

RE-APPRAISING GENDER ISSUES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: TOWARDS A PARADIGM-SHIFT

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Abstract

The issue of gender has generated lots of arguments in the field of knowledge. The equality and inequality associated with gender is nothing but a social construct, not a biological or ontological construct. The social construct is a distortion of what the original meaning of gender is. Gender is an ontological state of being male or female. That is, that one is either male or female is an inherit imprint devoid of inequality. Gender in itself does not have inequality or discriminatory imports. In the work, the scholars, introduced a paradigm-shift that should see gender from its original components and characteristics. The humanness of human person that does not have inequality, discrimination or superiority of one sex over the other. But one that enthrones the transcendental nature of human person that is an end in his/her self, a value-laden being that shares complementarity in their nature. If gender is seen from the thesis we proffer, sustainable development is realizable within our world.

Key Words: *Gender, gender equality & inequality, gender education, gender curriculum, paradigm-shift, sustainable development.*

Introduction

Our world is a world of opposites. This is an existential fact. We talk of up and down; tall and short; good and evil; male and female; etc. When a child is born, the first question most people would ask is: what is the sex of the child? This question is designed to know whether the child is a male or female. Having discovered the sex of the child, the society then makes effort to socialize the child in accordance with the child's sex. It is the society that makes distinction between two sexes – male and female and assigns different roles to each. This is why it is said that a child is born with his/her sex but develops himself/herself in accordance with the roles the society assigned to the particular sex. This sex role is the basis for gender identity, gender differences or gender inequality that we experience in our society (Ejikemeuwa and Udoh, 2015) Every human person has identity, either male or female. This identity is inherent and has natural capability to develop toward that line. No matter the distinction society imports into gender, both sexes should be seen as one in partnership for sustainable development in the society. There is nothing in gender that suggests

equality or inequality. It is the state of being male or female. This is the paradigm shift the work undertakes to appraise.

General View of Gender

Gender as a concept has generated a lot of concern in the intellectual arena. The discourse has polarized scholars. The feminists are there, asserting themselves, the male chauvinists are also there making claims to support their stance. Whatever the left nor the right are there saying, either ways, both are there for promotion and development of society and in extension, the for sustainable development. Nevertheless, all the groups agree that gender is nothing but a state of being female or male with more emphasis on socio-cultural disparities as against biological or inherent imprints of both sexes. Gender is a socially articulated explanation of women and men. It is different from sex as a biological characteristics of women and men, and cannot be likened to only women. Gender is determined by ascribing or allotting tasks, duties and roles to either male or female in the society. For UN-Habitat (2003) in Chukwuma–Nosike, Okoro and Akaraonye (2015) says that gender refers to economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female. UNESCO (2016) considers gender equality as a fundamental human right, a building block for social justice and economic necessity. It is a critical factor for the achievement of all internationally agreed development goals as well as a goal in and of itself. Pope Francis (2015) added value to the above when he writes, the acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the father and our common home, whereas thinking we enjoy absolute power over our bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation... valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity, he further says, it is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference. According to Ametete and Ametete (2007), gender is a social construct that establishes and differentiates status and roles between men and women, particularly in the way they contribute to participate in and are rewarded by the economy and most social institutions. Eze (2010) in associating gender to role playing opines that, it is a socially assigned role for men and women, based on sex, as distinct from their biological functions. For us, gender is an ontological state of being man or woman. It is an appellation that distinguishes and identifies a man as man and a woman as a woman and does not have inherent equality or inequality in itself.

Gender inequality

It is evidently and existentially clear that one of the major forms of social inequality is gender inequality. By a simple definition, gender inequality has to do with unequal treatment given to a person or group of persons on the basis of being male or female. It is an outright discrimination because of the simple fact that one is a male or female (Ejikemeuwa and Udoh, 2015). Gender inequality is not in its strict sense fashioned to either male or female. The direct meaning or interpretation of the concept does not explicitly delineates marginalization or discrimination of women. This is because, we cannot say that men are immune from discrimination, even though, and seemingly now, it does appear that men are not discriminated against, we cannot guarantee that this may not happen in the future, at least, the future is not for us to see. It demonstrates then, ideally that gender inequality refers to unequal treatment of person or individual based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure and hormonal differences (Wikipedia,2014). Gender inequality stems from distinctions either empirically grounded or socially constructed. Gender inequality is the marginalization and discrimination that is more often directed to women, this does not mean that men cannot be discriminated. Therefore, gender equality should be the concern of all and there is

need to change our orientation on how we perceive it. However, this is not to say that men and women are evenly affected by gender inequality. It remains true that women have the greater share of disadvantages (medel, 2007) in Ekwuru 2015). For Giddens, Duneier and Appelbaum (2003:299) affirm that gender inequality is “the differences in the status, power, and prestige women and men have in groups, collectives and societies”. Gender inequality gives birth to gender discrimination, polarization and oppression of women. These deprivations and discriminations are inferred and sustained in our social matrix.

