



## Gender Mainstreaming and Political Education Participation for National Development: Implications of Curriculum Impact on Women.

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### Abstract

*This paper examines the critical role of curriculum in influencing gender mainstreaming and women's political education and participation for national development in Nigeria. It establishes a connection between curriculum design, gender equality, and women's political engagement, highlighting the implications of gender mainstreaming for national development. Despite the numerous responsibilities shouldered by Nigerian women, which often leave them with limited time for other engagements, they remain largely excluded from decision-making processes and governance. However, when adequately empowered, women can serve as vital agents of equity, freedom, social justice, progress, accountability, and overall national development. Since sustainable development cannot be fully realised without the active participation of women, it is essential to empower them through an inclusive, gender-sensitive teaching and learning curriculum. This study highlights key issues, presents well-founded conclusions, and offers recommendations. Among these, it is suggested that relevant stakeholders and curriculum experts integrate gender equality training into secondary and tertiary education programmes in both public and private institutions. Such an initiative would ensure proper orientation on women's education and gender mainstreaming, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum Development, Gender Mainstreaming, and Women Political Education/ Participation.



### **Introduction/Background of the Study**

Women's education has long been recognised as a fundamental human right. Women play a central role in society, whether or not they are in formal employment. As primary caregivers, mothers significantly influence children's lives. Educating girls is one of the most important investments a country can make in its future. Education profoundly impacts girls' and women's ability to claim other rights and attain status in society, including economic independence and political representation. Studies indicate that education significantly enhances a woman's chances of securing well-paid employment, raising a healthy family, and mitigating the spread of diseases. Women with at least a basic education are far less likely to experience poverty. Providing girls with just one additional year of schooling beyond the average can increase their eventual earnings by 10 to 20 per cent (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002).

Every woman has the potential for self-understanding, encompassing awareness of her abilities, interests, behaviours, attitudes, values, aspirations, and role in society. Educational, career, political, and personal-social development can be fostered by creating a supportive environment that encourages self-awareness, aligns aspirations with societal needs, promotes independence, and equips women to navigate social and political challenges. Moreover, facilitating their active involvement in governance within a secure political climate is crucial (Gordon, 2000).

For over two decades, international agreements have emphasised the importance of gender equality and mainstreaming in education. Much attention has been directed towards gender parity—ensuring equal access to education for both boys and girls—with many countries achieving commendable progress in this regard (World Bank, 2012). Gender is a socially constructed concept that shapes attitudes, roles, responsibilities, and behavioural patterns of individuals in society. Gender relations differ across cultures and are shaped by power dynamics in multicultural societies such as Nigeria. Gender issues are fundamentally human concerns, reflecting diversity and differences. Discrimination based on gender remains one of the most pervasive forms of inequality worldwide, cutting across both developed and developing societies (Srivastava, 2000).

Women's empowerment is a socio-political ideal within the broader framework of women's rights. It is a process that enables women to realise their full potential, access opportunities and resources, and make autonomous decisions both within and outside the home. True empowerment occurs when improvements in women's conditions are accompanied by their ability to influence social change through equal participation in economic, social, and political spheres (Omoniyi, 2012).



Political education and participation are fundamental to the organisation of society, resource distribution, and decision-making processes. Women, like their male counterparts, seek to influence the allocation of power in governance. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) assert that women have, in recent times, become increasingly aware of the need for equitable power distribution and resource allocation. However, in Nigeria, women's political involvement is often limited to campaign mobilisation, voting, and passive support, with their participation dwindling when it comes to actual decision-making and governance (Omoniyi, 2012). There is ongoing debate regarding whether women should primarily focus on domestic roles or also engage in socio-economic and political activities. A system where political leadership is monopolised by a select group fails to foster dynamic and multifaceted national development. Consequently, the political landscape must be restructured to incorporate women's education and participation in all facets of governance. The school curriculum, in particular, should reflect women's roles in political engagement and national development.

