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CHALLENGES FACING GENDER EQUITY IN DEVELOPING ECONOMY

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Introduction

Gender has become an issue of great concern in the dying days of the twentieth century. The focus has become even more acute during this first decade of the twenty-first century. This has been the case partly because of the growing concern for development and the struggle of developing economies to improve their stance, while the developed economies are seeking stability and innovations. Gender has had so many implications for development. The clamour of the under-privileged gender is therefore understood to mean the quest for a means for them to contribute their quota to development during their own generation. Yet, there are impediments to this effort and their desire to contribute meaningfully to development.

There are some institutionalized practices which promote inferiority of one gender to the other thereby perpetrating gender disparity. This paper will throw some light on what is meant by equity and, by extension, gender equity. It will provide an understanding of the difference between a developed economy and a developing economy. Finally, it will attempt an understanding of the relationship between gender equity and development within a developing economy. Within this discussion, the challenges of gender equity will be highlighted.

What is Gender Equity?

Gender means the fact of being male or female. In the world today, many species are identified in terms of being male or female. In fact, in most cases, different names are given, depending on the gender e.g. goose/gander, sheep/ram, hen/cock, he-goat/she-goat and the like, including man/woman.

Equity depicts a situation in which people are treated equally; a system of natural justice allowing a fair judgment in a situation which is not covered by existing laws. Gender equity therefore means the treatment of both genders (male/female) equally and applying natural and fair judgment, especially in a circumstance where there is no existing law. Where there is an existing law, equity would demand the

interpretation and application of these laws to favour both genders equally. By implication, equity would frown at enactment of laws which favour one gender and act to the detriment of the other gender.

An Understanding of a Developing Economy

The discussion in this segment would be better understood by contrasting a developed economy, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Germany. On the other hand, as examples, a developing economy includes Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia. Using the countries highlighted, as examples the following criteria, among others, could be seen to be characteristics of a developed economy:

- (i) These countries have each achieved 99% literacy rate. UK, France, USA and Germany no longer record their literacy rates as these are no longer vital to assessing their development. Hence, other parameters used include number of people using phone and the percentage of the population using the internet.
- (ii) Each has adequate access to quality health care and social security.
- (iii) They have achieved a stable economy with negligible inflation over, at least, the past 10 years.
- (iv) There is the maintenance of human rights and dignity of human existence. They have even extended these to animals.
- (v) There are no compromise with supportive infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water and the like.
- (vi) There is a systematic maintenance of the supremacy of the rule of law. This leads to the development of a national conscience and patriotism.

By contrast, a developing economy is only struggling and experimenting with policies to see if she can break even with development issues such as literacy, population, health and maintenance of basic infrastructure. Different stages of developmental landmarks are used as yardsticks. For literacy rate, for instance, Nigeria still stands below 70%. Considering only youths and dividing this along gender lines, Nigeria has 89% of her male youths and 85% of female youths literate. Table I shows other countries and their relative standing on three key indicators, with regard to literacy.

Table I: Literacy Indices

Country	Male	Female	Phone use	Internet	Literacy rate	Population
Nigeria	89	85	24	6	69.1	104m
Togo	84	54	11	5	60.9	7m
Kenya	80	81	21	6	85.1	38m
Ghana	80	76	23	3	57.9	29m
Ethiopia	62	39	1	0	42.7	-
Algeria	94	91	63	7	69.9	31m
10mT10munisia	97	94	72	13	74.3	10m
France	-	-	85	50	99.0	62m
Italy	100	100	135	53	99.0	-
Germany	-	-	104	47	99.0	82m
UK	-	-	-	-	99.0	61m

Source: Curled from UNICEF (2010) and www.wikipedia.com:

When literacy is captured, the basic level of being able to read and write is often the basis. When the quality and level of attainment are concerned, it shocks one that the picture would really be skewed in favour of males. Although there is no clear cut divide between male and female on health, the fact that the Millennium Development Goal number 3 specifically addresses rescue for women indicates that women are the endangered species. On the other hand, both male and women in developing countries still have some strides to make to acquire acceptable health status.

Literacy rate, poverty, low health status, poor infrastructure and the like highlight the problems facing each country at any point in time. Paramount among these problems is the problem of gender equity, especially in developing countries of the world.

