

DOMESTIC ROLE SEGREGATION BY GENDER: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL EQUALITY IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Gender inequality as observed by World Bank 2001 constrains economic growth in developing countries. In line with this, gendered division of roles, with particular focus on the domestic sphere, stretches women's work hours very much beyond those of men, and also engenders lower valuation for women's work at the domestic as well as macro levels. The Nigerian situation is that domestic role division, is gradually reducing, though it still manifests powerful undertones of inequality. This inequality tends to be reenacted at the macro level in gender based divisions that impinge upon women's optimal labour force participation necessary for sustainable development. At the domestic level, inequality that is attendant upon segregation of roles, sustains an environment that consists of various forms of subordination and injustice including violence against women, and the denial of reproductive, inheritance, and other rights of women. This paper is a theoretical review of the relationships between gendered domestic role segregation, gender inequality and women's contribution to sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper concludes by positing some recommendations regarding potential interventions for substantial reduction in domestic and other related forms of gendered inequality.

Introduction

Gender differences are rarely neutral as has been demonstrated by Connell (1987) and Mac an Ghail (1994). In most societies gender represents a significant form of social stratification. This is because gender serves as a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances with which individuals and groups are faced, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions; from the household to the state.-Although the roles of men and women vary from culture to culture, Ortner (1974) observes; cited in Haralambos and Holbom (2004); that men's roles are generally more highly valued and rewarded than women's roles. With regard, to the domestic sphere the usual practice in almost all cultures is for women to bear the primary responsibility for child and other care roles and for domestic chores, while men have traditionally borne responsibility for providing the family livelihood and for family protection. This division of labour between the sexes has been held responsible for men and women assuming unequal positions in terms of power, prestige and wealth. Women's relatively lower status, and the tendency for them to have less material resources than men have constituted the basis for studies and discussions since the 19th century. However, in spite of much advancement achieved by women in countries all over the world, gender role divisions continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities. Hence, according to the Business and Professional women's Foundation (2004) cited in Allan (2007: 280-281):

...women generally get paid 76% of what a man makes for the same job with the same education, which means that women are underpaid by about half a million dollars over a lifetime. Interestingly, this discrepancy increases for some of the best-paying and most powerful occupations. Female physicians, for instance, earn about 68% of what comparable male doctors do.

Consequently, investigating and accounting for gender inequality remains an important concern for sociological enquiry.

Many theoretical perspectives from various disciplines have been advanced to explain men's enduring dominance over women at the household level as well as at the macro level income earning sphere. These include Milieu :1970, Rowbotham:1973, Firestone: 1979, Amos and Parmar:1984, Coontz and Henderson: 1986, Mama: 1989, Walby: 1990, 1997,

Paludi and Barickman: 1991, Ekejiuba: 1991, James and Busia:1993, Roseneil:1994, Humm:1995, Hakim: 1995, Breugel:1996, Albert: 1996, Abbott and Wallace:1997, Mason: 1998, Tashjian: 2001, Omonubi-McDonnel: 2003.

Where sociologists have identified inequalities of gender, they have also necessarily identified injustices. For instance, Philips (1987:5) pointed out that in the late 1980s when most states in the world would not contest the legal equality of women with men, it still remained the case that according to United Nations figures, "women constitute one half of the world's population, perform nearly two thirds of its work hours, receive one tenth of the world's income, and own less than one hundredth of the world's property.

An exhortation to justice is clearly visible in the sociology of gender, particularly as feminist sociologists have been instrumental in developing and shaping this field. As a result of above enquiries into the nature, character and consequences of women inequality with men, much awareness have been created and various forms of interventions have been undertaken to reduce gender inequalities. However, most of these interventions have been focused on the macro level economic and political spheres of life, leaving household gender inequalities, to right themselves over time. In Nigeria for instance over the years, focus on modern sector gender based inequalities in employment have brought about significant changes in raising conditions of service for women to the level of men (Okome: 2002) and for some progress in evening out employment opportunities for all sexes (Oguninn, Obilade and Aderinlo: 2007). The problem however, is that despite substantial progress achieved in reducing gender inequalities at the formal employment level, the household remains basically untouched. Indeed the picture that is conveyed by this situation is that these other spheres of attainment of reduction of inequality would somehow effect necessary changes at the household level of gender inequality.

