

# Gender Equity and Equality: A Crucial Role for Africa Moving Towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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**Abstract:** Gender is social differences between men and women that influence their roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and needs of women and men in a society, community or social group. Gender equality involves women and men have equal power in life. Gender inequality is caused by socio-cultural, educational, economic, biological and religious factors and all these factors are still very prevalent in Africa. There is a gap between women and men in Africa in terms of access to resources such as land, capital, knowledge and technologies that could boost their agricultural activities and enhance their productivity thereby solving the problem of food security, self-reliance and independence in life. The income generated from access to fundamental assets can be reinvested on food, school expenses, clothing, fuel and overseeing family health. Violence against women and girls make them to be more vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV and AIDS, maternal death and child trafficking can be controlled when women and girls actualize their rights which influence their decision making in the households, communities and society. The involvement of women in political processes helps in achieving sustainable peace, democracy and prosperity of the nation. Women are custodian of indigenous knowledge for the management of natural resources including forest and their products thereby enhancing biodiversity. Gender-based discrimination affect employment rate among women increasing the poverty level in Africa. The transition from Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an important process that can be achieved in Africa through gender equality that would promote unity for sustainable development. This paper takes a cursory look at the meaning and concept of gender, gender equality, gender inequality, gender and associated issues under the MDG's and the journey so far, expectations under the SDG's particularly in areas of empowerment and development issues etc. Suggestions and recommendations are made for various national governments, individuals as well as other corporate institutions alike.

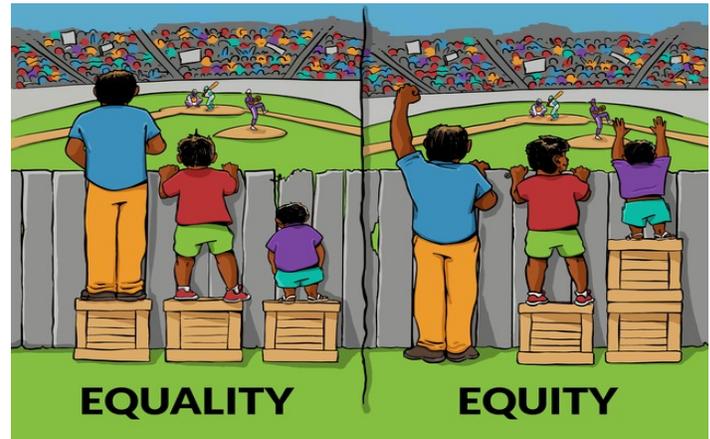
**Keywords:** Gender, Gender equality, discrimination, biodiversity, Sustainable Development Goals etc.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Concepts of Gender Equity and Gender Equality in Africa

Gender equality ensures that different behaviour, aspiration and needs of women and men are considered valid and favoured equally. Gender equity ensures fairness of treatment for women and men according to their needs though different but considered equivalent in terms of rights benefits, obligation and opportunities (ILO, 2000). Gender equity is a practice and way of

thinking that will help in achieving gender equality.



Equality = Sameness

GIVING EVERYONE THE SAME THING → It only works if everyone starts from the same place



Equity = Fairness

ACCESS TO THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES → We must first ensure equity before we can enjoy equality

**Figure 1. Source: Equity image credit: please note, this image was adapted from an image © 2014, Saskatoon Health Region**

The above graphic illustrations clearly depict what gender equity and equality mean. The opportunities provided in the two illustrations better defines what the two concepts mean in our daily lives. There is gender gap in education, improved health, politics emancipation, labour force participations. In Africa, the rights of women and children are recklessly violated

which leads to frustration, apathy violence and lopsided development and underdevelopment (NPC and UNICEF, 2001). Sub-Saharan Africa has more legal gender-based restrictions than Asia and Pacific, European and Central Asia (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2013; Gonzales et al., 2015). Africa lost up to \$ 105 billion

from gender gaps in labour markets alone, African women themselves have uniform outlook on gender relations, patriarchy and ways to improve their situation (Kimari et al., 2014). Equalizing access to education, health services, rights, labour forces, reduction in discrimination, and active involvement in politics will end gender gap thereby promoting sustainable development in Africa.

Agriculture is the backbone of Africa's economy, providing 70% employment (with women playing significant role and constituting up to two-third of the work force, women farmers have less access to farm inputs such as land, credit, fertilizer extension services and new technologies thereby making yields significantly lower than those of male farmers (AGI, 2015). Apart from agriculture, women spend more of their time caring for others than men thus suffering a greater deal of time with men having more leisure time than them. The men also invest more resources in themselves while women give priority to other (World Bank, 2001).

