

Deciphering gender disparities in socioeconomic cum cultural, and religious practices in Africa.

ODUSANYA, T.O., FAYOMI, O.O. and OGUNSANWO, A.

2023

© 2023 The Authors. Published by Innovare Academic Sciences Pvt Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

DECIPHERING GENDER DISPARITIES IN SOCIOECONOMIC CUM CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN AFRICA

TEMITOPE OMOTOLA ODUSANYA¹, OLUYEMI OYENIKE FAYOMI², ALABA OGUNSANWO³

¹Department of Law and Diplomacy, Babcock University, Nigeria. ²Department of Political Science, and International Relations; Nigerian Army University Biu (NAUB), Nigeria. ³Department of Political Science, and International Relations; Lead City University; Nigeria.
Email: temioudusanya@gmail.com

Received: 25 March 2023, Revised and Accepted: 02 May 2023

ABSTRACT

Demographically, more than half of the African population are women. Nevertheless, disparities in allusion to gender lingers at the apex of contemporary issues, especially in Africa. For several decades, women have been longstanding and continuously sidelined from the socioeconomic, cultural, and religious leadership positions and participation. Gender disparities, therefore, seem to be deeply embedded in socioeconomic, cultural, and religious practices in Africa. Despite the multifarious national and international legislations endorsed against gender disparities, there remains a great lacuna of women's marginalization in governance. The study illuminated the gender disparities with the aid of historical and analytical evaluation as well as the social role theoretical framework. This was further combined with the explanatory and exploratory qualitative research design. This was effective in understanding the numerous drivers for gender disparities as well as the social gender roles and norms, the general exploitative nature of marriage, cultural legacies, politics, and religion in the African context vis a vis western world. This paper also discovered that although women are as intellectually capable as men, ostracism of women remains evident across diverse echelons of human civilization including democratic societies. The research found that some critical factors such as economic impediments, lack of or inadequate education, and religious belief, foster gender disparities in Africa. This research recommended an overhaul of the patriarchal education and curriculum, the analysis and study of religious books must be in accordance with the transformed sociological realities. Moreover, equality must be evidenced in the recruitment process of qualified men and women in governance. The paper concluded that the inflexible and barbaric cultural stereotypes and religious practices be reformed with consideration to gender parity. A standard shift is essential especially by women themselves, to ensure that women are both enlightened and empowered.

Keywords: Civilization, Equality, Gender studies, Multidimensional poverty and social roles.

© 2023 The Authors. Published by Innovare Academic Sciences Pvt Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22159/ijss.2023v11i3.47686>. Journal homepage: <https://innovareacademics.in/journals/index.php/ijss>

INTRODUCTION

This paper is focused on the evaluation of gender inequalities in Africa, especially in consideration of the fact that more than 50% of the population in Africa are women (UNDP, 2019). This study aims to commence with a concise explanation of the term gender disparity, the historical background of gender disparities in Africa, the theoretical framework, and the methodology for the study before proceeding to examine inequalities from the social, economic, cultural, and religious perspectives. It would further analyze the nexus between these inequalities with the aid of indicators of their practices in Africa, before bringing the examination to a close, by concluding with recommendations on the way forward in understanding as well as tackling gender inequalities in Africa.

Gender disparity is a concept albeit sociocultural, attributable to patterns of division into numerous classifications such as female and male with an exceedingly high prejudice thereby positioning one precisely lesser than the other in a bid to incessantly effect unjustifiable dominance over them (Sibani, 2017). At this onset, it seems logical to assert that whether, the grouping female comes before that of the male or vice versa ought to be irrelevant or at best inconsequential, if there is parity in the truest sense of the word. Moreover, it is sarcastic that whilst human rights instruments such as the Committee on the Eliminations of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, declare that everyone is equal (The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, 1996). However, the irony is that the accomplishment of this underlying fact is hampered by conventional practices. In understanding gender disparities in deeper yet broader context, this study therefore explores this term in consideration to the socioeconomic cum cultural and religious practices in Africa.

Historically, gender stereotype is deeply rooted in the African patriarchal cultural legacies and religious norms. For starters, the birth

of a boy child customarily calls for a mega celebration compared to the birth of a girl child. More so, friends and family often make jest of a man who produces only female children as "lacking in strength and vigor," "unworthy, and "inactive" (Achebe, 1958). The young boy child is then groomed like a precious egg, to be domineering over the girl child. In the family setting, the very first and primary background of every African child, where there are mixed-sex children, the segregation of household chores is usually appalling. For example, it is unthinkable for the boy child to involve himself with household chores or be seen to help his sisters in the kitchen, to do so would be interpreted to mean that he is becoming less of a man and might even be mocked by his peers (Odusanya, 2022).

