
The Significance of Gender Research in the context of Nigeria’s Socio-political and Economic Landscape¹

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Abstract

The ability of gender research to illuminate systemic inequalities, inequities and inform policy that will address the deep -rooted structural imbalance embedded in the Nigerian society can not be over emphasized. By examining patterns of power, privilege, and discrimination based on gender, gender research uncovers how socio-political and economic systems perpetuate inequalities, marginalization and privilege groups in our society. It in within this context that this paper proposed some strategies to address this disparities in order to foster more inclusive development. The overall aim of this paper is to demonstrate the role of gender research in the development and implementation of policies and legislation aimed at promoting gender equality. Based on lived experiences across Nigeria ethnic communities, the paper challenged stereotypes and discriminatory practices and seek to give voice to those who have been historically silenced and/or overlooked. The study attempts to answer the following questions: what is the role of men and women in traditional societies including the impact of indigenous beliefs and practices on gender relations and the impact of colonial legacies on gender shifts? What are the gender dynamics in the post-independence era including the impact of military rule, civil wars, and economic shifts from agrarian to capital economy on gender roles? To what extent has contemporary modern challenges and evolving perspectives promoted gender disparities in education, health, politics, and economy in contemporary Nigeria? What is the influence of globalization and international gender rights movements on Nigeria society? How has the various religious beliefs shaped gender norms in Nigeria, and the interplay between practices and gender rights? The conclusion arising from this paper is there is need to promote gender research to urgently address the myriads of socio-political, religious and economic issues that promote social injustice, inequalities, inequities and marginalization in our contemporary society. Some strategies and policy recommendations for addressing these disparities to foster more inclusive development in Nigeria were proposed.

Keywords: Gender, Economic systems, Agrarian, Colonial legacy, Globalization, marginalization, traditional societies

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Gender research in Nigeria is gradually gaining a pride of place in view of its ability to illuminate systemic inequalities, inform policy interventions and catalyze transformative change. Gender research provides a critical lens through which to analyze the deep-rooted structural inequalities embedded within Nigerian society (Igbuzor, 2000). By examining patterns of power, privilege, and discrimination based on gender, gender research uncovers how socio-political and economic systems perpetuate inequities, marginalizing certain groups while privileging others (Hartman, 1997). This understanding is essential for devising strategies to address disparities and foster more inclusive development. Chapters in this volume show the power of Gender Research offering evidence-based insights that inform the development and implementation of policies and legislation aimed at promoting gender equality. By analyzing data on issues such as education access, healthcare provision, economic participation, and political representation, researchers can identify gaps and disparities that require targeted interventions. Moreover, gender research contributes to the formulation of laws and policies that protect the rights of women, address gender-based violence, and promote women's empowerment in various spheres of life (Arora-Jonsson, 2014). Gender research continues to espouse how cultural norms and practices often intersect with gender dynamics, thereby further placing the marginalized groups in more vulnerable positions, in particular, women and girls. Chapters in this volume highlight the lived experiences across Nigeria ethnic communities, challenge stereotypes, and discriminatory practices, and hitherto, give voice to those who have been historically silenced and/or overlooked. The volume presents women's empowerment has an essential prerequisite for fostering greater social inclusion and ensuring that all individuals can fully participate in and contribute to society (Gugan et al., 2024).

Gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a key driver of economic development. Gender research sheds light on the economic costs of gender disparities, such as lost productivity, constrained human capital development, and reduced innovation and competitiveness (Seguino and Were, 2014). By advocating for policies that promote women's economic empowerment, such as access to education, financial services, and entrepreneurial opportunities, gender research continues to contribute to unlocking the full potential of Nigeria's workforce and fostering sustainable economic growth. Gender research also plays a vital role in promoting social cohesion and stability by addressing underlying tensions and inequalities within society (Ratcliffe, and Newman, 2011). By fostering dialogue, empathy, and understanding across diverse groups, gender research contributes to building more cohesive and resilient communities. Moreover, by challenging patriarchal norms and promoting gender-equitable relationships, gender research illuminates factors that contribute to reducing conflict and violence within families and communities.

Notably, gender research is of paramount importance in the context of Nigeria's socio-political and economic landscape. By unveiling structural inequalities, informing policy interventions, empowering marginalized groups, driving economic development, and promoting social cohesion, gender research advances gender equality and fosters inclusive development in Nigeria.

A Glimpse into Nigeria: Land, People and Culture

A Brief geographical, historical, and cultural overview

Nigeria, located in West Africa, is the most populous country on the continent and boasts a diverse landscape that encompasses savannas, tropical forests, plateaus, and coastal plains. It shares borders with Benin, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, and its coastlines stretch along the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean (Robson, 2005). Historically, Nigeria has been inhabited by various indigenous peoples, with evidence of human habitation dating back thousands of years. The region witnessed the rise and fall of several powerful kingdoms and empires, including the Kanem-Bornu, Oyo, and Benin Empires (Abdullahi, 2015). Nigeria's history is marked by the transatlantic slave trade, colonization by the British Empire in the 19th century, and subsequent struggles for independence, which culminated in Nigeria gaining sovereignty in 1960 (Cornelius et al., 2019)

