

## Effective governance for economic growth and sustainable development: the experience of the Nigerian women

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### Keywords

Effective governance, Economic growth, Sustainability, Development, Governance, Nigeria women.

### Abstract

*One of the compelling challenges that Nigeria is battling with today is the issue of national development and transformation. Despite all the social and economic policies that have been put in place by various administrations in the different tiers of government, Nigerian women have continued to lag behind in social, economic and political development. Given this situation, attempts at reversal must be made in a very systematic and strategic manner. One of the major explanations for the failure of development programmes in Nigeria has been the absence of sustainable, inclusive, and social policies for development or effective monitoring of these policies to ensure good governance. It is in the light of this scenario that this paper reviewed the areas of underdevelopment in the lives of the Nigerian women, the policies put in place by Nigerian government to ensure social inclusion, as they affect women and development.*

*Methodology employed is the review of related literature using secondary data from books, journals and search engines such as Google scholar and Google advance search.*

*The paper concludes that poverty and discrimination remain the most potent factors militating against Nigerian women which have resulted in serious limitations in their socio-political and economic relevance. The paper, therefore, recommends that a concerted effort at formulating and implementing reasonable and objective policies on social inclusion which will ensure women economic empowerment and poverty alleviation is therefore a must.*

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### Introduction

Governance comprises all the political, economic, social, environmental, administrative, legal and other arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved (IFAC, 2013). Good governance depends on an ability to exercise power, and to make good decisions over time, across a spectrum of economic, social, environmental and other areas. This is linked with the government's capacity for knowledge, mediation, resource allocation, implementation and maintenance of key relationships (OECD, 2015). Good governance consists of several dimensions (Annual Democracy Lecture, 2005). One is the capacity of the state to function in the service of the public good. Effective functioning requires knowledge of the policies and rules that best serve the public good, and hence training of state officials in their various professional fields. This relates intimately to the second dimension of good governance, which is commitment to the public good. This commitment may derive from a cultural ethic that appreciates and a structure of institutional incentives that rewards disciplined service to the nation or the general community. A third dimension of good governance is transparency, the openness of state business and conduct to the scrutiny of other state actors and of the public. Transparency requires freedom of information, including an act to ensure that citizens can acquire information about how government makes decisions, conducts business, and spends public money. Needless to say, it requires full openness and competitiveness in public procurement, but it also requires openness with regard to the personal finances of government officials.

Transparency is intimately related to accountability, the fourth dimension of good governance. Governing agents are more likely to be responsible and "good" when they are

answerable for their conduct to the society in general and to other specific institutions that monitor their behavior and can impose sanctions upon them. Transparency and accountability are thus intimately bound up with a fifth dimension of good governance, the rule of law. Governance can only be good when it is restrained by the law: both effective government and well functioning markets require that there be clear rules about what constitutes acceptable conduct in all realms of economic, social and political life. All actors, public and private, must have confidence that those rules will be observed. Only under a rule of law are property rights secure and contracts enforceable. Only through a rule of law can individuals be secure against arbitrary harm from the state or powerful private actors.

Finally, when good governance functions in the above five ways, it also breeds social capital, in the form of networks and associations that draw people together in relations of trust, reciprocity, and voluntary cooperation for common ends. The deeper a country's reservoirs of social capital, and the more these are based on horizontal relations of equality, the more vigorous is coordination for and commitment to the public good. Social capital thus not only fosters the expansion of investment and commerce, embedded in relations of trust and predictability, it also breeds the civic spirit, participation, and respect for law that are crucial foundations of political development and good governance. In other words, it generates a political culture of responsible citizenship. This is summarized in the concept of social inclusion.

Social inclusion is a process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of background, so that all can achieve their full potential in life. It is a multi-dimensional process aimed at creating conditions which enable full and active participation of every member of the society in all aspects of life, including civic, social, economic, and political activities, as well as participation in decision-making processes (Essien, 2014). In another perspective, social inclusion is understood as the process by which societies combat poverty and social exclusion (De Haan, 1997). All of this in turn breeds political legitimacy and stability—further deepening the society's appeal to investors who must risk capital in the effort to create new wealth.

Fundamental to governance is how power and authority are allocated and applied in a variety of public realms: selection of leaders, provision of basic public goods and services (e.g., health, education, transportation and communications infrastructure), maintenance of law and order, revenue generation and allocation, economic and social policy-making, and so on. The ability of a government to provide the above for its citizenry is the basic foundation for meaningful economic growth and sustainable development.

One of the factors in determining the success of development is the status and position of women in the society (Dionco-Adetayo, Makinde and Adetayo, 2012). Their argument is that the neglect of women in the development process of any country constitutes a human resource waste. As such it will be a disservice for any country to ignore its women population in its development efforts. They stressed the point that economic development must involve women. True development of a woman is categorized into three namely individual, social, and economic developments (Rodney, 1997). According to the author, individual development means increased skills and capability, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. Increased capacity connotes social development, while economic development is determined by the increased capacity of the members of a society in dealing with their environment. Development is dynamic and therefore assumes a continuous transformation process and a movement towards better and improved conditions, locally and internationally.

