WOMEN DOMINATION AND OPPRESSION IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT
The issue of gender discrimination has become a distinctive phenomenon all over the world. Nigeria is not left out of this discriminating infamy. There was a time in Nigeria when women were campaigning for an opportunity to perform their civic rights and this eventually led to the general rule of the thumb in any election that allows every adult regardless of tribe, sex or creed to vote and be voted for. Hardly are women seen or heard in policy-making or decision-driven processes but they are often being used as instruments of voting in the political planes and child bearing and rearing in socio-cultural settings. The study was premised on the liberalist feminist theory. As a theory of gender inequality, it argues that equality with men can be achieved through an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that the inequality experienced by women especially is a product of a sexist patterning of the division of labour, and that through the re-patterning of key institutions such as work and family, gender equality can be achieved. *The paper reviews the reasons for women domination and oppression in the society and its implications for sustainable development and the reasons are given as follows: colonization, past independence history dominated by military rule, patrilineal system of government, literacy levels of the women population and on. In all, this shows that gender disparity plays a major part in segregating the role of the woman as only domestic in nature in a sustainable development.*

INTRODUCTION

Seen as the age of innovation, many historical processes had been essentially structured more than five centuries ago. Racial and gender issues became a hot topic during this period as two fundamental axes for splitting societies and exploiting the populace (Oyewumi, 2004). The dominance of the male-gender as a key part of European ethos became enshrined in the culture of modernity. (Hammond and Jablow, 1992: 150). Taking a critical look at the African setting, the view that women could never be effective leaders was held by many men in Africa. This is presented as a situation where men lead and women follow. It illustrates the deeply held notion of leadership as masculine and the belief that men make better leaders than women. Many women are confronted with constraints at individual, institutional and societal levels and so make sacrifices in the effort to succeed, whether professionally or personally (Dhlomo, 2001). knowledge innovation has become a key factor for consideration worldwide.

The advent of colonialism brings about a non-conforming society which cuts across the traditional-religious beliefs of the African man, including gender perceptions. The woman's role was reduced only to domestic chores and commercial labour - satisfying the sexual needs of men, tending babies, carrying loads, working in the fields, and preparing food (Hammond and Jablow, 1992: 150).

The disempowering colonial "*ideology of domesticity*" as espoused by the practice of "*housewification*" provided the springboard for women's educational imbalance in parts of Africa (Gaidzwanwa, 1992). As such, the attainment of overall human development in Nigeria is being obliterated by this unevenness in educational accessibility across gender categories (Abdullahi, 2000).

In addressing gender in Africa, historical and cultural contexts are fundamental. The failure to consider context accounts for misconceptions of the relevance of feminism in many Black African societies, including the rejection of feminism by some African scholars. The diversity of feminisms is emphasized in contemporary gender scholarship; issues of identity, the diversity of women's experience, and difference have become determinants of feminist orientation (Okojie, 2002). This is partly as a result of many third world women calling for the acknowledgement of difference as an imperative for fully apprehending their gendered context.

The term Gender exists in every society. It consists of all the notions of male and female that exists in certain place at a certain time and all the consequences as regards who does what, who decides what, and how we, collectively and individually, perceive ourselves and one another. Ideas and stories about gender pervade our thinking and determine not only sexuality and family life but also the labour market. Gender is manifested at many levels: in the case of individuals, as an aspect of their own personalities; at the cultural level, in figures of speech, metaphors, categories; at the social level, as principle for organization of work and decision-making processes.

The moment a child at birth is identified as a 'boy' or a 'girl', brings along with it discriminatory tendencies of sexism, especially in some parts of Nigeria. While a baby girl is referred to merely as a 'baby girl', a baby boy is given an added or superior epithet as 'bouncing baby boy'. The only time there seems to be much celebration in the case of a baby girl is within the specific contextual situation of a couple who had remained childless for a long period or that of a couple who have had a series of male children without a female one, thus lacking completeness.

Human Rights and Gender Equality
The Nigerian society has been patriarchal in nature which is a major feature of a traditional society. (Aina, 1998). It is a structure of a set of social relations with material base which enables men to dominate women (Stacey 1993; Kramarae 1992; Lerner 1986). It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females. The patriarchal society sets the parameters for women's structurally unequal position in families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, by tacitly condoning domestic and sexual violence and sanctioning differential wages for equal or comparable work. Tradition or culture and religion have dictated men and women relationship for centuries and entrenched male domination into the structure of social organization and institution at all levels of leadership. Patriarchy justifies the marginalization of women in education, economy, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance (Salaam, 2003).

