

## A Systematic Review on Gender Parity in Governance and National Cohesion for Sustainable Development in Nigeria



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**ABSTRACT:** The study focused on the impact of gender parity on achieving sustainable development vis-à-vis national integration in Nigeria. Consequently, the study examines those factors that propel symbiotic gender equality and sustainable development, towards national integration in Nigeria. The study further examined the apparent growing concern of gender inequality in the corridors of our socio-economic and political life as characterized in our workplace, politics and political appointments, school admissions, elective positions and job recruitment and placement, which directly or indirectly affects wealth creation, sustainable development and national cohesion in Nigeria. To investigate this, the study employed descriptive research design and deployed the PRISMA Model in the secondary sources of data collection, while content analysis was adopted for data analysis. The study was anchored on Julian Rappaport's (1981) Empowerment Theory. Findings showed that 80% of women population according to 2006 census figure remains the hidden resources for national cohesion and sustainable development in Nigeria. The study strongly recommends for gender parity as the best option so that women as hidden resources could contribute their quota towards sustainable development.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender Parity; Sustainable Development; National Cohesion

### INTRODUCTION

Gender parity is about equal treatment and chances for all; it is an advocacy aimed at removing the barrier of unequal treatment and denials of opportunities in our society based on people's gender. Women are confronted with many cultural denials, discriminations, and segregation in our society today; they frequently find themselves in low-status, low-paying positions with few or no possibilities for growth and limited access to credit (Gender Gap Report 2016). Gender equality is critical for advancing sustainable development and national cohesion, especially in a gender-centric country such as Nigeria. Gender parity aims to promote equal treatment in society based on people's gender. Gender equality and rights have made significant improvements in recent years, with comparable levels, opportunities, and enrolment ratios of girls in Nigeria. Despite these gains, reality remains unequal in terms of basic gender rights, resources, economic opportunities, and political appointments. Gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to accelerate sustainable development; without gender equality, sustainable development may remain elusive (Gender Gap Report 2016).

Gender parity advocates for a 50:50 split in access to education, decision-making, the workplace, and public posts for men and women. Women, who make up half of the world's population, clearly deserve equal access to health, education, participation, earning potential and decision-making authority (Global Gender Gap Report 2016). Equality between men and women is more than a social justice issue; it is a fundamental human right. It also makes excellent economic sense when women have equal access to education and participate in business and economic decision-making. It is also a major driving factor in the fight against poverty and the promotion of long-term development. Women who have equal rights are more educated, healthier, and have more access to land, jobs, and financial resources. Gender equality also leads to increased opportunities and well-being for children, lowering poverty for future generations (UNDP, 2010). Gender equality and equity are inextricably linked to poverty reduction, sustainable development, and national integration. According to Igbuzor (2008) in Ukpore (2009), "to promote sustainable development, citizens (men and women) must participate in the economic, political, and social development of the society." As a result of the intersection of gender discrimination and economic distress, women experience more severe kinds of poverty than males. Women have fewer opportunities than men to benefit from economic development due to lower labor-force participation, which will surely lift them out of poverty and promote sustainable development and national cohesion. The girl child accounts for the majority of

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children who do not attend school, nearly two-thirds of women in developing countries work in the informal sector as unpaid workers, women are largely underrepresented in decision making in virtually all sectors of society, and very few women comprise activist groups (United Nations, 2016).

Sustainable development, on the other hand, is development that satisfies the requirements of the present without jeopardizing future generations' ability to satisfy their own. It contains two key concepts: the concept of needs, specifically the essential needs of the world's poor, to which priority should be given, and the concept of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. Its heart is a development approach that seeks to balance many and frequently competing needs against an understanding of our society's environmental, social, and economic constraints. It is also about ensuring that society is robust, healthy, and just. Meeting the different needs of all individuals in existing and future communities, fostering personal well-being, social cohesion, inclusiveness, and ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in society (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2015) are all part of this. Without gender parity, no nation can flourish; with gender parity, the rights and opportunities denied to women or other disadvantaged groups because of our cultural orientations or socialization are restored. Since women constitute half of the world's population, including Nigeria, development cannot said to be in progress or complete unless women are brought at par with men. The post MDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) highlights the importance of addressing gender inequality and the good influence it can have on long-term development and national cohesion and integration.

Even in recent years, human rights breaches against women have increased at an alarming rate. Women do two-thirds of the world's work while earning one-tenth of the world's income and owning only one-hundredth of the world's property. They account for a startling 70% of the world's one billion poorest people; this is a serious development reality for our planet (Udaw & Charles, 2017). Nigeria's population of nearly 180 million people is 49% female, with 80.2 million girls and women. In comparison, 38% of these women lack formal education compared to 25% of males, and only 40% of these women have higher education compared to 70% of men (Udaw & Charles, 2017). It is obvious that no significant progress can be made at the local, national, or worldwide levels without understanding the importance of gender parity in society and the critical need to empower, up-skill, and invest in women for a better future. "When we empower women, we empower communities, nations, and the entire human family" (Ban Ki-Moon, 2010).