Despite the important contributions which women can offer to socioeconomic development, women suffer from various constraints, which inhibit them from fully realizing their potential for development. Personal values, social norms, and economic factors hinder the equal participation of women in society, (UNIDO, 2001). The 2006 census, the last official census in Nigeria, put Nigeria's population at 140,431,790 with the male population at 71,345,488 and female population at 69,086,302 (Nigeria Population Commission, 2006). Further analysis of the population shows that women of

working age are put at 32,239,658 if the thresh hold is put at 20-69 years. About 35% (11,283,880) of this number are employed in the formal sector. This leaves about 65% (20,955,778) either self-employed or looking for job. Based on this population distribution, for any meaningful development to take place women must as a matter of necessity be involved by being empowered to engage in economic activities, as well as being able to sustain and enhance such activities.

As observed from the above statistics, there are a large number of women in Nigeria that can contribute to the economic development of the country, but whose contributions are yet to be explored or they have not been adequately equipped to contribute their quota to the economic development. As observed by Sherfield (2013) effort should be made to develop a framework that recognizes women as the agents of change that they are. Women are critical for development and we cannot advance the health and wellbeing of society without them. When women survive, families, communities and nations thrive. The benefits derivable from empowering women are far reaching, starting with family advancement and eventually touching on national and global economic advancement. In line with this, therefore, this research addressed the following issues: Underdevelopment in the lives of the Nigerian women; Factors of entrepreneurial development in the Nigerian economy; Social inclusion and government policies on women; and solutions based conclusions.

### **Methodology**

The study is a review of existing literature and as such secondary source of data collection was used.

### **Areas of Underdevelopment in the lives of Nigerian Women**

Onyenekenwa and Nkamnebe (2011) identified unemployment, inadequate health facilities, rights and disinheritance issues, suppressed status, trafficking/labour/prostitution, poor representation in governance, underdevelopment and inadequate access to microcredit as some gray areas facing women in developing countries. The authors noted the following:

**Labour and unemployment:** Women are marginalized in employment. Male workers dominate all worker groups, such as the Force (Army, Airforce, Navy, Police, Federal Road Safety Corps and Civil Defense Corps), organized private sector, ministries and parastatals in Nigeria. The exceptions were teaching and nursing professions only.

**Inadequate health facilities:** In some places women have no or inadequate healthcare facilities, including ante natal care, birth attendance and family planning services. In some instances, some of these facilities may be available, but priced out of the reach of women. Women are more susceptible to easily preventable and communicable diseases due to ignorance, poverty and inability to act and take decisions (without the consent of men).

**Rights issues and disinheritance:** The complex socio-cultural, economic and political environments in Nigeria conspire, to deny females access to certain rights that foster development. Girls were caused to drop from school to assist with household work, such as baby-sitting or street hawking to raise household income. This disconnects them from the chances of being educated and their attendant benefits of development to full potential, ability to contribute to national development through enhanced family health and hygiene and reduction in infant and maternal mortality rates.

**Suppressed status:** With their suppressed status, women are not legally recognized as adults. Hence, they are not allowed to bail someone from the police or guarantee a credit, cannot own property (since, in some cases they are regarded as property) and cannot contract legally enforceable decisions without the male consent.

**Child trafficking/labour/prostitution:** Child labour has grown in dimension from the traditional practice of releasing one's child to help with house chores in a relation's household to hiring the child at exorbitant rate to foster a parent, who in turn, subjects the slave girl to child labour or prostitution in attempt to recoup the unfair charge from the child's parent(s).

**Poor representation in governance:** Women are poorly represented in governance. Hence, they are not given due consideration in the process of formulating national policies. As a result of the fact that

traditional beliefs and cultural practices generally exclude women in decision making, their interests are not often presented, canvassed and addressed or considered. Consequently, women lack in fair share of budgets and policies.

**Underdevelopment of women and children:** Almost half of the population (women) is marginalized in Nigeria; therefore, development has remained lop-sided and sluggish. The economy is not only a function of adequate levels of available finance, a reasonably open trade regime for goods and services, but more and more, is also dependent on our ability to tap into a society's reservoir of talents and skills.

**Inadequate access to microcredit:** A large percentage of women live in rural areas which are characterized by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of social and economic amenities and subsistence. Rural women, thus, are the poorest of the poor. The indispensable and unappreciated household chores, which women engage in, take a toll on their strength and time and reduce their engagement in other financially lucrative ventures. All these contribute to women bearing a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty.

Going through the literature, other authors also agree with the assertion of Onyeneke and Nkamnebe (2011). Abdullahi, (2015) noted that, economically, it is well documented that gender discrimination is a constraint to economic growth and poverty reduction while a more equitable gender relation is an accelerator of poverty reduction. The Author noted that anti-discriminatory laws and legislations exist in Nigeria but to an extent cannot be enforced due to the tripartite system of laws (Statutory, Customary, and Sharia) that is in existence in Nigeria.

