Towards Achieving Gender Equality in Nigeria: Addressing Barriers and Implementing Strategic Solutions

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Abstract

This study examines gender inequality in Nigeria, focusing on the barriers women and girls face in education, employment, healthcare, political participation, and environmental health. Using a multi-theoretical framework and secondary data analysis, the research reveals persistent gender disparities despite the presence of legal frameworks. Economic marginalisation, limited social well-being, underrepresentation in politics, and disproportionate environmental burdens are key factors contributing

to inequality. The study develops a comprehensive model to address these issues, emphasising strategies for economic empowerment, social protection, legal reforms, and cultural change. By offering actionable recommendations, the research aims to inform policy and foster long-term, sustainable progress toward gender equality in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Gender Inequality, Intersectionality, Reforms, Social awareness, Women's Empowerment*

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is a land of immense cultural wealth and demographic dynamism (Fantom & Serajuddin, 2016; Lawal et al., 2018). Renowned for its diversity, Nigeria is home to over 500 ethnic groups, each contributing distinct traditions, languages, and lifestyles. This diversity, coupled with abundant natural resources and vibrant arts, positions the country as a potential global powerhouse. However, persistent gender inequalities hinder Nigeria's progress, particularly affecting the well-being and opportunities of women and girls (UN Women, 2022).

Gender inequality in Nigeria is a complex issue influenced by interrelated socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Using a conceptual framework, this study examines the relationships between these factors and key outcomes such as women's access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. Socio-cultural norms, for instance, shape attitudes towards gender roles, often limiting girls' access to education and confining women to informal, low-paying jobs. Economic disparities exacerbate these challenges, as poverty disproportionately affects women and restricts their ability to access essential services. Institutional barriers, including inadequate legal protections and discriminatory policies, further entrench gender-based inequities.

This study aims to investigate these multifaceted barriers to better understand the extent of gender inequality in Nigeria. By identifying the specific ways in which socio-cultural norms, economic conditions, and institutional factors influence women's lives, the research addresses critical gaps in understanding the systemic challenges faced by Nigerian women and girls.

Building on this analysis, the study seeks to develop a comprehensive model for addressing gender inequality. The proposed model integrates insights from feminist theory, intersectionality, and social role theory to provide a holistic approach to tackling the issue. Feminist theory highlights systemic power imbalances and structural inequalities, while intersectionality examines the overlapping impacts of gender, ethnicity, and class. Social role theory provides a lens to understand how societal expectations shape and constrain women's opportunities. Together, these theoretical perspectives inform actionable strategies to empower women and girls and promote gender equity.

Despite global progress in advancing women's rights, Nigeria continues to grapple with significant challenges, including high rates of gender-based violence, child marriage, adolescent pregnancies, and underrepresentation in leadership roles. Critical data gaps, particularly in areas such as unpaid care work, the gender pay gap, and access to technology, further hinder the development of effective policies (Fantom & Serajuddin, 2016; Lawal et al., 2018). Addressing these data gaps and identifying context-specific solutions is essential for designing interventions that respond to the unique needs of Nigerian women and girls.

Through its dual focus on understanding barriers and proposing solutions, this study seeks to contribute meaningfully to ongoing efforts to achieve gender equity in Nigeria. By situating the findings within a clear conceptual framework, the research not only provides an in-depth analysis of the factors perpetuating inequality but also offers practical recommendations for fostering sustainable change.

Theoretical Framework

This study investigates the complicated subject of gender inequality in Nigeria using a thorough theoretical framework that incorporates many perspectives.. By combining feminist theory, intersectionality, social role theory, human capital theory, and institutional theory, the framework provides a holistic understanding of the systemic barriers women and girls face across various sectors. Each theoretical perspective contributes unique insights, allowing for a multidimensional analysis of the interplay between socio-cultural norms, institutional structures, and individual behaviours.

Feminist theory serves as the cornerstone of this framework, offering a critique of patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender inequalities. It highlights how power imbalances between men and women are institutionalised, resulting in systemic discrimination and unequal access to resources and opportunities (Lorber, 1997). In the Nigerian context, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms in cultural, religious, and social practices create structural barriers that marginalise women and girls, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to dismantle these inequities (Okome, 2003).

Intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, enriches this analysis by examining how various forms of oppression—such as gender, ethnicity, class, and geographic location—intersect to create unique experiences of disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989). In Nigeria, intersectional analysis reveals that women from marginalised ethnic groups, rural areas, or lower socio-economic backgrounds face compounded barriers to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This perspective emphasises the importance of addressing these intersecting inequalities to ensure that interventions are inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of women and girls.

Social role theory provides insight into how societal expectations and stereotypes about gender roles shape behaviour and opportunities (Eagly & Wood, 2012). In Nigeria, traditional norms often confine women to domestic responsibilities and limit their participation in public, economic, and political spheres. These roles not only restrict women's potential but also reinforce gender inequality by perpetuating stereotypes and limiting access to leadership positions, education, and formal employment. By addressing these societal norms, it becomes possible to challenge deeply rooted stereotypes and promote equitable opportunities for all.