Gender equality also known as sexual equality or gender egalitarianism refers to the view that men and women should receive equal treatment, and should not be discriminated against based on gender, unless there is a sound biological reason for different treatment. The objective of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which seeks to create equality in law and in social situations, such as democratic activities and securing equal pay for equal work.

Gender equality is essential for the achievement of human rights for all, yet in all legal traditions many laws continue to institutionalize second class status for women and girls with regards to nationality and citizenship, health, education, marital rights, employment rights, parental rights, inheritance and property rights. These forms of discrimination against women are dissenting with women's empowerment.

In many countries, gender inequalities persist and women continue to face discrimination in access to education, work and economic assets, and participation in government.(Aina,2010) For instance:

- In every developing world, women tend to hold less secure jobs than men, with fewer social benefits.
- Violence against women continues to undermine efforts to reach all goals
- Poverty is a major barrier to secondary education, especially among older girls.
- Women or girls cannot inherit property or give evidence in court.
- Women are largely relegated to more vulnerable forms of employment and many other discrimination against women depending on cultural and social background.

Despite the pronounced commitment of the international community to gender equality and to bridging the gender gap in the formal political arena, reinforced by the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform of Action, women are highly marginalized and are poorly represented in political activities in Nigeria (UNDP Report, 2005).

Gender issues as a Social theory
Gender inequality can be institutionally specified (strictly structured) as an inequality of access to material and non-material social resources between the sexes, generating male privilege and domination and female subordination in society.

In the Feminist theory notion which is generalized as a wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a women-centered perspective. It is woman-centered in two ways. Firstly, the starting point of all its investigation is the situations ansd experiences of women in society. Secondly, it seeks to describe and critically evaluate the world from the destinctive vantage points of women. Feminist theory differs from most sociological theories in that it is the work of an interdiscinlinary community. Feminist sociologies seek to roaden and deepen sociological knowledge by incorporating discoveries being made by this interdisciplinary community.

The social theory of gender is being supported by the notion of social structure as historically constituted by social practice, this theory aims to account for gender relations in a way that is challenging and transforming mainstream social and political theory. Feminist theories rooted in such practice-based structural approaches to understanding gender have in this sense made 'feminism' academically respectable and women's subordination amenable to theory-based political strategy and action for change.

The notion that social structure is historically composed has implications for the possibility of different ways of structuring gender, reflecting the dominance of different social interests. It is in fact only in terms of such a notion that a political agenda for changing the status quo makes any sense. A social theory of gender with subversive intent must therefore be underpinned by such a concept of social structure. This notion of social structure, as the pattern of limitation on practice inherent in a set of social relations, is what is well known. Gramsci, Williams, Said and Foucault, for example, share the belief that 'a collective culture sets limits and exerts pressures on thought and action' (Cocks, 1989:40-2) through what Gramsci calls 'hegemonic forms of cultural organization' (Connell's 'structures') or what 'discourse theory' would call 'discursive forms' or 'discursive structures'. The gendered division of labor, for instance, can be counted as a social structure precisely because, operating as it does through institutional devices like the differential skilling and training of women and men, it excludes a whole range of job options to women: it limits or constrains their economic and other social practices in significant ways.

Skilling and training is just one of the institutional mechanisms by which the gendered division of labor is made a powerful structure of social restriction.

By making practice through institutions, it would appear that structure is not immediately present in social life but underlies the surface complexity of interactions and institutions. But this fails to capture the concept of practice as the substance of social structure (Connell, 1987:93). The idea of a sharp separation between underlying structure and surface practice must be overcome; a more active connection between structure and practice must be made.

Giddens could not agree more with Connell about the idea of an active presence of structure in practice and an active constitution of structure by practice. In fact, he long ago (1979) formalized this idea theoretically in his concept of the 'duality of structure', explaining this concept of duality in his more recent work (1986) as the 'double involvement' of institutions and individuals. He argues, *that to speak of institutionalized forms of social conduct is to refer to modes of belief and behavior that occur and recur, or as the terminology of modern social theory would have it, are socially reproduced across long spans of time and space... societies only exist insofar as they are created and recreated in our own actions as human beings... We have to grasp what I would call 'the double involvement' of individuals and institutions: we create society at the same time as we are created by it. Institutions, I have said, are patterns of social activity reproduced across time and space... It is very important indeed to stress this point. (Giddens, 1975).*