In the traditional African imaginary, marriage seems to be the proper woman's end goal, she must be meek and humble, not speak when men speak, never challenge his authority, and never look into the eye of her husband or leader because that would be highly disrespectful, be respectful and quiet, never to challenge authorities (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). This is because, more often than not, women are somewhat stateless because they are expected to assume the state of their husbands. Consequently, they become easily relegated to the secondary positions of second-class citizens in communities while the male gender takes charge. Her ultimate concern must not be about societal or economic issues but rather, that of her family and children (Akyeampong and Fofack, 2013). This then makes the women majorly financially dependent, and consumer of wealth as opposed to direct economic creators (OECD, 2019). In essence, the disparity is skewed towards women as they had a manual of how to do; how to rightly behave; and live life in accordance with the patterns drafted for their way of life by their male counterparts (Oderinde, 2020). This arguably pushes the socioeconomic gender disparity as well as the

multidimensional poverty index a notch higher since these women, stay-at-home spouses cannot adequately cater to their economic welfare without their husband's support.

This is further reiterated in the words of Beauvoir, Simone de. The Second Sex. Vintage Classics, 2015, to the man, a woman is inessential and likened to nothing less than sex, without him, the man, she is nothing, she is exclusively under his guardianship, and she cannot even be defined or referred to in his absence. Since time immemorial, the place of women has been and continues to be dictated by men. These women are expected to mind the affairs of the home, be domestic servants who participate in petty trading, agriculture, nutrition, the machinery of child procreation and pleasure, burdened with pains, manual labor, and home management (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). Notably, these are tedious and time-consuming yet with meager income-earning kinds of labor. It reinforces the superiority of men and the inferiority of women (Momoh and Stephen, 2021). Culturally, women are home nurturing and onlookers at public gathering or at best entertainers for the male guest of honor.

However, women are capable of leadership positions and ought to be rightly accorded. For instance, it was learned from the elementary literature in history class, that Amina Sarauniya Zazzau, the warrior queen of Zazzau now called Zaria, Kaduna State in Nigeria ruled excellently despite the lack of informal educational background in her time, she led approximately 34 years and was the 24th have (name referred to rulers of Zazzau) as history have it. Amina of Zaria led men to war and became victorious, our women can also be at the forefront of decision-making and truly make an impact, and nothing has changed. More so, the world has evolved and today, we have prominent and powerful women thriving and making modern-day landmark achievements. A typical example of these types of contemporary women is the *Fuego*, also known as Forbes women.

This historical examination further leads to the analysis of this historical context in light of the social role theory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is hinged on the social role theory as the most relevant theory for understanding the practices of gender disparities in Africa. The social role theory as propounded by Eagly (1987) and Wood (1999) echoes the traditional assessment of the nature of responsibilities imposed on an individual under his or her gender. This arguably has been alleviated in our modern era, as the basic foundation of the intrinsic issue of the lack of gender parity (Odusanya, 2022). This has further been continuously strengthened and perpetrated by customary doctrines through traditions, unwritten laws, societal laws cultural values, sentiments, and norms (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021).

Gender roles are social constructs that drive and synergize with the cultural norms of a particular society. These roles are not based on reaching an equilibrium between the sexes (Odusanya, 2022). These traditional social roles are, conversely, unwritten yet not static and there is a higher likelihood that an individual would experience varying cultural changes at diverse times (Jalloh, 2021). Contrariwise, some researchers believe that cultures strengthen the already dominant political, economic, and social positions of men and that they can be unsolidified yet "long-lasting" (Baden and Reeves, 2000; Momoh and Stephen, 2021). Nonetheless, it could be observed that shifts and constant revision are inevitable based on a particular situation or social pressure (Onditi, 2022). This dynamic role-sharing varies among cultural or ethnic groups and is also a learned expectation that orchestrates inequality in societies (Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022).