Human capital theory highlights the economic implications of investing in education and skills development. It posits that disparities in educational attainment contribute to lower workforce participation and economic productivity among women (Becker, 1993). In Nigeria, these disparities are evident in limited access to quality education and vocational training for women, which undermines their ability to accumulate human capital. Addressing this gap is crucial not only for empowering women but also for fostering national economic growth and development.

Institutional theory focuses on the role of formal and informal institutions in shaping individuals' opportunities and behaviors (Scott,

2001). In Nigeria, institutions such as legal systems, political structures, and labour markets often reflect and reinforce gender biases. Discriminatory laws and practices restrict women's access to property rights, political participation, and formal employment. Institutional reforms are therefore essential to create an enabling environment that supports gender equality and empowers women and girls.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the framework underscores the interplay between societal norms, institutional structures, and individual behaviours in perpetuating gender inequality. It justifies the need for a multifaceted approach that combines legal and policy reforms with cultural transformation and economic strategies. This holistic perspective equips the study to analyse gender inequality in Nigeria comprehensively and propose actionable solutions tailored to the country's unique socio-cultural and institutional context.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach through secondary data analysis to examine the barriers faced by women and girls in Nigeria regarding education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. By leveraging existing data from credible sources, the research aimed to identify trends and patterns in gender inequality across these domains.

Research Philosophy and Design

The study adheres to a positivist research philosophy, which emphasises using observable, quantifiable data to examine relationships between variables and identify patterns. This approach aligns with the study's objectives of investigating specific barriers to gender equality and developing evidence-based solutions. The research design is descriptive in nature, focusing on identifying and understanding the scope of gender inequalities in Nigeria, and it adopts a cross-sectional design by analysing existing data collected at a specific point in time, which is appropriate for this type of investigation.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study includes women and girls in Nigeria across various regions, socio-economic groups, and age brackets. Given

the scope of the research, a national-level analysis is conducted to provide a comprehensive view of gender inequalities in the country. The sample consists of secondary data drawn from several key sources that provide data on gender indicators in education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. The sampling is purposeful in nature, selecting datasets that are representative of these sectors and gender disparities across different demographics.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from secondary sources, which were carefully reviewed and selected for their credibility and relevance to the research questions. The sources included:

Government Reports: the publications from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) offered data on national demographics, educational enrollment, labour force participation, and health indicators. Reports from the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and relevant state agencies provided insights into policies and programs promoting gender equality (National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2024).

International Organisations: Data from the World Bank, UN Women, and UNESCO Institute for Statistics offered internationally comparable indicators on gender equality, providing a benchmark to assess Nigeria's progress and areas for improvement (World Bank, UN Women, UNESCO Institute for Statistics).

Academic Journals: Peer-reviewed journals from reputable platforms such as JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and EBSCOhost provided in-depth analyses of gender inequality in Nigeria, focusing on topics such as cultural norms in girls' education and gender-based violence in healthcare settings.

Data Selection

To ensure the quality and relevance of the data, the following criteria were applied in selecting secondary sources:

Credibility of the Source: Data were chosen from reputable government agencies, established international organisations, and peer-reviewed academic journals with rigorous methodologies.

Relevance to Research Questions: Only data directly addressing gender inequality in the key sectors under study (education, employment, healthcare, and political participation) were included.

Timeliness: Data from the last 5-10 years were prioritised to reflect current trends and patterns in gender inequality in Nigeria.

Data Availability: Data were selected based on their accessibility in formats conducive to analysis, such as downloadable spreadsheets or publicly available databases.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using statistical software such as SPSS to explore trends and relationships between variables. Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, medians, and standard deviations) were calculated to provide an overview of the distribution of gender-related variables across different sectors. Additionally, inferential statistical tests such as chi-square tests were applied to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in gender inequality across regions, socio-economic groups, and educational levels in Nigeria. These analyses helped identify key areas where gender inequality is most pronounced, thereby informing the development of strategies to address these disparities.

Limitations and Considerations

While secondary data analysis is cost-effective and provides access to large-scale datasets, it presents limitations. Data may not always align perfectly with the study's specific research questions, and variations in data collection methodologies across different agencies could lead to inconsistencies (Bryman, 2016). To address these limitations, the study carefully selected data sources with strong methodological rigour and ensured triangulation by drawing from diverse, credible datasets to corroborate findings (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, the analysis was mindful

of the limitations inherent in secondary data, focusing on broader trends and patterns while acknowledging data gaps where relevant.

By addressing these methodological concerns and leveraging secondary data, the study provides a robust examination of the barriers to gender equality in Nigeria and develops a comprehensive model to address these issues.

