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**Gender Stereotyping and Empowerment in Nigeria Society:  
Implications for Women Repositioning in Curriculum  
Delivery**

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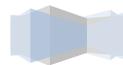
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**Abstract**

*Gender inequality is one of the contemporary issues which have featured prominently in both national and international debates for quite some time now in both developed and developing countries of the world. This has obviously thwarted women status in curriculum implementation in Nigeria education. This observation prompted the author to examine gender stereotyping and empowerment in Nigeria society with implications for women repositioning in curriculum delivery. The overview of religious records and gender position at creation were discussed. Likewise, the available reports of some studies in Africa in respect of disparity in gender enrolment, academic achievement as determined by gender and status were enumerated along with gender spread in commonwealth universities and some parliamentary seats worldwide. Human rights versus gender*



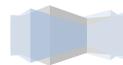
*stereotyping were also discussed vis-a-vis women empowerment. Thereafter, the implications of gender stereotyping for women re-positioning in curriculum delivery was logically dealt with. The paper recommends among other things that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) should be reinforced to carry out its duties more effectively so as to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights all the time, and that women in both administrative and academic positions should be given adequate support by their male counterparts to take care of their weaknesses, for there is no human personality without weaknesses.*

**Key words:** Curriculum, Empowerment, Gender, Stereotyping

### **Introduction**

One of the broad national and international debates in this globalized world has been on human rights issue in gender terms. Gender inequality, gender disparity, gender segregation, gender conflict, gender liberation and gender discrimination of all sorts are critical points of references in documentary evidences in various conversations locally and worldwide. Despite drafted documents at various times that were expected to have a profound impact on the lives of all human beings, the feminine gender obviously continue to agitate for emancipation, empowerment and repositioning in their respective countries. Ogbaji (2010) reported that the Population Reference Bureau of year 2002 data sheet shows that gender inequality is highly pronounced in the poorest regions and countries of the world. Even for over 60 years ago after the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) in documentary records, women still suffer discrimination in all its ramifications. Likewise, the gender statistics in leadership positions in favour of men continue to generate violence talks, and subordination against women.

In a democratic system, the issue of marginalization and erroneous notion about women's rights, empowerment and position are expected to have been a foregone conclusion. Still, efforts at making relevant reforms including constitutional, judicial, administrative policies and programmes as measures to eliminate and redress discrimination against women have not actually convinced the feminine folk of gender equality. It is argued that women are supportive, nurturers, growth-oriented, agent of change and future builders. Educational institutions cannot afford to ignore the strengths of female managers (Adadevoh, 2001).



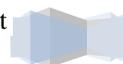
In spite of crucial effort about women empowerment, emancipation, and placement in leadership positions in Nigeria society, it is obvious that the feminine group is still struggling for better recognition. It therefore becomes imperative in this paper to further draw the attention including human rights crusaders to the need for giving more opportunities to the female folk in education, decision making, public life, politics and policy formulation. On this premise, this paper examines gender stereotyping and empowerment in Nigeria society with implications for women repositioning in curriculum delivery.

### **Gender and Gender Stereotyping in Nigeria**

Gender is a social construct, which is brought about by different societies ascribe to the two sexes. It is a culturally determined concept based on beliefs and traditions of a given society or community. It refers to the rules, behaviours and qualities ascribed to male and female folks. Gender can best be understood when sex is mentioned. Sex is the biologically determined characteristics or functions of male and female. Gender refers to those characteristics and functions society ascribes to male and female (Alade, 2006).

As a child grows, he is socialized to fit into those societal expectations. This results into the categorization of roles, activities, responsibilities, and careers suitable for female or male. Thus, gender permeates every human endeavour. Indeed, it has led to what is described as stereotyping. Gender stereotyping refers to a collection of commonly held beliefs or opinions about behaviours and activities considered by society as appropriate for male and female. Prior to the Nigerian civil war (1966-1970), the traditional role of home-making was the main duty of women. Although, the socio-cultural background of Nigerians differs significantly depending on which part of the country or ethnic group an individual comes from, though there are still common beliefs and attitudes which transcend geographical or ethnic peculiarities. Among these are beliefs, values and attitudes about women.

