




## GENDER INEQUALITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA



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### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 17 May 2019  
Revised: 24 June 2019  
Accepted: 30 July 2019  
Published: 12 September 2019

#### Keywords

Economic-development  
South-West  
Gender  
Inequality  
Discrimination  
Implications  
Nigeria.

Gender Inequality remains one of the many problems facing the African continent. Perhaps among the many spheres riddled with this problem is the economy of the continent which has been extensively affected. In Nigeria, particularly the South Western corner of the country occupied predominantly by the Yoruba, women have been observed to contribute immensely to the economy growth and social stability. Interestingly however, women in the region have been clothing others with the social and economic contributions while metaphorically remaining naked. This paper aims at making an assessment of this phenomenon and its overall implication to economic growth and development of the region. The methodology adopted for this work is historical approach. Hence, the study is based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprise of oral interview, newspapers, government gazettes, while relevant books were consulted as useful secondary sources. The study concludes that gender inequality affects economic development of the region to a reasonable extent.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This paper contributes to the existing literature by making an assessment of this phenomenon and its overall implication to economic growth and development of the region.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequalities have become a subject of discourse most especially among intellectuals and scholars. Gender-based discrimination is a pervasive and costly phenomenon. Everywhere females find it more difficult than males to access market activities, political power, or health and education inputs. The special qualities possessed by women have been toned down and played to a minor key due to ignorance on the part of most and lack of concern or appreciation by others. The establishment of structures of inequality against women, as opposed to men, has come to generate the phenomenon of gender discrimination. Perhaps no other discipline has gained notoriety, popularity and embedded in controversy other than Gender Studies. The field from the 1970s in the U.S and the 1980s in Nigeria has produced a variety of perspectives that have challenged and also reinforce views about the relationship between women and men in society. Nigeria, according to statistical figures has a large population of Women (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016) and as such it is not surprising that scholars over the years have paid increasing attention to the role of woman in the Nigerian narrative be it in the social, political or economic sphere. At this point it should be said that contrary to convention particularly as propagated by some western feminist

scholars in the past, women in Nigeria have played important roles. In fact Bolanle Awe in criticizing some of these scholars states that:

With specific reference to Africa...European and North American feminists (are fond of) imposing the historical and cultural experiences of North American and European women on African women, as African and Western societies do not share similar historical antecedents. Historical differentials like colonialism and neocolonialism have far-reaching consequences for the role and status of women (Falola and Aderinto, 2010).

She also adds that “the assumption that women the world over are subject to identical forms of masculine exploitation” (Falola and Aderinto, 2010) should not be held as the gold standard. Indeed, she believes that scholars should instead look at the experiences of women from a national or local perspective. In adhering to this apt line of thought this paper aims at providing an historical and yet critical understanding of the role and economic impact of women in South-Western Nigeria and how women had contributed to the economic development of Nigeria, most especially south western part of Nigeria. I hope this paper will change people’s perception and orientation on the role and contributions of women towards the economic development. Many a time, people attribute women to be home keeper alone, but many of them engaged in other meaningful economic activities some women even take the major role in the economic survival of the family.

## 2. GENDER AND GENDER INEQUALITY

A lot has been said elsewhere on the meaning of gender and gender inequality. Nonetheless, for our purpose here a cursory glance is necessary to provide a grounding foundation on our subject matter. On the one hand, studies on Gender have provided valuable insights on the intersection between gender and issues like social status, race, economic, and even political power. It should be said that traditionally gender was solely used as a grammatical term to differentiate the sexes or as a synonym for sex which dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century in more recent times it has been and is still been used analytically to represent a social category.

Gender is a crucial term for the way in which societies organize sexual categories, sexual roles, sexual behavior, and sexual identification (Malti-Douglas, 2007). Unsurprisingly, In 1955 psychologist and sexologist John Money proposed the concept of a gender role to “signify all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively.” In African countries like Nigeria Gender roles are in most cases culturally and socially defined (Hotchkiss and Pitts, 2007).

It has been established that the prominence of gender in ‘historical scholarship matches its visibility on the world political stage’ (Meade and Wiesner-Hanks, 2004). So much so that Joan Wallach Scott argued in the pages of the *American Historical Review* that history was enacted on the “field of gender.” and went on to state, in a “line that has since been quoted by scholars in many fields, that gender is a primary way of signifying relations of power” (Meade and Wiesner-Hanks, 2004).