Women are interested in taking cares of family needs spending on chunk purchasing convenience goods while men's incomes are deployed for capital goods (World Bank, 2001). Women experience barriers such as restrictions on women's ability to access institutions (such as getting an ID card or conducting official transactions owning or using property building credit or even getting a job (Klugman, 2005). Gender equality in the workplace is the respecting of maternity right and reproductive right of women (Fawcett Society, 2012). The

almost 6% of all production (Lusigi, 2018).

employer always asks women to sign formal or informal document stipulating that they will not get pregnant or face legal punishment (Lawn 202/2002 Romanian Law). Women often face severe violations of their reproductive rights at the hands of the employers and international labour organization classified forced abortion coerced by the employer as Labour exploitation (ILO, 2017). Fifteen countries still have laws under which women are required to get their husband's consent to work including eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Female labour force participation is lower in countries with more restrictions on working hours and the types of industries women can work in women participation is 10 percent the women point higher in countries with laws that mandate non-discrimination in hiring. The law is important for level the playfield informal employment and broadening women economic opportunities (World Bank, 2013).

In a broader sense, this paper takes a cursory look at gender in relation to developmental initiatives economically, politically and socially. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed by the United Nations after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were found not to really capture the essence of the goals they were set up. There are 17 goals with 169 targets. The SDG no 5 specifically addresses gender in a broader sense. It states: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The targets include:

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.

- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

We should learn at individual, community, local and national levels to put the rhetoric into real practice and in measurable ways. The full realization of the women rights are mentioned in every forum but how well are they implemented in all levels of our government from homes to the national level?

Women do 2.6 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. While families, societies and economies depend on this work, for women, it leads lower earnings and less time to engage in non-work activities. In addition to equal distribution of economic resources, which is not only a right, but accelerates development in multiple areas, there needs to be a fair balance of responsibility for unpaid care work between men and women.

Sexual and reproductive rights are critical in their own right. Shortfalls in these multiply other forms of discrimination, depriving women of education and decent work, for example. Yet only 52 per cent of women married or in a union freely make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care.

While more women have entered political positions in recent years, including through the use of special quotas, they still hold a mere 23.7 per cent of parliamentary seats, far short of parity. The situation is not much better in the private sector, where women globally occupy less than a third of senior

and middle management positions (UN Economic and Social Council (2017).

## 1.2. Gender Issues and Political Emancipation in African Countries

Political emancipation and political participation are two vital concepts which are fundamental and democratic sustainability. Quoting the works of Igwe (2002), Osimen Goddy Uwa et al (2018) indicated that political participation, is the degree and forms of involvement of the people in governance and related institutions of society, such as the economy and culture. In its active sense, it involves participation in political campaigns and debates, attending caucus or strategy meetings of political parties, voting during elections, standing as candidates for elections, and holding of government and party posts. These are both intrinsically related in that the extent to which women are politically emancipated – defined on terms of freedom and removal of obstacles to access to political right (Oni, 2014). The higher the level of women participation in politics and ultimately this has implication for their democratic sustenance and development. African women struggle in their relationship to the wider context of political, economic and social, change in the continent and seek to determine how economic and political forces shape women protest, this is including the resources, activities, modes of organization, the objective and claims the tactics, the discourages, farming and identify and the outcome of women mobilization.

For instance, South African women protested for better living condition in Polls

moor prison, they also contested the racial prison; they also contest at the racial class and gendered system of discrimination and oppression under apartheid (Scott, 1990). The Senegalese women fight against illegal boat migration, they also speak out against polygamy and their spouse failure to provide for family expenditure (Bouily, 2016).

Aba women riot of 1929 in Eastern Nigeria was among early efforts at women emancipation in Africa (Amadi and Amadi, 2015). In Ghana like most African women Ashanti women have always been farmers, traders and politically active citizens controlling a network of market systems including one of the largest markets in Africa, Kumasi market with a trading population ranges between 15,000 and 70,000 (Amadi and Amadi, 2015).

The issue of gender and political emancipation of women are central to Africa at the dawn of the 21st century. The key historic moment was the election of a female president in Liberia Ellen Sir leaf Johnson as the first African female president in 2005 which seemed to enliven the hopes of women in top government positions (Amadi and Amadi, 2015). Women representation in Africa has increase from 10% to 17% while growth rate in some countries such as Nigeria remains stunted. In Burundi, there is 30% quota for women representation in the constitution while there is 50% local government (Igbuzor, 2014).