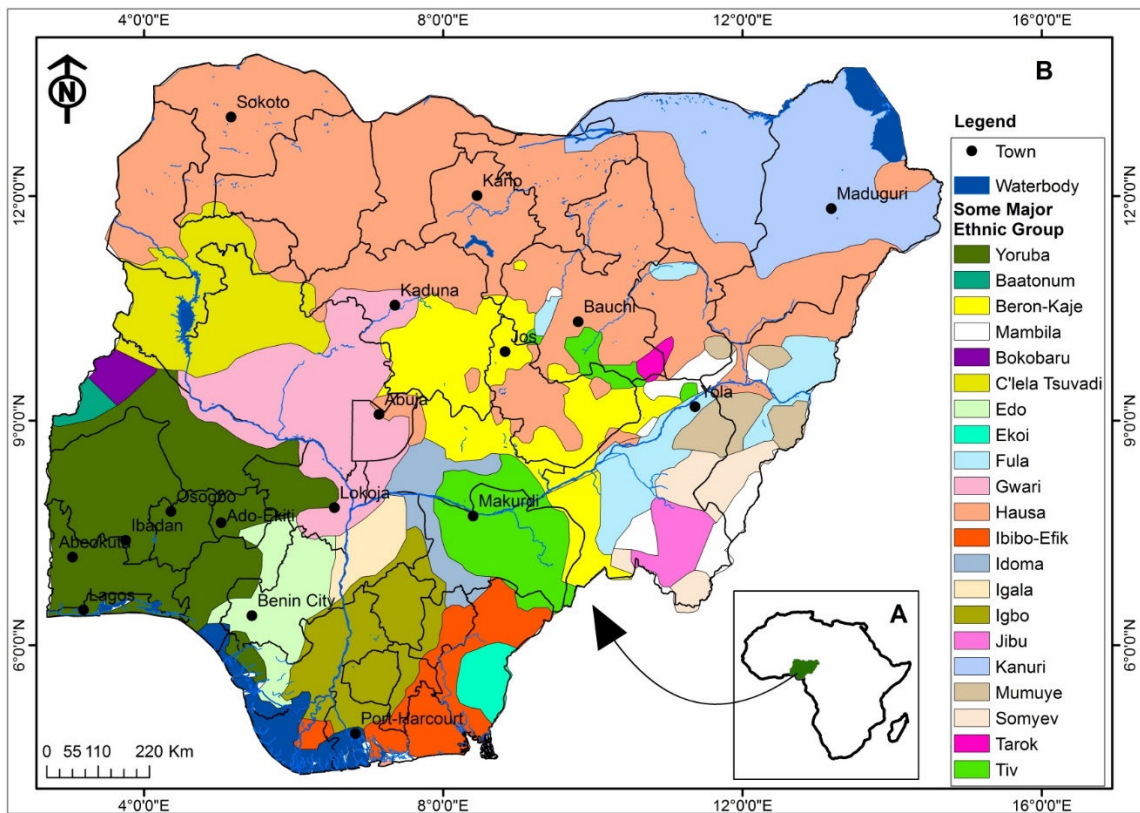
Nigeria's geographical diversity has contributed to the country's rich cultural tapestry and economic potential. The country's vast natural resources, including oil, natural gas, and agricultural land, have shaped its economic development and geopolitical significance

Introduction to Nigeria's rich tapestry of ethnicities, languages and traditions

Nigeria is home to over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own distinct languages, cultures, and traditions (Gandonu, 1978). The three largest ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, which collectively comprise the majority of the population (Okoro, 2012). However, numerous other ethnic groups, such as the Ijaw, Kanuri, Tiv, and Edo, also contribute to Nigeria's cultural diversity (Okolo et al., 2014). This diversity is reflected in various aspects of Nigerian life, including cuisine, music, dance, attire, religious practices, and social customs. Nigeria's linguistic landscape is similarly diverse, with over 500 languages spoken across the country, though English serves as the official language (Akinaso, 1989).

Nigeria's ethnic and linguistic diversity is both a source of strength and a challenge. While it enriches the country's cultural heritage and fosters a sense of communal identity among different groups, it also presents governance and nation-building challenges (Yahaya, 2023). Historically, ethnic tensions have fueled conflicts and political instability, highlighting the importance of inclusive governance and dialogue in managing diversity (Abasili and Nwokike, 2023). Efforts to promote cultural exchange, interethnic cooperation, and respect for minority rights are essential for building a more cohesive and inclusive Nigerian society (Adetiba, 2013). In summary, Nigeria's geographical, historical, and cultural contexts provide a multifaceted backdrop for understanding the complexities of the country's socio-economic dynamics. Recognizing and appreciating Nigeria's diverse ethnicities, languages, and traditions is essential for fostering unity, inclusivity, and sustainable development in the country.

Figure 1: (A) Nigeria nation in reference to THE continent of Africa;



(B) Distribution of some major ethnic group in Nigeria.

Understanding Gender: Definitions and Paradigms

Understanding Basic Gender concepts

Sex: Sex refers to the biological characteristics that define individuals as male, female, or intersex (Muehlenhard, and Peterson, 2011). These biological factors typically include chromosomes, hormones, and reproductive anatomy. While sex is often perceived as binary (male or female), it is more accurately understood as a spectrum encompassing a range of biological variations. Intersex individuals, for example, may possess physical traits that do not fit typical definitions of male or female. Additionally, the concept of sex is distinct from gender, as biological characteristics do not necessarily determine an individual's gender identity or expression.

Gender: Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological attributes, behaviors, and roles that societies construct and associate with masculinity and femininity. Unlike sex, which is biologically determined, gender is a socially constructed concept influenced by factors such as culture, history, and individual identity (Muehlenhard, and Peterson, 2011). Gender is fluid and multifaceted, encompassing a spectrum of identities beyond the traditional binary of male and

female. Gender roles and expectations vary across different cultures and time periods, and individuals may identify with or express their gender in diverse ways. Understanding gender as a social construct allows for the recognition of diverse experiences and challenges related to gender identity and expression.

Gender Roles: Gender roles refer to the societal expectations, norms, and behaviors that are associated with being male or female within a particular cultural context. These roles dictate how individuals are expected to behave, interact, and perform tasks based on their perceived gender. Gender roles are deeply ingrained in societies and often reinforce stereotypes and inequalities. Traditional gender roles may limit individuals' opportunities and constrain their freedom to express themselves authentically. Challenging and transcending rigid gender roles is essential for promoting gender equality and creating inclusive environments where individuals are free to pursue their interests and aspirations irrespective of gender norms (Lindsey, 2020).