In contrast to above, this paper takes the view that urgent direct focus is required to address household segregation of roles for several reasons. First these household inequalities already constitute serious problems and hazards as women are usually hard pressed to cope with the often conflicting demands of household chores and income earning work in which increasing number of them are engaged. In this situation children's security as well as women's health are endangered (Egbue: 2005, Hodges: 2001). Secondly, negative outcomes of household level gender role segregation and consequent low status of women, include violence against women, (Hodges: 2001, The Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women: 2002, Omonubi-McDonnel: 2003) boy child preference and attendant nutritional and other health hazards for female children and adults (Hodges: 2001). There are also educational inequalities and denials of inheritance rights and reproductive rights, (Nwankwo: 2004) and other forms of gender inequalities that are rooted in patriarchal values that foster male superiority and dominance.

Generally, there is a tendency for the mainstream of enlightened society to gloss over micro-level gender inequality: even when they lead to brutalization of females as in the case of some widowhood practices in south east Nigeria. This trivialization results in concentration of policy focus on macro level economic sector employment inequalities, as these touch the lives of middle and upper class citizens and therefore receive the attention of policy makers. Nonetheless, the reality is that the bulk of Nigerian population: over 65 percent: are in the relatively poor rural communities and are mostly uneducated and some-what isolated from the mainstream of modern socio-economic and political life. For most of these citizens household gender role segregation continues to constitute a major set-back to gender parity in their daily lives as shown in the report of the Association of African Women for Research and

Development (2000).

Theoretical Framework

This study takes its theoretical bearing from feminist ideologies concerning the status of women. Feminist generally espouse the view that relative to men women occupy disadvantaged positions in most dimensions of daily life. For the purpose of the study three feminist view-points are examined in relation to gendered division of roles at the domestic level and in other areas of women's

status in society. The views of Rosaldo (1974), Walby (1990, 1997) and Chafetz (1990) are briefly examined here with particular focus on the relationships that they perceive between domestic and public economic life, with regards to the creation and maintenance of inequalities. Rosaldo (1974) an anthropologist focused her theory on the public and domestic sphere. She was the first to argue that women's subordination was a direct consequence of a division between "public" and "private" (domestic) life. She identified two distinctive areas of social life. The domestic sphere is in her view the aspects of life that are organized around mothers and their children. Thus women are the major actors in this sphere. In contrast, the public sphere is dominated by men and includes activities and institutions that are concerned with rituals and religion, politics and the economy. Rosaldo agrees with the views of other feminists like Firestone (1979) and Ortner (1974), that women are disadvantaged in every society. In her view this stems from interpretations given of women's biology; that ties women to the rearing of children and other activities in the domestic sphere that are associated with this function. Men on the other hand are associated with more abstract authority that resides in the public sphere. She argues that due to men's dominance in the religious, political and economic sphere, they are in the position to also exercise power over the domestic units.

While it does not appear that Rosaldo believed in the prospect of a totally egalitarian society with regard to equality between the sexes, she expressed the view that the gap between men and women could be considerably lessened if men became more involved in domestic life. Criticism of Rosaldo's views includes her non-observance of the fact that even when women are involved in the public sphere, in economic activity, their work are invariably devalued: see Imray and Middleton (1983) cited in Haraiambos et al. Another criticism is that she failed to note that the domestic and the public sphere overlap, since women's domestic work makes it possible for men to devote themselves their public sphere activities (Siltanen and Stanworth: 1984) cited in Haraiambos et al.