The believe in the indigenous traditional Nigerian community is that the woman's role is in the home where she is a wife, a mother, and a housekeeper. She is on the whole catered for by the male members of the society, the husband playing a major role. It is considered odd for her to cater for herself or engage in occupations or activities considered reserved for men such as apprenticeship in carpentry, dying and bricklaying. These impressions about



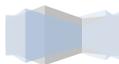
women are however fading away today. The cultural orientation by which the woman is perceived as dependent on the husband for her upkeep is what provides some justification for her subordination and restriction of the pursuit of education (Adamu, 1999). However, the male parent in the indigenous society often consider the girl-child as eventually going to parent somebody as a wife and therefore it may not be wise to commit resources to her education especially higher education as the economic returns for the investment can hardly be realized as expected. The present day Nigeria is refuting this perception about the female folk as made evident in women achievements in various fields of endeavour in Nigeria case and beyond.

There are a lot of challenges associated with women life (Olateru-Olagbegi, 2004). One is the age-long perception about the role women should play in the society. She draws a rather common and tradition-bound example with Nigeria when she explained that women are perceived as subordinate and inferior to men in the Nigerian society. These challenges have thwarted the society's perception of women as individuals and human beings. In gender stereotyping, the socio-cultural conception that women education ends in the kitchen, coupled with religious and economic factors probably account for their low proportion in administrative positions and curriculum delivery system in Nigeria environment.

### **Gender Position at Creation: An Overview of Religious Records**

From religious perspectives, in Christianity for example, God created man in His own image... man called Adam was left alone in the Garden of Eden to eat, drink, walk, jump, run, climb, throw and grow. God created a help mate for him (Eve). The Holy Bible says God created woman using the ribs of man, and that woman was purposely created to assist man. God decided to take one side bone of the many bones in Adam body while he was asleep to make the woman (The Holy Bible - Genesis 2:21-23). From here, it is observed that God created the male folk first before the female folk came to life through man. This is an act of God himself," so to say. Men were said to be pure, not women, and the gods would need pure individuals to appear before them to ask for favours (Asagba, 2005).

The Bible history with the following references has been frequently used to support women's inequality, submissiveness, inferiority to man and subordination, they are:

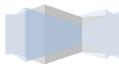


The Head of every woman is the man and the Head of every man is Christ and the Head of Christ is God. (I Corinthians 11:3); Let the woman learn to be in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the men, but to be in silence. For Adam, was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in child bearing if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety (1 Timothy, 2:11-15); Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience. And if they will learn anything let them ask their husband at home for it is a shame for women to speak in the church (I Corinthians 14: 34-35).

Adherents in religion have often used the above scriptural verses among many others to disallow women from taking leadership positions in the religious gatherings. In recent times, various opinions and publications have supported the aforementioned Biblical references by arguing that women cannot be ordained as priests, prophets, apostles, bishops, pastors and deacons (Egbomuche-Okeke, 2009). Such adherents ignore the same scriptures that recorded the life of Deborah as both the judge and prophetess at the same time (Judges 4: 4-5), and Phoebe, a deaconess in faith.

In actual fact, God did not collect any bribe or gratification from man for creating him first, for he has the materials at His disposal to create woman first if He had wanted. Therefore, none of the scriptural references is a license to look down on women or see them as worthless entities or instruments in any sector worldwide. Without a woman, no other man after Adam would have had opportunity to come into this world as the theory of creation indicates. Women are equally highly intelligent and capable of handling societal issues like their male counterparts. Esther of the Bible is another example of this fact. She handled the issue of Haman versus Modecai wisely before King Ahaserus. In the end, her kindred escaped Haman's destruction.