Gender Identity: Gender identity refers to an individual's deeply felt sense of their own gender, which may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth (Egan and Perry, 2001). Gender identity is internal and may be experienced as male, female, both, neither, or somewhere along the gender spectrum. Gender identity is a fundamental aspect of selfhood and may develop independently of biological sex or societal expectations. Transgender and non-binary individuals, for example, may experience gender dysphoria when their gender identity does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth (Murawsky, 2023). Respecting and affirming individuals' gender identities is essential for fostering inclusivity and supporting the well-being of all individuals, regardless of their gender expression.

Gender Blind: Gender blindness refers to a state of ignoring or overlooking gender differences and disparities in various contexts, such as policies, programs, or decision-making processes. When an approach or system is gender blind, it fails to recognize the distinct needs, experiences, and contributions of different genders, resulting in the perpetuation of inequalities and the exclusion of marginalized groups. While gender blindness may arise from a lack of awareness or understanding of gender dynamics, it can also stem from entrenched biases or a reluctance to address systemic inequalities. Gender-blind approaches often reinforce existing power structures and perpetuate discrimination, as they fail to address the root causes of gender disparities. Overcoming gender blindness requires recognizing the importance of gender analysis and integrating gender considerations into all aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Gender Bias: Gender bias refers to the systematic favoritism or discrimination towards individuals or groups based on their gender. This bias can manifest in various forms, including stereotypes, prejudices, and unequal treatment, and it often results in the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and power between genders (Bowen and Swim, 2000). Gender bias is deeply ingrained in social, cultural, and institutional norms, shaping attitudes, behaviors, and policies. It can manifest in both explicit and implicit ways, influencing decision-making processes and perpetuating inequalities. Addressing gender bias requires challenging stereotypes,

promoting awareness and empathy, and implementing policies and practices that promote fairness and equality

Gender Exploitation: Gender exploitation occurs when individuals or groups are subjected to unfair treatment, abuse, or exploitation based on their gender. This exploitation can take various forms, including economic exploitation, sexual exploitation, and emotional exploitation, and it often intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as race, class, or ethnicity. Gender exploitation is a manifestation of power imbalances and structural inequalities that disproportionately affect marginalized groups, particularly women and girls (Rafferty, 2023). It reflects broader patterns of oppression and discrimination within society and is often perpetuated by systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism. Addressing gender exploitation requires dismantling oppressive systems, empowering marginalized groups, and promoting gender justice and human rights.

Gender Gap: The gender gap refers to the disparity or difference between men and women in terms of access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes. This gap can exist across various domains, including education, employment, income, health, and political representation, and it often reflects systemic inequalities and discrimination. The gender gap is a reflection of structural barriers and biases that limit the full participation and potential of women and girls in society (Wang and Degol, 2017). It results from a complex interplay of factors, including social norms, institutional policies, and cultural attitudes. Closing the gender gap requires addressing root causes of inequality, such as unequal access to education and economic opportunities, and implementing targeted interventions to promote gender equity and empowerment.

Gender Equity: Gender equity refers to the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and rights between genders, with a focus on addressing historical and systemic inequalities. Unlike gender equality, which aims for sameness, gender equity recognizes that different groups may require different levels of support to achieve equality and seeks to rectify existing disparities. Gender equity acknowledges the diverse needs and experiences of individuals and aims to create conditions where all genders can thrive and reach their full potential. It involves identifying and dismantling barriers to equality, such as discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and implementing measures to promote fairness and justice (Panda et al., 2024) Gender equity recognizes that achieving equality may require targeted interventions and affirmative action to address historical disadvantages and ensure inclusivity.

Gender Equality: Gender equality refers to the state of equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for all genders, without discrimination or bias. It encompasses the principle of fairness and justice and recognizes that individuals should not be disadvantaged or privileged based on their gender (Nanni, 2023). Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of sustainable development. It entails eliminating discriminatory practices and policies, challenging harmful stereotypes and attitudes, and promoting equal participation and representation in all spheres of life. Achieving gender equality requires concerted efforts at the individual,

institutional, and societal levels, including legal reforms, education and awareness-raising initiatives, and changes in cultural norms and behaviors.

Women Empowerment: Women empowerment refers to the process of enabling women to realize their full potential, exercise their rights, and achieve greater autonomy and control over their lives (Sahay,1998). It involves enhancing women's agency, voice, and participation in decision-making processes and addressing the structural barriers that limit their opportunities and freedoms. Women empowerment is essential for advancing gender equality and promoting sustainable development (Pathania, 2017). It encompasses various dimensions, including economic empowerment, political empowerment, social empowerment, and psychological empowerment. Empowering women not only benefits individuals but also contributes to broader societal progress, as women play critical roles as caregivers, community leaders, and agents of change. Empowerment strategies may include providing access to education and training, promoting economic opportunities, ensuring reproductive rights and healthcare access, and challenging gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality.

Gender Mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming is a strategy aimed at integrating a gender perspective into all stages and levels of policymaking, planning, implementation, and evaluation. It involves systematically analyzing the differential impacts of policies, programs, and projects on women, men, and gender-diverse groups, and adjusting interventions to promote gender equality and address gender disparities (Lombardo and Mergaert, 2013). Gender mainstreaming recognizes that gender equality is not a separate issue but rather an integral component of all areas of development (Walby, 2005). By incorporating a gender perspective into decision-making processes, gender mainstreaming seeks to ensure that policies and programs benefit all members of society equally and address the specific needs and concerns of different genders. This approach helps to challenge gender stereotypes, dismantle discriminatory practices, and promote the full participation and empowerment of women and marginalized genders in all aspects of life.

Key elements in gender mainstreaming include:

- a. **Policy integration** - Gender mainstreaming requires integrating gender considerations into all stages of policy development, from agenda-setting and formulation to implementation and monitoring. This involves conducting gender analyses to identify gender gaps, inequalities, and barriers, and incorporating gender-sensitive indicators to track progress towards gender equality goals.
- b. **Institutionalization** - Gender mainstreaming involves establishing institutional mechanisms and structures to support the integration of gender into decision-making processes.
- c. **Participation and representation** - Gender mainstreaming emphasizes the importance of ensuring the meaningful participation and representation of women and marginalized genders in decision-making processes. This involves creating opportunities for women's voices to be heard, promoting women's leadership and

- representation in political and decision-making bodies, and engaging with diverse gender perspectives in policy dialogue and consultation processes.
- d. **Capacity Building** - Gender mainstreaming requires building the capacity of policymakers, planners, and practitioners to effectively incorporate a gender perspective into their work. This may involve providing training on gender analysis and mainstreaming techniques, developing gender-sensitive tools and methodologies, and fostering a supportive organizational culture that values gender equality and diversity.