Male and female children are accustomed right from infancy to behaving in a certain prescribed manner and playing dissimilar roles in society. They are encouraged and conditioned to conform to conventional ethnic customs with commendations and or punitive sanctions (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). Considering the African patriarchal nature, there is

a delineation of the term fatherhood and motherhood which appears to be a masculinist state of affairs within the notion that women should be silenced (Sen et. al, 2007). Culturally, men seem highly favored by these traditions whereas women appear to bear the mischievous hardships. A typical African woman should not be too educated, the culture abhors it. Never divorce no matter what, except she wants to be castigated as a bad example with the inability to take on leadership positions, especially in religious settings (Jalloh, 2021). Obviously, the reputation of women is determined by the upshot of religious texts construal. For example, In Christian religion, Apostle Paul clearly instructed that woman be silent in the church (1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 women to be silent). Such text might be too complex to accord adequate interpretation at all times (Sibani, 2017).

On the other hand, the typical African man rules over his family, he defends and honors his family, he is the breadwinner, he provides for his household, with a firm hand, he trains his children according to the directions of the patriarchal family (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). From the cultural perception of social role theory, the nature of men as powerful and women as subservient comes into play. For instance, the man, "he" hunts for wild food while the woman "she" does the cooking. In the same vein, the axe is to the man's tool for ploughing the field and the hoe is to the woman for processing planted crops (Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022). In the Igbo tradition, for instance, men cultivate yams and women nurture farm produce such as vegetables, corn, and melon. Correspondingly, in the Hausa custom, women are obligated by their religion to remain indoors and not even be seen in public talk more of running businesses. In these circumstances, their children are the agents who run errands on their behalf (Jalloh, 2021).

A perfect theory is non-existent. Nevertheless, the social role theory properly elucidates on the male and female role segregations. Social roles as prominently dominated by patriarchal cultures have some notions as to victims of violence, in some instances, as well as a negative causal effect in driving economic advancement (Onditi, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology exhibited in this paper is explanatory and exploratory, that is, textual and content analysis. This paper relies on secondary sources of data collection, such as desk or library-based research whilst relying on the works of other publishers. The sources of data are the technique and procedure for sourcing materials as will be used in this paper. This further explains the structural framework of the paper and the methodology so used. The sources of data for this paper include data generation and collection. Data from secondary sources such as books, peer-reviewed academic journal articles, and internet sources were collected, and content and textual analysis served as the techniques so adopted to compare and analyze data so sourced.

DECIPHERING GENDER DISPARITIES IN AFRICA

First of all, the concept "Gender" connotes the biological variation of attitudes, social differences, and characteristics beyond the physical physic of both sexes based on being a man or woman. Gender disparity is the opposite of parity and gender parity, the presence of parity amongst both sexes is a fundamental human right in driving economic advancement. It includes the preservation of absolute rights, the entitlements to human, economic, social, and cultural improvements, and an equal voice in political and civic life (Onditi, 2022). Gender has also been a significant factor in establishing social uniformity principles and gender roles which further reveals the gendered nature of social identity and the universal subordination of women (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021).

In the simplest analogy, gender disparity is simply the absence of gender balance and concurrently, gender parity would signal that there is a proportionate ratio, at par, of equality between both genders (UNDP, 2019). In the historical milieu, gender is a concept for determining and distributing social roles. Gender does not mean

concentrating exclusively on womenfolk, but reasonably on the disproportions between male and female, and should not be confused with feminism or women's studies (Kanu 2012 in Animasahun, 2020). Gender parity is a priority for agenda development as well as a key driver in driving economic advancement (Onditi, 2022). In order to eradicate, the slow rate of development in most African countries gender parity must become a holistic concept in people's perspectives. Gender in the African culture is an avenue for conducting one's actions in alignment with cultural expectations. There is a stringent division of labor that explains what it means to be a man or woman in society. However, the African continent is diverse in cultures and values, yet the notion of women being the subordinate and weaker sex is a uniformity (Animasahun, 2020; Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022).

In general, in the pre-colonial African society, women undertook critical responsibilities as agents of proliferating hereditary routine, the cohesion of society, economic growth, and preserving cultures, through procreation, nurturing, application of communal moral coercive force for the common good, and partaking in socioeconomic endeavors (Okrah, 2018; Abiodun, 2020). Before the emergence of colonial rule in Africa, African queens sometimes exerted political powers that surpassed that of actual sovereigns (Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022).

Legendary queens and queen mothers, such as the queens of Egypt, Nandi of the Zulu, queen of Kush who fought Roman armies and conquered them at Aswan; Daurama, mother of the seven Hausa kingdoms; Ana de Sousa Nzinga, who repelled the Portuguese subjugation of Angola; Beatrice Kimpa Vita, a Kongo prophet scorched at the stake by Christian missionaries; Nanda, mother of the famous warrior-king Shaka Zulu; Amina Kulibali, founder of the Gabu dynasty in Senegal; and many others (Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022). Noticeably, the Queen Mother was an elder, much older than the King who is her biologically relative. She has her courtiers and staff; decrees of the King can only be annulled through her. More often than not, she had land, from which she benefitted from revenue through tax and her word was law of the land she held (Abiodun, 2020).