Rosaldo's analysis of the power relations between women and men holds true for most societies. In Nigeria, while the domestic sphere is seen as the preserve of the women, this is mostly in terms of the work input that needs to be made there. The men still dominates this sphere in terms of major decision making for instance with regard to who gets what education, what money is to be spent on what family requirements, where to live and so on. In addition, public level economic and political life is dominated by men with very minimal contributions from women; as ministers, senators, house members, governors, local government chairmen and so on.

Chafetz (1990) a Marxian feminist identifies a causal type of relationship between gender division of roles at the macro and micro levels of society. She observes that two interrelated types of forces sustain a system of gender inequality; namely, those that are coercive and those that are voluntary acts by individuals. In the first case, macro-level division of labour in a given society is a major basis for gender stratification. Thus if division of labour is gendered, usually in favour of men; this means that males will receive more resources than women.

This male advantage in material resources translates into differences in power between men and women, at the micro interpersonal level usually represented by the household. Hence, the more men have material and power advantage over women as a result of gendered division of labour, the more men will use such power in their relations with women and wives and consequently the more it is likely that wives in particular, will differ to and comply with the demands of their husbands. Thus macro-level division of labour that favours men, gives them power advantages that they utilize at the household interpersonal level over their wives. This situation makes men less likely to contribute to household domestic work, thus leaving wives burdened with domestic chores, even when they are fully engaged in economic activity. This burdening of women coupled with their lower access to financial and other resources, in turn makes it increasingly difficult for women to effectively compete with men for more lucrative income generating work outside the home, thus further sustaining macro level gendered division of labour.

Furthermore, men's advantage at the macro-level division of labour tends to favour them in the acquisition of incumbency of elite societal positions that are tied to power resources. The more males

occupy these elite power positions, the more men are likely to be favoured over women in the distribution of opportunities in power and work roles outside the home. In line with such existing situations, attitudes and behaviours in work roles will foster male advantages, since these roles will be viewed as being in line with male attributes and abilities. Conversely, those roles that are attributed to females are often negatively evaluated by a system that is dominated by men, thus perpetuating the

advantage of men over women in competition for those positions that generate material and power resources.

In this way, macro level gendered divisions of roles filter down to micro level inter-gender interactions, especially between husbands and wives. Not only do men utilize their macro-level material and power resource advantage to define and thus ideologically control the income earning work situation, they also use the same definitional power to regulate micro-level encounters between men and women especially in the household. Women when they accept this male definition of reality, are more likely to accept gender based traditional domestic roles segregation as part of the status quo, while this in turn provides support for macro-level bias in the division of labour. Men's control of elite positions in the broader society put them in the position to perpetuate definitions of worth that favour men and consequently devalue the work that women do, both inside and outside of the domestic sphere. Hence domestic chores that facilitate family well-being remain unpaid and undervalued, while any economic activity that is traditionally regarded as women's work; for example secretarial work; is relatively undervalued and hence underpaid.

She also held the view that the greater consensus there is among a particular population on gender definitions, about basic and presumably biological differences in the nature of men and women, gender norms and expectations of appropriate behaviour, and gender stereotypes, and the more these gendered differences are presumed by individuals to represent the way the sexes really are; then the more these definitions will have the power to influence both the macro and micro level social processes that sustain gender inequality.

Walby (1990, 1997) a sociologist propounded the Triple Systems Theory. She attempted to synthesize feminists' competing explanations of the subordination of women. In her view the concept 'patriarchy' needed reworking so as to incorporate the experiences and analysis of black women. On the basis of this view she devised an explanation of the combined workings of patriarchy, capitalism and racism as they act on women as a group and on individual women; that came to be known as the Triple Systems Theory. In her view patriarchy is a system of abstract relations between women and men, that also intersects with capitalism and racism.