Flowing on from this, what has to be determined are the factors influencing gender parity and the influence of gender parity on sustainable development in relation to national cohesion? The researcher handled the problem of gender parity from a secular standpoint throughout this study. Gender equality and women's emancipation are crucial aspects for achieving sustainable development and national integration through economic, social, and democratic advancement, as well as the development of human society. This study is conducted for these reasons in order to unravel and x-ray these crucial issues in order to propose necessary solutions to end the terrible situation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Gender parity**

The intellectual debate on gender parity and gender equality has elicited enormous views on what the duo portends. Numerous feminist of the African dissent has mistaken both in applicability in governance systems and most times, it appears as if it is blackmail against the opposite gender. Regardless of diverse views on it, we align ourselves with the position of those who argue that both are not the same. To us, gender parity emphasizes condition of being equal, especially as regards "status or pay" while gender equality talks about the state of being equal, especially in "status, rights, or opportunities".

Nonetheless, Abdellatif (2023) observed that writing about gender parity and political participation in France, Lépinard (2007) shows that parity does not necessarily lead to equality: "In France, we believed that the idea of parity would put an end to the political exclusion of women. Yet equality still struggles to translate into action" (Lépinard 2007, cover blurb; translation, Abdellatif, 2023).

In 2012, the British Council Nigeria reported that Nigeria was classified as a lower middle-income country. In contemporary times, the biggest challenge facing the country is how to create sustainable jobs, foster development and empower factories, take the blame and allow for an equitable sharing of the benefits of the development. The report adds that not only does it urgently address the problem of inequality, but it also offers the prospect of a multiplication and aggravation of conflicts. Nigeria demonstrates extraordinary and disturbing depths of disparity (Tinuke, 2016). The British Council Nigeria also cites Film (2008) which acknowledges the connection between gender inequality, wider systems of injustice and clashes in the specific context of Nigeria's political economy. Furthermore, Caprioli (2005) and Melander (2005) as well as Iheduru (2006) see a connection between gender equality and intensive warfare within the state. This report underscores the importance of valuing and addressing gender relations.

### **Governance**

In general, the notion of governance is associated with a change of character state. In this sense, governance denotes a governance process that deviates from the traditional model in which collectively binding decisions are made by elected representatives in

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parliaments and implemented by bureaucrats within public administration. Governance takes into account the development of the actor constellation, both in the formulation and in implementation of political measures and in the political orientation. Management thus refers to social control and is often described as a process of coordination within networks (Kooiman 2003; Jordan and Schout 2006).

Following Rosenau (1992), Renate Mayntz understands governance as a system of rules that shape the actions of social actors. The management perspective is therefore clearly conceived as an institutional perspective (Mayntz 2004). The different management modes fall into a spectrum the two opposing ideal types “market” and “hierarchy” define that. Between these two typologies, we can distinguish other forms of governance, such as 'communities', 'associations' and 'networks' (Schneider and Kenis 1996). It should be noted, however, that these types are "ideal types" rather than "real types". Empirically we only find hybrid forms, since a form of government always contains elements of other forms of government. Otherwise, effective governance and coordination would not be possible (e.g., markets must rely on hierarchical authority to enforce contracts) (Streeck and Schmitter 1985: 7).

According to Obadan (1998), governance entails the efficiency and effectiveness of a government in promoting the economic well-being of its people. To the African Development Bank (1999), governance may be seen as denoting how people are ruled, and how the affair of a state is administered and regulated. On his part, Boyte (2005, p. 536) posits, “Governance has become a global discourse with a breadth that suggests its usefulness for exploring the fundamental questions of democracy, civil agency and politics”. World Bank (2004) see governance as “the process and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised... how governments are selected, held accountable, monitored and replaced”. In the same vein, the UNDP see governance in terms of its emphasis on the interactions among governments, civil society and business groups that are essential for development (cited in Boyte, 2005).

### **The Nexus of Gender Parity in Governance and Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Gender disparity in governance is seen as detrimental to National cohesion and development. Oni and Agbude (2011) argue that sustainable democracy relies upon the equality and complementary participation of both male and female in the conduct of governmental affairs as basis for development of nations. Liebenow (1986) posits that the process of National cohesion is to a considerable degree a product of social engineering rather than the result of natural or inevitable evolutionary forces. This implies that for any nation to achieve sustainability in governance and development, social engineering is a vital choice to make. Therefore, an end to discrimination against women in governance and their involvement in the policy process in a traditional patriarchal society of male dominance like Nigeria is a right step in the right direction for development.

The 2013 Gender in Nigeria study reveals that a significant portion of Nigerian women face limitations in increasing their household income, thereby restricting their potential to impact national expenditure and contribute to financial development. Land ownership is a challenge for many women, both in rural and urban areas, making it difficult for them to diversify their financial resources. Additionally, women have lower employment rates in the formal sector but show higher levels of education in the micro-enterprise sector. These factors contribute to the continued marginalization of Nigerian women, depriving them of equal opportunities for development and reaping its benefits. While variables such as education, social class, ethnicity, lineage, marital status, and religion may complicate the situation, these challenges are prevalent across Nigerian women.

