. For Sandole-Staroste (2009), a gender perspective allows both women's and men's voices to be heard, which, in turn, makes it possible to imagine and build a better future for all humans.

Gender mainstreaming, Mukhopadhyay (2007) acknowledged, can be viewed from two dimensions: 'integrationist mainstreaming' and 'transformative' or 'agenda-setting mainstreaming'. While, 'Integrationist' advocates the incorporation of gender equality into the issues across sectors by promoting the integration of gender concerns into the existing development priorities, 'transformative' or 'agenda-setting' seeks to addresses structural inequalities by transforming the existing development agenda to enable women and men partake actively in decision-making processes that affect their daily livelihoods, through the application of a gender perspective. Gender mainstreaming thus starts with the recognition that gender equality is a basic development goal and a key objective of development plans. It aims to transform gender relations and unjust structures of power to ensure that women and men benefit equally and have access to, and control over human rights, opportunities, social justice, resources, and decision-making (Sivakumar, 2016). This ambition, Hosein, Basdeo-Gobin, & Rose-Geny (2020) argues, goes beyond enhancing women's participation in ready-made development agendas without taking their inputs, priorities and needs into cognizance to transforming subtle forms of inequality (in our institutions, values, and beliefs) which create and perpetuate the imbalance between women and men. An essential feature of gender mainstreaming is equality from the conception of development processes so that women and men have equal opportunity to influence and bring real changes in all stages of development (Sivakumar, 2016).

Mainstreaming as a strategy to bequeath gender equality eliminates domination, discrimination, stereotyping, marginalization, and other negative connotations like gender inequality, power imbalance, gender bias, and gender insensitivity. Men and women will be seen as partners in the development processes in the political, economic, and social cum cultural milieu where issues would be viewed from the vantage points of men and women. Unless this strategy is implemented, women, Stiegler (2001) opined, will remain stuck in the role of petitioner pleading to have their demands met while sustainable development suffers.

Women empowerment

To start with, empowerment itself is a multi-dimensional process involving efforts to help people gain control over their own lives. In the submission of Lohani and Aburaida (2017), it is a process that fosters power in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

In the specific case of women, it refers to efforts to help women gain more power and control over their own lives in economic, socio-cultural and political spheres. As captured by Egwurube (2016) it is the relative ease with which women have access to decision

making roles and can mobilize available legal, economic, social and political capital to make and take decisions that affect their lives and those of others around them. Relatedly, Akomolafe (2006) sees it as the development of the mental and physical capacity, power or skills in women, for them to operate meaningfully in their social milieu, thereby experiencing a more favourable level of social recognition and subsequently enhance their economic status. It means giving traditional and legal status to the efforts of women to develop and contribute to the creation of wealth, taking and participating in decision making of their families and societies at large and to reduce their present state of vulnerability, decrease dependency and passivity and be at the centre, not at the periphery.

As stated in Okeke (2018), women empowerment should be holistic and encompasses finance, agriculture, health and other basic amenities of life; education, economy (resources) as well as other social areas of a woman's life. This is to align with the Second National Development Plan (1970-1974) which emphasized building a nation that has bright and full opportunities for all citizens. An empowered woman, the UN Population Fund argued, has a sense of self-worth and can determine her own choices, and has access to opportunities and resources providing her with an array of options she can pursue. She equally has control over her own life, both within and outside the home and has the ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, both nationally and internationally. The essence of empowering women is to narrow the "gender gap" and to create an equal playing field for women and men. This ambition, Lohani and Aduraida maintained, is an important process in reaching gender equality, which is understood to mean that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of individuals will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Therefore, empowering women is neither to arm them with power to overpower men nor to empower them to the detriment of men. It is primarily to achieve gender equality, a precondition for sustainable development. Lohani and Aburaida (n.d.) authenticated this by noting that the UNDP focuses on gender equality and women empowerment not only as human rights, but also because they are a pathway to achieving sustainable development.