Notably, gender mainstreaming is a transformative approach that seeks to address the root causes of gender inequality and promote systemic change. By embedding gender considerations into policy and practice, gender mainstreaming contributes to building more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies where all individuals can realize their full potential regardless of gender. However, it also requires sustained political will, commitment, and resources to overcome resistance and institutionalize gender equality principles effectively

Most of these gender concepts are interconnected and complex, shaping institutions, and individuals' experiences and interactions within society. Understanding these concepts requires recognizing the diversity of human experiences and identities and challenging rigid stereotypes and norms that perpetuate inequalities. Embracing gender diversity and promoting inclusivity are essential steps towards creating a more equitable and just society for all.

WID - GAD Paradigm Shifts

Why Gender and Development?

The paradigm shift towards sustainable development requires a renewed focus on people-centered development that prioritizes the expansion of capabilities, the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of all types of inequalities, including gender inequalities. To eradicate poverty, growth and development strategies must be inclusive, equitable, and sustainable, while the equal participation of women is a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development. Thus, gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development and it is vital to the zof human rights for all (Aina, 2011). As a fundamental human right, gender equality is enshrined in various international and regional instruments ratified amongst member states. For example, the non-discriminatory principle inherent in the Nigeria constitution takes its root from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948. Thus, gender-based discrimination is treated as a violation of the principle of equality before the law, while by extension, gender equality (in particular, equal participation of all citizens in popular democracy) is at the bedrock of good governance.

The overall objective of gender equality is a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights, and obligations in all spheres of life. According to a UNFPA Report (2022), equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the

distribution of power and influence; have equal opportunities for financial independence through work; enjoy equal access to education and the opportunity to develop personal ambitions, interests, and talents; share responsibility for the home and children, and both are completely free from coercion, intimidation, and gender-based violence both at work and at home.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that in most cases where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Discrimination against women and girls - including gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health inequities, and harmful traditional practices - remains the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality in the world today. A major component of the global gender equality agenda, therefore, is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances, economic inequality, educational gaps, and other manifestations of inequality across sectors.

It is now realized globally that issues of women's human rights are essential for any meaningful development to take place. Apart from social justice, which demands equal opportunity for all citizens, it is smart economics to plan with both halves of one's population because it benefits society as a whole (British Council, 2012). Investing in women and girls does not only create a positive development cycle, the opposite is also adjudged to be true, that is, a country that fails to empower half of its population will suffer from lower productivity, slower economic growth, and weaker development outcomes.

Development standpoints on women's needs and welfare are helping to refocus attention on the situation of girls across nations. If resources reach women and girls early, transformative change can happen quickly, while poverty can be stopped before it starts (DFID, 2013). The invincibility of this standpoint can be summarized in the UNDP perspective that a development that is not **engendered is endangered** (Human Development Report, 1995).

A gender-transformative perspective, rooted in the 'Gender and Development (GAD) approach, is now adopted to change the narrative of continued marginalization of women. It criticized how (global) capitalism, patriarchy, and other forms of institutional structures of social oppression continue to keep women/girls in marginalized and subordinate positions. According to Kabeer (2005), GAD approach signified gender relations as power relations and thereby requiring that marginalized women be empowered while also challenging the mainstream development paradigm, which continues to support the structure of gender inequalities in society. A gender transformative framework (using gender, rights, and equity lens) is critical of the neoliberal development paradigm and aims at transforming paradigms, institutions, and social relations in favor of the marginalized group (women, children, and persons living with all forms of vulnerabilities).

The WID - GAD Frameworks

WID framework emerged in the early 1970s, as a response to the failure of the mainstream development practice to address women's roles and contributions to the development process. WID advocates the integration of women's interests and concerns in the development processes, while also recognizing the important contributions women make to economic development, that is, recognizing their productive roles, and accounting for these in development models.

The WID approach was increasingly criticized because it did not attempt to change existing socio-cultural gender biases. Furthermore, female-focused projects did not always result in improved economic conditions, even for the women themselves. For example, most income-generating projects were found to be ineffective, while women-focused production/technology projects often added to rather than eased women's workloads and involved trade-offs with other responsibilities (Razavi and Miller, 1995: 13). WID, therefore tended to reinforce stereotypical roles of women, and often seen as paternalistic and top-down approach to development. As a result, by the mid-1980s, GAD had emerged as the successor to WID, with an underlying platform of explicitly challenging gender imbalances.

GAD, in contrast to WID, does not concentrate its attention exclusively on women, but examines the social construction of gender and the assignment of specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations to women and to men. The GAD approach aims to understand the power dynamics between men and women in different contexts arguing that it is only by understanding gender power relations that development can empower women and thereby create positive and sustainable socio-economic change (see Table 1.1). GAD places critical importance on the use of gender analysis to gather and analyse information on social roles based on gender, in order understand and redress gender-based inequities through development interventions.

Critiques of GAD have argued that despite its conceptual power, it has been practically applied in donor organizations in ways similar to WID, with a primary focus on women through similar interventions such as micro-credit, education and health, while less attention is given to the longer-term goal of challenging gender-based inequalities. In such interventions, gender has become a synonym for women, with little substantive analysis of or investment in redressing gender inequalities between men and women. The success of the GAD framework in bringing about gender transformative change, depends on the extent to which the gender mainstreaming policy is supported and translated to concrete actions, otherwise, for many organizations and institutions, what is supposed to be a vibrant GAD model, remains nothing but a WID model in reality, while the gender mainstreaming intent easily evaporates. This has been attributed to lack of political will and high-level leadership to support a system-wide gender mainstreaming options. Competing development priorities in the mid-2000s, including, current attention on good governance, poverty reduction, new aid modalities, HIV/AIDS, anti-corruption, climate change, security and humanitarian action, among others, corroded attention on system-wide

gender mainstreaming. This led to a general poor implementation of Gender Policies, where they existed. Notably, the emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015 - 2030), brought about renewed vision on gender mainstreaming and gender integration into policies, programs and projects.