Walby sees patriarchy as consisting of six relatively autonomous social structures that also function relatively interdependently. These are: Patriarchal mode of production: Patriarchal relations in paid work: Patriarchal relations in the state: Male violence against women: Patriarchal relations in sexuality: Patriarchal relations within cultural institution. Admittedly, there has been marked transformation in women's status in most societies. As Walby (1997) reported about Britain, marked changes have occurred in the situation of gender equality. Increasing numbers of women are employed in work activities outside their homes. Female school leavers obtained higher grades than their male counterparts, and were catching up with male counterparts in most areas of higher education. Gains were also being obtained in other areas. For example there was increasing awareness about the ills of violence against women and police were gradually becoming more willing to intervene in family violence. There was also more awareness of sexual harassment at work. In general women were acknowledged to be increasingly more independent of men. However, they still remain very much under represented in most of the powerful positions in public life; as members of parliament, chief police constables, high court judges, ambassadors and heads of overseas missions, or as heads of public corporations and other public organizations.

The improvements recorded by Walby, reflect changes worldwide, though to a lesser extent in a developing country like Nigeria. Whatever gains that have occurred however, should not mask the fact that avoidable areas of inequality still abound and that most of these are due to institutionalized systems of power relations that need to be adjusted to reduce the acute pressures of domestic labour coupled with often extensive economic activity. Women's extensive economic activities (often involving several types at the same time) are not as a result of their choice but are often essential for family survival. The three feminist theories examined here, serve the general purpose of identifying the

basis and currents of feminist insights into gender power relations. This paper's main focus is however directed at some aspects of Chafetz's analysis of the relationship between domestic and public level gender power relations.

Domestic Labour as Impediment to Gender Equality in Nigeria

The Nature of Domestic Labour

Traditionally most societies in Nigeria defined different economic and social roles for the sexes. This situation has more or less remained. Generally it is still a woman's duty, as defined by tradition, to cook family meals, do house-keeping work and carry out most of the activities required for children's upbringing, as well as work in the farm and carry out most food processing and preservation work required (or home needs and for sale. Indeed women are generally acknowledged to bear a disproportionate burden of the work load in the household and related farm activities. (Okojie: 1991). While the exact details of women's domestic roles vary between ethnic groups, the broad picture of women's domestic roles vis-a-vis those of the men folk remains valid.

Additionally, especially in southern Nigeria the woman was expected to make economic contributions to substantially supplementary the household food needs with produce from her farm, her poultry and her trade. This traditional rural family division of labour, by which the wife has primary responsibility for the home and children, is still prevalent both in rural communities and in urban centres. In the latter situation the relative isolation of urban life leaves women without the traditional support provided by co-wives and other female members of the extended family (Damachi and Diejomaoh: 1978). Even in rural households, fast increasing women's participation in petty-trading has reduced the stock of relative who are available or willing to care for children in the absence of their mothers.

The major difference between the rural and urban situations of domestic labour is that modern facilities and gadgets would likely be more available in the latter environment. These facilities help to reduce the tedium of domestic labour, for those who can afford them. Men's participation in these forms of energy demanding and time consuming work still remains very minimal.

Domestic work has received little consideration from economists as noted by Boserup (1990), due to several factors. These include the fact that such work does not usually lend itself to the use of measurements available to economists. Secondly this form of work was also regarded by the predominantly male economists as of secondary importance, and performed with reserve time, that could be called up for use when other more important "productive" tasks require to be done. Thirdly such work tended to be regarded by traditional economists as having zero economic value. Loutfi (2001:90) observes that generally 'domestic work "has been perceived as falling outside the conventional definition of work".

Low valuation for women's macro level work, whether in terms of their income or other benefits accruing to such work, may be said to have strong relationships to inequality that is evidenced in the domestic sphere. Several authors have shown that women's work in the income earning spheres tend to follow the pattern of their house work (ILO: 1981, Hodges: 2001). Hence society tends to see such income earning work as nursing, secretarial work, teaching, marketing of goods, as being in keeping with the image of women as home keepers and care givers.