Sustainable development

To bring development to life is one thing and to sustain it is another. Thus, any development effort worth initiating is worth maintaining hence, the idea of sustainable development. In popular imagination, sustainable development is development that can be maintained overtime. Maintaining development over time requires addressing structural impediments (such as inequalities) that might deter the beneficiaries of development (present and future generations) from exploiting development opportunities and achieving their development needs. This concept is not detached from the global

understanding of sustainable development. For instance, Our Common Future by the World Commission on Environment and Development, in the late 1980s, defined sustainable development as development which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Lohani & Aburaida, 2017). Central to this is that development should be maintained in such a manner that the future generations should also leverage on the efforts of the present generation to have their development needs met. That being said, the resources which the future generation will rely on will not be depleted but maintained and the natural environment which they will leave in will not be polluted or destroyed, but maintained by the present generation. That is to say that the present generation needs to address all impediments that might severely constrain development; otherwise, it will not be achieved in a sustainable manner; hence the need for mainstreaming gender and empowering women.

Sustainable development is anchored on three interrelated pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. These elements aim at eradicating poverty through creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living and fostering equitable social development and inclusion, Lohani & Aburaida (2017) maintained. This cannot be achieved if inequalities continue to be perpetuated. Therefore, there is the need to eliminate gender disparities and other subtle forms of inequalities in the economic, social, and environmental sphere in order to move towards development that satisfies present needs without hampering the opportunities of future generations to satisfy their own needs. The present generation cannot bequeath development that is truly sustainable if gender relations are not addressed in the economic, social and environmental strata in the form of intra-generational equity to eliminate prevailing inequalities. This therefore calls for mainstreaming gender and empowering women in order to pave the way for intergenerational equity where a more equitable world (Lohani & Aburaida, 2017) will be passed on to the future generation for effective sustainable development.

Theoretical construct

To explain the centrality of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment to sustainable development, the general systems theory will suffice. This is because of its significance in explaining the implications of collective action of components units in maintaining the entire system. The general systems theory was promulgated, beginning in the late 1920s by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (Dore, 2008). The basic principle of the theory is that elements of the system need each other, not antagonistically but interdependently, in order to keep the system afloat. The interdependent relationship, logically, recognises

boundaries and their permeability, hierarchy, equifinality, and homeostasis which are the basic ingredients of relationship among components in a system. While boundaries designate the distinction among the elements of the system and differentiating specific systems from the larger environment, hierarchy demonstrates a level of interaction and complexity existing and expected among the various elements in a system. Hierarchy is meant to forestall overstepping of bounds and abuse of relationship amongst the parts of a system. Whereas equifinality indicates the different approaches to achieving a goal and sustaining the system, homeostasis is premised on the notion that energy is needed from the components for the sustenance of the system. This energy represents resources in the form of time, finance, labour, idea, etc without which the system and its components risk dysfunction (Dore, 2008).

Systems theory has provided the explanatory underpinning through which sustainable development could be achieved. Indeed, it demands collective actions, devoid of bickering and rancour, in a manner that does not severely constrain development processes. In all strata of our society – politics, education, economy, agriculture, socio-cultural activities, to mention but a few – there is a high demand for input, resources and consensus from the segments of the society. This high level cooperation is total and comprehensive such that marginalization, stereotype, and all shades of discrimination that are indicators of underdevelopment and unhealthy living are avoided. Achieving this requires combined efforts of all classes of people, particularly men and women. However, the dichotomy between the two genders relating to roles, power and authority, has led to agitations and antagonisms. This has undoubtedly undermined efforts at sustaining development processes in many quarters, hence the adoption of this framework to underpin the significance of collaborative efforts to achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.

From the standpoint of the systems theory, mainstreaming gender and empowering women are rational approaches to ensure that men and women work in harmony to achieve sustainable development. The interdependent relationship between the two genders do not in any way oppose differences in gender roles, power and authority of each gender, and the potential resources of each gender. Rather, the theory recognises and proposes that the features and attributes of each gender be respected, promoted, and ultimately, utilized as disharmony between the genders is a threat to the achievement of sustainable development; a situation that is antithetical to the nation and its members. As clearly illustrated in the general systems theory, a system can only be in equilibrium when its component parts work harmoniously. In the case of the nation as a system, its development can only come to light when men and their women counterparts work collectively and in harmony. Therefore, it is expedient that the interests of both genders

are harmonized, recognizing their limits and utilizing their strengths, for the good of their country.