The vast majority of sectoral policies and service delivery system frequently fail to adopt gender sensitive approaches to address gender inequalities. In Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, women are denied their human rights. Systematic gender discrimination creates gender gaps which reinforces inequality between men and women. (Ekwuru, 2015). For us, gender inequality is a stratification naturally and artificially that separates male from female. The stratification naturally does not remove humanity shared by male and female. It is only of differentiation. That male is male biologically and female is female biologically. This should be seen as complementarity of both sexes. The artificial is the one imported into society to put undue advantage over one sex to another. It is the segregation of either male or female purposively orchestrated to demean, marginalized and discriminate the other for remote or immediate gains. What may be considered male-oriented in a clime may be female-oriented in another. To support our stance, Chafetz in (Ejikemeuwa and Udoh, 2015) validated it by saying that, the vast majority of the behavioural and psychological characteristics identified as masculine or feminine in a society are not innate aspects peculiar to gender. Chafetz, therefore argued that traits identified as masculine in one society may be feminine in another, and vice versa. Gender inequality is manifested in different forms which pose serious challenges to sustainable development.

Gender Equality

To discuss gender equality, it is pertinent we start by defining equality first. According to Ekpo (2014) equality means the same rights, responsibilities and status for all the members of a family, group or society.

Gender equality therefore is for Roberts (1994), refers to same rights, responsibilities and status for all humans. It means equal access to social goods, services, resources and equal opportunities in all sphere of life for everyone. Gender equality is conceived as a question of power distribution rather than equal access between the sexes. Gender equality, according to United Nation Children Education Fund (UNICEF) is affirmed as leveling the playing field for girls and women by ensuring that all children have equal opportunity to develop their talents. Gender equality is a basic human right which refers to the equal treatment of men and women with respect to their rights in legislation and policies, as well as in providing equal access to and control of resources and services within the family and society. While the world has achieved progress towards equality and women’s empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human rights, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, healthcare, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. While a record 143 countries guaranteed equality between men and women in their constitutions by 2014, another 52 had not taken this step. In many nations, gender discrimination is still woven through legal and social norms. Though goal 5 which is one of the 17 Sustainable Development

Goals, is the gender equality stand-alone goal-the SDG's can only be successful if women are completely integrated into each and every goal (UNN sustainable Development Goals).

Gender Stereotype

Gender stereotypes are simplistic generalization about the gender attributes, differences, and roles of individuals and/or groups. Stereotypes can be positive or negative, but they rarely communicate accurate information about others. (<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/...gender/>). On their part, Apakama & Amadi (2014) see stereotypes as something borne out of belief systems that are widely accepted as truth, but which are not supported by any empirical evidence. Most of these beliefs have been entrenched in the socialization process such that even the women tend not only to believe in them but become agents of their sustenance. Unegbe (2001) in Apakama & Amadi (2014) outlined some stereotypical reason for female exclusion. They include:

- a. A woman's place is in the kitchen
- b. Women are easily deceived
- c. Their arguments lack focus
- d. Marriage and childbirth reduce their availability.
- e. Women are harsh, selfish, rude and emotional.
- f. They are the weaker sex, subordinate to men
- g. Her advice should centre in the home front.
- h. They are child bearers and child rearers.
- i. Their roles are to take care of their family other extended family members. Furthermore, gender stereotypes reflect a societal duty, function, bond, obligation, engagement, responsibility or contract assigned exclusively to either men or women. Gender stereotypes are social and behavioural norms that are generally considered appropriate by a particular society for either male or female in any social or interpersonal relationship, the perception of which may include attitudes, actions, reactions, and personality traits associated with a particular gender within a given culture (Parcley, 2002) Gender stereotypes can be a perceived over generalization on ways a particular gender does things but not dependent on empirical evidence to substantiate it.

