



Harnessing Women Capacities for Development and Productivity

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Abstract

Women are supposed to be counterparts of men, but the indexes of development and productivity show a gender gap with women lagging behind men. The need to change the narrative has become an issue of concern as the world intends to achieve gender equality SDG5 by 2030. The paper identifies a series of constraints affecting women and their participation in development and productivity. This includes peculiar challenges imposed by the natural composition of women, sociocultural, economic, demographic, and male dominations factors. The paper acknowledged that women have capacities and potentials that should be harnessed properly for maximum benefits to humanity. The approaches include intensive quality education, capacity building, support services, sponsorships grants, skill acquisitions, empowerment, policies, political wills, synergies, collaborations and networking system to accelerate gender equality at all level, where no one, is left behind.

KEY WORDS: Harnessing; Women; Capacities: Development; Productivity

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of women are more than men as all over the world, as they form 54% of total world population (World population 2021) yet, women below men in so many positive areas and indices such as education, employment, health, economy, business, science, information technology, entrepreneurships, and leadership positions. But possess higher rate in negative indices like illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, diseases and unemployment. The plights faced by women across the world seems to create the gender gap that has become source of hindrance to development and achievements at local, national and global level. It is a known fact that women also possesses intellect, potentials and capacities to develop, participate, acquire, and

contribute in knowledge, skills and numerous ways to promote the national economic, political, educational scientific, technological drive for excellence and advancement. Available report and data show that women are making contributions in operations from family to global level (Fisher in Coughlin. Wingard and Hollihan 1999), UN Women (2022). But due to circumstances, only few women are participating and contributing in decision making level, at family, community, state, national and International level. According to UN Women (2022), empowerment of women in educational, social, economic and political arenas will yield a lot of dividend at family, community, national and improve global index positively.

In fact, historical facts revealed that just as there are men, so also are there women who are geniuses, talented, gifted and intelligent who have made outstanding contribution to humanity. Albert Einstein once said, "Women bring a different way of thinking; a cooperative spirit; a gift for reading people; patience; empathy; networking abilities; negotiating skills; a drive to nurture children, kin, business connections and the local and world community; an interest in ethnic diversity and education; a keen imagination; a win-win attitude; mental flexibility; an ability to embrace ambiguity; and the predisposition to examine complex social, environmental, and political issues with a broad, contextual, long-term view. This indicates that women have enormous capacities, so if female mind becomes unleashed, our modern world, stand to benefit and succeed more. <https://helenfisher.com/downloads/articles/07leadership.pdf>

These mean that women possess capacities and potentials in multidimensional ways. But despite these enormous capacities possess and even exhibited by women, the participation, achievements and contributions of women are still far below expectations due to some constraints peculiar to



women or imposed by socio-cultural and other phenomena. According to Global Gender Gap Report (2022), Gender parity is not recovering, it will take another 132 years to close the global gender gap. Due to compounding crises, women's workforce outcomes are suffering and the risk of global gender parity are backsliding. This is quite alarming, and intensifies the need to harness, fast track, promote and channel women potentials for maximum benefit of all. A lot needs to be done to identify and address both internal and external factors affecting women from different contexts. This includes addressing the negative images, perceptions, misconceptions, and narratives on women being weak, inferior, evil and also the bias, barrier, discriminations, hostilities, persecutions, exclusion, happening in their homes, communities, states, countries and world at large. The status of bequeathed to women at family and society depicts how their outcomes, progress and success in all sectors of development will be. Thus, proper and quality care, nurturing, education, training, empowerments, support and motivation can accelerate women capacities (Devadas and Kim 2021). Currently, the global agenda 2030 involves commitment in raising awareness on the merit of leaving no one behind, the demerits of marginalizing any gender, and the wisdom in gender complimentary and collaborative activities to drive world toward achievements and successes. There are many collaborative efforts such as Womenwatch managed by a taskforce of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) led by UN Women. A Policy Advisory Group meets once a year and is currently comprised of the Gender Focal Points in the UN Secretariat's Department of Public Information (DPI); Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Telecommunication Union (ITU); Regional Commissions (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and Regional Commissions New York Office), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-Habitat), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), and UN Women. Funding for the website is provided by members of IANWGE as well as external donors (). But the global target of

50%/50% gender equality is still a mirage. The prospects in harnessing women potentials are enormous, such that women, children, men and communities, states, nations and global will benefit in many ramifications.