Result

Barriers Faced by Women and Girls in Nigeria in Key Areas

Gender Data Gaps: Nigeria vs. Africa

Figure 1 illustrates significant gender data gaps in Nigeria, which hinder comprehensive assessments of the country's progress toward achieving gender equality. The data indicates that 53.3% of gender-specific SDG indicators are missing for Nigeria, creating substantial barriers to tracking gender-related advancements. Only 4.9% of the indicators show high performance, suggesting that despite some progress, many challenges persist. Comparatively, the African continent faces a larger data gap (62.3%), further demonstrating the widespread challenge of data scarcity. The lack of data and its implications highlight the need for improved gender-responsive data collection systems to inform policy and action.

Figure 1: Gender data gaps and country performance
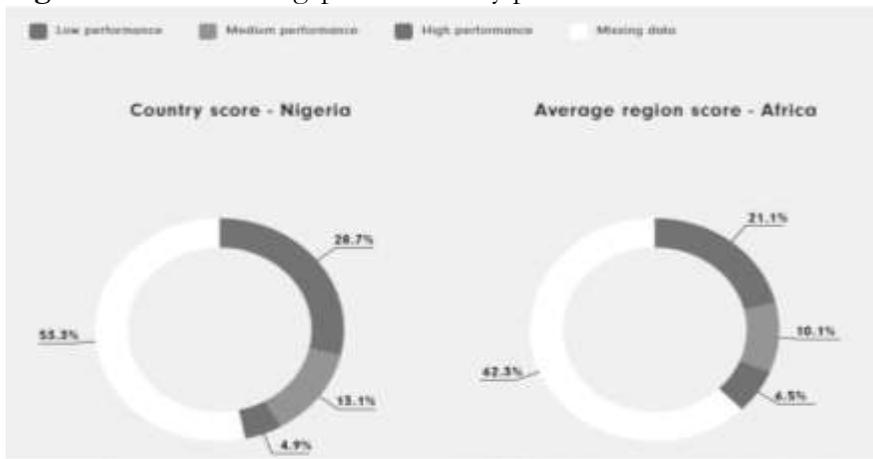
Source: Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub

Gender Disparities in Nigeria's Labour Market: Poverty, Pensions, and Unemployment

1. *Employed Population Below the International Poverty Line*

Figure 2.1.1.1 shows that 32.2% of employed women fall below the international poverty line, implying that a sizable proportion of Nigerian women in Nigeria work in low-paying jobs. While men also face poverty, the slightly higher rate among women indicates barriers such as limited access to resources and gendered labour market segmentation. This finding underscores the need for policies that promote economic empowerment and tackle the gender wage gap.

2. *Proportion of Population Above Statutory Pensionable Age Receiving a Pension*

Figure 2.1.3.1 shows a marked absence of data for women in the pension system, reflecting lower participation in formal employment sectors that provide pension schemes. The high mortality rates and limited economic opportunities available to women exacerbate this issue. This finding highlights the need for gender-sensitive social protection policies that ensure women's financial security, particularly in old age.

3. *Unemployment Rate*

Figure 2.8.5.2 indicates a lower unemployment rate for women (7.5%) compared to men (9.4%), but this statistic does not account for the high levels of women working in the informal sector, which are not captured in official unemployment rates. Cultural norms and the lack of access to formal employment opportunities contribute to this hidden unemployment, reinforcing the need for inclusive economic policies and labour market reforms that address gender disparities.

Figure 2: Economic Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Source: Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub

Gender Disparities in Social Well-Being: Food Security, Maternal Health, and Maternity Benefits

1. *Proportion of Mothers with Newborns Receiving Maternity Cash Benefit*

Figure 3.1.3.1 shows that only 0.1% of mothers receive maternity cash benefits, emphasising the extreme lack of social protection for women during a critical phase in their life. This gap points to the need for improved maternity benefits and support systems that reduce the financial burden on mothers and promote maternal health.

2. *Prevalence of Severe Food Insecurity*

Figure 3.2.1.2 shows that women (73.4%) are more likely to experience severe food insecurity compared to men (70%). Women's vulnerability to food insecurity can be attributed to factors like unequal access to land, resources, and income-generating opportunities. Addressing gendered barriers to food security requires targeted interventions that improve women's access to resources and empower them within the household.

3. *Maternal Mortality Ratio*

Figure 3.3.1.1 highlights Nigeria's alarming maternal mortality ratio (917 deaths per 100,000 live births), which underscores the high risks women face during childbirth. Limited access to quality healthcare, inadequate skilled birth attendants, and poor infrastructure in rural areas contribute to this crisis. Addressing maternal health disparities requires investments in healthcare infrastructure, professionals, and access to maternal care, especially in rural areas.