The importance of religion has grown since 1999, following the political opening that allowed for greater religious freedom, as highlighted by Nolt et al. (2010). The contrasting environments between the predominantly Muslim North and the predominantly Christian South, with some areas not exclusively belonging to either, play a crucial role in the struggle for gender equality, as noted by The British Council Nigeria (2012) citing Edozie (2007). Regional differences, including rural-urban segregation and the North-South divide, further exacerbate the disparities. Residents of industrialized areas in the South generally enjoy better living conditions compared to those in the North. This disparity is evident not only between the North and South but also within each region. State capitals in both regions tend to offer better living conditions than smaller cities in their respective provinces. Insufficient investment in rural infrastructure and services further contributes to the improved quality of life experienced in urban areas, which perpetuates the disparities.

However, Nigerian women continue to face significant challenges in achieving gender parity and equitable opportunities for development. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive efforts that consider the intersecting factors of education, socio-economic class, religion, geography, and infrastructure development.

### **Gender Disparities in Governance and Political Participation**

Gender inequality permeates every facet of human existence, leaving a significant impact on Nigeria. Despite comprising almost half of the country's population, women in Nigeria face severe disparities in political participation, resulting in their marginalization within democratic institutions. Traditionally, power dynamics have governed governance, favoring men and perpetuating their authority and control over society. Women have long been excluded from positions of authority and equal partnership under the law, primarily due to deep-rooted gender stereotypes. For the nation to achieve unity, it is crucial to effectively mobilize all available human and material resources, irrespective of gender.

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The male gender continues to dominate the Nigerian government, wielding the balance of power and exerting complete control over resource distribution and management. Studies, such as the research conducted by Melander (2005), indicate that increased female participation in governance correlates with lower levels of intrastate and local conflicts. International initiatives also support this notion. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) stated in 2002, "Development would occur as quickly as feasible if all people were free to share the opportunities available." While women constitute the majority of voters, demonstrate significant attendance at political events, and actively support political causes, they are significantly underrepresented in political parties and hold minority positions within Nigeria. Discriminatory socio-cultural practices and economic barriers, such as violence in the oil industry, contribute to limiting women's involvement in politics.

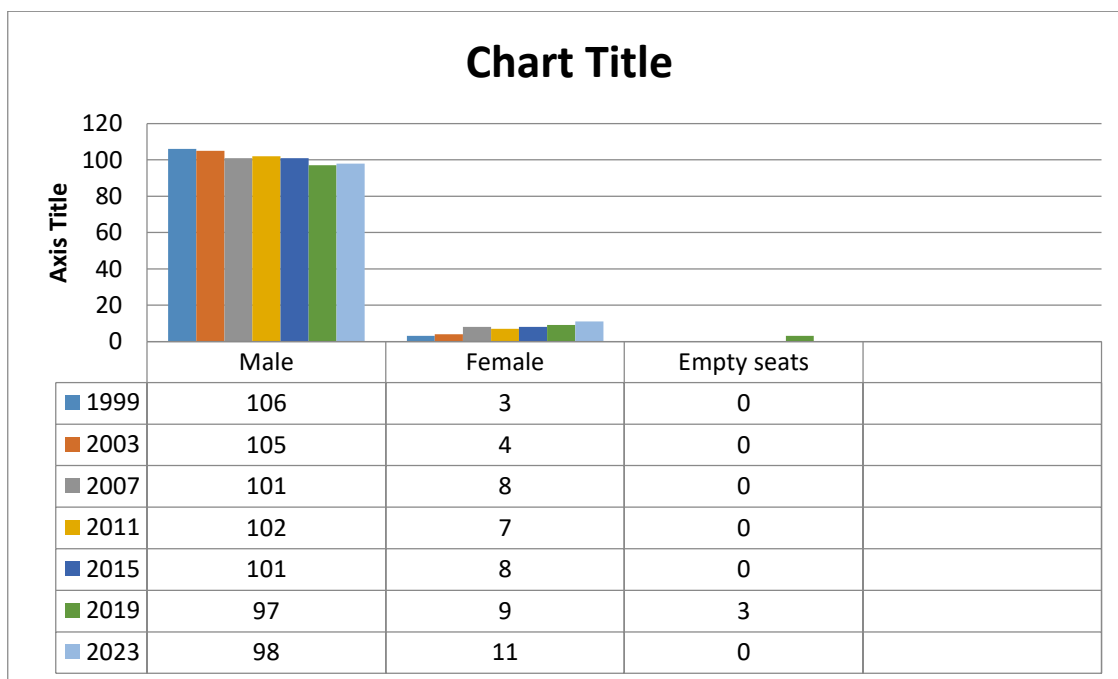
In Nigeria's 2015 general elections, although there were 52 million eligible voters, only 2.34% of the female electorate won seats, as reported by Badmus (2015). In terms of political party membership, women accounted for only 5% in 2015, while 7% held executive positions within parties, and 8% served as party representatives. Out of the 109 Senators in the current National Assembly, only 7 are female. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, only 12 out of 360 members are women. At the state level, women hold 18 out of 990 seats in the State House of Assembly, 143 out of 8,810 positions in local government councils, and eleven out of 774 chairperson roles in local governments. Women's representation in appointive positions remains significantly low, with only 5 women among the ministers and presidential advisors appointed in 2015, and a mere 4 women among the 52 ambassadors. Of the 750 individuals appointed to 137 federal boards by the federal government, only 68 were women. The representation of women stands at just 11.3% in the cabinet, with one elected female governor, 1.1% of councillors, 1.2% of local government chairpersons, 2.8% of senators, and 3.3% of representatives in the House of Representatives. Although there has been a slight increase in women's representation, it remains far below the expected 30% required by Affirmation Action principles and the national strategy for women. Fast-forward to 2023, while the women got 15 seats, which represent 3.5%, the men got 408 seats, which represent 96.5% of the 423 seats. The elected legislators include 98 out of 109 Senate, and 325 out of 360 House of Representatives seats.