It must be stressed that God would not have created woman if it had been alright for man to live alone. It is obviously the incompetence of man without a woman that made God create woman. That is why a man is regarded only as responsible and religiously qualified to take leadership position effectively



well after marriage. This further confirms the importance of woman in the family and spiritual matters, the misconceived degrading status of woman notwithstanding. It is noteworthy in the present day Nigeria that some religions assemblies tended towards gradual acceptance and repositioning of women by ordaining them as pastors, bishops, priests, and so on. Despite the tenacity of some religions groups to disallow women from being in the hierarchy of religious responsibilities, women repositioning to advance the coast of religious injunctions have rapidly improved in Nigeria in recent times.

### **Gender Spread in Commonwealth Universities and Some Parliamentary Seats Worldwide**

Reports of studies in Africa revealed that there is generally low level of admissions in science and technology-based courses compared with admission into arts and social sciences programmes. More importantly, it is obvious that there is a wide disparity in enrolment and academic achievement of boys and girls in some areas of specialization. Also, female students tend to drift or be guided towards areas of studies regarded as feminine and thus shy away from scientific and technological field (Alade, 2006).

In a similar view, Oluokun (2002) had earlier observed that certain career such as engineering are said to be suitable to men while catering or secretarial studies are deemed suitable for women. So the gap in enrolment and achievement at all levels of education is largely due to gender role expectations and gender stereotyping. Worried by the gender disparity in enrolment in colleges of education, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) at various times in their research reports on gender issues in colleges of education revealed that the areas of female students concentration are the arts, education, social sciences, and vocational education. The specific subject areas where they significantly outnumbered the males are music, French, Nigerian Languages, home economics and secretarial studies.

Female constitute about 50% of Nigeria's over 120 million people (Njoku, 2001). This female's proportion in the population is an important factor to reckon with in socio-economic terms. This is why Alele-Williams in Njoku (2001) posited that it is economically detrimental if such a fraction of the population has restricted access to science and technology. Such restriction is



tantamount to depriving the Nigerian economy of a potentially vibrant labour force. Meanwhile, some schools of thought believe that the female folk is not restricted from any specialization. That it is a factor of the man, positive interest, self concept and career choice among others.

Despite the fact that some progress has been made in the bid to achieve equity in gender representation of both male and female staff in higher education, commonwealth universities, women are still severely under-represented. Dines (1993) reported that the global picture is that men outnumber women at about five to one (5:1) at middle management level and twenty to one (20:1) at senior management level. It was further reported that the percentage of women employed as academic staff ranges from 9.5% in Ghana to, over 50% in Jamaica. The commonwealth average was 24%. These obviously show low participation of women in curriculum delivery.

Lund (1998) in a survey study drew attention to position held by women within the academic hierarchy and subsequent ability to influence policy direction of their institution, whether at departmental or institutional level. As women moved up the occupational ladder, they become increasingly disadvantaged, and thus, as personnel involved in curriculum delivery, their rate of contributions towards actualizing the curriculum objectives in the target audience (learners) is low and slow. Below is the distribution of men and women by occupational category as recorded by UNESCO (2003).

Table 1 clearly presents a true picture of gender inequality in higher institutions with a very low percentage of women in both the administrative and academic positions of the commonwealth universities. Also viewed over the long term, the gender status and position of women in political scene worldwide has attracted a challenging attention. For instance, Ogbagi (2010) gives the percentage of parliamentary seats held by women as at 2009. The descriptive picture is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 shows clearly that Nigeria has the least percentage (3%) of women's contribution to the political and leadership development in Nigeria while Sweden has the highest (49%) percentage of women's access to the political sphere of its country. On the whole, women's position in the parliamentary arena of their respective countries is below average. Thus, there is gender inequality and lopsidedness in gender distribution and control in the globalized world. All these have implication for women repositioning in curriculum delivery.