As an instrument of educational advancement, curriculum development is integral to equipping learners with the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to address societal challenges. A well-structured, gender-sensitive curriculum can foster an inclusive learning environment, encouraging both girls and boys to actively participate in education. Gender inequality is not only prevalent in society but also within educational institutions, where traditional teaching practices often reinforce gender biases. Ensuring gender equality in curricula is central to delivering quality education. To enhance equal access to education and promote political awareness, innovative teaching methods, inclusive curricula, and equitable learning experiences must be developed. Furthermore, the school environment—including its cultural practices beyond formal instruction, such as interactions in playgrounds and communal activities—also influences gender perceptions and future societal roles (Akpakwu & Simon-Bua, 2014).

Gender mainstreaming has emerged as a strategic approach to fostering gender equality. The United Nations (2005) defines gender mainstreaming as the process of evaluating the implications of policies, legislation, and programmes for both men and women at all levels. It aims to integrate gender perspectives into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and initiatives across political, economic, and societal domains, ensuring equal benefits for all and preventing gender-based disparities. By incorporating gender equality considerations into all aspects of governance and development, gender mainstreaming contributes to achieving balance and equity.



Cultural, religious, and social factors significantly influence girls' access to education. In many societies, there is limited recognition of the value of educating girls. Furthermore, prevailing attitudes often restrict girls to 'traditional' subjects, discouraging them from pursuing fields such as mathematics, science, and business. Gender bias within curricula perpetuates stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women. Additionally, socio-cultural factors such as early marriage, pregnancy, and domestic responsibilities frequently hinder girls from completing their education (Levtov, 2014). In some communities, there is concern that education may alter girls' attitudes, making them less desirable for marriage. Economic barriers, including lower wages and restricted employment opportunities for women, further deter families from investing in girls' education due to perceived lower financial returns.

Equal participation in education is not only a fundamental human right but also a catalyst for economic, social, and democratic development. Extending girls' education beyond the primary level is among the most impactful investments a country can make. Education equips individuals with essential skills for employment and entrepreneurship, thereby stimulating economic growth and enhancing national development (Levtov, 2014).

Investing in education significantly contributes to poverty alleviation and overall societal progress. Education, particularly for girls, is a powerful tool for transforming communities and fostering sustainable development. When girls receive an education, they are better positioned to support themselves, their families, and their communities, ultimately driving national growth. UNESCO's Director-General, Irina Bokova, affirms this notion: "When girls are educated, livelihoods are improved, economic growth is increased, and civic responsibility is enhanced." The equal participation of women in political and economic spheres is a crucial indicator of gender equality and empowerment.

### **Gender Mainstreaming and Political Participation for National Development**

The term "gender mainstreaming" came into widespread use with the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. It came as a result of the realisation that not much has been achieved in reducing gender disparities in the different sectors and levels and changing the situation of women despite the efforts made for over several years. Gender mainstreaming refers to the systemic incorporation of gender concerns into policy, planning and programme implementation so that before decisions are taken an analysis is made on the circumstances and effects on women and men. It is not simply concerned with increasing the participation of women but also the quality and conditions of their participation (Leseane, 2016). Mainstreaming is not a goal but a process or strategy towards the achievement of transformation and development goals. The two foci of



gender mainstreaming are equity of representation and gender mainstreaming within government functioning and practice. Mainstreaming women represents the more political aspect of mainstreaming, emphasising the importance of women's equal participation not just as actors in development, or even as beneficiaries, but particularly as active players in all decision-making processes (Corner, 1999).

For conceptual clarity, the term gender refers to the economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. In most societies, men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in the control of resources, and in participation in decision-making. In Nigeria, women as a group have less access in these domains than men. Such inequalities are a constraint to development because they limit the ability of women to develop and exercise their full capabilities for their benefit and for that of society as a whole. The nature of gender definitions (what it means to be male or female) and patterns of inequality vary among cultures and change over time (OECD-DAC, 1999).

The National Policy on Women (NPW, 2000) section 15 subsection 15.1.2 stated that: "Women's numerical strength in the population is not reflected in the political life and decision-making process and structures of the nation. They are inadequately represented at the Senate, National and state legislatures, and the House of Representatives. At the state Houses of Assembly and at the Local Government Councils, women are either completely absent or grossly under-represented, as well as at the highest decision-making levels (executive, legislature, judiciary) in the country. There is the need to correct the situation to ensure the full realisation of democracy." It is very obvious that this situation will be far from being corrected if there is no reorientation of the womenfolk and the society in general towards female participation in the nation's politics.

