Gender Stereotyping and its effects on Women Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Every society has a culture, which encompasses the behaviour, attitude and ways of living of its members, who are male and female, hence the social attitudes of the society toward women vary significantly across societies. Historically, there are several barriers to women development and advancement and one of them is notably gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are socially constructed beliefs and expectations about the roles, behaviors, and characteristics deemed appropriate for men and women. These stereotypes often perpetuate a binary and restrictive understanding of gender, reinforcing traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. As a result, women are frequently perceived as less competent in leadership roles or in fields traditionally dominated by men, which contributes to the gender pay gap, underrepresentation in senior positions, and limited career advancement opportunities. This paper therefore makes an analysis of gender stereotype, pointing out how it affects women development. It further explains that stereotype is a barrier to women growth and advancement and concludes that any society that needs sustainable development ought to challenge and dismantle these stereotypes in policy reforms, educational initiatives, and cultural shifts so as to promote gender equity and encourage diverse representations of women in all sectors. The elimination of gender stereotypes is crucial for achieving social justice, equality, and empowerment for women across the globe

Key Words: Gender stereotype, women, culture, development, society.

Introduction

Gender stereotyping as a concept refers the negative attribute given to a person as a result of the socio-cultural construct that define roles, role-play and positions of people based on sex and other factors. This issue remains a significant social issue globally, hence affects human, societal and sustainable development.

In Nigeria, there are various tribes with culture and traditions, as culture is an instrument that socially and strategically defines and stratify any existing society, in addition to being the major determinant of the

trend of growth and development associated with the human society. The lifestyle adopted and consequently practiced by any given society, determines and affects her level of economic, educational, religious, political, technological, industrial and overall advancement and global recognition. In other words, cultural traditions and social expectations have lots of influences on sex, gender roles, and these influences are seen as stereotypes. These stereotypes often hinder women from reaching their full potentials. This article therefore makes an analysis of gender stereotyping, and also points out how gender stereotypes affect women development in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Gender Stereotype

For better understanding of the idea of gender stereotype, the idea or concepts of gender and stereotype are analyzed. The word gender refers to that socially-constructed difference between men and women, as distinct from sex, as influenced by biological distinctions. This differentiation usually plays out in roles and positions exhibited or occupied by the opposite sex. Gender roles demarcate responsibilities between men and women in social and economic activities, access to resources and decision-making authority. These roles can and do shift with social,

economic, and technological change. For example, factors such as career consciousness and workplace can influence the roles of men and women in the labour force.

Similarly stereotyping is as an irrational or uncritical analysis or act of prejudice meted on a person or group of people because of the actions or behaviors of others that they share common attributes with; for instance, race, age, sex, gender etc. According Gilligan:

> Gender stereotypes can be described as the characteristics, attitudes, values and behaviours that society specifies as appropriate for the particular gender. The differences may have arisen not just from biological differences but also from sex role socialization during childhood and the way in which men and women develop psychologically.[1]

To stereotype therefore involves a reflexive rather than thoughtful intellectual process. Gender stereotypes has consistently demonstrated that men are generally seen as more important, proactive and more competent than women, while women are seen as more expressive and communal than men The stereotypical beliefs about women

in managerial positions generate the idea that having the traditional male characteristic is a better predictor for success, thus reinforcing the belief to "think manager-think male." Jerry Kang explains: "Stereotyping is an irrational or uncritical analysis that ignores or downplays evidence in favor of generalizations as a mental shortcut…an association between a social group and a specific trait."[2]

However, gender stereotype **r**efers herein therefore to the negation attributed to a person as a result of the socio-cultural construct that define roles, role-play and positions of people based on sexual differentiation and relative cultural conscriptions. Gender stereotypes are generalizations about what men and women are like, and there typically is a great deal of consensus about them. According to social role theory: "Gender stereotypes derive from the discrepant distribution of men and women into social roles both in the home and at work". [3]

This therefore implies that the center of gender stereotyping is to overgeneralize beliefs or assumptions about the sex, roles, attributes, and behaviors of anyone. In many societies, including Nigeria, men are often viewed as strong, more intelligent, leaders,

better decision-makers, and physically strong, while women are perceived as weak, unintelligent, assistants, nurturers, caregivers, and homemakers. These pre-conceived notions limit both men and women by imposing rigid expectations and behaviors.

How Gender Stereotyping affect Women Development in Nigeria

In Nigerian homes, families and societies, gender roles are deeply entrenched in cultural, traditional, religious, and societal norms. From an early age, boys and girls are socialized into traditional roles that dictate what is acceptable for them. Boys are encouraged to pursue education, leadership, and professional careers, while girls are often directed towards domestic chores and caregiving roles. These expectations perpetuate stereotypes that men are more competent in education, leadership and technical fields, while women excel in roles related to nurturing, wifeing and homemaking-related roles.

Gender stereotype brings about educational barriers. In other words, gender stereotyping in Nigeria contributes significantly to educational inequality. In many parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, girls face challenges in accessing education. Some

families may prioritize the education of boys, viewing it as a better investment, while girls are expected to marry early and take on domestic roles. According to UNICEF:

> An estimated 60% of the 10.5 million out-of-school children in Nigeria are girls. This lack of education limits women's opportunities for personal growth, economic independence, and leadership roles.[5]

No doubt, women occupy a greater percentage of the human population, as such, stereotyping them, not only hinders women development but societal growth and sustainable development. This implies that women are the backbone of the society; therefore, educating them will help improve the healthy living and discipline of the people of that society.