Historically, women had acknowledged their vital roles in the economic well-being of their societies. Accordingly, from the Kikuyu of Kenya, women were majorly food producers; not only had ready access to land but also had the authority over how the land was to be used and cultivated (Animasahun, 2020). Therefore, the value of women's productive labor in producing and processing food established and maintained their rights in the domestic and other spheres. Nowadays, women still are major food producers either directly or through employment, they do not receive the recognition and respect that they used to (Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022). Although the bride's wealth given to a woman by her newly wedded husband, it was primarily a woman's source of finance. However, this is arguably not economic independence, because with the new financial constraints from their husbands-to-be, these men based on colonialism, particularly in the form of heavy taxation, had to control and curtail bride wealth (Abiodun, 2020; Jalloh, 2021).

Arguably, advocating the essence of gender balance has been perceived as meddling with the intimate structural constructions of societal customary values. Hence, there has been some form of resistance to the advancement of gender parity in Africa (Bartels-Ellis and Franklin, 2011; Jalloh, 2021). Indications from the political survey across the African continent depict a recurring fraction of imbalance among the sexes (Oderinde, 2020). Fayomi *et al.* (2020) corroborate the gender imbalance in politics and emphasize that women's participation in politics is an important aspect of democratization and political transition, especially in Africa. While countries such as Rwanda, Senegal, and Uganda rank high in global rankings on women representation in parliament, several other African countries like Nigeria rank disappointingly low (Fayomi *et al.*, 2020). Gender disparities through the socioeconomic, cultural, and religious stereotypes of women's roles and poor legislation on women's representation raise the feminization

of poverty (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). The affirmative action of 30% gender representation in 1995 during the Beijing conference is yet to be fully adopted in Nigeria (Onditi, 2022). The Beijing Declaration is one of the international conferences which serves as a reference point for women's empowerment, participation, and equal access. Of all legal frameworks on gender equality in Nigeria, the grundnorm of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, that is, the Constitution is the most powerful legislation. Section 2 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN, 1999) explicitly informs against the prohibition of all forms of discrimination (Momoh and Stephen, 2021).

Essentially, on the one hand, gender disparities against men are worthy of consideration and must not be sidelined. Although prevalent with the female gender, is not restrictive to women alone. Sometimes though seldom, men are also dazed with inequality issues. A typical example could be: if both sexes apply for a particular job and the woman gets the job with a lower qualification just because feminism has attracted it to be so. This is especially evident in numerous marketing organizations as they utilize this to their advantage by recruiting more women to package themselves desirably just to attract investors to their organizations (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021).

Gender parity is a way of allocating equal standards to both sexes in the socio, political, religious, economic, and cultural practices. Conversely, the structural inequality resulting from the stereotypical confinement of gender roles congealed their economic power and made them more impoverished. It also has a limiting causative effect on the social, political, and economic prosperity of women (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). While it is not forbidden to take into cognizance the different peculiar compositions of the sexes, it is, however, essential that this cognition be a means to creating a leveler for equality amongst men and women. This should not be confused with denying an adequately qualified woman a position of power, either on the basis of their sex or under the guise that there would be no day-care facilities for her offspring (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021).

Certain African cultures, however, are permeated with religious connotations which are upscaled to a celestial directive to give them sovereignty and ensure they are observed (Ekenedilichukwu and Nwachukwu, 2022). In this essay, African culture is not inaccessible; hence, it is observed that gender disparities can be thoroughly examined from the social, economic, cultural, and religious factors (Animasahun, 2020). Thus, it is fundamental at this point to address how these crucial factors enable the understanding of gender disparities in Africa.

SOCIOECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN AFRICA

The African continent is one of the largest multi-ethnic continents in the world with more than 250 ethnic groups with diverse cultural practices (Jalloh, 2021). The idiosyncratic patterns of ideas, unbalanced governance, norms, and beliefs illustrate the way of life and affairs of a society or group within a society. These are labeled as culturally appropriate behaviors based on the gender ideologies of that custom or tradition (Momoh and Stephen, 2021).