Mainstreaming, therefore, can be described as the process of promoting the full and equal participation of women in decision-making in all areas and at all levels; using gender analysis on a routine basis to identify the differential access to and impacts on women and men of all projects, programmes and policies; and using such analysis to devise measures to bring about equal participation and equal benefits for women and men. Mainstreaming women emphasises the need to increase women's active participation in mainstream activities, particularly in politics, leadership and governance. Gender mainstreaming is a more technical approach that requires the differential impact on women and men to be identified for all policies, programmes and interventions through gender analysis and gender statistics so that inequalities can be eliminated (National Policy on Women, 2000).



However, it is also important to recognise that mainstreaming women does not necessarily involve gender mainstreaming, since men who are decision-makers for women can be just as blind to gender differences and their impact as men. In particular, since gender roles, stereotypes and norms differ among women themselves (by education, income and social class, for example), mainstreaming a gender perspective as a technical approach that takes these differences into account might continue to be desirable even after women and men are to be found in roughly equal proportion in all key decision-making bodies and positions. Mainstreaming women and mainstreaming gender are complementary and equally necessary to the attainment of gender equality in its widest sense, although the emphasis in countries is likely to vary (Corner, 1999).

The comprehensive integration of gender equality dimensions into governance is critical to ensuring local ownership, effective delivery of political dividends, and strengthened inclusion, oversight and accountability. However, in many countries, such as Nigeria, political policies and programming currently fail to involve both women and men in governance and decision-making processes and do not adequately acknowledge gender dynamics in attempting to understand issues such as sexual violence or small arms violence. This failure frequently results in continuing to perpetrate human rights violations and remaining the stronghold of discrimination and harassment of women in the political field. Women, men, boys and girls all have different political experiences, needs, priorities and roles. A gender perspective calls attention to these differences and seeks to ensure that the political needs and capacities of women and girls are taken into account as much as those of men and boys (Budlender and Rhonda, 1998).

Arowolo and Aluko (2010), in their survey, believed that women have certain forms of embargo/hindrance from participating in politics. They also found that aside from the fact that the majority of husbands do not allow their wives to participate in politics, many female respondents also believed that politics would prevent them from taking absolute care of their families. Fear of broken homes, breeding irresponsible children, the need to perform domestic chores, political violence, thuggery, intimidation, money politics and lots more were found to be some of the factors militating against women's participation in politics. Although there seems to be a progressive increase in the trend of women participation in politics in terms of appointments and elections, the participation is still considered very low considering the international standard of a 30 percent benchmark.

Gender equality and democracy can be advanced through increased knowledge and understanding of the principles and values to ensure that women are well equipped to manage gender policies and programmes within political processes and initiatives. Increase in the participation of women at all levels, such as in trade unions, political parties, interest groups, professional associations and the business/private sector. In this



regard, gender-disaggregated data is pertinent to tracking and assessing progress or serious inconsistencies as far as gender mainstreaming is concerned in Nigeria.

### **The Curriculum and Gender Equality**

In this study, curriculum is defined generally as a plan to guide instruction or a written document with content and planned learning experiences for achieving desired goals or ends (Tyler & Hlebowitsh, 2013; Willis & Bondi, 2010; Marsh & Willis, 2007; Doll, 1996). However, a comprehensive view of curriculum must consider not only the planned curriculum, but also the enacted or taught curriculum, the experienced curriculum, and the tested curriculum, as well as the hidden curriculum (Kelly, 2004; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Curriculum could also be viewed as an arena for social engineering, which takes into account all the experiences individuals are expected to have to become the kind of productive citizens they ought to be (Joseph, 2015). It reflects the knowledge that society considers valuable and appropriate to be taught in schools. As society changes, the curriculum will also change, as well as the way in which it is viewed and what is considered valuable. This means that the curriculum and teaching practices can express ideas and practices marked by gender inequality and mainstreaming.