Table 1: The Wid- Gad Frameworks

DESCRIPTION	WID	GAD
Approach	Takes situation of women as problem to be alleviated or redressed	Sees inequitable gender roles as a hindrance to development
Focus	Women	Gender based roles
Problem	The exclusion of women from development processes	Unequal power relations (rich and poor; women and men) that prevent equitable development
Goal	More efficient, effective development	Equitable sustainable development with both men and women as decision-makers
Solution	Integrate women into development processes	Empower the disadvantaged and women to transform unequal relations
Strategies	Women’s projects; women’s components in projects; increase women’s productivity; increase women’s income; increase women’s ability to look after the household	Identify/address practical needs determined by women and men to improve their conditions. At the same time, address inequality affecting women; address strategic interests of the poor through people-centered development

Source: World Bank (1998: 6), reproduced in Hafner-Burton and Pollack (2002: 349)

Historical Lens: Gender Roles and Relations in Pre-Colonial Nigeria

A glimpse into traditional societies and the roles of men and women

This section provides a historical overview of gender roles and relations in pre-colonial Nigeria, offering insights into the social organization, norms, and expectations surrounding gender within traditional societies. It explores the distinct roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women, their contributions to community life, and the ways in which gender roles were shaped by cultural, economic, and environmental factors. Examining gender roles in pre-colonial Nigeria offers valuable insights into the historical roots of contemporary gender dynamics and provides a nuanced understanding of how gender identities and relationships were constructed and negotiated within indigenous societies (Egbuchulem, 2024). By delving into the division of labor, familial structures, and systems of authority, this section illuminates the diverse ways in which men and women participated in and contributed to the social, economic, and political life of their communities. Additionally, it highlights the complex interplay between gender, kinship, and social status, shedding light on the intersectional nature of gender inequality and the ways in which it intersected with other axes of identity such as age, class, and ethnicity.

Across Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, traditional societies exhibited varying gender roles and relations (Kritz, 1999). For instance, among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, women often played central roles in agriculture and trade, contributing significantly to the household economy. In Igbo society, women were responsible for cultivating crops such as yams, cassava, and vegetables, while men typically engaged in activities such as hunting and clearing land. However, both men and women participated in decision-making processes within the family and community, with women holding considerable influence in matters concerning the household.

Similarly, among the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria, gender roles were defined by complementary responsibilities (Usman, 2020). Men were traditionally responsible for providing for the family through activities such as farming, herding, and trading, while women managed domestic affairs and childcare. However, Hausa-Fulani women also engaged in income-generating activities such as weaving, pottery, and trading, contributing to the household economy and exerting influence within their social networks.

These examples illustrate the diverse ways in which gender roles were constructed and negotiated within traditional Nigerian societies. While there were commonalities in terms of the division of labor and familial structures, there were also variations shaped by factors such as geography, ecology, and cultural practices. Despite differences in specific roles and responsibilities, both men and women across Nigerian ethnic groups played vital roles in sustaining their communities' social and economic life. Understanding these traditional gender roles provides insights into the historical roots of contemporary gender dynamics and

underscores the importance of recognizing the agency and contributions of women within indigenous societies.

The Impact of Indigenous beliefs and practices on gender relations

This section explores the influence of indigenous beliefs, customs, and rituals on gender relations in pre-colonial Nigeria, examining how cultural norms and values shaped perceptions of masculinity and femininity, as well as expectations regarding gender roles and behavior. It considers the role of religion, spirituality, and ancestor worship in shaping gender ideologies, as well as the ways in which rituals and ceremonies reinforced gender hierarchies and power dynamics.

Indigenous beliefs and practices played a significant role in shaping gender relations in pre-colonial Nigeria, providing a framework through which individuals understood and negotiated their gender identities and roles (Aina, 1989; Ewrierhoma, 2002). By examining the cultural significance of gender-specific rituals, rites of passage, and symbolic practices, this section offers insights into the construction of gender norms and the ways in which they were transmitted and reinforced across generations. Moreover, it considers how indigenous cosmologies and worldviews informed notions of gender complementarity, reciprocity, and balance, as well as the implications of these beliefs for women's status, autonomy, and agency. Understanding the impact of indigenous beliefs on gender relations provides a foundation for analyzing continuity and change in gender dynamics over time, as well as the resilience of certain cultural norms and practices in the face of colonialism and modernization.

Indigenous beliefs and practices profoundly influenced gender relations in pre-colonial Nigeria, shaping perceptions of masculinity and femininity and guiding social norms and behaviors. For instance, among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, gender roles were influenced by the concept of "African womanhood," which emphasized qualities such as nurturing, fertility, and resilience. Yoruba society celebrated the role of women as mothers and caretakers, with rituals such as the "Iyale," a ceremony honoring the mother goddess, highlighting the significance of motherhood in Yoruba cosmology.

Similarly, among the Edo people of southern Nigeria, gender relations were influenced by traditional religious beliefs and practices. The Edo worshipped various deities associated with fertility, prosperity, and protection, with rituals and ceremonies playing a central role in reinforcing gender hierarchies and power dynamics. For instance, the annual "Igue" festival celebrated the Oba (king) and his divine authority, reinforcing patriarchal structures and reinforcing the importance of male leadership within Edo society

These examples illustrate how indigenous beliefs and practices shaped gender ideologies and norms within Nigerian societies. Religious rituals and ceremonies served as mechanisms for transmitting cultural values and reinforcing gender roles, while mythologies and cosmologies provided frameworks for understanding gender identities and relationships. However, it's

important to recognize that these beliefs were not static and could evolve over time in response to social, economic, and political changes. Understanding the impact of indigenous beliefs on gender relations provides insights into the cultural foundations of gender dynamics in Nigeria and underscores the need for context-specific approaches to promoting gender equality and social justice.