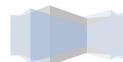
## **Human Rights versus Gender Stereotyping**

The concept of "rights" has been defined and described variously as documented in the literature. For example, Adefolarin (1981) cited in Asoga-Allen (2008) defined right as certain privileges that every citizen can enjoy in a century. The rights are documented in the constitution of every state. Such rights are civil and political rights. Looking into history, rights and duties of a citizen have Greek origin. That man is born free and equal, and therefore should remain as such. Among the natural rights of man which is a free being are liberty, security, property and resistance to oppression. Meanwhile, Norberg (2003) has pointed out that one of the world's crudest injustices is the oppression of women. The discrimination and oppression are rooted in cultural beliefs and practices regarding the different gender role.

Rights are the legal entitlements of every citizen in a state regardless of gender. They are thus the constitutional benefits of the citizens of a country which can be protected in the law court if violated by an individual or government. The fundamental human rights are provided in the Nigerian independence constitution of 1960. Chapter IV of both the 1979 and 1985 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria contains the fundamental human rights of the citizens. These are:

- (a) Rights to dignity of human person.
- (b) Rights to fair hearing.
- (c) Right to private and family life.
- (d) Right to freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion.
- (e) Right to freedom of expression and the press.
- (f) Right to peaceful assembly.
- (g) Right to freedom of movement.
- (h) Right to own property.

With these rights, it cannot be doubted that the state of human rights, adherence to the rule of law and the integrity of the judicial process in any society are related and relevant benchmarks for determining the society's conformity to democratic norms. Also, the stated human rights do not discriminate against women irrespective of gender stereotyping as they are also citizens of Nigeria.



Despite the cultural believe or opinions and impression about gender, it is a pity that Nigerian women, like women the world over, and especially in most parts of the developing world continue to face various forms of discrimination and development problems, largely on social and economic condition. Lending credence to this observation, Egbomuche-Okeke (2010) declared that in Nigeria, discriminatory laws and practices against women and the refusal to recognize the value of their contributions to society is rampant. The stereotypic conception of the society which to a great extent does not favour women makes the treatments given to Nigeria women in the names of culture and tradition many a time, to contradict most of the constitutional provisions of rights of the citizens.

Women and girls are still far from being able to enjoy fundamental human rights, and are yet to match or compete in appropriate measures with men in their participation in politics. Their male counterparts still out-weigh them in political campaigns and positions. They are constantly violently abused (Ogbagi, 2010). This nullifies the enjoyment of fundamental rights and basic freedom due to women as human persons.

### **Women Empowerment**

Years after the declaration of Human Rights, women still suffer discrimination in all its ramifications and violence against women did not abate. This lingering discrimination calls for women struggle to improve their status the world over in politics, economy, education, social recognition and acceptance, etc. The women struggle along this trend ushered in empowerment which is a development strategy with a view to transforming the doctrine of subordination through changes in legislature, property rights and distribution, and all those other sectors which are male dominance.

The concept of "power" in empowerment is to gain control or have control over ideology, values, resources, intellectualism, assets of all kinds, leadership, labour and tutelage. Due to the ideologies of dominance, gender marginalization and subordination, the United Nations and Development stakeholders have within their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and target provision for women empowerment. Goal three of the MDGs is to "promote gender equity ad empower women". Target four (4) of the MDGs is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2015, and in all levels of education not later than 2015.



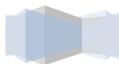
Women empowerment seeks to increase women access to the factors of production through special credit facilities and other modes of financial access (Yero, 2010). It is also believed that women empowerment is inherently focused in the following;

- (1) Equal protection and enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in social, cultural, political, economic and other sphere of life.
- (2) Prevent violence against women.
- (3) Make women participate in policy making instead of being passive beneficiaries and followers of these parties.
- (4) Right to life and aiming in assisting women gain more control of their times.
- (5) Allow women to make choices in their lives without undue focus over external interference.
- (6) Enabling women to be in control of their life in decision making.
- (7) Prevention of violence against women.
- (8) Right to the highest standard attainable in life.
- (9) Right to just services and favourable condition.
- (10) Empowering women to gain access to control of materials.

It is believed that women empowerment would tend to reduce the incidence of poverty among women if well developed and managed. This also increases employment and household income, all for sustainable economic development among other.