Over the years, there has been a great deal of curriculum reform as the country reassesses its national identity or position in the global economy. In Nigeria, the curriculum, a key piece of national legislation, is often amended after changes in government or as a result of the influence of powerful social movements. The National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) and the national curriculum documents express the commitment in terms of providing education for all children. In order to increase demand for girls' education, the value and relevance of the education must be clear. The way in which girls, their families, and teachers view education and the content of the curriculum will be influenced by gender equality in the wider society. In Nigeria, assumptions about what is appropriate for boys and girls to learn can undermine equality in learning. For example, in many societies, it is assumed that girls are not good in mathematics and that boys cannot learn about the care of young children (Shakeshaft, 2005).

Curriculum assumptions such as these, and the teaching that accompanies them, may reinforce gender inequalities, with girls often channelled into "lower status" subjects. In Nigeria, it can be said girls may have almost gained equal access to schooling. However, this does not mean that they have gained equal access to the curriculum and the power that is related to certain types of knowledge. In Nigeria today, there has been a conscious effort to present girls in positive roles. However, the tendency to cast the positive roles of women in the characters of the idealised and exceptionally heroic has not been very effective. In addition, gender stereotyping and inequalities persist in the narratives. Women appear largely in material roles, while the decision-makers and protectors tend to

be male. In one textbook, a lesson on women's empowerment was placed next to a lesson with a very patronising and alienating description of a tribal community, which was labelled as a criminal community (Akpakwu & Simon-Bua, 2014).

The goal is to achieve gender equality, such that “women and men have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realising their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development” (UNESCO, 2009). The focus now should be on achieving equality within the school system and perhaps most importantly, in other outcomes through education. So, political education is taken to refer to any course studied in school that may have political content: history, current events, economics, social studies, geography, citizenship education, civics, environmental studies and similar subject matter. The function of such courses is to initiate individuals into "the skills and concepts required for active participation in political affairs of citizenship (Levtov, 2014). Women need to be equipped and initiated into this knowledge for effective and functional political participation and governance.

### **Development of Gender-Sensitive Teaching and Learning Curriculum**

This involves instituting training on political skills-based education for teachers and trainers. As political education is about changing attitudes and behaviour of both men and women, and the society at large to see the need to allow women participate fully in politics and governance. This requires the following:

- Including accurate and appropriate information on political education, gender, risk and vulnerability in all teacher training programmes, both in-service and pre-service;
- Provide all teachers with all the information they require in durable packaging especially in remote rural areas where educational materials may be hard to access;
- Establish face to face in-service education for teachers on political education life-skills-based education, but provide backup of substantial content and methodological guidance in training materials;
- Make a plan with concrete and realistic benchmarks to monitor implementation.

Curiously, gender issues seem to evaporate at this stage from the UNICEF guidelines. However, there is need to include discussion of gender in school-based system via political education to enlighten the society on the role of women in politics. Here gender-specific approaches and recommendations adapting teaching methods to both male and female students (Schenker & Nyirenda, 2002). Teaching and learning need to be related to the existing balance of power between boys and girls. Girls' refusal and negotiation skills need to be strengthened.



Many countries are planning to include gender mainstreaming and political education programmes in the school curriculum. Evidence from Africa (Tiendrebeogo, Meijer and Engleberg, 2003a) shows that further analysis, planning, negotiation and teacher preparation are required for these to be effective. Few meet the criteria for effective programmes. Curriculum developers have paid little attention to effect, process and outcome evaluations. There is little specific coverage of gender issues; it seems clear that gender data and analysis are not used sufficiently in programme development. Further concerns are raised by Boler and Aggleton (2005). These include a lack of focus on pedagogy, the harsh reality of the classroom in many resource poor contexts and generalised assumptions about young people and their rationality. They concluded that there is a need to take local contexts more into account and for prevention efforts to be multi-faceted and appropriate to social context which includes gender power relations. The structural barriers that affect susceptibility such as gender must be taken more seriously.

The extent to which current school-based political education programmes incorporate a gender-mainstreaming approach is hard to determine. Gender is a key concept in the education programme which seeks to develop self-esteem in young people, respect for others and negotiating skills which will assist them in dealing more effectively with peer pressure. There is lack of explicit gender benchmark(s) results in a lack of information on the extent to which the education programmes have based their approaches on gender analysis and whether any lessons have been learned in design and implementation in relation to gender. There needs to be a fundamental review of curriculum to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate attention to the teaching and learning issues. The development of specific teaching and learning materials needs to be accelerated (UNESCO 2003b).