At this point particularly after taking into consideration the meaning of gender it is apt to describe Gender Inequality as the established relations of power between men and women in any given society. Ridgeway (2011) buffers this statement when she defines “gender inequality as an ordinal hierarchy between men and women in material resources, power, and status (Ridgeway, 2011). Gender differences in all socio economic attributes of income, wages, skill, health, wealth and poverty widened in developing countries because women cannot have access and control over resources, benefit from economic opportunities, and influence their power in political arena. The existing literatures in Nigeria attest to the male dominated agriculture linked to the disproportionate male access to resources and information required to produce crops more efficiently than their female counterparts (Odozi, 2012).

### 3. WOMEN, LABOUR AND THE ECONOMY: ASSESSING THE ECONOMIC ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

Today's South West Nigeria is home to a number of states mainly Lagos, Ekiti, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ogun state. Also, demographically, South Western Nigeria is said to be generally occupied by a number of ethnic groups however, in terms of population the Yoruba(s) represent the predominant ethnic group (Falola and Genova, 2009). On this background this paper would be limited to using the Yorubas in this region as the case study.

In assessing the economic impact of women in South Western Nigeria one needs to take into consideration the intersection between labour, economy and gender in Africa and indeed Nigeria. Frader and Herrick (2004) points out that:

The most fundamental characteristic of human labor – one that has crossed both temporal and geographical boundaries – has been the fact that with the possible exception of the earliest human societies, it has virtually always been marked by “gender,” – that is, by the social and historical meanings of sexual difference and the power relations that they have produced. Men and women have, much of the time – some might even say most of the time – performed different roles. But these differences were never inscribed from the beginnings of human life on the planet; they emerged through historical developments and cultural change. (Frader and Herrick, 2004).

At numerous points in Nigeria's history, gender differences particularly as it relates to labour and the economy has been manipulated or transformed due to wars, Slavery, social hierarchy and political power. In fact, the changing epochs – particularly the colonial and post-colonial period have had a tremendous effect on gender and gender inequality in Nigeria.

At this point it is important to examine the significance or culturally conceived importance of women in Yoruba-land. Many argue that women play important roles in both the politics and economy of Yoruba-land. In fact, according to one account at the inception of the Yoruba race, three cults controlled the affairs of Yoruba-land and also served as the backbone of the 'Oba's' (king) power- Ifa' (male), Ogboni (male) and Abiyamo: (female). Similarly, it is said that 'the Yoruba accept that the Creator-God put women in charge of all the good things on earth' (Jegede, 2007).

In the pre-colonial period when the Nigerian economy was extensively tied to agricultural activities such as farming and fishing it is observed that women played the major role in the production and distribution of goods. In fact, Denzer (1994) assessing a plethora of studies states that women played crucial roles in the precolonial Yoruba economy and that sizeable evidence can be found from testimonies in the published observations of the nineteenth-century travelers and missionaries' (Denzer, 1994).

Another case in point can be found in Ondo state among the Ilaje were it is said that women particularly among the Ilaje-Ugbo are charged with the responsibility of converting fresh fish into smoked fish, selling the fish acquired in markets among others (Ajetunmobi, 2003). To buffer this point Olaoba and Ojo (2014) state that historically, women dominated the markets in most Yoruba communities adding that over eighty percent (80%) of Yoruba traders were women. They even claim that these women exhibited clear hostilities towards men who patronised and sold in local markets (Olaoba and Ojo, 2014).

Concurrent with this point is the fact that in terms of market administration Women occupy the apex position. Indeed, most markets in Yoruba-land are headed by the Iyaloja (female market chieftain).

One must also add that this phenomenon did not decisively change during the colonial period. According to Denzer (1994) throughout the colonial period in Nigeria, women in Yoruba land continued to play an important

role In the region’s economy as farmers, processors of food products, traders, and skilled craftswomen (Denzer, 1994). It is also said that Yoruba women taking advantage of credit opportunities offered by European firms took to trading with some establishing shops at big commercial centers in the region (Denzer, 1994).