Figure 3: Social protection, poverty and freedom from violence, stigma & stereotypes
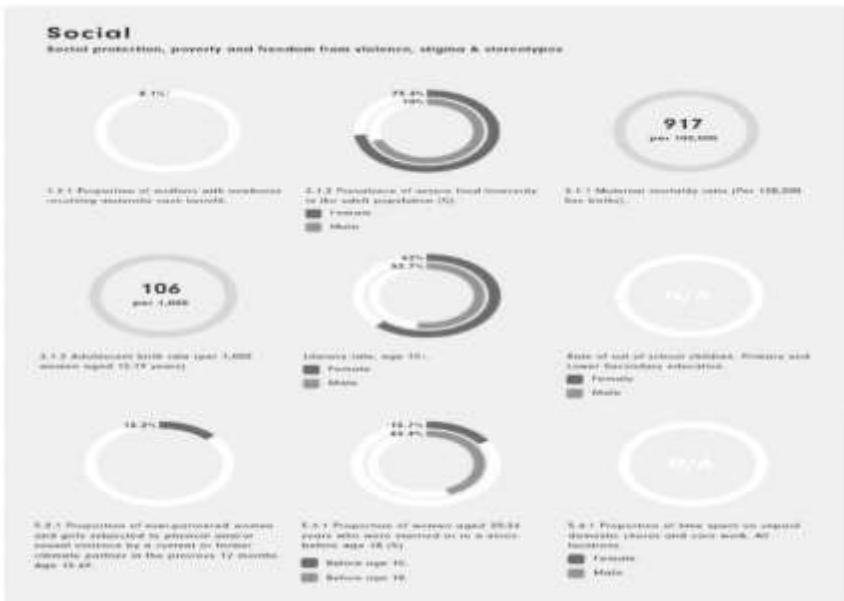
Source: Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub

Education, Adolescent Health, and Literacy Rate

1. *Adolescent Birth Rate*

Figure 3.7.2 reveals a concerning adolescent birth rate (106 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19), which contributes to delayed education and long-term economic disadvantage for young women. This finding calls for enhanced access to reproductive health education, contraception, and

support services that enable young girls to make informed choices about their health and education.

2. Female Literacy Rate

Also, Figure 3.7.2 shows a higher female literacy rate (62%) compared to males (52.7%) suggests some progress in women's access to education. However, the missing data on school enrollment and completion rates signals potential gender disparities in educational access, particularly in rural areas. Policies focused on improving school infrastructure and addressing socio-cultural barriers to girls' education are critical.

3. Violence Against Women and Child Marriage

Figures 3.5.2.1 and 3.5.3.1 highlight the prevalence of violence against women (13.2% of women aged 15-49) and the high incidence of child marriage (43.4% of women aged 20-24 married before 18). These statistics emphasise the need for stricter legal frameworks, enhanced law enforcement, and community-based programmes to combat gender-based violence and child marriage.

Unpaid Domestic Work

While the data on unpaid domestic work is unavailable (Figure 3.5.4.1), it is likely that women disproportionately bear the burden of domestic chores and caregiving, limiting their opportunities for paid employment and education. This unquantified yet critical area calls for social policies that recognise and value unpaid care work, as well as initiatives that promote shared responsibility within households.

Developing a Model to Address Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Stalled Progress: Gender Disparity in Nigerian Political Participation and Leadership

1. Legal Frameworks

Figure 4.5.1.1 indicates that while Nigeria has made progress in establishing legal frameworks for gender equality (81.8% achievement),

the country still faces significant challenges in areas such as violence against women (58.3%) and family law (30%). This disparity calls for stronger enforcement of laws and policies that protect women's rights, particularly within the family and private sphere.

2. *Women's Representation in Government*

Figures 4.5.5.1 and 4.5.5.2 show that women's representation in Nigeria's national parliament (3.6%) is alarmingly low, indicating a significant barrier to women's participation in political decision-making. This underrepresentation highlights the need for gender quotas, training, and support for women in politics to ensure more equitable representation.

3. *Women in Leadership Positions*

Figure 4.5.5.2 shows that women hold 30.3% of managerial positions in the private sector, reflecting some progress in gender inclusion. However, the proportion of women in senior management roles (28.9%) remains lower, suggesting the need for policies and organizational practices that promote women's advancement to top leadership positions.

