Millennium Development GOALs (MDGs) And The Quest For Gender Equity In Nigeria

Oluwatuyi Omotoso
&
Amen Osamede Jegede

Abstract

Women all over the world are noted for being empathetic, sympathetic, compassionate and kindhearted. Despite these qualities of women, they have not been given chance to occupy their status in the society. In fact, in some countries, it is believed that women should only be seen and not heard consequently; they have suffered untold hardship and have been marginalized in nearly all sectors of the economy. This paper looks into MDGs and the quest for gender equity and women empowerment. It derives data from Secondary sources. For women to be empowered, the paper suggest access to education, access to paid work, voice participation, involvement of women in non-governmental organization activities and the involvement of women in unionism as ways through which women could be empowered and could compete favourably with their men folk. The paper will be of great use to policy makers and researchers.

Keywords: MDGs, Gender, Equality, Conceptualization, Nigeria.

Introduction

Inequality means something that is unfair, the state of been unfair. Disparity and imbalance manifest in all facets of life. For instance, it manifests between the rich and the poor, urban and rural areas in Nigeria, and between males and females. From environmental perspective, since nature has never distributed resources equitably all over the universe, there are bound for some areas to be better placed than others.

Gender inequality on the other hand is a big cankerworm that has eaten deeply to the fabric of our society. Since creation, women roles have been relegated in Nigeria, in fact, women were regarded as weaker vessels and are expected to play fewer roles in the socio economic and political development of the society. In some areas, women were denied in such activities, such as, in the governance and administration of the society, in economic activities, especially in trading of goods and services especially in the market and were limited to house hold chores. In fact, in some areas, their movements were strictly limited and because they cannot engage in other activities as their counter-parts, their level of empowerment is greatly reduced and the consequence is poverty and other social related problems.

Gender equality is the third of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is therefore explicitly valued as an end in itself and not just as an instrument for achieving other goals. The initiative to monitor progress in achieving this goal is closing the gender gap in education at all level, increasing women share of wages, employment in the non agricultural sector, and increasing the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

As earlier pointed-out, when there are gender inequalities in the various societal activities, women stand to be at a disadvantage and the disadvantage relates to the high rate of poverty especially, among the women folks. Though poverty itself is a material deprivation, but its causes can be found in the power relations that governs how valued resources, materials and symbols are distributed (Ajakaye, et, al, 2000)

Those relations, position poor men, women and children as subordinate to, and dependent on, with privileged access to these resources. Along with material deprivation, therefore, the poor lack power. The empowerment of poor women must clearly be part of an agenda that addresses the empowerment of the poor in general.

At the same time, however, poor women are generally subordinate to poor men, Obadan (1997). The reduction of poverty, thus, has to take account of gender inequalities among the poor, including inequalities of power. The paper is organized around three resources suggested by the indicator for achieving the goal of gender equality and women empowerment. Education, employment and political participation, each of the resource has the potential to bring about positive changes in women's lives. In each case, however, the social relationship that governs access to the resource in question will determine the extent to which this potential is realized.

General Objective And Specific Objectives Of Study
The general objective of this study was to examine the role of MDGs on gender equality .
The specific objectives of this study were to;
 (i) identify the problems of gender disparity in the study area.
(ii) identify ways of reducing gender disparity in the study area.

The Study Area
Nigeria is located in western part of Africa on the Gulf of Guinea and has a total area of 923,768km making it the world's 32nd largest country (after Tanzania). It is comparable in size to Venezuela, and is about twice the size of California. It shares a 4,047 kilometers (2,515 miles) border with Benin Republic. Nigeria officially called the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a federal constitutional republic comprising thirty six states (36) and its Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The country is located in West Africa and shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the west, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the North. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean. The three largest and most influential ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In terms of religion, Nigeria is roughly split half and half between Muslims and Christians with a very small minority, who practice traditional religions. Source,(www.onlinenigeria.org.2010**).**

Methodology
This work is basically an evaluative study as the subject under review is a contemporary issue. Descriptive-analytical approach data collection was adopted. Data and literatures for this work were obtained from the analysis of the views, comments and opinions in books,

articles in journals, magazines, newspapers, internet materials, as well as speeches and addresses in seminars, conferences, workshops and meetings. Qualitative method was therefore employed in the analysis and presentation of the information collected.