Trends on Contribution of Women to Development and Productivity Globally

There are numerous famous women who have made remarkable achievements that are highly reckoned with in diverse areas of development and productivity at National and International in the past and present. Like Marrie Currie, who founded the science of radioactivity, Margret Thatcher first British first female prime Minister, Indra Ghandi Prime Minister of India, Catherine served as Russia's longest ruling female leader, Willie Mandela African activist has won many honorary awards, Rosa Parks, American activists who sparked civil right in 1960s, Emmeline Pankhurst social reformer. On the Currently, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala served as former Finance Minister in Nigeria is currently the first Woman and African to serve as Director General, World Trade Organization. Also, Amina Muhammad once served as a minister and is currently serving as the Deputy Secretary-General of United Nations. Enoch Obong is still serving as Director, United State Trade and Development Agency. United Nation (UN2020);

<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/women-challenge-gender-stereotype-nigeria-feminism/>

Available records show that top ten countries with high gender equality and women attainments include four Nordic countries namely, Iceland, Norway, Finland, and Sweden; as well as their European neighbors Ireland, Switzerland, and Lithuania (the lone Eastern European country); the Asian Pacific country New Zealand; and two Sub-Saharan African countries, Rwanda and Namibia. While the countries with high gender inequality index are, Afghanistan (44.4%), Yemen (49.2%), Iraq (53.5%), Pakistan (55.6%), Syria (56.8%), Congo (57.6%), Iran (58.2%), Mali (59.1%), Chad (59.3%) and Saudi (60.3%). Nigeria has (62.70 %) gender index gap, (68.70%) in economic opportunity, (80.60 %) in education (96.70%) in health and (4.70%) in political participation.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/gender-equality-by-country>

Globally, women constitute 43% of world's agricultural force with some countries having up to 70%, while some in African countries have about 80% of agricultural production done by rural women farmers. According to UN Women watch



organization (2021) rural women play key roles in achieving food, nutrition, security, income generation and improvement of livelihoods and general wellbeing in the family and rural areas. Due to awareness and exposure to education, training, and advancement more women are into modern work force, thus combining the domestic role with other productive activities, occupations, careers and professions. However, available reports revealed that women participation in occupations and professions is still very low compared to male counterpart (Petersen, Snartland, Meyersson & Eva 2006). This is attributable to low access and level of education, trainings and opportunities made available and accessible to women. Globally, illiteracy rate is higher among girls and women, so also is unemployment rate, thus result in low productivity rate among women.

In attempt to raise awareness and address this at global level, 11th of October is marked as International Day for Girl child to promote training, capacities developmental activities of girl, while the International Women's Day is celebrated on 8th of March annually. The purpose is to promote women, identify and address their challenges. Each year a theme for annual celebration captures context on gender equality. The theme for 2019 was "think equal, build smart, and innovate for change". While for 2020 was "I am Generation Equality: Realizing Women's Right". In 2021 the theme was "Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow", while in 2022 the theme is "Breaking the bias, forged by millions worldwide: Imagine a world free of bias, stereotype and discriminations". The themes are geared are goal oriented to solve plights of women.

Actually, the key to achieving the 2030 agenda for SDG depends much on empowering girls/women and harnessing their capacities through education, training and providing equitable, compatible and appropriate level for each gender to access opportunities, to participation and contribute to national productivity. According to report by Global citizen (2022), indicated that there 1.1 billion girls in the world who ought to be source of power, energy, creativity, development and creativity, are faced with various dimension of threats, discriminations, violence, constraints, and bias subjecting them to sufferings, pains, physical and psychological trauma, diseases, and other unbearable conditions on daily basis, thus denying them rights, opportunities and chances to live, participate, contribute in building a better life for themselves and all. In addition, the role of women in raising children, caring for their husbands and managing families yields huge contributions to development

and productivity in physical, social, economic, political and human resources for all form of advancements, so their capacities in this regard must be harnessed for maximum benefits. These also affect women participation in developmental and productive activities in their societies and countries.