Figure 4: Political participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions
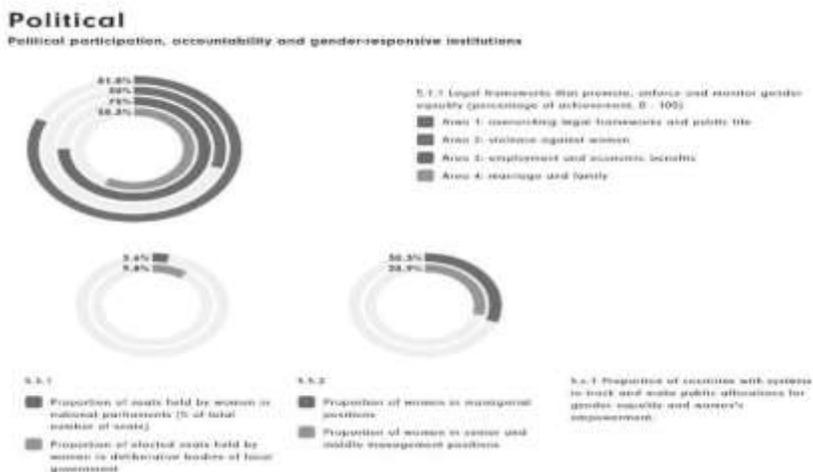
Source: Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub

The Murky Reality: Environmental Challenges and Gender in Nigeria

1. Air Pollution and Health

Figure 5.3.9.1 highlights the high mortality rate attributed to household air pollution, a problem that disproportionately affects women and girls due to their primary responsibility for cooking. The findings point to the need for clean cooking technologies and environmental policies that address gendered health risks.

2. Access to Clean Water and Sanitation

Figure 5.6.1.1 reveals that only 22% of Nigeria's population has access to safely managed drinking water, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Improving access to clean water and sanitation is essential to promoting gender equality and improving public health.

3. Clean Energy Use

Figure 5.7.1.2 shows that only 13% of Nigerians use clean cooking technologies, exacerbating health risks from air pollution. The findings suggest the need for policies that promote clean energy solutions and gender-responsive approaches to environmental sustainability.

Figure 5: Environmental conservation, protection, and rehabilitation
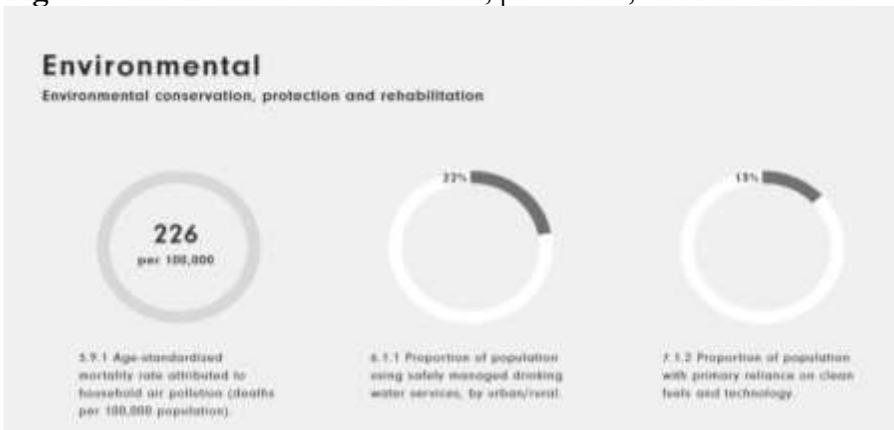
Source: Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub

Discussion

Examining the barriers women and girls face in Nigeria in key areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and political participation.

Barriers to Education:

The underrepresentation of women in education continues to be a major barrier to gender equality in Nigeria. Despite improvements in female literacy (62%), the data shows a persistent gender disparity in education, especially at higher levels. Figure 3.7.2 reveals the high adolescent birth rate (106 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19), which is often linked to early school dropout and limited opportunities for girls. These barriers are compounded by cultural norms that prioritize boys' education over girls', limiting their access to opportunities and perpetuating the cycle of gender inequality. This issue is also discussed in line with liberal feminist theory, which highlights systemic inequalities within educational structures.

Barriers to Employment:

Women face significant economic challenges in Nigeria, with a disproportionate number of employed women living below the international poverty line (32.2%) compared to men (34.5%). The results from Figure 2.1.1.1 highlight the economic marginalization of women, especially those working in informal sectors where pay is often below the poverty threshold. The lack of maternity benefits, as shown in Figure 3.1.3.1, adds to this economic insecurity, exacerbating the systemic inequalities women face in the labour market. These findings align with liberal feminist theory, which points to the economic structure as a key determinant of gender inequality.

Barriers to Healthcare:

Healthcare access, particularly maternal healthcare, represents another major barrier to women's well-being. The high maternal mortality ratio (917 deaths per 100,000 live births) and the high unmet need for family planning services (61% of women aged 15-49) are critical concerns, as presented in Figures 3.3.1.1 and 3.4.1.2. These statistics reflect a lack of

access to essential healthcare services, especially in rural areas, where women are most vulnerable. As Okonofua and Thakar (2022) noted, inadequate healthcare infrastructure contributes to poor maternal outcomes, which further limits women's health and autonomy. The findings directly tie into the patriarchal norms and institutional barriers women face in accessing quality healthcare services.