As argued by Okpara (2004), a closer examination of women running for office reveals that many of them rely on familial or marital ties to powerful politicians, rather than having an independent political standing. Despite some progress in improving the social, cultural, and economic well-being of women, advancements in terms of political leadership have been scarce. The continued dominance of men in positions of power has discouraged many women from actively pursuing roles in politics.

**Table 1.1: Member of Nigeria Senate and House of Representatives (1999 – 2023)**

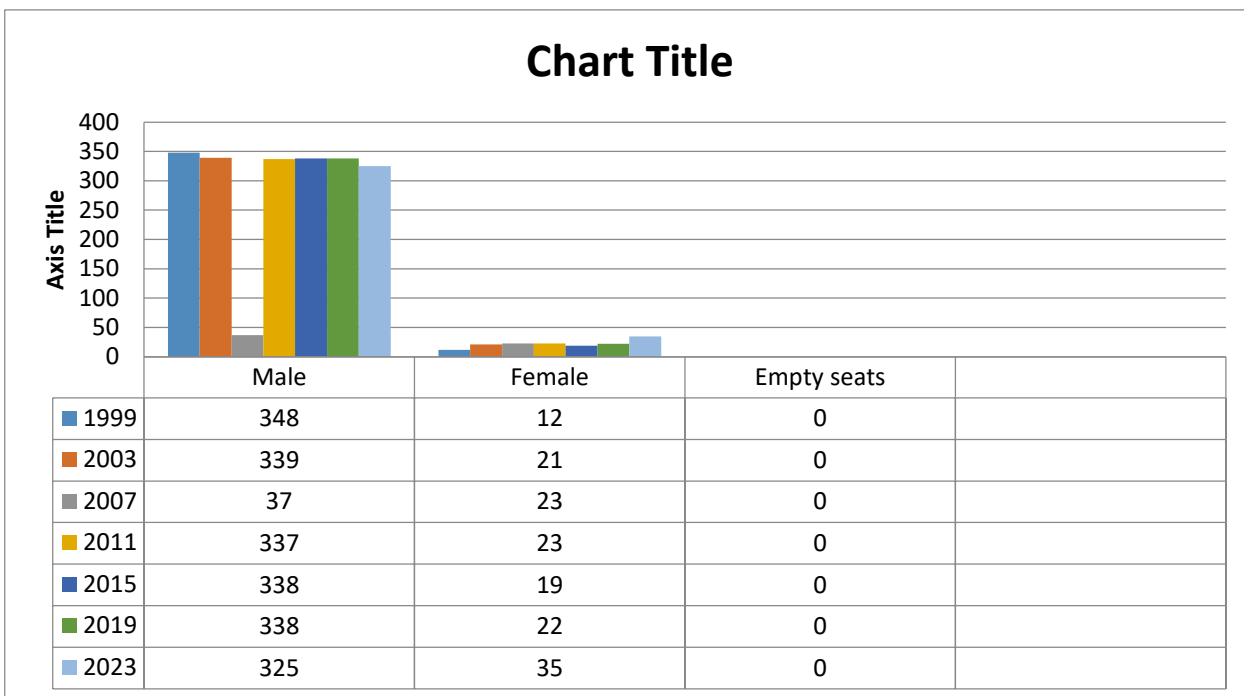
Sex	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015	2019	2023
Male	106	348	105	339	101	337	102
Females	3	12	4	21	8	23	7
Empty Seats	0	0	0	0	0	0	3

Source: Egberi & Madubueze, 2023.



**Fig 1.1: Member of Nigeria Senate (1999 – 2023)**

Source: Egberi & Madubueze, 2023.



**Fig 1.2: Member of Nigeria House of Representatives (1999 – 2023)**

Source: Egberi & Madubueze, 2023.