Grounds for gender mainstreaming and women empowerment

The condition of women, particularly the rural women in Africa and indeed Nigeria, in relation to their male counterpart, appears pathetic, depressing, and appalling. They are seen as a set of powerless, inferior, passive, and more worrisome, insignificant species. A critical analysis of their situation from the legal and of course, humanistic perspectives, will see circumstances and facts which make mainstreaming gender and empowering women logically necessary. Aside meeting the development needs, as humans, women deserve better treatment. This section dedicates attention to the agonies of women arising from societal norms, institutional restrictions, and other forms of maltreatment by men, as a justification for mainstreaming gender and empowering women.

Ebirim (2004) has shown that in most African traditional societies, women have been abused, marginalized, discriminated against and denied their rights in most spheres of life, especially rural women who have low literacy level and, have consequently, become mere tools in the hands of their husbands. He contended that women work more hours than men in productive activities. Women's labour in the informal sector, both in rural and urban areas, has remained high but yet, largely unrecognized with increasing work overload and fatigue arising from other multiple roles including farming, household and family caretaking.

In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is still the most important sector with women, accounting for 75% for its production (FAO, 1999a), yet, their labour force in the sector is substantially underestimated. They have also contributed hugely to the development of the nation and have been subjugated and oppressed. They are perceived more as husband's property than co-operators or partners in development efforts (Ebirim, 2004). Women comprise the majority of the population below the poverty line and have very often found themselves in situations of extreme poverty. GENDERNET (2011) equally observed that women often face discrimination and persistent gender inequalities, with some women experiencing multiple discrimination and exclusion because of factors such as ethnicity or caste. Women perform 66% of the world's work, and produce 50% of the food, yet earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property.

In Nigeria and indeed Africa, inhuman traditional practices are meted out to widows at the death of their husbands in most rural communities. For instance, women are prime suspects at the death of their husbands and as such, are forced to drink water used in

bathing their husband's corpse. The affected women are declared innocent on survival after drinking the water. This situation, Okeke (2018) lamented, does not apply to men if the reverse becomes the case, noting that such evil practices against women thrive because of the dependency of the women on their husbands in virtually everything including food, clothing, shelter, and life-sustenance.

In another development, Sandole-Staroste (2009) noted that the processes that establish sustainable peace, security, and development often marginalize or exclude the women. To him, low or no participation of women in development efforts is not, on their part, a lack of interest or ability, but the deliberate efforts by men who hold leadership position. This is corroborated by Johnson (2005), who contested that women are excluded from decision making because women who occupy leadership roles are perceived as threatening by their male counterparts. Their mere presence, Johnson posited, disrupts male solidarity, thereby undermining the privileges that come with male power (Sandole-Staroste, 2009).

Equally, female-headed household, (Ogato, 2013) noted, are on the increase in sub-Saharan Africa and albeit, poorer than those headed by males and rural women bear the brunt more. This is so given that women lack education, access to resources such as land, time and capital, as well as financial services that would enable them sustain their households. Beyond farming, women are still found mostly in the resource-trapped informal sector where income is low and unstable and where government protection is minimal (Ruzvidzo, 2007; Ogato, 2013).

Women, Ogato (2013) opined, occupy low status in society. They are socially, culturally, and politically disadvantaged. Rights such as access to land, credit, and other productive resources are difficult for them to attain. They also experience multiple forms of other deprivations such as longer working days, women-specific ill-health, low level of education relative to men, and lack of adequate representation in leadership and decision-making positions (UN, 2002; Ogato, 2013).

It is equally clear of global patterns to inequality between women and men. For instance, more women than men, (UN, 2002; Sivakumar, 2016), tend to suffer violence at the hands of their intimate partners; they have different economic opportunities from men; they are over-represented among the poor; and, women and girls make up the majority of people trafficked and involved in the sex trade. Therefore, with the above justifications, if gender is not mainstreamed and women empowered, the future of our corporate existence and sustainable development looks bleak.

