

Strategies for Achieving National Gender Policy in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The global introduction of the millennium Development Goals has drawn National attentions to pursuing gender policies, (Goal 3 of the MDGs), geared towards achieving gender equality. The Nigerian government key into this policy, replaced the erstwhile National Policy on women adopted in the year 2000 with National gender policy in 2006. The policy goal is aimed at eliminating cultural, religious gender based biases and harmful cultural and religious practices which tends to reproduce inequalities in gender roles relations in the Nigerian society and thereby giving a subordinate status to women compared to men. Hence, development opportunities continue to elude women since the policy failed to challenge the structure which reproduces gender inequality and overall dis-empowerment of women. This paper sets to critically analyze the policy strategies of achieving the policy goal and objectives. We conclude and made recommendations as a guide to policy makers.

Key words: Gender, gender analysis, gender mainstreaming, policy, strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, scholars have now acknowledged that promoting gender equality as a development strategy for reducing poverty in the developing countries among women and men, improving health and living standards and enhancing efficiency of public investments. We are in agreement with the fact that promoting and attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end in itself and human rights issue, also as a criterion for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria.

In Ciroma's foreword, Nigeria as a member of the United Nations signed and ratified the various relevant international instruments, treaties and conventions without reservation. These instruments have always emphasized that member nations put in place the necessary mechanisms needed to eliminate gender discriminations, ensure equality and human dignity to all men and women (cited in FMWA, 2006: XI).

In recognition of the extant National women policy and other sectorial policies to respond to challenges of gender inequalities as a result of socio-economic, traditions, customs, culture and other gender biases, a National Gender policy was established to replace the National women policy in 2006.

The policy is aligned with relevant regional and international protocols and instruments such as the Beijing platform for Action (BPFA), New partnership for African Development (NEPAD), African Union (AU) solemn Declaration for gender equality, African protocol on people's rights and the rights of women (APPRRW) the convention of the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), National Empowerment and Development strategy (SEEDS), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), will provide standards, which will set essential benchmarks to measure performance of the country as regards promotion of gender/equality. (cited in FMWASD, 2006) It is expected that this policy will help in gender mainstreaming and women's human rights in the country.

The policy is perceived as a new touchstone in the arsenal of national and state gender machineries, a sine-qua-non towards ensuring that both female and males benefit from policy changes vital for Nigeria to reach its developmental goals.

Efforts were made in the past by the Nigerian government towards integrating women into development policies. However, discrimination, inequalities continue unabated in National, state socio-economic and political spheres. This arising from customary belief system, ancestral heritage and religious bigotry. All these are barriers to full participation of women on an equal basis with men in National development.

This paper critically analyses the new policy strategies upon which the policy goals and objective will be achieved.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

In order to fully comprehend the subject matter of the research paper, it is imperative to conceptualize the major variables as used. These are as follows:

Gender

Gender refers to the social roles allocated respectively to men and women in particular societies and at particular times. Such roles and the differences between them are conditioned by a variety of political, economic, ideological and cultural factors and are characterized in most societies by unequal power relations. (cited in FMWA,2006:122). Here, gender is distinguished from sex which is biologically determined. Civil Resources Development and Documentation Centre (CIRDDOC) (2001:1) defines gender as a system of roles relationship that are determined not biologically but by the social political and economic context.

Gender Analysis

This means a critical understanding of all "gender biases" which perpetuate gender inequalities in all sector of society. A situation analysis seeks to capture the position on ground as far as the issue in questions is concerned. It highlights demographic changes, past government efforts to address poverty reduction, wealth creation, economic growth and service including the success and limitations of such programmes, and to draw out the situation of both men and women in relation to the specific issues covered in the situation analysis. (FMWA 2006:122)

Gender Mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming refers to a process that is goal oriented. It recognizes that most institutions consciously and unconsciously serve the interests of men and encourages institutions to adapt a gender perspective in transforming themselves. It promotes the full participation of women in decision-making so that women's needs move from the margins to the centre of development planning and resources allocation (FMWA, 2006).

Policy

Policy refers to guiding principles to a course of action arrived at by decision-makers to address a particular issue or issues.

Strategies

Whereas strategy is concerned with war, including the preparations and the waging of same, and taking into consideration the main component elements of operational art, tactics and strategies which are indispensable for its practical implementation; strategies on the other hand, we relate it to the entire potentials of the state, economically, politically, socio-culturally, technologically etc. As policy strategies deal with creations of the resources of the state for the fulfillment of purpose, refers to needs which are identified as necessary to transforming existing women and men in society. Addressing women strategic gender needs, expedite women empowerment and facilitates the functional social transformation necessary for establishment of gender equality.