With no sense of threat, both men and women often agree that there is need to treat men and women equally. The Nigerian constitution states unequivocally in article 33, 34 and 35 respectively as follows:

- Every person has a right to life and no one shall be deprived intentionally of his life.
- Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of another person and accordingly no person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.
- No person shall be held slavery or servitude.
- Every person shall be entitled to his personal liberty.

Here, one notes such phrases as “every person”, “no one”, “every individual” and the like. These are surely non-discriminatory. These assert and in one's imagination when both genders co-exist with equal considerations, it would engender maximum development. In default therefore, where gender equity is not achieved, development would be hampered.

In the same vein, the Millennium Development Goal 3 seeks to promote gender equality and empower women. This goal has expressly identified the endangered gender. Although emphasis is laid on eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015, the provision recognizes disparity between the genders also in health. This is the target in goal number 4 to improve maternal health. Ezeilo (2004) observes that until the last decade, gains of women from development were minimal and temporal, while the entire process intensified existing gender inequalities even in period of national prosperity.

These provisions are made with the belief that greater development would be achieved, if there is gender parity and equity in all considerations. Taking these into consideration, it is necessary to pursue gender equity at all cost. Hence, all challenges should be removed so that optimal development may be achieved.

Issues in Gender Co-existence and Gender Equity

Generally, when cases in gender co-existence, gender discrimination and the like are discussed, a skewed picture seems to be painted. This discussion seems to be the same as it is realized that in all considerations, the male gender seems to be favoured, while the female suffers some disadvantages. At this point, one should begin to articulate these issues yet again, in order to examine if these practices pose some challenges to achieving gender equity.

Focusing on Nigeria as a nearest example, one would love to examine practices which challenge the achievement of gender equity. These include:

- (i) Cultural practices
- (ii) Relative standing of different genders on the poverty scale
- (iii) Physical health-related issues
- (iv) Participation in politics
- (v) Legislation
- (vi) Implementation of laws
- (vii) Gender violence

Although the Nigerian constitution does not discriminate against women in bailing of accused persons, hardly would one hear the police accept a woman to sign and bail an accused. They will always prefer a man. As long as these practices continue, gender equity will continue to have challenges.

Cultural Practices

Under cultural practices, the case discussed earlier is yet an example. However, more to it are cases of differential child-rearing practices between the girl and the boy-child, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

Culturally, the role of the girl-child in Nigeria is stereotyped to that of a home-keeper and a would-be wife who does not need any formal education to acquire home-making skills (Idris, 1996). The girl-child always loses out in favour of the boy-child, whenever a decision on who should be educated in the family is taken. Discussing some of the impediments to women (girl-child) education, Igwe (1994) postulates that in several cultures in Nigeria, women are second rated; only suitable for keeping the home and children; going out of their way to make the man happy even when they have to give up their rights and pleasures.

Early or forced marriages, misconceptions that educated girls will not be servile wives are also some of the factors that have contributed to making women 60% of the illiterates in Nigeria (Idris, 1996). According to Oloko (1998), some parents perceive their daughters as assets, who are forced to leave school for marriage. This disrupts the education of girls and limits their chances to participate in formal sector employment. Consequently, a high percentage of women's employments concentrate within the lower levels of the unregulated, informal sector. The disparity between the young bride and her much older husband increases the probability that she will become a widow at relatively young age.

The Nigerian constitution of 1999 permits both male and female Nigerians to own and acquire movable and unmovable assets. In spite of this, a large percentage of women in Nigeria are still barred from owning land by customary laws of inheritance. Land, which is considered the highest asset in Ibibio culture and several other cultures in the southern part of Nigeria, is never inherited by a woman. If a woman must own land at all, she must buy and should she become a mother, at death, her son inherits the land. In some other cultures like some places in Anambra and Enugu States of the South eastern part of the country, a woman is never permitted to buy land. There are unspoken traditions that the seller would never accept to sell his piece of land to a woman. Even in cases of house rent, a woman finds it comparatively more difficult to bid and rent an apartment of her own. She would need to pass through a male relation and/or counterpart to front the negotiation for her.