Implementation of gender mainstreaming prevention education has been slow, piecemeal and insufficient quantities and qualities of teaching and learning materials as well as women empowerment in politics. Carr-Hill (2002), in discussing the institutionalisation of political education, focuses on the practical problems of altering the curriculum; the difficulties of scaling up and sustaining peer counselling programmes such as community orientation programmes; the difficulties in involving women through participatory methods; the problems of teachers and their training. There is a lack of gender perspective in political education. This needs to be incorporated in a more comprehensive analysis of challenges to the effectiveness of curriculum-based interventions.

## **Implications of Political Education-Participation and Curriculum Impact on Women**

1. Women will have access to decent work, elimination of gender-based discrimination in employment, social protection, health care, and quality care for children, full control of assets and incomes, elimination of social discrimination in acquisition of assets such as credits, natural resources or through inheritance.
2. Gender balance among civil service staff is an indicator for gendered outcomes in schooling. Girls' enrolments rise relative to boys as the proportion of female workers rise from low levels. This is a strong 'suggestive evidence' that moves towards equality in the gender balance of civil service will promote gender parity in the sector. But this is lacking in women mainstreaming in governance.
3. Women's voice in decision making at all levels (including political processes and households) as well as participation in both the public and private spheres will be heard, recognized and accepted.
4. Rapid socio-economic development of a nation has been observed to depend on the calibre of [women and their education](#) in the country. As such education bestows on women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills.
5. That Nigeria is a signatory to the United Nations resolutions on the recommended ratio of 30:70 women to men in top political positions. She must be seen to be implementing all the resolutions passed. Moreover, Nigeria's size numerically and politically in Africa makes it imperative that nation in general should be leading in the race to implement such Resolutions that affect more than fifty percent of her populace, in order to achieve the nation's vision: 2020.
6. Tertiary institutions' curriculum knowledge is reproducing the dominant patriarchal culture. As argued in preceding sections, curriculum texts and course outlines depict masculine narratives and discourses of male knowledge. Although women are not invisible in curriculum texts, their visibility, and narratives are confined to their roles appendages of men. There is a gap between theory and practice concerning gender sensitiveness by some education practitioners in tertiary institution.



## **Conclusion**

Gender sensitive curriculum is part of a process of transforming the mainstream through changes in women and men, as well as in the social, economic and political environment in which they live. The content and delivery of political education and how it can reflect and reproduce gender-equitable approach in the curriculum is a potent factor in this study. In the short term, women leaders need to gain the skills, knowledge and experience levels of men in order to be able to function effectively in a male-dominated mainstream. In the long term, women need to take the driver's seat through active participation, self-confidence and the support of their constituencies to join with men in leadership; which has a different style, new objectives and new priorities.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are put forward:

1. Government and other relevant stakeholders should ensure that curriculum development involves consultation at all levels of society about gender equality, and what decisions mean for women and girls, especially those who may be marginalized because of language, social practice or environmental degradation.
2. Government should develop and implement government-agreed standards for quality and equality in education. And also ensure that there are strong legal measures to outlaw sexual violence and harassment in schools, with clear procedures for dealing with abuse, which are widely communicated.
3. Relevant stakeholders and curriculum experts should ensure that training in gender equality is included in the secondary and tertiary education programme, both in public and private institutions to ensure proper orientation on women education and gender mainstreaming.
4. Develop capacity and role of the inspectorate and gender units to support gender equality in the classroom at all levels of educational institutions is utmost important. And the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be properly funded by the government, corporate, and private individuals, in order to introduce the gender friendly programme to communities.
5. More women should be encouraged by government to hold high public offices in education, economy and politics in all the states of the federation. This will give them opportunity to encourage other women through sensitization and other form of empowerment.

6. Ministry of Women Affairs should encourage women to seek greater involvement in the politics and decision-making processes at all levels to provide a systematic significant influence on decision-making processes and policy outcomes.
7. Ministry of Women Affairs and relevant NGOs should establish and sustain a knowledge network that serves as a clearing house of information and expertise for scholars, practitioners and activists on women's political empowerment, with a particular focus on gender equality policy formulation.

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