Analyses of gender disparities from the socioeconomic, cultural, and religious angles reveal that women and girls as being in weaker and disproportionate positions (Abiodun, 2020). Socially, economically, culturally, and religious-wise, there are central and fashioned gendered prospects that shriek imbalance. In certain societies, parents consider the education of a female child to be an exercise in futility, because they believe she is solely the commodity of her husband and would never bear any benefits to her natal family (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). Subsequently, this could foster awkward or unnecessary exposure and vulnerability to abusive spouses and economic dependence (Abiodun, 2020; African Barometer, 2021).

Africa practices a patrimonial system of governance that is male-centric and based on fatherhood. Hence, gender equality is frequently neglected (Cock and Bernstein, 2001). Notwithstanding numerous struggles of

policies, international declarative interventions, and academic endeavors, gender disparities remain controversial and contentious globally and especially in Africa (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021). Disputably, a true form of democratic governance remains a utopian being that one of the indices of democracy is equality, that is, equal gender representation and participation. Justice, equality, fairness, and other inalienable rights must be evenly enjoyed by the citizenry without an unusual concession to gender receptiveness (Öztürk, 2020). Notwithstanding the rapid worldly arrangements, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious practices evidence a continuous form of imbalance in African leadership and various strata in society (Momoh and Stephen, 2021).

These cultural nuances breed harmful and somewhat physical, verbal, and or mental violence in marriages. For example, it could be adduced that, the ideology that the man is the head of the home and he is to firmly steer the marriage in the right direction that it should go might make him misbehave and even refuse to ask for his significant other, partner and wife's opinion since he is regarded as the master and lord of the home and therefore accountable to no one but himself. This goes without saying that when there is no accountability, abuse is inevitable and, in this circumstance, the lack of transparency can be highly detrimental. Although the woman nurtures, cares for, and tends to her home, she is merely regarded as a slave to her lord, and master who is supposedly her husband (Oderinde, 2020).

Arguably, this further foster polygamy because the man of the home does not think he is a cheat, rather he owns up to his action and with so much pride and effrontery to bring her home (Hailu and Regassa, 2008). Who dares question or challenge the typical African man who is set in his ways? In certain circumstances, this also makes some of these men feel the need to discipline their wife or wives like a little child if she refuses to comply with his bidding. In this sense, it could be logically inferred that patriarchy fuels gender-based violence (Adeosun, 2021). Moreover, when the man of the home dies, in certain cultures in Africa, the widow is made to swear to ancestral spirits, deities, and shrines elucidating the reason for her husband's death and that she has no part in it. In some extreme cases, to prove her innocence of his death, she may be forced to sleep in the same room with the corpse as well as drink the water used in bathing the corpse (Jalloh, 2021; Momoh and Stephen, 2021).

This patrilineal respect accorded to men is enormously reflected right from the birth of a male child who is considered the precious son and heir. Ostensibly, this immediately causes susceptible conditions and creates a prejudiced mentality in an infant as it accredits the male child and portrays him as of greater standards instead of an equal value to their female counterparts. Subsequently, all the parental courtesy and diverse opportunities ranging from technical skills to formal education are bestowed to allow them to sit at the table of decision-making, strategically positioned for high remuneration, and be favored for political positions (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021).

The contemporary religion in Africa still plays as a critical spirit in governance, gender structure and impresses the inevitability of pursuing religiocultural socialization for both women and men (Rwafa, 2016). By custom conventions, women are believed to be custodians of acceptable behaviors (Dhont *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, through religiocultural approach, older women who serve as the model induct younger women and girls into being "the standard women" in the society. Regardless of this, women are subjected to positions of helplessness compared to men. The reality of patriarchy in the sexual context means that that women are situated to serve men for sexual, entertainment, and domestic purposes with limited decision-making capacity (Aziegbe-Esho and Anetor, 2020). Understanding gender disparities therefore pays homage to socioeconomic and religiocultural analysis.

It is appalling that Africans though deeply entrenched in high religiosity, religious activities especially Christianity, Traditional worshippers,

and Islam still stigmatizes witchcraft. This witchery humiliation also evidences gender disparities as women are mostly at the heartbeat of witchcraft accusations (Momoh and Stephen, 2021). To a considerable extent, this reflection evidence religious freedom or practices and at the same time, religious discrimination. More so, this is excessively flagged up mostly in African countries and significantly male-dominated religious leaders. Several people not necessarily with the power of choice in the first instance got dedicated to a particular religious gathering, grew up in those sacred religious backgrounds, and just continue to pass it on from one generation to the other. Furthermore, it appears that for example in Nigeria, logical reasoning disappears when religion surfaces and these religious practices are often, regrettably, twisted to suit strategic situations (Jalloh, 2021). For example, Christianity has diverse denominations with multifarious focuses. For some, the emphasis is on economic prosperity; while others are focused on the second coming of Jesus Christ (Silberschmidt and Masculinities, 2004), and supercilious predictions about Jesus coming like a thief in the night and how to be rapture-able without being left behind (Onditi, 2022).