The women's movement has been able to build consensus around key issues of importance to women such as rights to livelihoods and economic empowerment, access to decision – making, reproductive

rights and health, non-discrimination and the critical importance of peace. In addition, scholars, activists, community leaders, writers, thinkers, professionals, rural women and politicians who were part of a progressive women's movement have been able to create body of knowledge through activism on women's rights and gender equality (Fayemi Bisi-Adeleye, 2013). In 2016, a Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill was tabled, calling for the adoption of Temporary Special Measures to eliminate discrimination in political and public life. UN Women supported the Bill's passage in five States (Anambra, Ekiti, Imo, Kogi and Plateau) and is currently advocating, alongside partners, for its adoption at the National Assembly (Osimen Goddy Uwa et al, 2018).

In announcing the line-up of his new cabinet, Prime Minister Ahmed in 2018 told the Ethiopian Parliament: "Our women ministers will disprove the old aphorism that women can't lead." Contrary to this old aphorism, he argued, women can help fight corruption, reduce inefficiency, and bring accountability and fairness to government - and that is leadership. Ahmed's latest decision to fill 50 per cent of his cabinet with female ministers is an integral part of the transformative agenda he has set out during his inaugural speech on April 2.

In an Al Jazeera's editorial stance, Awol K Allo recently scholarly work reviewed the representation of woman in Afaan Oromo and Amharic aphorisms, two of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia, depict a shocking portrait of a deeply rotten culture that casts women in a degrading and

dehumanising light. A widely used Oromo proverb states "A woman can be tall but not knowledgeable". An Amharic proverb stays: "A woman does not know anything, but gives birth to a knowledgeable child."

There has been progress towards the equal representation of men and women in decision-making in the past ten years. According to statistics from UN Women, the percentage of women in parliament has nearly doubled in the last 20 years. As of January 2017, 10 women were serving as Head of State and nine were serving as Head of Government. Rwanda has, for over a decade, been topping the global list of countries with the most female political parliamentarians. That's mainly due to the country's legally set quotas, with the Constitution stipulating that at least thirty per cent (30%) of Deputies in the Lower House of Parliament must be women. Women in Saudi Arabia voted for the very first time in 2015 and were even allowed to run for public office.

So, are women better off staying home to cook and knit? Can they make decisions on what is right for their home, or on a bigger scale, nation? The latter is evident, with the past couple of strides serving as defining moments for women in the political sphere, with more of them stepping up and assuming key leadership positions.

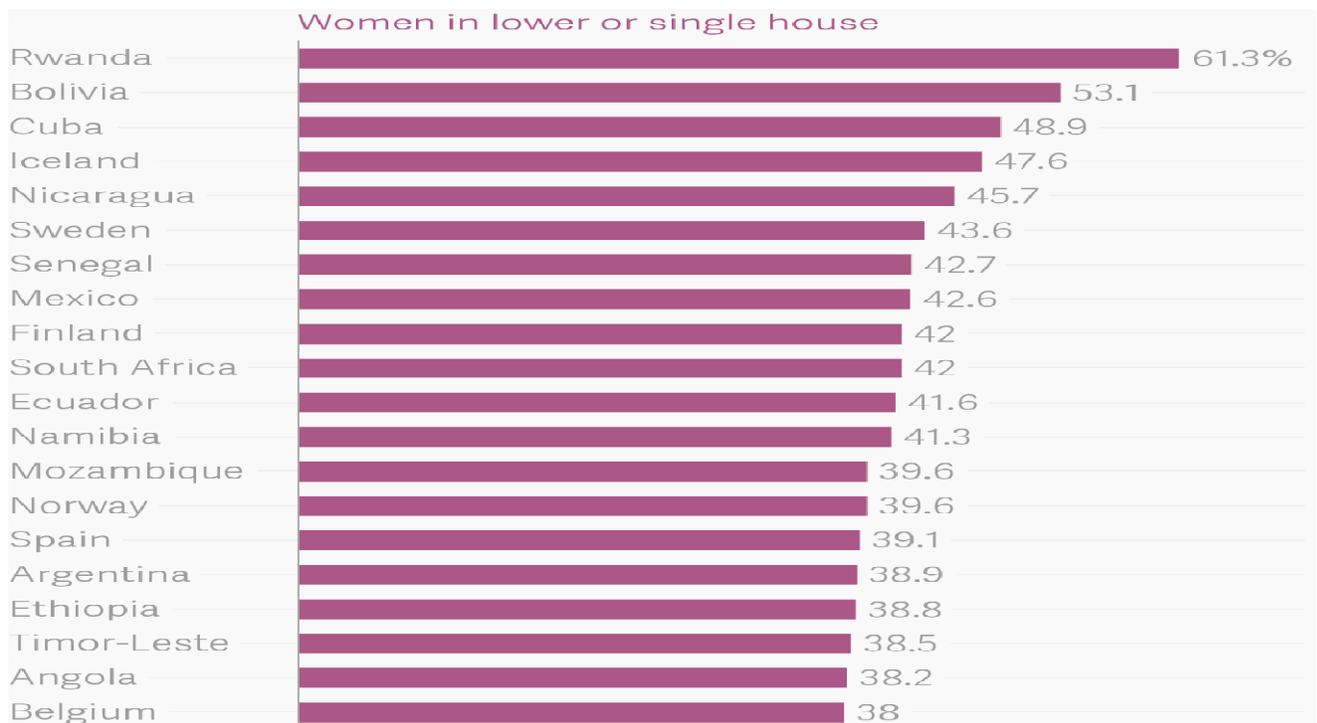
While some forms of discrimination against women and girls are diminishing, gender inequality continues to hold women back and deprives them of basic rights and opportunities. Empowering women requires addressing structural issues such as unfair social norms and attitudes as well as