Female children are expected to grow up and get married out of their family of origin. In some families in Ibibio, one of the tribes in Akwa Ibom State, South-south Nigeria, formal educational training used to be given to male-children only. The erroneous reasoning behind this is that it is only the male children who will 'carry' the family's name to the next generation whereas female children, if trained, will, on marriage, transit to their husbands' families to enjoy with them, leaving their biological family. In place of inheritance, a female is given material things like cooking utensils and other moveable assets. It must be observed here that most of these gifts are perishable and may not last a lifetime. It is expected that the girl-child will achieve fixed assets through the portion inherited by the husband.

These considerations in themselves introduce superiority between the genders. To gain access to land, the woman is given only on trust for cultivation purposes only. This would be given to her, depending of course on how agreeable she is to the rightful owner of the piece of land. As a wife, she must be submissive 'in all respects' even at her expense for the husband to apportion a piece of land for her. As a sister, she must plead to her brothers in addition to the above-referred submission. This singular phenomenon subjects the female gender and dictates a role, which is comparably inferior to the male gender in the society.

The relative status of each gender in society offers ingredients for child-rearing tendencies. Fathers enjoy inheritance, power of decision-making, relative authority and ownership of the family's wealth, irrespective of the initiators and contributors. The mother suffers subjugation. She only enjoys the family's wealth as a partner and can hardly be a sole proprietor, even when she is the initiator and sole contributor. Her decisions must always pass through a 'clearing house' before implementation.

With these at the background, fathers and mothers have differing approaches to rearing boys and girls. Towards the boys, the anxiety of parents is that of being able to continue the family and lifting it to a higher height than that achieved by his father. Towards the girl, the anxiety is her achieving high moral standards so that she could be married in the first instance. Should she be married, for her to be able to support herself and her children or should her husband be found unable to do this.

Relative Standing of Different Genders on Poverty Scale

While espousing the effect of resource exploitation, women in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, Ekpo and Obinaju (2003) write,

Resource exploitation may not be multinationals and other companies, which produce goods and services in the Niger Delta region alone. Even in the family circles, resource exploitation generates effects on women. The mere fact of the woman's labour extorted in family business where she does not have direct control of the resources is exploitation on her part. For instance, she spends more time and labour growing both food and cash crops. She smokes and markets fish; she gathers and transports yams and other farm products to and from farm and markets but when sales are made, the proceeds go to the husband.

This view directly paints the picture of a woman as the 'family slave'. She toils but has no direct control. There is no wonder if the average woman is much poorer than the average man in the society. With increasing intensity, women are the beast of burden in the society. They form the higher percentage of workers on agricultural farms, building sites and domestic arena. Their work is less priced and they are relatively less paid. According to FGN (2006:7),

Women are responsible for carrying out 70% of agricultural labour, 50% of animal husbandry related activities and 60% of food processing activities. Despite the integral role that women play in the agricultural sector, their contributions are not valued or recognized, nor are they reflected in the National Accounting Systems or given prime considerations in agricultural policy processes. Consequently, the issues and concerns of women employed in the agricultural sector have been largely overlooked in programmes dedicated to improving agricultural productivity. Women have access to less than 20% of available agricultural resources a serious impediment to their maximizing agricultural

production. Men are generally presumed to be the chief actors in agricultural production and, as such, are often the main participants in and/or recipients of programme-related support.

Obinaju (1995), while discussing equity in students' admissions in African Universities states:

Power differential between the man and the woman in the traditional setting does not accord the woman the right to question when she has been unjustly treated. Decisions which affect her are sometimes taken without consulting her. Indicating her interest to participate in the decision of issues affecting her is often interpreted as an insult, thereby further subjugating her to subordination. This subordinate position does not in the least favour achievement of high goals....

Rural and some urban families have evolved a new form of family operation where feeding of the household is zoned primarily to the woman because she would not bare the sight of her child crying because of hunger. Men use their income for such visible contributions as building of houses, purchase of bicycle/cars and the like. These they claim ownership to and at the slightest dispute, the woman is denied the right to these assets. These practices conspire to make the woman relatively poorer with these equity issues still arise.