It is majorly believed that men or husbands are good providers of financial and other needs of the family more than the women or wives, but this is not totally true because there are good number of women that are better providers of family needs more than the men or husbands. Some earn two times of their husbands salaries. What is stereotype in one culture may not be in another culture. It is a societal labeling of duties to gender based on perceived characterization of an entire body of persons.

Gender Education

National police on Education (2004) defines education as a process of inculcation or a process of transmission of what is worthwhile to those who can be committed to it. Fafunwa (1989) in Offorma (2016) sees education as the human act of informing, forming and strengthening of the powers of the body and mind, a process for transmitting culture for the knowledge to ensure social control and guarantee rational direction of society. Fafunwa further added that the purpose of education is to develop attitudes, abilities and behaviours considered desirable by society. In line with the above thought, Offorma (2016) affirms that, education is a process for transmission, preservation and improvement of the culture of a people. It is a process through which human beings become morally good members of their society. Education helps individuals to realize their potentials and there by improve their society. Ofoegbu (2017) joining his voice opines that

education is the acquisition of new knowledge either formally or informally. It increases human's horizon on realities. Human being is a being endowed with the natural capacity to seek for knowledge and development by acquiring knowledge. NPE(2004:6) "Education is an instrument for national development." Developmental consequences of education is not predicated on gender. Male and female do not have inherent or ontological barriers to education. Seeking of knowledge is free and within the purview of any and everyone who desires it. Since education in itself does not put restriction, it presupposes openness, availability and accessibility to all gender. Gender should not and does not have right of deprivation of education to anyone. The basic function of education is to remove that which beclouds the mind from perception or reception of right knowledge. Ignorance, parochialism, gender discrimination, unreasoned tribal/cultural beliefs are some of the things that beclouded and veiled the mind. Whenever and wherever these things are manifestly prevalent, development is unrealizable. For a nation to grow, she has to put more premium on education. Education for male and for female. Education is an indubitable derive for socio-economic, politico-cultural rebranding of the society. The self-worth of every individual is enhanced by education. It is a key to success. The key to any poverty reduction plan is the rebuilding of humanity and social interaction through education. Our position is that, male and female should be seen as co-builders of national and international developments. Both should be given equal access to knowledge. Male and female have excelled in the field of their professions. This should be encouraged. Dozie and Njemanze (2013) supported thus, a fact of basic importance is that Nigeria is a developing nation and education in such an instance is a means to promote independence, self-sufficiency, and order. These can only be realized when issues of national development are not considered the man's prerogative or hinged on gender. Integration of women in development through education changes the graph of national development in this era from good to better and even best.

Gender Education Curriculum

To understand gender education curriculum, it is imperative we break it down by going to etymology of the word curriculum. What then is curriculum? It is from a Latin meaning which means "a race" or "the course of race" that is derived from the verb *currere* meaning "to run, to proceed". The first known use of the word curriculum in an educational context is in the *Professio Regia*, a work by University of Paris Professor Petrus Ramus Published posthumously in 1576. Curriculum is broadly defined as the totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process. The term often refers specifically to a Planned sequence of instruction, or to a view of the student's experiences in terms of the educator's or school's instructional goals (Wikipedia, 2016). Curriculum for us, is the all embracing teaching/ learning processes planned within specific time and period in realization of school's objectives and goals. Within that time-frame, the curriculum deciphers what to be learnt, why it should be learnt and to whom the studies is planned for.

Having articulated the meaning of curriculum. How then can we fashion out appropriate curriculum to accommodate gender? Good gender curriculum can bring about sustainable development, this makes it functional and functioning in the society and in particular school. According to Nwagbara (2009), designing an appropriate curriculum for gender education is a complex task that would involve active participation of all stakeholders in education. For learning to be meaningful, focused and complete, it would require the use and guidance of a curriculum. A well planned curriculum that will put the society in a progressive path of development, is that which does not lean hugely towards a particular gender. Little Wonder, Ehindero (1986) sees curriculum as a vehicle through which the school thrives towards the achievement of their education goals /ends, be them those of the nation state or local government. The afore said depicted the relevance of taking

gender education curriculum seriously. It should be a philosophy enshrined in all strata of the society and all tiers of school system. Since society is becoming boundless, gender should be boundless. No more special attention to a particular sex either male or female. The growth and sustainability of the cosmos depend on good gender curriculum. A curriculum that will emphasize equal opportunities for both male and female. That will show remarkable accomplishment of both gender in their fields. This will help encourage everyone that realization of dreams cannot be deterred by gender. The defeat is from self not gender. The gender education curriculum would be a document that would contain themes, subthemes and topics surrounding the learning contents, experience and activities that the learners need to know and understand about gender issue at each level of education.