In the religious sense, ethical, pragmatic, and normative ideals are embraced to emphasize universality, promote good and godly living, spirituality in this world and beyond (Rwafa, 2016). Although globally, religion generally accords respect for men, women, and women's pivotal role in family lives. The world's religion does not however accord the total sense of parity between women and men (Moyo, 2004). Is equality before God a mere lip service? The character of God, the uncreated creator is usually demonstrated by the male figure with the woman merely as the mother to this "male figure" son. Jesus and his twelve disciples in the Bible were also men. Due to this patriarchal disposition, a woman, even though mother to the "son" for instance, Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus Christ, is only honored or revered as the mother to the savior (Silberschmidt and Masculinities, 2004). Women are not visible in public positions, events including the religious ceremonies as she is relegated to the household, motherly duties. There are certain misogynist ideas relating to religion and a country or continent that is overly religious must be cautious to achieve gender parity (Onditi, 2022). More so, gender roles are unbalanced as well as distinguished as the most acute constraints applies to women throughout pregnancy or menstruation. For example, she is exempted from entering the temple or even touching the Quaran (Sibani, 2017).

The global COVID-19 pandemic just like other forms of pandemics has often ensued in national, international, and sub-regional catastrophes with a substantial level of inequalities across diverse societies. Regardless, the pandemic heightened the pre-existing inequalities in the socioeconomic, cultural, and religious practices in Africa (Adeosun, 2021). Given the patriarchal structure that primes men over women, and the socioeconomic, religious, and cultural norms, there might be a clash in the household division of labor between the two sexes as well as an extra burden of adequately caring for the vulnerable during the pandemic such as elderly, children, and relatives and in customary roles (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021).

Gender disparity has been revealed to be correlated to the adverse impact on the economy (Oderinde, 2020). This is because cloaking the gender gap is fundamental for attaining higher productivity, stability, and economic growth (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021). In addition, this challenging concern of gender imbalance generally undermines well-being. It is also at the heart of equity and is considered to be a form of prejudice (Öztürk, 2020; Adeosun, 2021).

Political apathy often arises due to the colossal control of men in all things culturally and especially politics (Mushori, 2017). For instance, in voting rules and through voters' registration processes especially in some cultural settings, the head of the household usually keeps the voter's cards of his family members being the firm head, that nature has bestowed him to be and because he feels only him can do an excellent job of safekeeping essential documents. Then, he would only release those national voter's cards on the day of the election while leading his wife

or wives to the voting pool while monitoring and ensuring the vote and supporting only his candidate (Momoh and Stephen, 2021). Ostensibly, this constricts fundamental human rights and democratic privileges such as the freedom of choice of every citizen. Correspondingly, if such a woman thinks to even contest an election, she will most likely be crucified for attempting to behave, become or usurp the powers and entitlement accorded only to the menfolk. In addition, by virtue of those traditions, norms, financial obligations, lack of collateral and or funding networks, and educational level involved, she might not go far with that dream (Odusanya, 2022).

Some of these are deeply embedded as root causes for gender disparities in Africa. They are but are not limited to traditional imbalances amongst the sexes, family and financial constraints, cultural beliefs and practices, and environmental and religious encumbrances (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021). Discrimination against women, norms, and cultures in favor of the male gender, disparities in educational attainment, the gap in earnings, and low levels of political opportunity and participation, further bolster gender imbalances in Africa (Momoh and Stephen, 2021). More often than not, women are incapable of having financial access which simultaneously goes together with the control of power. The desired Africa is one where women have equal opportunities to participate in all levels of socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and political decision-making without bias, fear, or hindrance and with unequivocal support (African Barometer, 2021). There is a need for a special measure to correct historical and decision-making roles as well as imbalances in family settings, communities, and our national life (African Barometer, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Globally, there is a void. No single country has achieved gender parity, yet. We must collectively do more to effect a true, sustainable, and positive change. Starting with the understanding of gender disparities, the revelation and essence of dislocating cultural nuances, barbaric customs, and norms becomes discernible. Women must be restructured back into the societal structure of power and in full force (United Nations, 2020). It is crystal clear that women and men are far from being at par as equals, especially with consideration to reputation, incomes, and power. What is expected though, is an evolution of women in power, prestige, position, and finances. An all-inclusive constitution that is non-discriminatory and re-affirmative of the doctrine of gender parity is amongst other things, a crucial step in the right direction to break away from the historical gender disparities (Oderinde, 2020).