Physical and Health-related Issues

In jobs requiring high risk and enormous energy, the biological composition of a woman may not pre-dispose her favourable for these. This includes such professions like the military, welding and masonry. The woman would naturally evade these professions. She would prefer professions which demand less energy and less risk. Equity in terms of numerical distribution would therefore not be achieved.

Participation in Politics

Gender has become an issue of great concern particularly as it concerns women in Nigeria, in spite of the fact that women constitute about 50% of the total population in the Nigerian society, according to the 2003 census political climate and unfolding events during political campaigns and elections. Tugger, use of dangerous weapons, kidnapping and the like usually perpetuated by men do not create conducive enabling environments for women to participate in politics and governance. It is generally accepted that success should be achieved through hard work and competition but as Umoh (2004) pointed out, patriarchy has made it impossible for the 'other sex' to

compete favourably with men. The percentage of women in high contestable political offices in Nigeria is still very negligible and unacceptable.

On March 8, 2010, while commenting on the International Women's Day and the significance of this to global development, on radio, it was commented that the agreed platform for women 30% representation -in Beijing, 1995, had been achieved in countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Kenya and Mozambique. Nigeria was said to have only 8% of women representation when Chairmen of Local Government Areas, members of the State and National Houses and the Senate are considered. This surely does not speak equity. Equity would be sensed, if women did not have the wherewithall in terms of intelligence to legislate or they are not sufficiently educated to do so. In fact, 30% does not represent an equitable distribution and representation of women, especially when the world's population is taken into consideration, men and women. Let one believe that the United States conferences to review this later in the year will consider a more equitable representational percentage.

Be that as it may, what contributes a challenge is the way women have accepted whatever has been prescribed for them with no impetus to improve on it. Looking at the number of women who vied for election in comparison to men, the number is still quite negligible.

Legislation and Implementation

Legislations in any country are expected to exemplify equity. When property bought by a man (husband) is sold by the man, it is normally not questioned. On the other hand, when property is sold by a woman, such a question as this arises: *I hope she is not selling the family's property*. What this means is that she (female) does not own any property. Anything acquired by her immediately becomes the family's property. The only right to ownership which is ascribed to her is when she is single and immediately she is married, all other assets acquired by her or brought into that marriage by her cease to be hers and become the "family's property". One therefore doubts whether there is equity in this development.

These inheritance and customary laws which derive from patriarchy are normally quoted and sustained. In contemporary times, one wonders if it is not time for all non-equity customary laws to be reviewed.

So much noise has been made about the Nigerian Police not allowing a woman to bail. Today, they would not want to be quoted so they do not expressly tell one to bring a man but they would dribble one until *you know what to do*. Obviously, till today, no accused person is released on bail to a woman, no matter how highly placed the woman is. Again, gender equity is queried.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and her endorsement notwithstanding, the nationality and citizenships of children are still determined along patriarchal line. This still skews line of authority towards the male and leaves the female line increasingly powerless. With this arrangement, one is increasingly in doubt if equity would ever be achieved.

It would be imagined that there would be appropriate legislation in favour of gender equity after several massive international and prolonged campaigns since 1975 when the first International Women's Day was celebrated by the United Nations. Since then, several other themes have been used as guides to campaign for equity and equality between genders.

- 1975: First IWD celebrated by the United Nations.
- 1996: Celebrating the past, planning for the future.
- 1997: Women at the Peace table.
- 1998: Women and Human Rights
- 1999: World free of violence against women.
- 2000: Women uniting for peace.
- 2001: Women and Peace: Women managing conflicts.
- 2002: Afghan Women today: Realities and Opportunities.
- 2003: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals.
- 2004: Women and HIV/AIDS.
- 2005: Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a more secure future.
- 2006: Women in Decision-making.
- 2007: Ending impunity for violence against women and girls.
- 2008: Investing in women and girls.
- 2009: Women and men united to end violence against women and girls.
- 2010: Equal rights, equal opportunities, progress for all.

Despite these, there has been minimal improvement on the status of women.