### Gender Disparities in Poverty

Gender disparities in poverty are a pressing issue in Nigeria, as highlighted by the British Council Nigeria (2013). Despite the country's substantial wealth and resources, a staggering 54% of the population lives in poverty. Women in Nigeria are often engaged in essential sectors such as agriculture, informal income-generating activities, health, and education, yet many of them remain trapped in poverty. Fapohunda (2013) emphasizes that poverty disproportionately affects women, presenting unique challenges that not only undermine national well-being but also pose a threat to sustainable development.

According to the UNDP (2013), 70% of individuals living in poverty in Nigeria are women. The transition to democratic rule in 1999 was expected to enhance the country's development prospects, but progress in terms of job creation has been limited. Moreover, a significant portion of the generated prosperity is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, with approximately 50% of the population grappling with just 10% of the total national income. The UNDP (2012) reports that inequality in Nigeria worsened from 0.43 to 0.49 between 1998 and 2011, placing the country among those with the highest levels of inequality globally.

The poverty challenge in Nigeria stems from extraordinary disparities, evident in unequal income distribution and disparities in accessing basic infrastructure, education, training, and employment opportunities. Recognizing the established link between female earnings and household outcomes, examining gendered poverty raises the question of how many children could potentially escape poverty if gender equality were achieved. It is clear that the cost of gender inequality in Nigeria is significantly higher than commonly assumed.

### Gender Disparities in Employment

The recent economic downturn in Nigeria, coupled with the gap between job creation and the increasing number of job seekers, has led to a worsening unemployment situation for both men and women. However, women face additional vulnerabilities in the job market, as highlighted by a study conducted in 2012. Factors such as limited access to education and training, occupational segregation, the burden of unpaid domestic work, childcare responsibilities, and reduced availability of time and energy for work-related activities contribute to women's job market disadvantages.

According to the UNDP (2014), only approximately one in ten women in Nigeria's workforce hold paid employment, and women have significantly lower chances (67% less) than men to secure wage-earning jobs. Fapohunda (2012) reports that between 1970 and 2009, the percentage of women employed in the formal sector decreased from 57% to 53%. During the structural adjustment program between 1985 and 2000, 2.5 million women lost their jobs, with women constituting 31% of those laid off despite comprising only 6% of the formal sector workforce. The social services sector, where many women were employed, faced severe budget constraints, leading to significant layoffs. The majority of these women were forced to seek employment in the informal sector.

Currently, up to 25% of women are employed in the non-agricultural informal sector, primarily engaged in small-scale trade, home-based processing, and manufacturing. However, these informal sector workers face limited access to reliable sources of financing and information. They are also responsible for their own healthcare and retirement needs, without receiving the benefits of minimum

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wage or social security provisions. While the informal sector serves as a subsistence means for many women, low entry barriers and capital requirements characterize it. Nevertheless, women still struggle to expand their enterprises due to inadequate access to affordable loans, supplies, technical support, and facilities. The informal sector, where women are predominantly employed, often exhibits low productivity and hidden unemployment.

Due to the prevalence of unplanned, low-skilled, and low-wage jobs in the informal sector, Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female private enterprise in Africa, as reported by the British Council Nigeria (2013). Furthermore, according to the UNDP (2014), only 7.2% of women own the land they cultivate, which hinders their access to financing and restricts their participation in free trade and commerce.

### **Gender Disparities in Earnings**

Earning inequalities between men and women within an economy are referred to as gender disparities in earnings. It is well known that these discrepancies favour men and are unfavourable to women. In addition to the 2007 Gender Equality Duty, which is applicable to all public entities, and some of the 2010 Equality Act, Nigeria established equal pay regulations more than 40 years ago. However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2012) reports that Nigeria continues to have one of the largest gender wage gaps in the world, with fewer women holding positions with greater pay and more clout.

The distribution of income varies significantly between rural and urban areas, and this has a particular impact on women. The British Council Nigeria Gender Impact Report (2014) highlights that out of Nigeria's 80.2 million females; 54 million reside and work in rural regions, where they constitute 60-79% of the country's workforce. The World Bank (2009) suggests that various obstacles, such as reproductive responsibilities, limited access to productive resources, and challenges related to low levels of education, collectively contribute to the observed gender disparities in income. Additionally, a gender bias in the allocation of income tax payments unfairly burdens female taxpayers.

The significant wage inequality between males and females in Nigeria reflects the unequal opportunities for livelihoods. The report further supports the assertion made by Okpara (2004) that workplace gender discrimination, present in both the private and public sectors, contributes to additional pay discrepancies. The British Council Nigeria Gender Impact Report (2014) cites Oyelere (2007) to illustrate that, in 2007, males earned an average of N2, 300 more per month than females, with the earnings gap increasing to at least US\$23 per month during that time. This comparison of earnings between males and females with similar educational levels reveals that females, at all levels of education, earn less than their male counterparts. In some cases, males with lower levels of education receive higher pay than more educated female colleagues.

Training and employment serve as pathways to female empowerment. However, in Nigeria, it is evident that improving earnings solely based on educational criteria is somewhat challenging. Structural barriers must be addressed before education can truly make a difference for women. Morrison et al. (2007) emphasize the cost of inequality and argue that achieving income equality between males and females are not only a matter of social justice but also sound economic policy.

