Gender inequality and its challenge to nation building in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nation building describes a process of national integration and consolidation that makes individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for their nation and accept their commitment to the nation state. Its aim is to achieve sustainable development through unification of the nation's people within and outside, so that it remains politically stable and viable. Gender inequality on the other hand is the unequal treatment of individuals wholly or partly due to their gender. The paper therefore examines gender inequality in politics, economy, education, culture and tradition and other spheres of Nigerian society. The paper further looks at the impact of gender inequality on nation building in Nigeria. The paper finds that gender inequality exists in all sectors of Nigerian society and the inequalities women suffer in Nigeria has led to serious protracted agitations by women for inclusion in the scheme of things. Further, more the paper is of the opinion that the struggle for gender equality by women in Nigeria will remain a continuous social revolution if not resolved. The paper is anchored on the multi-disciplinary approach and used secondary and tertiary sources and has recommended that gender equality is a panacea for sustained nation building in Nigeria.

Key words: Gender, Inequality, Equality, challenge, Nation building

Introduction

Nation building is a search for nationhood; it is a process for developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for the nation and to accept their commitment to a nation's state.[1] Nation building helps many nations and regions to become economically, socially, and culturally united. For instance, it is argued that in Europe, the traditional, pre-modern state made up of isolated communities with parochial cultures at the bottom of the society and a distant and aloof state structures at the top largely concern with collecting taxes and keeping order were brought together through nation building and through the process members of the local communities were drawn upwards into the larger society through education and political participation.[2] This clearly explains that Europe became developed and integrated through the process of nation building and that nation building involves all the citizens in the society. Elites alone cannot drive the process; it has to be a collective bargain.

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[1] U.U.Ikenna and V.A.Onyemauwa "The problems of nation building in Nigeria" https//www.researchgate.net/publication/35973546, retrieved on 1/7/2022
[2] U.U.Ikenna and V.A.Onyemauwa "The problems of nation building in Nigeria"

Nigeria since independence lags behind in nation building; Nigeria has lived in a state of doubt and uncertainty. There is lack of socio-economic and political unity in Nigeria and among Nigerians. This according to Ikenna and Onyemauwa is because Nigerian leaders saw nation building as an elite project without input from the masses and citizenry.[3] Many other variables have been identified as being responsible for Nigeria's inability to build a sustainable national identity and social cohesion that is truly Nigerian and all-encompassing. Some of these variables include ethnicity, religion, insecurity, separationists agitations, constitutional problems, corruptions and leadership challenge, among others. Ganbari has listed some challenges of nation building as follows:

> the challenge of history, socio-economic inequalities, constitutional challenges, the challenge of building institutions for democracy and development, institutions for fostering public integrity, institutions for public service delivery, the judicial institutions, institutions for economic governance leadership challenge.[4]

Even though political leadership and corruption are identified as the major factors for the failure of nation building,[5] gender inequality and other factors cannot be left out of the nation building question or failure in Nigeria. In Nigeria, despite the high numeracy rate of women, they are under-represented in politics, in economy, in education and are also denied some basic rights. As a result of these they face many challenges such as high rate of poverty, illiteracy, disease among others this has led to continuous agitation by women and women groups for more inclusion in the scheme of things and a change in their socio-economic status.

This paper is set to interrogate the effect of gender inequality on nation building process in Nigeria, to ascertain if gender inequality has in anyway hindered or is detrimental to the process of nation building. The paper is structured in several sections including introduction, conceptual clarifications, gender inequality in Nigeria, gender inequality and nation building and conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

To limit the level of ambiguity which is a hallmark of academic research, it is pertinent to conceptualize the main concepts used in the study. Thus the concepts of nation building and gender inequality would be clarified. The concept of nation building is defined differently by different people just like many other concepts in the social sciences. The concept is generally accepted to be a process of constructing national identity using the power of the state. Nation building is defined as a process through which the boundaries of a

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[3]U.U.Ikenna and V.A.Onyemauwa "The problems of nation building in Nigeria" https//www.researchgate.net/publication/35973546, retrieved on 1/7/2022
[4]A.I.Gambari "The challenges of nation building :the case of Nigeria."from https//www.mafng.org retrieved on 1/7/2022
[5]U.U.Ikenna and V.A.Onyemauwa "The problems of nation building in Nigeria" https//www.researchgate.net/publication/35973546, retrieved on 1/7/2022

modern state and those of the nation community become congruent.[6] The desired outcome is to achieve national integration. Nation building is also described as:

> a process by which society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitution and legal dispensation, a national public education system, and integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, as equals to work for eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past to foster unity and promote a country wide conscious sense of being proudly members of the country, committed to the country and open to the continent and the world.[7]

Dinnen refers to nation building as a process of developing a shared sense of identity or community among the various groups making up the population of a particular state.[8] According to Gambari:

> Nation building has many important aspects, firstly it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles and a common citizenship, secondly, it is about building institutions which symbolize the political entity or institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service and civil society organizations.[9]

Nation building has been theorized as a structural process intertwined with industrialization, urbanization, social mobilization among others as a result of deliberate state policies that aim at the homogenization of a state along the lines of a specific constituted story.[10] Nation building is therefore all encompassing; it is a process of working to achieve sustainable development through job creation, employment, good conditions of service and welfare packages and a creation of a favorable climate for investors both in urban and rural areas. Consequently, the process of nation building is aimed at unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and developed. Nigeria as British creation also has its own share of the problem of nation building. This is because Nigeria was given a new identity by the British, they gave Nigeria a new identity by turning over 250 ethnic nationalities that existed as independent groups to a united entity. Other African nations that were forcibly united as Nigeria have successfully created their own identities through the instrument of nation building. However, since independence Nigeria is unable to achieve nation building rather is saddled with a lot of developmental

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[6] "Harris Myionas" Nation building assessed on 5/7/2022 from
https://www.oxfordbiographies.com
[7] https://www.dac.gov.za>content
[8] "Sinclair Dinnen" Nation building assessed on 5/7/2022 from
https://www.researchgate.net>2831
[9] A.I.Gambari "The challenges of nation building :the case of Nigeria."
[10] "Harris Myionas" Nation building

challenges such as insecurity, poverty, gender inequality, illiteracy, corruption among others.

Gender inequality refers to the legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles.[11] This affects their status in all areas of life in society, whether public or private, in the family or the labour market, in economic or political life, in power and decision making, as well as in gender relations. In virtually all societies women are in the inferior position to men. Gender inequality refers to unfair rights between male and female based on different gender roles which leads to unequal treatment in life.[12] UNICEF states that Gender inequality means women and men, girls and boys, do not enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protection.[13] All the conceptions of Gender inequality are clear on the fact that there is gender discrimination between men and women in the society, socially, culturally, economically, politically and legally. Sen outlined seven types of gender inequalities including, mortality inequality, basic facility inequality, special opportunity inequality, professional inequality, ownership inequality and household inequality.[14] This is to indicate that women face so many inequalities that can be imagined. Again economic, political and social gender inequality has several dimensions.

> The dimensions of political inequality include women's lower representation in elected offices, lower representation in political and corporate appoints. The dimensions of economic gender inequality include the fact that women still make less than men in the formal work sector, are more likely to live in poverty, are less likely to participate in the formal work sector, and do a larger share of work in the household sector. Social gender inequality has numerous dimensions some are less favorable to men while other are less favorable to women: men are more prone to violence, imprisonment, and disability, while women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.[15]

Gender inequality against women occurs in several ramifications, there is no facet of the Nigeria society that is devoid of gender inequality against women. The discrimination women suffer in Nigeria has made them to agitate for a better deal creating unrest among women.

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[11] Gender Inequality, European Institute for gender equality, accessed on July, 6th 2022, https:// eige.europe.eu

[12] Zulfar Ashraf Wani and Ruchi Gbosh Dastidar, "Gender Inequality-A Global Issue" *International Journal of Research*, 5(19) 2018 accessed on July, 6th, 2022, https:edupediapublications.org/journals

[13] UNICEF, Promoting Gender Equality: an Equity focused approach to Programming accessed on July, 6th, 2022, https:www.unicef.org/gender/files/overarching

[14] A. Sen," Many Faces of Gender inequality", in Frontline 8 (22), accessed on July, 6, 2022, https:// www. Sas.uppen.edu2001

[15] Zulfar Ashraf Wani and Ruchi Gbosh Dastidar, "Gender Inequality-A Global Issue"

Gender inequality in Nigeria

Gender inequality exists in all sectors of Nigerian society including politics, economy, culture, education among others as already stated. And in all these sectors women are the less privileged group, while men are placed in the privileged positions. In this study we shall look at gender inequality in politics and leadership of Nigeria. Women constitute about 49% of Nigerian population, despite this numerical strength; the Nigerian society has not accorded them the opportunity to actively participate in politics and leadership. In all the political dispensations in Nigeria since independence, women are underrepresented at the federal, state and local governments.