More properly, Giddens' 'duality of structure' refers to 'the essential recursiveness of social life as constituted in social practices: structure is both medium and outcome of the *reproduction* of practices. Structure enters simultaneously into the constitution of... social practices and "exists" in the generating moments of this constitution' (Giddens, 1975:5). Clearly, Giddens is making it a logical, definitional requirement of 'structure' that the practice that constitutes it is socially reproduced. Connell notions sharply differ here. 'By making the link of structure and practice a logical matter, a requirement of social analysis in general, Giddens's closes off the possibility that its form might change in history. This is the possibility raised... explicitly by the practical politics of liberation movements; its significance for the analysis of gender is evident' (Connell, 1987:94).

In addressing gender in Africa, historical and cultural contexts are fundamental. The failure to consider context accounts for misconceptions of the relevance of feminism in many Black African societies, including the rejection of feminism by some African scholars. The diversity of feminisms is emphasized in contemporary gender scholarship; issues of identity, the diversity of women's experience, and difference have become determinants of feminist orientation. This is partly as a result of many third world women calling for the acknowledgement of difference as an imperative for fully apprehending their gendered context. Whereas postmodernist feminism, a major aspect of the third wave of feminist theorizing, underscores diversity and difference, some African scholars have problems with other versions of feminism, especially radical feminism, which fail to acknowledge context.

The nature and condition of gender and gender theorizing in Africa continues to draw the attention of theorists, activists and policy-makers; it is imperative for sound scholarship to understand the plurality of values of which Africa consists, and to be located in history. The number of national, tribal and ethnic groups is as important as race, colonial experience, post-colonialism, neo-colonialism, apartheid, military rule, culture, tradition, religion, modernity and more recently, globalization. All these factors impact on African women's reality in particular ways, and have to be dealt with in any investigation of the interdependent relations of feminism, gender theory, gender relations and power constructs in Africa. The diverse historical

experiences of Africa continue to shape the perception of social realities, including gender - and thus the many ways gender and feminism is understood.

Tackling Gender Issues for Sustainable Development

Since the advent of colonialism in Africa, women have always been exposed to varying forms of discrimination due to the simple fact of their 'femaleness', which ought to have been understood on the basis of its mutual usefulness (Obbo, 2005: 22). It is observed that some African countries have not had specific laws or policies to stem the tide of gender inequality. However, the colonial hegemonic philosophy, dependent political ideology and identifiable socio-economic exigencies are seen as factors aiding the prevailing distinctions between men and women in our society (Adeniran, 2006: 45).

In the process of facilitating equality among gender group, and in measuring up to the mean record already attained by developed societies and some other developing societies, Nigeria needs to jump-start an affirmative action plan focusing on the transformation of the gender base mainstreaming. For instance, China and India, by themselves 38% of the world's population, have considerably realized most of the objectives of the MDG 3 targets i.e. gender equality and women empowerment (Sachs, 2004: 10).

Factors Responsible for Gender Imbalance
    1. Socio-cultural factors

Gender issue has been an offshoot of the socio-cultural climate in Nigeria society. The traditional social structures have been limited in their drive to balance the existing distribution of power between men and women. As observed by Nmadu (2000: 165), the Nigerian society (pre-modern and contemporary) has been significantly dotted with peculiar cultural practices that are potently hostile to women's emancipation, such as early or forced marriage, wife-inheritance and widowhood practices. Moreover, to Bhavani et al (2003: 5) such unequal social and gender relations needs to be transformed in order to take women out of want and poverty.

As daughters, self-identity as female with their mother and sisters, sons as males with their father and brothers, gender stereotyping becomes institutionalized within the family unit (Haraway 1991:138). Also, the dominant narratives of religion in both colonial and post-colonial Nigerian society indeed privileges men at the detriment of women. As such, our society remains entrapped in "history of analogy" whereby it is either eroticized, or simply represented as part of European history (Mamdani, 1996: 6-11). CEDAW articles (1979), therefore, acknowledging whatever socio-cultural norms that deny women equal rights with men will also render women more vulnerable to physical, sexual and mental abuse.