Men's Contribution to Domestic Labour

There is a vast amount of evidence that women bear the brunt of domestic work in most societies and that this severely disadvantages their productive capacities at the macro level. Men's low contribution to household work is a debated issue even in developed countries of the west such as the United States of America. For instance Parenting Magazine recently raised an outcry- about what it considered to be breadwinning fathers' low level of assistance towards child care. According to Sacks (2009) this survey claimed that 31 percent of mothers get "little or no help" with child care. Though Sacks, a well known advocate for fathers, strongly disputed the statistical basis for this data, it is interesting that the issue of male assistance in the home is topical even in the United States where women's and children's rights are given relatively high regards. A similar situation exists in many western societies. As Philips (1996: 38) observed about Britain, "unless the responsibilities of domestic labour are equalized between women and men, women's income position will continue to reflect the bad luck of being born female". Other western feminists have also followed this path. These include Chodorow (1978) who proposed that men and women ought to share parenting activities more equally.

In the African and Nigerian context household work is perceived to constitute a major impediment to women's full participation in socio-economic and political life. As observed by Tamale (2002) "domesticity confines African women both conceptually and practically in ways that limit their access to resources". Okome (2002) observes that until Nigerian men and women have equal share of household labour, women will have limited access to employment opportunities and upward mobility. Tamale's (2002:6) stand is that "sharing domestic work between women and men "would ultimately tilt the scales to a more balanced workload, and thus liberate women to contribute more meaningfully to sustainable development".

Domestic Role Segregation and Injustices

This paper's basic orientation is taken from Chafetz's views derived from Marxian feminist theory; that patriarchy and capitalism work together to maintain severe restriction, subjugation and exploitation of women. The central dynamics here is women's domestic labour preoccupations, and the relations of this situation to gender inequality at the macro level.

Micro and Macro Relations of Inequality

This paper diverges from some aspects of Chafetz's views in the sense that while there are evident relationships between domestic labour, wage employment and gender inequalities in Nigeria, negative impact of patriarchal value system on women is seen to begin in the home, rather than trickle down from the macro employment level, as espoused by Chafetz. It is however acknowledged that there has been a substantial shift of emphasis from private patriarchy to public patriarchy. This is because in the past fifty years since political independence from the 1960s; women have gradually become a force, in terms of their numbers at least, in the public level work arena, with relatively fair amount of attention being directed at the inequality situation at that level. The domestic sphere, however, still remains the most problematic area of women's subjugation. In the first place the domestic sphere remains the nurturing ground for both women and men, where various dimensions of socialization, including education and social learning and modeling (Bandura: 1977), contribute to the final outcome of a woman's or man's self image and world view. An individual's understanding of gender relations begins with and is nurtured within his/her exposure at the household level (Chodorow: 1978). The patterning of gender relations as enacted by parents, siblings and other relatives and friends are significant to personality formation. Male superiority, as evidenced by household labour divisions, role segregation, male child preference, inheritance laws, domestic violence and so on, are aspects of the molding of the young that contribute substantially to building up their personalities and the patterns of their gender relationships. Thus female subjugation that begins in the household, is nurtured and strengthened there, incorporating both female domesticity and male domination of the religious, economic and political dimensions of social life. For the vast majority of Nigerians, modern private and public sector wage employment, as envisaged in western literature, is something that only affects them indirectly via the remittances and assistance rendered by urban dwelling relatives, while their own experience is limited to farming, craftsmanship and petty trade. Therefore, the transfer of unequal power relations as obtainable in the Nigerian context, is basically from the domestic to the public.

It should also be noted that in rural communities, that are usually still predominantly traditional in organization and outlook, the boundary line between the private and public is quite blurred, so that private and public dimensions tend to inter-mingle, with wives and children often forming a part of and contributing to a man's economic activity, rituals and political power. A major aspect of subjugation and exploitation of women is that such domestic contributions are often unacknowledged and unrewarded materially. Additionally most women also actively farm their own crops, which form the basis for their contribution to the food and other needs of the family. Thus women's economic involvements are often as active as that of men. Nonetheless, women are denied public level power through marriage and inheritance laws that make them the properties of their husbands and deny them ownership rights to the land on which they carry out life-long toil for the upkeep of their families.