developing progressive legal frameworks that promote equality between women and men. (Report of the Secretary-General, the

Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2018).

**Table 1. Distribution of females Elected between 1999 - 2015 in Nigeria (Adopted from Osinem Goddy Uwa et al., 2018)**

S/n	Position	No of available seats.	No. of women in 1999	No. of women in 2003	No. of women in 2007	No. of women in 2011	No. of women in 2015
1	Presidency	1	0	0	0	0	0
2	Senate	109	3(2.8%)	4 (3.7)	9(8.3%)	7(6.4%)	7(6.4%)
3	House of Representative	360	12(3.3%)	21(5.8%)	26(7.2%)	25 (6.9%)	19 (5.2%)
4	Governorship	36	0	0	0	0	0
5	36 States House of Assembly	990	24 (2.4%)	40(3.9%)	57 (5.8%)	68 (6.9%)	54 (4.6%)
Total		1532	28	67	94	99	80



**Figure 2: Countries With the highest number of women in parliament (Adopted from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/10/ethiopia-s-new-50-women-cabinet-isn-t-just-bold-it-s-smart/>)**

The Figure given in figure (2), depicts Rwanda is arguably the most pro-woman democratic country in the world and this is very evident in practice. In the parliament, for example, women hold more than half the seats.

### **1.3. Gender Based Discriminations and Barriers to Overall Development**

The type of discrimination women suffers make them to be at a disadvantage and thus give barriers to personal developments. Such barriers manifest from the home and extend into the larger society. Firstly, female gender suffers greater insecurity due to suppressed status and child trafficking labour and prostitution, inadequate facilities, poor representation in governance and inadequate access to microcredit, right issues and disinheritance.

Women are deprived and assumed to be adult; they experienced suppressed status by their male counterpart. Women find it difficult to bail people from police custody without male consent (Merritt, 2006). Traditionally since female child is often release to help with house chores in a relations household to hiring the child at exorbitant rate to foster parents, who in turn, subject the slave girl to labour or prostitution and child trafficking (NPC and UNICEF, 2001).

In addition to, change complex socio-cultural economic and political environment in Nigeria conspire to deny females access to certain right that foster development. This right issues and disinheritance whereby, the basic right of women and girl children to human dignity denied through cultural practices such as female genital mutilation

(FGM) harmful widowhood practices, forced marriage early marriage, physical and emotional abuse by husband and males.

Sexual harassment at home and workplace is another problem that women have to contend with (NPC and UNICEF, 2001). Furthermore, women do not have adequate health facilities in some places including antenatal care birth attendance and family planning service women and children are more susceptible easily preventable and communicable diseases due to ignorance, poverty, inability to act and take decisions without men consent (Eneh and Nkamnebe, 2011).