Barriers to Political Participation:

The results indicate a significant gender gap in political representation. The low proportion of women in national parliaments (3.6%) and local government positions (9.8%), as shown in Figures 4.5.5.1 and 4.6.3.1, highlights the institutional barriers that prevent women from participating fully in political processes. These figures underscore the need for legal reforms and societal shifts to ensure equal political participation. The results reflect the theoretical concepts of institutional barriers, where societal norms and structures disproportionately hinder women's access to political power (Akinbi and Akinbi, 2015).

Developing a Comprehensive Model to Address Gender Inequality in Nigeria

Data Collection and Analysis

A foundational issue identified is the significant gap in gender-specific data, with 53.3% of required indicators missing. This gap limits the development of targeted interventions across all domains. To address this:

Gender-Responsive Data Systems: Establish a robust system for collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data to provide insights into key areas such as health, education, and employment. Specific gaps identified include a lack of data on gender disparities in rural health outcomes, employment rates for women in the informal sector, and educational attainment in various ethnic groups. These gaps hinder effective policymaking and resource allocation.

Gender Audits and Annual Gender Reports: Implement gender audits in public institutions to track gender-specific disparities and progress.

Annual gender reports could be generated at the local, state, and national levels to monitor the status of gender equality across sectors.

Stakeholder Collaboration: Partnerships with government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations will ensure standardised methodologies and effective progress monitoring. Collaborative efforts should focus on improving data collection at the national and grassroots levels, especially in rural communities.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Progress will be tracked against global frameworks like the SDGs, and gender-specific indicators for education, healthcare, employment, and political participation will be developed. These indicators will help assess the effectiveness of interventions and ensure real-time data tracking at the national and local levels.

Data collection efforts must focus on regions where gender disparities are most pronounced, such as in rural health outcomes, where lack of infrastructure limits women's access to maternal healthcare. In employment, gender-disaggregated data should capture the increasing informal sector workforce, particularly women in agriculture, to tailor economic policies accordingly.

Barriers in Education

The study highlighted persistent gender disparities in education, linked to cultural norms, high adolescent birth rates (106 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19), and school dropout rates for girls.

Proposed Solutions: The model prioritises

Public Awareness Campaigns: Target campaigns to challenge norms that devalue girls' education. These campaigns should include media-driven activities directed at parents, teachers, and community leaders that highlight the long-term benefits of girls' education. Community leaders, especially from rural areas, can be key influencers in shifting public perception.

Financial Incentives: Scholarships for girls can reduce economic barriers. To further support families in poverty, financial support should also cover

indirect costs such as uniforms, books, and transportation. Targeting families in low-income regions could maximise the reach and impact of these incentives.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Introducing culturally sensitive programs focused on reducing adolescent pregnancies and their impact on school dropout rates. These programs should be integrated into school curriculums and community workshops. Furthermore, local adaptations may be required to accommodate for regional differences in cultural attitudes toward sexuality.

Barriers in Employment

Women face significant economic challenges, with a disproportionate number of employed women living below the poverty line (32.2%). Many work in informal sectors, where pay is often below the poverty threshold, and they lack access to maternity benefits.

Proposed Solutions: The model emphasizes:

Vocational Training Programs: Align these programmes with high-growth industries such as technology and agriculture. Integrating technology in training—through remote or online platforms—can broaden access, particularly for women in underserved areas.

Policies Ensuring Equal Pay and Maternity Benefits: Advocate for laws ensuring equal pay for equal work and maternity benefits, particularly in the informal sector. Developing tailored microfinance schemes would provide women access to capital for entrepreneurship, contributing to their financial independence.

Formalising Informal Employment Sectors: Encourage initiatives that help transition women working in the informal sector into formal employment, offering improved labour rights and social protection.
Technology Integration: Mobile platforms and digital solutions can be developed to connect women with remote work opportunities, expand access to formal employment, and promote entrepreneurship. Leveraging technology in the workplace is key to creating sustainable economic opportunities for women.

Leveraging mobile technology to provide women with access to remote work or entrepreneurship opportunities can bridge the employment gap in rural areas. Additionally, integrating digital skills into vocational training programmes can prepare women for high-growth sectors like technology, e-commerce, and digital marketing.

Barriers in Healthcare

Critical gaps in maternal and reproductive healthcare were evident, with high maternal mortality rates (917 deaths per 100,000 live births) and unmet family planning needs (61%).

Proposed Solutions: The model includes:

Investments in Rural Healthcare Infrastructure: Focus on building and improving health facilities, particularly in rural areas, and training skilled birth attendants to reduce maternal mortality.

Subsidised or Free Access to Maternal and Reproductive Healthcare Services: Ensure access to essential reproductive health services, especially for low-income women. Efforts to reduce financial barriers can include the introduction of government-funded health insurance schemes.

Community-Based Programs: Develop programs aimed at educating women on reproductive rights and family planning options. Special efforts should be made to involve men in maternal health decisions, challenging patriarchal norms that limit women's autonomy in healthcare.