Gender Violence

The gender issues discussed so far in this paper continually boosted the male ego such that any attempt of the "other gender" at assertiveness is misunderstood, frowned at and almost always punished. In the home, it is no news when a husband beats up the wife. The only news that can ever be would be when a wife beats up the husband. Domestic rape is viewed as non-existent as the wife is expected to yield at all times and at all cost to the sexual demands of the husband. She is not expected to complain, refuse or reject advances. Under the context and rationale for developing

the National Gender Policy, it is stated that violence against women particularly domestic violence and rape is wide spread and has increased the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS. It continues that another major violence against women is the insalubrious attitude of wife beating and women trafficking. The underlying force behind behaviour is the wrong believe that women are inferior and are supposed to be treated as second class citizens in the society (FGN, 2006).

On streets, it is common sight for young boys/men to touch/hold a girl he admires even if he has never met her. Should the girl rebuff such touch/hold, comments of passers-by would frown at her reaction. The situation is worse in markets. In a country like Ethiopia, a beautiful girl is abducted, disvirgined and a message sent to the parents, especially where the male (husband to be) suspects that he may not be accepted by her family. He does this because he knows that once disvirgined, she has to marry him or no one else. These occurrences take place because of the physical advantage a man/boy has over the woman/girl. Non-equity in strength is translated to non-equity in right to decision over self. This should not be in a circumstance where mutual respect is advocated and protected. Gender violence has permeated the fabrics of the society such that younger females have accepted some aspects of this as a part of the culture. These are only but few examples in issues of gender equity in Nigeria as an example of a developing economy.

Impending Factors to Gender Equity in Developing Countries

- (I) Differential in authority between men and women even as father and mother;
- (ii) Continual institutionalization of laws which maintain women in relative position of poverty and inferiority;
- (iii) Discriminatory child-rearing practices and education;
- (iv) Tuggery and rigging invaded politics in these countries;
- (v) Unnecessary intimidation and exploitation of women by rape, wife battering and impolite words, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and the like;
- (vi) Unspoken male preference;
- (vii) Messages from the pulpit.

The Way Forward

On the whole, legislation is recommended against all discriminatory traditional, social, political and legal practices against women. FIDA has always provided a

platform for litigation against unlawful acts against women. Members have also been one of the voices advocating equity between men and women but the battle is far from being won.

Non-governmental organizations such as Women in Nigeria (WIN) and Women Aid Collective (WAC) continually enlighten the women on issues of rights and equity as their own contribution to making women assertive towards improved status but the battle is still not won.

The Ministry of Women Affairs has been established nationally and in every state of the federation in Nigeria. This ministry is expected to coordinate the activity of women, advocate as well as defend the cause of women. This is a step in the right direction for other developing countries to emulate. However, the machinery within this ministry should be more proactive towards achieving gender equity than what obtains at present.

Most importantly, developing countries are essentially very religious. Pastors, Imams and other religious leaders need to be enlightened towards the values of achieving gender equity. These should be the target because their words appear to be sacrosanct even among women religious organizations. When they are properly enlightened, lobbying to build elements of gender equity into their message would go a long way at reaching the grass-root men and women.

Affirmative action from Beijing 2000 has given gender equity a boost. A more proactive affirmative action is expected in September 2010 when women from all over the world would be meeting in Washington. The first step to take is to pressurize United States of America (USA) to sign the CEDAW. This country which seems to be quite liberal and to a great extent gender sensitive has never had a woman president and until 2010 has not yet endorsed the CEDAW. This is assumed to be a wrong signal. Recognizing that many developing countries look forward to America and in particular the USA as a big brother and mentor, their tendencies should be watched. Washington should pressurize USA to sign and implement the CEDAW as a first step and other affirmative actions can follow.

All actions by the government, non-governmental organizations and Faith-based organizations towards ensuring that the gloomy picture painted above is addressed should be fast-tracked so that gender equity could have a positive boost.

Conclusion

In this discussion, the paper has been able to throw light on what constitutes gender equity, developed and developing economies, issues which highlight gender equity or disparity in developing countries. Finally, the paper summarized factors which impede gender equity in developing countries. As a way forward, legislation has been seen as a step in the right direction but above all, correct equitable implementation of the various clauses in the legislation. There must be continuous and concerted mobilization by all men, women and children to ensure that gender equity has a positive boost as the world stands to gain greatly from this. GENDER EQUITY IS THE ONLY WAY OF SECURING A DEVELOPED FUTURE.

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