Political positions and positions of power should not be reserved or labeled "men only" affairs, these societal roles and responsibilities must be evenly distributed amongst both sexes and on merit (Adeosun, 2021). The education of the girl child is paramount in bridging gender gaps and societal tolerance as well as for the enhancement of the economy and reduction of poverty. It suffices to assert that the popular sayings of educating a girl child being tantamount to educating an entire community are apt. The historical illusion that women's core duties and personalities should be confined to the domestic or household level only must be eradicated, and new premise and typical examples must be highlighted and built (Ahinkorah *et al.*, 2021).

Given that women represent a momentous population force, women's issues and representation cannot be too easily jettisoned (Onditi, 2022). Regardless, quotas are not the best way to proceed and effect a sustainable change that goes to the root of history and cultural practices (Odusanya, 2022). Policies must be focused on fostering the advancement of women's educational qualifications and also embolden the participation of women in high-paying jobs as opposed to the traditional job construction and description stipulated for women.

Human capital expansion must be accorded sufficient attention at all levels of authority, especially from the home settings, and in raising boy and girl children equally (Oyekanmi and Moliki, 2021). Religious and traditional leaders should vehemently inculcate religious education,

support the essence, and push for gender balance in all strata including religious practices. Empowering women's access to prominent opportunities like men would significantly skyrocket the financial returns, reduce multidimensional poverty, and uplift good standing of the African economy.

Tackling the gender concerns and bias that consistently dawdles and deteriorate societies is imperative; since for instance, women's cognitive, and communication skills, and technological literacy seem inhibited and untapped (Momoh and Stephen, 2021). While several efforts have been established by government parastatals and various stakeholders, there remains a void, a conspicuous gap that necessitates being occupied for prompt and expedient socioeconomic development.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

The authors contributed to the body of existing literature and from a distinct lens. The major contributions centers of closing the gender disparities gap through addressing critical factors such as economic impediments, lack of or inadequate education, and religious beliefs. The study also recommended that the inflexible and barbaric cultural stereotypes and religious practices be reformed with consideration to gender parity. A standard shift is essential especially by women themselves, to ensure that women are both enlightened and empowered.

AUTHORS FUNDING

The authors report that there are no affiliations with or involvement in any organization with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the research of materials discussed in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

REFERENCES

- Abiodun B. Poverty Eradication and Empowerment of Rural Women: The Okowo'Dapo Initiative. [Paper Presentation]. Oke-Mosan, Ogun State: Women Empowerment Initiative Conference; 2020.
- Achebe C. Things Fall Apart. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press; 1958. p. 37.
- Adeosun OT and Owolabi KE. Gender inequality: Determinants and outcomes in Nigeria, J Bus and Socio-economic Development, 2021;1:65-181.
- African Barometer. Women's Political Participation. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; 2021.
- Ahinkorah BO, Hagan JE Jr., Ameyaw EK, Seidu AA, Schack T. COVID-19 pandemic worsening gender inequalities for women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa. Front Glob Womens Health 2021;2:686984.
- Akyeampong E, Fofack H. The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development in Post-colonial Africa: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No 6537; 2013.
- Animasahun BF. Cultural stereotype and women's subjugation in an African society: Challenges and way forward. J Afr Stud 2020;7:19-31.
- Aziegbe-Esho E, Anetor FO. Religious organisations and quality education for African women: The case of Nigeria. In: Empowering African Women for Sustainable Development. New York City: Springer International Publishing; 2020. p. 73-83.
- Cock J, Bernstein A. Gender differences: Struggles around needs and rights in South Africa. NWSA J 2001;13:138-52.
- Dhont N, Luchters S, Ombelet W, Vyankandondera J, Gasarabwe A, Van de Wijgert J, *et al.* Gender differences and factors associated with treatment-seeking behaviour for infertility in Rwanda. Hum Reprod 2010;25:2024-30.
- Eagly A, and Wood W. Social role theory. SAGE Publications Ltd. 2012;1-2 <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222>
- Ekenedilichukwu AO, Nwachukwu CC. Gender issues in African culture: An evaluation. J Appl Philos 2022;20:194-205.
- Fayomi OO, Salau OP, Popoola RO, Adigun OW. Women in executive political leadership in Africa. In: Yacob-Haliso O, Falola T, editors. The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies. Cham: Palgrave