Furthermore, majority of Nigerians are removed from the focus of middle and upper class policy initiatives that tend to concentrate focus of women subjugation in modern style economic activity mostly located in the few urban and semi-urban centres. Yet even at this urban public level, the pressures imposed on women by domestic role divisions are evident. Women are forced to steal

time from their offices in order to attend to child hospital care, to go to markets for food purchases, or even in order to sell some items in the desperate bid to meet up with domestic responsibilities. It is also now common to find working women with their babies in their offices during work hours. Much of this overlap of domestic and work place activities are due to lack of reliable assistance, or as a result of not affording nursery facilities for young children. Girl children usually have to supplement their mothers' effort at the domestic level, thus often suffering from disadvantages that this places on their education and their childhood.

Thus patriarchal relations at the household level and consequent denial of male assistance for family domestic needs, as well as state apparent lack of concern for the welfare of families, through the provision of adequate and affordable child care and other care facilities, constitute the background within which the devaluation of women's work at the public level is facilitated. Clearly, in the often over-burdened existence of female householders, a large percentage of whom combine full housework and full office work, some aspects of the woman's work are bound to suffer. There is therefore no doubt that for a woman who is inundated with household chores, the level of her commitment to wage employment cannot match that of an average man, as noted by Hakim (1995).

Therefore, as long as women are expected to encompass the full scope of household labour without commensurate male assistance and without the state's consistent focus, through policy and practice, on providing facilities and infrastructural needs of domestic labour, so long will women continue to cut corners at the public level and so long will their work be devalued. It is acknowledged that women's labour market participation has continued to increase. This is welcome as a way to increase women's economic power and avail them of enlightenment. It is important to note that while there is much need to improve women's status at the public level, the increase of women's participation at this level is in itself a very viable avenue for empowering women (Ogunirin et al 2007) towards liberating themselves from injustices that are incumbent upon a patriarchal value system.

However one must not fail to acknowledge that a small percentage of women for whom their home environment is conducive are able to perform as highly as men. This small minority therefore serves to demonstrate that there is nothing inherently of lower value in a women's work. Social change required in [his situation therefore, reside with individual women and men at the cultural and the structural levels. This view stands in stark contrast with Chafetz's view that the effect of male domination at the macro employment level trickles down to create problems at the domestic level. In any case, much of Nigerian social life is not amenable to the public, private dichotomy that tends to form the basis of western analysis of gender relations.

Voluntarism and Domestic Level Inequality

Chafetz describes the household domestic level compliance of women that often stand in conflict with their public level activities as voluntaristic. This is not in consonance with the reality, especially in Nigeria and other developing countries. Chafetz (1990: 64) observes that people "of both genders tend to make choices that conform to the dictates of the gender system's status quo". It should however be noted that the difference often perceived between the coercive and the voluntaristic, tends to result from inability to probe beyond the surface. In the first place some of the behaviours that indicate acquiescence and support for gender inequalities are unthinking or automatic and do not convey the true meaning of 'voluntary'¹. They are, as it were, in-built into the individual by culture. For instance a woman is such because she can care for her children, differ to her husband and so on. On the other hand there are clearly laid out sanctions for non-compliance, such as family rejection, public ridicule, ostracism and so on. A woman or a man may therefore have no other choice than to 'choose' to comply with the requirements of gender divisions, segregations and inequality. This cannot therefore represent voluntarism in the full sense of that word.