Colonial Legacies and Gender Shifts

Colonial rule had a profound impact on gender roles and relationships in Nigeria, reshaping traditional dynamics and introducing new forms of inequality and discrimination. The imposition of colonial administration disrupted existing social structures and norms, leading to significant shifts in gender relations across Nigerian society. Under colonial rule, patriarchal norms were often reinforced, as colonial administrators favored traditional male leaders and elites who were perceived as easier to govern. This reinforced existing gender hierarchies, where men held positions of authority and power, while women's roles were often confined to the domestic sphere (Salaam, 2003; Stacey, 1993, Kramarae, 1992, Lerner, 1986). Colonial economic policies further entrenched these inequalities by promoting cash crop production and wage labor, which marginalized women's traditional roles in agriculture and handicrafts, and led to economic dependency on men (Aina, 1985).

Concrete examples of how colonial experience disrupted the traditional social structures, and in particular, the gender relations of power, abound. For example, among the Yorubas, colonialism disrupted the traditional matrilineal kinship system which had previously allowed for women to inherit property and hold positions of authority within the family. Also, the introduction of Western education by colonial authorities initially favored boys' education over girls', leading to disparities in literacy rates and access to formal employment opportunities across the Nigerian ethnic groups. Among the Igbo ethnic group, colonialism disrupted the Igbo traditional system of decentralized governance, which had allowed for women's participation in decision-making processes at the village level. The introduction of cash crops as a result of colonial economic policies shifted the focus away from women's traditional roles in subsistence agriculture, leading to economic marginalization for many Igbo women.

Among the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, colonialism reinforced existing patriarchal norms among the Hausa-Fulani, where men held positions of authority and power within the family and community. The imposition of colonial legal systems often discriminated against women, restricting their rights to property ownership, inheritance, and political participation.

Among the Edo Ethnic Group in the old Benin Kingdom, colonialism disrupted the traditional system of hereditary rulership among the Edo people, which had previously allowed for women to ascend to positions of power as queen mothers. So also, the introduction of Western education by colonial authorities initially favored boys' education over girls', leading to disparities in

literacy rates and access to formal employment opportunities among the Edos, just as it is with other Nigerian ethnic groups.

Colonial education systems thus played a significant role in shaping gender roles (Ellis, 2020). While education was initially limited and often segregated by gender, colonial policies eventually prioritized the education of boys over girls, further limiting women's access to formal education and perpetuating gender disparities in literacy and skill development. Additionally, colonial legal systems introduced laws and regulations that often discriminated against women, restricting their rights to property ownership, inheritance, and political participation.

In summary, colonial rule in Nigeria disrupted traditional gender roles and relationships across various ethnic groups by reinforcing patriarchal norms, introducing new economic structures, and imposing legal systems that often discriminated against women. These changes had lasting impacts on gender dynamics in Nigerian society, shaping patterns of inequality and discrimination that continue to be part of women's daily experience in Nigeria today. However, colonial rule also brought about some positive changes in gender relations (Korieh, 2010). The introduction of Western legal systems led to the codification of laws that, in some cases, granted women greater rights and protections, such as property ownership and inheritance rights. Furthermore, colonialism facilitated the emergence of new social and political movements advocating for women's rights and gender equality, as women became increasingly aware of their subordinated status and mobilized for change.

The impact of colonial rule on gender roles and relationships in Nigeria was complex and multifaceted. While colonialism reinforced patriarchal norms and inequalities, it also created opportunities for resistance and change. The legacy of colonialism continues to shape gender dynamics in Nigeria today, as many of the inequalities and disparities introduced during the colonial period persist.

Understanding how colonial rule affected gender roles and relationships is essential for addressing the historical roots of gender inequality in Nigeria. It highlights the need for interventions that promote gender equity and empowerment, address the structural barriers that perpetuate gender disparities, and recognize the agency and contributions of women in Nigerian society. By acknowledging the impact of colonialism on gender relations, policymakers, activists, and scholars can work towards building a more inclusive and equitable society for all genders in Nigeria.

Post-Independence Transitions

Gender Dynamics in the immediate post-independence era

The section explores the gender dynamics that unfolded in Nigeria during the immediate post-independence era, following the country's attainment of sovereignty from colonial rule. It examines how the transition to independence influenced gender roles and relationships, as well as the emergence of new social, political, and economic challenges and opportunities for men

and women. In the wake of independence, there was a surge of optimism and enthusiasm for progress and development across Nigerian society. However, the realities of nation-building posed complex challenges, including issues related to governance, nationhood, and identity. Within this context, gender dynamics were shaped by ongoing struggles for power, resources, and representation, as well as efforts to redefine national priorities and aspirations.

The immediate post-independence era in Nigeria was characterized by significant social, political, and economic changes that influenced gender roles and relationships in various ways. While independence brought about new opportunities for women's participation in public life and decision-making processes, patriarchal norms and structures persisted, often limiting women's access to power and resources. Additionally, the transition to independence presented both opportunities and challenges for men, as traditional roles and identities were renegotiated in the context of a changing society. Popular events, momentums, and actors emerged providing a voice for the Nigerian women. Some of these are listed below:

Women's Political Participation: Following independence in 1960, women's organizations such as the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) emerged to advocate for women's rights and participation in politics. Prominent women activists like Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti played pivotal roles in demanding political representation for women and challenging patriarchal norms.

Legislative Initiatives: In the immediate post-independence era, Nigeria saw the enactment of legislation aimed at promoting gender equality, such as the Married Women's Property Act of 1960, which granted married women the right to own property in their own names. These legal reforms reflected efforts to address gender disparities and empower women in Nigerian society.