Centrality of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment to sustainable development

Aside the pathetic and depressing conditions of women as expressed above, there are other attributes which make mainstreaming gender and empowering women an indispensable resource to sustainable development. For avoidance of doubts, Oyebamiji and Amini-Philip (2012) recalled that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) devoted its goals (Goal 3) to gender equality and women empowerment. This implies that eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education, economy, agricultural sector, and politics is a pathway to achieving the millennium development goals.

According to Sandole-Staroste (2009) sustainable peace, security, and development cannot be achieved if only one gender is included in the development processes. They may not sustain development in a comprehensive manner since they do not have all the ideas as they affect both sexes. Such lopsided development efforts are viewed from a narrow lens since problems and solutions associated with it are considered from the perspectives of the participating gender hence, lacking in comprehensiveness and inclusiveness. Development processes that are gender sensitive are viewed from diverse backgrounds and as such take care of diverse needs and attract sustainable attention from women and men.

Again, achieving sustainable development in any society depends, incontestably, on the level of cohesion among its people. Where peace and unity are threatened, development dwindles. The rift between women and men on gender issues polarizes efforts on sustainable development to pursuit of lopsided interests. Sustainable development can only be achieved if men and women are in harmony and work together.

Empowering women, especially in education (including vocational education) and politics equips them with requisite skills, expert knowledge, and authority to participate in and influence development in a sustainable manner. Many United Nations conferences have, to this effect, advocated that women empowerment is central to sustainable development. For instance, the Copenhagen Declaration of World Summit on Social Development [WSSD] (1995) posited that empowering people, particularly women to strengthen their own capabilities is a main objective of development (Baden & Oxaal, 1997). Women empowerment is recognised as one of the building blocks in combating poverty and achieving sustainable improvement of livelihoods of a community. Without promoting gender equality and women empowerment, it is hardly possible for least developed countries to achieve development goals (Saito & Spurling, 1992; Wahaj & Hartl, 2007).

With the adoption in 2015 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gender mainstreaming has gained a new impetus given the realization that gender equality and empowerment of women and girls will make decisive and cross-cutting contributions to progress in all the goals and targets of the agenda. Thus, the Agenda asserts that "the achievement of full human potential and sustainable development is not possible if one half of the humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities" (Hosein, Basdeo-Gobin, & Rose-Geny, 2020). Oyebamiji and Amini-Philip (2012) equally noted that societies that do not accord equal rights to men and women do not achieve development in a sustainable manner. A plausible explanation for this trend is that achieving gender mainstreaming and empowering women is central to sustainable development.

Approaches to gender mainstreaming and women empowerment

Gender inequality and women disempowerment are tied to a range of issues in the economic, political, legal, and socio-cultural structures, etc. Therefore, to address these gender issues, efforts are made to approach them from the above perspectives. These approaches are interconnected in the build up to gender mainstreaming and the restoration of the dignity and status of women for sustainable development.

Economic approach:

Economic approach targets increase in the capacity of women and men in economic processes. The aim is to ensure equitable participation and contribution of both sexes in the economic processes and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth (GENDERNET, 2011). In the case of women, the approach is a strategy that seeks to empower them to increases their access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information. The idea behind this, GENDERNET revealed, is that women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling them to have control over their lives and exert influence in society. Economic approach seeks to create just and equitable society by advocating to empower both sexes (particularly the women) as a prerequisite for sustainable development. This requires sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment from all development actors (GENDERNET, 2011).

Socio-cultural approach:

Socio-cultural approach is a strategy which aims at reforming the social and cultural elements of the society that perpetuate inequality and cause disharmony between women

and men. According to Khan and Mazhar (2017), socio-cultural factors are deeply rooted elements of a particular society and encompass the values, attitudes, norms, practices, institutions, stratifications, and related ways of a society. The approach targets these socio-cultural norms and practices that give preference to one gender over the other causing discrimination, inequality, power imbalance, and other subtle forms of disadvantages thus impacting negatively on development processes. Women are particularly affected negatively by these socio-cultural norms. For instance, even within households, inequalities in negotiating and decision-making potential and access to resources have been documented (UN, 2002) and women are on the losing side. In effect, socio-cultural approach takes cognizance of this and seeks to mainstream gender and empower women. Socio-cultural empowerment of women include the base of gender inequality, sex ratios, life expectancy rates and fertility rates which shows the general status of women in terms of literacy, economic growth, availability of health care and birth control facilities, educational status of women, age at marriage, literacy rates and participation of women outside the home (Khan & Mazhar, 2017). Age, education, caste, religion, marital status, family income, housing conditions etc. are some of the important variables that affect women in their empowerment and development (Khan & Mazhar, 2017).