In fact, as one scholar notes in Lagos, there were over four hundred merchant women, each of whom owned between three and five rental houses for clothes (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1994). Similarly, Coquery-Vidrovitch (1994) points out that most of the women involved in this fabric trade had started as little as at the ‘age of ten or twelve in a time when there was no question of their going to school. Yoruba women specialized in cloths, deemed very profitable’ (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1994).

The post-colonial period was not markedly different from other epochs. Nonetheless, it must be said that during the colonial period the introduction of education and the consequent access for girls though at the time quite low opened other opportunities for woman in other areas of the economy other than agriculture and the predominant traditional industries in Yoruba-land.

Petroleum dependent state facilitated by petro-dollars has equally affected the importance of agriculture and almost all other activities in the country.

Nevertheless, it must be said that agriculture still remains an important sector where women participate extensively. An observation of the table above highlighting traffic to farms in Idanre, a town in Ondo state suggests that women make more trips to farms than men.

#### 4. STATISTICS ON THE LABOUR FORCE IN NIGERIA

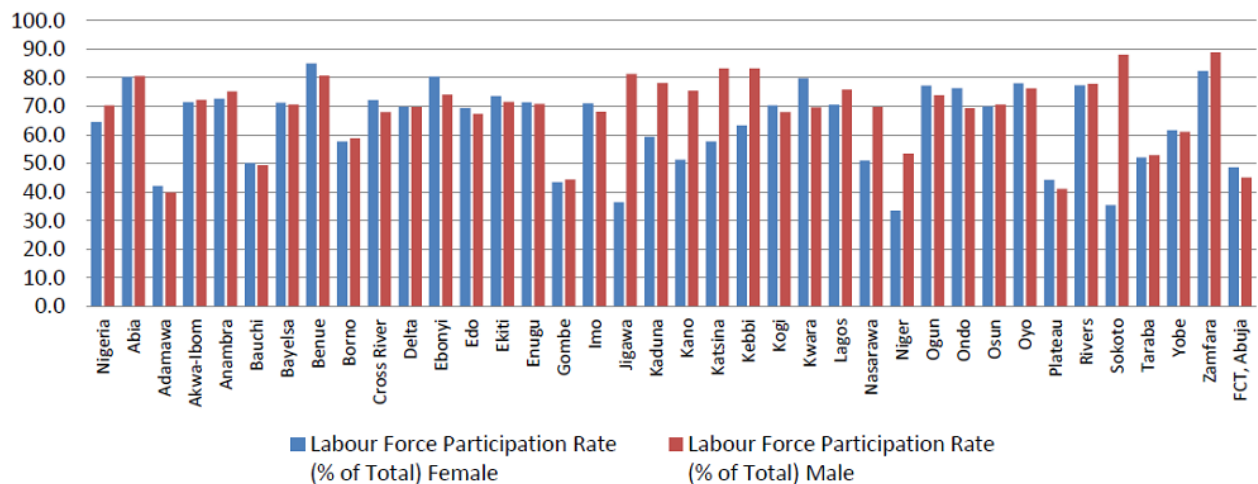


Figure-1. Shows the percentage of women in the Nigeria labour force compared to the male gender. This statistics is meant to debunk the discrimination in which the female gender encounters in the Nigerian society despite their immense input to the national labour force and GDP. Source: NBS (2016).

Similarly, the graph above indicates that in the South-Western states particularly Ekiti, Ondo, and Oyo women still dominate as the major labour force. The predominance of women as labor in these states is not far fetch considering the fact that the local economy of these states are currently still ties to agricultural activities. In fact, it is believed that over 50% of food is produced by women it should be noted that this is probably true particularly for rural women who produce ‘food and cash not only to meet the needs of their families, but also to support the low wages of their husbands’ (Ikhizama and Lawal, 2006).