Understanding the gender dynamics of the post-independence era is essential for contextualizing contemporary gender issues and identifying historical continuities and ruptures. It provides insights into the ways in which broader social and political transformations have shaped gender relations in Nigeria and underscores the importance of addressing historical inequalities and injustices in the pursuit of gender equality and social justice.

The Impact of military rule, civil wars, and economic shifts, especially the shifting from agrarian to capitalist economy on gender roles

This section examines how the tumultuous period of military rule, civil wars, and economic shifts in Nigeria impacted gender roles and relationships. It explores how political instability, violence, and economic restructuring during this period shaped gender dynamics, exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new challenges for men and women.

Military rule in Nigeria, characterized by authoritarian governance and human rights abuses, often reinforced patriarchal structures and marginalized women's voices and agency. Civil wars, such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), further exacerbated gender disparities, as women

bore the brunt of the conflict's social and economic consequences, including displacement, violence, and loss of livelihoods. The Nigerian Civil War had devastating consequences for women, who bore the brunt of the conflict's social and economic impact. Women were disproportionately affected by violence, displacement, and loss of livelihoods during the war, highlighting the gendered dimensions of armed conflict and its aftermath. The era of military rule in Nigeria, particularly under leaders such as General Sani Abacha, was marked by authoritarian governance and the suppression of dissent. Military regimes often reinforced patriarchal structures, marginalizing women's voices and limiting their participation in decision-making processes.

Moreover, economic shifts during this period, particularly the transition from an agrarian to a capitalist economy, had profound implications for gender roles and relationships. While industrialization and urbanization created new economic opportunities, they also perpetuated gender inequalities, as women continued to face discrimination in the labor market and limited access to education and resources. The period of military rule, civil wars, and economic shifts in Nigeria had a significant impact on gender roles and relationships, exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new challenges for men and women. The authoritarian nature of military regimes often reinforced patriarchal structures and marginalized women's voices and agency, while civil wars further marginalized women by subjecting them to violence and displacement.

Additionally, economic shifts during this period perpetuated gender disparities, as women faced discrimination in the labor market and limited access to education and resources. Understanding the impact of military rule, civil wars, and economic shifts on gender roles is essential for contextualizing contemporary gender issues in Nigeria and identifying the historical roots of gender inequality and injustice. It underscores the importance of addressing the legacy of this period in order to promote gender equality and social justice in Nigeria.

Other major elements further reshaped Nigeria women's experience at this period. First is the transition from an agrarian to a capitalist economy, causing Nigeria to experience significant economic changes during the post-independence period. The new capitalist economy, accompanied by urbanization and industrialization, created new economic opportunities, but also perpetuated gender inequalities, as women continued to face discrimination in the labor market because of their limited access to education and resources. This period also birthed the Women's Rights Movements. Despite the challenges posed by military rule and economic shifts, women's rights movements continued to advocate for gender equality and social justice in Nigeria. Organizations such as the Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the Women's Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) mobilized women across the country to demand political representation, economic empowerment, and an end to gender-based violence.

These examples demonstrate how various actors, events, and momentums shaped gender dynamics during the post-independence transitions in Nigeria. From women's political activism

to the impact of military rule and economic shifts, these historical experiences continue to influence contemporary gender relations in Nigerian society.

Modern Challenges and Evolving Perspectives

Gender Disparities in Education, Health, Politics, and Economy in contemporary Nigeria

In this section, contemporary gender disparities in key sectors such as education, health, politics, and the economy are examined. Despite progress in some areas, significant gender gaps persist, affecting access to opportunities, resources, and decision-making power for women and girls. In education, although there has been an increase in girls' enrollment rates, disparities still exist, particularly at higher levels of education and in rural areas. Gender gaps in literacy rates, dropout rates, and subject choices continue to limit girls' educational attainment and prospects for future success. In terms of health, women and girls face unique challenges, including limited access to healthcare services, maternal mortality, and gender-based violence. Cultural norms and practices, as well as inadequate healthcare infrastructure, contribute to disparities in health outcomes between genders. In politics, women remain underrepresented in decision-making positions, both at the national and local levels. Despite legal frameworks promoting gender equality in politics, cultural and institutional barriers, including sexism and discrimination, hinder women's political participation and leadership. In the economy, women continue to face barriers to economic empowerment, including unequal access to resources, limited employment opportunities, and wage gaps (Marcus, 2021). Structural inequalities, discriminatory practices, and traditional gender roles perpetuate economic disparities between men and women.

Contemporary gender disparities in education, health, politics, and the economy highlight persistent challenges to achieving gender equality in Nigeria. These disparities are rooted in deep-seated cultural norms, social structures, and institutional biases that perpetuate gender inequalities and limit women's opportunities for advancement. Evidence such as data on literacy rates, maternal mortality, political representation, and wage differentials provides concrete examples of these disparities. For instance, statistics showing lower enrollment rates for girls in secondary and tertiary education compared to boys, or higher rates of maternal mortality among women, illustrate the extent of gender disparities in education and health.

Moreover, case studies or real-life stories can be used to illustrate the impact of these disparities on individuals and communities. For example, narratives of women struggling to access healthcare services due to cultural barriers or facing discrimination in the workplace can help to humanize the issue and highlight the urgent need for action. Overall, analyzing present-day gender disparities in education, health, politics, and the economy provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing women and girls in Nigeria and underscores the importance of targeted interventions to address these inequalities and promote gender equality.

This section explores how globalization, technological advancements, and international gender rights movements have influenced Nigerian society's perceptions and practices regarding gender equality. Globalization has led to increased interconnectedness and integration of economies, societies, and cultures, influencing norms and values regarding gender roles and relationships (Akpuokwe, and Chikwe, 2024). Western ideologies promoting gender equality have gained prominence, challenging traditional patriarchal norms and encouraging greater recognition of women's rights and empowerment. Technological advancements, particularly in communication and information technology, have facilitated the dissemination of feminist ideas and activism, amplifying voices advocating for gender equality and social justice. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for organizing, mobilizing, and raising awareness about gender issues, empowering individuals to challenge discriminatory practices and demand change.