In many countries it is women who shoulder most of the responsibilities and tasks related to the care and nurturing of the family (including laundry, food preparation, childcare, care of the sick and cleaning). These tasks add to women's workload and are often their obstacle to engaging in political activities or expanding economic activities (UN, 2002). Therefore, transforming structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate inequality is the starting point for socio-cultural approach.

Legal Approach:

Legal approach is the application of the instruments of law to protect and advance the interest both sexes, particularly the women who are vulnerable to the menace of inequalities. There are discriminatory practices against the women in our society through government regulations, customs and traditions, etc to which women lack the will to challenge. Addressing these constraints for women is important both as an end in itself and an essential element for formulating effective national strategies for increasing economic productivity and growth, reducing poverty and achieving sustainable development (UN, 2002). Thus, Ruzvidzo (2007) encourages government at all levels to strengthen legal frameworks that promote the rights of women and to ratify, domesticate, and implement all international, regional, and municipal statuses on women's rights. An example is the 1979 Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW) which emerged to deal with human rights of women by prohibiting all

forms of discrimination against them, Tang (2000). Legislation alone cannot protect policies on gender relations but appropriate legal frameworks to prosecute such policies.

Political Approach:

The field of politics is the dominant arena for policy and decision-making. Therefore, political approach seeks to provide equal opportunities for women and men to participate in formal decision-making in governments, community councils, and policy-making institutions. This becomes imperative given that most societies' priorities and needs are often defined without seeking women's input and, according to Ogato (2013), they are grossly underrepresented in parliaments, and administrative bodies in most countries worldwide, despite increased international calls for women's political empowerment. Continuing, Archibong, Bassey, and Nwagbara (2018) noted that women constitute about half of the projected population of Nigeria; yet, their numerical strength has never found a corresponding representation in Nigeria's political space and even the 35% quota for women in political positions as recommended at the Beijing conference in 1995 has not been enforced in Nigeria. Quoting Ezenlo (2011) they lamented that Nigerian women have about the worst representation of 5.9% in the national legislature when compared to most other African countries such as Uganda, 34.6 per cent, South Africa, 43.2 per cent, Ethiopia, 27.7 per cent, Cameroon, 20 per cent, Niger,12.3 per cent and Congo, 8.0 per cent.

Political approach to gender mainstreaming and women empowerment can be viewed from two perspectives: gender representation in policy areas and gender-responsive content of policies. Gender representation seeks to ensure a balance in the number of women and men both as policy beneficiaries, and decision-makers to bring in different experiences that might improve the decision-making process. This can be checked by collecting information on the representation of both sexes within the decision-making bodies. On the other hand, gender content of policies considers the gender sensitivity of policy contents in order to unravel how policies benefit both sexes in order to avoid gender-blind policies (policies that do not take into account a gender perspective). This can be checked through a gender-impact assessment to analyze policy implications on gender needs [women's and men's live] (EIGE, 2016). Thus, political approach to gender mainstreaming and women empowerment requires the commitment and support of male parliamentarians and political leaders who dominate the decision-making, among others, to enhance women participation in politics preferably through quotas and active party politics that promote the candidacies of women (UNICEF, 2006).

Education Approach:
This approach seeks to mainstream gender and empower women through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, habits, and values that enable one to function effectively in the society. Education, according to Okafor (1984) helps people to maximize their physical, mental and emotional capabilities which are useful for them and their society. It entails giving boys and girls, women and men equal opportunity to acquire knowledge from pre-primary school to tertiary institution and in the non-formal setting for vocational skills acquisition. In the sense of women, it arms them with knowledge, skills, norms and values that are necessary for their development and that of the society. This cuts across Information Technology (IT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), astronomy, etc. and other vocational skills development. To empower women, they should be given preferential opportunity to acquire knowledge to any lengths. According to Ojobo (2008), educated women contribute significantly to national development in the areas of marital obligation, agricultural development, social development, health, economic development, and national reconstruction. Through the education approach, women can have the opportunity to go into parliament and vote against discriminatory laws from statute books, government regulations, administrative practices, and from all customs and traditions, which harbour inequality.