Telemedicine: Integrating telemedicine services could help address healthcare access issues in rural and remote areas, providing women with consultations and resources for maternal care.

Barriers to Political Participation

The underrepresentation of women in politics (3.6% in national parliaments) and decision-making reflects deep institutional barriers.

Proposed Solutions: The model incorporates:

Gender Quotas: Implement minimum representation thresholds for women in political and administrative roles, ensuring their participation in decision-making bodies.

Leadership Development Initiatives: Provide mentorship and training for aspiring female leaders. These initiatives could be conducted in partnership with local NGOs and international organisations, especially in regions with lower female political representation.

Strengthened Legislation: Enact and enforce laws that protect women from violence and discrimination in politics, creating a safer environment for women to participate.

Challenging Sociocultural Norms

Patriarchal norms that limit women's roles in education, employment, and family life continue to present barriers.

Proposed Solutions: The model promotes:

Community Dialogues: Facilitate discussions to challenge harmful practices such as child marriage and intimate partner violence. These dialogues should engage local leaders, especially in rural areas, to catalyse change.

Engaging Men and Boys: Develop peer mentoring and workshops targeted at men and boys, focusing on how their involvement in gender equality initiatives leads to better outcomes for families and communities. Media campaigns could also highlight positive male role models supporting gender equality.

National Campaigns: Raise awareness about gender justice champions who have broken societal barriers, thus encouraging cultural shifts toward equality.

Environmental Considerations

Environmental challenges such as limited access to clean water and exposure to household air pollution disproportionately affect women's health and productivity.

Proposed Solutions: The model advocates for:

Subsidised Clean Cooking Technologies: Introduce eco-friendly stoves to reduce exposure to harmful pollutants, that affect respiratory health.
Investments in Water and Sanitation Infrastructure: Focus on improving water storage systems and sanitation facilities in rural and underserved areas. This will reduce the time women spend collecting water, leaving more time for education and economic pursuits.

Programmes for Climate Resilience: Engage women in climate adaptation planning, particularly in agriculture, where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. This will also increase their economic participation by promoting sustainable agricultural practices.

Implementation and Sustainability

The success of this model depends on:

Partnerships: Collaborating with local communities, NGOs, and international organisations to ensure culturally relevant and sustainable solutions are implemented. Regional variations should be considered when developing localised interventions.

Policy Integration: Embedding the model within national development plans, such as Nigeria's National Gender Policy and the SDGs, ensures gender equality is prioritised across all sectors. Policy integration must extend beyond education and health to other sectors such as agriculture and climate change. In agriculture, gender-sensitive policies should ensure women have equal access to land, credit, and training. Additionally, gender-responsive budgeting across all sectors, including infrastructure and climate resilience, should be implemented to guarantee that financial resources align with gender equality objectives.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting: Implement gender-responsive budgeting practices to ensure adequate financial resources are allocated to gender equality programmes and interventions.

Capacity Building: Training key stakeholders—such as facilitators, health workers, educators, and policymakers—in gender-sensitive practices to ensure the model's long-term impact.

Expected Impact

By addressing the barriers in education, employment, healthcare, political participation, and sociocultural norms, this model provides a holistic framework for fostering gender equality in Nigeria. It offers a clear pathway to an inclusive society where women and girls can thrive, through evidence-based interventions sensitive to local contexts, and aimed at long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

Nigeria's journey towards gender equality presents a complex landscape, characterised by significant challenges and promising opportunities. The data analysed underscores the pressing need for enhanced data collection and reporting on gender equality indicators, with over 50% of the required data currently missing (World Bank, 2018). Filling these gaps will provide a clearer understanding of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, facilitating informed decision-making and more effective policy interventions.

The analysis reveals a persistent gap between existing legal frameworks and their implementation, highlighting significant disparities in women's economic opportunities, health outcomes, political participation, and exposure to environmental risks. While there are pockets of progress, such as the increase in female literacy rates, these improvements are insufficient to bridge the broader gender gap. This points to a need for urgent action in several key areas.

Achieving true gender equality in Nigeria requires a multi-pronged and holistic approach that tackles the root causes of these disparities. Economically, policies that promote equal pay for equal work, dismantle barriers to women's participation in higher-paying sectors, and invest in skills training and education programs targeted specifically at women are

critical steps toward their financial empowerment (World Bank, 2018). Expanding social security coverage and ensuring access to maternity leave and childcare support are critical for women's full participation in the workforce.

Addressing violence against women must remain a top priority. Strengthening legal frameworks to combat gender-based violence, alongside improving law enforcement and providing comprehensive support services for survivors, is crucial (WHO, 2013). In addition, investing in comprehensive sex education and ensuring access to contraception can help reduce adolescent birth rates and improve maternal health outcomes (UNPF, 2021).