The gender education curriculum should address gender issues such as the following:

- ❖ The meaning of gender.
- ❖ Features and characteristics of gender.
- ❖ Historical background and trend of gender issues/ education.
- ❖ The importance of gender education.
- ❖ The effect of gender activities in the socio-economic and political lives of the citizens / society.
- ❖ Meaning of concepts associated with gender such as gender discrimination, gender stereotyping, gender imbalance and balance, gender equality and inequality, gender misrepresentation, gender gap, gender abuse and gender disparity.
- ❖ Giving examples of each of the concepts in a peculiar societal situation.
- ❖ Theories of gender
- ❖ Identifying the differences existing between each concept.
- ❖ Man's roles /activities as they affect gender issues positively or negatively.
- ❖ Legislative acts and articles that support gender activities.
- ❖ The meaning of gender mainstreaming and interaction.
- ❖ Gender responsive models.
- ❖ Identify various agencies and their roles towards gender awareness.

The curriculum planners have the duty of identifying and developing activities and experiences around these major themes for the total benefits and development of the learners and the society. All these broad themes can be divided into sub-themes and topics putting all individual factors surrounding the learners into consideration. These factors include the age, class level, interest, level of maturity, socio-economic, cultural background and family background. Activities can be organized around these contents and learning experiences to take care of all learners at their different levels of education. The gender curriculum learning contents, experiences and activities should also be developed to reflect the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of knowledge for behavioural change towards gender issues for sustainable peace and development of all citizens. (Njoku, Uchechukwu & Ugwuozor, 2013) in (Chukwuma-Nosike, Okoro and Akaraonye, 2014).

The Notion of Paradigm-Shift

The idea of paradigm in post-modern discourse come into the fore mostly on account of the controversial idea of Thomas Kuhn's book: *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. Very contrary to the modern idea of the progress of science from hypothesis to experimentation to objective theories, Kuhn argued that "fundament shifts in theory are not simply logical modifications or reinterpretations of the past knowledge. Nor does scientists simply add one fact to another in mechanistic, objective sort of way". Scientific progress according to Kuhn arises from radical shift

on how scientists view the world. What we call progress is indeed as a result of paradigm shift. But a paradigm “is a social construction of reality”. It is in the word of Kuhn “the entire constellation of belief, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community.” To be more precise. “it is a belief system that prevails in a given scientific community at a given time in history”. Paradigms have enormous interpretative power, but they are never absolute. They are never able to explain everything. This Lacuna gives the opening for another attempt to adopt a new model of interpretation. It is in this shift, to a new model, that scientific revolution consists, and hence for Kuhn, scientific truths are ultimately social. (Kuhn, 1970 in Oguejiofor, 2010).

Further more, paradigm is a pattern that comprises all the noticeably agreed opinions or views about a concept, hypothesis, theory and how they will be carried out. When arrived at a new view, then there is a shift to another body of knowledge.

Re-appraising Gender Paradigm Shift for Sustainable Development

The philosopher, Thomas Kuhn was the first to use the term for science, suggesting that scientific research does not progress towards truths, but is subject to dogma and clinging to old theories. Revolutionary science, often questions the paradigm itself. Kuhn, originally believed that a paradigm would make a sudden leap from one to the next, called a shift, and he believed that the new paradigm could not be built upon the foundations of the old. (Explorable, 2016) We shall erect our edifice on the above foundation enunciated by Thomas Kuhn. The gender paradigm we are trying to establish is one that does not lean on either male or female; but the one that places or sees male or female as a human person, whose personhood in its ontological essence does have distinction or differentiation but not societal discrimination, or that sees the other less human and less contributor to the sustainable development of the society. The ontological nature of gender removes inequality. It gives equal value and respect to both sexes. The ultimate goal and purpose of the sociality of human person is the realization of personhood. This universal intent of person is the foundation for the actualization of his/her joy and development. Real happiness of human person is not tenable outside the realm of the society and this creates room for the accomplishment of his personhood. This gives credence to the social nature of human person. It follows then, that human sociality makes sense within the horizon of realization of the essence of personhood. This fertilizes the soil for the actualization of the purpose of the society social mobility, justice, equity process, and sustainable development.