In many countries and societies (African, Asian, European), the traditional and cultural roles of women revolve around domestic activities, while men engage in activities and work outside homes. However, in some societies women engaged in fetching water, firewood, agricultural trading activities and other out of home works. Societies and countries with high number and level of educated women have low gender gaps in participation and contribution to national development. While those with high illiteracy and ignorance rate have low women participation rate in development and productivity indices as well as general outcomes of a country.

Currently, African continents, Nigeria inclusive have joined the global competitiveness for economic, scientific and technological advancement, which include empowering women to pursue as high as their potentials and interest can yield. The trend now is women are striving and breaking series of biases and barriers to showcase their capacities and contribute in meaningful ways. Example, in the 55 years history of Nigerian Airforce, Kafayat Sanni became the first female fighter pilot in 2019 and also the first woman to go through regular combat training at Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA). Salma Okonkwo works in oil and Gas Sahara energy group and was the founder of blue power energy an alternative power source that developed solar farm projects in Ghana. Nkemdilim Begho is a leading lady in Nigerian IT industry and is also a founder and managing director of Future Software Resource that provides online services in website design, security, webhosting and an accomplished entrepreneur. Tara Fela-Durotoye was reknown founder and Chief Executive Officer, House of Tara International creator that engaged in African network of makeup, salons, shops and workshops. Dakolo (2020) was able to identify 100 powerful, innovative and successive women in Nigeria who have excelled in diverse areas of human endeavor such financial, business, corporate, social, academic, public, private, political and economic sectors, as professionals, career who have contributed and impacted greatly at national and international level. (<http://guardian.ng/guardian-woman/leading-ladies-africa-100-most-inspiring-women-nigeria-2020>)

According to PwC report, there are 23 million female entrepreneurs in Nigeria. Also NBS



data indicated that 38% of federal employees in Nigeria are women mostly occupying lower cadre position. Similarly, based on current Central Bank Nigeria (CBN) policy, the banking industry has fulfilled and achieved the 35% margin as eight out of 23 Banks Chief Executive Officers are women. Women are contributing immensely in agriculture and promoting food security. This means that with the right policy and implementation, there are qualified and competent women available to participate in agricultural-economy, entrepreneurship and leadership position in various sectors.

The issue Nigerian women are yet to given the global 30% affirmative appointment positions as at 2022 only 6% of Nigerian Parliaments are women. Women make only 4.2% of senior advocates of Nigeria in 2022. Nigerian female labor force participation rate in 2022 is 48.4%, while the number female university professors in Nigeria stood at 1,802 and male are 10,075. The enrolment data in educational institution shows persistence gender gap from primary to tertiary level. And since education remains the best key to unlock development and attainments by humans, society and nations, it means that the gender gap in education will affect the general attainments of women negatively. Odeide and Oyedele (2021) attested to persisting educational, socio-cultural, economic, political, security, policy challenges that serve constraints to women participation and contribution to their societies and countries.

Nigeria's employment by gender revealed that while male constitute 59.8% and female 50.5% women participate more in service oriented jobs like education, health, medical profession, however more women are now exploring into male dominated jobs in sciences and technology, economy and business sectors. Further analysis of percentage of women workforce participating and contributing in different cadre in Nigeria shows that, only 19% serve as board of Directors, only 23% are in management team, only 19% in private sectors and only 5% in construction sectors. Nigeria has the lowest female representation in politics and governance, ranking 146th in global political empowerment index, having only 11% in presidential cabinets and less than 6% in national assembly and 7% in house of representative with very few state and local government level (WEF, 2020). In economy and entrepreneurship sector, women account for 41% ownership of micro business in Nigeria with 3.4% of female employment within micro enterprise. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1288043/female-labor-force-participation-rate-in-nigeria/>