PRINCIPLES, OBJECTIVES, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES OF POLICY PREMISE

According to FMWASD Policy Paper, the under listed are the guiding principles, objectives, goals and strategies of the burgeoning gender policy in Nigeria

Guiding principles

The government and people of Nigeria affirm that:

- Making all stakeholders, including government, the private sector, civil society, organizations, and community-based organizations, development partners, and individual women and men see the sense and embrace their roles in the achievement of gender equity and equal
- Instituting a gender-friendly culture that brings about cooperative interaction between women and men recognizing human rights of all persons in a culture which respects women's and men's capabilities and entails cooperation and interdependence.
- Embarking on a cultural re-orientation that will be supported by policies and programmes of gender education, sensitization, dialogues, incentives, motivation and responsiveness, rather than only through legislations
- Reforming the existing structures of the national gender management system with a view to strengthening their capacity for a more robust mandate
- Promoting the empowerment of women through the bridging of existing gender gaps will be considered integral to the achievement of gender equality, and using policies and legislations of affirmative action if necessary and would no way be deemed discriminatory
- Transformation of the policy environment within which gender equity, programmes are to be implemented supported by resources, financial and technical, demonstrating political will.
- Promotion and protection of human rights social justice and equity (FMWASD 2006:17)

Policy objectives

Also, the following have been advanced as the policy objective; inter-alia:

- Contribute towards women's empowerment and the eradication of unequal gender power relations in the workplace and economy in trade unions and in broader society.
- Encourage the participation, support and cooperation of men in taking shared responsibility for elimination of sexism and redefining of oppressive gender roles
- Increase the participation of women in leadership and decision-making

- Increase awareness and gender sensitivity in all sectors.
- Ensure that through labour legislation and collective bargaining the particular circumstances of women are considered and that measures are promoted on the basis of gender
- Fight against stereotyping on the basis of gender in the workplace
- Ensure that there is gender perspective in all sectors of development (FMWACD 2006: XIX).

Strategies for achieving policy objective

Furthermore, the Strategies for achieving the objectives of the National Gender policy have been identified as:

- Policy partnership and programme reforms through mainstreaming of gender concerns at all levels
- Gender education and capacity building to enhance necessary technical expertise and positive gender culture
- Legislative reforms to guarantee gender justice and respect for human rights
- Economic reforms for enhanced productivity and sustainable development especially that which address the needs of women and children and others vulnerable groups. (FMWASD, 2006:31).

Policy Goal

In a nutshell the policy paper provided that:

[T]he overall goal is to build a just society devoid of discrimination, harness the full potentials of all social groups regardless of sex or circumstance, promote the enjoyment of fundamental human rights and protect the health, social, economic and political well being of all citizens in order to achieve equitable rapid economic growth; evolve an evidence based planning and governance system where technological resources are efficiently and effectively development (FMWA, 2006).

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING POLICY OBJECTIVES

The policy paper put forward a number of strategies to achieving the policy goal. The researcher is interested in finding out the extent to which these strategies have tended to facilitate the success or otherwise of the gender equality in Nigeria. The paper is also aimed at expanding the scope of the strategies, with a view to providing a very rewarding analysis. These are discussed below:

Politics and decision making reforms:

Omonubi-McDonnell (2003:3) making a case for gender inequality in politics and decision making in Nigeria. He opines that: Politically, Nigerian women are a negligible and undermined force, with little political involvement. Economically, they constitute the majority of the peasant labour force in the agricultural sector, while most of the others occupy the bottom of the occupational ladder and consequence of the unequal status between men and women is a high level of economic and political powerlessness among women, powerlessness in turn retard development at any level politically, economically and socially.

This is so, according to Aina (1998), Nigeria is a highly patriarchal society where men dominate all spheres of women's lives. Women are regarded as being inferior to men and therefore not capable and suitable for political leadership. As a result of its societal negative orientation in societal processes especially politics. Their participation in Nigeria politics has

been very marginal and insignificant because of societal negative perceptions of the role of women in the public sphere and especially their participation in politics, which is often seen as male domain.

In the submission to the above, the core hindrance in their participation in active politics and decision making include general apathy to politics amongst women; religious and cultural biases against women in politics, lack of resources to compete with men in politics; low membership of women in political parties. They only serve as supporters for male to acquire political positions. Discouraged from participation in the electoral process because of malpractices, unfavourable political environment characterized by political violence. Therefore, the policy is faced with the challenge of the continuing marginalization of women in Nigerian politics. Development requires good governance, which is likely to provide both men and women folk equal opportunity in decision-making and policy implementation.

Legislative reforms to guarantee gender justice and respect for human rights

The Nigerian legal system is based on a tripartite system of laws (statutory, customary and the sharia) which is sometimes contradictory. Thus has made it difficult to fulfill one of the basic stipulations of Nigerian constitution which requires that all citizens be treated as equal under the Law.

According to George-Genyi, (2008:102), despite a general commitment to the principle of non-discrimination as enshrined in section 2 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. There is short fall of the desired result of giving males and females equal opportunities to advance socially, physically, politically and economically, evidences abound that several negative aspects of gender relations, such as gender based division of labour, disparities between males and females, access to power and resources and gender biases in rights and entitlements remain pervasive in Nigeria. The provision in the Nigeria constitution that guarantees equality between the sex, and fundamental human rights, practically women rights are infringed upon at different levels of their lives.

However, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), established in 1999, has not adequately in its capacity, compel key public institutions to promote fundamental human rights and freedoms. The most serious violations of women's rights are those associated with unwritten traditional norms and practices of Nigeria's numerous and diverse ethnic groups. Take for instance most common widowhood rites, inheritance rights, the land tenure, female genital mutilation/ female genital circumcision (FGM/FMC) and early marriages. This affects the health and well-being of Nigerian women and girls and further undermines their development and progress.

Economic reforms and women empowerment

Sustained economic growth and development is essential to poverty reduction and women's empowerment is a strategic and effective entry point to alleviate poverty. Women are worse hit by economic transition processes, mainly because they lack access to critical resources: education, capital, labour, entrepreneurial skills and equally lack control over the use of their valuable time.

Ominode (1996), stressed that economic empowerments are a major component of women's total empowerment and liberation; because political, social and cultural empowerment are often wide and incomplete without access and control over resources.

In addition, the various poverty alleviation strategies of successive Nigerian governments to promote the status of men and women economically, have failed to attract noticeable economic transformation for women because they remain focused at the micro level. There is widespread poverty, some of the challenges are unemployment, malnutrition, illiteracy, law status of women, environmental degradation and limited access to social and health services, including reproductive health services.

However, there has been programmes like better life for rural women, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) many of these programmes failed to attract noticeable economic transformation that is beneficial to women because they remained at micro level framework.

Gender education and capacity building

A number of policies now treat education as an instrument of development, and women education as a road to gender equality and social justice. Policies including the Nigeria constitution, the National policy of Education, the Universal Basic Education Policy among others all advocate acquiring of basic education as a means to meaningful contribution to development.

However, despite these attempts improving the education of the girl child, there are still major constraints to female education including poor implementation of government policies, weak monitoring mechanism to measure the implementation of programmes, poor budgetary allocation to educational sector, poverty, culture and religious practices, example early child marriage, teenage pregnancy, child labour and trafficking.

Culture, family and socialization

The socio-cultural practices that have perpetrated gender inequality in third world countries are rooted in socio-cultural norms of society. But developed societies have employed culture to improve on other areas of development by modifying cultural practices through government policies. Aina (1998) view culture as an explanatory variable in understanding the predominant gender ideology within the Nigeria society.

However, Nigeria has allowed culture of patriarchy to infringe on human rights of women, socialization of children and development practice through policy. Although women –focused welfare and development programmes exist, the confines of culture and traditions, religion, legal and economic structure limit the roles of women and prevent them from benefiting from the development process.

CONCLUSION

The success of the National Gender Policy, technically rest on how operators of the policy are able to follow due process, the use of gender mainstreaming as tool for institutionalizing change in gender power role relations

There is need for government to challenge existing structures, particularly those structures that perpetrate gender inequality and gender injustice. Most importantly, confronting patriarchy, exacerbated in the culture of male supremacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are challenges in the strategies for achieving policy objectives. We advanced the following measures in making it a success.

There should be high level of awareness about the existence of the policy, it's set targets. This calls for commitment of significant resources to raising awareness on the existence of the policy and its purpose among government, employees, private institutions and members of the public in general.

Effective coordination of policy framework is required. Ensuring a culture of gender sensitivity and equality principles in all institutions and structures of government and private sector and communities with gender policies.

To all the stakeholders and institutions saddled with the responsibilities and implementation of the National Gender Policy, the provisions of the constitution that guarantee equality of all citizens are strictly adhere to and those that promote discrimination on the basis of gender and culture be removed from the constitution. Therefore, there must be an institution to regulate, monitor and control gender role relations in the public and private sector. That is mechanism for enforcing laws that regulates and penalize discriminatory practices.

There should be equity and equality in employment opportunities and elimination of all discriminatory and abusive practices (on the grounds of sex, race, ethnicity, class, religion, age, disability or marital status) against the employment of women in the public and private sectors of the economy.

At the Local Government levels. It occupies a vantage position in mainstreaming gender equality principles into traditional structures, the cultural life of the people; delivery of basic needs, especially in the area of physical and social services, electricity, read network, market, healthcare services, environmental protection, sewage etc (FMWA, 2006). Therefore, its importance to engender local government policies and practices as the local government is an institution closest to the people and in the best position to work with traditional structures in advancing women empowerment and practices.

Special measures such as quotas and mechanisms for achieving minimum critical threshold of women in politics, offices, party organs, and public, life by pursuing 35% affirmative action in favour of women to bridge gender gaps in political representation in both elective and appointive posts at all levels of government.

There should be culture of respect for the human rights of women and men, including freedom of expression, and the elimination of all negative stereotypical representation of women and girls and presentation of gender issues at various levels of the information dissemination and communication chain.

There should be equal access of women and men to critical resources (capital, labour, land, technology and entrepreneurial skills) through special initiatives and reduce the number of citizens in core poverty group particularly women.

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