The paradigm shift here is to place gender to its proper place. The proper place is on ontological perspectives, where everyone is equal, which is a self-evident truth. Equality or inequality is nothing but a worldview or ideological importation. To support this, Ejikemeuwa & Udoh (2015) wrote, one can say that gender inequality is an ideology, it is a kind of worldview that guides the way people think or relate in a particular society with reference to one being male or female. This observation implies that gender inequality is not innate. It is something we learn from our environment... the fact that one is male or female does not make one to be more human than the other. Both men and women share equally in the humanness of the human person. That is, both sexes share in the same substance of the human person. If both men and women share equally in the humanity of the human person, it therefore follows that, it is irrational to continue to talk of gender inequality since it constitutes a serious challenge to sustainable development. Lubac (1952) added that, the social nature of man (human person) is most deeply grounded, not in a utilitarian way in external dependence on others, but metaphysically in the essence of man (human person), which means wealth not poverty. Gender has ontological complementarity and simultaneity where human person helps each other to attain certain end and where there is no need to who comes first. Understanding gender from the point of view of personhood demonstrates the uniqueness of male &

female, unrepeatability and complete value every individual has, that when jointly harnessed will create unquantifiable sustainable development.

Any distortion or attack on personhood is an attack on gender. If anyone discriminates against person's gender, you discriminate against his personhood and this is a challenge to the uniqueness, unrepeatability of his/her being; and sustainable development. Aquinas added thus, "many people no longer want the word "person" to intend the uniqueness, unrepeatability, absolute value, and sacredness of the individual but wish to assign to this word (person) a merely sociological meaning. The above shows the superlative reality of individual person in the ontological realm. It is an indubitable fact which ab initio is prior to the society but ordained towards his/her society. The development and sustainability of the society is largely dependent on personhood –of- gender, seeing male and female as a complementary whole. Verveer (2012) in Ejikemeuwa & Udoh (2015) submits that sustainable development can be achieved only when women are given equal opportunity as men... society flourishes when women's leadership, creativity, and initiative are recognized, embraced and harmonized. Let every human action in respect to the other be seen as a universalize actions. Kant's categorical imperative becomes necessary here, "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (kant, 1959:39). If we employ this principle of universality by seeing gender in its original biological and ontological perspectives, where one action is seen as actions for all then sustainable development will be realizable.

Recommendation

- ❖ The dignity of every human person, that is not dependent on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, age, height or strength, is the foundation of the paradigm shift we advocate. Where no human-person's dignity, ability or liberty is discriminated against because they are female or male
- ❖ Gender should be seen from its biological and ontological essence and meaning. By this we mean, there is nothing in gender that innately suggests inequality or that one is more human than the other. It is nothing but a social construct that should be expunged from the society.
- ❖ Gender should be regarded as a gift entrusted to humanity by the Supreme Being or nature, and it is our duty to promote every aspect of it for sustainable development of the society.
- ❖ Provision of equal access to education to both female and male is necessary for sustainable development.
- ❖ Government, locally and internationally should see gender from its biologic-ontological stance by setting up skills acquisition centres where female and male can be trained to acquire skills that can make them functional and self-reliant in the society.
- ❖ Gender equality should be boldly enshrined in the curriculum from lowest level of education to the highest and in extension, the society in general. This is because, every human person is an end in his/herself. Equality is ontological gift.

Conclusion

The basic foundation of this discourse is to establish in clear terms that gender in itself does not portend inequality. The manner individuals comprehend or associate with one another can contribute towards the appreciation, maintenance and development of gender equality. Human person should not be seen from gender bias perspectives that portrays superiority of one sex over the other. It is biological as well as ontological gift of nature to female and male. The distinction and differentiation are inherent and doesn't discriminate but shows uniqueness of the sexes that work towards complementing each other in the sustainable development of the society. Male and

female share oneness of humanity, which demonstrates that human person is an end in his/herself, a transcendental value-being, whose nature of differentiation should be seen as a matter of identity; and that identity does not mean inequality or equality, superiority or inferiority, or one being more human than the other.

Identity is that which shows what a thing or person is. It is the totality of what constitutes a thing or a person that distinguishes it from the other. It shows individuality, singularity or self-sameness of a thing or a person.

Since gender is ontologically the state of being male or female we then advocate a paradigm-shift that should start seeing gender from personhood of both sexes. That gives equal rights to all, equal access to education and other social opportunities. Gender inequality is foreign to the nature of human person. It is nothing but a social-construct or world-view that is not built on rational and philosophical foundations. For sustainable development to take place, the above should be taken seriously.

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