Harnessing Women Capacities and Contribution to National Productivity

Naturally women are endowed with variety of capacities which need to be identified, tapped and channeled properly to meet personal, community, national and global goals. The need to harness women capacities as human resource for national development and productivity is very vital. Many factors account for inadequacy of women participation and contributions in national activities, among which are socio-cultural inhibitions and limitations imposed on women regarding their education, training, occupations, marriage and ownership of assets. Other associated factors are gender barrier, bias, and violence against women, job requirements, discriminations and victimizations affecting gender status, opportunities, activities and participation in diverse sectors of development. There is need to recognize the inhibitions imposed by biological, reproductive and nurturing factors of womanhood and support women for best outcomes. The invisible indigent and rural struggling women need to be captured in data, records, reports used in assessing and evaluating national productivity indices. The paper opined that women like every man has capacities and potentials, which if well-developed will contribute to personal and national productivity, therefore limitations on the basis of sex or gender need to be addressed properly. Each person should be considered, accorded and treated on individual needs and merit.

Currently, the global agenda gives due emphasis and concern for realization of gender equality. But this is far from being achieved based on figures and statistics available across the world. The SDGs is about halfway to the 2030 endpoint, the need for speedy intervention to act and invest in women and girls to close gender gaps is now. The gender snapshot (2022) presented the latest evidence on gender equality across all 17 Goals, showing that there still long road ahead to achieve gender equality. According to the index released by World Bank (2019), globally women are accorded only three-quarters of the legal rights that men enjoy. Similarly women are not accorded equal economic, political, social opportunities in 178 countries. Unwomen (2021) reported that about 3.9 billion people living in rural areas, in poverty and illiteracy tend to be women. Prioritizing the development of women capacities in every field of engagement and operation with appropriate access and support will bring about phenomenal changes in development and advancement of human race and global community. Girls and women access to training, capacity building and empowerments are pivotal in gender equality and driving the world toward progress and advancement in all fields. women



and girls' being central focus and having immense role in leading the way forward.

Globally, 143 countries has legally accepted equality between men and women, but in practice, gender inequalities still exist in most parts of the world. The need for more realistic commitments from all and sundry to ensure that factors inhibiting women training, participation and contributions are properly addressed at all levels. According to Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) (2021), report the "transformative process by which women and girls go from having limited power, voice, and choice at home and in the economy to having the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to access and compete equitably in markets and the agency to control and benefit from economic gains."

Therefore, in order to harness women and reduce gender inequality, there is need to prioritize individualized instructions and gender sensitive approaches in curriculum design and implementation. There should be effective the roadmap to enable general development, and appropriate complementary partnership between boys and girls, men and women in all engagements.

The need to build and harness women and sense of self: Most women do not have self-identity, or positive self-concept, self-image, self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Some do not know their right, and cannot even fight for their own right. This explains the perpetuation of exploitations, abuse and violence on women in various societies. Some women circumstances they found themselves become indifferent, very dependent, and indecisive, that decision has to be taken for them. Some due lack self-value, are even willing to submit themselves to be exploited for economic, social, educational and other personal gains such as slavery, pornography, sex workers, sex for grades, sale girls, house girls, trafficked out of the country as sex workers, used by companies, banks as protocols, personal officers, to promote business for minimum pay. Due the status accorded to women in some communities and societies most of them have deflated self-system, lack adequate self-identity, self-image, self-confidence, self-reliance, courage and freedom. Sometimes women are their own enemies due to envy, jealousy, and dislike to see the progress of other women.

The need to carry out enlightenment, sensitization and educate males on plights of women. This should embrace training boys and men to view women as complimentary partners and for both gender to support and assist each other for collective good.

The need for gender mainstreaming and inclusive policies to promote and reward women as

done to men in order to harness their capacity is very imperative. Sometime the contributions of women are not recognized, this could be inferred from merit awards, chieftaincy titles, recognitions and honorary awards given in various places in the society. The need to address gender bias and barrier in women access to opportunities, assistances and supports in every circumstance could serve to harness women participation and contribution to national productivity.