Indicators of Gender Mainstreaming and Women Empowerment
For gender mainstreaming and women empowerment to be achieved, certain objectives need to be met. These include: equality, equity, parity, empowerment, and transformation.

Equality: Equality is obtained when women, men, girls and boys enjoy equal conditions, treatment, and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development notwithstanding whether they are born male or female (UNICEF, 2017). By this, society gives equal value to the similarities and differences of men and women and the roles they play. Both sexes will be seen as full partners in the home, community, and society.

Equity: This is when the ratio of participation, access, opportunities, rewards, and benefits are obtained according to the needs or concerns of women and men. For equity to prevail, specific measures will be designed to compensate the most disadvantaged sex in order to eliminate disparities and discrimination between the sexes. Equity compensates for unequal opportunities and guarantees the fairness of programmes and activities in the society (Archibong, Bassey, & Nwagbara, 2018).

Parity: Equity signifies the presence of equal representation and participation of women and men as agents of change in economic, social and political processes which are essential for achieving gender equality (Archibong, Bassey, & Nwagbara, 2018). Corroborating this view, UNICEF (2017) believes that as a numerical concept, it addresses the ratio of female-to-male (or, male-to-female) in certain cases.

Empowerment: This occurs when women and men have the capacity to meet their needs in every sphere of life and be able to witness increase in their self-confidence, self-reliance, and ability to set their own agendas. In other words, women and men will have equal pivotal roles and establish partnership to create more equal societies. This is thinkable when women's level of empowerment is increased in relation to men (Archibong, Bassey, & Nwagbara, 2018).

Transformation: Transformation takes place when there is a balanced gender relation in gender orders, existing distribution of resources and responsibilities. It implies that structures, institutions, and policies that were hitherto biased, are reformed to have a gender-sensitive face. In order words, the society's structures and practices and the relationship between women and men need a radical rethink to root out the deep-seated and often hidden causes of inequality. The goal is thus the transformation of unequal social and institutional structures into equal and just structures for both men and women (Sivakumar, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender mainstreaming and women empowerment can be seen as an effective tool for the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria and elsewhere. Addressing these gender issues in all ramifications eliminates potential conditions that can breed conflict and thus pave the way for true gender relations. The paper recalled that the agitation for gender mainstreaming and women empowerment arose as a result of inequality in the relationship between women and men which inadvertently affect sustainable development. It therefore posited that these gender concerns be given paramount attention in order to move towards development that is truly sustainable. It discussed the dehumanizing and appalling conditions of women as the justification for mainstreaming gender and empowering women and argued that true development can come to light if the two sexes collaborate. Further, it saw the economic, political, education and socio-cultural approaches as the strategies for addressing the gender issues. Finally, the paper believes that the presence of equality, equity, parity, empowerment, and transformation signifies the achievement of gender mainstreaming and women empowerment and thus

makes the following recommendations to further strengthen the strategies for effective sustainable development:

International development agencies are encouraged to work with women's organisations at the community level and channel development resources through them in order to increase the likelihood of resources reaching the most vulnerable members of poor communities, women, and children (UNICEF, 2006; Ogato, 2013).

Government and organisations at all level (including community councils) should involve women in every stages of policy development. This will help to ensure that development programmes will be designed from the vantage points of men and women to cover diverse interests.

Government at all levels should encourage girls and women education by giving them scholarship and other incentives to improve their literacy level.

Government should design a legal framework specifically to protect the interest of women who are the prime victims of gender inequality and criminalize and sanction any discriminatory action.

Government needs to show political will to support policies on gender relations. This political will is required to enforce national and international conventions on gender issues, and mandate organisations and institutions to strictly observe policies on gender relations.