### **Gender Disparities in Education**

Nigeria continues to grapple with significant gender disparities in enrollment at the primary and secondary levels of education, posing a barrier to realizing its demographic dividend, as emphasized by Dauda (2007). While there have been fluctuations in primary school enrollment, with a peak in 2010 followed by relative stability, the current net attendance percentage stands at 61%, falling short of the Education for All objective of achieving universal enrollment, according to UNESCO (2014). Alarming, Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children of primary school age globally, as reported by Theobald et al. (2012) and The British Council Nigeria (2013). The 2015 Nigeria Education Data Survey reveals that 1.8 million children (8.1% of children aged 6 to 14) were not enrolled in school, with nearly 61% of them being girls.

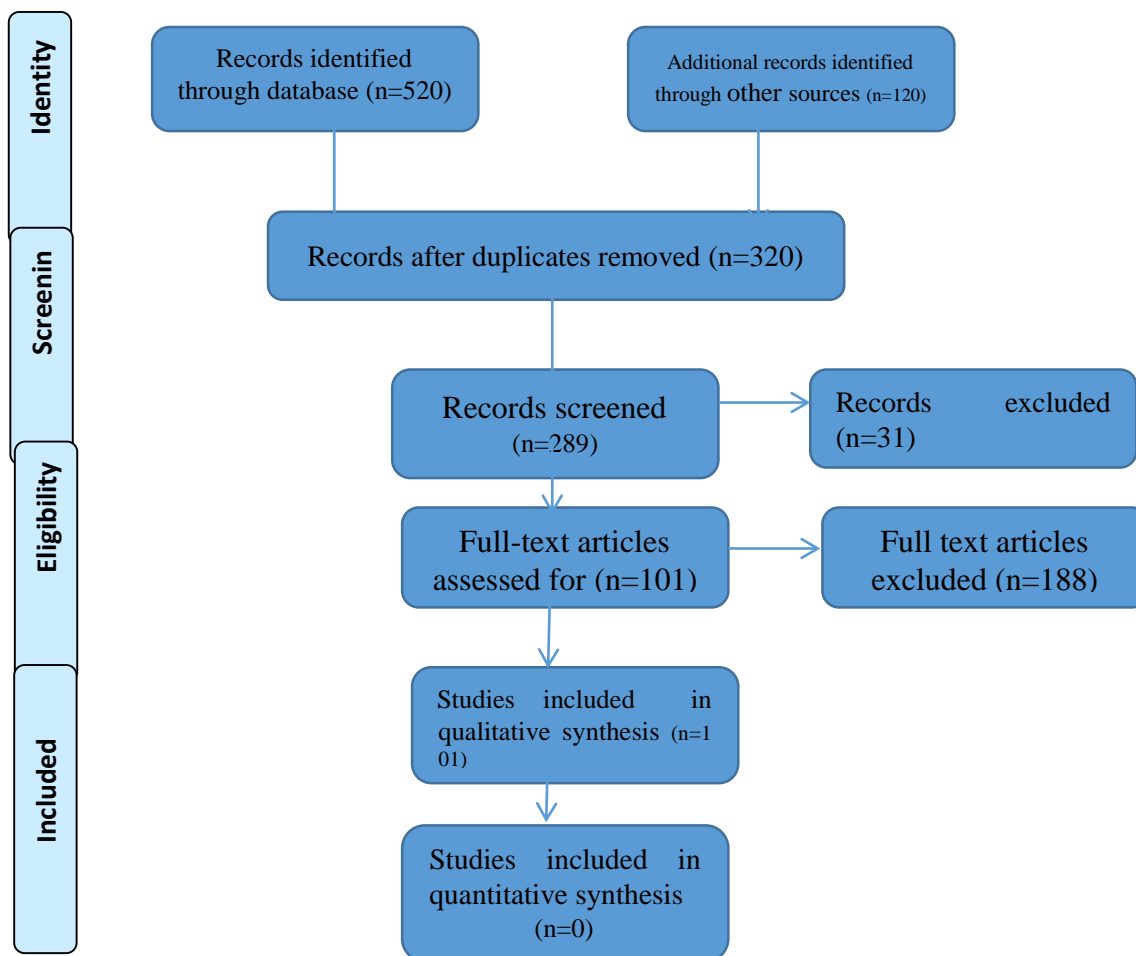
Despite some progress in narrowing the gender gap, girls' overall enrollment rates remain significantly lower than those of boys. Moreover, girls experience lower completion rates compared to boys. UNESCO (2014) highlights shockingly low graduation rates for girls in several Northern States, dropping as low as 7.8%. Mahdi (2011) identifies a prevailing societal factor contributing to this issue, as some parents prioritize sending their sons to school based on the perception that daughters will not continue or carry forward the family name. Hunt (2008) identifies various causes for the alarmingly low completion rates, including parental opposition to the secular curriculum, user expenses, bullying, and early marriage. Consequently, a substantial number of girls who complete primary school do not progress to secondary education. In the Northern region, the net enrollment rate for girls is only 22%, according to UNESCO (2015). The 2012 Gender Equality Report by the British Council Nigeria highlights that over 80% of women in eight Northern States are illiterate compared to 54% of men. In Jigawa State, estimates suggest that 94% of women and 42% of men are illiterate.