Women's Role in Gender Role Segregation

The tendency especially by feminists to directly or indirectly point the finger at the male segment of society as those responsible for women's lower status may serve the purpose of at least exerting pressure on those who are the apparent beneficiaries, at least in the short run, from what

is seen as women's marginalization. However, there are possibilities for other points of views

about this issue of male supposed manipulation of societal material resource for their exclusive benefits. In reality women could also be seen as having some responsibility for the perpetuation of patriarchy, to the extent that they, as major nurturers of offspring's are largely responsible for its perpetuation through the socialization process. Women by the existing role segregation processes are those who have the most contact with children and young people. Thus it is women; mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts; who as major agents in the process of socialization insist on what roles to allocate the young members of their families. To a large extent therefore women promote and perpetuate patriarchy at the domestic level. It is also women as mothers, sisters and other categories of female relatives of men, who insist on women toeing the line and keeping within the limits of patriarchal rules and regulations, and who serve as watch dogs for safeguarding the taboos that guard patriarchal value systems. This is not only because of their docility, or their myopic viewpoints with regards to the limitations imposed upon them by culture and tradition. Rather the patriarchal system has over time consolidated women's role-as committed supporters for the maintenance of the status quo,-as the so called keepers of morality.

Due cognizance should also be given to the fact that socialization takes place within the context of a society's culture. Hence, women's socialization of their own offsprings take place within the context of the environment of their own daily lives and within the ambit of the cultural practices imparted to them by their own predecessors. Deviation from those patterns would therefore, be attended by various forms of social sanctions. Women therefore need to be enlightened towards other options that are available outside of a patriarchal value system, that would not necessarily upturn family cohesion in the long term.

In seeking to effect change, the multidimensional and contextual nature of empowerment must be given adequate focus to ensure maximum "effectiveness of empowerment programmes (Maihotra et al: 2002). Empowerment has tended to be lumped together as a single-stream action that usually involves provision of resources or provision of institutional changes that automatically bring about alteration in the power base, that then serves as catalyst for change in the desired direction. In reality, however, empowerment decisions should be made specific to the community context as well as to ethnic and cultural contexts, and socio-economic status. For instance in the past in many parts of Nigeria resources provided for improvement of women's lives were later discovered to be placed under the management of men by the women beneficiaries, hence further increasing men's power over them. Furthermore, there are often a variety of components in one particular sector of empowerment. Thus the assumption that decision making power over an activity such as cooking is equivalent to that over children's schooling, or the marriage of offspring's, would be erroneous in some contexts, thus leading to non-attainment of expected improvements.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Sociologists find "gender"¹ to be a useful concept mainly because gender expectations are central to people's lives, whether they conform to it or resist it. Segal (1990) notes that for many people failure to conform to gender expectations represent a source of intense emotional conditions; in the form of confusion, pain and/or pleasure. A major reason why people tend to shy away from confronting gender related inequalities is because they see this as a form of unwelcome disturbance of the status quo that would lead to destabilization and disruption of social order. However, from a sociological perspective, gender awareness and its associated goal of equality of the sexes should, in many ways actually serve the function of strengthening the family and the social system as a whole. For instance, if men and women did not feel constrained to choose and marry partners to conform to the expectation that female spouses should be several years younger than their male partners, then the sex ratio for live spouses would be more balanced especially in old age. At the very least married couples would tend to spend more years together which would have several positive outcomes. Furthermore if both sexes' self images, aspirations and life chances were less constrained by gender scripts, men who earned less than their wives or were less driven towards career formation and advancement, or enjoyed child care activities, would choose to remain at home and take care of children rather than be forced to pursue full time careers. These are only a few examples that indicate that society could in several ways be better served by adjustments in gender relations that are directed towards more equality of the sexes. Another example is that if women were paid salaries equal to those of men due to equal valuation for work, then women would be likely to be less vulnerable to poverty, especially in the event of separation, divorce or widowhood. While gendered domestic role segregation in the home may not lend itself to direct policy intervention necessitating legal provisions, such as is possible in the macro level employment arena, education, enlightenment and reorientation are key areas for social change involving both men and women at the domestic level.