#### 5. CLOTHING OTHERS WHILE NAKED: GENDER INEQUALITY IN SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

The narrative so-far has revealed the role of women in the economy of South Western Nigeria. It is clear from the foregoing that women were involved in different parts of the economy throughout the different epochs in the

regions' history. Interestingly, however even with this obvious economic power there has not been a significant change in the gender scale. The use of a women's labour force in the economic development of the country is minimal. The political sphere of the country is, by and large, reserved for men alone. The place of women in society is also relegated to contributing minimally to the social development of the country. In addition, women's rights are not properly being protected in order for women to participate in various the issues of their country but are subjected to abysmal violations. Moreover, women are highly affected by environmental problems, and less emphasis is given to their participation in protecting the environment (Bayeh, 2016). Gender inequality arises from reading of various social sciences literature, including economics: it manifests as hierarchical genders relations, with men above women, and women being regarded as inferior and less valuable solely by virtue of their sex. Although the literature predominantly focuses on women we recognize that men in less developed countries also suffer from behaviors and policies that foster hierarchical gender relations. Gender hierarchy is manifested in family relationships, inheritance laws and customs; valuations of women's work and its general invisibility; and the power to make decisions in society, the family, work place, religious and other cultural institutions. It is apparent in the relative opportunities available to women and girls for development, education, health and nutrition and in the pattern of violence between the sexes. Such hierarchy is generally accepted by both genders, and it is not normally questioned within its cultural context (Mikkola and Miles, 2007).

In fact, as Jegede (2006) notes the power of women is usually described in ambivalent terms among the Yorubas. In the positive sense, women are seen as the life giving, mother figure and an indispensable part of creation. In the negative sense, they are seen as frightening and dangerous witches who possess supernatural powers that can destroy natural phenomena and so should be feared and appreciated always (Jegede, 2006). What this represents is the cultural dualism that exists in Yoruba-land when it comes to women. On the one hand, while women are perceived generally has bringing beneficial input to any given activity such as agriculture and the economy at large on the other hand, they are also consciously culturally subjugated as evil which can destroy things.

One must be cautious not to take this view as the prevailing norm during the different epochs in South-west Nigeria however; it does reveal the cultural psyche about women in Yoruba-land. Perhaps because of this psyche women are relegated on different levels thus though they contribute to the economy their role remains static.

Decision Making: A Gender Analysis for Nigeria, Gender Disparities in Africa's Labour Market, Jorge Saba Arbache, Alexandre Kolev, and Ewa Filipiak (Eds) Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank.

It has been established that despite the fact that woman do a large chunk of the work in the agriculture sector, women particular the ones found in rural areas often lack control over key farm inputs and decisions (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010). Similarly, it should be noted that a woman's right to own land is dependent on her relationship with her husband or male relatives so much so that the risk of losing land rights has become a disincentive for women to invest in land (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010).

## 6. BASIC STATISTICS ON OWNERSHIP OF LAND IN NIGERIA (%)

**Table-1.** Gave a statistical explanation of land ownership rate in Nigeria among the male and female gender. The low percentage of women ownership of land is however subjected to the cultural orientation among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria as well as the belief that land ownership belong to the male descends of the family.

Women	Men	Non-poor women	Non-poor men	Poor women	Poor men
13.02	46.85	11.19	36.21	15.02	58.96

Source: Adapted from Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010).

According to another study, it is established that 40% of the male farmers were able to fund their farming through loans from banks because they had access and ownership to land and other assets which they used as

collateral to secure loans from financial institutions. However, unlike men, women were reported to having no loan from banks even when they had access to land, the existing structure prevents them from claiming ownership.

It would seem that this culture was also the norm in the colonial period. Indeed, it is said that the 'colonial administration ignored women, and for a long time development "experts," African and foreign, did as well. The colonizers focused on men, from whom they demanded a tax in silver and compulsory cash-cropping, privileging men's entry into the monetary economy.' Coquery-Vidrovitch (1994) this phenomenon ensured that men were entrenched in the colonial economy thus keeping men on the land. The surprising thing in this colonial sponsored arrangement was that among the Yoruba, Women had to help them to care for the young trees and to harvest and transport the harvest without receiving any form of compensation (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1994).

Interestingly, it would seem also that education also plays a role in promoting gender inequality in Yorubaland particularly in the rural areas. According to Coquery-Vidrovitch (1994) the social and economic status as since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century been devalued so much so that they've been excluded from western capitalism and denied a western style education. The implication of little or no education for Women meant that they were and in most cases still unable to understand and utilize technical information because they lack basic formal education. Similarly, it is said that because of this illiteracy, women farmers are unable to read and understand the written material provided by extension programs that educate farmers (Natural Resources Management and Environment Department, 2010).