### **Implications of Gender Stereotyping for Women Re-positioning in Curriculum Delivery**

The discussion in this paper has shown that there is gender discrimination against women in education, employment, politics, and generally in the society. They remain discriminated against largely because of the societal



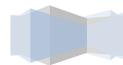
beliefs and attitudes about them. In spite of the natural and social inequalities paramount in gender stereotyping in Nigeria, education has been found to prepare women to respond positively to more opportunities to challenge traditional values, perpetuating their subordination in various sectors, education inclusive.

Curriculum delivery otherwise taken to be curriculum implementation using curriculum instruction as a means for learning needs the collaborative roles of men and women who are educational leaders, who can rebuild and reinforce curriculum delivery activities in the educational institutions at all levels. Although, women are variously available in sickle as administrative and academic personnel in education sector, of more important is to re-position the opportunities given to them so that the lopsidedness in gender distribution of office holding among those that partake in curriculum delivery would be drastically reduced.

Sustainable approaches to curriculum delivery system in Nigeria are imperative if we are to combat the many years of dwindling curriculum fortunes, challenges and poor implementation in the country. With the ever increasing demand for enhanced curriculum productivity at all levels of education in Nigeria in the face of ever decreasing qualitative resources, human and material, at least the basic inequalities in both the administrative and academic positions in curriculum delivery operations which persist side by side with noticeable improvement should still be dealt with. This can be made possible if the female folk are given more opportunities in leadership positions during curriculum delivery. They should not be largely restricted to playing followership roles during curriculum delivery implementation. Instead division of labour commensurate with the percentage of women on ground is ideal so as to give them the chance of making impact in curriculum delivery.

Wherever the gender disparity in women repositioning exist in curriculum delivery, the improved access women may have to positions holding in education is likely in the next few decades to also facilitate their participation in the political and economic spheres, thereby providing them with the power based to challenge male dominance where they deem qualified along with their male counterparts.

Also by implication, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) should be reinforced to carry out its duties more effectively so as to enhance

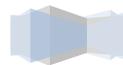


the enforcement, promotion, and protection of Human Rights all the time; women themselves should improve in their networking and integration into all avenues in education and other sectors where opportunities exist so as to help one another move up the ladder and carve a place for themselves in the domains where they are competitively qualified; women should be given due opportunities to participate in policy making instead of being passive beneficiaries of these policies; women in both administrative and academic positions should be given adequate support by their male counterparts to take care of their weaknesses, for there is no human personality without weaknesses.

It is quite reasonable to end this paper by saying that the human rights of women and of the girl-child in curriculum delivery are inalienable and integral parts of universal human rights. The need for women to have more access to both academic and administrative responsibilities in curriculum delivery at the local, state, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all antidotes of gender disparity on ground in all concerned quarters of education should be borne in mind by all the human machineries concerned about Nigeria education and the globalized world.

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Table 1: Men and Women Occupational Category.

Level Administrative	Men (%)	Women (%)	Unspecified
Vice Chancellors /CEO	76.1	6.9	17.0
Deputy Vice-Chancellors etc	59.7	8.4	31.9
Pro-Vice-Chancellors	61.5	13.2	25.3
Registrars	60.1	13.9	26.0
Deans of Faculties	56.8	8.5	34.7
Heads of Departments	84.8	15.2	-
Finance Directors	69.2	7.8	23.0
Chief Librarians	51.1	29.3	19.6
Level Academics	Men (%)	Women (%)	Unspecified
Professors	90.3	9.6	-
Associate Professors/Readers	80.6	19.4	-
Assistant Professors/Senior Lect.	74.1	25.9	-
Lecturers	66.2	33.8	-

Table 2: Women Position in Parliamentary Seats Worldwide.

Country	Percentage of Women in Parliamentary Seats
Sweden	49%
South Africa	30%
Vietnam	26%
Mexico	16%
Cuba	14%
India	9%
Brazil	6%
Nigeria	3%
Egypt	25%