References

Archibong, E.P., Bassey, G.E., & Nwagbara, E.N. (2018). Gender mainstreaming and attainment of sustainable development goals: Does Nigeria have the political will to work the talk? *Global Journal of Social Sciences, 17(4), 21-29.*

DAC Network on Gender Equality [GENDERNET] (2011). Women's economic empowerment. *Issue Paper*. Available at: www.oecd.org/dac/gender

Dore, M.M. (2008). Family systems theory. In K.M. Sowers & C.N. Dulmus (Eds.) *Comprehensive handbook of social work and social welfare: human behaviour in the social environment,* volume 2. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

ECOSOC (1997). Mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the UN system, Report of the Secretary-General, Economic and Social Council.

Egwurube, J. (2016). Challenges facing women empowerment in contemporary Nigeria. *Revue Miroirs*, 2(4), 135-171.

European Institute for Gender Equality [EIEG] (2016). What is gender mainstreaming? Luxemburg: Publication Office of the European Union.

Hosein, G., Basdeo-Gobin, T., & Rose-Geny, L. (2020). Gender mainstreaming in the national sustainable development planning in the Caribbean. Santiago: United Nations Publications.

Johnson, A. (2005) *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

khan, M. & Mazhar, S.C. (2017). Socio-cultural impediments and women empowerment. *International Journal for Innovative Research in Multidisciplinary Field,* 3(7),413-416.

Lohani, M, & Aburaida, L. (2017). Women empowerment: A key to susutainable development. *The Social Ion,* 6(2), 26-29.

Longwe, S.H. (2000). Towards realistic strategies for women's political empowerment in Africa. *Gender and Development,* 8(3), 24-30.

Mukhopadhyay, Maitrayee (2007), Mainstreaming gender or 'streaming' gender away: feminists marooned in the development business. In C. Andrea, C. Harrison, & W, Ann (Eds.). *Feminisms: Contradictions Contestations and Challenges in Development*. New York: Zed Books.

Oyebamiji, M.A. & Amini-Philip, C. (2012). Empowering rural women: a critical foundation for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social sciences*, 2(2),536-545.

Okafor, R.K. (1984) *Nigerian Teacher Education: A Search for New Direction,* Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers Co. Ltd.

Ojobo, J.A. (2008). Education: A catalyst for women empowerment in Nigeria. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Science*, 4(1), 93-108.

Okeke, C.C. (2018). Women empowerment and development in Nigeria. Nwafor Orizu Journal of Educational Research & Development. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/32802745.

Ogato, G.S. (2013). The quest for gender equality and women's empowerment in least developed countries: implications for achieving millennium development goals in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology,* 5(9),358-372.

Ruzvidzo, T. (2007). Gender net, Issues 4. Addis Ababa: Economic Commission for Africa. Retrieved from https://www.uneca.org/eca_programme/acgd/Publications/GenderNet07_1pdf.

Sandole-Staroste, I. (2009). Gender mainstreaming: A valuable tool in building sustainable peace. In Sandole, D.J.D., Bryne, S., Sandole-Staroste, I., & Senehi, J. [Eds.], *Handbook of conflict analysis and resolution*. Routeledge: Milton Park, Oxon.

Siakumar, I. (2016). Gender mainstreaming: A tool for women empowerment. Indian Journal of Women's Studies, 6(9), 53-59.

Stiegler, B. (2001) 'How gender enters the mainstream: concepts, arguments and practical examples of the EU strategy on gender mainstreaming', *Labour and Social Policy Department*. Bonn: Economic and Social Policy Research and Consulting Centre of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES).

Tang, K.. (2000). The leadership role of international law in enforcing women's rights; the optional protocol to the women's convention. *Gender and Development*, 8(3).65-73.

UN (2002). Gender mainstreaming: An overview. New York: Two UN Plaza.

UNICEF (2006). The state of the world's children 2007: Women and children – the double dividend of gender equality. New York: UNICEF.

UNICEF (2017). Gender equality: Glossary of terms and concepts. Asia: UNICEF Regional Office.

United Nations Development Programme (2015), *Where are the Women? A Study of Women, Politics, and Equality in the CARICOM Countries.* United Nations Development Programme.

UNDP (1997) Guidance note on Gender Mainstreaming, www.undp.org/gender/policies/guidance.html