Conceptualizing Empowerment: Agency, Resources And Achievement

\One way of thinking about power is in terms of the ability to make choice using the concept of human poverty to describe the human development index (HDI), UNDP (1997) noted that this does not focus on what people do or do not have but on what they can or cannot do. The HDI is thus, not a measure of well being nor is it a measure of happiness; instead it is a measure of empowerment. The opposite of empowerment refers to the proverb by which those who have been deprived the ability to make choice acquire such ability. In other words, empowerment entails a proven of change people who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered because they were never disempowered in the first place.

However, for there to be real choice, this situation must hold; (a) there must be alternatives, the ability to choose something different. Poverty and disempowerment, thus goes hand in hand, because of inability to meet basic needs. Alternatives must not only exist, they must also be seen to exist. Power relations are most effective when they are not perceived as such. Gender often operates through the unquestioned acceptance of power. Thus, women who for example, internalize their larger claims on household resources or accept violent at the hand of their households do so because to behave otherwise, is considered outside the realm of possibility.

The concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions: agency, resources and achievement. Agency is how choice is put into effect and hence, is central to the process of empowerment. Resources are the mechanism through which agency is exercised, and achievement refers to the outcomes of agency. Each will be considered in-turn and also, their inter-relationship in the content of empowerment.

AGENCY: It encompasses both observable action in the exercise of choice, decision making, protest, bargaining and negotiation, as well as the meaning, motivation and purpose that individuals bring to their actions, their sense of agency.

Agency has both positive and negative connotation. Its positive sense, the 'power to' refers to people's ability to make and act on their own life choices, even in the face of other opposition.

Its negative sense- the 'power over' refers to the capacity of some actors to override the agency of others, for example, the exercise of authority of the use of violence and other form of coercion. Agency in relation to empowerment implies not only actively exercising choice, but also doing this in ways that challenge power relation. Because of the significance of belief and values in legitimizing inequality, the process of empowerment often begins from within. It involves changes in how people see themselves and their capacity for action.

RESOURCES: Agency operates through the mobilization of resources and has resource as medium of power. They are distributed through the various institution and relationship in a society. The way resources are distributed depends on the ability to define priorities and enforce claims. How people gain access to resources is very important in the process of

empowerment. Resources might improve women agency within the family as it provides an independent source of income and hence a stronger
'Fall back' position from which to bargain.

ACHIEVEMENTS**:** Resources and agency make up people's capabilities their potential for living the lives they want, their lives achievement refers to the extent to which this potential is realized or fails to be realized i.e. the outcomes of their effort. In relation to empowerment achievements have to be looked at in terms of both agencies exercises and their consequences for example, taking up waged work would be regarded by the MDGs as evidence of progress in women empowerment.

In analyzing the extent of inter-relationship between agency, resources and achievement therefore, there is a distribution between "passive" forms of agency action taken when there is little choice and active as way which reflect, more purposeful behaviour. Access to resource can often improve women agency. However there is an important distinction to be made between greater effectiveness of agency and agency that is transformative. The former relates to women's greater efficiency in carrying out their given roles and responsibilities, while the latter relates to their ability to question, interpret and perhaps, change these roles and responsibilities.

The paper focuses on transformative forms of agency and on those achievements that suggest a greater ability on the part of poor instrument to question, analyze and act on the structure of patriarchal constraint in their lives.

This involves looking at a range of different questions: how do women perceive themselves and how are they perceived by intimate friends, as well as distant others in the society? How do they treat themselves and how are they treated by others Are they able to make key decisions about matters relating to themselves (their own well being) and to their children and particularly their daughters? What kind of say do they have in other aspect of decision making within the family? Do they have any influence in matters relating to the community and society in which they live and is these influence decisive or merely symbolic?

The three dimensions that make up the concept of empowerment can be seen as the pathway through which the process of empowerment occurs. Changes in anyone can lead to changes in others. These processes of change may occur over the life course of an individual or group but also across the generation as mother seeks to give their daughters the changes that they themselves never had.