Moreover, women are poorly represented in governance as a result of traditional belief and cultural practices. Women are excluded from decision making and their interest are not often presented (Eneh and Nkamnebe, 2011).. Besides, women in rural areas are characterized by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of social and economic amenities and subsistence which prevent their access to microcredit (Eneh and Nkamnebe, 2011, Lopez-claros (2008) opined that the economy is not only a function of inadequate level of available finance but more dependent on our ability to tap into a society's reservoir of talents and skills.

There are some forms of traditional and religious issues which suppress developmental initiatives of women. In some African societies, it is abnormal for women to lead in any organisation. In the Muslim world, women are barred from carrying out so many functions in the society. A good example is driving of cars.

In Saudi Arabia, it is just of recent that women are allowed driving rights in the cities.

## **2. SDGS AND IMPLICATION FOR GENDER AND WOMEN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

Africa is the only region in the world, where the absolute number of “missing” women has actually increased over the last two decades, large rates of maternal deaths and poor water, sanitation and health service (World Bank, 2012). Women are more likely to work in less productive sectors, less profitable areas, in low-wage or unpaid family employment or in the informal wage sector (World Bank, 2012). Women development in Africa is crucial since it affect the overall wellbeing. The development is concerned with societal wellbeing in terms of access to safe water, rate of poverty access to health services, access to sanitation, life expectancy at birth, infant and maternal mortality rate, population estimate, and the process of achieving transformation of the society, adult illiteracy, population estimate and gross domestic product (Worldbank, 2001).

The empowerment of women is needed in so as to narrow the gender gap and establish a level playing field between men and women for gender equality to be reached and maintain (UNECE, 2012). According Osagi (2001) an empowered women possess a sense of self-worth has the capability to define her own choices, has access to resources and a wide array of opportunities she can pursue as well as being able to persuade the direction of social change to

fashion a more just economic and social order locally and internationally.

According to UNDP (2013) it is acknowledged that significant progress has been accomplished on many Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) such as poverty reduction, decrease in infant and child mortality and on education but inequalities in varied dimension including extensive environmental degradation, economic crisis with gender based inequalities being perceived as retarding progress on many development goals.

Sustainable development goals are universal in character which incorporates a range of key areas that were not fully covered in the millennium development goals such as energy, climate change that they reflect equally the economic, social and environment dimensions of sustainable development and the interconnections between them. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) came to an end in 2015 while progress has been made globally. Africa is off-track in achieving most of the targets, so the millennium development goals will remain relevant beyond 2015. The development of sustainable development goals should recognize the need for complementary with the Millennium Development Goals.

Furthermore, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa sustainable development encompasses the inter-linkages of the three dimensions of economic growth, social development and environment sustainability. The environment is considered the source of life and gives rise to economic activities which in turn sustain

social development. Without growth, there will be no social development.

Moreover, sustainable development tends to achieve a balance in interrelationships and three dimensions. Economic growth, therefore has to be environment-friendly and socially responsible economic growth to be sustainable efforts need to be directed to an efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, agricultural practices that are environment-friendly, renewable energy development less carbon intensive production of goods and services.

In addition, In Africa-North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa are identifying as key sub-regions are for sustainable development priorities. Since many women in Sub-Saharan African have little degree of control over household decisions or about how their earnings are spent targeting to intervene for women during the defining adolescent stage have the ability to prevent risky sexual behaviour, encourage girls to stay in school or engage in skill trained to combat gender inequality (World Bank, 2012).

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Various national governments particularly in Africa still believe in the traditions of keeping women from the fore of governance at all levels from the home up to the national level. This old idea should be discarded and reformed in line with affirmative actions passed at the United Nation meets. In summary, the followings are hereby recommended:

- Keeping women as labourers to fend for the family should be discouraged. By nature, women are hardworking and pleasant in ensuring that the family is cared for. This humble disposition should not be unduly abused.
- Ensuring appropriate implementation of legal regulatory and policy frameworks for critical building of women in decision making in politics and labour forces. More women should be encouraged to take leading roles in the communities all over the world.
- Right to good livelihood through reduction in insecurity of women due to inadequate facilities such as health and credit loan.
- Bad traditional vices of female genital mutilations should be discouraged. It is good news that some national governments have legislated on this.
- Self-worth among women will be promoted through women empowerment and judicious use of environmental resources for sustainable development.
- Inheritance rights of women should be guaranteed so that they can have access to properties of their parents and spouses after death. Inability to have access to these properties do affect their livelihoods and finance.

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