So far, it is clear that women have been under rewarded in the economy due to many reasons. Unsurprisingly, this has not been limited solely to the agricultural sector. In Nigeria, where there is the presence of several automotive, tobacco, textile, and food factories around big cities like Lagos, Ibadan women are scarcely found. Interestingly, it has been observed that while there is nothing in Yoruba tradition keeping women from working outside their homes and doing paid work nonetheless, women are seldom recruited by multinationals, and those who work in industry do so in small, backward businesses. In one observation it was found that Odu Textile mill provided a significant reflection of this phenomenon. It is said that this factory was established in 1966 in the current province of Ondo in Nigeria, 'a region where hand weaving was an ancient craft. The local chief, educated and "modern," wanted to create jobs locally. But in 1972 the factory employed only 62 women compared with 1,300 men' (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1994).

Interestingly, this is not even the most surprising point observed by Coquery-Vidrovitch (1994) according to her women in this factory held semi responsible posts. In contrast to what men in the factory had to do they had been hired to prepare cotton thread for the looms, an easy, repetitive job that required no excessive physical labor, and they could do it while sitting and talking. The implication of this form of work load was that the company and even the women knew that they would be given no promotions or salary increases for fear of having to give them more during any future maternity leaves (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1994).

The pattern of inequality as observed from the foregoing clearly reveals that women have been clothing others while metaphorically remaining naked. No doubt, when this is taken in bold relief particularly when one takes into consideration what this means for the economy the implications are profound.

## **7. A CASE OF UNBALANCED PROSPERITY: ASSESSING THE IMPLICATIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

As pointed out earlier the discipline of gender studies has since its existence been concerned with highlighting gender inequality in all its form and how this is affecting every sphere of human existence. This paper does not steer far from this integral premise. In fact, it should be said that the major assumption of this paper follows the thought of two scholars who states that inequality particularly when it relates to gender affects economic development. According to Awoyemi and Adeoti (2006).

Persistent inequality between men and women constrains a society's productivity and ultimately slows its rate of economic growth. The economy pays for this inequality in reduced labour productivity today and diminished national output tomorrow. (Awoyemi and Adeoti, 2006).

Both scholars also posit after assessing cassava holdings in rural south-western Nigeria that the level of inputs (household resources and other productivity augmenting resources) being used on female farmers' plots of land is lower, so the marginal productivity of additional inputs is higher. They believe that economic productivity and development can only be increased by improving women's access to productive resources (such as land and capital). Indeed, these gains according to them would translate to productivity and income at the household and farm levels which would influence economic growth rates in Nigeria.

However, one must be conscious not to take this narrative as the gold standard indeed, from our analysis the 'intersectionality' of gender, and class is visible. Indeed, following the statistical publications of international organizations such as the World Bank it is observable that rural areas house some of the poorest people in the world. Poverty in many ways sustains the gender structure and the cultural norm of patriarchy. It should be said that rising income and falling poverty levels which translate to the elimination of a survivalist class common in the rural area tends to reduce gender disparities in education, health, and access to productivity augmenting resources (Awoyemi and Adeoti, 2006). Women are now becoming ever conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as merely rational instruments but demand rights befitting of human person, both in domestic and public life. Actually, in every human being, the inferiority complex which endue for hundreds of years is disappearing while in others there is gradual feeling of the corresponding superiority complex which had its roots in socio-economic privileges, sex and political standing (Anyalebechi, 2016).

## 8. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, a critical evaluation of the foregoing analysis would reveal that women constitute an important part in the economic growth and development of Nigeria particularly south-western Nigeria. Unfortunately, a number of factors have limited their input, and productivity and it is not gainsaying to state that if this is not checked the region and in a much larger context the country would continue to underperform economically. At this point it should be said that a plethora of recommendations have been provided by a number of scholars to resolve the problem of gender inequality in Nigeria ranging from constitutional changes, policy, and even gendered orientation programmes to undermine the entrenched patriarchic norms in many communities (Allanana, 2013; Mtsor and Idisi, 2014). Nonetheless, it should be said that a lot is still needed particularly a radical programme to change the established norms in the region which relegates women to remain dependent on men or worst still restricts their economic productivity.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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