For Alemika and Ogugua (2001), women's numerical strength in the population is not reflected in the political life and decision making processes and structures of the nation. They are not adequately represented at the Senate, national and state legislatures and House of Representatives. Politically, the woman is marginalized in Nigeria. She hardly gets the permission to venture into politics as men believe that home keeping is their priority and not how the society is governed. The modus operandi of political parties in Nigeria is one of the factors prohibiting women's participation in politics. Most political parties hold their meetings at night which discourages women especially married ones, to play active roles in politics. It takes a very courageous woman and a very understanding husband to allow his wife to attend nocturnal political meetings in which important decisions are taken. The summary of it all, the men and the women themselves sometimes believe that the women do not have the required economic power to indulge in dirty political ideals characterized by money shows, violence, political thuggery, assassinations and other vices (Mason, 1986; Abdullahi, 2015).

Abasilim (2015) also noted that women productive capacity is negatively affected by poor infrastructural amenities. The Author noted that there is a negative influence of economic factors (capital, credit facility, basic infrastructure, social infrastructure, market accessibility, and social network) on business performance of women entrepreneurs in micro scale enterprises in Nigeria. It was noted that in many traditional economies, like Nigeria, that advancement and opportunities in the political and economic arenas, for women have remained limited (OECD, 1997). Going further, the report noted that concerted efforts are needed to enable female entrepreneurs to make better economic choices and to transform their businesses into competitive enterprises, generating income and employment through improved production.

### **Social Inclusion and Government Policies on Women**

The overall goal of Nigeria's Gender Equality Policy is to build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potential of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, promote the enjoyment 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. It also aims to evolve an evidence-based planning and governance system where human, social, financial and technological resources are efficiently and effectively deployed for sustainable development.

The National Gender Equality Policy includes priorities and targets. Some of the policies put in place by the Nigerian Government to ensure social inclusion and gender equity according to the State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) (2013), include but not limited to the following:

- Establish frameworks to ensure public and private spheres address gender
- Develop and apply gender mainstreaming approaches, tools and instruments compatible with Nigeria's macro-policy framework
- Ensure gender equality as a core value and practice in society and governmental institutions
- Ensure that global and regional gender equality frameworks are incorporated in Nigeria's laws, legislative processes, judicial and administrative systems. Examples of which are:
  - Equity/equality in employment opportunities
  - Elimination of discriminatory practices against the employment of women on grounds of sex, ethnicity, class, religion, age, disability or marital status
- Ensure minimum threshold of representation for women to promote equal opportunity in all areas of political, social and economic life. For example:
  - 35% affirmative action in favour of women in political representation in elective/appointive posts.
- Undertake capability building projects to enable women and men to take advantage of economic and political opportunities towards the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. Examples:
  - Equal access to critical resources
  - Reduce numbers in core poverty groups, particularly women
- Sensitize all stakeholders on gender equality and women's empowerment as central to the attainment of overall national development. For example:
  - Equal access to formal/informal education and skills development opportunities.

The importance of women in development has been underscored through the provision of some international resolutions and agenda and their subsequent domestication at national government levels, including Nigeria. As noted by Akpan (2015), international declarations and resolutions focusing on gender right and women empowerment have always guided the Nigerian government actions on gender and women related issues over the years.

The quest for gender and inclusive participation in governance has endured for some time but the minimum affirmative action standard of 35% representation for women is yet to be achieved. These policies have been very useful in principle. In practice, there is a paucity or complete absence of relevant statistics to assess their utility and relevance in enhancing the empowerment of women. It is also important to note that the existence of these policies hardly receive solid institutional back up in the forms of legislations. They exist, more or less, as ad hoc and regime-based policies whose utility and existence are tied to politics and the longevity of a specific regime. Hence women still face critical challenges in relation to participation in development activities (Akpan, 2015).

### **Policy Recommendations and Conclusion**

The review of literature has revealed that the minimum affirmative action standard of 35% representation for women in all sectors of the Nigerian Government is yet to be achieved. Women bear the consequences of social problems like unemployment, poverty, powerlessness, conflicts, corruption among others, in addition to the effects of economic recession, economic restructuring and rapidly changing systems of production and consumption. All these have consequences for women's health, safety, security, and overall quality of life. Based on the above, policies on effective governance as it affects women must not only be formulated but must be implemented. As such, government should facilitate legislative acceleration for the enactment of Gender and equal opportunities bill and establish a system of gender mainstreaming which incorporates 35% of women in all sectors of government.

Overall, the components of the gender equality and social inclusion is desirable not only to gain the confidence and put integrity into the governance system in Nigeria but also to establish a social compact with the people to help put pressure on political leaders to deliver on their electoral promises. This will undoubtedly speed up women's active involvement and meaningful participation in economic productive activity and nation building which leads, on the long run, to sustainable development.

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