Nigeria began to play active role in politics after independence, therefore in 1960 a woman from western Nigeria became the first female member of the federal parliament, in 1961 three women were members of Eastern House of Assembly, however in the north women were denied franchise until 1979 and as a result women were not allowed to voted and be voted for.[16]The Second Republic witnessed low representation of women in politics only a few women won elections to the National Assembly and to State Assemblies, only two women at this point were appointed Federal Ministers and a few women were appointed commissioners in their States[17]. After 1983 elections, the military returned to politics, the Head of State General Buhari introduced the quota system which provided that at least one woman be appointed as a member of the Executive Council of every State, all States complied with the directive and some states had two or three members.[18] In the early 1990s, two female Deputy Governors were appointed for Lagos and Kaduna States.[19] The transition election to the Third Republic saw the emergency of a few women at the local government and State levels.

With the return of democracy in 1999, the representation of Nigerian women has increased however women are still underrepresented and the 35% affirmative action has not been met. Table 1, below shows the under representation of women in Nigerian politics 1999 to 2019.

Table 1: Women Representation in Nigerian Politics 1999-2019

	1999		2003		2007		2011		2015		2019	
Office	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women	Seat Available	Women
President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0

[16]"O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics, accessed on July, 7th, 2022, https://unstate.un.org>gender
[17] "O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics,
[18] "O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics,
[19] "O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics,

v. President	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
Senate	109	3(2.8)	109	4(3.7)	109	8(7.3)	109	7(6.4)	109	8(7.3)	109	5(4.5)
House of Reps	360	12(3.3)	360	21(5.8)	360	23(6.4)	360	26(7.2)	360	19(5.3)	360	9(2.5)
Governor	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0	36	0
Deputy Governor	36	1(1.2)	36	2(5.5)	36	6(16.7)	360	3(8.3)	36	4	36	3(8.3)
State House of Assemblies	990	12(1.2)	990	38(3.6)	990	52(5.3)	990	62(6.3)	-	-	-	-
SHA Commitees Chairpersons	829	18(2.2)	881	32(3.6)	887	52(5.9)	887	-	-	-	-	-
L.G Chairpersons	710	9(1.2)	774	15(1.9)	740	27(3,6)	740	-	-	-	-	-
Councillors	8810	143(0.02)	6368	267(4.2)	6368	235(3.7)	6368	-	-	-	-	-

Source: O. Oluyemi, "Monitoring Participation of Women in Politics, accessed on July, 7th 2022, https://unstate.un.org>gender and P.K. Nwanesi and K. Wasudawan, "Gender, Political Participation, and Representation: The Nigerian Story" in Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies 9(4), 2020 accessed on February, 14, 2022 from https:// researchgate.net/publication/ 343424218

The table above shows that women were under represented in 1999 to 2019 elections in Nigeria. In all the available elective positions, women did not meet the target of 35% affirmative action recommended by the Nigerian Gender policy. They did not even meet the global average of 22.5% neither did they meet the African Regional Average of 23.4% or the West African Sub Regional Average of 15%. In appointive positions the story is not different; it is a replica of what is obtainable in elective positions. Oluyemi reported that:

in 1999 and 2003, out of 130 Federal Boards of public corporations only 7(5.6) were women, during the same period out of 47 cabinet members, only 7(14.89) were women. One woman was appointed a Director General of a government regulatory agency. 2women appointed Special Advisers and Special Assistants respectively and 6 women were appointed Special Assistants.[20]

In 2011, 12 women were given ministerial appointments out of 42 which represented 30%, 4 women were made Special Adviser out of 20.[21] However in 2015, 6 women were appointed ministers out of 30 ministerial appointees.[22] This also shows gross under representation of women in leadership of Nigeria. One would expect that even if women are denied elective positions, they would be compensated with appointive positions, but this is not the case in Nigeria. The question to ask what is responsible for the unfair treatment and denials women face in Nigeria?