    2. Colonial factors

The colonial conception of gender arguably marginalized the womenfolk in favour of the men. Mama (1997: 69) accorded this to the fact that cultural imperialism viewed Eurocentric religion, morals and ideas as inherently superior to those of the aboriginals, with the resultant changes being noticeable in the relations of both sexes in the continent. She posited that imperialism obviously enabled the imposition of rigid pairings about everything, including gender perceptions, on our collective awareness as reinforced and upheld by the Christian and Muslim religions. Gaidzwanwa (1992) asserts that domestic education as enshrined in the ideology of "*housewification*" which was social engineering initiative designed to create 'suitable' wives for indigenous colonial employees' further disempowered women socially, and economically.

Subsequently, the colonial exclusion of women from most sectors of the formal labour market for the purposes of domestic works which were often times without benefits has been observed as one of the most unyielding factors responsible for the significant marginalization of the women folks in the contemporary African settings (Mama, 1997: 69-70). Indeed, the exclusively male, bureaucratic apparatus did away altogether with pre-colonial system; which clearly permitted women some level of political and economic participation (Meena, 1992: 1).

3. Political factors

Ake (1996:6) claims that the surrogate post-independence political elite deliberately weakened women organisations hitherto involved in active agitation for liberation by enhancing the militarization of the polity, and increasing the statism of the economy. As observed by Mama (1997: 71), gender blindness has meant that until recently the differential impact of colonialism on African men and women has not been taken into consideration.

Opaluwah (2007:5) however, opines that the coordination of gender advocacy based on indigenous patriarchal anxieties about meaningful gender equality, external pressure and western prescriptions has had far reaching consequences for the womenfolk. Our unbridled openness to western influence by the political leadership has equally worsened the dependency dilemma; with the west providing us with anything, but participative emancipation (Ake 1996: 9-10) e.g. the sapping effects of the SAP policy of 1986 on Nigerian women. Unlike the largely successful equity-driven NEP Development Plan (1971 – 1990) in Malaysia which ensured gender parity in school enrolments, rhetorism has been the bane of such programme in Nigeria. For instance, the New Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy {NEEDS), projected to draw inspiration from the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)'s gender parity principle – Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004). According to Oyekanmi (2005: 159), in respect of Nigeria, the enabling laws and programmes to achieve the objectives of NEPAD are not yet in operation.

 However, the last decade has witnessed a relative increase in women's participation. This is only when we measure increase in participation with certain standards like the number of women who vote in elections; the number of public offices held by women; number of women related policies implemented by government etc. Over the years, there has been a remarkable increase in women's participation in politics in Nigeria considering these standards, yet there is inherently a pronounced level of under representation of women in politics when compared with their male counterparts (Nkechi, 1996). The aspiration of women to participate in governance is premised on the following ground – women in Nigeria should be allowed a fair share in decision-making and the governance of the country since they represent half of the population. Secondly, women possess the same rights as men to participate in governance and public life since all human beings are equal. The right to democratic governance is an entitlement conferred upon all citizens by law.

4. Economic factors

The economic sector of our society is a scenic panorama of discrimination against women. According to the CEC report (2007), the role of women in employment and economic activities is often underestimated because most women work in the informal sectors, usually with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection. It observes that the female labour force in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 was about 73 million, representing

34% of those employed in the formal sector, earning only 10% of the income, while owning 1% of the asset. Women are more likely than men to work in informal employment (UN Women, 2015).

Nigerian women, like their counterparts, around the world, face a lot of discrimination that limit their opportunities to develop their full potential on the basis of equality with men. They are far from enjoying equal rights in the labour market, due mainly to their domestic burden, low level of educational attainment, poverty, biases against women's employment in certain branches of the economy or types of work and discriminatory salary practices. More women than men work in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs (ILO, 2012). As of 2013, 49.1 per cent of the world's working women were in vulnerable employment, often unprotected by labour legislation, compared to 46.9 per cent of men. In some establishments women are not allowed to get married or pregnant because it is thought that it will reduce their productivity and of course profit. Some women particularly the young ones are only employed as long as they are ready to use their bodies to woo customers for their business organizations. Salaam (2003) described this as "corporate prostitution". Women are mostly involved in farming and food processing. They do not have access to land except at the instance of their husbands and brothers. Women also have limited access to agricultural inputs, seeds, credits, and extension services (FAO, 2011). Women tend to be disadvantaged, because when compared with men, they do not have access to obtaining credit facilities and so are rarely engaged in the production and marketing of lucrative cash crops, such as cocoa, which tends to be a male preserve. The legal protection granted by the constitution and the Labour Act has little or no effect in the informal sector – agriculture and domestic services where the vast majority of women are employed.