Educational disparities between genders must be addressed with a two-fold strategy. Firstly, understanding the underlying reasons for gender disparities in school enrollment, completion rates, and access to quality education—particularly in rural areas—is essential. Secondly, tackling cultural norms that prioritise boys' education over girls' education and providing targeted support programmes for girls can help close the gender gap in educational opportunities (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021).

Increasing women's political participation requires a combination of approaches. Implementing quota systems or affirmative action policies can be a short-term solution to accelerate gender parity in government bodies (Busemeyer, 2015). Additionally, promoting civic engagement programs and leadership training specifically designed for women can create a pipeline of female candidates for political office, ensuring greater representation and decision-making power for women.

Environmental considerations, particularly about women's health and well-being, must be integrated into gender equality initiatives. Investing in renewable energy sources and promoting cleaner cooking technologies, such as biogas or solar cookers, can significantly reduce household air pollution—a health risk that disproportionately affects women due to their traditional roles in household chores (WHO, 2016). Moreover, expanding access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities in rural areas is essential for improving public health, with particular attention to addressing the specific sanitation needs of women and girls.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality in Nigeria is not merely a moral imperative; it is a critical pathway to sustainable development. By dismantling the barriers that limit women's opportunities and

empowering them to reach their full potential, Nigeria can create a more just, equitable, and prosperous society for all its citizens. Challenging patriarchal norms, investing in education and healthcare, and increasing women's political participation are crucial steps in this process. By adopting an intersectional lens and addressing the root causes of inequality, Nigeria can build a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

Recommendation

The analysis underscores the urgent need for a multifaceted approach to address gender inequality in Nigeria. Empowering women and bridging the gender gap requires a comprehensive focus on economic empowerment, social well-being, political participation, and environmental health.

Economic Empowerment

A critical recommendation is the implementation and enforcement of policies that ensure equal pay for equal work across all sectors. This would address disparities in compensation and support women in accessing fair economic opportunities. Additionally, enacting legislation to prohibit gender-based discrimination in hiring and promotion practices is vital for creating a more inclusive and equitable workforce. Investments in skills training and education programmes targeted at women are equally important. These programs should focus on sectors with high growth potential and incorporate financial literacy education, empowering women to make informed decisions about their economic futures. Furthermore, expanding financial inclusion by providing access to microloans and credit facilities can support women's entrepreneurship and foster greater economic independence.

Social Well-being

On the health front, a significant recommendation is to invest in comprehensive sex education programs and ensure access to affordable contraception to reduce adolescent birth rates and improve maternal health outcomes. Allocating more resources towards improving healthcare services for women, especially in rural areas, is crucial to addressing the specific health needs of women. The recommendations

made by Okonofua and Thakar (2022) to increase funding and expand access to sexual and reproductive health services further underscore the importance of addressing women's reproductive health needs. Another pressing area is tackling violence against women. Strengthening legal frameworks to address various forms of violence, including domestic violence and sexual assault, is imperative. Enhancing law enforcement capacities to investigate and prosecute such offences, along with establishing comprehensive support services such as shelters, counselling, and legal aid for survivors, should be prioritised. Incorporating insights from Dim (2020) on ethnoregional dynamics can help tailor culturally sensitive awareness programmes and community-based interventions, especially in areas where traditional practices persist. In education, it is essential to conduct research to identify and address the root causes of gender disparities in school enrollment and completion rates. Targeted support programmes like scholarships and mentorship initiatives for girls, especially in STEM fields, will help bridge the educational divide.

Political Participation

To enhance women's representation in politics, exploring temporary quota systems or affirmative action policies could significantly increase the number of women in government roles at all levels. Additionally, promoting civic engagement programs and leadership training designed specifically for women will help build a pipeline of female candidates for political office. Supporting women's political parties and organisations will further enhance their participation and influence in politics. The media can play a critical role by promoting positive narratives about women in leadership roles, which will challenge existing stereotypes and inspire more women to engage in political life.

Environmental Health

Addressing environmental health is an important part of improving gender equality. Investing in renewable energy solutions and promoting cleaner cooking technologies, such as biogas or solar cookers, can significantly reduce household air pollution, which affects women due to their roles in managing household energy. Expanding access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, especially in rural areas, is crucial for public health. It is essential to consider the specific sanitation needs

of women and girls when developing infrastructure to ensure their safety and well-being.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Finally, establishing a national framework for monitoring and evaluating progress towards gender equality is essential. Regularly collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data across sectors will enable policymakers to track progress and make informed adjustments to existing programmes. Promoting transparency and accountability by publicly reporting on the progress made and challenges encountered will foster greater trust and engagement from stakeholders.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigeria can create a more equitable society where women are empowered to thrive and reach their full potential. Involving women in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these initiatives is crucial to ensuring that their needs and priorities are effectively addressed. Additionally, fostering a shift in social norms and attitudes towards gender roles will be essential for sustainable progress. By working together, stakeholders from government, civil society, the private sector, and communities can create a future where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a reality for all Nigerians.

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