The persistently low enrollment and high dropout rates among girls and women in Nigeria are disheartening, considering the crucial role of education in the country's future. It is imperative to address these challenges and promote gender equality in education to ensure a brighter and more equitable future for Nigeria.

**METHODS AND MATERIALS**

The study used descriptive research design. The primary source of data gathering was secondary, which means that data were obtained from advance literature such as textbooks, journals, and official publications. A qualitative systematic review was performed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA; Liberati et al. 2009). We systematically searched for gender parity, governance and sustainable development reviews conducted by scholars in both Scopus and other journals and published in Women’s Studies International Forum with digital object identifier (doi). By following Liberati et al. (2009)’s approaches, the study provided an explanation of the reporting checklist items of the PRISMA that are followed to conduct systematic reviews in the social sciences.

The reviews followed that records identified through database searching were Five Hundred and Twenty (520), additional records identified through other sources were One Hundred and Twenty (120), records after duplicates removed were Three Hundred and Twenty (320), the records screened were Two Hundred and Eighty Nine (289), the excluded were Thirty-One (31), full-text articles assessed for eligibility were One Hundred and One (101) while full text articles excluded were One Hundred and Eighty-Eight (188) and records included in qualitative synthesis were One Hndred and One (101) while none was used for quantitative synthesis.



**Fig: 1.3: Flowchart of the study selection process.**

**1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is based on Empowerment Theory. Julian Rappaport (1981) proposed the theory. The philosophy attempts to connect the personal and the social, the micro and the big. The empowerment process for individuals (micro) is a process of increasing control and transitioning from a state of powerlessness to a state of ownership and power, whereas community empowerment (macro) is a collective social process of creating a community and achieving better control over the environment and decision-making in which group’s organizations or communities participate.

The theory is vital to this research because it will help educate women about their basic fundamental rights at a time when gender and domestic violence are on the rise across all age groups of women. This notion is especially essential because empowering women promotes family stability, peace, and growth, which leads to economic growth and long-term development. Furthermore, it is pertinent to the target subject matter given the strong belief that there is a gender gap and a lack of sustainable development as a result of women’s socioeconomic and political under-empowerment.

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The Empowerment Theory has numerous significant justifications in terms of gender parity and sustainable development. The theory captures people or groups who have experienced exclusion in various ways, such as decision-making processes and economic acquisitions, or discrimination due to sex inequality. Women are known to have been totally or partially excluded from socio-political and economic decisions, despite the fact that their contributions have been widely recognised by society; clearly, policymakers have ignored their contributions. As a result, for significant long-term development, women must be included (empowered) in all levels of socioeconomic and political decision-making.

### **Practical Implication of the Study**

The study "Advancing Sustainable Development and National Cohesion through Gender Parity in a Gender-Centric Nation such as Nigeria" has several practical implications for policy-makers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders concerned with promoting sustainable development and national cohesion in Nigeria. Some of these implications include: Increased focus on gender mainstreaming: The study highlights the need for a gender-centric approach to development in Nigeria. This means that policies and programs should be designed to take into account the different needs, perspectives, and experiences of women and men.

Policy-makers should focus on creating an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming by adopting gender-responsive budgeting, gender-sensitive planning, and gender-aware monitoring and evaluation. Promoting women's economic empowerment: The study highlights the need for policies and programs that promote women's economic empowerment in Nigeria. This includes providing access to credit, promoting entrepreneurship, and addressing the gender pay gap. Women's economic empowerment can contribute to sustainable development by reducing poverty and inequality, as well as enhancing national cohesion by promoting social inclusion. Promoting women's political participation: The study highlights the need for increased women's political participation in Nigeria. This includes ensuring that women have equal access to political positions and that their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Increasing women's political participation can contribute to sustainable development and national cohesion by promoting democratic governance and social inclusion. Strengthening gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis: The study emphasizes the importance of collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data to inform policy-making and program design. Policy-makers should prioritize efforts to strengthen data collection and analysis systems to ensure that gender is mainstreamed across all sectors of development.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of promoting gender parity in Nigeria as a means of advancing sustainable development and national cohesion. By adopting a gender-centric approach to development, policy-makers can address the root causes of gender inequality and promote inclusive development that benefits all Nigerians, regardless of gender.