Adequate machineries should be in place from family unit to other macro social organs to checkmate all socio-cultural factors that inhibit on women participation and performances in education and training, job, performances, opportunities and other activities.

The need to develop women as human resource capital through education, training and empowerment as well as provision of incentives, sponsorships, scholarships, and grants is very crucial for building women capacities to promote science, innovation, technology and national productivity and advancements. There is need for capital intensive financial support for women to improve women economic viability such as provision loans, financial grants, social capital (mentorship, network, etc.) and physical capital (land, machineries, etc.) to support businesses and entrepreneurs among women. The relevance of adequate role models and mentoring approaches in schools and work places to promote women participation and contribution in national development are important for enhancing women participation in national productivity.

Nigeria being a signatory to gender equality laws and declarations, and also being a strong Nigeria advocate of human right and gender equality activists need to sign the proposed 35% affirmation bills and other gender bills which were turned down by parliaments. The need for inclusion of women in all boards, councils and managements, principal offices responsible for making and taking decisions in all domain of affairs is very vital. Women must have both seats and voice at decision-making tables. Women capacities need to be harnessed to guard against physical exploitation, misuse use of their bodies, time to promote their engagement in productive employment and decent jobs.

The need for urgent transformative actions to reverse all these negative trends that constitutes constraints to women contributions productivity. To achieve the vision of leaving no one behind in development, societies must move beyond lip service to implementation of rights-based and gender



sensitive approaches to achieving equality, resilience, and sustainability.

The need to sustain strengthen and empower women at family and home based role to give each child (male and female) a good beginning as foundation for sustainable growth, development, progress and success for each individual so as to participate and contribute to national development and productivity.

There is need for wholesome census and demographic gender survey so as to have accurate data and statistics to enable adequate and proper planning for boys and men, women and girls to meet individual and collective goal. Unless and until the male counterpart is fully aware and ready to give women the needed support and cooperation the addressing the constraints and barrier against women will forever remain a mirage.

There is need to improve on assistance, support, collection and coordination, monitoring, collation, evaluation, reporting, proper record keeping, accounting, research support and implementation of gender policies with more emphasis on promoting women.

The need to mobilize populace toward changing ideas, perceptions, treatment and handling of women, and to grant women all possible support and assistance to live and extoll their potentials to the fullest. Now many women cannot acquire wealth and fortunes, political and leadership position due to existing constrains, barriers and biasness.

Ending violence against women and closing gender gap should be given emphasis from the family base to national level in all sectors. The need for proper mechanisms for addressing grievances, abuses and GBV will help to address the high incidence of GBV.

The need for Paradigm shift on policy of to allow women to participate in decision making process. The policy on gender inclusiveness and mainstreaming should be enforced in all management boards, board of directors, in public and private sectors so as to provide adequately for women needs and enhance their participation and contribution to national development and productivity.

The need for linkages, networking, partnership, cooperation and coordination between local, national and global content and areas of human endeavors should be harnessed.

The need for education and training institutions as well as recruitment exercises to be gender sensitive and to consider the peculiarities on female gender needs in the course of training and employment. The need for provision of policies that promote gender equity, as well gendering of the

educational curriculum and mobilizing both gender on equitable ground. The paper suggest the need to promulgate, implement, and enforce policies and laws to educate, empower and harness women capacities for optimum realization of their potentials for personal, family, and national development and productivity. Women contribution in various activities and areas should not be ignored such as roles in nurturing and human services, education, economic, business, agriculture and politics. Adequate survey and stock taking should be properly employed to evaluate women contributions in families, rural communities for inclusion in national development and productivity indices.

II. Conclusion

Harnessing women capacities will help shape and transform the world. put in their best. The fact that women are left behind are not due their weaknesses, but due gender gap and gender inequality in all areas such as education, training, capacity building, decision making process, leadership and governance. There is dire need to support women to attain the highest of their potentials, and to give them adequate and appropriate training and opportunities to attain full development and advancement as per their potentials, interest and goals. In the bid to attain global development and advancement and make the world a happy place for all. The future of globalized economy is female so investing and empowering women to harness their capacities is a sure and best decision to reach the goal.

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