Ways Of Empowering Women
Women at all levels need to be empowered. This is because a situation where by in the 2006 you still see women, for example in Nigeria carrying firewood, farm inputs and products on their head and walking five and eight kilometers on road to reach their homes or market to sell their farm product is unacceptable (Falegan, (2001), consequently, the following ways are suggested as ways of ensuring gender equity.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION**:** Education involves total way of learning which start from birth and ends at death. It is one of the most important socio-economic variables that have bearing effect on human empowerment. Education kills the blight of diseases, ignorance, superstition, fear and poverty (Aregbeyen, 1996). Education of women brings change in the

women status in a number of ways. Firstly, it has certain effect at the level of individual i.e. cognition and behaviour. These are relevant to all marginalized groups in society because they promote agency as 'the power'. Secondly, it improves access to knowledge, information and new ideas, as well as ability to use these effectively. These changes apply to young men as well as young women, but the former are likely to be exposed to new ideas and probabilities through their wider contract with the word outside family and local community.

According to Olayemi (1995), education appears to improve women's ability to process and utilize new information, although, more rapidly for certain issues than others, for example, less educated women live as likely as educated ones to have their children immunized; educated women were more likely than uneducated ones to know about family planning, but only secondary school women received an in-depth understanding of disease and prevention.

Education increases the likelihoods that women will look after their own as well as family well being (Osibogun 1998). A case study in rural Zimbabwe by Cassel (1995) found that among the factors that increase the likelihood of women using contraception and assuring ante-natal-care both of which reduce maternal mortality, were education and paid work. Women with low level of education were less likely to visit ante-natal facilities.

According to (FMH), 2000) it was found that in rural Nigeria, 96 percent of women with secondary and higher education, 53 percent of those with primary education and 47 percent of these with little or no education had sought post natal care in the 5 years of the 90's. Furthermore, education of women will give room or greater role for women in decision making and willingness on their part to question male dominance in the home and community as well as boosting their role in economic decision making.

ACCESS TO PAID WORK: Access to paid work can increase women's agency in several ways. In fact, it can shift the balance of power in the family. Humphrey (1985) studied Bangladeshi women working in home based piece work in Britain, noted that with rising male unemployment, many had become prominent bread winner, slightly altering the balance of power between the genders. Similarly a detailed study of women engaged in industrial homework in Mexico by Maro (1987) noted that, particularly in households were women economics contribution was critical to household survival, women had been able to negotiate, a greater degree of respect.

Moreover, if women are engaged in non-agricultural sector, it will lead to a rise in wage employment for women in medium and large scale production units. The income earned will bring about economic improvement for themselves and their families. Among other advantages include: access to new social networks in the factory floor, the greater voice enjoyed in household decision-making, the respect received from other family members, including their husbands, an enhanced sense of self-worth and self reliance and greater personal freedom and autonomy.

Voice, Participation And Women's Empowerment
Gender equality implies 50 percent representation by women. Though, such achievement could go with certain qualifications, represents the most ambitious of the three forms of change singled out to measure progress on women's empowerment and heat the most potential for transformation. A review of the relevant statistics suggests that, regardless of

political system, the percentage of women in national parliaments around the world is extremely low, an average of 13.8 percentage in 2000 (See Table 1)

Table 1. Women in Public Life

	% parliamentary seat in single or lower chamber occupied by women			% women in decision making position in government.			
				Ministerial level		Sub ministerial level	
	1987	1995	1999	1994	1998	1994	1998
MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA							
Morocco	0	1	1	0	0	0	8
Egypt	4	2	2	4	6	0	4
Algeria	2	7	3	4	0	8	10
Kuwait	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Oman				0	0	2	4
Saudi Arabia				0	0	0	0
GAE	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rep of Yemen		1	1	0	0	0	0
SOUTH ASIA							
India	8	8	8	3		7	
Bangladesh							
Pakistan	9	11	9	8	5	2	0
Nepal							
Sri lanka	9	2	2	4	7	1	1
	9		6	0	3	0	0
		5	5	3	13	6	5
EAST ASIA							
Taiwan							
Rep of North Korea							
Rep of South Korea	3	2	4	4		0	
China							