### **Gap in the Study**

While the study "Advancing Sustainable Development and National Cohesion through Gender Parity in a Gender-Centric Nation such as Nigeria" provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of promoting gender parity in Nigeria, there are several gaps that need to be addressed. These include: Limited empirical evidence: The study relies heavily on secondary sources of data, such as reports and publications. While these sources provide useful insights, there is a need for more empirical research on the issues of gender parity in Nigeria. This research could include surveys, interviews, and other methods to collect primary data on the experiences of women and men in different sectors of the economy. Lack of focus on intersectionality:

The study does not fully explore the intersections of gender with other social identities such as race, ethnicity, religion, class, and disability. Understanding how these identities intersect with gender can provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing women and men in Nigeria. Limited engagement with grassroots organizations: The study focuses primarily on the perspectives of policy-makers and other stakeholders at the national level. However, grassroots organizations and civil society groups play an important role in promoting gender parity and advancing sustainable development. More engagement with these organizations could provide a deeper understanding of the challenges facing women and men in Nigeria. Limited attention to the role of men and boys: The study focuses primarily on women's experiences and perspectives. While it is important to prioritize women's empowerment and gender equality, it is also important to engage men and boys as allies in promoting gender parity and advancing sustainable development.

Addressing these gaps would help to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities of promoting gender parity in Nigeria and would enable policy-makers and other stakeholders to design more effective interventions to advance sustainable development and national cohesion.

## **2. POLICY DISCUSSION**

We live in a world where the majority of girls and women endure real-life poverty, gross inequality, molestation, alienation, dejection, rejection, dehumanization, and injustices from birth to death. The sequence of discrimination and atrocities a woman may face throughout her life, from bad education to poor nutrition to assault and brutality to vulnerable and low-paying employment, is wrong but all too typical in our global world (Elegbede, 2012). In her view of gender equality, Ogwu (2014) correctly stated, "It is about having half of humanity participate." Women's advancement means...the advancement of the entire world." "In comparable societies, Nigeria's 80.2 million women and girls have significantly worse life chances than men and their sisters." (DFID 2012



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Gender Report in Nigeria). This illustrates the Nigerian people's and government's failure to address the issue of gender inequity despite pleas from numerous sides; it also reveals our naive notion of preparing the girl child for future motherhood, family, and societal challenges.

The report, which stated succinctly that "women are Nigeria's hidden resources," revealed that over 1.5 million children aged 6- 14 (8.1%) are currently not in school, a situation that has easily earned Nigeria the world's largest out-of-school children country, an unfortunate achievement of a strong nation. "In eight Northern States, over 80% of women are illiterate (compared to 54% of males); in Jigawa State, for example, 94% of women are illiterate compared to 42% of men; presumably, (DFID 2012 Gender Report in Nigeria). We have failed to recognize that only few investments have a greater payback than girl education. Lack of funds due to widespread poverty, traditional and religious inclinations that place low priority on educating the girl child, non-provision of educational facilities by the government, poor funding of the educational sector, weak educational policies, early marriage, early childbirth, poor sanitation, and ignorance, to name a few. Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa; the majority of women work in the informal, low-skilled, low-paying sector. Only 15% of women have access to a bank account. Educating and empowering the female child entails preparing her for future motherhood issues that will effect a family, the greater society, and promote Sustainable Development in the near future (DFID, 2012).

Gender inequality has a significant impact on human capital in the following generation, because women carry the majority of the responsibility of bearing and rearing children. Women who lack knowledge and decision-making power at home have significant challenges in raising healthy, productive, innovative, and creative children. They also have more children than they want, adding to the stress on themselves and their families. Women with a greater level of education are better able to speak with their spouse about family size decisions, use contraception more efficiently, and have higher expectations for their children. Without education, the female child has fewer opportunities to live her dreams, preventing her from participating in the labour market; it also results in low or no sources of income and eventually poverty in the sense that these girls who are denied education have fewer opportunities to get a job, earn an income, and financially provide for herself, family, and children, and these gender inequalities will impede sustenance.

### **3. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

Gender equality is an essential step in overcoming poverty and advancing sustainable development and national integration. Disparities in schooling and other social and economic variables impose significant costs on well-being, reducing productivity and the capacity to decrease poverty. Women's limited prospects in most communities hinder their ability to better economic situations and access to services that will increase their well-being

Reduced gender-based barriers necessitate shifting deeply held attitudes about acceptable gender roles, as well as taking action to achieve greater gender fairness. If Nigeria is to maximize its "demographic dividend" and achieve long-term development and national integration, it must prioritize investments in women and girls to ensure that the next generation of young adults is healthier, better educated, and better able to contribute to economic growth and development. Investing in adolescent girls and women is not only a matter of human rights; it is also a matter of economics. Investing in women is not simply morally correct. It's the wise thing to do. We are persuaded that the world has the most substantial and yet mostly untapped potential for growth and peace in women." (UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon). To realize their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the achievement of sustainable development, governments must collaborate with religious and traditional institutions to ensure an increase in girls' education, women's political participation, legal and marital rights, outside-the-home employment for women, and reduced child mortality.

### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

All authors contributed to the drafting of the manuscript. Anthony Ejue EGBERI, Thematic Analysis by Madumelu H.C. MADUBUEZE, carried out conceptualization Draft Preparation was written by both authors. All authors have read and approved the final draft of the manuscript.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors have no competing interests to declare relevant to this article's content.

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