- Macmillan; 2020.
- Hailu A, Regassa N. Characterization of women under polygamous marital relationship: (An examination of socio-cultural contexts of gender disparities through qualitative approach study in Sidama Zone of Southern Ethiopia). *Orient Anthropol* 2008;8:169-79.
- Jackson J. A conversation with Fiona Bartels-Ellis: About her background, her work on equality and diversity in the global environment, and her thoughts on future developments in the field", *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 2011;30:75-84.
- Jalloh AA. Role of Women in African Society; 2021. Available from: <https://www.dw.com-delwer> [Last accessed on 2022 May 14].
- Momoh Z, Stephen A. Gender disparities and the Nigerian civil service (2010-2016). *Benin J Soc Work Community Dev* 2021;3:12-20.
- Moyo FL. Religion, spirituality and being a woman in Africa: Gender construction within the African religio-cultural experiences. *Agenda* 2004;18:72-8.
- Mushori J. Demystifying Cultural Gender Disparities Experiences in Socio-economic and Political development in Africa. In: *Universities, Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development in Africa-Conference Proceedings*; 2017.
- Oderinde OA. Bible and women identity in post-colonial Africa. *KIU J Humanit* 2020;4:133-43.
- Odusanya TO. Gender equality and climate change: The international maritime organization's impact on mauritius climate justice. *Carnel J Law Polit* 2022;3:16-29.
- Odusanya TO. Reviving Gender Equilibrium on Corporate Boards Composition: From Bedrooms to Boardrooms. Turkey: 4th International Congress on Life, Social and Health Sciences in a Changing World; 2022. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358872943_reviving_gender_equilibrium_on_corporate_boards_composition_from_bedrooms_to_boardrooms [Last accessed on 2022 Apr 20].
- OECD. Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment Time Use Data and Gender Inequality. OECD Policy Paper, Development Policy Papers No 16. France: OECD Publishing; 2019.
- Okrah, K. The dynamics of gender roles and cultural determinants of African women's desire to participate in modern politics. *Global Engagement and Transformation*, 2018; 2(1). Available from <https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/joget/article/view/24395> [Last accessed 2023 May 03].
- Onditi F. *Equalitarianism*. In: *Gender Inequalities in Africa's Mining Policies*. Singapore: Springer; 2022.
- Oyekanmi AA, Moliki AO. An examination of gender inequality and poverty reduction in Ogun State, Nigeria. *J Sustain Dev Afr* 2021;23:31-43.
- Öztürk YM. An overview of ecofeminism: Women, nature and hierarchies. *J Acad Soc Sci* 2020;13:705-14.
- Reeves H, Baden, S. Gender and development: Concepts and definitions. Report prepared for the Department for International Development (DFID) for its gender mainstreaming intranet source, Institute of Development Studies, BRIDGE Report, Brighton. 2000. Available from [https://www.scirp.org/\(S\(351jmbntvnsjtlaadkposzje\)\)/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=959228](https://www.scirp.org/(S(351jmbntvnsjtlaadkposzje))/reference/ReferencesPapers.aspx?ReferenceID=959228) [Last accessed on 2023 May 03].
- Rwafa U. Culture and religion as sources of gender inequality: Rethinking challenges women face in contemporary Africa. *J Lit Stud* 2016;32:43-52.
- Sen G, George A, Ostlin P, Ramos S. *Unequal, Unfair, Ineffective, and Inefficient Gender Inequity in Health: Why It Exists and How We Can Change It*. Final Report to the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health; 2007.
- Sibani CM. Gender inequality and its challenge to women development in Nigeria: The religious approach. *Unizik J Arts Humanit* 2017;18:432-49.
- Silberschmidt M. Masculinities, sexuality, and socio-economic change in rural and urban East Africa. In: *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa*. Sweden: Nordic Africa Institute; 2004. p. 233.
- The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action: Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995. New York: Department of Public Information, United Nations; 1996.
- Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. With the first, second and third alterations of 2010;1999. Available from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/44e344fa4.html> [Last accessed on 2023 May 03].
- United Nations. Funding for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Programming: Case study. Nigeria: UNFPA; 2020.