Japan	21	20	20	0		2	
	21	21	22	6		4	
	1	3	5	6		8	3
WEST AFRICA							
Ghana		8	9	3	6	12	9
Cameroon	14	12	5	7	10	5	6
Burkina Faso		4	8	8	3	14	10
Ivory Coast	6	5	8	10	21	0	3
Mali	4	2	12	0	29	0	9
Gambia	0		2	7	9	7	17
Senegal	11	12	12	3	6	0	14
Nigeria	11	12	12	3	6	11	4
EAST AFRICA							
Kenya		11	16	13	13	4	11
Uganda	2	3	4	0	0	4	9
Tanzania		17	18	10	13	7	13
SOUTHERN AFRICA							
Zimbabwe	11	15	14	3	12	25	6
Zambia	3	7	9	5	3	9	12
Mozambique	16	25	25	4	0	9	15
Malawi	10	6	8	9	4	9	4

CARIBBEAN							
Jamaica	12	12	13	5	12	17	22
Barbados	4	11		0	27	16	20
Trinidad and Tobago	17	19	11	19	14	13	19
Guyana	37	20	18	12	15	25	22
LATIN AMERICA							
Brazil	5	7	6	5	4	11	13
Mexico	11	14	17	5	5	5	7
Argentina	5	22	28	0	8	3	9
Chile		8	11	13	13	0	8
Peru	6	10	11	6	10	11	23
OTHER COMMON WEALTH NATION							
UK	6	10	18	9	24	7	19
Australia	6	10	22	13	14	23	17
New Zealand	14	21	29	8	8	17	31
Canada	10	18	21	14		20	

Source; International Development Research Centre, 2009, United Nations Statistics Division.
This is an extraordinary under-representation of women in the highest structure of governance in the various countries listed above. Various forms of bias in the institution of civil society and the political sphere-along with conscious dissemination-operate to exclude women, including men from privilege elites.

Women must not allow the efforts of notable women of virtues in politics and government to be in vain. Such efforts of women of virtue in politics as Margaret Thatcher of Britain, Indra Ghandi of India and Benita Bhutto of Pakistan be sustained, and in a study like this, efforts of such women in politics of Nigeria like Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Florence Ita Giwa and Dora Akunyili be commended. Women should not stay away from political participation and must be involved in all tiers of governance.

Non Government Organization And Women Empowerment
One of the strategies in combating poverty and empowering women are the involvement and participation of non governmental organization. The NGOs are powerful agent of change. They play crucial roles involving and enabling various communities to develop themselves by definition, they are organizations that are not financed by individual, government, either directly or through or untapped assessment system, although, they received government subventions for specific purposes (Kobia, 1987), such as Country Women Association of

Nigeria (COWAN); Police Officers Wives' Association of Nigeria (POWAN), National Committee of Women in Senate (NCWS), National Association of Women in Academics (NAWACS) and other women groups play great roles in empowering their women folks, especially in the area of economic empowerment through making loan available for women (.micro credit scheme) integrated health and family planning, elevation services, women agricultural food production and processing, as well as in technology (Omotoso, 2009).

Agency And Collective Action: Building Citizenship From The Grass Root

There is clearly room for public policy to help realize more fully, the potential that these changes in the social, economic and political arenas – have for transforming the structures of patriarchal constraint in women's lives. It is also clear that there is likely to be powerful forces, within the policy domain itself that will militate against this happening. Indeed, it is likely that the political preserve needed to ensure these actions from above will have to come "from below". It can come from various forms of agency, exercised by, on behalf of, marginalized group, seeking to claim their rights, in various, or different areas.

Involvement Of Women In Unionism

Women are the people needed in Unionism. This is because they have empathy, sympathy, compassion and feelings. What some men will look at and walk away, women wont. Women should rise and protect their interest in the work place (Obiajulu, 2009). Nigerian women in particular should be interested in trade unions, because it is the person who wears the shoe that knows where it pinches. It is only in Nigeria that women are given twelve weeks maternity leave, in other African countries; it is fourteen weeks so that they could have time to breastfeed their babies. It is high time women rise and protects their interest in all sectors.

Lastly, women should be given priority in the disbursement of loans initiated by private and public sectors. For example, in the micro credit schemes of Ekiti State Government, women should be considered so that they could be empowered socially, politically, and economically.

Conclusion

Women have great role to play in the socio-economic and political development of any nation and this research work has examined how access to variety of resources-social, economic and political impacts on women's agency in renegotiating their roles in production as well as reproduction in ways that have implications for the larger renegotiation of the patriarchal order. Women should be given chances to contribute their quota to the socio-economic and political development of their society.

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