International gender rights movements, such as the global women's rights movement and campaigns such as HeForShe and #MeToo, have had a significant impact on Nigerian society, inspiring activism and advocacy for gender equality. These movements have raised awareness about gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality, mobilizing individuals and communities to take action and promote gender justice. The influence of globalization, technology, and international gender rights movements on Nigerian society is evident in various aspects of everyday life, from changing attitudes towards gender roles to increased awareness of women's rights and empowerment.

Concrete evidence of this influence can be found in the adoption of international frameworks and conventions promoting gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Nigeria ratified in 1985. Additionally, the emergence of grassroots feminist organizations, women's rights campaigns, and gender-focused initiatives in Nigeria reflects the growing influence of global feminist movements and advocacy efforts.

Moreover, the use of case studies or examples of individuals or communities impacted by these global trends can illustrate the tangible effects of globalization, technology, and international gender rights movements on Nigerian society. For instance, stories of women leveraging social media platforms to advocate for their rights or campaigns mobilizing support for gender equality legislation can demonstrate the transformative power of these influences (Akpuokwe, and Chikwe, 2024). Overall, analyzing the influence of globalization, technology, and international gender rights movements on Nigerian society provides insights into the evolving perspectives on gender equality and highlights the interconnectedness of local and global efforts to promote gender justice.

The Role of Religion and Culture

How Various Religious Beliefs, Both Indigenous and Introduced, Shape Gender Norms in Nigeria

This section delves into the intricate interplay between religious beliefs and gender norms in Nigeria, examining how both indigenous and introduced religions influence societal attitudes, behaviors, and practices regarding gender roles and relationships. Indigenous religious beliefs, such as those practiced by the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups, often incorporate gendered cosmologies and rituals that shape perceptions of masculinity and femininity. For example, among the Yoruba, traditional gods and goddesses embody gendered attributes and roles, influencing concepts of power, fertility, and social order.

Introduced religions, such as Christianity and Islam, have also played significant roles in shaping gender norms in Nigeria (Josephine, 2006). Christian and Islamic teachings on gender roles, family structure, and morality have influenced societal attitudes towards women's roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers. However, interpretations of religious texts and teachings vary, leading to diverse practices and beliefs regarding gender within religious communities. Religious Leaders and Institutions: Religious leaders, including pastors, imams, and traditional priests, play influential roles in shaping gender norms within their respective communities. Their interpretations of religious texts and teachings can either reinforce traditional gender roles or challenge them, depending on their perspectives and beliefs. Religious Festivals and Ceremonies: Religious festivals and ceremonies often incorporate gendered rituals and practices that reinforce traditional gender norms. For example, during Yoruba festivals honoring fertility deities, gendered roles and responsibilities are emphasized, reflecting cultural beliefs about gender complementarity and reproduction.

Women's Religious Movements: Women's religious movements, such as the Women's Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN) and the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), provide spaces for women to advocate for their rights and challenge patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings. The influence of religious beliefs on gender norms in Nigeria is profound and multifaceted, shaping individuals' identities, behaviors, and societal expectations. Concrete actors, events, and momentums demonstrate the ways in which religious beliefs intersect with gender norms and practices, illustrating the complexity of this relationship. For example, the role of religious leaders and institutions in interpreting and disseminating religious teachings can either reinforce traditional gender norms or provide opportunities for reinterpretation and change. Women's religious movements, meanwhile, highlight the agency of women within religious communities and their efforts to challenge patriarchal interpretations of religious texts. Furthermore, religious festivals and ceremonies serve as important sites for the reproduction and reinforcement of gender norms, reflecting cultural beliefs about gender roles and relationships. By examining these concrete examples, we

gain insights into the ways in which religious beliefs shape gender norms in Nigerian society and the potential for religious institutions and leaders to promote gender equality and social justice (Para-Mallam, 2010).

The Interplay Between Cultural Practices and Gender Rights

This section explores the complex interplay between cultural practices and gender rights in Nigeria, examining how cultural norms, traditions, and customs impact women's rights and gender equality. Cultural practices, such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and bride price, often perpetuate gender inequalities and discrimination against women (UNFPA, 2022). These practices are deeply ingrained in societal norms and beliefs about gender roles and relationships, posing significant barriers to women's empowerment and autonomy. However, cultural practices are not static and can evolve over time in response to changing social, economic, and political contexts. Efforts to promote gender rights and equality must navigate the tensions between respecting cultural diversity and challenging harmful practices that violate women's rights.

Traditional Leaders and Elders: Traditional leaders and elders play influential roles in upholding and perpetuating cultural practices within their communities. Their support for or opposition to gender rights initiatives can shape public opinion and attitudes towards gender equality.

NGOs and Civil Society Organizations: NGOs and Civil Society Organizations work to challenge harmful cultural practices and promote gender rights through advocacy, education, and community mobilization. They provide support to women affected by gender-based violence and empower communities to reject discriminatory practices (Nigerian NGO, 1999).

Legislative Reforms: Legislative reforms aimed at protecting women's rights and promoting gender equality can influence cultural norms and practices. For example, laws criminalizing female genital mutilation and child marriage seek to challenge entrenched cultural practices that harm women and girls.

The interplay between cultural practices and gender rights in Nigeria reflects the complexities of promoting gender equality in diverse and multiethnic societies. Concrete actors, events, and momentums demonstrate the ways in which cultural practices intersect with gender rights initiatives and highlight the challenges and opportunities for advancing women's rights. Traditional leaders and elders wield significant influence in shaping cultural norms and practices, making their support for gender rights initiatives crucial for achieving meaningful change. NGOs and civil society organizations play vital roles in challenging harmful cultural practices and empowering communities to embrace gender equality (Aina, 1998b). Legislative reforms provide a framework for addressing discriminatory practices and protecting women's rights, but their effectiveness depends on implementation and enforcement (Igbuzor, 2012). By examining these

concrete examples, we gain insights into the strategies and interventions needed to navigate the complex interplay between cultural practices and gender rights in Nigeria.

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