Discrimination against women in politics and leadership has a long history, in pre-colonial period; women were an integral part of leadership of their communities. They play active roles in leadership, the likes of Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ife, Emotan of Benin to mention a few. Colonialism however, affected women negatively; they were not given leadership opportunities among other things. However, in contemporary Nigeria factors which tend to militate against women's participation in politics and leadership are outlined below. One of the factors is gender stereotyping which is the culturally and socially learned difference between men and women. Gender stereotyping defines men as decisive, logical and ambitious while women are placed in roles like taking care of the children, husbands and the home. Men and women are thus the creation of their cultures and the environment. Ojogbane confirms this assertion;

> the practice, institutionalized in many societies is to see women as inferior to men and therefore, not in position to effectively compete with men for societal positions. They also see women as less intelligent and less valuable. Another concept is that women are in the world for the pleasure or comfort and assistance of men and therefore, therefore their role be complementary to that of men. [23]

Another factor is patriarchy and it is seen as a set of social relations common to members of a community who have lived together a long time sharing and learning from each other's customs and traditions and have a material base that

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[20] "O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics, accessed on July, 7th, 2022, https://unstate.un.org>gender
[21] "O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics,
[22] "O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics
[23] V.J Ojogbane, "Nigerian Women and Post-Colonial Politics" in *Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria* eds. Okpeh O.O et al (Makurdi, Aboki Publishers, 2007) 96

enables men to dominate over women.[24]Patriarchy is a strong determinant of the nature and character of gender relations and it defines the status of women in a number of ways which are largely responsible for their disadvantaged positions in the network of the inevitable social relations involving them and men. In Nigeria, there is male dominance in all spheres of life. Women are seen as inferior to men and as such placed in particular roles that are suitable to that are suitable to their status and politics is not one of such roles. Another factor against women's participation in politics is poverty or low economic status. The proportion of women in active and profitable economic in Nigeria is low and this explained partly by the types of work performed by women which are considered as employment but are exclusive domestic work and petty marketing activities. Women are found occupying low income jobs and majority of them are found in the informal sector of the economy. Ojogbane describes them as "peasants and housewives who have been marginalized in the process of production and distribution by the character of the Nigerian State."[25]Majority of them are found in the rural areas and are worst hit by poverty. They lack the economic strength to compete with their men folk and depend on men for sustenance.

Education is a social mechanism designed to bring about certain skills and attitudes in a person that are judged to be useful and desirable in a society. Until a few years ago, education in Nigeria was more focused on men instead of been based on individual needs and abilities. Even though many parents now encourage the education of their female children, girl child education has continued to trail behind the education of boys because gender continues to play the roles of determining who goes to school. Consequently, illiteracy among women in Nigeria is higher than men and this has had serious negative impact on their political participation. Education has been identified as a critical variable for the integration of women into the mainstream of national development. Education is therefore, the only tool that prepares women for challenges of the new social system, since majority of women especially those who reside in the rural areas are illiterates. It relegates them to the background in all facts of life and perpetuates their low socio-economic and political status. Education is therefore, the only instrument that can equally widen women's horizon, shatter the oppressive socio-cultural ideologies about women and transform them socially, economically and politically.

The Nigerian political process generally is characterized by violence, abuse, harassment, assassination, threats to life and property and godfatherism. The electoral process itself is faulty; it is not free and fair, open to elite manipulation and riggings among others. All these manipulations tend to scare women from engaging in politics. Ojogbane asserts that "women conceive politics as an aggressive, violent and dirty game and these tend to deter them from participating in it"[26]This has created a culture of helplessness, apathy and indifference about the happenings in the political scene.

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[24] D. Tyavyar cited in T. Agena, "Culture, women and Development in Tiv Society of central Nigeria"in *Reading in Central Nigeria Culture* eds. Amali, A.A et al (Jos, Concept Printing and publishing Company, 2011)164
[25]V.I Ojogbane "Nigerian Women and Post-Colonial Politics" 99
[26] V.I Ojogbane "Nigerian Women and Post-Colonial Politics" 98-99

There has been many concerted efforts at addressing the problem of under representation of women in Nigeria politics and leadership, among such efforts are

> the establishment of Women Political Empowerment Office and Nigerian Women Trust Funds, Women Lobby Group, the institution of an INEC gender policy, the national multi stakeholder dialogue, the initiation of several interventions to actualize affirmative action and the convening of the Nigerian Women Strategy Conference among others.[27]

All these efforts have not been able to change the situation, women have continued to be marginalized and underrepresented in politics. This has also made to be agitated as they strive to find lasting solutions to their marginalization in politics. The agitation by women sometimes results to protests and campaigns, which is detrimental to nation building.