Domestic role segregation constitutes an impediment to sustainable development, because it is a key area of inequality that impedes effective utilization of manpower by constraining a particular sector of society from fully actualizing available opportunities for participation in areas of their choices of economic activities. Equal sharing of domestic chores with male relatives and partners would avail women the opportunity to utilize more of their time for wage employment and other activities, if they choose to do so. It would give men the opportunity to appreciate the totality of child rearing and home management functions, and give women more scope to add their input in important family decisions that are usually reserved for men.

It is acknowledged that considerable advances have been achieved in the past few decades in gender equality. However, evidence of segregation and discriminations still persist, in the household, the work place, in politics and state level decision making arenas. While women and girls bear the largest and most direct costs of these inequalities, quite evidently the costs also cut more broadly across society, with ultimate negative effects on the entire society (World Bank: 2001). For these reasons gender equality should be regarded as a core development issue. Indeed it constitutes a development objective in its own right as demonstrated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since it has the potential to strengthen a country's ability to grow, to reduce poverty, and to govern effectively. Promoting gender equality is thus an important part of a development strategy that seeks to enable all people, men and women alike, to escape poverty and improve their standard of living.

Quite clearly, in the Nigerian situation there is need for change; most of it taking place simultaneously within both cultural and structure spheres. At the micro level, harmful traditional practices that are evidence of an extreme variant of patriarchal values need to be eradicated. In the past in many parts of Nigeria, joint action by international agencies, civil society organizations, town unions, traditional rulers and other stakeholders have achieved a recognizable level of cultural change to reduce some harmful aspects of culture, such as some very traumatic and unhealthy aspects of widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, that are part of patriarchal subjugation of women at the domestic level. Other practices such as wife battering, rape and sexual harassment also emanate from low status of women and societal condoning of negative male power assertions associated with masculinity. These could also be given focus with a view to their eradication; with the media playing important role. However, these interventions focused on the micro level do require some macro level support and mobilization. So far, these have taken the form of state bills and laws in recent years. However, many of these are not strongly anchored to cultural change. More awareness creation is therefore required.

In Nigeria policies regarding gender often turn out to be just token. Examples are the National Policy on Women, and Nigeria's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; without effecting its domestication. There is therefore a need; with increased enlightenment; to erode some of the norms, ideologies and stereotypes that strongly determine gendered performance as observed by Goffman (1959) cited in Ferrante (2003) so as to dispose the elite towards effecting necessary social change at the macro level in order to remove impediments to the achievement of gender equality.

With regard to domestic labour, there is need to bring about more equitable sharing of work between the sexes, and to evaluate domestic work with a view to adequately remunerating women. Though household issues such as domestic work do not often lend themselves to legislations, the media has an important role to enlighten the public. Negative consequences of gender domestic role segregation on children's and women's wellbeing and the benefits of male participation need to be adequately highlighted. Simultaneously, macro level reformation of work patterns to allow for more part-time work would also help to improve women's concentration in the work place for the period they choose to spend at that work.

Education is a very important aspect of empowerment. Both men and women in educational institutions would benefit from inclusion of human rights education in their curriculum, to acquaint them of the nature and problems of gender inequality. This would also help to reduce the distance in orientation between men and women which Chodorow (1978) describes as intrapsychic differences.

There are also urgent needs in the following directions:

- To improve the quantum of girls' schooling to ensure more enlightened female population.
- To improve women's access to basic infrastructures and facilities for health care, finance and child care.
- To create more opportunities for employment and revenue generating activities.
- To set up specific actions in favour of women, such as the creation of listening and orientation centres for women in difficult situations, along with measures of material assistance and

procedures of integration.

- To ensure respect for women and men's civil rights through legal means.
- To re-educate school personnel, public officials and police specifically on the protection of the rights of women to equality in the household and public places.

All the above would help to engender a socio-cultural and socio-structural environment that would engender equality of the sexes necessary for optimal utilization of the country's manpower for sustainable development.

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