However, the denial of women's inheritance and land rights has made their economic participation considerably constrained and by implication, their educational aspiration (Nmadu, 2000: 166). To Eade (1996), such government's macro-economic policies like liberalization of petroleum sector and removal of subsidies e.g. on fertilizer, have always created distortions, in spite of strides women (rural dwellers) make in self-reliance. To this end, Ake (1996: 53) believes that the contradictions between the latent and manifest functions of public have often been the bane of all emancipatory agenda in Nigeria.

5. **Educational factors**

Education is said to be a vehicle that break the shackles of poverty thereby leading to transformation, development and progress (Ikoni, 2009). With the 2005 MDGs' first deadline for attainment of gender parity in primary and secondary schools' enrolment already missed, the ability of women and girls to empower themselves economically and socially by going to school, or by engaging in productive and civic activities is still being constrained by their responsibility for everyday tasks in the household division of labour (CEC Report 2007). In Nigeria, educational facilities are generally believed to be inadequate, and access, limited for many, especially girls and women (Uku 1992). According to the *United Nations Human Development Report* (2005), Nigeria was classified as a *low developing country* in respect of equality in educational accessibility. *Female Adult Literacy Rate* (ages 15 and above) for the country was 59.4% as against male, 74.4%; the *Combined Gross Enrolment* for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary schools for female was 57% and male, 71%. Consequently, Ojo (2002) affirms that women are fewer than men in certain socio-economic activities. According to him, the percentages of female workers in some selected professions were as follow: architects, 2.4%, quantity surveyors, 3.5%, lawyers/jurists, 25.4%, lecturers, 11.8%, obstetricians and gynaecologists, 8.4%, paediatricians, 33.3%, media practitioners, 18.3%.

In the same vein, Omolewa (2002) shows that this inequality has its root in the colonial system of education which was primarily geared toward meeting the manpower need of the colonial government that obviously alienated women from educational and economic opportunities. Women in Nigeria are harder-hit than men by poverty due to the nonchalant emphasis placed on female education, and the prevalence of early marriage which tend to further impoverish the womenfolk, and subject them to statutory discrimination (Ojo, 2002).

Mamdani (1996) posited that the incidence of poverty is more rampant among the African women because of discrimination in educational opportunities. On the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), Nigeria ranks a withering 123rd position with the Estimated Earned Income (EEI) for female as low as US $614 and the male, US $1,495 (UNDP, 2005). Lack of education has been a strong visible barrier to female participation in the formal sector. The social pressures on females such as early marriages, and other extraneous factors as well as consideration of female education as secondary to that of boys and certain inhibitive religious practices in some parts of Nigeria are the major causes of the high illiteracy rate amongst women. As the impact of teenage pregnancy and early marriage makes abundantly clear, girls are at a double disadvantage in educational access, especially in the north, where these practices are most widespread (NDHS, 2003).

Education gives women the opportunity to be less dependent on men and to have more control over their sexual and reproductive health, often resulting in fewer births and a greater spacing between births, which is both healthier for mother and child. Where women lack education and information about family planning and have a low social status, there is a much higher prevalence of unintended pregnancies; the biggest risk factor associated with this being unsafe abortions.

Generally, the girl-child educational opportunities tend to be circumscribed by patriarchal attitudes about gender roles, which result in some parents attaching greater importance to the education of boys than girls. This is always the likelihood when the parents lack resources to enrol all their children in school. Some families tends to see the girl-child educational investments as only profitable to the family she will eventually marry into, unlike in the case of boys. This argument holds in particular for higher education, which involves greater expenditure and is seen to be less necessary for females whose main role is seen to be dedicated to home-keeping and child-bearing.
The female inferiority complex established from childhood through social interactions in the home, including the differential levels of support and motivation, influence the aspirations and eventual learning achievement of boys and girls.

Theoretical Explanation

Liberalist Feminist Theory
Liberalist Feminism is a variant of feminist theory that focuses on how women can achieve equality with men in the society. As a theory of gender inequality, it argues that equality with men can be achieved through an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that the inequality experienced by women especially is a product of a sexist patterning of the division of labour, and that through the re-patterning of key institutions such as work and family, gender equality can be achieved (Benn, 1993; Lorber, 1994; Pateman, 1999; Schaeffer, 2001, Ritzer, 2011).