Even when they have the opportunity to be employed, this discrimination and stereotype continue. The labor market in Nigeria is also affected by gender stereotypes. Women are often restricted to certain professions considered more suitable for their gender, such as teaching, nursing, and caregiving. Even when women break into male-dominated industries, they face barriers such as wage gaps, limited opportunities for promotion, sexual harassment and unequal

treatment. These stereotypes hinder women's career advancement and limit their financial independence, contributing to the overall economic inequality between men and women in Nigeria.

However, gender stereotyping affects women's ability to participate fully in the economy. In other words, it facilitates socio-economic exclusion women, particularly in rural areas, as such, women are relegated to informal, low-paying jobs such as subsistence farming, trading, and domestic work. These jobs offer little financial security or opportunities for growth. Additionally, stereotypes about women being less capable of handling financial matters limit their access to credit, property ownership, and entrepreneurial opportunities. This exclusion perpetuates the cycle of poverty and dependency among women.

Violence and discrimination are not left out. Harmful gender stereotypes can also contribute to violence against women, which can come in form of domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation among others. In Nigeria, cultural norms that portray women as subservient to men often lead to the normalization of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and early marriages. According

to a study conducted in New Delhi in 2012, the result indicates that 92 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces in their lifetime, and 88 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures) in their lifetime.[6] Hence, Ishrat Batool Naik et al explain:

> … girls are at greater risk of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation. In addition to the resulting adverse psychological, sexual and reproductive health consequences, school-related gender-based violence is a major obstacle to universal schooling and the right to education for girls.[7]

Gender stereotypes that perpetuate male dominance and female submission make it difficult for women to assert their rights or seek justice. This not only affects women's physical and mental well-being but also limits their capacity for social and economic development.

Solutions to Breaking Gender Stereotypes

The solutions or pathways to breaking gender stereotypes centre on the position for the attainment of women development, global peace, security and social Justice. These include the following:

Education, Reorientation and Awareness

Educating both men and women that sex is only biological and not destiny. This will help them understand the damaging effects of gender stereotyping is essential for changing societal attitudes. Eboh explains:

> The primary aim of women education is to prepare a woman for social, economic and above all, effective family care and maintenance of a happy home, which will lead to a stable family and society that promote national development. We can deduce that women education is non-self-centered, because women provide the first discipline at home.[8]

Education however re-orientates them, by awareness campaigns, school curricula, and community programs can help dismantle stereotypes and promote gender equality. Encouraging girls to pursue STEM fields and leadership roles while supporting boys in embracing caregiving responsibilities can

break down traditional roles and broaden opportunities for both genders.

Empowering Women

Empowering women through education, skill acquisition, and access to financial resources is crucial for challenging stereotypes and promoting development. Women's empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, such as microcredit schemes, vocational training programs, and mentorship for female entrepreneurs, provide women with the tools they need to overcome barriers to success.

Women empowerment, therefore promote gender equality, strengthen women's agency, and question limiting cultural conventions. It acknowledges that women, as full participants in society, have the authority to make choices, manage their own lives, and advance their local and global communities economically, politically, and socially. Sustainable development and the general welfare of societies depend on women's empowerment, making it a question of justice and human rights as well. Empowering women aims to further these initiatives by creating a climate that values and promotes women's skills, ambitions, aspirations and successes

Policy and Legal Reforms

The Nigerian government can play a critical role in addressing gender stereotypes by enacting and enforcing policies that promote gender equality. Laws that ensure equal access to education, equal pay for equal work, and protection from gender-based violence are essential. Additionally, gender quotas in political representation can help ensure that women's voices are heard in decision-making processes.

Challenging Cultural Norms

There are some cultural practices that promote stereotype against women. These obnoxious tradition and culture should be abolished and also amended respectively, as the case may be. Culture is an instrument and level of transformation experienced by most societies, there seem to be certain aspects of culture that tend to hinder the growth of individuals especially women and the development of some societies.

Also, cultural and religious leaders in Nigeria hold significant influence in shaping societal values. Engaging these leaders in discussions about gender equality and the harmful effects of stereotypes can foster community-wide support for change. Promoting positive role models who challenge traditional gender roles can also inspire future generations to

embrace more equitable perspectives on gender.

Also, an empowering leadership approach, incorporating women as invaluable partners for social development should be encouraged.

Skills, capabilities and achievements should henceforth take pre-eminence over obnoxious gender stereotypes in classifying and rewarding people in Nigeria.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Gender stereotyping remains a major impediment to the development of women in Nigeria. It limits their access to education, employment, leadership, and socio-economic opportunities. Addressing these stereotypes requires a multifaceted approach involving education, empowerment, policy reform, and cultural change.

By breaking down these barriers, Nigeria can create a more inclusive society where women are able to contribute fully to national development. The eradication of ignorance, poverty and social instability in our society demands that women and men be given equal opportunities in various sectors; educational and socio-economic spheres, and by extension have equal access to, and control, over the resources of the society. As such, our society would become a more habitable entity for both sexes to co-exist, progressively.

To this end, equality means providing equal access to education, political and economic opportunity for all (men and women). Supporting our girls and women will not make men less men, but will improve the domestic economy and contribute greatly to nation building.

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