Gender Inequality and Nation Building

Gender inequality is used to describe the gap or imbalance that exists between males and females which perpetuates the unequal situation between the two sexes and subjugating and subordinating one gender against the other. This the situation women face globally and in Nigeria in particular. The 1999 constitution of federal republic of Nigeria section17, sub section1(2) states that, "every citizen shall have equality of rights, obligations and opportunities before the law"[28] Despite the provisions of the constitution, which prohibits discriminatory practices on grounds of gender with respect to civil, economic, cultural and political rights, discriminatory practices against women have persisted in Nigeria.

In the face of discrimination and marginalization Nigerian women have resorted to protests and other non constitutional means to resolve issues of inequalities they face in the society. For instance recently in Nigeria female legislators at the National Assembly sponsored five bills including a bill sought to grant citizenship to foreign-born husbands of Nigerian women, a bill to allocate 35% of political positions based on appointments to women, to create special seats for women in National and State Assemblies, indigeneity through marriage and affirmative action in party administration.[29]All the five bills were rejected by National Assembly; this made women to protest the decision of the National Assembly. On the march 2nd, 2022, a day after the voting, womentrooped out in their numbers and asked the law makers to revisit the gender bills. The protest continued on March, 8th 2022 a day commemorated as International Women's Day. Protests, agitations strikes and other civil unrest are detrimental to nation building.

Nation building is a process which is aimed at unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run.

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[27]"O. Oluyemi" Monitoring participation of women in Politics
[28]Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,1999
[29]Nigerian Women Protest after Law makers reject bills seeking gender equality accessed on July, 11, 2022 from https://www.premiumtimesng.com

According to Dinnen a practical way of supporting nation building is through enhancing political participation.[30] Enabling ordinary citizens to participate in and influence decision-making process is a key aspect of good governance and effective nation building. Among other things, increased political participation will improve the efficacy of public services, will make government more accountable and will deepen democracy.[31] In a similar vein, Alozie is of the opinion that gender inequality and persistence of human rights abuses is a challenge to nation building in Nigeria.[32]In addition to gender imbalance in governance women suffer several other human rights abuses in Nigeria such as rape, unwholesome widowhood and traditional practices, ritual killings among others. The persistence of these injustices against women is detrimental to nation building.

The inclusion of women in politics and leadership is pertinent, regarding their great potentials for promoting peace, stability, economic growth and are good diplomats in resolving complicated issues in the society.[33] Pre-colonial Nigerian women such as queen Amina of Zaria, queen Emotan of Benin and Moremi of Ife were women leaders and figures in the pre-colonial Nigeria that impacted their societies significantly. In contemporary Nigeria women that have opportunities in politics and leadership have performed extremely well. The likes of Professor Dora Akunyili, Dr. Okonjo Iweala and a host of others did tremendously well as Director General of NAFDAC and Minster of the Federal Republic of Nigeria respectively. Therefore, women inclusion in politics and leadership is a prerequisite for national development and nation building. If women are given a sense of belonging and integrated into politics and leadership, agitations and protests by women would definitely come to an end. Peace between the two genders would be achieved, good governance would be promoted and this would go a long way in enhancing nation Building.

Conclusion

Women suffer several inequalities in Nigeria including political, economic, social and cultural. The paper interrogated the effect of gender inequality on nation building. the paper opined that the underrepresentation and marginalization of women in Nigerian politics is detrimental or undermine nation building. The underrepresentation of women in Nigerian politics has led to serious agitations and protests by women creating tensed atmosphere. Nation building cannot be achieved in an atmosphere of crises, protests, agitations. A situation where majority of the citizens of Nigeria are left out of politics is against the tenets of nation building. Therefore, gender equality remains the panacea for nation building among other things. Gender equality is a veritable tool for nation building, any society that shows greater concern for the rights of women and other weaker strata of its society is less likely to

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[30] "Sinclair Dinnen" Nation building
[31] "Sinclair Dinnen" Nation building
[32] Cyprian Alozie, "The Nigerian State and the Challenges of Nation Building in the 21st Century: The Way Forwarded" in South East Journal of Political Science 4 (1) 2018, 333-356 accessed on July, 1, 2022
[33]Asor Gbamwuan, "Interrogating the Poor Performance of Women in Nigerian Politics" in *Themes on Women Studies in Africa: Perspectives fromNigeria*, eds. Okpeh O.O et al (Abuja, Donafrique Publishers, 2015) 80-93

initiate violence. Again economic and social developments are strongly elevated when women enter the market place. Gender equity and women inclusion play a central role both as a litmus test and as an active variable shaping more democratic, stabilized and developed society. Therefore, for nation building to be achieved in Nigeria, women must be equitably represented in the development and democratization process.

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