Liberal feminism has its roots in Serena Falls 1848 politically inspired document which she titled "Declaration of Sentiments". Falls' intention was to ensure that women's rights are included in the Declaration of Independence. Principally, it claimed for women the universal rights ascribed to all persons, under the natural law, on the basis of human capacity for reason and moral agency. She asserted that the denial of these rights – rights to happiness and self actualization- by any law were "contrary to the great precepts of nature and of no… authority" and thus called for a change in societal customs and laws that will ensure women attain equality with men in society. She concluded that the denial of the rights by governments contravenes natural law and is the tyrannical agenda out of multiple practices of sexism.

Liberal feminism rest on a number of beliefs;

1. That human beings possess certain fundamental features –capacity for reason, moral agency and self-actualization
2. The exercise of these capacities can be secured through legal recognition of universal rights
3. The inequalities between men and women assigned by sex are social constructions having no basis in 'nature'
4. Social change for equality can be produced by an organized appeal to a reasonable public and the use of the state.

In sociological discourse, contemporary liberal feminist theorists have in part attempted to define gender as a structure (Martin, 2004; Risman, 2004) rather than as social structure. According to Risman, gender is a highly complex structure; it models human behavior along three levels – individual, cultural/interactional, and institutional. As a result, Risman sees the defining social effect of gender as "a socially constructed stratification system" (Risman, 2004, 230). Following this line of argument, within liberal feminism discourse, gender is viewed as a system of stratification that produces a gendered division of labor, a structuring of society into public and private domains, and a cultural dimension of sexist ideology.

In contemporary societies, sexual division of labor according to liberal feminism divides production on the bases of gender, and spheres defined as "public" and "private". Women have the responsibility to oversee the private domain while men have the freedom to access public domain which is considered the center of true rewards. While women have entered and more are still entering the public arena preserved for men, increasingly, the spheres regularly intermingle in the life of women than men even though both domains are shaped by patriarchal ideology and sexism. Women's experience within the public spheres of education, politics, work and public space is constantly restricted by the existence and practice of discrimination, marginalization and harassment (Benokraitis 1997; Ridgeway, 1997). Conversely, within the private sphere, they are victims of a "double bind" situation; they undertake a "second shift" in form of home and child care at the close of paid employment, a condition underpinned by the ideology of intensive mothering (Hochschild, 1989, 1997; Shelton, 2000).

The pressures experienced by women are a product of combined and multifaceted factors. This is a major focus of liberal feminism, to understand the interactions emanating from such pressures. Because women's ability to compete in career and profession is hindered by expectations of private domain (Waldsfogel, 1997), the "ideal worker norms" of public sphere (Williams, 2000), patterned along male working schedule increases the stress of domestic responsibilities on women. This reduces the resources and time required for crisis management

in the private sphere – the home. Moreover, the sexist expectations to provide emotional support, care giving, and routine maintenance in the private domain by women is expected, solicited and demanded of them within the public sphere. These "womanly skills" are however usually tied to under-remunerated jobs that have been commoditized and marketed (Adkins, 1995; Pierce, 1995).   The sexist division of labor, patterning of work and at home puts enormous economic pressure and risk on women thereby engendering "feminization of poverty" (Edin and Lein, 1997; K. Harris, 1996; Hays, 2003).

Conclusion

Democracy anywhere in the world is the right of the people. This is because sovereignty belongs to everyone – women inclusive. It is therefore important that the act of governance should be diversified to capture the interest of women through adequate representation. First of all, relevant clauses of the Beijing Conference should be reactivated giving specific rights to women. This way, the personality and character of women will be respected. Further, the United Nations General Assembly should reaffirm its Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) thus making it mandatory for all nations of the world to adopt as cardinal objectives of its constitutions. Stringent sanctions should be meted out to any form of violation of this convention. Second, society-imposed limitations of tradition, religion, and other offensive beliefs must be done away with. Women are not properties and should, therefore, not be domesticated. They should be given equal right in the workplace and associated benefits as enjoyed by men. They should enjoy equal access to functional and holistic education and healthcare, free and fair electoral process, the right to vote and be voted for and equal other opportunities with their male counterparts.

This paper, primarily, has brought to the fore identifiable institutional and contemporary prejudices against the female gender and the possibility for sustainable development. It also identified socio-economic disparities among women, in spite of the claim by the respective authorities promoting women empowerment and gender parity at both national and regional levels.

Assuredly, the eradication of social instability, poverty and ignorance in our society demands that both women and men be given equal rights in the democratic system of governance whereby fairness is given top priority in the civic responsibility and participation of each and everybody. Thus, this presents a better playing ground for both sexes in the society to co-exist habitably and as such make for improved sustained development.

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